INTRODUCTION

Born in Japan and educated at Amherst and Harvard, Toshikazu Kase was a diplomat working in the Japanese Foreign Office during the 1930s. By 1940, Kase was a personal advisor to Emperor Hirohito. In August of 1941, Admiral Isoraku Yamamoto disclosed to his general staff his plan for attacking Pearl Harbor which Yamamoto had devised in January of that year. Although Yamamoto's staff was unanimously opposed to the plan, Yamamoto gave them no choice, and on 11 October, the plan was approved by the Japanese government. Since Kase was privy to the plans of the Imperial Palace, he understood the sharp differences of opinion that surrounded this plan. He also felt that it was wrong. In a last attempt to persuade Hirohito that the attack in the long run would hurt his own country more than the United States, Kase wrote the following letter to the Emperor in late November of 1941.

November 27, 1941

To His Royal Highness, Emperor of The Kingdom of Japan:

In early October of this year, our government made the decision to carry out an attack against the United States' Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. Although I believe that the plan may succeed in achieving its immediate goals, I also believe that the decision to carry it out will, in the long run, hurt our country. I believe this because some of the the basic truths that Admiral Yamamoto [illegible] our enemy our incorrect. Our Admiral is not a stupid man. He has considered his options wisely. However, he is human, and his considerations are flawed with biases that will prove deadly to us all. I beg you to read the remainder of this letter so that I may show why our decision to implement this plan is tragically flawed.

There are two decisional biases that seem to be deluding Isoraku as to the long term effects of his surprize attack. I will explain each bias with an example, and then show how each are playing a role in the decision to attack.

The first bias actually has two parts. I will refer to them as anchoring and adjustment. Anchoring refers to how our thought processes are affected by the introduction of an artificial starting point for a decision. Once given this starting point, or anchor, however arbitrary it may be, we tend to reach a final decision by adjusting this anchor to a more reasonable result. The problem is that irrelevant anchors have a detrimental affect on our decisions even when we are fully aware of their irrelevance.

As a trivial example of anchoring and adjustment, suppose that you have just finished the last meal of the day, and your youngest of six children asks for six more rolls of sushi. You know full well that the child should not receive any more food, but given such a large anchor of six, you may be prejudiced into thinking that zero is too harsh an answer to give. As a result of this, you adjust this anchor to one, and your youngest ends up with more food.

Your child deserved no more food. Your child introduced an anchor of a very high number, which you knew perfectly well was very high. Yet, you fell into the trap of the anchoring and adjustment bias because you compared in your mind the outcome that you knew to be just with an outcome that you knew to be absurd and came up with an answer that is 5/6 just and "only" 1/6 absurd. In your mind you consider yourself "ahead." Yet, objectively speaking, you should have ignored this young upstart's suggestion altogether and [redacted] is the bias of anchoring and adjustment.

The second decisional bias is that [redacted] humans tend to base decisions on information that is the most vivid, rather than necessarily the most relevant. For example, suppose an acquaintance has visited you frequently at the Imperial Palace during the last week to discuss certain matters of foreign policy. Suppose also that the post of ambassador to a foreign county has recently opened up and that you must choose someone to fill the post. Lastly, suppose that most people in the court know of a second person who has spent most of his childhood in that foreign country and therefore knows its culture and language fluently. If asked to make a decision on the spur of the moment to fill this post, you might choose your most recent and frequent acquaintance because he might seem satisfactory for the job and was the first person that came to mind. Clearly, however, the later person is better qualified, yet was not chosen because his qualifications were not in your recent memory. You would have become a victim of the availability bias.

I strongly believe that these two biases are at work in our own minds as well as that of Isoraku Yamamoto, and that if we become fully aware of these biases, we cannot help but see that his deadly plan is foolhardy.

Admiral Yamamoto wants to dictate peace to the White House on his terms. The Admiral thinks that with the U.S. Navy crippled, he can use Hawaii as a stepping stone to the rest of the Pacific and even California. This is absurd. The continental United States has never been attacked across either of its two vast oceans. The very thought that our tiny island could be a prolonged threat to the industrialized might of the States is grossly unrealistic.

Yamamoto's brash opinions have become your anchor. By listening to the plan at all, you are falling victim the to anchoring and adjustment bias. You adjust in your own mind to be satisfied with a few more Pacific islands. You should not make your decision by moving his anchor, you should throw it overboard without the chain attached before we all drown under its pull.

The availability bias is also at work in the mind of Isoraku. The events that are most likely to come to the forefront of his mind making him overly optimistic and [illegible] He was surprising successful at the London Naval Conference in 1935 in winning allowances for a larger Japanese navy. The United States has taken a long time in going to war in Europe. He has the past hesitancy of a democracy on his mind while ignoring the possible future resolve of that same democracy. We trounced the Russian fleet earlier this century and signed a Non-Aggression Pact with Russia in April. As of September of last year we signed the Tripartite Act, making us allies with the successful Axis powers. We took Peking in 1937 and had the Vishy French sign an agreement of collaboration regarding our goals of a Pacific Empire. Shortly thereafter we took Tonkin without resistance.

By considering only the above information, anyone might reasonably conclude that we are invincible and the West is helplessly crumbling. As a result, Yamamoto is overconfident. Once the U.S. government understands what a threat we can be, they will mobilize to thwart us. We cannot take Hawaii in one step. The U.S. will continue to use it and its other Pacific possessions as bases for launching counter-offenses. Nor will Russia honor its non-aggression pact when they feel threatened by our expansions.

I beg your careful reconsideration of the facts in light of these decisional biases. You must insulate your decision from your admiral's ambitions. We must make this decision based upon the probable future, not just the salient past. The real enemy is closer than we think.

Your humble servant,

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EPILOGUE

Toshikazu Kase was later chosen to write the official report to the Emperor of the surrender ceremony that took place in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945 aboard the U.S. battleship *Missouri*. Manchester observes:

> Kase wrote that while on the American battleship he had noticed many miniature Rising Suns, "our flag," painted on a steal bulkhead, indicating the number of Japanese ships, submarines, and planes sunk by the *Missouri*. He had tried to count them, but "a lump rose in my throat and tears quickly gathered in my eyes, flooding them. I could hardly bear the sight. Heroes of unwritten stories, these were young boys who defied death gaily and gallantly....They were like cherry blossoms, emblems of our national character, swiftly blooming into riotous beauty and falling just as quickly."
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> According to members of the imperial household, the emperor lingered over this passage a long time; then he sighed deeply, nodded, and murmured, "*Ah so, ah so deska.*"

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