

THE END OF THE WORLD WAR

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Abstract: The end of the world war must be viewed on three fronts: the Italian front, which marked the fall of fascism; the German front, which brought an end to Nazism; and the Japanese front, where Japanese imperialism came to an end. In Italy, the defeat of the Italian Social Republic led Benito Mussolini, along with his lover Claretta Petacci, to seek help from German troops to escape to Switzerland. They were taken aboard into a German convoy. At the edge of the village of Dongo, on the shore of Lake Como, they were stopped by Italian partisans, Mussolini being recongized. Mussolini and Claretta Petacci were arrested without any opposition from the Germans. The next day, they were taken from there by a communist partisan who called himself “Colonel Valerio.” Mussolini allegedly promised him “an empire” in exchange for his freedom. However, the partisan summarily executed both Mussolini and Claretta Petacci on the spot. Alongside the bodies of 12 other former Italian officials shot by the communist partisans, their corpses were taken to Milan and publicly displayed, hanging upside down. In this swift manner, fascism in Italy was brought to an end. In Germany, the situation was different. In January 1945, Eisenhower and Churchill urged Stalin to hasten Germany’s defeat. On January 12, 1945, the Soviet offensive for Berlin began. The Soviet army advanced on three fronts: one led by Marshal Zhukov, the second by Marshal Konev, and the third by General Chuikov, the hero of Stalingrad. Faced with this situation, a desperate Hitler ordered on April 26, 1945, that all officers leave Berlin—he wanted to save them. Secondly, he appointed his successors: Goebbels, Admiral Dönitz, and Bormann. Thirdly, decided to commit suicide together with Eva Braun. The next day, he married Eva Braun, and on the third day, inside the Führer’s bunker, Eva Braun took poison and Hitler shot himself. Their bodies were taken by loyal SS soldiers and burned. The following day, Goebbels and his entire family committed suicide. On April 30th, General Krebs proposed a conditional surrender to Soviets, but it was rejected in favor of unconditional surrender. The next day, on May 1, Soviet Sergeant Kantaria entered the Reichstag, climbed to the chapel where the German flag stood, tore it down, and hoisted the Soviet flag as a sign of victory. It was a complete symbol of victory. Berlin had fallen after a devastating and bloody fight. On May 4, 1945, authorized by Admiral Dönitz, Admiral von Friedeburg surrendered to General Montgomery at Lüneburg, along with German forces in northern Germany. On May 7, 1945, Field Marshal Jodl signed the surrender before General Eisenhower in Reims. Following Stalin’s demand, the formal German capitulation was signed in Berlin on May 8, 1945, by representatives of Dönitz’s government. Because the discussions lasted into the night, the final act was signed at 1 a.m. on May 9, 1945. Thus, the Western Allies celebrate Victory in Europe Day on May 8, while the Soviets celebrate it on May 9. Stalin kept his promise to the Western Allies and transferred four Soviet armies to fight the Japanese, who had forces under General Osaka in Manchuria. The Soviet army was commanded by Marshal Vasily Alexandrovich Vasilevsky. It was a total land victory for the Soviets. At the same time, the British, eager to restore their colonial empire, attacked and captured Burma, Rangoon, Siam (Thailand), all of Indochina, Indonesia, and Singapore, and made their fleet available to the Americans. The Americans, after fierce fighting and heavy losses, managed to capture the

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islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. In these conditions, the use of their weapon, the atomic bomb, was considered. The new President of the United States, Harry Truman, declared he would continue the decision of his predecessor, the late President Roosevelt. Generals Marshall and Eisenhower were not fully in agreement. In turn, General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the Pacific forces and thus master of the ocean, was indifferent. As a result, on August 6, 1945, the Japanese city of Hiroshima was bombed, followed by Nagasaki on August 9. The destruction and loss of life were immense. Besides the instantaneous death of hundreds of thousands of people, it became clear that the atomic cloud had deadly effects that could not be fully assessed at the time. Immediately, Emperor Hirohito (1927–1989) convened the Council of Elders, composed of six members. On August 14, 1945, three members of the council voted to continue the war, while the other three voted for surrender. The Emperor decided in favor of surrender. The next day, on August 15, he gave a recorded radio speech in the cryptic language of the imperial court. Very few people understood that he was announcing Japan's surrender. A group of zealous young officers stormed the Imperial Palace, looking for the speech text and the Emperor to kill him. They failed. The Americans were satisfied, as they had not forgotten Pearl Harbor and wanted revenge. Douglas MacArthur was summoned to sign the act of surrender. This took place on September 2, 1945, aboard the American battleship Missouri. Japan was represented by its foreign minister. As a result, following the signing of the surrender, the Japanese Empire was definitively defeated, and the world war came to a complete end. The signing of peace treaties followed, which will be the subject of another paper. Today, however, although we believed it was left in the past, new influences from that time continue to emerge and shape the present.

Keywords: Red Army, General, Marshal, unconditional surrender

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At the end of the "Great War" – 1914-1918 – Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France, former Supreme Commander of the Allied forces and a man of great culture, after finishing reading the documents that marked the end of the hostilities among the war's participants, smiled and exclaimed, addressing Winston Churchill, the British Lord of the Admiralty: *"This is not a peace treaty, but an armistice for a period of twenty years."*².

He was absolutely right. After a long armistice period, generally referred to by historians as the interwar period, fighting resumed among the great powers.

The main cause was that the desires which had led to the start of the fighting during the "Great War" had not been resolved.

This time, the direct, hot, military conflict, after serious and careful preparation, was opened on three fronts.

2 Cf. Winston Churchill, *History of the Second World War*, volume 1, *The Gathering Storm*, 1st ed., Cassell & Co, London, 1948, p. 7.

În Asia, the Council of Elders in Tokyo decided on February 25, 1931, that Japan should implement the Tanaka Plan³. Following the Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931⁴, Japan decided to invade and conquer the southern part of Manchuria. The peninsula was the most industrialized region of China (northeast). The Soviet Union held the northern part of the peninsula; Japan and Imperial Russia, later the USSR, had been present in Manchuria at least since the war of 1904-1905⁵.

There, Japan created a puppet state, Manchukuo⁶.

Immediately after occupying southern Manchuria, the Japanese Empire brought settlers into the region. They were generally young people coming from the overpopulated Japanese Empire, where there was no available arable land.

3 The “Tanaka Plan” has been the subject of considerable discussion in historiography. It was most likely drawn up by the Prime Minister of the Japanese Empire, Baron Tanaka Giichi, who held office between 1927 and 1929. This plan — or Tanaka Memorial — was supposedly presented to Emperor Hirohito (December 25, 1926 – January 7, 1989). The plan allegedly aimed at the conquest of the entire world by the Japanese Empire. In practice, it began with the conquest of Korea, which Japan had already possessed since 1911. Next on the list were: Manchuria — the most industrialized region of China, contested between Japan and Imperial Russia, later the Soviet Union, at least since 1905 — Mongolia, and from there, the rest of China. Japan then intended to move forward with the conquest of European colonies in Southeast Asia, and eventually even set its sights on the land of Japheth (a biblical reference, sometimes interpreted to mean the Western world or Eurasia). The Tanaka Plan was reportedly first discussed at the Eastern Conference attended by 22 high-ranking Japanese officials involved in the Empire’s foreign policy — a secret meeting held in Tokyo between June 25 and July 7, 1927. The main topic was the unfolding events in China and, in this context, how best to defend Japan’s economic interests in the region. At the time, fighting in China was taking place between the nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek and the communist forces led by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the latter being supported by the USSR. The authenticity of the Tanaka Plan has been questioned, as the original document has never been found, and the Japanese have always denied its existence. Nevertheless, despite their continual denials of any intention to conquer large parts of the world, in the first half of the 20th century, the Japanese acted precisely in the spirit of the “Tanaka Plan.” (For a discussion on the authenticity of the Tanaka Plan, see: John J. Stephan, *The Tanaka Memorial (1927). Authentic or Spurious?* in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. VII, no. 4, July 1973, pp. 733–745).

4 On September 18, 1931, Lieutenant Suemori Kawamoto of the Japanese 29th Infantry Regiment from the Kwantung Army detonated a small amount of explosives near the South Manchurian Railway line, close to the city of Mukden, the capital of Manchuria and the most sacred city of the former Chinese Empire. The plan had been devised by Colonel Seishirō Itagaki and Lieutenant Colonel Kanji Ishiwara, with the support of the army, a large part of the government (except for the Prime Minister), the Diet, and even the Emperor himself, in order to provoke the Japanese invasion of southern Manchuria. The pretext was the defense of Japanese property (the railway) and the lives of Japanese citizens in the region (cf. Robert H. Ferrell, *The Mukden Incident: September 18–19, 1931*, in *Journal of Modern History*, March 1955, pp. 66–72).

5 See in detail: Bruce Elleman, *International Rivalry and Secret Diplomacy in East Asia, 1896–1950*, Routledge, London–New York, 2020, pp. 12–17 and following.

6 In 1934, it was granted the rank of Empire, and Pu-Yi was placed on the throne of Manchukuo. He was the last descendant of the Han imperial dynasty and had been the last emperor of China, forced to abdicate in 1911 while still a minor, during the revolution led by Sun Yat-sen. A puppet state, Manchukuo was abolished in 1945, with the defeat of the Japanese Empire.

In 1932, Japan went even further and attacked China. There, they encountered resistance from the Chinese, led by the Communist Party, with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai at the forefront.

At the same time, although the Japanese had signed a political and economic treaty with the Soviet Union in 1925 in Beijing⁷, they attempted to cross its border.

However, in 1939, the Japanese advance was halted by the Soviet army. In the battles fought between May 11 and September 16, 1939, near Khalkhin Gol, the Soviet armies—commanded during the August counterattacks by General (and future Marshal) Georgy Zhukov—achieved a decisive victory⁸. The Japanese were stopped at the Amur River and at the northern border of Manchuria.

As a result of this defeat at Khalkhin Gol, their strategy changed. They moved on to the attempt to occupy China, but adopted the plans of the Japanese naval commanders, who promoted the conquest of Southeast Asia, where there were Dutch, French, and British colonies (Indonesia, Indochina, Singapore, Burma, Rangoon) that had raw materials needed by the Japanese and where only the U.S. Navy could oppose them—whom they believed they could easily take out of the fight.

As a result, on December 7, 1941, in the port of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked the USA, being assured by the treaty with the Soviet Union concluded that same year of its neutrality toward them.

After the first stages of opening of this first front of the world war, ideologically, diplomatically, and militarily supported by Nazi Germany, the second front of the world war was initiated.

In 1936, Italy attacked and conquered Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Then it strengthened its position in Libya. Finally, with Germany's help (which cost the Germans dearly), the Italians conquered Albania and Greece.

The Germans and Italians were assured through the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis that they would be supported by the Japanese Empire in the event of the expansion of the world war and the attack on the Soviet Union.

Germany wanted to secure peace in Europe through a treaty with the Soviet Union. Likewise, the USSR wanted to ensure the same peace in order not to have to fight simultaneously on two fronts (in Asia and in Europe).

After a long-lasting interwar collaboration between the Soviet Union and Germany, on August 23, 1939, in Moscow, between the Foreign Ministers V. M. Molotov and

7 Cf. Bruce Elleman, *op. cit.*, p. 182 ff.

8 Cf. Gregory Aldrete, *The Decisive Battles of World History*, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, 2014, p. 221-226.

Joachim von Ribbentrop, under the direct supervision of Stalin himself, a so-called non-aggression pact was concluded, accompanied by secret protocols. Through these Soviet-German acts, practically a repetition of the Tilsit agreement (1807), the secret protocols provided for a division of Europe between Germany (the Third Reich) and the USSR.

On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, using the existence of the Danzig corridor as a pretext.

It was the third phase of the world war, this time in Europe.

The German army, very well trained and equipped, quickly succeeded in Poland. On September 15, 1939, the Romanian government, led by Prime Minister Armand Călinescu, opened the northern border of the Kingdom of Romania and allowed the Polish government, the marshal of the Polish army, the depositaries of the country's treasury, and the Polish population to take refuge in Romania. It was an act full of courage by the Romanian leadership.

On September 19, 1939, German troops reached near Brest-Litovsk, at the line where they were supposed to meet the Soviet army, which was to occupy eastern Poland.

The USSR claimed that it attacked Poland to protect the Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities after the “collapse” of the Polish state. Practically speaking, Poland, divided between the Germans and Soviets, disappeared as a state.

Then, Germany found itself at war with France and England.

These countries, which had demanded Germany to withdraw from Poland, did not declare war on the Soviet Union, nor did they demand USSR to leave the occupied Polish territory without right – despite having defense treaties with Poland.

Declarations of war against Germany were made on September 3, 1939, by France and on September 5, 1939, by England. The entry into war of these huge colonial empires accentuated the global character of the conflict, as French and British colonies were also dragged into the fight.

At the same time, the Soviet Union – using the pretext of moving the border – attacked Finland (November 30, 1939) with a force of about 500,000 soldiers. The victory was hard-won by the Soviets (March 12, 1940), who took part of Finland's territory.

At the same time, the Soviet Union invaded the Baltic countries and the Kingdom of Romania.

From Romania, USSR took northern Bukovina and Bessarabia.

Germany, for its part, invaded Denmark. On April 9, 1940, Denmark surrendered without a fight. Between April 9 and June 9, 1940, Germany conquered Norway.

On May 10, 1940, Germany attacked France. The tanks commanded by General Heinz Guderian broke through the Maginot-Daladier line of fortifications⁹, and on June 14, 1940, they occupied Paris. France's capitulation was on June 22, 1940.

Simultaneously with the advance of the German troops, fascist Italy declared war on France and occupied the Savoy region.

Hitler, as an Austrian, was deeply dissatisfied that the USSR, following the secret protocol of August 23, 1939, issued the Molotov ultimatum and occupied parts of Romania, including northern Bukovina (because this specific area once belonged to the Austrian Empire. Hitler, as an Austrian, could not accept the occupation of northern Bukovina). Bukovina had never belonged to the Tsarist Empire. The Russians could not claim this territory as compensation on the grounds that the Romanians had reclaimed in 1918 Eastern Moldova, a territory that always had belonged to them and had been torn from the Moldavian Principality in 1812 at the suggestion of General Prince Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov.

As revealed in his discussions with Molotov in Berlin on November 13, 1940, the Germans understood from the secret protocol signed on August 23, 1939, that "Germany declares its political disinterest regarding Bessarabia," but not regarding Bukovina.

Molotov admitted that the secret protocol did not mention Bukovina.

However, the situation had caused the Soviet Union to be initially interested in northern Bukovina, and at the time of the discussion on November 13, 1940, Molotov also raised the issue of southern Bukovina. He complained that the USSR had not received a response regarding southern Bukovina up to that point.

Hitler clarified that he did not agree for any part of Bukovina to come under Russian control because, according to a previous oral agreement, it had been agreed that any area that had once been part of Austria would fall within Germany's sphere of influence.

Furthermore, Hitler pointed out during the discussion with Molotov that the term "sphere of influence" had not even been defined in the secret protocols¹⁰.

9 General Heinz Guderian's tanks advanced rapidly along the French roads. When they ran out of fuel, the German tanks would stop at French supply stations, refuel, pay, and continue on their way. In cases where the German tank crews ran out of money, they would issue payment vouchers to the French stations, which were to be reimbursed later by the authorities of the Third Reich.

10 „Molotov then mentioned the question of the strip of Lithuanian territory and emphasized that the Soviet Government had not received any clear answer yet from Germany on this question. However, it awaited a decision.

Given this situation, it is reasonable to assume that this was the moment when Hitler urgently ordered General Franz Halder (and the German Army General Staff) to finalize the Barbarossa plan for attacking the USSR. Subsequently, this plan was modified by Hitler and other generals from the High Command several times. On June 22, 1941, the German army attacked the Soviet army.

Although much of historiography claims that the Soviets were taken by surprise, there are other well-documented opinions showing that their army was well prepared and was actually waiting to attack Western Europe¹¹. Initially, the Axis forces were successful.

Enormous clashes followed on Soviet territory, where, with heavy losses on both sides, surprisingly, the German army was defeated: the Battle of Moscow (October 1941), Stalingrad (November 1942 – February 1943), Kursk (November 1943) –

Regarding Bucovina, he admitted that this involved an additional territory, one not mentioned in the Secret Protocol. Russia had at first confined her demands to Northern Bucovina. Under the present circumstances, however, Germany must understand the Russian interest in Southern Bucovina. But Russia had not received an answer to her question regarding this subject either. Instead, Germany had guaranteed the entire territory of Rumania and completely disregarded Russia's wishes with regard to Southern Bucovina.

The Führer replied that it would mean a considerable concession on the part of Germany, if even part of Bucovina were to be occupied by Russia. According to an oral agreement, the former Austrian territories were to fall within the German sphere of influence. Besides, the territories belonging to the Russian zone had been mentioned by name: Bessarabia, for example. There was, however, not a word regarding Bucovina in the agreements. Finally, the exact meaning of the expression "sphere of influence" was not further defined. At any rate, Germany had not violated the agreement in the least in this matter. To the objection of Molotov that the revisions with regard to the strip of Lithuanian territory and of Bucovina were not of very great importance in comparison with the revision which Germany had undertaken elsewhere by military force, the Führer replied that so-called "revision by force of arms" had not been the subject of the agreement at all. Molotov, however, persisted in the opinion previously stated: that the revisions desired by Russia were insignificant." Cf. *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939–1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*, Washington, Department of State, Publication 3023, 1948. Hitler was so upset because, by taking Bukovina, the Soviets could reach the center of Europe—the border with Hungary, Austria, and the western part of former Czechoslovakia. At the same time, he feared that the Soviets might also seize Romanian oil, which at that time represented the fourth largest reserve in the world, absolutely essential for Germany's modern war machine. At the end of the war, the victorious USSR imposed the continued recognition of its occupation of Bukovina (and Bessarabia). Through the Peace Treaty (1947, Paris), Bukovina was torn from Romania and integrated into the USSR. This border change was stipulated in Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Peace Treaty of February 10, 1947, concluded between Romania and the Allied and Associated Powers, published in the Official Gazette no. 199 of August 30, 1947 (Article 1, paragraph 2: The Soviet-Romanian frontier is thus established in accordance with the Soviet-Romanian Agreement of June 28, 1940, and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Agreement of June 29, 1945.)

11 M. Solonin writes in his book *Butoiul și cercurile, 22 iunie 1941 sau când a început marele război pentru apărarea patriei* (=The Barrel and the Circles. June 22, 1941, or When the Great Patriotic War Began), Iași, Polirom, 2012, p. 20 ff., that it is debatable who attacked first—the Germans or the Soviets—on the night of June 22, 1941, but that the Soviets already had both equipment and troops stationed at the borders. In any case, it is certain that as a result of this minor border clash, the great war between Germany and the USSR began—the most significant part of the world war.

the largest tank battle, the unsuccessful siege of Leningrad (September 8, 1941 – January 27, 1944).

By the end of 1944, the entire territory of the USSR had been liberated.

And the situation in the rest of Europe was similar. In 1943, American troops under General Patton and British troops under General Montgomery landed in Sicily and then advanced through the rest of Italy.

Duce Benito Mussolini was dismissed by the Grand Fascist Council through a vote of no confidence on July 25, 1943. Then King Vittorio Emanuele III declared that he had stripped him of all the titles he held as head of state and ordered the arrest of Benito Mussolini. Italy signed the armistice on September 3, 1943, with the new leader of Italy, Marshal Badoglio."

Mussolini was freed on September 12, 1943, by a German commando unit led by Otto Skorzeny. It was a spectacular operation. Mussolini established in the north the so-called Italian Social Republic. But it could not hold. It was pressured by the advance of Anglo-American troops, who were moving northward from Sicily into southern Italy, while in the north the Italian communist partisans were very strong. As a result, Mussolini, accompanied by Claretta Petacci, tried to flee to Germany with a German tank unit. He did not succeed. On April 27, 1945, he was arrested near the village of Dongo, on the shore of Lake Como. The next day, he was executed by a partisan nicknamed Colonel Valerio (Walter Audisio). The lifeless bodies of Mussolini, Claretta Petacci, and several of his former officials were taken to Milan, mocked in the streets, and then hanged upside down¹².

This marked the beginning of the end of the war.

Italy had surrendered and was entirely occupied by Anglo-American forces, who had also driven out Rommel's German army from North Africa.

Now the focus shifted to the second front – achieving Germany's surrender. From the west, troops that had landed in France (Normandy) on June 6, 1944, under the command of American General Dwight Eisenhower, were advancing toward Berlin. Paris was liberated on August 23, 1944.

From the east, Soviet troops were heading toward Berlin as well, having finally launched their counteroffensive in January 1945. This Soviet counterattack was supported by Romania's action on August 23, 1944, when it broke its alliance with

12 Cf. Maurizio Serra, *Misterul Mussolini. Omul. Provocările. Eșecul*, trad.din lb. franceză, Ed. Trei, București, 2024, p.374-394. The author cross-references previous accounts and testimonies, including the investigation conducted the following day, April 29, 1945, by his father, who was a journalist but was not permitted to publish the full article with photographs until later. His explanation for the summary execution is that it was carried out on the orders of the Italian Communist Party. At the same time, the Allies were also uneasy about the prospect of a trial for Mussolini.

Germany. On the same day, King Michael I of Romania (1940–1947) allied the country with the forces fighting against Nazi Germany.

The Kingdom of Romania's withdrawal from the war was a significant contribution to Germany's defeat. Romanian troops, through their efforts, played a crucial role in denying the Nazis access to Romanian oil, and in the defeat of the Nazi army in Transylvania and the Banat.

The battles near the city of Turnu Severin should not be overlooked, where cavalry general Ilie Antonescu distinguished himself by largely blocking the retreat of German troops trying to reach Hungary. In Romania, the Soviet army split into two. The southern part, under the command of Marshals Malinovsky and Tolbukhin, moved toward the liberation of Bulgaria (on September 9, 1944), and then the rest of southeastern Europe. In Yugoslavia and Greece, the effort was greatly supported by partisans commanded by Tito and by the landings of British troops in Greece and Albania.

The Soviet counteroffensive finally began to the west on January 12, 1945. It was launched following a telegram sent by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to Generalissimo I. V. Stalin, requesting him to fulfill the promise made at the Tehran Conference in November 1943. The Soviets allocated three large army groups for this purpose, commanded by Marshal Zhukov, Marshal Konev, and General Chuikov.

Seeing that there was no escape, on the night of 28 to 29 April 1945 Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun married. Almost 36 hours later she committed suicide by taking cyanide, and he shot himself with a revolver. Their bodies were then, according to Hitler's instructions, burned in the bunker courtyard.

Hitler had established the succession: Admiral Karl Dönitz, head of the Kriegsmarine, was appointed Reich President. Goebbels was appointed Reich Chancellor, and Martin Bormann – Party Chancellor, as well as executor of Hitler's will. Goebbels committed suicide together with his family.

Bormann sent a message to Admiral Dönitz, at his Headquarters in Pion, near Kiel, on the Baltic Sea coast. The message informed Dönitz that he had been designated as the Führer's successor, without telling him that he had died.

On 1 May 1945 the Grand Admiral formed the so-called Dönitz Government or Flensburg Government as Reich President. At the same time, Count Johann Ludwig Schwerin von Krosigk, who had been appointed Minister of Finance in Adolf Hitler's political will, was appointed Leitenden Minister and Reichsaußenminister (de facto Prime Minister and Foreign Minister). The government was established on 3 May in Flensburg near the former border with Denmark.

Before his death, Hitler had demanded that all German officers leave Berlin. He wanted to save them in this way.

On the night of 30 April to 1 May 1945, General Krebs tried to reach an agreement for an armistice with the Soviet General Konev and the representative of Marshal Zhukov. The latter called Stalin directly, who, awakened from sleep, upon hearing the news of Hitler's suicide, was dissatisfied that he had not been captured alive, ordered that nothing but unconditional surrender be accepted and ordered that he not be disturbed for trifles. The next day he was to have the May Day parade in Moscow. As a result, the Soviet commanders demanded that General Hans Krebs convey to those who remained that only unconditional surrender was accepted. They gave a deadline of 10 a.m. on May 1. Otherwise, Berlin would be turned into a pile of ruins. The answer did not come. The Soviets acted accordingly, systematically destroying the city¹³. Among the ruins, only the dome of the Reichstag shone, on which Soviet sergeants Meliton Kantaria and Mikhail Egorov had planted the Soviet flag in place of the Nazi flag. A Georgian, Kantaria, had been specially chosen as a tribute to Stalin's origins. It was further evidence of the Soviet victory over Berlin.

On May 4, 1945, Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg, commander of the German fleet, signed a partial surrender, with the authorization of Admiral Dönitz, in Lübeck in front of the British (General Montgomery).

On May 7, 1945, in the city of Reims, Marshal Jodl signed the surrender on behalf of the Dönitz government, in front of General Eisenhower, who was the Supreme Commander of the Western Allies (on behalf of the Western Allies).

To calm the Soviet protests, who angrily demanded that the general surrender be signed once more in their presence, General Eisenhower urgently sent Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, head of the OKW, Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg, commander of the military fleet, and Colonel General Hans-Jürgen Stumpf for the Luftwaffe by plane to Berlin on May 8, to sign the surrender in the Soviet-occupied area of Berlin Karlshorst (today a museum), in front of Marshal Zhukov on behalf of the USSR.

Since Eisenhower was Zhukov's superior in terms of military command, he did not come to Berlin himself, but instead commissioned one of his deputy, Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, to sign the acceptance of the German surrender once more. The French, on the other hand, also wanted to be mentioned in the German surrender act, but the Soviets opposed it. At that time, the French could only sign as witnesses, represented by General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny (who would command the French army that lost Indochina). The American General Carl Spaatz was also a witness on the act.

13 Cf. A. Beevor, *Berlin – Căderea 1945*, RAO, București, 2005, p. 647 ff.

The text of the German surrender act was drawn up in Russian, English and German, with the express mention that only the texts in Russian and English were considered valid.

Because of the discussions between the signatory allies, followed by the consecutive translations of the modified text versions, the final drafting was extended until May 9, 1 a.m. Central European time.

For this reason, it was decided that the Western Allies would celebrate the victory over Germany on May 8, and I. V. Stalin decided that, on the contrary, this extremely important event would be celebrated in the USSR on May 9.

It is true that on May 9, another surrender was signed in Czechoslovakia before Soviet Marshal Konev - of what were considered to be the last forces of the Germans and their European allies.

On June 23, 1945, a grand military parade was held in Moscow, celebrating the final defeat of the Nazi forces – Germany and its European allies.

At the same time, it was decided that between July 17 and August 2, 1945, the third conference of the victorious Allied leaders would be held in Potsdam near Berlin.

This was the third (and last) major conference of the “Big Three” in connection with the World War after Tehran (November 28-December 1, 1943) and Yalta (February 4-11, 1945). At each one, fundamental decisions for the course of the war were made.

This time, however, the Big Three would be different. The only one among them who remained the same and prevailed through experience and strength at Potsdam was Stalin.

Also there, in Potsdam, I. V. Stalin promised the new US President Harry Truman (because Franklin Delano Roosevelt had died unexpectedly on April 12, 1945) and the new British Prime Minister Clement Atlee (because Winston Churchill had lost the elections just during the conference and the British cabinet had changed), that within three months of Germany's unconditional surrender, the USSR would enter the fight against Japan. With it, it had concluded a non-aggression pact in 1941. Stalin had just refused the request of the Japanese Prince Konoe to mediate the conclusion of an armistice or an honorable peace with the USA and Great Britain. Worse for the Japanese, in Potsdam the Allies issued an ultimatum-communicate to which the Japanese responded in a way that the West considered defiant.

Stalin revoked the old non-aggression treaties with the Japanese Empire, which were automatically renewed if not denounced by either party.

Then, exactly three months after Germany's surrender, he sent four Soviet armies to the Far East. However, this movement was supported by funds and weapons that he

had requested and received from the USA specifically for the Soviet offensive against Japan.

Marshal Vasily Alexandrovich Vasilevsky was appointed commander of the Soviet armies.

The Soviet troops were to begin the attack exactly on August 9, because Stalin considered that it would be three months since Germany's surrender.

But not long before, in the USA, President Harry Truman decided to use the atomic weapon against the Japanese Empire. Generals Marshall and Eisenhower later declared that they had reservations about the new weapon, the effects of which they did not know. General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of the Pacific forces, therefore the master of the Pacific, was indifferent to the use of atomic weapons, which he considered just another weapon, but he accepted because he wanted to lose as few soldiers as possible in the battles to conquer the Japanese islands. In Okinawa alone he had suffered losses of 12,000 soldiers, and in Iwo Jima another 15,000 soldiers. He considered that these new weapons would help the Americans lose fewer people. However, it was solely the decision of the political leadership.

As a result, on August 6, 1945, American aviation dropped the second of the three atomic bombs they had built on the city of Hiroshima. The effect was horrific: over 700,000 dead, total destruction, and extraordinary radiation from the atomic cloud. On August 9, 1945, the U.S. Air Force dropped the last of the atomic bombs in its possession on the city of Nagasaki. The effects were the same — absolutely devastating. Very few people foresaw the lasting consequences for the development of warfare weaponry, and even fewer grasped the impact on the environment, the affected people, and so on.

At the same time, also on August 9, 1945, Soviet armies — totaling 1.5 million troops and equipped with highly advanced combat technology, much of it supplied by the United States — invaded Manchuria and quickly defeated the Japanese army known as the "Kwantung Army" within 7 to 10 days. This force, under the command of General Otsuzo Yamada, was composed of approximately 700,000 troops in Manchuria and another 280,000 stationed in Korea, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands¹⁴.

The reasons for this swift defeat were multiple. Although fanatical, the Japanese army was made up largely of untrained recruits and was poorly equipped compared to the American weaponry and technology used by the Soviets. As a result, the Japanese could respond only with kamikaze-style attacks. At the same time, errors were also made at the level of military planning leadership. Specifically, Japanese defenses entirely neglected the possibility that the Soviets might launch an attack by crossing

14 Tsyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy, Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2005, p. 84 ff.

a mountain range located in the center of the contact zone. These mountains remained undefended and proved crucial to the Soviet success¹⁵.

The Soviets, however, had broader objectives. They entered Korea and occupied Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. But they eventually withdrew from Korea, as the premature landing was not supported by ground troops, and the Americans did not permit the occupation of the entire Korean Peninsula.

On August 14, 1945, faced with the unfolding disaster, Mikado Hirohito (Emperor of Japan from 1927 to 1989) convened the Council of Elders. It was composed of six high-ranking officials, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. The question of whether to continue the war or not was debated. Three members of the council supported continuing the war, while the other three opposed it. Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki, an admiral who had initially remained reserved, ultimately accepted the Emperor's will to end the war and resigned.

The Mikado was the decisive force behind Japan's decision to end the war — in fact, to surrender. The Americans, in particular, accepted nothing short of Japan's unconditional surrender.

The next day, on August 15, 1945, the Emperor delivered a radio address, recorded the night before, in which he announced Japan's withdrawal from the war, although he carefully avoided using the word "surrender." The speech became historic for the phrase: "*enduring the unendurable and suffering what is unsufferable*."¹⁶

15 Cf. S. Hayashi, *Study of Strategic and Tactical peculiarities of Far Eastern Russia and Soviet Far East Forces*, in *Japanese Special Studies on Manchuria (Report)*. Vol. XIII. Tokyo: Military History Section, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, US Army, 1955, p. 40-41 și urm.

16 The speech of the Mikado of Japan, recorded and broadcast on the radio, later translated into English and published in the New York Times, was as follows:

„After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, We have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure.

We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their Joint Declaration.

To strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations as well as the security and well-being of Our subjects is the solemn obligation which has been handed down by Our Imperial Ancestors and which lies close to Our heart.

Indeed, We declared war on America and Britain out of Our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement.

But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone—the gallant fighting of the military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State, and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people—the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest.

Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, not only would it

It was not widely understood at the time, as he spoke in the court's highly formal and archaic language. Nonetheless, a follow-up explanation was broadcast by the radio station.

A day earlier, several conservative officers had forcibly entered the imperial palace, killed guards and officers, and hastily began searching for the emperor, whom they intended to kill. Their goal was to seize the recording of the speech announcing Japan's withdrawal from the war, believing that by doing so, they could prevent capitulation. They failed.

In the Japanese Empire, news was beginning to spread about the horrors of the atomic bombings, the occupation of the Kuril Islands, Sakhalin, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and especially the loss of Manchuria and the destruction of the Kwantung Army. In this context, the emperor's decision to surrender — previously unimaginable — was accepted by public opinion.

On August 16, Japan's message of surrender was transmitted via the Swiss embassy in the USA. The only condition, vaguely stated, was that the emperor's person and the imperial dynasty remain unaffected.

On August 18, Generalissimo Stalin ordered the occupation of the Kuril Islands, southern Sakhalin, northern Korea — where Soviet troops were advancing with difficulty — and all of Manchuria. At the same time, Stalin ordered amphibious landings in the ports of Dalian and Port Arthur (which had been lost by Imperial Russia in 1905).

U.S. President Harry Truman received and immediately accepted Japan's surrender. He communicated his acceptance to both Moscow and London. He also agreed to the condition of preserving the imperial dynasty. Regardless, Japan would go through a process similar to the Nuremberg Trials.

American General Douglas MacArthur was appointed the high-ranking official to receive the act of surrender on behalf of all Allied forces in the Pacific War. It was a natural choice, as he was their supreme commander.

result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.

Such being the case, how are We to save the millions of Our subjects, or to atone Ourselves before the hallowed spirits of Our Imperial Ancestors? This is the reason why We have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Powers...

The hardships and sufferings to which Our nation is to be subjected hereafter will be certainly great. We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of all of you, Our subjects. However, it is according to the dictates of time and fate that We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is unsufferable.” (cf. „The New York Times”, August 15, 1945. p. 3).

On September 2, 1945, the battleship Missouri arrived in Tokyo Bay. That same day, Japanese Imperial Government representatives — Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu and General Yoshijirō Umezu, Chief of the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff — were sent as envoys. They were the officially authorized signatories of Japan's surrender, and they were the first to sign.

Then, according to protocol, the following individuals signed to acknowledge Japan's surrender: General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Pacific Ocean. He was the first of the Allies to sign, representing all the Allied powers. After him, one by one, a representative from each of the Allied nations that had sent delegates signed, in the following order: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz – for the United States; General Hsu Yung-Chang – for the Republic of China, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser – for the United Kingdom, Lieutenant General Kuzma Derevyanko (at that time Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army in the East Asian theater) – for the Soviet Union, General Thomas Blamey – for Australia, General Philippe Leclerc – for France, Air Vice-Marshal Leonard Isitt – for New Zealand, Colonel Lawrence Moore Cosgrave – for Canada. To humiliate the Japanese, General Douglas MacArthur signed each letter of his name with a different pen.

With this surrender, the world war apparently ended definitively — at least de jure. On September 3, 1945, a grand celebration of victory over the Japanese Empire was held in Washington, D.C., United States. On September 7, the act of Japan's surrender was extended to include all of Japan's Asian possessions, as the act signed on September 2 referred only to the Japanese home islands.

Thus, on September 7, General Umezu was forced to surrender again, this time for all of Japan's territories in Asia. The ceremony was held symbolically in Nanking, then the capital of the Republic of China, governed by Chiang Kai-shek.

With this third act in the Far East, the hot phase of the global conflict officially came to an end. What remained was the settling of the victorious powers' demands in the peace negotiations, which would take place in Paris in 1947.

The main outcome was the creation of the United Nations, greatly influenced by the energy and vision of Nelson Rockefeller, who ensured that the organization would be declared the guardian of world peace.

However, it could be said that the most important consequence of this war was the realization of a prediction made by Alexis de Tocqueville as early as 1838, in his book *Democracy in America*¹⁷. In it, he clearly stated that the future would bring a bipolar world, in which power would be divided between the Russian Empire — later the USSR — and the United States.

17 Cf. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. Vintage Books, 1954, passim.