

Tōgō's Meetings with the Cabinet and the Emperor, August 7-8, 1945

Source: Gaimushō (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs) ed. Shūsen *Shiroku* (*The Historical Records of the End of the War*), annotations by Jun Etō, volume 4, pp. 57-60 [Excerpts] Translation by Toshihiro Higuchi

On the morning of August 7th, the American radio conveyed President Truman's statement, saying that "The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima ... is a weapon that brought a revolutionary change to warfare. Unless Japan is willing to surrender, we will drop bombs in other places." Upon hearing this broadcast, Foreign Minister [Shigenori] Tōgō felt an urgent need to make a protest against the United States with regard to its atomic use, if it was the case. Communicating with the Army for the confirmation of the event, the Army replied that, contrary to the American argument, the bomb seemed to be not an atomic bomb, but an extremely powerful conventional bomb. The foreign minister then asked the Army for an urgent investigation.

On the 7th, concerned ministers met to discuss the issue. Tōgō made a detailed report about the American broadcast on the atomic bomb. The Army took a position that they needed to wait for the result of the current investigation before taking any steps, an attitude which tended to downplay the bomb's effects. At the meeting, the foreign minister suggested that the advent of the atomic bomb offered a reason for the military to terminate the war and, therefore, they should consider the end of the war on the basis of the Potsdam Declaration. At that time, however, the foreign minister's proposal did not become an agenda item for further discussion.

The next morning, Tōgō, well aware of the continuous publicity blitz of the Anglo-American broadcast about the atomic bomb, was admitted to the Emperor's presence at the Court after consulting with Prime Minister [Kantarō] Suzuki. Informing the Emperor of the broadcast, the foreign minister reported that there was no option but to accept the Potsdam Declaration. Hearing this, His Majesty stated that the advent of the new weapon like the atomic bomb made it impossible to continue the persecution of war and steps should be taken to end the war without delay. His Majesty ordered the foreign minister to relay his remark to the prime minister.

Telling Lord [Kō'ichi] Kido [the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal] and Prime Minister Suzuki about the emperor's statement, Tōgō asked the prime minister to convene the Meeting of Principals of the Supreme Council for the Direction of War (Kōsei'in Kaigi) as soon as possible. Accordingly, the prime minister arranged for a meeting to take place the next day, the 9th. Then, on the morning of 9th, the Soviet Union entered the war, and in the middle of the hastily convened Meeting of Principals, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. ...

[W]e should not overlook the fact that, on August 7, the night after the Hiroshima bombing, Tōgō and Army Minister [Korechika] Anami had a long conversation alone at the Army Minister's residence. At this occasion, the army minister was said to express his agreement, in a candid manner, with Tōgō's opinion that the defeat would be only a matter of time. Their conversation continued from around 6:30 pm to near 9.

[Excerpts from post-war accounts]

Seiji Hasegawa, "Hōkai no zenya" (The night before the collapse), in *Fujin Kōron*, August 1947.

... On August 6, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. With Hiroshima thoroughly destroyed, a special telephone line at my office (Dōmei News Agency) went out of order. Everyone, including the head of the [agency's Hiroshima] branch, had died, so I could hardly grasp what happened at all. When I asked the Communication Bureau, I was told that one or two airplanes flying over Hiroshima dropped only one or two bombs, and that they crushed Hiroshima and tossed the [Dōmei] branch into a mess, too. Still, I couldn't understand what they were talking about at all. Then, shortly after 9 in the evening, I returned to the hotel (I was then staying at the First Hotel) and went to bed. On the 7th, around 1:30 am, the phone rang in my room. [By then, Dōmei's receiver station had been relocated to Kawagoe so that it could receive Anglo-American broadcasts]. The phone call told me that that President Truman announced that the United States attacked Hiroshima with an atomic bomb, and that British Prime Minister Atlee said the same thing. But since I didn't know how terrible the atomic bomb was, I felt I was shaken out of bed for a trifling matter. Anyway, I went back to the agency, and relayed the report to Foreign Minister Tōgō and Chief of Cabinet Secretariat [Hisatsune] Sakomizu. But neither of them knew anything about the atomic bomb. The military knew it, but believed the fact that it was an atomic bomb should not reach the public; it made deceptive propaganda reports that it was a "new bomb," and [claimed] that people did not need to worry if they covered themselves with white cloth.

Transcript of Foreign Minister Tōgō's Testimony, "Shūsen ni saishite" (At the time of the end of the war), September 1945.

On August 6, the United States attacked the city of Hiroshima with an atomic bomb, and the Anglo-American camp began a massive propaganda campaign about the atomic bomb, saying that the atomic bomb not only changed the situation of the war completely, but also brought a revolutionary change to the society. It also stated that if Japan did not accept the three-power joint declaration [the Potsdam Declaration], it would continue to use atomic bombs until Japan was annihilated. On the afternoon of the 7th, cabinet ministers had a consultation about the atomic attack. The Army appeared to be trying to discount its effect as much as possible.

The next day, on the 8th, I was admitted to the [Imperial] presence in the underground room of the Court and reported to the Emperor about the enemy's announcement about the atomic bomb and other related matters in detail. His Majesty observed that, now with this kind of weapon in use, it had become even more impossible than ever to continue the war; we should no longer miss an opportunity to end it with an excuse to wait for a favorable term [of the surrender]. We would not completely discard the possibility of negotiating conditions, but should make every effort to put an end to the war as soon as possible. Thereafter, I met the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal [Kōichi Kido] and the prime minister, conveyed His Majesty's will, and decided to hold a session of the Supreme Council for the Direction of War next day, on the 9th.