

## II. ORGANIZATION

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### A. COMMAND STRUCTURE

#### 1. Administration

*High Command.* Any explanation of the organization and administration of the Imperial Japanese Navy has to begin with the Japanese sovereign. Theoretically, the emperor—whose person and authority, according to the Japanese constitution, was “sacred and inviolable”—reigned supreme over all government agencies and institutions, including both armed services, but in fact, his practical involvement and responsibility in the operation of government were limited by tradition and law.

Functioning beneath the emperor were the armed services, the civilian government headed by the prime minister, and certain prestigious but generally passive advisory bodies. The prime minister’s cabinet included the ministers of the two armed services who were selected by and nominally responsible to the prime minister. In reality, the army and navy ministers looked to the chiefs of staff of their respective services for direction because they were usually officers on active service. They could, and sometimes did, bring down a civilian cabinet by refusing to serve in it. In any event, real power in both armed services resided not in the ministers, who were generally responsible for administration, but in their general staffs.

The Navy General Staff was composed of three divisions—operations, intelligence, and readiness—and was charged with the preparation of war plans, collection of intelligence, setting the requirements for the navy’s force structure, drafting warship designs, and direction of operations at sea. The chief of the Navy General Staff, acting in the name of the emperor, held “the right of supreme command,” which meant that he was responsible only to the emperor and not to the civilian government. In theory, all plans devised by the navy general staff required imperial sanction; in practice, the emperor approved them automatically. This meant that, with the exception of the submission of the navy’s annual budget to the Diet, the navy was accountable to no one else.

This system had several baleful consequences. The first was the fact that, because the will of the emperor was “sacred and inviolable,” all who acted in his name could not be obstructed in the conduct of their duties by anyone outside the navy—a recipe for chaos in the conduct of Japan’s foreign policy. The second consequence was equally pernicious. Because of the untrammelled authority of the armed services, there was no effective civilian voice to raise an objection or to point out the folly or danger of a particular military initiative. This proved to be a crippling defect in the conduct of Japanese military operations in the Pacific War, beginning with the decision to go to war.