Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki on the Eve of Pearl Harbor: New Evidence from Japan

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ABSTRACT
This essay introduces readers to newly-discovered documents which quote Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki at length on the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack. The documents were penned by Vice Home Minister Yuzawa Michio at 23.20 p.m. on 7 December; the Pearl Harbor attack began four hours later. The reproduced documents offer insights into Tōjō's mindset, his leadership, and his relationship with the Emperor. They also reveal Tōjō's confidence in Japan's ability to emerge victorious from World War II. That this confidence was misplaced hardly requires reiteration. Of perhaps greater interest is the source of Tōjō's misplaced confidence: his predictions of victory were grounded neither on notions of superior strategy nor on calculations of the enemy's strength, but instead on a sense of self-satisfaction at having united Japan's otherwise fractious policymaking process.

KEYWORDS
Asia; Japan; Pacific War; Pearl Harbor; Shōwa Emperor; Tōjō Hideki

Introduction
This essay introduces Global War Studies readers to two recently-discovered documents which quote Japanese Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki at considerable length on the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack. The documents were penned at 23.20 on 7 December 1941 by Vice Home Minister Yuzawa Michio immediately following a meeting with Tōjō; the Pearl Harbor attack began some four short hours later. The reproduced documents offer insights into Tōjō's mindset, his leadership, and his relationship with the Shōwa Emperor (known to the outside world as Hirohito). The reproduced documents also reveal Tōjō's confidence in Japan's ability to emerge victorious from World War II in Asia and the Pacific. That this confidence was misplaced hardly requires reiteration. Of perhaps greater interest is the source of Tōjō's misplaced confidence: his predictions of victory were grounded neither on notions of superior strategy nor on calculations of the
enemy's strength, but instead on a sense of self-satisfaction at having united Japan's otherwise fractious policymaking process.

The reproduced documents are, in their original form, handwritten documents of some five pages in length. Document One comprises a record of conversation; Document Two provides Tōjō's intended 8 December schedule. (The day proceeded more or less in accordance with Tōjō's schedule). Various historians, including Nihon University's Furukawa Tadahisa and the University of Shizuoka's Moriyama Atsushi, have separately examined the reproduced documents and have attested to their authenticity.

The reproduced documents are located in a wider collection of Yuzawa Michio's personal papers. The Yuzawa papers remained in the possession of the family for some sixty-five years after the end of the war. A bookseller in Tokyo's famed second-hand book district in Kanda received the Yuzawa papers from the family in 2009. The papers remain in the bookseller's possession today; the reproduced documents were printed in their entirety on 24 July 2018 in the daily newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun. Aside from the reproduced documents, the Yuzawa papers also include materials concerning the downfall of the Tōjō cabinet and the creation of the Koiso Kuniaki cabinet in July 1944, the circumstances in Japan in the immediate aftermath of surrender, as well as a copy of Field Marshal Sugiyama Hajime's August 1945 suicide note.¹

**Document One**

7 December 1941 (Sunday)
23.20
Vice Minister's residence

I was invited to the prime minister's residence at 8:30 this evening. Prime Minister [Tōjō Hideki] informed me, along with Vice War Minister [Kimura Heitarō], of the decision to open hostilities tomorrow against the United States and Britain, and of measures to be taken toward the Japanese people. These decisions appear on the separate form [Document Two] in the same order as they were relayed to me. Prime Minister [Tōjō] seemed relieved of a great burden, and said his mind was now at ease. [Even so,] he could not control his emotions. This matter is based on His Majesty the Emperor's

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¹. The Yomiuri Shimbun carried three stories across two separate days introducing, examining, and reproducing the document in question. See "Tōjō kaisen zen'yā 'katta'" [Tōjō declared victory on the eve of war], Yomiuri Shimbun, 23 July 2018; "Tōjō no kyōchū namanamashiku" [A fresh entry into Tōjō's feelings], Yomiuri Shimbun, 23 July 2018; "Tōjō kaisenbi no chiansaku shijii" [Tōjō's instructions for public order on the day war opened], Yomiuri Shimbun, 24 July 2018. Concerning Furukawa's and Moriyama's examination of the document, see the second of the above-mentioned Yomiuri Shimbun articles.
decision, and the armed services will as one obey Imperial Orders and will conduct themselves in perfect unison under military/naval regulations. Prime Minister [Tōjō] also said that even if His Majesty praised him, that would not be fine.

I told Prime Minister [Tōjō] of my deep emotion at his complete lack of agitation and distress at this moment of such great decision. The Prime Minister said: "This is based completely on His Majesty's decision. Until he made the decision, His Majesty showed great solicitude and considered many aspects. Once he made the decision, he was composed and was not at all anxious [illegible character, which renders the next five characters unintelligible]."

The Prime Minister also said: "I told His Majesty everything. In other words, I told him without omission about the present situation and of course about what should eventuate in the future. Therefore, when I reported to the emperor today about tomorrow's events, he murmured in agreement and his usual demeanor remained unchanged. I placed everything I know before His Majesty and he consented."

He also said: "If His Majesty had any regret over negotiations with Britain and the United States, he would look in some way grim. That this is not the case was a result of his resolve." Prime Minister [Tōjō] became slightly intoxicated and said: "I am completely at ease. Because of this situation, I can already claim victory." In this way, he expressed his confidence in total victory.

One year after the 2,600th year of the imperial era, I am moved and honored to know of this great decision which will decide the Imperial nation's fate, and to participate in the progression toward the opening of hostilities. This will leave a deep impression on me in the future.

We returned directly to the Vice War Minister's residence. We summoned the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police, the Home Ministry's Police Affairs Bureau Director, and the Air Defense Bureau Director. We relayed this [decision for war], and ordered them to undertake tomorrow all preparations that should be undertaken by the Home Ministry. We informed them there is no need to do anything tonight. We told them to sleep well, and then to deal with the major activities [from tomorrow].

Document Two

04.00 Air defense order. Arrangements [made] for suspected foreigners (however, arrests after issuance of imperial edict)
07.00 Cabinet
07.30 Privy Council summoned
07.30 report to the emperor; imperial edict
10.30 Privy Council complete
11.00 imperial edict issued
11.30 imperial edict broadcast, followed by prime minister's broadcast
13.00 Cooperation Council (postponed since 09.30)
14.00 Imperial rescript to army and navy
14.30 army-navy informed
18.00 meal, Liaison Council

1. U.S.–Britain [two illegible characters] nations
2. Handling of ambassadors and consuls requires conscientiousness
3. Measures for the Communist Party: nothing that will incite the Soviet Union

One British plane has been shot down off the Malay coast.

**Supplementary Source Materials**

The remainder of this essay aims to assist readers in contextualizing and making sense of the reproduced documents. Readers who wish to supplement the reproduced documents with other documentary source materials would do well to consult Ike Nobutaka's excellent *Japan's Decision for War*, which includes records of the policy conferences on the eve of Pearl Harbor. The further availability of source materials otherwise depends on readers' Japanese-language capacity. Itō Takashi has edited an exhaustive compilation of source materials entitled *Tōjō naikaku sōri daijin kimitsu kiroku* (Prime Minister Tōjō's confidential records). A book edited by Jōhō Yoshio and entitled *Tōjō Hideki* includes materials not readily available elsewhere. The diary of Tōjō's secretary (himself a military officer) is also available. The exhaustive Imperial Household Agency compilation, released in 2014 and entitled *Shōwa tennō jitsuroku* (True documents of the Shōwa Emperor), also provides a necessary reference point.²

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Tōjō and post-Pearl Harbor Police Actions

Readers will note that Tōjō summoned Vice War Minister Kimura Heitarō and Vice Home Minister Yuzawa Michio to his official residence on the eve of Pearl Harbor (Document One). Tōjō's reason for summoning these men can be readily explained: Tōjō on the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack was serving not only as prime minister, but also concurrently as war minister and home minister. He was, in effect, informing his immediate subordinates in the war and home ministries of the impending hostilities, and was moreover instructing them as to the implementation of police measures once the war had begun. This made bureaucratic sense, insofar as the home ministry controlled the police and the war ministry controlled the military police in pre-surrender Japan. (It might be parenthetically noted that no less a personage than the Shōwa Emperor later criticized Tōjō for having "overused the military police."\(^3\))

Tōjō's orders concerning wartime police measures are of interest at several levels. For one thing, Tōjō was adamant that any measures taken to repress domestic communists must not incite the Soviet Union (Document Two). Tōjō, evidently, wanted no actions which might impact negatively on the neutrality treaty which Japan and the Soviet Union had concluded in April 1941. This accorded neatly with the Army's war planning: impending hostilities against the United States and Britain in the Pacific, coupled with the ongoing and wearying war in China, rendered unthinkable the prospect of simultaneous war against the Soviet Union. To borrow the words of a masterfully-understated policy document dated 15 November: "the Empire will endeavor to the utmost to prevent the outbreak of a war with the Soviet Union while we are engaged in military operations in the South."\(^4\) The Army

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\(^2\) "Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War Against the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Chiang," 15 November 1941, Ike, ed., *Japan's Decision for Global War Studies 15 (1) 2018 │ 39*
was, in effect, shelving its long-standing enmity toward the Soviet Union so as to concentrate its efforts elsewhere (this dovetailed neatly with the Soviet Union's inability to entertain so much as the prospect of war against Japan, as long as it remained utterly preoccupied with its war against Nazi Germany).

Tōjō's orders concerning impending police measures also reveal his awareness of the need to tread carefully in Japan's treatment of enemy diplomats. Internment of foreign officials was inevitable; Tōjō's demand for "conscientiousness" (Document Two) seemed to encapsulate the need for thoroughness while at the same time remaining within the bounds of accepted international norms and behaviors. Certainly, this reading of Tōjō's call for "conscientiousness" accords with his subsequent instructions to Superintendent General Tomeoka Yukio. "Management [of the U.S. and British embassies] is a policy of strictness," Tōjō told Tomeoka on 8 December, after hostilities had begun. "Yet, so far as possible, we will provide the necessities of life. If they desire anything, do not hesitate to say so."\(^5\) (Whether Japan's subsequent actions met Tōjō's pre-Pearl Harbor demand for "conscientiousness" is nonetheless debatable. To cite but one example, U.S. Embassy staff were "bitterly critical" of their post-Pearl Harbor confinement, which they likened to "incarceration" rather than internment.\(^6\))

It is also interesting that the downing of a British airplane continued at this late hour to weigh on Tōjō's mind (Document Two). Earlier that day, Japanese fighter planes had shot down a Royal Air Force flying boat off the Malayan coast. The Japanese Army pilots had been motivated by the perceived need to "conceal the intentions" of the convoys carrying the 25th and 15th Armies. In this they were successful for the convoys were, for the remainder of the day, able to "navigate without any enemy interference."\(^7\) Tōjō was, however, concerned lest the downed plane alert the British to the imminence of the amphibious invasion of Malaya. And only hours before the scheduled opening of hostilities, Tōjō continued to worry about the

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possibility of a premature clash with British forces, which might compro-
mise the surprise element of the impending and near-simultaneous attacks
against British Malaya and Pearl Harbor.

Tōjō and the Shōwa Emperor
Of enduring historical interest is Tōjō's account of the emperor's role in the
decision for war. The opening of hostilities, according to Tōjō, was "based
on His Majesty's decision." The emperor had shown "great solicitude" and
had not rushed to a decision for war. Tōjō told the emperor "everything" and
in so doing had contributed to what Tōjō evidently regarded as the right
decision, namely, the decision for war (Document One).

This pre-Pearl Harbor account of the decision for war differs markedly
from Tōjō's postwar statements. Before the International Military Tribunal
for the Far East (IMTFE), he argued: "Members of cabinet and of general
headquarters … bore complete responsibility [for the decision for war]. His
Majesty the Emperor was not responsible." Tōjō made clear that the emperor
did not have the freedom to impose "his own ideas" on either "state policy"
or matters of "supreme command." In practice, this meant that the emperor
did "not exercise the right to veto final decisions reached by those respon-
sible on cabinet and in the supreme command."

Before Pearl Harbor, Tōjō was portraying the emperor as an autocrat, and
in the aftermath of war was portraying the emperor as a constitutional mon-
arch. The two are necessarily incompatible. Was Hirohito the dynamic and
active monarch of Tōjō's pre-Pearl Harbor formulation? Or was he the
passive and largely powerless monarch as depicted by Tōjō during the
Tokyo Trial? This essay suggests that neither portrayal was entirely
accurate.

The emperor was not an autocrat with absolute power, nor was he a
constitutional monarch who automatically approved government policy. He
had considerable discretionary power and he played an active role in the
policymaking process. Yet he was, by his own admission, but "one
component of the state." He had to contend with other loci of institutional
power, including (particularly) the armed services. They used their jealously-
guarded prerogatives and shaped policy in ways that did not necessarily
match the emperor's proclivities.

A brief account of the weeks leading to the decision for war should
illustrate this point. The emperor on 18 October 1941 asked Tōjō to form a
cabinet, and ordered him to discard an earlier decision for a late-October
deadline for war against the Anglo-American powers. Tōjō, who had
hitherto championed the late-October deadline for war, took the emperor's
admonition seriously. In the days after his prime ministerial appointment,
Tōjō led his cabinet and the Supreme Command in a reappraisal of national policy. Tōjō reported the outcome to the emperor through tears of trepidation on 2 November: Tokyo would continue to pursue negotiations with the United States, and would simultaneously continue preparations for war. Unless there was a diplomatic breakthrough by late November, Tōjō asserted, Japan would open hostilities in early December against the Anglo-American powers.10

This was contrary to the outcome for which the emperor had hoped. He sought Tōjō's reassurance that the government would do its "utmost" to effect a "breakthrough in the Japanese–U.S. negotiations," and he—curiously—importuned Tōjō to "investigate [the possibility of] settling this difficult situation through the pope." The emperor also asked whether, in the event of diplomatic failure, it would be necessary to decide on war. By asking this question, the emperor was making clear that he was not sanctioning a decision for war and that any recourse to war in late November must not be automatic. This point cannot be overemphasized, if only because it has been completely overlooked by the existing literature: the emperor was effectively demanding that the question of war or peace be revisited if the late-November deadline passed without diplomatic resolution. By so doing, he was making apparent that he was not approving, formalizing, or sanctioning a decision for war. He then presided silently over the 5 November Imperial Conference which formalized the decision to impose a late-November deadline for diplomatic success.11

By late-November, when the deadline loomed and the Japanese–U.S. negotiations were hopelessly deadlocked, the emperor sought a way to avert the decision for war. He consulted with what he hoped were the anti-war voices of the former prime ministers known as the jūshin, and he gave Navy Minister Shimada Shigetarō and Navy Chief of Staff Nagano Osami a final opportunity to state their service's unpreparedness for war in the Pacific. These consultations were to no avail: the jūshin were divided on the question of war or peace, while Shimada and (especially) Nagano were bullish. In the meantime, the Tōjō cabinet and the Supreme Command concluded that the time for diplomacy had ended.12

The preceding paragraphs provide some insight into the complex

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interplay between the emperor and Tōjō in October–November 1941. The emperor asked for reconsideration of the deadline for war. Tōjō led the government in just such a reconsideration, but the Supreme Command (in particular) took an extremely hard-line approach. Ultimately, Tōjō succeeded only in postponing the deadline for war. When the emperor learned of the new deadline, his options were limited. Indeed, the emperor's insistence on revisiting the question of war in late-November–early December was really the only option open to him. This option was, however, only viable if a significant anti-war voice were locatable in the halls of power in Tokyo. Such was nowhere to be found. An Imperial Conference convened on 1 December and, before a silent emperor, formalized the decision to open hostilities against the Anglo-American powers.13

**Tōjō's Motivations**

Why did Tōjō misrepresent the emperor's policymaking role? Why did Tōjō in conversation with Kimura and Yuzawa portray the emperor as an autocrat? (And after surrender, why did he portray the emperor as merely a titular leader?) One possibility can be immediately dismissed: Tōjō was no simpleton. Whatever were his faults, he was the Army's ablest administrator since Katsura Tarō (who served thrice as prime minister in the early 1900s). And, as was the case with practically all modern Japanese political and military leaders, Tōjō was not averse to using, shaping, and manipulating the throne.

Consider Tōjō's post-surrender portrayal of Hirohito as constitutional monarch. In this instance, Tōjō was addressing a military court convened by Japan's wartime enemies with at least a passing interest in the emperor's culpability. He knew his role. He told defense counsel Shiohara Tokisaburō of his "resolve to protect His Majesty at the cost of [his] own life."14 In a word, Tōjō determined at the IMTFE to shoulder all the blame for the war and, by so doing, to render the emperor blameless.

Tōjō's pre-Pearl Harbor account of the emperor-as-autocrat was no less manipulative. In this case, however, Tōjō sought not to minimize the emperor's role, but instead to amplify it. Recall that he told Yuzawa and Kimura that the decision for war was "based on His Majesty's decision" (Document One). By exaggerating the emperor's role as decision-maker, Tōjō sought to portray the throne as he believed it ought (at least theoretically) to operate. In this regard, it should be recalled that, in the military academy and other Army educational facilities, Tōjō imbibed deeply of the emperor-centric theories of Tokyo Imperial University law professor Hozumi Yatsuka. Suffice it here to quote one illustrative passage attributable to Hozumi: "The will of the sovereign is the will of the state; the sovereign

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and the state coalesce; and the sovereign is the state.”

By portraying the emperor as an active—and indeed determining—player in the decision for war, Tōjō was bending reality so that the Shōwa Emperor more closely approximated Hozumi's idealized sovereign.

This, in turn, fed Tōjō's optimistic forecasts of Japanese victory. He understood the risks involved in fighting the imposingly powerful Anglo-American powers. He was, after all, an active-service Army general who had dedicated his entire working life to understanding war. And, only a few months earlier, he had told his prime ministerial predecessor (Konoe Fumimaro): "Sometimes a man has to jump, with his eyes closed, from the veranda of Kiyomizu Temple." He could see that war in the Pacific was, at the very least, a gamble. Yet, on the evening of 7 December, Tōjō expressed his satisfaction with the prospects for victory. He based his optimism less on forecasts of enemy strength or superior Japanese strategy, than on a sense of satisfaction at having guided the policymaking process in such a way as to ensure unity behind the decision for war.

That unity was hard-earned. Tōjō had to do more than convince the emperor of the recourse to war (Document One). For one thing, he had his share of detractors in the War Ministry. Some Army officers seemed convinced that Tōjō had, since his prime ministerial appointment, abandoned the Army and its insistences. Tōjō had himself burnished such an image from the outset of his prime ministership, as for instance when he refused to make cabinet appointments in agreement with the Army's preferences. He had also to contend with a fiercely independent supreme command. For example, not until late-November did the chiefs of staff inform Tōjō of the plan to attack Pearl Harbor and even then he was only privy to this information because, in his capacity not as prime minister but instead as war minister, he joined the supreme command in its deliberations. He had also to reckon with a Navy which owed him no fealty. In this, he enjoyed some luck: he had reacted to the service's initial choice as Navy minister—the fiercely anti-Army Admiral Toyoda Soemu—by expressing his intention to "decline" the prime ministership. That proved unnecessary, and the minister's post fell instead on Admiral Shimada Shigetarō, who was (in naval historian Sadao Asada's estimation) "a yes-man

18. Tobe Ryōichi, "Sensō shidōsha to shite no tōjō hideki" [Tōjō Hideki as a leader in war against Britain], Sensōshi kenkyū kukusai fuōramu hō kokusho [International forum on war history] (March 2003), p. 61.
… [who] always swam with the tide."\textsuperscript{19}

One final point of interest to emerge from the reproduced documents is Tōjō's assertion concerning the emperor's lack of regret at the impending war with the Anglo-American powers (Document One). Here, again, Tōjō was manipulating and misrepresenting the throne. For one thing, Tōjō might reasonably have deduced that the emperor indeed entertained some regrets when, for example, the emperor told Tōjō of his "heartbreak" ("danchō") at the breakdown in relations with (particularly) Britain.\textsuperscript{20} And, witness Tōjō's reaction to a personal telegram which the emperor received from U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt around midnight on 7 December. "It's a good thing the telegram arrived late," Tōjō stated. "If it had come a day or two earlier we would have had more of a to-do."\textsuperscript{21} This sounds very much like the emperor entertained at least some misgivings, and Tōjō was well aware of this.

Conclusion
To conclude, the reproduced documents should be of interest to anyone who has studied the origins of Japan's calamitous participation in World War II in Asia and the Pacific. The documents add considerable perspective to existing scholarly depictions of Tōjō on the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack. Most particularly, the documents offer insights into Tōjō's understanding of the emperor and his role in the Japanese policymaking process. In this regard, the documents need, nonetheless, to be read with a degree of caution. As this essay has indicated, Tōjō's eve-of-Pearl-Harbor account of the emperor's decision for war contrasts sharply with his postwar account thereof. His motivations in both cases differed, and this essay has suggested that Tōjō was manipulating the throne. Tōjō seems honestly to have believed that the decision for war would ultimately be proven correct, if only because the decision-making process had followed—or could be depicted as having followed—an idealized emperor-centric process. In a word, the reproduced documents reveal Tōjō as having paid considerably more attention to internal political and policymaking processes than to such overwhelmingly important issues as America's ability to bring Japan to its knees.


\textsuperscript{20.} Terasaki, \textit{Dokuhakuroku}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{21.} Tōgō Shigenori, \textit{The Cause of Japan} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), pp. 220-21. It might be noted that Iguchi Takeo has asserted that the Army withheld Roosevelt's telegram from the emperor until it was practically impossible to overturn the decision for war. See Iguchi Takeo, \textit{Demystifying Pearl Harbor: A New Perspective from Japan} (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2010), pp. 218-28.