

The Cabinet Meeting over the Reply to the Four Powers (August 13)

Source: Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], ed., *Shusen Shiroku [Historical Record of the End of the War]* (Tokyo: Hokuyosha, 1977-1978), vol. 5, 27-35

Next day, on August 13, the official reply from the Four Powers was also handed [to the Japanese].¹ Near 9:00, at the Prime Minister's residence, a meeting was convened only with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Army Minister, the Navy Minister, and both of the Chiefs to exchange opinions [Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki, Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo, Army Minister Korechika Anami, Chief of the Army General Staff Yoshijiro Umezumi, Navy Minister Mitsumasa Yonai, and Chief of the Navy General Staff Soemu Toyoda]. The meeting, once interrupted from 9:00 to 10:30 when the Chiefs left and paid a visit to the Court, eventually lasted for about five hours in total until 15:00, with the arguments repeated and the debate stirred. The opening of the cabinet meeting was accordingly much delayed until 16:00. Concerning the reply from the Four Powers, the Prime Minister asked each of the members clockwise at the table to express his candid opinion.

Justice Minister [Hiromasa] Matsuzaka: I would like to clear some unsettled problems about the wording of the Third Point concerning the national polity [*kokutai*]. But if there is no room for further negotiation, I cannot accept it since our feeling as a faithful subject to the Emperor cannot stand with the provision that the future of the Imperial House should be decided by the people. I think there is no choice for us but to redouble our resolution to fight to the end. Foreign Minister Togo: I think it is in fact impossible for us to ask for any more, as is the case with the non-aggression pact [the Paris Treaty].² I reach this conclusion only after taking in full accounts the current circumstances in Japan.

Matsuzaka: The idea that people as a sovereign will decide [the national polity] is fundamentally different in concept [from the existing system]

Togo: At the time of His Majesty's Sacred Judgment at the Supreme War Council on August 9, "There is no hope to continue to wage the war. I will accept the [Potsdam] Declaration, in a spirit of enduring the unendurable," said His Majesty. It is contrary to our desire, but, following His Majesty's words, I feel that we need but to retreat.

Matsuzaka: If that is His Majesty's intention, there is no room for argument. I would not dare to be against his sacred judgment.

Supply Minister [Teijuro] Toyoda: On the Third Point, I am in total agreement with Minister Matsuzaka's observation. It is very difficult to accept its wording, but with the sacred judgment as mentioned by the Foreign Minister and taking it into consideration, this problem might have been settled by the decision, too. No word is enough to depict His Majesty's feeling when he made the decision ... (and, he was ready to wait for His Majesty's Sacred Judgment).

Interrupted by Interior Minister [Genki] Abe: You have frequently referred to the Supreme War Council but it is not part of the institutions that the Constitution defines. In

short, the whole matter is in the Government's responsibility, and it is quite troublesome if the Government fails to fulfill its role as an adviser to His Majesty.

Togo: I just mentioned the fact of the Sacred Judgment. Of course, we, as the members of the Cabinet in charge of advising His Majesty, should express opinions freely based on each one's belief. Exactly for this purpose we have this Cabinet meeting.

Abe: If I remember correctly, our Cabinet decision was to continue the war unless we can preserve our national polity...

Then Cabinet Secretary [Hisatsune] Sakomizu challenged him over the phrases concerning the preservation of the national polity and the Emperor's prerogatives as a sovereign ruler. The Prime Minister steered the debate away by asking Minister [Hyogoro] Sakurai for his opinion...

Minister Sakurai : It is beyond our reasoning. I will leave the whole matter to the Prime Minister. I believe that the national politics and the supreme military command should be in harmony. There is no hope left to us for the continuation of the war, now with the atomic bombs dropped and the Soviet Union joining in the war. The current reality in Germany indicates our ever difficulty as a different nation.³ Having said that, the lack of harmony between national politics and the supreme military command could also lead our nation to collapse. The same can be said also in case of continuing the war. To die is easy, but to live is difficult. Today, it is totally impossible for us to see any sort of harmony between the national politics and the supreme military command. It is this very point which demands our redoubled efforts. I would like to trust the whole matter to the Prime Minister, in fear that we might be following the same destiny as the Heike clan.⁴

Prime Minister Suzuki: I will present my opinion last. First, please give your opinions ...
Minister Hirose?

Treasury Minister [Housaku] Hirose: There is no other way but to accept it as the Foreign Minister said, insofar as the national polity will be mostly preserved. Thinking about the continuation of the war, our productivity in major items after April and May is estimated to decline to the level of Showa First [1926] as early as at the end of this year. Moreover, entire small- and middle-size cities will be destroyed, and in addition, we now have the Soviet Union's entry into the war. -How much worse the situation could get, I don't know. At this moment, we should preserve our nation with the losses at the current level, in hope of a future restoration.

Agriculture Minister [Tadaatsu] Ishiguro: According to the judgment about our national capacity, there is no choice but accept. Having heard about His Majesty's deliberate Sacred Judgment at the Privy Council, I am but deeply impressed by his care about his subjects as the Emperor of Japan. I would like to hear from the Prime Minister more about the Sacred Judgment. I regret I missed an occasion to hear about this before.

Suzuki: It is as the Foreign Minister said, I am afraid...

Minister [Touji] Yasui: I already said on a previous occasion that I cannot help but be against [acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration]. But our nation might be in danger of collapse anyway without harmony between the national politics and the supreme military command, between the civilians and the military. On this point, the Prime Minister and both the Ministers of the Army and of the Navy should act with a broader vision, and I hope even more efforts by the Prime Minister [toward the harmony] according to His Majesty's will. On the national polity I understand the point made by the Justice Minister. However, [the Four Powers have different ideas [about the polity]. I believe that to be in harmony with His Majesty's will is our nation's will. The conclusion is far from satisfying, but it is inevitable to achieve the harmony of the national politics and the supreme military command.

Suzuki: You have mentioned harmony, but I don't know what kind of harmony. In this time of making an important decision, we had first the session of the Supreme War Council at the supreme military command and then the Cabinet meeting, only to reach no consensus. Because of this, at the Privy Council I let each of you speak from your own opinion, asked the attendance by the Chairman of the Privy Council [Kiichiro] Hiranuma and asked His Majesty for the Sacred Judgment after the two-hour discussion. Even with these exhausting deliberations on both war and peace, we are still far away from any sort of consensus.

Yasui: When I mentioned harmony, I meant by it our attitude. As the problem is very grave, it is inevitable to see the confrontation of opinions. If a consensus is reached, however, we should be in harmony.

Suzuki: We have been already in harmony due to the Sacred Judgment.

Transportation Minister [Naoto] Kohiyama: Simply follow His Majesty's will. Very unsatisfying, but, considering the current circumstances at home and abroad as well as our national power, it is no choice but to accept.

Abe: It seems to me that the word "subject to" in the First Item suggests strict obeisance rather than mere restriction. The phrases about the national polity, I think, are also against our current national polity. On top of that, if accompanied by the military occupation, we cannot but have much doubt in whether we can preserve our national polity. In Yanan [in China] there is a movement led by communists to liberate Japan. I cannot but shed tears when I hear about His Majesty's will, but we should firmly proceed to preserve the national polity. If there is no victory, we all should die. We should do it anyway. I would like to leave to the Prime Minister a choice between negotiations and war.

Education Minister [Kozo] Ohta: I talked with the Foreign Minister about a plan of inquiring again about the possibility of seeking changes [in the surrender terms], but it did not work out. This time, we have no choice. By His Majesty's will, I cannot but be impressed thoroughly. The arguments go like before...

Minister [Hiroshi (Kainan)] Shimomura [Director-General of Information Bureau]: I have already proposed that we should convey our will of acceptance with some words about our hope for information [about the Four Powers intentions]. I understand some disagreement over the Point Three, but what if our nation of Japan would be destroyed for good? Now is the time to follow only His Majesty's will.

[Minister of State Masazo] Sakonji: I understand that the Army Minister feels that [the situation] is more difficult than cutting himself⁵ but at this moment we should consider our endurance for the next hundred years. We should launch negotiations without delay to terminate the war.

Welfare and Health Minister [Tadahiko] Okada: We should accept in a spirit of a worm that bends itself.

Army Minister Anami: As I said before, I am thoroughly worried. Here everybody concerned has some doubts. Some argue that any condition proposed by us would break off negotiations, but we should put forward a proposal at least like this. Where we negotiate with a firm determination against any retreat, there is a hope. I believe that our demands will be incorporated to some degree without continuing the war. We should do what we should do.

(In a reply to Foreign Minister Togo's argument)

Anami: You argue there is no room for any further negotiation concerning disarmament and military occupation, but I believe there is some leeway. We should resolutely make our demands. Disarmament does not necessarily lead to peace. Putting forward conditions does not necessarily mean the continuation of the war. We are still left with some power to fight. Here over this point we differ in judgment. No need to listen to counterarguments any more. Now it is time for us to completely determine ourselves to be decisive.

Navy Minister Yonai: To much regret, it seems that there is no option left to us but to accept.

Prime Minister Suzuki: As we have listened to each of your opinions, I would like to present my own opinion. Up to this day, I had determined myself to carry out the war thoroughly, but a big shift in the circumstances forced my idea to change.

Having found some unacceptable items in the reply from the other side, I made my mind not to retreat from the war even a bit. However, putting it candidly, after I was advised by Chairman of the Privy Council Hiranuma yesterday and repeatedly read the reply, I came to realize that the United States might have not written it with malicious intent. Both countries differ in the state of affairs and in the way of thinking. I concluded that they would change little in substance concerning the Emperor and therefore we should not complain over the wording. After all, they will not understand our complaints about the wording. Having said that, we should be careful about military occupation and disarmament. I do not believe that they would resume the war after filling in our moats like the battle of Osaka,⁶ but nevertheless we cannot be too careful about this point in time of accepting. If there is no malice about this point, there will be no problem. But if

the way of occupation is ill-intentioned, it might be possible to find the war resumed again. This is the very situation both of the sides should prevent to happen. Finally, we feel some danger to the preservation of our national polity, but in asking to ourselves if we would continue the war thoroughly, we should remind ourselves that His Majesty desires peace. Even if we fight with our back to the wall, it is too late in the age of atomic bombs. If we do, we will be never able to preserve our national polity. Perhaps, there might be a dim hope in the dark. There might be a way out of a fatal situation. It is not hopeless yet. But I should say this is a gamble too dangerous to make in preserving our national polity. We should remember His Majesty's desire to care for all of his people. For us as loyal subjects, it may be possible to fight to the end. In this way we may be able to satisfy ourselves, but if we contemplate on how Japan would be as its result, we will find it too dangerous. As His Majesty has already took into accounts such a danger in time of making his Sacred Judgment, I believe there is no other way for us but to follow it and serve him. Therefore, in this sense, I will report today's discussion to him as it is and ask for his Sacred Judgment.

Anami: In fact, allowing us to disarm ourselves voluntarily is the way to expedite peace. If military occupation ever comes, we will be totally naked while the other side has warships and airplanes. Should we ever violate our promise, they would be able to do whatever they want. They can do the task of occupation with only a few supervisors. This way will help both sides. At this time with some power left to us, we should grab a diplomatic-opportunity.

Togo: Without a firm resolution to fight more, we will present our opinions at every appropriate opportunity.

Anami: Please add this to our reply.

Yasui: I agree.

Yonai: For the two proposals we have discussed, this opinion is about the one on which His Majesty has already made his Sacred Judgment. I think it inappropriate to discuss a thing we have already rejected before.

Suzuki: I think so too.

Yasui: But simply communicating our desire will be a good way to take initiative. We should not say this is a condition...

Anami: The current situation is totally different from the time of the Sacred Judgment. [At the last Privy Council on August 9] we had the only one proposal from the Foreign Minister. I would like to ask the Navy Minister [whether it is true], but I don't think it is wrong.

Togo: It seems impossible for us to insist on our voluntary disarmament with small arms left to us, but I will make a representation when the time comes.

Some proposals are made by Shimomura, Ishiguro, and Kohiyama.

Togo: There is an opposition [to peace with Japan] on the other side. I would like to handle a problem of condition as a separate matter.

Toyoda: How about touching it in a nonchalant manner?
This all happening, the Cabinet meeting dissolved without conclusion. [...]

Notes [Prepared by translator]

¹. The word "also" was used because Japanese officials had already seen an unofficial text on the wire services.

². An elliptical reference to Tokyo's previous objections to the determination of the Four Powers to prosecute the Japanese leadership as war criminals under the Kellogg-Briand non-aggression pact of 1928.

³. Sakurai was implying that the treatment of Japan under an Allied occupation would be even more severe than the treatment of Germany because the latter was part of the European "White Race" while Japan was regarded by the West as a lesser, "Yellow Race."

⁴. The Heike was the samurai clan that the rival Genji clan defeated in the late twelfth century.

⁵. This was a reference to the difficult situation that Anami saw but not to ritual suicide which would not have been mentioned in such a discussion.

⁶. As a final touch to his reunification of Japan under the Edo shogunate, Ieyasu Tokugawa defeated the Toyotomi clan by filling in the moats around Toyotomi's Osaka Castle.