

The pleas from Japan's leaders to Stalin and Molotov entreating them to accept a diplomatic mission led by former Premier Prince Konoe Fumimaro\* and provide the "good offices" of the Soviet Union in peace negotiations\*\* are almost without exception treated in the histories of the time as symptomatic of naiveté at the least, and not infrequently as evidence of fumbling incompetence.

But those leaders were all highly intelligent men who had risen to their positions in an intensely competitive environment, and had a strategy for ending the war with a negotiated peace like that which ended WWI, a strategy that might well have worked if the U.S. had not had the atomic bomb. This strategy was basically to promote and exploit the disintegration of the U.S./U.K.-U.S.S.R alliance they foresaw would inevitably follow the defeat of Germany.

\*Though his rank of 公爵 (*koushaku*) is customarily translated as "Prince", "Duke" would be more accurate.

\*\*Revealed to U.S. and British leaders by interception of the message exchange between Ambassador Sato in Moscow and Foreign Minister Togo in Tokyo, popularly known as the "peace feelers through the Soviet Union".

This strategy is concisely summed up by a remark made by Vice-Admiral Onishi Takejiro, (Vice-Chief of the Naval General Staff at war-end), in a remark he made to his friend and neighbor Yatsugi Kazuo in the final week of the war:

"Meanwhile, we'll strengthen our defensive posture rapidly concentrating our Manchurian and northern China forces in southern Manchuria and northern Korea, and drawing back to a Nanking-Hangzhou line centered on Shanghai in central and southern China. If we then let the Soviet and Red Chinese armies flood into the vacated areas, we'll bring China and the Soviet army into confrontation, and are likely also to draw the U.S. and Soviets into confrontation. So if we can then deal a devastating blow to America's great homeland-invasion force, we can buy ourselves some time, and it will be quite alright to seek peace in line with developments in the international situation."

Yatsugi, Kazuo、Shōwa jinbutsu hiroku, Shin Kigensha, Tōkyō, 1954, pages 329-332

The original Japanese:

「他方満洲北支の兵力は速かに南満から北鮮にかけて集結させ、中南支もまた上海を中心に抗洲 [杭洲?] 南京の線に引き防禦体形を固めることだ。そしてソ連軍と中共軍を日本軍の退却した地域に氾濫させれば、中国とソ連とが対立し、ひいて米ソの対立に導き得るだろう。だから米軍の本土上陸の大部隊に大打撃を与えることに成功すれば、あとはしばらく時が稼げるし、国際情勢の推移によつて和平するならそれからでよい。」

矢次一夫、昭和人物秘録、新紀元社 (1954/1/1)