The Emperor Learns of The War-Termination Maneuvers of the Tōdai Seven

In which the author tells of Nambara’s conspiracy with Takagi Yasaka and others to bring about an early end to the war. He discusses Takagi’s career as a pioneer in American studies, his connection with Privy Seal Kido, and his attempt before Pearl Harbor to forestall war with the U. S. What the professors recommended in 1945 proved far more realistic than actual government policy, and although Nambara concluded that their efforts had been fruitless, the author argues that these efforts did come to the emperor’s attention and hence had an effect. He concludes—this is his final chapter, followed only by an epilogue—with reflections on history as “double weave.”

Nambara and Takagi

The book Verbatim: Recollections of Nambara Shigeru has this to say about the war-termination maneuvers of the seven Tōdai professors, of whom Nambara was one. Nambara is speaking: “This maneuvering to terminate the war we Law Faculty colleagues did completely on our own…. Takagi, Tanaka, Suenobu Sanji, Wagatsuma Sakae, Oka Yoshitake, Suzuki Takeo, and I. It required, of course, extreme secrecy, so it had to be underground. It took plenty of awareness and resolve on that point and careful planning, so these acts would be buried forever. We couldn’t leave records. We agreed among ourselves that it would be covered up forever, that we’d act as if it hadn’t happened.

“Among them, Takagi was my closest confidant, the most important person. Takagi was a specialist in American studies, and as a classmate of Kido Kōichi[1] at Gakushūin, Takagi was close to him, and like me he grieved at the progress of the war; he had influence and was a kindred soul. At first the two of us drew up the skeleton of the idea and gradually expanded our numbers until there were seven of us.” The seven gathered secretly in the Reception Room on the second floor of the main library, pooled reports and analyzed them, and discussed the officials they should contact and who should do the contacting. The central actors were Nambara and Takagi.
Takagi was born the second son of Kanda Naibu, Japan’s most famous English-language educator. Kanda was a baron, the first student sent to study in the U.S., who accompanied the Iwakura Mission in 1871 and stayed for eight years. After returning to Japan, he was a professor of English at Tōdai, Tokyo Higher Commercial, and Gakushūin. Takagi studied at Gakushūin since middle school and was a close friend of Kido Kōichi, later Privy Seal. Takagi graduated from the Political Science division of the Faculty of Law of Tokyo Imperial University, then entered the Finance Ministry, serving for a time in the banks division, then became an assistant professor in the Faculty of Law. He studied abroad at Harvard, where he earned his M.A. He had many acquaintances among important government figures in Japan and the U.S.

Takagi appeared at the Tokyo trial as special counsel for Kido. At that time he presented a sworn affidavit to the court, and in it he wrote as follows: “5. Marquis Kido is a lifelong friend. In 1871 his father and my father went to the U.S. accompanying Mori Arinori. … He too has been greatly influenced in his fundamentals by English and American culture; in general, he leans to English and American thought, so basically he is liberal… Beginning when Kido was Minister of Education,[2] I had countless consultations on university issues and later as international relations became more important, with the idea that it was one of my duties to tell Kido what I thought based on my research on the U. S. Every time we met in time of crisis, I advised earnestly and spoke my opinion particularly on policy toward the U.S. And after Kido became Privy Seal, I continued to do so diligently.”

The Push into the Dutch East Indies Invited U.S. Involvement in the War

Takagi’s actions are substantiated by the Kido Diary and the Documents Relating to Kido Kōichi presented as evidence to the court. For example, in the Documents there is a long position paper Takagi delivered to Kido’s home with an attached memo, “The Hour is Already Late.” The date is October 1941, two months prior to the opening of hostilities between Japan and the U.S. “In this time of crisis I wish to draw your attention in particular to two points. First, the idea that if we seize the Dutch East Indies swiftly, England and the U.S. will not embark on the road to armed opposition is mistaken. This opinion is the basis for those currently advocating an advance south and a hard line toward the U.S., but if you sum up the reports from many U.S. magazines and the like that I have recently got hold of, the attitude of England and the U.S., especially after the Atlantic Conference, is to abandon the policy of appeasement and press on instead to a policy first of economic war and then if necessary of armed conflict: on this point there can be virtually no doubt. Concerning the recent experience when the occupation of French Indochina gave rise to so great a collision and to resistance, that experience should serve as a good and significant lesson at decision time in this critical moment…” [emphasis Tachibana].

At the time, relations between Japan and the U. S. were touch-and-go. When the Second World War began in Europe in September 1939, the German Blitzkrieg swept over Europe. France surrendered barely nine months after the opening of hostilities. Japan proclaimed its non-involvement in the European war; but when France surrendered (June 1940), Japan used its advantageous position (the alliance between Japan and Germany) to seize control of Asia and immediately embarked on military occupation of French Indochina (September 1940). So long as that involved only northern Indochina, the U.S. merely protested forcefully; but when in June 1941 the occupation spread to Southern Indochina, the U.S. considered it contrary to international law and retaliated by freezing Japanese assets in the U.S. It prohibited all oil exports. England and Holland followed suit. The underlined portion of Takagi’s memorandum—to so great a collision and to resistance—points to these retaliatory measures. England, the U.S., and Holland controlled virtually all the world’s oil resources, and their ban on shipments to Japan meant that Japan had only enough oil for one or two years. In
the face of the oil embargo, there arose in Japan the strong contention that Japan should occupy the Dutch East Indies and seize the oil. The judgment: if Japan acted with lightning speed, England and the U.S. would not intervene.

Takagi’s memorandum argued that this point of view was utterly mistaken, that it was inevitable that as soon as Japan intervened in the Dutch East Indies, England and the U.S. would go to war. That year U.S.-Japan relations were troubled, and Takagi met time and again with Kido and suggested policy toward the U.S. According to the *Kido Diary*, Takagi met with Kido right before the opening of hostilities four times. This was only one small part of Takagi’s efforts to avoid the outbreak of war; during this time Takagi worked for the easing of tension between Japan and the U.S. not merely with Kido, but also with Prime Minister Konoe, U.S. Ambassador Grew, Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Nomura Kichisaburō, and others. His sworn affidavit contains the following:

6. In late January 1941, at the time Ambassador Nomura departed [for Washington], I presented my views on U.S.-Japan relations to him, as I always tried to do at such a time… I met with Kido and stated my views. Kido showed strong sympathy. Later, I actually met more frequently with Konoe than with Kido, and although my abilities were limited, as one scholar I did everything I could to improve U.S.-Japan relations.

In late May, in view of the international crisis that at the time added to the tension…I advised Kido in particular. …

In August that same year, at the time of the sending of the Konoe message, I too took part in planning the Konoe proposal. Down to the present, I have been unable to shed my regret that at the time we were unable, via the statesmanship we attempted, to find a way out. Both before and after, I met a number of times with Ambassador Grew, exerted my unworthy efforts as a scholar for U.S.-Japan understanding, and based on my opinion that was undergirded by those contacts, I presented my sense of things to Kido.

The “Konoe message” of August was the proposal that Japan and the U.S. hold a summit conference: regretting the fact that U.S.-Japan relations were getting steadily worse, and letting bygones be bygones, Prime Minister Konoe and President Roosevelt would meet face-to-face somewhere in the Pacific and try to solve at one go all outstanding issues between Japan and the U.S. This Konoe message moved President Roosevelt temporarily—“The president praised Konoe’s message as ‘absolutely splendid’ and said he’d like to meet with Konoe for about three days. Konoe says, ‘That moment was the closest Japan and the U.S. came.’” That’s how important the Konoe message was. And Takagi was among those who drafted it.

Izawa Takio, elder statesman among Home Ministry officials, was charged—should the meeting take place—with boiling down the agenda for the two men; he said, “The bottom line was that Roosevelt would have to betray America 40% and Konoe would have to betray Japan 60%.” Izawa said to Konoe, “If you do this, it’s a foregone conclusion you’ll be murdered.” Konoe replied, “It will be worth it." Which shows how anxious he was to proceed. [3] But the talks never happened.

In actual fact, it was only for a very brief moment, on the occasion of this Konoe message, that Japan and the U.S. showed an inclination toward rapprochement. Beginning immediately thereafter, the hawks seized control of national policy in both Japan and the U.S., and the situation worsened, snowballing downhill toward the opening of hostilities between Japan and the U.S. at year’s end.

Takagi was meeting frequently with Kido when this Konoe message was sent. In the *Kido Diary* for this period, there is a memo that is likely Kido’s recording of his own thoughts. Reading it, we understand well what Kido was thinking at the
stage when it was touch-and-go whether war between Japan and the U. S. could be avoided. We can see that Kido took fully into account Takagi’s proposals—his judgment of the tension between Japan and the U.S. and the absolute need to avoid war:

- Oil: the Navy says it has oil for two years—a year and a half if war breaks out. The Army says about one year.
- So to state the conclusion first, if the above is true, we have to say we are utterly unable to fight a must-win war against the U.S.
- If we look for nearby sources of oil other than the U.S. and Great Britain, there are only the Dutch East Indies and Southern Sakhalin….
- If we invade the Dutch East Indies, the U.S. will enter the war. If that is the case, even if we procure oil, its importation over long distances under threat of British and American submarines and carrier planes is very dangerous, and it is exceedingly doubtful we can achieve the anticipated result.
- If we miscalculate, it will be an alarming disaster, and solely on the issue of oil, Japan will have no alternative but to surrender.
- Turning to current conditions, to speak bluntly, our national strength is weak, so we can’t have our way; the surface conditions are different, but I can’t help thinking that there’s no alternative to the resolve Japan showed at the time of the Triple Intervention after the Sino-Japanese War (1895).[4]
- That is, we aim for ten years from now and resolve to persevere and be determined.

We should exert all efforts to do the following:

- adjust relations between Japan and the U.S. for the present in order to secure the necessary material resources;
- domestically, make the advance South our ultimate goal, and allow ourselves about ten years for the achievement of this objective;
- build up heavy industry and the machine-tool industry;
- build up the artificial oil industry rapidly;
- expand distant sea lanes and shipping greatly; and so on.

In short, there’s no alternative but determination and perseverance (expanding national power in the meantime). It’s all too clear to us today, knowing what really happened in that war, all the way to horrific defeat, that at the time this was the only correct policy choice. But at the time, people thinking this coolly were in the minority; unable to restrain the military and pulled along by an overly rosy estimate of the situation, the majority rushed into war.

Opposition to Mediation by the Soviet Union

As I’ve said, the maneuvering to terminate the war was carried out in total secrecy. It came to light at the Tokyo trial. The defense presented evidence (Kido’s affidavit, the Kido Diary, Takagi’s affidavit, etc.) to prove that Kido was not a central promoter of war but until the very last had searched for possible ways to peace, and that evidence brought to light the fact that such maneuvering had taken place. For example, in Takagi’s affidavit, there is the following: “7. In May 1945, I consulted with Konoe and several other political figures about terminating the war, and after considering carefully what I’d learned, I paid a visit to Kido on June 1 to present a peace proposal. There was no difference between the marquis and me on the policy to pursue. I could see his determination clearly. He thought that ‘a purge of the Army equals peace’….
“On July 31 I talked with Konoe at Karuizawa about the urgent need to decide the official response to the Potsdam Proclamation.\[5\] I stressed acceptance of the Proclamation; in turn, the prince suggested that I meet Kido and state the same opinion.

“On August 3 I met with Kido and stated that we should of course press on with a peace policy that took the U.S. as opposite number.”

At the very end of the war, some Foreign Ministry and Army officials who had begun to grope blindly for peace planned to ask the Soviet Union to act as mediator. Their plans got as far as opening talks at the ambassadorial level and planning to send an emissary (Konoe) to Moscow. But the Tōdai professors condemned the idea strongly. In Nambara Shigeru Recollected, there’s this passage:

Maruyama: What did you recommend?

Nambara: First, the timing of the termination of the war. We were active from the end of March 1945 into April and May [TT: actually, until August], and we thought the German collapse would come in May. We thought that the German surrender likely presented the best opportunity for a Japanese peace proposal. At the latest, before the Americans landed on Okinawa—we were agreed on that.

Second, how to make the war-termination contact with the Allies. We thought it best to deal directly with the U.S. If that proved absolutely impossible, Switzerland or some other country would be okay, but make an offer to the U.S. through a third party. To say it the other way round, avoid the Soviet Union. We judged that it wouldn’t do to complicate matters. We discussed this thoroughly with Foreign Minister Tōgō, and we had such a warm conversation that Tōgō himself asked if we wouldn’t please think about concrete methods.

The people favoring Soviet mediation believed that with the neutrality pact between Japan and the Soviet Union in effect and the two countries still maintaining diplomatic relations, the Soviet Union—if asked—would serve as mediator. But in fact, at the Yalta Conference in February, the Soviet Union had promised to enter the war after the German surrender, so that option simply didn’t exist. On August 3, when Takagi and the others met with Kido for the last time, Soviet troops were already massing on the border between Japan and the Soviet Union in preparation for the attack that came five days later, and it was already clear that the Tōdai professors, not the Foreign Ministry officials and Army officers who favored Soviet mediation, had made the right call.

We know from other materials that when Tōgō, attracted by the Tōdai professors’ proposal, asked them to think about concrete methods, he was really asking Takagi, Isn’t there some way you can use your personal connections to contact the U.S.? The Takagi affidavit continues: “The last two or three times I visited Kido, I went with my close friend Nambara, then dean of the Tōdai Law Faculty. Nambara and I had virtually the same opinions on domestic politics and international relations, so especially after May, we favored terminating the war and repeatedly went together to visit politicians.”

Immediately after these facts came to light in the courtroom, the University News ran the headline:

ENCOURAGING TERMINATION OF THE WAR
‘UNIVERSITY REASON’
SEVEN PROFESSORS, INCLUDING NAMbara, TAKAGI, TANAKA
The article said: “The Takagi affidavit that is a high point of the Tokyo trial makes clear how Professors Nambara and Takagi of the Tōdai Faculty of Law offered advice on the termination of the war, and how at the time of the termination of the war, unexpectedly, Tōdai, citadel of truth and reason, roused itself to action in the homeland’s moment of danger, its practical action shot through with academic fervor so befitting that reason.” The existence of the war-termination maneuvering came to light at this time, but even thereafter, in keeping with their original promise “to bury this act forever,” those involved did not come forward to speak of the facts. The facts were spoken of in full for the first time in Nambara Shigeru Recollected (1989).

Maruyama: I returned to the university from my first conscription in November 1944[6] and remember hearing from you in very broad terms ideas about terminating the war…. You said that the only strategy to suppress the Army’s do-or-die resistance was to use the court and the senior councilors. If the Army simply wouldn’t obey, you said something about there being no alternative to using the Navy’s power….When had you begun to have such thoughts and plans?

Nambara: …I broached it in concrete terms to my faculty colleagues after becoming dean… There was a group of us who lamented the war in the same way as I. As individuals we gathered reports tirelessly, exchanged them in secret, and studied them. …I thought, let’s try gathering them systematically.

This initiative developed into the meetings, mentioned earlier, in the Reception Room in the library.

Maruyama: Did you meet regularly, on a given day?

Nambara: No. It wasn’t regularly. It wouldn’t do to attract attention to the fact that all seven of us were meeting, so we decided to meet three or four at a time…. The conclusions we’d reached by collecting the most reliable reports possible and analyzing them accurately we spoke of to Konoe first of all, to the sympathetic senior councilors and cabinet ministers, and to people who—though not in the cabinet—had influence.

The point of working on people in authority, as in Maruyama’s earlier statement, was that the only strategy was to use the senior councilors and court and the Navy.

Maruyama: How did you approach the senior councilors?

Nambara: We divided them up, and each of us approached sympathetic people in secret and appealed to them. Generally, I went round with Takagi. To speak only of the visits I remember, Konoe twice—once in his villa in Odawara we talked for quite a long time. Another was Wakatsuki Reijirō. The first time was a visit with Tanaka Kōtarō to his villa in Izu; thereafter, we visited his Tokyo home two or three times. Again, I received a call from Suzuki Takeo, and we called on Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Ishiguro Tadaatsu. Also Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori, Privy Seal Kido Kōichi, General Ugaki Kazushige—they were my chief targets.

Evidence of these activities of the Tōdai professors appears, for example, in the Kido Diary for May 7, recorded in simple fashion: “Three p.m.: once again to the office. Professors Nambara and Takagi came. Consulted. The path ahead in the war, etc.” Or on June 1: “2:30. Tōdai Professors Nambara and Takagi came to my office; spoke of their opinions on prospects for the war, policy in response, etc.” No matter what the topic, the Kido Diary includes only simple notes of this sort. As to the precise content of their war-terminating maneuvers, the professors left no notes, and the senior councilors who listened to their appeals left no true notes, either. But it’s not the case that the content is unknown. We do have a single document that dates from that time.
War-Terminating Maneuvers Even the Navy Promoted

That document is a memo left by Admiral Takagi Sōkichi, former Chief of the Education Bureau of the Navy Ministry, who on secret orders from the Navy Minister, Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa, had a hand in war-terminating maneuvers at the end of the war. Takagi was one of those targeted by the seven professors, and in his diary and the documents appended to it, published in 2000, there are two detailed memos from the time he was approached by Nambara and the others. In Nambara Shigeru Remembered, Nambara speaks of Takagi as follows: “At that time Admiral Takagi Sōkichi was Yonai’s brain trust, so Takagi and I—the two of us—met him three times and told him we’d like the Navy to act. The Navy too was deeply worried, so although in the end he took no action, Admiral Takagi saw the larger picture unusually well for a military man. So he understood what we said and kept things secret.”

In fact, at this time Admiral Takagi, too, was involved in secret plots (from the dump-Tōjō movement to plans to assassinate Tōjō), so even though he was approached by Nambara and the others, he couldn’t respond. Later, in the newsletter that accompanied Takagi Yasaka’s collected works, Admiral Takagi wrote as follows: “From 1944 on, as is well known today, Japan’s war situation had fallen into the worst possible state, and people of influence who took a comprehensive view of world conditions felt acutely the need for Japan’s policy to make a 180-degree turn, from prosecuting the war to searching for peace; but on account of the terror tactics—Military Police, Special Police—of the then government, it was an exceptionally dark atmosphere in Japan. To express that view in word or deed was to risk your life. In this atmosphere, I received a visit from Nambara of Tōdai on June 8, 1945, and on June 15 Takagi and Nambara visited my office at the Naval University.”

Admiral Takagi and Takagi Yasaka had met earlier. From 1938 to 1939 then-Captain Takagi Sōkichi held the important position of Chief of the Emergency Research Bureau in the Navy Ministry. At that time he summoned talent broadly from outside official circles and initiated a sizable project to depict what the Navy’s (and by extension Japan’s) grand design for the future should be. The project was divided into six sections (focus groups) and assembled sixty people—only the best and brightest of the day; at that time the most influential member of the foreign policy discussion group was Takagi Yasaka. The Navy took the U.S. as hypothetical enemy, so American studies was essential knowledge for naval officers, and Takagi’s Introduction to U. S. Political History (1931) had long been required reading. That’s how highly the Navy already thought of Takagi Yasaka.

As part of their war-termination maneuvering, Takagi and Nambara visited Takagi Sōkichi at the Naval University on June 8 and 15: “At that time, citing the writings of former ambassador Grew and Dr. Reischauer, the professors emphasized that U.S. postwar planning was not thinking about changing our kokutai root and branch and that we should negotiate with the U.S. as direct opposite number, that we should negotiate with Great Britain focusing on respect for the imperial house, and that continuing the war was not advantageous. Nambara made the point that the Suzuki Cabinet wasn’t up to a courageous decision to change state policy, so he hoped an Ugaki Cabinet would emerge.

“On top-secret orders from Navy Minister Yonai and Vice Minister Inoue in August 1944, I had encouraged research and promotion of maneuvering to terminate the war, but that was utterly secret even within the Navy; so although I was thoroughly sympathetic to the concerns of the two professors, I couldn’t take them into my confidence.”

The True Relation between Sovereign and Subject in the Imperial Declaration Ending the War
The memo of the June 8 meeting preserved by Admiral Takagi contains as the professors’ analysis of the situation, “Germany is done. The Soviet Union will swing to the enemy side.” That is what happened. Moreover, concerning the domestic scene, the memo states, “If the policy is to be 100,000,000 glorious deaths, it will reach an impasse at the kokutai, that grave issue.” And the following: “If it comes to 100,000,000 glorious deaths, then in American and British eyes, the imperial house will have served no purpose; its continued existence will have no point. Seen through Japanese eyes, too, we should listen to the voices of ordinary subjects. It’s become a matter of what goes in the emperor’s ear. If it’s to be 100,000,000 glorious deaths, then resentment against the emperor will erupt. Distrust abroad and at home will shake the foundations of the kokutai.” Again, in terminating the war, the true relation between sovereign and subject is crucial, and a draft imperial proclamation to display the true relation emphasizes these points: “I do not intend that our allies die and our country fight on alone… For the sake of humanity… To save the people from falling into great misery.” Again: “Even though Germany lost the war, the culture of Kant, Hegel, and Goethe endures. What will get Japan get back on its feet?”

5. The senior councilors, too, are considering termination of the war. After the battle of Okinawa, we hope the Navy will offer the emperor its tactical opinion on the direction the war is taking.

6. After the battle of Okinawa, if the Navy reports to the throne on the war’s prospects, the senior councilors will act accordingly.

And it mentions the sense the professors had gathered from making the rounds of the senior councilors—that the senior councilors, too, were already leaning in the direction of terminating the war; that if the Navy took the lead, the senior councilors would respond.

In the memo from the meeting of June 15, when both Nambara and Takagi Yasaka were present, there are these comments: “1. Since the beginning of last year [1944], in discussing Japan, American draft plans for the postwar world pay particular attention to the kokutai argument, to wit:

- The central ideas of Grew et al. in the State Department are relatively sound.
- The latest Reischauer editorial, too, likely reflects the opinion of the State Department.
- Not changing the kokutai is virtually explicit.”

And then comes Takagi’s analysis specifically of the kokutai issue. In essence, there are various opinions about this issue in the U.S. domestically, but if we take the U.S. on directly as opposite number and express Japan’s true intent candidly, the basic thought of the core makers of Japan policy isn’t anti-emperor; so the discussion will undoubtedly bear fruit.

What’s important here is the issue of moral justification on the emperor’s side—why the decision to terminate the war? “The Imperial House wishes to save the people from further war damage, so if it orders a ceasefire, if it orders peace, it is to save the situation.” The imperial proclamation should stress that the decision to terminate the war is not for the sake of preserving the emperor’s status, but above all for the sake of the people, to avoid further war damage to the people.

Another key point is whether the surrender is conditional or unconditional and, related to that, the issue of what happens to the emperor system. Here is Nambara: “In the matter of conditions for terminating the war, it’s probably better not to insist on conditions—in other words, we thought ‘unconditional.’ Our conclusion was that it’s best to terminate the war
as early as possible. As to form, we thought it most desirable in Japan’s case that it be the emperor’s decision—that is, via the issuance of an imperial declaration. In the imperial declaration at the time of his decision, the emperor should make clear to the world and to Japan his own responsibility. The sense that he should abdicate at an appropriate time after the end of the war was there implicitly. But we did say let’s defend the emperor system—we’d probably have to limit the constitutional authority of the emperor sharply—but defend the emperor system. We didn’t use the phrase ‘defend the kokutai,’ but we were saying, why not take that position?” Defend the emperor system as system, but in the war-termination proclamation have the emperor make clear his responsibility. And have him abdicate at an appropriate time. In addition, limit greatly the postwar emperor’s power—this with an eye to the postwar revision of the constitution.

As I explained in detail in the last chapter, Nambara had long thought the emperor should take responsibility for the war and abdicate at an appropriate time. That feeling surfaced most clearly after the war when Nambara was elected to the House of Peers and debated the new Imperial House Law. Nambara found it strange that this draft law contained no provision at all for the abdication of the emperor, so he asked, What would happen in case the emperor contracted an incurable disease? Or if as a free individual he said he wanted to stop being emperor, what then? Nambara argued as follows: “Should the emperor encounter a grave incident and feel strongly his own moral responsibility, and should he wish to say so even at the risk of his position, the fact that that path is blocked, I think, is equivalent to blocking such a supremely moral act on the part of the emperor. What is the government’s position?” This, of course, is to ask what would happen if the emperor feels war responsibility and says he wants to stop being emperor.

Further, Nambara made this clear statement:

I have to think about this particularly in the context of the recent war. It is clear from an interpretation of the existing [Meiji] constitution that the emperor bears no political or legal responsibility for the war. In particular, the people all know full well that he more than anyone wanted peace from first to last and that he took on himself the suffering of the state. Nevertheless—no, for that very reason—we can speculate that he must have felt the strongest spiritual and moral responsibility toward his ancestors above and the people below for the fact that the greatest misfortune ever in the history of our country arose during his reign.

Now the people all are wading in the depths of material and spiritual disaster. Most especially, wounded soldiers, innumerable war refugees, and survivors of the millions of war dead, fill our streets. They know that in the time of military rule, the leaders were mistaken, but every last one of them invoked the name of the emperor and fought and suffered for the emperor. And beginning with the senior councilors and close advisors, leaders all over the country are facing death in harsh legal trials or are being purged. Still for a while, during this period of extraordinary change and even while being made to shoulder incalculable grief and sense of responsibility under these conditions, it’s the emperor who is attending to national affairs all by himself.

Thus, Nambara’s point was that for the emperor’s sake, too, there should be provision for abdication. But in fact no such provision was made, and presumably also partly for that reason, the Shōwa emperor did not abdicate.

The War-Termination Maneuvering of The Tōdai Seven: Were They Themselves Satisfied?

To return to the story of the war-termination maneuvering of Nambara and the others, they thought bringing about an end to the war was probably too much for Suzuki Kantarō, then-prime minister and a Navy man. The greatest obstacle to surrender was clearly the Army, which trumpeted the final battle on the home islands and 100,000,000 glorious
deaths. Thinking it would take a strong cabinet with Army ties to bring about the termination of the war, Nambara tried to entice Army elder statesman General Ugaki Kazushige:

Ishida: Who went to see Ugaki?

Nambara: I went alone…. Something had to be done: he did listen carefully to what I had to say, and we were in general agreement…. Not simply Ugaki but Konoe, too: …we as scholars truly grieved for the country…and had concluded that this was the only possible route; they all agreed wholeheartedly. Especially Wakatsuki was greatly moved and showed full-blown sympathy—something had to be done, so let’s work together. All the people I paid calls on promised very seriously to cooperate.

But in retrospect, May and June passed while we were doing this….Time passed, right up to August 15. In other words, in reality it was the dropping of the atomic bombs that brought about the end of the war. When all is said and done, what we did had no effect. Nothing more than our own self-gratification—frankly, nothing more than that.

So because it produced only their own self-gratification, Nambara’s own evaluation of their war-termination maneuvering was quite low.

But was that really the case? I think it was not something to be so modest about. To be sure, their maneuvering did not become the occasion when events began to move suddenly, amid general applause, toward an end to the war. However, if you look at the actual movement toward ending the war that developed several months later, elements that the Tōdai professors had thought of did come to pass. For example: the Navy’s rising to the occasion and working in cooperation with the court and senior councilors to suppress the resistance of the Army; using the form of termination via imperial decision, persuading the people with the force of an imperial proclamation; ending reliance on Soviet mediation and pinning hopes on direct negotiations with the U.S.; putting no conditions on surrender but accepting unconditional surrender. That the actual process was so similar to what the professors imagined means we can say that the work of the professors had not a direct but an indirect effect, lingering like an after-image in the minds of the important people.

At first I thought that, as Nambara said, their war-termination maneuvering had had no real effect, that it produced only their own self-gratification. But when I read the Shōwa Emperor’s Monologue (1991), my thinking changed. That’s because in its section, “The Argument over the Potsdam Proclamation,” the emperor’s own words are noted as follows: “The Foreign Minister says we can accept this proposal [the Burns reply]; the Army says we can’t. Kido’s position is that we ought to accept it. If I may add a word to the argument at this time, Nambara, dean of the Tōdai Faculty of Law, and Takagi Yasaka have visited Kido and expressed the opinion that we had at all costs to sue for peace. Again, Arita Hachiro[11] had come to Kido to tell him we had to sue for peace directly with the British and Americans…. Thus, among the people the mood to sue for peace had intensified.” The appeal of Nambara and the others had reached the emperor’s ear. And it became one reason the emperor moved conclusively to accept the Potsdam Proclamation.

I said to myself, “Aha!” I thought I knew the basis of the emperor’s words at the end of the war, at the time of his second Imperial Conference decision. The first imperial decision at the end of the war was handed down on August 9: “We accept the Potsdam Proclamation on the understanding that the emperor system [kokutai] will be maintained.” In responding three days later (August 12), the Allies said nothing directly about the desire to maintain the emperor system but simply reiterated the principles: “From the time of surrender, the sovereignty of the emperor and the Japanese
government will be subject to the control of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers,” and “The ultimate form of the government of Japan will be decided by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people.”

The Japanese side split sharply in interpreting and evaluating this reply. At the second Imperial Conference (August 14) there was a clear difference between the opinion of the Army—“It’s not clear from this whether the kokutai will be maintained, so we need a second reply making that explicit”—and the opinion of the Foreign Ministry and Navy—“This is sufficient, so without requesting a second response or doing anything to ruin the talks, we should accept this reply.” The emperor’s second decision was that this reply was sufficient.

At the time he issued the second imperial decision, the emperor explained, “It’s not that I don’t understand the views of those uneasy about whether this truly protects the kokutai, but I believe firmly that this truly protects the kokutai. I believe firmly this is the true intent of the Americans.” This statement checked those who opposed accepting the Burns note. But in fact the basis for his full confidence was nowhere made clear. However, that basis becomes clear when we know that the logic of the arguments the Tōdai professors used in their war-termination maneuvering was communicated to the emperor. Takagi had emphasized these points. He investigated closely what the U.S. officials of the time had said up till then, explained which person had which thoughts and how government opinion changes in terms of political dynamics, that with people friendly to the emperor system in positions of power, if now Japan approached the U.S., the emperor system would undoubtedly be maintained, but that if Japan involved the Soviet Union, which opposed the emperor system, the emperor system would be endangered. In time of chaos, a revolution might arise.

It can only have been Takagi’s argument, reaching the emperor via Kido, that gave the emperor firm confidence that the U.S. side intended to maintain the emperor system. There could be no doubt, given his birth and personality, that Takagi was a firm supporter of the emperor, and we can surmise that the emperor trusted him. The fact that Takagi’s name appears in the emperor’s statement I quoted earlier from the Shōwa Emperor’s Monologue is, I think, the best possible proof.

Secret Support for the Emperor System from the U.S. Side

In “My Proposed Amendment to the Draft Revision of the Constitution,” Takagi speaks of his own view of the emperor as follows: “What is the essence of the emperor system? To try to cover it in a phrase, the emperor system is the system that in Japan emperors from time immemorial have ruled with virtue and with the advice and assistance of generations of Japanese; in a bit more detail, the emperor himself doesn’t rule but in each age entrusts rule to bearers, yet he continues of course to exist and rule as the lead force spiritually and morally—this is our political system. We can express this most simply with the words ‘sovereign-people same rule’; it also should be called the product of our people’s historical development stretching over the past 2,000 years, the central unique reality of our kokutai. This form of state can also be comprehended in the words ‘sovereign-people one body.’"

This formulation is virtually the same as what the emperor-centered believers put forward during the war. Because that was his position, Takagi’s private constitutional revision excluded popular sovereignty from the new constitution, and if you were to ask people today, they would be tempted to call it a substitute whereby democracy was merely patched into the Meiji Constitution. Takagi’s draft preamble began, “The Japanese emperor and people form one sovereign-people body…” and Article 1 says, “Japan takes the emperor as head of state and is a peaceful democratic state that takes the emperor as symbol of national unity based on the will of the people.”
To listen to Takagi, that slight mismatch between Japan’s conditional acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation and the American response (the Burns note), which did not address that condition, was an adroit policy of maintaining the kokutai, created by exquisite political craftsmanship. (It did not shout out ‘maintain the emperor system,’ but in fact it did maintain the emperor system: it was a foregone conclusion that if the Japanese people expressed their will freely, the emperor system would be maintained.) Via the Burns note, he said, the kokutai was maintained, beautifully. As for the theory that August 15 brought about change in the kokutai, Takagi said that was nonsense: it “completely ignored both the strenuous effort in which our subjects had poured out their lifeblood and the cooperation of sympathizers abroad.” In fact, concerning the line in the Burns note that “the sovereignty of the emperor will be subject to the orders of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers,” Secretary of War Stimson said later, “The response of the Allies made no promise at all beyond the condition already stated in the Potsdam Proclamation, but at the same time, it stated that the sovereignty of the emperor will be subject to the orders of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, and it accepted the status of the emperor implicitly” (emphasis added).

Indeed, precisely in line with Takagi’s analysis, Japan policy-makers in the U. S. had made the preservation of the emperor system their basic policy. Yet what would happen under their rule when the Allied forces in fact came to Japan? That wouldn’t be known until the time came. (In particular, would the emperor system be maintained when the new constitution came into being?) Even after the arrival of the Allies, Takagi took many turns on stage—his English was excellent, and he had many acquaintances in the core of the Occupation. He was fully engaged at every turn, including constitutional revision. Takagi’s talents were on full display especially in the process whereby the symbolic emperor system was created. For example, Takagi was deeply involved, along with Konoe and the others, even in the very first stage of constitutional revision. Nakamura Akira writes as follows in Who Created the Symbolic Emperor System?:

With Takagi, Matsumoto Shigeharu, and others, Konoe was in close touch with the relevant diplomatic officials on the U.S. side—George Atcheson and the others. When Konoe heard about the fundamental policies of constitutional revision as planned by the U. S. in late October of that same year [1945], Takagi says, ‘In the car on the way to Hakone, deeply relieved that the State Department did not intend harsh, high-pressure non-recognition of the emperor system, Konoe let slip a huge sigh—’Thank goodness!’ It left an indelible impression on me.’”

As before, the government brain trust too was worried about the continued existence of the emperor system, and when the Takagi group was shown by the U.S. side the passage, “Head of the state [sic] should take action pursuant to authority delegated to him by the constitution,” it deepened their sense that the U.S. intended that the emperor continue to exist.

As I wrote in the last chapter, Takagi—fervent supporter of the emperor system, one of the planners of the postwar symbolic emperor system—thought that the emperor should take responsibility for the war and abdicate in order to show that “power does not trump morality.” And in fact Privy Seal Kido, too—Takagi’s dear friend and the emperor’s closest advisor—thought that the emperor should take responsibility and abdicate, which may or may not have been the influence of Takagi. This surprising fact came to light first in the late portions of the diary Kido continued to keep in Sugamo Prison after October 1951, after the signing of the peace treaty; in 1948 at the Tokyo Trial he received a sentence of life imprisonment and immediately began serving it.

It was Shōwa historian Awaya Kentarō who deciphered this fact and announced it in the notes to Documents of the Tokyo Trial: the Kido Kōichi Interrogation. According to him, Kido had been saying to the emperor in person, since
right after the war, that he should abdicate. Kido did so too at the farewell dinner the emperor held for Kido immediately before Kido was arrested as a war criminal:

At this time of parting from Your Highness, I wish to say that Your Highness bears responsibility for this recent war, and when the Potsdam Proclamation has been completely carried out—in other words, at the time of the conclusion of a peace treaty—I think it is right that Your Highness take responsibility toward your ancestors and toward the people and abdicate…. With that act the families of the war dead and the war wounded and the families of those missing in action and the war criminals[17] will feel some consolation, as if they have received some recompense, and it should make a very positive contribution to national unity centering on the Imperial House. If that does not happen, the Imperial House alone will not have taken responsibility in the end, and it will leave a lingering unease, and I fear it may even become a permanent source of evil. At all costs, even if right now such action on Your part is not possible, if Your intention is leaked, the positive impact on the people’s hearts and minds will be enormous. Even though now it is not my place to say this, at an appropriate time I do hope Your Highness will act in accordance with my thinking.

In October 1951 Kido communicated to court officials his wish that they pass this on to the emperor. Thereafter, too, any number of times, he recommended through intermediaries that the emperor abdicate. Taking his loyal advice, the emperor intended to abdicate, but MacArthur and Prime Minister Yoshida feared negative political effects for themselves and blocked that action.

Then when the emperor spoke at the 1952 ceremony commemorating the peace treaty, at two or three places at first in the draft of his speech there was the expression, “I apologize deeply to the Japanese for responsibility for the war,” but his advisors revised and revised, and such expressions disappeared entirely; it became a sentence that seemed as if it was about other people: “In particular at this time I believe we should reflect deeply on past transitions, be on our guard together, and deeply etch on our hearts that the mistake not be repeated.”

The section of the draft that disappeared is the passage that caused such a large reaction when it was published in the July 2007 Bungei shunjū, “Draft of the Imperial Apology”: “Earlier we lost the goodwill of our good neighbors and caused trouble with the Allied powers, ending finally in bitter defeat: the terrible torment has come to the extreme we know today…. The suffering and distress of all my people is truly a disaster unprecedented for my country, and when I think of it calmly, my sadness burns like fire. I am deeply ashamed before the world for my lack of virtue.”

In prison, Kido learned of the disappearance of the apology to the people and sent Matsudaira Yasumasa, Grand Master of Court Ceremony, this message: “The emperor takes war responsibility and expresses it for the time being in formal apology. His Majesty’s feelings should be preserved as historical evidence. Constitutionally, he cannot abdicate, but it is necessary to rectify the true relation between sovereign and people. Otherwise, we lost the war but did not acknowledge our fault, and responsibility is zero; if it stops there, it will be a problem for future history, too.”

Nambara’s speech in the House of Peers where he urged the abdication of the emperor—we quoted from it earlier—continues as follows: “Particularly for us educators, from primary school to the university, who regard moral duty as holy, this is a grave issue. The war has weakened our sense of responsibility, our sense of duty, and the whole society shows signs of moral decadence; I believe it is no exaggeration to say that the future fate of the fatherland depends solely on whether we have a moral and spiritual revival.” In today’s Japan the moral senses—responsibility, duty, and the like—are flickering. We can’t say it’s solely for this reason. Even so, we can’t say for sure that it’s...
unrelated. In recent years, people speak now and then of the absence among Japanese of historical consciousness (of their obliviousness to the people’s responsibility for the war), and I think that this issue also plays a significant role there.

**History as Double Weave**

Using Tōdai as axis, this study has depicted over one hundred years of this country’s history, and when I look back, I’m struck by how this country has had to bear up under an indescribably immense fate. If we compare it to a novel, it’s like a stormy serial that leaves you in a cold sweat. And yet it has its fascination, and in terms of its historical main actors from time to time, it’s a serial too serious to sum up as merely “fascinating.” Tōdai as university gets both praise and blame, but in every age this university continues to produce leading historical figures—in that sense, it provides a very convenient stage on which to watch history.

When you write history, the world seems to be a double weave of discontinuity and continuity. Even in an age like 1945, when it seems there is great rupture in every facet of society, if you look again from a slightly changed angle, society in every aspect is continuous.

After all, history all relates to “now.” While I’ve been writing of various eras, my thoughts have leapt any number of times to Japan’s “now.” In order truly to understand Japan’s “now,” I’ve had any number of times to place “now” atop that historical double weave—discontinuity and continuity—and amend my view.

---

1. RHM: Throughout the war, Kido was Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, closest advisor to the emperor. Sentenced to life imprisonment at the Tokyo Trial in 1948, Kido was released for health reasons in 1953.
2. TT: Kido was Minister of Education October 1937-May 1938, at the time of the Yanaihara resignation, the Popular Front Incident, the arrest of Ōuchi.
4. RHM: As a result of its victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War, Japan achieved a privileged position in Shandong, only to have Russia, France, and Germany intervene and force Japan to disgorge the fruits of its conquest. Japan resolved not to take immediate action, and within a few years, the “scramble for concessions” began, with Germany establishing a position in Shandong similar to that Japan had been forced to renounce.
5. RHM: Meeting outside Berlin, the British, U.S., and Chinese leaders (the Soviet Union was not at war with Japan) had issued the Potsdam Proclamation on July 26.
6. RHM: Maruyama was conscripted twice.
7. RHM: Despite sharing the surname Takagi, the two men were not related. The naval officer took the name of the family into which he married.
8. RHM: “100,000,000 glorious deaths” was a late wartime slogan touting the supposed willingness of all Japanese to sacrifice their lives.
11. RHM: Arita had been foreign minister three times between 1936 and 1940.
12. RHM: This phrase was from the reply of Secretary of State Byrnes.
13. “Kempō kaisei hōan ni taisuru shūsei shian,” *Chosakushū* 4. RHM: Takagi’s two terms are *kunmin dōchi* and *kunmin ittai*.


17. RHM: This is a reference to those leaders about to be tried at the Tokyo Trial.