STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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THE KWANTUNG ARMY AND THE NOMONHAN INCIDENT: ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL SECURITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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From May to September 1939 Japan and the Soviet Union engaged in what started out as a small border clash but quickly escalated into a large undeclared war in the Mongolian plains near the city of Nomonhan. The Soviets won by employing over 1,000 tanks against the Kwantung Army's predominately infantry force by executing a near perfect double envelopment. However, the isolation of the battlefield, combined with the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, overshadowed the conflict. But today, both the Soviets and the Japanese examine the Nomonhan Incident in minute detail. It even serves as a case study at the advanced tactical schools of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force.

The intent of this paper is to look at the development of the Kwantung Army from a strategic perspective using the Nomonhan Incident as a backdrop. Specific emphasis will be placed on identifying and analyzing the Kwantung Army's relationship with Imperial Japanese Army and the civilian authorities located in Tokyo. In the final analysis, the incident was a major contributor to the Japanese strategic decision to pursue a southern axis of advance in 1941, rather than joining the German attack on Russia.

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The Kwantung Army and the Nomonhan Incident: Its Impact on National Security

From May to September 1939 Japan and the Soviet Union engaged in what started out as a small border clash but quickly escalated into a large undeclared war on the Mongolian plains near the city of Nomonhan. Both countries committed tens of thousands of troops, hundreds of tanks and airplanes. The tactical outcome of the confrontation sided with the Soviets. The superior artillery, armor, and air support, coupled with the near-brilliant orchestration of the campaign by General Zhukov, provided the Soviets a decisive victory.

From a strategic point, the Nomonhan Incident had far-reaching consequences for Japan and the Soviet Union. As Dr. Edward Drea pointed out, "Although Japan's decision to execute its 'go south' strategy [in 1941] was predominately predicated on economic factors, the Nomonhan Incident of 1939 was a definite factor in Japan's decision to switch from its traditional 'go north strategy' and adopt the 'go south' strategy."[1] Even the Soviet historian Ponomaryov and colleagues concluded that "the defeat inflicted by the Red Army on the Japanese troops along the Khalkhin Gol (also referred to as the Halha) River somewhat sobered up the high-handed Japanese militarists, while the Soviet-German (Nonaggression) Treaty deprived them of the basis of their anti-Soviet designs."[2] This strategic shift to the south relieved the pressure of the Soviets having to fight two land fronts simultaneously as well as permitting the Soviets to shift their military resources against the Germans in the west. General Petro Grigorenko confirmed the Russians' own perception of the risk facing them if Japan had chosen to strike north after the Germans invaded Russia from the west. Maj General A.K. Kazakovtsev, the operations chief of the Far Eastern Front, told Grigorenko in 1941: "If the Japanese enter the war on Hitler's side ... our cause is hopeless."[3]

So how did the Japanese lose in 1939? There are many reasons why the Japanese lost at Nomonhan. One could easily point to the weak logistical structure, the lack of artillery or even the Japan's inferior anti-tank weapons. But from a strategic standpoint, the Nomonhan Incident provides an example of a field army dictating foreign policy of a nation. The Kwantung Army invaded Mongolia without the permission of high headquarters or even the civilian authorities. After the Nomonhan Incident, military and civilian authorities located in Tokyo recognized this critical vulnerability and took corrective action. They replaced key leaders in the Kwantung Army and pulled back the authority of committing forces. So, how did this field army become a military force capable of dictating foreign policy with impunity? In this paper, I will look at the evolution of the Kwantung Army, using the Nomonhan Incident as a backdrop, to gain insights of how this occurred. I will do this by first presenting the historical development of the Kwantung Army, followed by a brief account of the Nomonhan Incident, and then highlight critical factors that contributed to creating a army with a "prima donna" persona.

THE KWANTUNG ARMY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In understanding the Kwantung Army persona, one has to understand, from a historical perspective, the military force that occupied Manchuria. By the terms of the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905 ending the Russo-Japanese War, Japan inherited the lease on the Kwantung Territory in southernmost Manchuria. In the treaty, Japan gained control of Port Arthur, Talien, and adjacent territory and waters as well as all the rights, privileges, and concessions associated with a lease. By Imperial Ordinance No. 196 of 1906, the Governor-General was to "take charge of the defense of the territory within the limits of his jurisdiction" and, whenever he found an emergency to exist, was authorized to employ military force.[4] Hence, regular troops became known as the Kwantung Army. With the railway in South Manchuria being a critical lifeline for supplies and commerce, the Governor-General determined a need for guarding the 782 kilometers of railway: about 12,000 to 13,000 railway guards, or the equivalent of one division. However, the guards were not deployed along the railway but stationed in Mukden, centrally located for control reasons.

In the 1920's, the entire Japanese army consisted of 21 infantry divisions. One of these divisions was always stationed in the Kwantung Territory on a two-year tour. It was the Port Arthur-based Kwantung Army that provoked the incident at Mukden in September 1931 and overran Manchuria in a "blitzkrieg" of five months. At the outset, the total Kwantung Army strength amounted only to 10,400 men: the one-infantry division and six-garrison battalion comprising the Independent Garrison Unit, whose headquarters was at Mukden.[5]

After Manchukuo (the former Manchuria) was established in 1932, a mutual defense treaty was signed between Japan and Manchukuo, which placed the Japanese Army units along the Soviet boundary on the north and east, and the Outer Mongolian frontier in the west. There were almost 3,000 miles of such borders, lying between Manchuria and the USSR or the Mongolian People's Republic. With the Soviet Union depicted as Japan's number one hypothetical ground enemy, the Kwantung Army was transferred north to the Manchukuoan capital, Hsinking. Japanese ground and air strength was built up steadily from two divisions in 1932 to eight divisions, two tank or cavalry brigades, eight border garrison units, and five independent guard units by 1939; and from three air squadrons (approximately 30 planes) to three air brigades,up from 65,000 men to perhaps 250,000. This reinforcement was matched by the Soviet buildup in the area. By 1939, the Russians deployed 20-30 infantry divisions, 5-7 cavalry divisions, 6-8 mechanized brigades numbering 2,500 tanks and 2,500 military aircraft.[6]

THE BORDER ISSUE

The boundaries were often unknown or imprecise. Perhaps the most vague border issue was that on the flatlands between western Manchuria and eastern Outer Mongolia. For over two centuries, the vicinity of Nomonhan has been the boundary line separating the pastoral plains of the Halha Mongols of Hulun Buir, and the Kalmucks of Outer Mongolia. During the era of the Ching Dynasty in 1734, the

Chinese authorities fixed boundaries between the rival nomads. Border disputes occurred constantly thereafter, with the stronger tribesmen controlling the region for the past two centuries. No definitive borderline was ever drawn or observed.[7] With the founding of Manchukuo, the border around Nomonhan became the scene of disputes between the Outer Mongolian "People's Republic" and the Hsinking authorities. Behind the respective regimes, the Soviet Union and Japan exerted decisive influence upon the border controversies. Since the strength of the Kwangtung Army far exceeded that of the Soviet Far Eastern Army between 1931-1935, no border disputes broke out during that period.[8]

The Manchukuoan government unilaterally contended that the valley of the Halha River represented the natural boundary between Manchuria and Outer Mongolia. The situation became aggravated, however, after the Soviets gradually built up their Far Eastern military strength and instituted far more stringent control over Outer Mongolia than Japan did over Manchuria. Border disputes erupted with increasing frequency, since the Soviet Union instigated the Outer Mongolians to action.[9] Local fighting broke out in 1935 when Outer Mongolians violated the frontier near Halhamiao. The Manchukuoan Government attempted to reach a settlement with the Mongolians through diplomatic negotiations, but no accord was reached. In early 1936, the Soviets and the Outer Mongolians concluded a mutual assistance pact which incorporated an unpublished "gentlemen's agreement" from 1934 which laid the groundwork for Russian troops in Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) and stiffen the Mongolians' resolve concerning the border issues.[10] (See Figure 1)

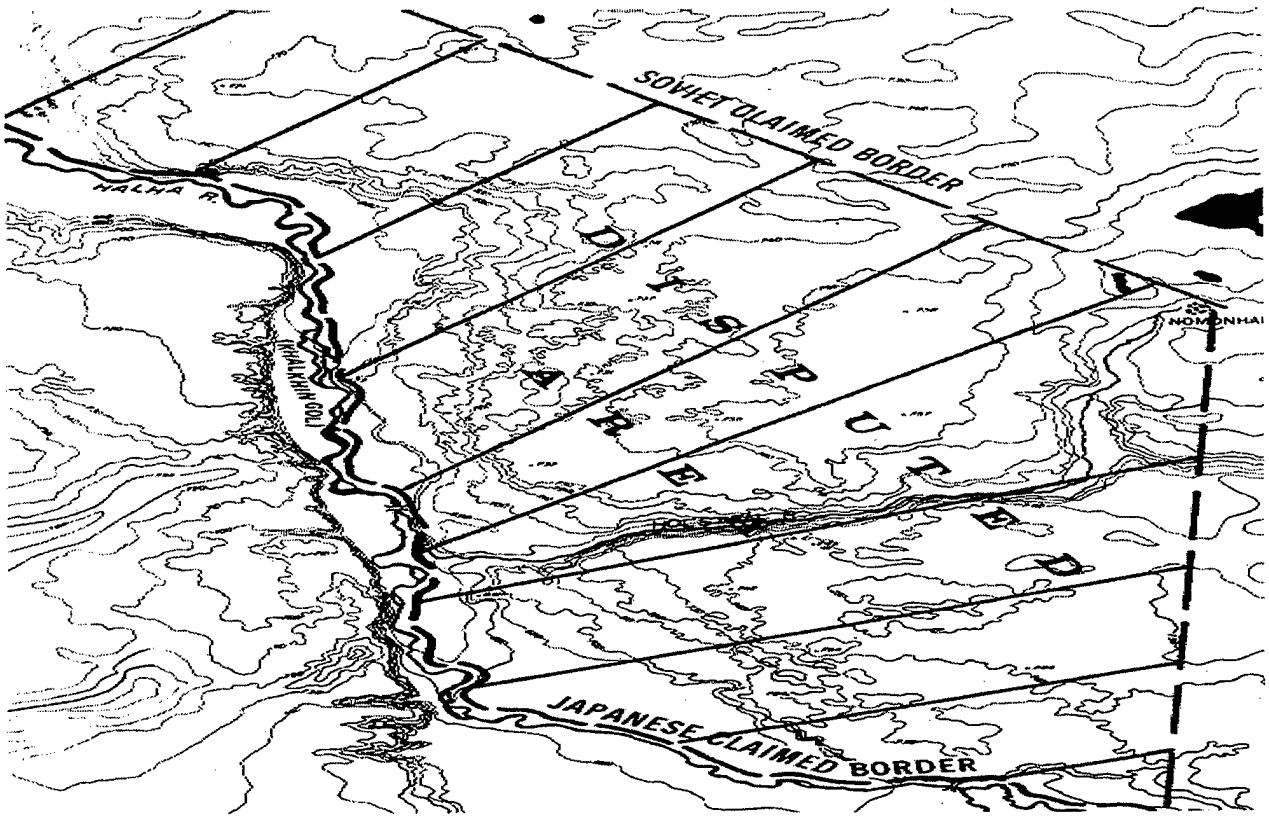

FIGURE 1. MAP OF DISPUTED BORDER BETWEEN NOMONHAN AND HALHA RIVER

THE NOMONHAN INCIDENT

With border incidents on the rise, the resolve of both Japan and the Soviet Union became evident in the spring of 1939. On 11 May 1939, the Manchukuoan cavalrymen initially drove the Outer Mongolians west of the Halha River. However, Outer Mongolian cavalry forces returned but the Manchukuoan troops were unable to push them back across the Halha. As a result, the Kwantung Army ordered the 23rd Infantry Division, which was responsible for border security, to drive the Mongolians from the disputed area. In turn, the Division commander designated the 64th Infantry regiment and its reconnaissance element as the force to evict the Outer Mongolians.[11]

A few days later, LTC Azuma Yaozo led the reconnaissance force to the disputed area but the Outer Mongolians withdrew, only to return one week later. However, this time the Outer Mongolians and the Soviet Union surrounded LTC Azuma's force and destroyed them.

With this defeat in mind, and cognizant of the continued Soviet buildup, the Kwantung Army planned a division-sized attack to oust the Soviets and their allies. This operation began 1 July with the 71st and 72nd Infantry regiment from the 23rd Infantry Division attacking to seize the Baintsagan Heights, the high ground west of the Halha River. Additionally, the Kwantung Army formed an armored task force consisting of the 3rd and 4th Tank Regiment (73 tanks total), the 64th Infantry Regiment, and the 2d Battalion, 28th Regiment, 7th Infantry Division attacked Soviet positions on the Halha's east bank (see Figure 2).[12]

The Japanese attack proved successful initially but stalled in 3 July. The Soviet force led by General Zhukov committed then 11th Tank Brigade (-), 7th Motorized Armored Brigade, and the 24th Motorized Rifle regiment of the 36th Motorized Rifle Division, totaling 186 tanks and 266 armored cars, against the Japanese forces on the west bank.[13]

Without any supporting infantry, General Zhukov accepted the risk and counterattacked to blunt the Japanese offensive. Casualties on both sides were high. Japanese troops destroyed at least 120 Soviet tanks or armored cars with Molotov cocktails, 37mm antitank guns, and antitank mines. The Japanese lost several hundred troops. Additionally, the Japanese forces depended on a single pontoon bridge across the Halha River for resupply. This single bridge was not able to handle the amount of ammunition and equipment required for the Japanese to continue the battle. As a result, the Japanese force withdrew back to the east.[14]

On the east bank, the Japanese regiments failed to break through the Soviet defenses and lost over half of their tanks. Meanwhile the 64th Infantry Regiment and the 2/28th Infantry battalion also could not penetrate the Soviet lines. With the failure of the two-pronged attack, the Japanese focused their forces on the Soviet main defense belt on Hill 733.

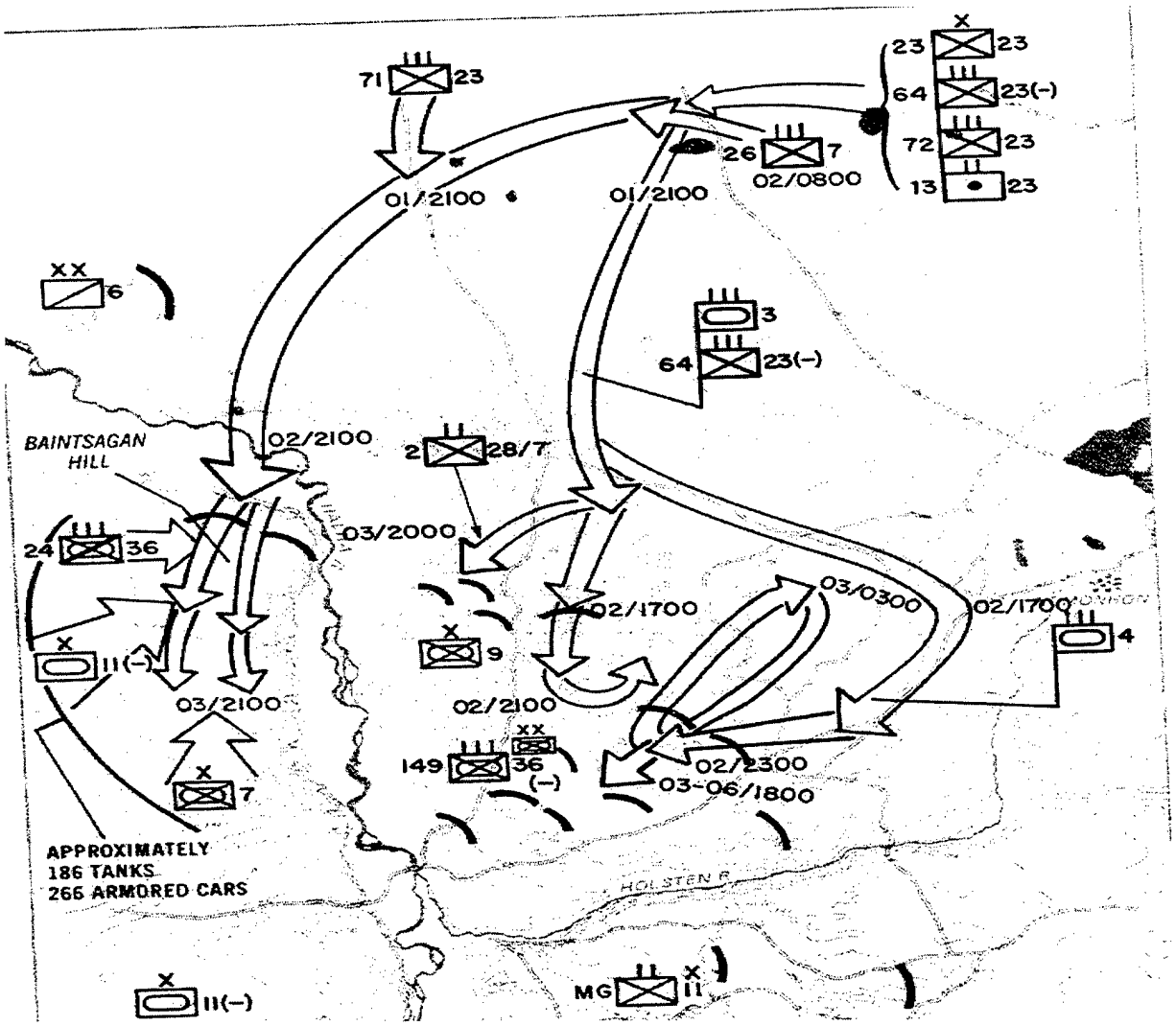

FIGURE 2. MAP OF JAPANESE GENERAL OFFENSIVE 1-4 JULY 1939

From 7-22 July, the heaviest fighting occurred along a 4-kilometer front from the Holsten River to just north of Hill 733. The Soviets reinforced the defense on the Halha River's east bank by committing the 24th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 11th Tank Regiment, 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 5th Machine Gun Brigade, and 602nd and 603rd Rifle Regiments of the 82nd Rifle Division. Additionally, the Soviets added over 50 pieces of artillery to the defense, employing 26 on the west bank and 24 on the east bank.[15]

On 23 July, the 64th and 72nd Infantry regiments launched a frontal assault following an intense artillery preparation against the 11th Tank Brigade, 149th Motorized Rifle Regiments and 5th Machine Gun Brigade. The battle quickly became an artillery dual with the Soviets producing a greater volume of fire. Although the Japanese did succeed in pushing the Soviets off Hill 733, over 5,000 Japanese troops were killed, and the Soviets were still on the east side of the Halha River, the Japanese claimed border (See Figure 3).[16]

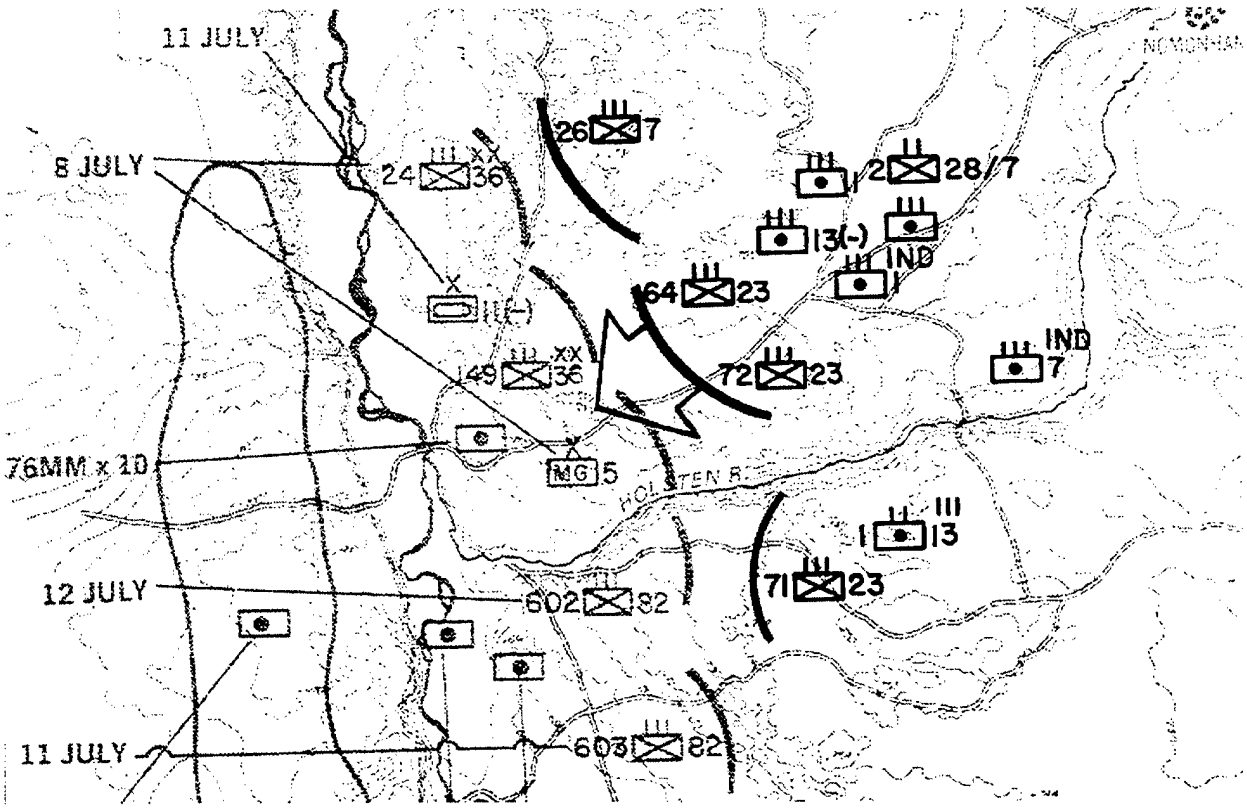

FIGURE 3 JAPANESE GENERAL OFFENSIVE 23-25 JULY 1939

On the morning of 20 August, General Zhukov launched a concerted offensive along the entire 30-kilometer front. He concentrated two rifle divisions, two cavalry divisions, a motorized rifle division, a machine gun brigade, two tank brigades against slightly more the two Japanese infantry divisions (see Figure 4). Heavy airstrikes and a massive artillery concentration proved decisive in silencing the antiaircraft batteries, interdicting critical supply points, as well as softening the Japanese forward positions. In the north, the 7th motorized Armored Brigade and the 601st regiment attacked the Manchukouan Army cavalry near Hill 721, but encountered very stiff resistance. The firm Manchukouan/Japanese resistance was a result of the 23rd division commander sending reinforcements, believing the Soviet main thrust was to the north. In the center, the Soviets forces were to engage as many Japanese units as possible to prevent the Japanese from reinforcing their flanks. With the main effort in the south, General Zhukov concentrated his armor with over 320 tanks plus an armored car brigade. With the support of an infantry division, the armor quickly broke through the Japanese defense and isolated the 8th Border Guards Regiment and 2/28th Infantry Battalion. After four days on intense fighting on Hill 721, the Soviets northern pincer penetrated south to complete the encirclement of the 23rd Division at Nomonhan.[17]

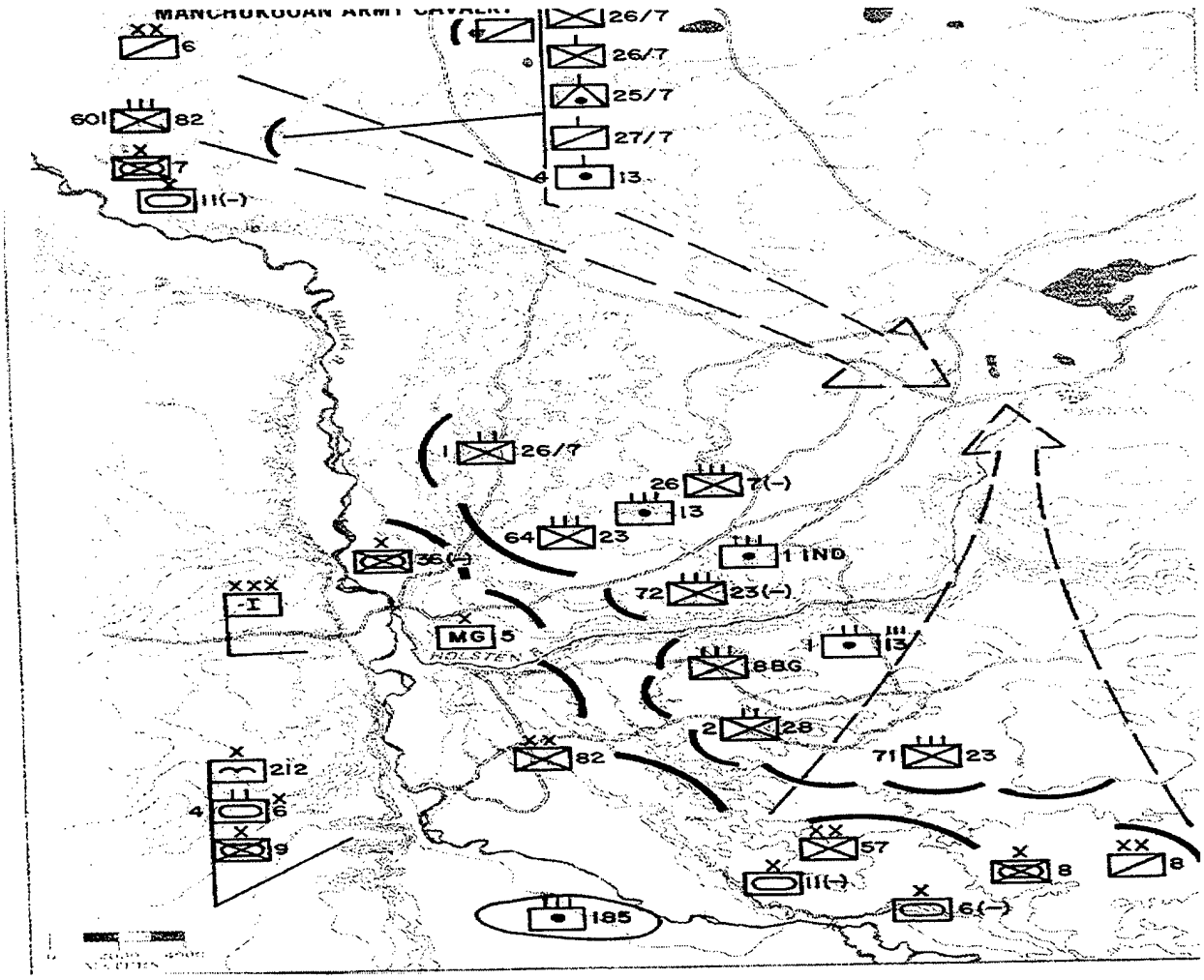

FIGURE 4 SOVIET PLAN OF OPERATIONS 20 AUGUST 1939

With the Soviet objective met and considering a shortage of manpower and materiel, General Zhukov halted the offense and consolidated its gains. A cease-fire was declared on 16 September. The Japanese losses were heavy: over 17,000 were killed or wounded. Soviet casualties were estimated at over 9,000 killed or wounded.[18]

THE KWANTUNG ARMY: "PRIMA DONNA" AT ITS BEST

The Mongolians, with new determination, escalated border incidents in early 1939. In late April, the Kwantung Army headquarters unilaterally wrote a secret operation order titled "Principles for the Settlement of Soviet-Manchurian Border Disputes." In the Army's defense of Mancaukuo, the order stated for the Kwantung Army to follow the basic policy of neither committing nor allowing others to

commit violations of the frontier. If Soviet or Mongolian forces intruded, the Kwantung Army would "nip their ambitions in the bud." Aggressive punitive action was the only way to prevent aggravation or recurrence of border disputes. In the operations order, friendly units must challenge courageously and triumph, regardless of relative strength or location of boundaries. "Do not concern yourselves about the consequences," local troop commanders were told. To trap or lure enemy troops onto Mancaukuo, local commanders could enter Soviet territory temporarily. Area defense commanders were authorized, on their own initiative, to establish boundaries on unclear districts. These aggressive orders were written by the staff officers in the Kwantung Army without reference to the High Command in Tokyo or the civilian government.[19]

EXECUTING FOREIGN POLICY

These orders were first tested in Mid-May 1939 when it was first reported that a large-scale Outer Mongolian cavalry unit was operating east of the Halha River. Lt Gen Komatsubara Michitare, the 23rd Infantry Division commander, decided to leverage the recent orders by forming a motorized task force under COL. Yamagata Takemitsu's confident but weakly equipped reconnaissance regiment and its commander, LTC. Azuma Yaozo, to expel the enemy force east of the Halba River. As previously stated, the outcome of the engagement resulted in LTC Azuma's force being wiped out by the Soviet artillery and armored cars, leaving a bridgehead east of the Halha River.[20]

At this point, relations between the Kwantung Army and the High Command were satisfactory. However, the Kwantung Army reported this action on a "post facto" basis, and the general staff was deeply concerned over the developments in the Nomonhan area, since the China Incident was entering its third year. But the Japanese High Command promised the Kwantung Army reinforcements, if necessary, while at the same time it encouraged localization of the situation. For its part, the Kwantung Army Headquarters played down the border incidents—in other words, it underestimated the situation even though the Japanese reconnaissance force was destroyed.[21]

In Mid-June, to the surprise of the Kwantung Army Headquarters, Soviet bombers attacked two key points, Kanchuerhmiao and Arshann, well inside Mancaukuo. The operations officers at the Army headquarters immediately recommended that a massive ground and aerial response was required. The Kwantung Army Chief of Staff, LT Gen Isogai Rensuke, recommended that High Command approval first be obtained. Two impatient staff officers, Operations Chief COL Terada Masao and Senior Staff Officer LTC Hattori Takushiro, successfully argued that the situation allowed no delay.[22]

In the meantime, aerial fighting had broken out over Nomonhan. At Tamsag, Japanese Air Force staff officers pressed for permission to launch a strike against the air bases inside Outer Mongolia. The Kwantung Army command section agreed on 23 June but kept the decision secret, sending a courier by the slowest means to advise Tokyo. The High Command, however, somehow learned that Kwantung Army Headquarters was contemplating early escalation of the Nomonhan situation and an Army General Staff officer was rushed from Tokyo. He arrived too late. Concerned that the command would

countermand its orders, the Kwantung Army commander had already committed the Air Force. This "unilateral and defiant raid prove to be the cause of the irremediable split which now developed between the Kwantung Army and the High Command. Messages of recrimination and complaint began to flow between from the headquarters. One especially strong wire from the Kwantung Headquarters stated: It is requested that handling of trivial matters in border areas be entrusted to this army".[23]

THE KWANTUNG ARMY'S FOREIGN POLICY DISCOVERED

The High Command was finally awakening to the fact that the Kwantung Army operation order of April 1939 had indeed allowed "temporary" crossing of the borderlines. As a result, the High Command in Tokyo issued an order on 29 June specifically denying such authority and enjoining prudence, at least to the extent of limiting the scope of the ground combat at Nomonhan. However, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army and two staff officer flew to the headquarters of the 23rd Infantry commander to coordinate the already scheduled ground offensive on 2 July. In the plan, the right wing of the projected offensive once again included "temporally" crossing onto the west side of the Halhba River. Once again, an Imperial Sanction was not requested, and the civilian government was neither notified nor consulted.[24]

Japanese ground forces, without tanks or artillery, crossed over on a single bridge into Mongolia on 2 July. The crossing force was quickly met, as described earlier, with swarms of Soviet tanks and armored cars. The Japanese suffered very heavy casualties and withdrew on 4 July. The left wing of the operations did not even reach the river and also sustained heavy losses.[25]

> In mid-July 1939, the Soviet Air Force struck west of Tsitsihar in Mongolia. Once again the Kwantung Army requested permission to use its own air force against Outer Mongolia again. On 17 July the High Command refused, and from the broad strategic view. The Kwantung Army's view of this decision is best summed up by its Chief of Staff. "The reply incurred the resentment of all echelons at [our] headquarters. Thereafter an emotional antagonism developed between the High Command... and the staff officers at Kwantung Army Headquarters." When the General Staff on 20 July presented its "Essential for Settlement of the Nomonhan Incident," to include the evacuation of the disputed sector when appropriate, the Kwantung Army Chief of Staff objected strongly. "We cannot abandon a region where controversy has erupted and where thousand of heroes' lives have been sacrificed." [26]

On 23 July, the 23rd Division attempted a new ground offensive toward the Halha River on the east bank. But this operation failed again, and the Division dug in with the intent of going on the offensive in the autumn. However, General Zhukov executed a counteroffensive, which encircled and overran the 23rd Infantry Division in about 10 days.

Even with this defeat in hand, the Kwantung Army was planning a new counteroffensive involving fresh divisions. This is when the Japanese High Command stepped in and issued an Imperial order on 3 September to preempt these counteroffensive plans. Fortunately for the Japanese, the Soviets held up at the boundary lines they claimed east of the Halha River, near Nomonhan.

To evade further confrontations with the Kwantung Army, the High Command adopted a policy of simply not informing the Kwantung Army of the diplomatic initiatives with the Soviets. Since late August, Japan's Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Togo Shiegenori, had been conducting discussions with the Soviets. After the catastrophic defeat at Nomonhan, Ambassador Togo was empowered to commence serious negotiations in Moscow. At the fourth meeting with Vyacheslav Molotov, on 15 September, the Soviet foreign minister indicated that the USSR "could accept the Japanese proposal of cessation of hostilities."[27] By now, Gen Zhukov's armies had achieved all of their objectives in the Nomonhan area and had completed the annihilation of the 23rd Infantry Division. During the same period, the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact had been signed on 23 August, the Hiranuma Cabinet had fallen on 29 August, and World War II had exploded in Poland on 1 September. These developments suggest that the Kwantung Army had been operating *in vacuo*, in understanding the shifting winds of the world environment. [28]

A PRIMA DONNA IN THE MAKING

The Nomonhan Incident clearly illustrates a strategic example of what happens when an independent military organization, such as the Kwantung Army, is given unilateral control to make decisions without regard to the impact of national policy. In looking at Nomonhan, the Kwantung Army unilaterally invaded a foreign country (Outer Mongolia) by ground and air, without Imperial Sanction and without a declaration of war. It manipulated the High Command in Tokyo, withheld information, and even duped higher headquarters on occasion. It evaded national policy and ignored the home government. The Kwantung Army was a "prima donna" which proved insensitive to the central controls of the High Command and the civilian government. By it actions, the Kwantung Army was making foreign policy at gunpoint and risking all-out war. So how did this field army come to exert such a flippant disregard for higher authority and a despised "weak-kneed" civilian diplomacy?

The answer lay in Japan's overly aggressive leadership doctrine. Japanese Army training emphasized commander's *dokudan senko*. In order to provide a degree of flexibility in the field, especially when time was of essence and communications were not ideal, Japanese military doctrine emphasizes the importance of *dokudan senko*. This term was meant "initative and originality in emergencies," not high handed or unilateral action. With great distances and communication very poor between the headquarters of the Kwantung Army at Hsinking and the High Command in Tokyo, *dokudan senko* was permitted to ferment, especially if headstrong staff officers in the field were determined to interpret guidance as they deemed fit.[29]

This leads to another Japanese Army leadership phenomenon called *gekokujo*. *Gekokujo* means "domination of seniors by juniors," terminology close to "insubordination" in English. Major Tsuji Mananobu, a Kwantung Army planner who assisted in writing the "Principles for the Settlement of Soviet-Manchurian Border Disputes," was considered "the god of *gekokujo*." General Inada Masazumi, chief of the Army General Staff's operation section in Tokyo stated, "Tsuji was too much for me this time" [at

Nomonhan]. General Inada's remark regarding Maj Tsuji and the phenomenon of *gekokujo* can be understood within the context of the two next points concerning the Army General Staff monopoly of rank and position and the field training approach of *dokudan senko*.[30]

The Kwantung Army's distaste for central authority was spawned by previous restraints. There was a feeling of "humiliation" because of the restraints insisted upon by the High Command. Both the Amur and Changkufeng Incidents in 1937 precluded the Kwantung Army from aggressively counterattacking Soviet border violations. In both cases, the Kwantung Army suffered heavy casualties, and the crisis was resolved through diplomatic channels. The High Command determined that there would be no repetition of weakness and timidity in the face of the "puny" Mongolians and their Soviet Allies. This aggressiveness and autonomy of the Kwantung Army is illustrated by the "Border Defense Guide" issued in April 1939. The guide was a major factor in the escalation at Nomonhan. The guide amounted to a *carte blanche* authority where local Japanese military commanders could interpret ill-defined borders as they see fit with full support from higher headquarters. The High Command in Tokyo did not approve or comment on the "Border Guide" and did not even understand the implications of the aggressive guide until after the Kwantung Army's air raid at Tamsag.[31]

The Kwantung Army thought that diplomacy should only be used when all else fails instead of force being used only when diplomacy fails. However, less than a year before the Nomonhan Incident, Yuasa Kurahei, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, advised the Emperor about field armies and border fighting:

> Strategic significance ... may be one thing, but the location of the state frontier is another. We cannot take territory belonging to another country, by the use of force, regardless of strategic importance. The prime consideration must be center on the question of which side is in the right. ... We ought not to fight USSR now, from the broader standpoint.[32]

In retrospect, the civilian government acted exactly as the Kwantung Army desired. It was not until late July and early August, when all was lost, that the civilian government engaged in a diplomatic resolution to the Nomanhan Incident.[33]

CONCLUSION

In assessing the defeat at Nomonhan, one could easily point at the Japanese military approach to leadership in understanding the development of Kwantung Army's *prima donna* personae. The Army's overly aggressive leadership approach and the passive civilian control cultivated the *prima donna* attitude by tolerating insubordination and even encouraging independent thought without regard to the national or strategic consequences. In essence Nomonhan is a prime example of military policy strategy shaping the foreign policy of a nation. The impact of this *prima donna* persona had far reaching consequences. In fact, the independent action of the Kwantung Army at Nomonhan was an unspoken factor of Japan's strategic decision to go south in 1941. Alvin D. Coox, in a lecture at San Diego State University in 1992, stated the following:

> Yet, though everyone spoke of oil, there is one crucial unspoken reason why the Japanese Army, when fortune beckoned in mid-1941, recoiled from war with Russia so soon, and that is the Kwantung Army's failure against Zhukov at Nomonhan in 1939. In notes on a conversation with Zhukov that were released in 1987, we learn the Marshal's thoughts on the subject. Zhukov felt that, for the Japanese side, Nomomhan had been a major reconnaissance in force, a serious feeling-out: "It was important for the Japanese to find out whether we were capable of fighting them, and the outcome of the fighting subsequently determined their more or less restrained conduct with the start of our war against the Germans. I feel that if at Nomonhan their affairs would have gone successfully, they would have initiated an offense against us. Their far-reaching plans included the capturing of the eastern part of Mongolia, cutting the Siberian main railway line." The Tokyo war trial jurists agreed and said, in memorable prose that as the door of opportunity closed in the north, the southern gates began to open for Japan.[34]

In the fall of 1941, the Wehrmacht was approaching Moscow. However, the timely arrival of Soviet reinforcements from the Far East prevented the capture of the capital by the Germans. When the Russians learned through the Sorge spy ring of the Japanese decision to attack south toward the "Southern Resources Area" rather than move north to the Soviet maritime provinces, they were able to stave off defeat. The baleful ghost of Nomonhan which haunted the Japanese Army paid dividends for Russia.

Word Count = 4,542

ENDNOTES

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[18] Ibid., 11.

[19] United States Forces Far East, 99.

[20] Ibid., 100.

[21] Ibid., 242.

[22] Ibid., 243.

[23] Coox, "High Command and the Field Army; Kwantung Army and the Nomonhan Incident," 273.

[24] Ibid., 274.

[25] Ibid., 276.

[26] Ibid., 327.

[27] Ibid., 353.

[28] Ibid., 354.

[29] Ibid., 305.

[30] Ibid., 306.

[31] Ibid., 309.

[32] Ibid., 310.

[33] Ibid., 310.

[34] Alvin D. Coox, The Unfought War : 1941-1942. (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 1992), 63.

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