

History and Neorealism

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Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
1 Theory and international history ERNEST R. MAY, RICHARD ROSECRANCE, AND ZARA STEINER	1
2 Transformations in power RICHARD ROSECRANCE	8
3 Domestically driven deviations: internal regimes, leaders, and realism's power line JOHN M. OWEN, IV	29
4 How international institutions affect outcomes ROBERT O. KEOHANE AND LISA MARTIN	49
5 Not even for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: power and order in the early modern era PAUL W. SCHROEDER	78
6 Austria-Hungary and the coming of the First World War SAMUEL R. WILLIAMSON, JR.	103
7 British decisions for peace and war 1938–1939: the rise and fall of realism ZARA STEINER	129
8 Realism and risk in 1938: German foreign policy and the Munich Crisis NIALL FERGUSON	155

viii	Contents	
9	Domestic politics, interservice impasse, and Japan's decisions for war MICHAEL BARNHART	185
10	Military audacity: Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and China's adventure in Korea ANDREW B. KENNEDY	201
11	The United States' underuse of military power ERNEST R. MAY	228
12	The overuse of American power ROBERT S. LITWAK	246
13	Redrawing the Soviet power line: Gorbachev and the end of the Cold War DEBORAH WELCH LARSON AND ALEXEI SHEVCHENKO	267
14	Shared sovereignty in the European Union: Germany's economic governance SHERRILL BROWN WELLS AND SAMUEL F. WELLS, JR.	307
15	John Mearsheimer's "elementary geometry of power": Euclidean moment or an intellectual blind alley? JONATHAN HASLAM	322
16	History and neorealism reconsidered RICHARD ROSECRANCE AND ZARA STEINER	341
	<i>Index</i>	366

Tables

11.1	Iron/steel production of the powers	<i>page</i> 229
11.2	Energy consumption of the powers	229
11.3	Iron/steel production of the powers	231
11.4	Energy consumption of the powers	232
11.5	Military personnel, 1930	233
11.6	Total GNP (1964 \$)	234
16.1	Action—restraint under the impulses of the international system, leadership, situation, and domestic politics	356

future for the Americans," declared the *Stammtisch* sage in 1942, in one of his dinner-table monologues:

In my view, it's a decayed country. And they have their racial problem, and the problem of social inequalities. Those were what caused the downfall of Rome, and yet Rome was a solid edifice that stood for something ... The German Reich has 270 opera houses – a standard of cultural existence of which they over there have no conception. They have clothes, food, cars and a badly constructed house – but with a refrigerator! This sort of thing does not impress us.¹³⁶

By the time he spoke those words, Hitler had managed to embroil Germany in a war against the British Empire, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Extensive though his conquests had been between 1938 and 1941, they had not given the Nazi empire and its economically much inferior confederates sufficient resources to stand a serious chance of success in such a conflict. The strategic odds, as is now well known, were overwhelmingly against the Axis powers from 1942 onwards. The tragedy nevertheless remains that such a global conflagration was ever necessary to curtail Hitler's ambitions. Though the odds were less overwhelmingly against Germany in the summer of 1938 than they were four years later, they were still sufficiently skewed that a Churchillian policy of confrontation rather than appeasement would have stood a good chance of success. Of all the decision-makers who made the Second World War happen, Chamberlain was nearly as unrealistic as Hitler.

¹³⁶ H. R. Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941–44: His Private Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens, 2nd edn. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), January 7, 1942; August 1, 1942.

9 Domestic politics, interservice impasse, and Japan's decisions for war

Michael Barnhart

If the quintessential test for a state is to have its managers identify perfectly with it and with perfect rationality identify its interests, few states have been universally well-served. The fault is hardly with those managers. The interests of the state are seldom self-evident and nearly always subject to debate. Even in absolute monarchies or dictatorships, the sovereign's advisers offer competing policies.

Imperial Japan legally was such an absolute monarchy, with its emperor granted nearly unlimited power, in theory. More, the leaders of Japan's Meiji Restoration had a near *tabula rasa* on which to design a new state, one that would benefit from their intense study of the West and its institutions. Keenly aware of the West's threat, these leaders – inspired, dedicated, and intelligent all – deliberately set out to build a rational state capable of dealing with that threat.¹ They failed spectacularly.

In reality, Japan was not an absolute monarchy. It was a virtually headless state from 1868 to 1945. For its first forty-five years, a measure of consensus was provided by the commitment of its founding generation to the avoidance of sharp internal disputes. Japan could ill-afford these, menaced by the West as it was. But the construction of that consensus required the construction of a governing apparatus that, ironically, acted to make consensus impossible once the founding generation passed away. In its place arose a structure of autonomous and highly competitive ministries – bureaucracies – that created professional and powerful allegiances to themselves. In consequence, the last thirty years of Imperial Japan were wracked by chronically severe, sometimes crippling, ultimately self-destructive bureaucratic rivalries. By far the most severe, crippling, and destructive rivalry arose between the Imperial Army and Imperial Navy. Their officers came to see each other as implacable enemies who, alas, could never be truly vanquished. This enemy, the army for the navy and vice versa, with a radically different

¹ And domestic threats to their new state's legitimacy, not under study here.

assessment of the foreign threat and the policies needed to address that threat, would always be with them.

This ultimately suicidal rivalry could have been mitigated by any number of factors. A central locus of sovereign authority, whether the emperor or the prime minister, would have been one answer. The ability of other power centers to impose their will, or at least influence the military services, might have saved Japan from the disaster of 1945. Least plausible but still possible, the reestablishment of a foreign-policy consensus among all concerned elites, or at least the leaders of the army and navy, could have avoided catastrophe. None of these occurred. Given the way in which Meiji Japan created itself, none was ever very likely.

The foundation of interservice rivalry was laid in the Meiji Constitution itself. That document decreed that, while the emperor was sovereign over all matters of foreign and defense policy for Japan, he would be counseled by the army and navy which were his sole and sovereign instruments in protecting his realm. Unhappily for all concerned, the constitution did not specify procedures to govern policy decisions if the army and navy disagreed.

At first no difficulties arose on this point because Japan had no navy. The earlier national regime of the Tokugawa shogunate had maintained a modest coastal patrol, as Japan's relations with Korea and China hardly required anything more. But the two domains – Chōshū and Satsuma – which had furnished the initiative and leaders of the Meiji Restoration, had experienced Western naval power first-hand and were well aware of the usefulness of naval power. After Chōshū effectively captured control of the new Imperial Army, many Satsuma leaders saw the creation of a navy as fulfilling the doubly desirable objectives of restraining Chōshū influence in the new government while neutralizing the Western naval threat. Frustrated for nearly twenty years by the need to contain domestic discontent and occasional rebellion (the most famous, of 1877, arising out of Satsuma itself) and Japan's stark fiscal inability to construct a modern, hence quite expensive, fleet, naval leaders finally came into their own in the 1890s.

The Imperial Japanese Navy was ultimately created upon the interconnected foundations of doctrine and politics. Dynamic naval leaders like Yamamoto Gonnohyōe studied then preached the ideas of American Alfred Thayer Mahan. The secret to British (and increasingly American) global dominance was a powerful navy based upon a core of heavy battleships capable of defeating an enemy's battle fleet and imposing control over the seas. Of course, a strong Japanese battle fleet required a powerful Imperial Navy.

It also required rather powerful funding. For a Japanese economy dwarfed by Britain and America, the effort would be Herculean, not only in terms of securing the funds and establishing the necessary industrial base in time,² but also in winning the consent of Japan's elites to making the effort in the first place. Yamamoto and his colleagues succeeded by assiduously courting the new political party leaders in the equally new Diet – to the alarm and disgust of the leaders of the Imperial Army.³

The army was the backbone of the new Meiji state. It suppressed internal dissent and rebellion. It furnished the clearest example to every Japanese of direct service to the divine emperor. Not least, its leaders, such as Yamagata Aritomo, saw themselves as the wisest guarantors of Japan's sovereignty in a hostile world. They were deeply suspicious of the new political party leaders, whom they saw as civilian parvenus mainly interested in further enriching themselves without regard to the safety of the nation. Instead of forming alliances with these politicians, Yamagata's first instincts were to wall them off from any role in national security policy-making. His methods were straightforward. Partymen were to be denied the prime ministership and, above all else, the army (and navy) portfolios. Indeed, wherever possible the Ministries – not just Army and Navy but Foreign, Finance, Justice, and, another Yamagata favorite, Home – would be staffed from starting functionary through vice-minister strictly through an examination and internal promotion system. In the case of the army and navy, of course, this aim was eminently possible: only graduates of the service academies would become officers and only those passing through the services' staff colleges would become senior ones.

Yamagata succeeded in denying the politicians access to army personnel or policy, but he still needed a budget year after year. The army would eventually resolve this dilemma with a series of reluctant compromises with the party leaders, but not before it saw the navy threaten to surpass it in spending. Part of the navy's success was in its basic strategy of accommodation, indeed alliance, with the partymen. But admirals also knew the value of direct public-relations efforts to the electorate, and the navy's impressive performance in the Sino-Japanese

² The earliest ships of the Imperial Navy were purchased abroad, often from British yards, almost until the First World War.

³ For doctrine, see Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: American Strategic Theory and the Rise of the Imperial Japanese Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006); for politics, J. Charles Schencking, "Bureaucratic Politics, Military Budgets, and Japan's Southern Advance: The Imperial Navy's Seizure of German Micronesia in the First World War," *War in History* 5 (1998), 308–26.

War of 1894–95 and Russo-Japanese War ten years later dramatically enhanced its prestige among the public and the party leaders alike.

Still, during these years major interservice clashes were avoided through the intermediary influence of the personal ties of the Meiji founders. These “senior statesmen,” or *genrō*, had disagreements to be sure, particularly over the role of (and their role in) political parties. But these disputes never became crippling because the *genrō* never allowed them to become so lest the Meiji state itself fail. But the *genrō* could not live forever, and neither could the emperor.

The death of Emperor Meiji in 1912 and the “Taishō Crisis” of that same year saw the first manifestation of unfettered army–navy disagreements that would plague Imperial Japan till its end. But it was only the first. Japan’s reaction to the outbreak of the First World War, its response to the Bolshevik Revolution, and the challenges to the Pacific of the Allied victory in Europe all contributed to critical tensions between army and navy leading to catastrophic impasse by the 1930s.

The Taishō Crisis began as a purely budgetary one. The party government submitted a budget featuring sharp retrenchment in all categories save one: naval spending. The army, already disappointed with the government’s refusal to send reinforcements to Manchuria in the wake of the Chinese revolution a year earlier, withdrew its minister from the cabinet and refused to name a replacement, forcing the entire body to resign. The new prime minister was more to the army’s liking, but the old government refused to cooperate with him, a recipe for impasse that the old meant to resolve by calling for elections. The elections almost certainly would have vindicated the old government, so the army (and new prime minister) secured a rescript from the emperor calling for no elections. When the Diet refused to obey, constitutional crisis loomed. It was resolved only through the prime minister’s resignation. His successor was none other than Yamamoto.⁴

Interservice rivalry also determined Japan’s entry into the First World War. Under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan – that is, the Imperial Navy – was delighted to intervene to commence patrols against German shipping and to seize German islands throughout the Pacific. But, to the consternation of the British (and horror of the Chinese), Japan also invaded Germany’s leased territory in China’s Shantung peninsula. This was the Imperial Army’s price of acquiescence. Sino-Japanese relations took a further turn for the worse after Japanese forces occupied the entire peninsula, not just the leasehold,

⁴ Yamamoto’s victory would prove short-lived. Within months a scandal over naval contracting would compel his resignation as a gleeful army attacked him openly.

and Japan insisted on far-reaching concessions from the new Chinese government, the so-called Twenty-One Demands that stirred even American ire.

These steps angered China, Britain, and the United States, but they kept the Imperial Army satisfied and so avoided another domestic crisis. Much the same logic was on display when the Russian regime fell in 1917. The army insisted on intervention in Siberia to forestall Bolshevik control there in order to safeguard Japanese interests in Manchuria and Korea. In fact, these actually were army interests in Manchuria, Korea, and most recently Shantung. By 1917 Japan’s governor of Korea invariably was a general. The South Manchurian Railway, Japan’s administrative organ for Manchuria, was increasingly staffed and dominated by army (or ex-army) officers. In marked contrast to every earlier intervention, the army had refused to cede control of Shantung to any civilian authority. The same would be the case in Siberia, as the army dispatched forces far larger than the Tokyo government had indicated to foreign powers.

The army’s justification for its increasingly unilateral actions was, in essence, constitutional. The Meiji Constitution vested the right of supreme command (the right to determine Japan’s defense policies) in the emperor, through His army and navy. This right was absolute and beyond civilians’ ability to question.

This reading was hardly lost on leaders in the Imperial Navy. But they faced a more complicated path to command unilateralism. Victory in the First World War had spurred a naval race among the victors. But Japan had scant hope of catching Britain, let alone a furiously building America, in any such race even if the Imperial Navy had unfettered access to the entire defense budget, something an army with growing continental interests was hardly likely to permit. Yet not to race held awful prospects, particularly to a navy that knew only a Mahanian tradition. And political success: during the First World War the Imperial Navy had persuaded the Diet to fund a mammoth “Eight-eight” (for eight battleships and eight battlecruisers) building program.

By all logic, the Imperial Navy ought to have expanded its “Eight-eight” program and engaged in a protracted naval race with the Americans. The navy had the foreign threat as justification and the domestic base in the Diet to support just such an effort. The army surely would have objected, but it had been confronted successfully during the Taishō Crisis and there was every indication it could be bested again.

But the navy did not even make the attempt. Instead, it accepted a comprehensive limit on battleship construction that, even more

remarkably, accorded it an inferior position to Britain and the United States. Why?

The opportunity for naval restraint arose from American political dynamics that led Washington to propose naval limitation talks.⁵ Japan's acceptance of a treaty in 1922 limiting it to 60 percent of the battleship tonnage of Britain or the United States, however, was made possible only by the policy determination and political skill of senior admiral Katō Tomasaburō. Katō realized that Japan could not match America in a building competition. He hoped that the army's adventures in Siberia, and especially China, would not so poison relations with Washington that any agreement would be impossible.

In the short term, Katō's hopes were correct. But the resulting Washington Treaty System contained the seeds of its own destruction. The army, for example, was willing to tolerate the status quo in China so long as it guaranteed Japan's (meaning the army's) rights in Manchuria and northern China and so long as a weak and divided China posed no threat to the army's preparations for war against the Soviet Union. However, the recovery of Soviet power and, even more alarmingly, the rise of a potentially unified China convinced the rising, new generation of army leaders that radical action against China and much stronger preparations against the Soviet Union were necessary by the end of the 1920s.

Within the navy, opposition arose much more quickly. Younger officers – who stood the most to lose professionally from a smaller battlefleet – were appalled that Katō would not even attempt to compete with the Americans. For them, the Washington system was a humiliation to be eradicated as rapidly as possible. Katō's argument that Japan could not compete was irrelevant. Even before the Washington agreements were signed, these officers plotted the removal of so-called "treaty faction" admirals. By the early 1930s, they had succeeded.

This visceral rejection of the Washington naval treaties by a new generation of admirals guaranteed that the Imperial Navy of the 1930s would not follow the meek realism of the prior decade. Likewise, the rise of Soviet power and a Chinese threat convinced army leaders that their interpretation of the menace to Japan's interests was the correct one even as its "young officers" seethed over budgetary reductions the army had suffered in the 1920s. By 1931 those young officers resolved to overthrow the remaining façade of Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria

⁵ See Thomas H. Buckley, *The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921–1922* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970); Roger Dingman, *Power in the Pacific: The Origins of Naval Arms Limitation, 1914–1922* (University of Chicago Press, 1976).

even if doing so provoked a crisis with both the Soviet Union and the West.

Historians have long known that the initiative behind the occupation of Manchuria belonged to majors and colonels stationed there. But the fact remains that their superiors in Tokyo made no substantive attempt to stop them and, in the face of that tacit approval, Japanese civilian and naval authorities were helpless despite their reservations over the step. Indeed, many younger civilian officials openly approved of the occupation and favored a thorough renovation of Japan's polity along fascist lines. They, along with their counterparts in the army, were not interested in, or at least not concerned about, Japan's rapidly worsening relations with China, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States.

In this sense it indeed is fair to assert that Japan's path to Pearl Harbor, and its destruction that followed, was a straight one from 1931. To be sure, there were tactical differences of opinion within the army. Should the Chinese Nationalists be neutralized after Manchuria was secured, or should first priority go to preparations northward against the Soviets? Should the army pause and consolidate Manchuria economically and push major efforts to build heavy industry in Japan to prepare for a protracted, "total" war against the West in a decade or so? The army elected to pursue all of these objectives simultaneously.

And that was just the army. The navy, which ought to have been acutely aware of how every new battleship built made it more dependent upon Western, especially American, sources of oil, abrogated all naval limitation agreements by the end of 1934 and commenced colossal building projects shortly after. This at a time when the army's adventures in China strained Japan's relations with the West badly. Had a sort of collective insanity infected Japan's leaders?

The answer is that there were no leaders of Japan through these years. There were leaders of the army and navy. There was a prime minister, often drawn from army or navy senior officers after 1932 (and a wave of assassinations or assassination attempts upon civilian politicians). There was the emperor. But no one had the authority to impose a unified direction, or indeed direction of any kind, to Japan's defense policy. The flaw was not in the leaders, but in the polity.

Decisions were made in such a polity in a combination of direct initiatives (what might be termed policy by fait accompli) and excruciating compromise. The Manchurian occupation stands as a fine case of the former. But it was swiftly followed by the multiple assassinations from 1932 through 1936. Young officers either intimidated senior political

leaders or murdered them. The favored targets were finance and prime ministers who attempted to restrain military spending, which accelerated markedly after 1930. Internal army debates were sometimes settled in this way, too. Nagata Tetsuzan, head of the "total war" officer clique, was murdered in his office in 1935 by a colleague convinced that a policy of patience played into Chinese and Soviet hands. While senior officers did not participate in these crimes directly, they easily blocked meaningful prosecution of the plotters by denying the authority of non-military courts to try such cases.

Senior officers themselves were fully capable of independent action. The decision to send heavy reinforcements into China after fighting broke out between Japanese and Chinese forces around the Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing in July 1937 is a case in point. Technical authority concerning troop movements was lodged with the head of the Army General Staff's Operations Division – not the chief of staff, nor the army minister, certainly not the prime minister or cabinet. That head, Ishiwara Kanji, believed that adventures against either China or the Soviet Union would sap Japan's resources while making it further dependent upon the West, which he regarded as Japan's true antagonist. Ishiwara therefore opposed reinforcement and urged a quick, local settlement of the dispute. But subordinates in the Operations Division's China Section – strong proponents of escalation to bring the Chinese into line once and for all – kept up a steady flow of calls for reinforcement, combining these with (sometimes willfully) incorrect intelligence that large Chinese forces were being rushed into the area. Ishiwara gave in.

Once he did, further escalation was inevitable. Reinforcements required a higher headquarters organization than had existed for Japanese forces around Beijing and that headquarters required a senior general as commander. Matsui Iwane, the choice, quickly expanded the fighting beyond Beijing. After the Chinese Nationalists engaged Japanese forces at Shanghai, Matsui decided upon an offensive up the Yangtze valley into Nanjing. It was taken, with heavy civilian casualties and a major international incident, by year's end. Ishiwara resisted these escalations. He avoided Nagata's fate, but was shunted off into a newly created staff office that ended his career.

Far from limiting its involvement in China, the Imperial Army expanded operations in central and southern China in an attempt to force the Nationalists to the peace table. As the strain on army forces, in fact the Japanese economy itself, mounted, one might have expected care to avoid confrontations with the Soviet Union and the West. The opposite happened. Some senior officers, such as Ishiwara or retired

Ugaki Kazushige, clearly understood the dangers of expansion. But they either were shunted into meaningless positions or denied access to meaningful ones. Ugaki, for example, became foreign minister briefly in 1938 (his appointment itself testimony to how little influence in Foreign Ministry had) to actively pursue negotiations with China. These went nowhere in the face of army field commanders certain that the best way to peace was through conquest.

While Ugaki was attempting restraint, those same field commanders initiated skirmishes with Soviet forces along the Manchurian border. The first, at Changkufeng in 1938, was merely a battlefield punishment for Japanese forces. The second, a year later at Nomonhan, was a full-fledged disaster that could have turned catastrophe but for Soviet restraint due to the unsettled conditions in Europe.

The Imperial Navy pushed for additional operations in southern China, specifically the capture of Hainan Island and Kwangtung province. The navy was partly sincere in pointing out that occupying these areas would complicate Western efforts to supply aid to China. But it had a larger agenda as well. The war in China was overwhelmingly the army's war. Even by early 1938 that war threatened the completion of existing naval expansion programs and jeopardized the start of any new ones. The navy needed a mission to justify its continued hold on resource and funding allocations. The "Southward Advance" promised to provide that mission.

The Southward Advance was not invented in the 1930s, but it was perfect for the navy's purposes then. Japan's destiny lay seaward: to control the islands of the west Pacific, including the oil-rich East Indies, and adjoining land such as Indochina. Oil was a strong attraction, made stronger by growing American hostility toward Tokyo as the China war dragged on. But the key benefit, for the navy, of the Southward Advance was that it would require a strong navy. No reduction of shipbuilding, no diversion of steel to the army's operations in China, could be allowed to jeopardize the potential realization of the Southward Advance.

This advance, or rather its advocacy, was also well timed to influence another army project: the opening of discussions with Nazi Germany for an alliance. The army intended the Soviet Union as the sole target of such an alliance and was determined to get one, even if that meant bringing down the cabinet by withdrawing the army minister from it. But while a new prime minister (and cabinet) could be selected easily enough, the navy's consent was indispensable since the navy, of course, could ruin cabinets too. The navy was willing to consider an alliance with Germany, but only if the United States was a target as well and the

occupation of Hainan finally undertaken.⁶ Hainan was occupied but the alliance not signed: Germany elected to neutralize Soviet opposition to German plans in Europe directly through the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939.

The outbreak of war between Germany and the West in September initially alarmed Japanese leaders in Tokyo. Besides the failure to ally with Germany or otherwise address the Soviet threat, Japan also confronted a worsening shortage of resources and equipment necessary to continue the war against China. Britain, now at war with Germany, was hardly a reliable source of these any longer and the United States, though technically neutral, would be far more likely to supply Britain's war rather than Japan's.

Imperial Army generals in China, however, had a different perspective. The Chinese would find Western aid harder to come by. Accordingly, the army broadly expanded offensive operations in China, called for increasingly severe austerity measures for civilians in Japan, and resisted any suggestions for accommodation with the West.

This stance seemed vindicated by Germany's astonishing victories of the spring of 1940 over the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. Army planners immediately proposed the occupation of the Dutch East Indies – a southward advance. The navy strongly objected. On the surface, this objection seems puzzling. The Southward Advance was the navy's own idea, specifically designed to ensure a strong naval role and concomitant funding. But the army's version of that advance stipulated a lightning strike into the East Indies only. For this, the Imperial Navy would be little more than a ferry service. Naval leaders also objected that the plan was unrealistic. Great Britain, still in the fight against Germany and with significant possessions around the East Indies, would not stand idly by. But when the army grudgingly agreed that the attack could target British colonies in the southwestern Pacific too, the navy played its trump. The Americans would not remain aloof either. They would certainly come to the aid of the Dutch and British. In short, any advance to the south had to be the navy's Southward Advance, meaning war against the Netherlands, Britain, and the United States. Given the Americans' colossal naval construction program started immediately after the fall of France, Japan should rein in its operations in China and devote the freed resources to naval building programs.

⁶ Exactly what obligations were at stake in the alliance was problematic and consumed months of negotiations with Germany and between the army and navy. In essence, Germany wanted Japan to go to war against the Soviet Union once Germany did. The navy would not sanction such an assurance.

The Imperial Navy had no intelligence that in fact the Americans would rush to Britain's aid.⁷ It was enough that the army, which had virtually no assessment capabilities regarding the West, could not disprove the navy's assertion of "Anglo-American indivisibility" and that the risks of assuming such divisibility were too high to allow the army's version of the advance to proceed. More fundamentally, it was enough that the navy simply vetoed that version, as Imperial Japan lacked any mechanism for resolving such an interservice impasse.

That impasse was resolved, but only through painful negotiations between the army and navy. The army could occupy the northern half of French Indochina, useful to cut off Western supply routes to China and as preparation for possible moves on British or Dutch colonies. The army could revive alliance discussions with Germany, so long as America remained a target. There would be no attack on the East Indies, but Japan would open negotiations with Dutch authorities to obtain access to oil resources there (and Japan's delegation would be chosen by the navy, not the army). And the navy would receive very substantial increases in its budgetary and steel allocations for the coming fiscal year, some of those increases coming directly from the army's quota.

This interservice impasse reappeared in the spring of 1941, but with the services exchanging positions. Now the navy favored a swift advance to the south and the army resisted one. This startling dual volte-face is explained by a piece of intelligence that both army and navy did have by that time: the impending German attack on the Soviet Union. While the alliance with Germany (signed in September 1940) did not demand a military response (courtesy of the Imperial Navy's continued veto to such a requirement), the army was eager to prepare one. Such preparations required no southward advance in 1941, but rather a northward one. For the navy, the possibility of war with the Soviet Union was thoroughly alarming. It would be an all-army affair that would doom the Southward Advance and, more importantly, all the budgetary and resource concessions the navy had won. Worse, time was against the navy. The American Pacific Fleet alone would dwarf it by early 1943 given the scale of American naval building already undertaken. The Southward Advance – against Dutch, British, and Americans – not only had to begin, it had to begin quickly.

⁷ This assertion has the classic difficulty of proving a negative. However, decades of work in the naval archives by Japanese scholars and numerous published recollections of Japanese naval leaders have yet to turn up any indication that the Imperial Navy knew what American President Franklin Roosevelt would do, much less whether the American Congress would allow him to do it.

The impasse of 1941, like that of 1940, was resolved through protracted and painful negotiation between Japan's co-sovereigns. The army won the navy's consent to prepare for war against the Soviet Union by reinforcing Manchuria. The navy won the army's consent to prepare for war against the West by occupying the southern half of French Indochina. How matters might have evolved once both preparations were complete is speculative, because a new round of interservice negotiations was compelled in July and August by the American freeze of Japanese assets (and resulting cutoff of American oil shipments to Japan) as a result of the Indochinese occupation.

The American freeze was a shock to army and navy leaders alike. Both had calculated that Washington would avoid confrontation with Japan as it moved to assist Britain in Europe. Both had assumed that the alliance with Germany would instill further caution in the Americans. Both were wrong. But it was the army that had to pay the higher price. Faced with the prospect of rapidly declining oil reserves, it had no choice but to agree to a swift execution of the Southward Advance on the navy's terms. Planning for an attack on the Soviet Union was scrapped, at least for 1941. Yet the army hedged its bets. Even after acrimonious negotiations with the navy forced it to agree to simultaneous attacks on Dutch, British, and American possessions in the southwest Pacific, it offered an absolute minimal number of army forces to accomplish these rather far-reaching objectives. Even then, it secured the navy's agreement that no additional troops would be forthcoming and that those committed to the Southward Advance would be returned (mainly to China and Manchuria) as rapidly as possible.

The Imperial Navy saw the American asset freeze as a decidedly mixed blessing. On the one hand, it compelled the army to adopt the navy's position on the key issue of the scope (and timing) of the Southward Advance. There would also be scant objection to still further increased warship construction. On the other hand, the navy now finally had to confront Admiral Katō's logic of twenty years earlier: confrontation with the Americans was unwise because Japan simply had no way to match them in naval capacity. It seems clear that all but the most rabid naval leaders understood this fact perfectly well in 1941. But what was the alternative? In the autumn of 1941, as the navy began to sidle away from the prospect of war by supporting fresh negotiations with the United States and securing the services of retired admiral Nomura Kichisaburō to lead them, the army bitterly accused the navy of accepting increased budgets – indeed weakening the army's war capacities in doing so – without having the determination to ever use its warships.

Nomura's negotiations in Washington failed. The chief stumbling block, as historians have long recognized, was Japan's position in China. To put it another way, that block was the army's refusal to surrender that position.⁸ War came in December 1941 with attacks on British, Dutch, and American possessions in the southwest Pacific – and Hawaii.

The Pearl Harbor attack represents one more case of army–navy discord in Imperial Japan. The navy, since even before Katō's time, had been aware that the American fleet was likely to outsize it. In Mahanian terms this was doubly unwelcome, since, as any Mahanian knew, a naval war had to end in a single, climactic battle where the largest number of guns would prevail. For decades the Imperial Navy had planned, and built, for such a battle. The formula was simple: seize or besiege the American Philippines; use long-range submarines and aircraft based on Japan's mid-Pacific islands to weaken the American battle fleet as it rushed eastward to the rescue; and ambush that battle fleet in the western Pacific, using extraordinarily long-ranged torpedoes and the monstrously large guns of the *Yamato*-class battleships to pound the Americans as they attempted to close the range, and obliterate their fleet once they finally did.⁹

This battle plan underpinned the Southward Advance. But some officers, particularly Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, believed that the Americans might not follow the script. In early 1941, he proposed moving the climactic battle, in essence, to Hawaii, with a surprise strike on the Americans by carrier-borne aircraft.

Yamamoto's plan was not only a gambler's throw of the dice, risking all on avoiding detection. It also would disrupt the carefully negotiated agreement between the army and navy for carrying out the Southward Advance. Since Yamamoto demanded, upon threat of resignation, that all six of Japan's fleet carriers be used against Hawaii, none of them would be available to provide air support for operations in the southwest Pacific. Since such support was imperative, the army would have to offer additional air assets of its own. The army did so, but not without securing additional promises that these assets, like most of its ground forces, would be provided only on a temporary basis.¹⁰

⁸ As is also well known, the army, suspicious that Nomura and the navy would weasel out of war at the army's expense, sent one of its officers to Washington to monitor Nomura directly.

⁹ Stephen E. Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor: The Failure of the Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007); Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*.

¹⁰ Michael Barnhart, "Planning the Pearl Harbor Attack," *Aerospace Historian* 29 (1982).

The Hawaiian attack and Southward Advance were great successes. But both were undertaken on a basis that nearly ensured Japan's ultimate defeat. In the spring of 1942, the navy would ask the army to provide troop support for either an invasion of Australia or operations against British India. The army refused, citing the interservice agreement of 1941, ensuring that an opportunity to place heavy pressure on the British government was missed. Indeed, the army was unresponsive throughout the Pacific War. It was late to recognize the threat of the American counteroffensive in the Solomon Islands in late 1942 (in part because the navy did not divulge its catastrophic losses at Midway). It refused to commit major reinforcements to the Pacific islands throughout 1943. It effectively abandoned the Philippines in 1944 even as the navy was banking on a major showdown there to deal the American invaders crippling losses at Leyte. The Imperial Navy was crippled instead.

That, at least, ended the co-sovereignty of Japan's two armed services, since only one remained by late 1944. Unhappily for the Japanese people, the Imperial Army was determined to survive the war. To this end, it devised the admirably direct strategy of binding itself to the people so directly and so closely that the Americans would have to obliterate Japan in order to end the Imperial Army. The *kamikaze* air and sea squadrons and the training of children to use bamboo spears to attack the Americans were only the most macabre manifestations of this strategy. It ought to have worked, but it had one unavoidable vulnerability. As the army's representatives pointed out at every command or cabinet conference, they fought to preserve the Meiji polity: the emperorship. This line of argument was unassailable, especially given the Americans' refusal to offer any assurances concerning the emperorship. But it also gave the emperor himself real policy leverage for the first time. Convinced that the army's umbilical strategy would in fact doom the Japanese people as well as itself, particularly after Soviet intervention closed off any hope of a negotiated solution, Emperor Hirohito declared that he was willing to sacrifice himself to save his people. The army had no answer for this (save to argue that Hirohito was deranged or at least unsettled and needed to be taken into army custody or perhaps even compelled to abdicate – options the army actively considered in August 1945 but in the end declined to pursue) and the rest, as they say, is history.

The implications of Japan's story for contemporary debates over the nature of the behavior of great powers are alarming. Japan certainly was offensively minded or, to put it more accurately both the Imperial Army and Navy were. But Japan, in the broadest sense, was senseless

to its international environment and engaged in offensive action with risks far outweighing potential benefits. It did so because its internal structure mattered, mattered critically. Its domestic politics, in particular its interservice dynamics, were malign in the extreme. The Imperial Army and Navy may well have pursued their own institutional interests coherently and rationally, but the result was unreal and disastrous for the Japanese people and, ultimately, both services. The fault was not in the international system, but in the Meiji polity itself.

A "realist" Imperial Japan?

History grants the magic wand of hindsight. It is an instrument historians are loath to use, as it invariably distorts their ability to understand the world their subjects saw. Yet temptation remains, if only to speculate: if we could travel in time back to 1941, or even earlier, with news clips from our world in hand, and show them to the leaders of Imperial Japan – show them the absolute catastrophe that awaited their country by 1945 – would they have done anything differently?

This is, in essence, what realism requires us to do, and why many historians have trouble with it. But even if we grant realism's premises, would Imperial Japan's policy-makers have acted differently once we stepped out of our time machine?

It is hard to believe that they would have. The Imperial Navy in particular faced an excruciating dilemma: fight the West or admit it was useless as a tool of Japan's security. Even Yamamoto Isoroku, a man fully aware of the risks being undertaken, embraced war before humiliation. If we take the navy out of the equation (as our magic wand becomes bigger), it may have been in retrospect that Imperial Japan would have been better served by a 1941 attack upon the Soviet Union, as indeed most elements in the Imperial Army preferred. Doing so, however, would have required the sufferance of the United States or, more particularly, the continued flow of American oil. This was simply not in the cards, as the Imperial Navy repeatedly and correctly argued.

If we take the Imperial Army out of the picture as well, then Japan enjoys the possibility of rapprochement with the West – exactly the course pursued after 1945. There were some Japanese leaders who favored such a course in the interwar period. But they were never remotely in a position to contest the control of the military's conception of Japanese security. It is, in fact, impossible to conceive of any force powerful enough to contest that control short of one capable of imposing terms of virtually unconditional surrender upon Japan. If our time travelers encountered those few leaders favoring rapprochement,

how many of those leaders would have agreed to pay the price Japan did for ridding itself of the military's control of security affairs? And, if the answer to this question is "none," where are we left in our consideration of realism as a meaningful tool for judging how nations should behave?

10 Military audacity: Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and China's adventure in Korea

Andrew B. Kennedy

In the study of international relations, it is popular to imagine leaders as constrained by the distribution of material power. If military balances and alliance patterns do not dictate foreign policy, they can still pose powerful incentives that leaders ignore at their peril. For this reason, leaders often give way before stronger rivals, or at least defer military conflict with them as they build up their own strength. Nonetheless, some leaders are much less deferential when the balance of power is not in their favor. Rulers from Alexander the Great to Ho Chi Minh have fought for remarkably audacious goals, even when their forces were outnumbered or outgunned. In fact, states have launched wars against significantly stronger adversaries at least eleven times since World War II alone.¹ In short, while leaders often avoid conflict with more powerful states, the exceptions to this rule are too numerous and noteworthy to ignore.

Why do leaders vary in their willingness to attack the forces of stronger opponents? Or to use a term employed in this volume, why are some leaders more willing to punch above the "power line" of their state? It is tempting to focus on individual tolerances for risk as an explanation. Typically, risk-taking refers to the selection of choices that offer a wider array of potential outcomes: "risky" options promise relatively great rewards if successful but relatively great costs if they fail.² Defined in this way, attacking a stronger state seems like a fairly risky option, other things being equal. If successful, such military action could eliminate important threats, allow for national expansion, and enhance the

¹ T. V. Paul notes ten such cases between 1945 and 1993. See T. V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 3–4. Since 1993, Pakistan's attack on India in the Kargil War of 1999 represents another case.

² Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 40; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 26.