Fumimaro Konoe and the Sino-Japanese War

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《決定日本的一百年》《紐約、東京、台北》《戰後日本的思想與政治》
《私のアメリカと日本》《日本的作家與作品》《近代日本外交與中國》
《日本的國會》
《中日問題論文集》《近代中國政治外交史》《菊池寬的文學世界》《戰後日本的政府與政治》…等一百多
I.

On June 4, 1937, Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe created his first cabinet to succeed that of Senjuro Hayashi. Fumimaro Konoe’s background as a member of a noble clan close to the Japanese imperial family made him a strong favorite of Genro Kinmochi Saionji. Konoe, 46 years old, made a young, handsome prime minister. He projected a fresh, rational, and dynamic image, and was liked by the military, political parties of both the left and the right, and the Japanese populace as well.

On the day he created his cabinet, Konoe announced his wish to lessen internal discord and friction. He vowed to promote international righteousness and social justice in his tenure. A year earlier as a matter of fact, after the 2-26 Incident, the Saionji petitioned the emperor to ask Konoe to form a cabinet, but he turned it down, citing health reasons. A year later, he had no choice but to accept the appointment, despite his unwillingness to assume the post of the prime minister.

Konoe later wrote in his diary: “Basically, I know which direction the Japanese nation should go. I’ll do my best to insist on that road. To achieve this, it is necessary to suppress the aggressive and irrational military sector. But I will listen to their petitions so long as they are reasonable.” This shows that at that time, the military had already become a headache for the Japanese people.

A month and three days after his inauguration as prime minister, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred, an event which later triggered the Pacific War and eventually led to Japan’s defeat. In this paper, a comprehensive narrative of Fumimaro Konoe’s involvement in the Sino-Japanese War will be made, especially his role in the war and its significance.

II.

On the evening of July 7, a company of Japanese soldiers were taking drills near the Marco Polo Bridge. After the exercises, as they prepared to return to their barracks, they were fired upon. A roll call showed that one
soldier went missing. A report was sent to their superiors. Soon, Colonel Takuro Matsui, Director of Intelligence stationed in Peiping, made a phone call to Takutaro Sakurai, adviser to the Hopei Political Affairs Commission. The latter met in person with General Chien, Teh-chun, Commissioner of the Hopei Political Affairs Commission and Vice Commander of the 29th Corps. It was agreed that both sides refrain from further complicating the incident.

News about the incident reached the Japanese central government early morning of the following day. A meeting attended by representatives from the Army Ministry, the Foreign Ministry, and the Navy Ministry decided “not to further complicate matters and to resolve the issue quickly through local negotiations.” Furthermore, directives were given to the Japanese army stationed in Tienjin.

The Konoe Cabinet convened a provisional meeting on the morning of July 9, during which it decided to support the Army Ministry’s position not to blow up the matter. In reality, however, the war was getting worse. On this issue, Konoe later said:

As the China incident was erupting, my cabinet, as well as the army, advocated not to make matters worse. But things went the other way. It continued to escalate….I (later) asked Kanji Ishihara, the Director of Military Operations, why despite his support for this principle, as well as government backing for it, the situation still went out of hand? Ishihara responded: we were fooled by those who had voiced support but secretly planned for an escalation of the situation. These people cooked up their plans in the Army and in the troubled location itself. At least, the chief-of-staff agreed to support the resolution, but Ministers Hajime Sugiyama and Yoshiziro Umezu of the Army Ministry were ambivalent. The Governor-General of Korea, General Jiro Minami, and the Commander Officer in Korea, General Koiso Kuniaki, even publicly called for the government to “do it to the very end” in their written proposals. For this reason, conflicts of opinion often occurred in upper-echelon government
meetings.

According to Konoe’s experience, the reason why the Marco Polo Bridge Incident grew worse was the rift between the military and the government. The government couldn’t take a hand in military affairs, much less intervene with military directives. In turn, the Army Ministry could not impose control on the local army. For this, Konoe said with regret: “Instead of saying that the cabinet exercises no control over the military (constitutionally, the cabinet and the supreme command are totally independent of one another), it would be more fitting to say that the army leaders exercise no power over the army itself.”

Because the prime minister was kept in the dark on the status of the war and its motives, he could not properly set his diplomatic and fiscal policies. He wrote the emperor for help, requesting that the cabinet be informed beforehand on matters handled by the supreme command. The emperor responded saying that the military refused to discuss war matters in a cabinet meeting attended by ministers from various political parties. Instead, the emperor would relay information to the prime minister and the foreign minister, but they could only listen without giving any opinion.

Fumimaro Konoe ardently wished for an early solution to the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. He even tried Kanji Ishihara’s suggestion to personally meet with Chiang Kai-shek in Nanking for a political solution of the issue.

In his notes, Konoe writes: Not long after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, I recall Secretary Ting of Ambassador Chiang Tsuo-pin’s office told me to contact Ryusuke Miyazaki and Teisuke Akiyama if there was something to discuss. Without a personal meeting with Chiang Kai-shek, we could not prevent further deterioration of the situation. I got in touch with Akiyama and it was decided that we send Miyazaki. We obtained permission from the Army Minister, General Sugiyama, and quickly dispatched Miyazaki to Nanking. But before he could board the ship in Kobe, Miyazaki was seized by the military police. Akiyama, too, was
arrested. Conditions became complicated. When asked why the military police acted to disrupt the plan he previously approved of, General Sugiyama answered evasively. From this, it is evident that Konoe was genuinely interested in resolving the conflict with the Nationalist Government. Meanwhile, the military headquarter’s chief-of-staff had set plans to send 15 divisions to China from mid July to mid-August, and had set a budget of 2.5 to 3 billion yen for the operations. In fact, by the end of September, Japanese forces in China had reached the equivalent of 15 divisions.

Japan’s attack on China was conducted on three fronts: Inner Mongolia, Northern China and Southern China. The Kanto Army took control of Inner Mongolia and later established the Mongolia-Sinkiang Administration. The Northern China Army conquered Hopei, Shanhsii and Shantung, then established the “Republic of China Provisional Government” (with Wang Ke-min as leader). In Central China, with Shanghai as focal point, three divisions were mobilized, but strong resistance from the Chinese army led to massive losses. Three more divisions were dispatched from Northern China to form the 10th Army, which landed in the Gulf of Hangchou. This was joined by the 16th Division sent to Shanghai from Northern China and which landed at the lower reaches of the Yangtze near Paimaokou. Gradually, the Chinese line of resistance collapsed, followed by a full retreat. The Nationalist Government slowly moved inland to the Wuhan cities and Chungking.

Actually, the Japanese Government, especially in terms of how Konoe handled the matter, bore the greatest responsibility when it came to Japan’s invasion of China and the war’s subsequent deterioration. On July 11, the five major ministers met with the cabinet to decide what war strategy to adopt. From dusk of July 11, Konoe called representatives from the Diet, the nobility, important figures in the finance industry, and the mass media for consultation in his official residence. He personally announced the Japanese government’s decision. Two days later on July 13, Konoe invited
representatives from the industrial sector and major magazine publishers for a meeting, requesting their full support. Soon, Japanese dailies were blustering about the chastisement of China, thus giving the hardliners the upper hand. This played a role in the irreversible deterioration of the situation. No wonder, Mamoru Shigemitsu, a former foreign minister, labeled Konoe as “a most suitable puppet of the military.” He was “just an official who adapted his ways to the changing times.” Itaro Ishii, who was then director of the East Asia Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, had the following view of Konoe: “He knew how to tell the good from the bad, but lacked the courage to choose what is good. He always gave in to external pressure. That’s why the hardliners gained the upperhand in the Sino-Japanese conflict, which went on and on. He was disloyal to his own principles. Having a person like that as prime minister in a crisis period, what would you expect?” “Prince Konoe was just too superficial.”

III.

As the Japanese continued their relentless attack on the Chinese mainland, the British, who enjoyed great power in China, attempted to broker peace between the two countries. But the Japanese army rejected the idea. Instead, the Germans, through Osker Paul Trautmann (1877-1950) acted as intermediary for talks towards ending the war.

On November 2, the Japanese foreign minister, Kooki Hirota, first made a peace proposal through the German ambassador to Japan, Herbert Von Dirksen (1882-1955). Trautmann, the German ambassador to China, received a copy of the proposal from Von Dirksen. On November 5, he relayed the terms of the Japanese on two conditions: (1) The Germans must mediate to the very end, and (2) Japanese administrative sovereignty in Northern China must be maintained.

The Japanese, however, seeing that they had the upperhand in the war, and in fact, were planning to capture Nanking, added more preconditions. Dirksen was informed of the additional conditions on December 22. Trautmann relayed the message to the Chinese government on December
26, hoping that the Nationalist Government could respond before the fifth or sixth of January in the new year. The Japanese government and its military celebrated the new year in good spirits, anticipating good news from the Chinese. On January 13, the Chinese rather than give a formal response, made contact to inquire about concrete details of the Japanese demands. The Japanese took that as a delaying tactic adopted by the Chinese who had no real desire to negotiate. On January 16, their declaration to the Chinese inquiry was “No. We will never again deal with the Nationalist Government.”

People in Japan, including the former prime minister, Reijiro Wakatsuki, criticized the Japanese declaration. Konoe, in fact, knew that the declaration was a blunder. In his notes, Konoe wrote: Evidently, this declaration was a big mistake. I personally accept that it was a failure. To rectify the mistake of having made this declaration, I tried to resume our relations with Chungking. We used various means, but to no avail…

The cabinet was re-organized on May 26 and a declaration called “New Order” was made on November 3 as a way to rectify the previous declaration refusing to deal with the Nationalist Government. Konoe gave orders to the new foreign minister, Kazushige Ugaki, to do everything possible to abolish the said declaration. Considering the new declaration an insult, the Nationalist Government became even more resolute in its struggle against the Japanese. There is no question about that.

In the new cabinet, most of the attention was given to the position of army minister. Konoe was not on good terms with Hajime Sugiyama, the former army minister. It was generally considered that replacing Sugiyama was crucial to the solution of the Sino-Japanese conflict. With much effort, Konoe finally succeeded in appointing Seishiro Itagaki, then commander of the Fifth Division stationed in the Hsuchou front. Konoe thought that Itagaki was against further deterioration of the conflict. Little did he know that Itagaki, too, was a puppet, much like Sugiyama was. He listened to his subordinates, a fact that later greatly disappointed the prime minister.
It turned out that Konoe had no idea about Itagaki’s thinking and personality. In appointing Itagaki as army minister, Konoe was merely swayed by the man’s reputation and by rumors he heard about him. He was therefore very disappointed when they personally met to discuss matters. On the third day of the meetings, the secretary of the interior minister, Koohei Mastsudaira made the following comments to Kumao Harada, then secretary of Saionji: “This is confidential, but His Majesty told the Interior Minister that ‘Konoe told him he had met with Itagaki, and he realized that Itagaki was stupid.’ He also laughingly said that ‘Konoe will change soon.’”

In fact, after Itagaki assumed his post, the war in China turned for the worse. The Japanese attacked Hankow and Canton. On this, Konoe writes in his diary: “I have the vaguest idea where opinion in the army really comes from. The cabinet is kept in the dark by a marshall who has yet to show his true colors.” He told people that he “no longer wishes to continue acting as a puppet.”

Konoe, desperate about Itagaki, was even more dissatisfied with the new interior minister, Admiral Nobumasa Suetsugu. Konoe had selected Suetsugu to counter the influence of the right wing. However, the newly sworn-in Suetsugu acted like the virtual spokesman of the right wing. It was not possible for the cabinet to suppress the rightists. Hapless, Konoe wrote to the emperor: “Suetsugu is the center of trouble in the cabinet.” Konoe wanted to resign as a way out. He told his friend Kumao Harada:

“People overestimated me. How could I have become the prime minister? It’s just too presumptious.”

The new foreign minister, Kazushige Ugaki, worked hard towards forging peace with the Nationalist Government. He hoped to see peace talks held before the Japanese army attacked Hankow. On June 26, the Japanese consul-general in Hong Kong, Toyoichi Nakamura, sent a wire, saying that a confidant of Kung Hsiang-hsi wanted to meet with Ugaki for possible peace negotiations and asked for instructions. Ugaki personally drafted
directives for Nakamura, telling the latter to continue negotiations and asking him to return to Japan to discuss matters. Ugaki decided that after talks had progressed, Kung Hsiang-hsi could secretly travel to Kyushu for a face-to-face meeting with Ugaki.

At this point in time, the Japanese government was drafting plans for the establishment of a central body—the “Institute on China” (Koain)—to be subordinated under the office of the prime minister as a way to handle the Sino-Japanese conflict. Once established, this institute would not only reduce the power of the foreign minister, but also set up an office in the occupied territory to handle local political matters. To show disapproval for this plan, Ugaki submitted his resignation on September 29. Konoe expressed surprise, not knowing the reason for the resignation. This shows that Konoe’s revamp of the cabinet was useless.

Indeed, the new cabinet was getting worse each day. It was, therefore, no exaggeration when Saionji’s secretary, Harada, said “The current cabinet works much like a federation.”

Faced with such a difficult situation, the Konoe cabinet finally dissolved on January 4, 1939. Konoe himself had the following words for his first cabinet:

I have made a conclusion regarding my tenure as prime minister over the last year or so: My cabinet had no support from the right or the left and had no public opinion to rely on.

Since the Saito cabinet, the Duke of Saionji has always, in principle, been opposed to the policies adopted by the military. But the cabinets, forced by the trends, had to follow a restricted middle road. This was especially true in the cases of the supreme command and the State Affairs, which alienated each another. The bridge between them was the ambiguous army minister, who himself was constantly trying to stifle the cabinet. The cabinet is itself state affairs, and is thus a very weak thing manipulated by the supreme command. People’s lives and diplomatic policies have no relationship whatsoever with popular will and public
opinion. The military is loomed over by the hazy, illusive shadow of the supreme command, who decides, revises and abandons at will. I have, for several times, tried to learn from the army minister the real color of the shadowy military sector. I did it, to some extent, to appease my political conscience and shoulder my political responsibilities. Back then, I asked Ugaki to take charge of the foreign ministry, hoping for a change in our China policy. But his China policy was altered by the military, resulting in its defeat. In the face of the military’s attack, and in order for me to take a greater responsibility in the Sino-Japanese conflict, I gradually shook off and abandoned the middle road. With public opinion behind me, I tried my best to suppress the ambitions of the military.

Today, it is impossible to suppress the military using powers resting in the different political parties. For this reason, I can only make the following conclusion: Only by the establishment of a people’s organization different from already existing parties, one that can take root in the civilian society, and one that can support the government, can it be possible to suppress the military, and eventually, resolve the Japan-China conflict. I resigned with my first cabinet with the idea of studying how to form such an organization.

IV.

Just when Foreign Minister Ugaki was meeting with Kung Hsiang-hsi about peace negotiations, rumors went around that Sadaaki Kagesa, bureau chief of the Army Ministry, had asked the Nationalist Foreign Ministry’s Asian Affairs Director, Kao Tsung-wu, to travel to Tokyo for a secret mission with the goal of luring Wang Ching-wei out of hiding. Konoe had done his best about Wang Ching-wei, but he had no plans of asking Wang to form a new government. Instead, he hoped that Wang could act as a bridge in peace talks with the Nationalist Government.

According to the accounts of Akira Kazami, secretary-general of the first Konoe cabinet, if not for Konoe’s work on Wang, he could have tendered his resignation as early as November of 1938. Kazami was asked to draft the resignation statement around the end of October. He gave it to
Konoe on November 3. But the resignation was not tendered until January of the following year. He was waiting until Wang Ching-wei had fled Chungking.

After he stepped down, Konoe became the head of the Sumitsuin, then joined the cabinet of Kiichiro Hiranuma as minister without portfolio, an arrangement that allowed him to continue his work on Wang. It is said that on June 14, 1939, Konoe met with Wang, who was then visiting Japan, for a discussion that lasted three and a half hours. Konoe started by mentioning how his father, Atsumaro Konoe, was concerned with the China issue and his relationship with Sun Yat-sen. Wang Ching-wei was so moved he said: Prince Konoe is an outstanding politician. With people like him, Japan faces a bright future.

On July 8, 1938 at nine in the morning, Konoe went to see the Director of the Asian Affairs of the Nationalist Foreign Ministry, Kao Tsung-wu, who arrived in Japan in secret and on his own accord to better understand conditions there. They talked for about an hour in Konoe’s residence. Also in attendance was Shigeharu Matsumoto. Konoe said: “My mission now is to prevent the two countries from repeating this tragedy in the future,” He expressed disapproval of autonomy for Eastern Hopei. He said: “Japan basically wants to help China. We hope to cooperate. We absolutely have no intention to interfere with Chinese sovereignty.” Viewed from various perspectives, it appears that Konoe had neither imperialist ambitions nor a desire to invade China.

I have mentioned earlier that after he stepped down, Konoe wanted to organize a political party backed by popular will. He believed that only then could the military be restrained and the Sino-Japanese conflict be resolved. His close associates, led by Akira Kazami, Yorichike Arima, and Kisaburo Kisya, thus went about campaigning for the formation of the new party. In Konoe’s mind, the ideal new government should consist of existing parties and the newly rising political entity. Realizing that Konoe was a political heavyweight, many political parties disbanded one after another, to join the
bandwagon. Konoe was surprised and displeased. Konoe once told Kisaburo Kisya:

What a disaster! Everybody’s calling for the formation of a new party. But I wonder just how many of them truly see the need for a new party? Our goal is to avoid direct conflict with the military. By organizing a political party, we hope to use political power to somehow put a check on the military’s excesses. However, among proponents of a new party, not a few want to organize a party that has close relationship with the military or that even advocate military rule. It would be quite acceptable if they were ordinary members of the parliament, but many of the new party cadres harbor the same views. I cannot just accept them. The rightist camp is spreading rumors that Konoe wants to organize a new party following the styles of shogun politics. This morning, Harada (Kumao) contacted me by telephone to tell me that these people will distribute leaflets to protest the formation of the new party in Tokyo. Of course, I know that the military is behind that. The louder our voices are, the more vehement the opposition will become. What I worry about most is this—do the cadres of the new party have enough courage to resist?

Konoe abhorred those who just go with the current for their own vested interests, not for the country’s. Much more those opportunists who wished to tag along with him for a possible position later on. For this reason, he became more cautious in campaigning for the new party. In response to a newspaper article alleging that he wanted a political comeback, Konoe made the following declaration through the mass media: “Establishing a new political system is necessary.” However, he added that it would be deceiving the people if the establishment of such a system would merely mean the disbanding of political parties and their regrouping. He called for an awakening of the people whose organization and ideas must keep up with the times. Merely currying the favor of the militarists would be meaningless. “If we have to always listen to the military, we might as well opt for a military government.”
After his resignation, Konoe was succeeded by Kiichiro Hiranuma （January 5, 1935）, Nobuyuki Abe （August 30, 1939）, and Mitsumasa Yonai （January 16, 1940）. On July 17, 1940, Konoe was called to form a cabinet for the second time.

Before his appointment, he expressed his views during a conference of elders: The new prime minister must have a thorough understanding of military affairs. He said that he himself lacked this and that he was psychologically unprepared to accept the position. But he was later convinced to accept the appointment after Kooichi Kido, ex-Prime Minister Reijiro Wakatsuki, Kiichiro Hiranuma, Senjuro Hayashi, Keisuke Okada, and the president of the private council, Yoshimitsu Hara, all voiced support for him.

Soon after the formation of his second cabinet, the “Basic National Policy Outline” was passed on July 26. Among others, all designation bearing the term “Teikoku” was changed into “Kokoku.” The term “Hakkoichiu” started to be used. Similarly, the name “East Asian New Order” was revised as “Greater East Asian New Order.”

One of the most important achievements of the second Konoe cabinet was the signing of a pact with Germany and Italy. Foreign Minister Yoosuke Matsuoka insisted on signing the pact for the following reasons: (1) Insufficient understanding of the military strength of Germany, (2) As a way to counteract pressure from the United States and Great Britain, (3) For an early solution to the Japanese-Chinese conflict, (4) Yielding to pressure from the army, and (5) Japan needs for German support in improving diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Matsuoka believed that the pact with Germany and Italy, aided by the Russians, would force the Americans to capitulate. But instead it resulted in a war with the Americans and the British. On the first day of the war with the U.S., Matsuoka, with tears in his eyes, told his friend, Yoshie Saito: "The tripartite pact was the biggest blunder of my life."

On March 30, 1940, the Wang puppet regime was formally
established in Nanking. At this time, Konoe was still trying to establish contact with the Chungking administration in his hope for a peaceful negotiation with the Nationalist Government. Two cases in point are works done by Sung Tzu-liang and Chien Yung-ming, both of which ended in failure. This explains why the Japanese government delayed recognition of the Wang puppet regime for eight months.

After the formation of the new Konoe cabinet, an imperial headquarters-government meeting was held on July 27 to adopt important national strategies that would decide the fate of Japan—the Main Outlines for Handling World Situation and Vicissitudes—whose major points included seeking a solution to the Sino-Japanese conflict, the southward thrust of the empire (including the use of force), strengthening of cooperation with Germany and Italy, and a rapid mending of state relations with the Soviet Union.

Provision 1 of the main outlines says: To solve the China conflict, joint efforts by political and military means shall be adopted, including stopping all third-country assistance to Chiang. All necessary measures shall be adopted to speedily force the Chungking regime to its knees. In other words, Konoe had at this point already made the following conclusion: Without mediation from the United States, solution to the Chinese problem would be nowhere in sight, for which reason he decided that it was necessary to start negotiating with the Americans.

But talks with the Americans didn’t go on smoothly for a host of reasons, including miscalculations by Foreign Minister Matsuoka, and a strong American position. Matsuoka, who prided himself as the “Japanese Hitler,” made Konoe appear helpless. Matsuoka had not the slightest inkling that war was about to erupt between the Germans and Soviets (it started on June 22) and in fact, believed that “amity” between the Soviet Union and the Japanese, Italian and German bloc would dissuade the Americans from joining the war. He was for an all-out war with the United States if necessary. The Showa Emperor, worried about a war with the
Americans, suggested to the interior minister, Kooichi Kido, to replace the foreign minister. Besides, the Americans had been blaming Matsuoka for the deadlock in the Americans-Japanese talks. Konoe, who was responsible for the appointment of Matsuoka, and for that matter, for the fuss the latter had created, tendered his resignation together with his cabinet on July 16, 1941.

V.

On July 17, after a conference attended by important ministers, the Japanese emperor requested Konoe to form a new cabinet. The Minister of the Navy, Teijiro Toyoda, took over as foreign minister. The third Konoe cabinet was thus formally seated on July 18.

To solve the diplomatic impasse with the Americans, Konoe, at one point in time, even considered making a personal trip to the United States for talks with President Roosevelt. He obtained approval from the Navy and was ready to send a coded telegram asking for the emperor’s permission. However, Tojo Hideki, Minister of the Army, demanded that the Americans concede as a precondition for his approval. The Americans refused, rendering a U.S. trip by Konoe impossible.

On September 6, a meeting with the emperor was held to discuss the “Pointers for the Implementation of Imperial National Policies.” Among other things, the meeting discussed negotiations with the Americans and the British, and completion of war preparations before the end of October. In other words, if diplomatic talks with the Americans failed to meet Japanese demands by the middle of October, Japan would be ready to declare war on the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands.

A day before the meeting, Emperor Hirohito met with Prime Minister Konoe, Chief of the General Staff Sugiyama, and Chief of the Naval General Staff Osami Nagano. Konoe’s diary has the following records of this meeting: “The emperor asked Chief of the General Staff Sugiyama: ‘How much time would the army really need to resolve a Japanese-American war?’ Sugiyama answered: ‘In the South Seas, three
months or so would be necessary.’ Then the emperor asked Sugiyama: ‘I recall that you were the army minister when war with China erupted. That time, you said that ‘One month or so would be enough to solve the conflict.’ It’s been four years now, and no solution is within sight. The Chief of the General Staff stammered and defended himself by saying that China has a large territory and that the original war plan could not be followed. The emperor told him in a loud voice: ‘You say that China has a large territory. The Pacific Ocean covers a much larger space. On what basis do you say three months?’ Unable to respond, the general remained silent, his head bowed low….”

Konoe became increasingly worried about the diplomatic impasse with the Americans, whose suspicions about the Japanese were deep-seated. As Charles Beard (1874-1948) said, Japan has a long record of “barbaric behavior,” and that Konoe, no different from the “bloodthirsty militarists,” wants to deceive the Americans.

Under such circumstances, Konoe summoned Army Minister Tojyo, Navy Minister Oikawa, Foreign Minister Toyoda, and Planning Institute President Teiichi Suzuki to his official residence, the Tekigaiso, on October 12, his birthday, for a final meeting on the fate of the war. The meeting went on for four hours.

On this occasion, the words of Tojyo carried the heaviest weight and were the most decisive.

Tojyo: When negotiating with the Americans, we cannot give in on the issue of stationing troops (the issue of the Japanese army garrisoned in China). If the Americans do not yield on this, our negotiations will be doomed to failure.

Oikawa: We are now at a crossroads. Shall we decide to go to war or continue diplomatic talks? If we choose to negotiate, then we must stop preparation for war and devote ourselves fully to the negotiations. But this must be done only if there is hope for success in the negotiations. After two to three months of talks, we
cannot stop in the middle of them. I'm in favor or letting the prime minister decide.

Konoe: What is the opinion of the foreign minister?

Toyoda: Because we have an opponent, I can’t be absolutely confident.

Tojyo & Oikawa: If we delay for a long time only to regret it and opt for war, it would bring lots of difficulties. Now is the time to decide

Konoe: There are risks involved either way. The question is which way brings the greater risk. If we have to make a decision now, I’d choose to continue negotiating.

Tojyo: Is the foreign minister confident? What the foreign minister has just said will not convince the supreme command.

Konoe: Comparing possible results of the two, I’d choose to negotiate.

Tojyo: That’s just a subjective view of the prime minister. It is still unconvincing to the supreme command.

Oikawa: I agree.

Tojyo: The prime minister does not have to make such an early conclusion. I want to hear the view of the foreign minister.

Toyoda: That depends upon the conditions. Now, the most difficult issue is the stationing of troops. If the army minister does not give in totally, negotiation would be doomed to failure. If we yield a bit, there is some hope for the talk to succeed.

Tojyo: The stationing of troops is the very life of the army. We absolutely cannot give in on that.

Konoe: Is there a way to call it by any other way? We do it on the surface the way the Americans want it but in real terms, we continue stationing our troops as before. In any case, I will surely opt for diplomatic negotiations. If we go to war, let it not be said that I am responsible for it.

Tojyo: Didn’t we already decide to go to war if negotiations do not hold any promise in our meeting with the emperor on September 6? You
were present at that meeting too, Mr. Prime Minister. I don’t quite understand when you say you cannot be held responsible for it.

Konoe: What I mean is that I feel more confident about the negotiations. If you ask me to choose something I’m less confident about, I cannot be held responsible for it. The decision during that meeting was made on the premise that there is no hope for success in the negotiations. It’s not that we see no hope in holding talks now. We are confident about it.¹

On September 14, before the cabinet meeting was held, Konoe again summoned Tojyo. He wanted Tojyo to be pragmatic enough to agree to a troop withdrawal. He told the Army Minister that “the conflict with China has dragged on for four years and Japan is now on the brink of an uncertain war” and that no matter what, he couldn’t let that happen. Tojyo was firm in his disapproval. He said that “it is a clash of personality.” The helpless Konoe told his close aides: “The army wants to wage a war that is destined to fail. The navy is not confident and the emperor himself is against war. The army minister refuses to listen. He’s a real dumb fool.”² Failing to reach a consensus with Tojyo and facing the army’s demand for him to step down, Konoe finally tendered his resignation on October 16, 1941, citing as reason a clash of opinion with the minister on diplomatic negotiations with the Americans. The third Konoe cabinet died a natural death three months after it was formed.

VI.

The next cabinet was formed by Hideki Tojyo himself. He also appointed himself minister of the army and minister of the interior. Later, he also took the post of the Chief of the General Staff. This was unprecedented in Japanese history. On December 8, Konoe immediately returned to Tokyo from Hakone after hearing radio broadcasts about the

¹ Yabe, op. cit., p. 164.
declaration of war against the United States. He told Morisada Hosokawa\(^3\) who was then visiting him: “It’s a disaster. I have an inkling that Japan will lose the war at a great expense. This temporary situation (winning with glorious victory) will last for only two to three months at most.”\(^4\)

As Konoe predicted, Japan’s victory was short-lived. Since the Battle of Midway (June 5, 1942), the Americans had gained control of the Pacific War. On June 19, 1944, Saipan fell into U.S. hands. On October 20, the Americans conquered Leyte Island in the Philippines. Then on November 11, B29 bombers bombarded Tokyo. On November 10, Wang Ching-wei died at the Nagoya Imperial University Hospital.

Konoe was received by the emperor on February 14, 1945. He told the emperor three things: (1) Japan will lose the war, (2) He was afraid that Communism would rise after the defeat, and (3) He was worried about the reformist movement in the army.

Konoe had been plotting in secret with Reijiro Wakatsuki, Keisuke Okada, and Kiichiro Hiranuma to oust Tojyo. Nobuhito Takamatsnomiya, brother of Emperor Hirohito, had once thought of getting rid of Tojyo.\(^5\) However, the emperor trusted Tojyo,\(^6\) for which reason Konoe once said: Emperor Hirohito was like a puppet of Kido. All suggestions made to him were divulged to Kido, who, in turn, immediately informed Tojyo.\(^7\) Kido and Tojyo were good friends, and the latter did not want the emperor to receive too much “noise.” This explains why, in more than three years, not even Konoe could see the emperor unaccompanied.

When things turned for the worse, Emperor Hirohito again summoned Konoe. He was assigned to go and convince the Soviet Union to broker

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\(^3\) Morisada Hosokawa was a son-in-law of Konoe. His son, Hosokawa Morihiro, later became prime minister of Japan.


\(^5\) The author heard Hosokawa himself say this when he visited Taipei. Discussion with Morisada Hosokawa (Tokyo: Chuokoronha, February 1990), pp. 182-186.

\(^6\) Memoirs of the Showa Emperor, pp. 74-81.

\(^7\) Yabe, op. cit., p. 177.
peace. Konoe’s plane and entourage were ready to depart but the Soviet Union had, by then, decided to declare war on Japan. The Soviets sounded evasive and didn’t directly respond to Konoe’s request for a visit. On July 26, the allies made the Potsdam Declaration. On August 6, the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Two days later, the Soviet Union declared war against Japan. On August 15, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally.

On November 22, the three-time prime minister Konoe took responsibility for his failure to solve the Sino-Japanese conflict and save relations with the United States by making a humiliating apology.

A warrant for his arrest was issued by the allied forces on December 6. Konoe, respected as a prince, refused arrest. In the early morning of December 6, the day of the scheduled arrest, he committed suicide by taking poison. He was 55.

The night before his suicide, Konoe talked until about two in the morning with his second son, Michitaka. Michitaka gave his father a pencil and asked him to write down a few things. Konoe jotted down what he felt at that moment:

I have made many political mistakes since the Chinese conflict. I feel responsible for them but I cannot accept the idea of being tried as a so-called war criminal in an American court of law. I feel especially responsible for the China conflict, and its resolution was a greatest mission.