

# SENGOKU JAPAN

## DELEGATE BACKGROUND GUIDE



# *Staff*

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# ***A Letter From Your Director...***

## **Hello, and welcome to the Sengoku Jidai.**

My name is Mercer, and I will be the director of this conference. I'm a second year student studying Politics and Philosophy, with a minor in East Asian Studies, focusing on Japanese history. In my mind at least, this conference has been in the works since high school. The Warring States period of Japan is one my absolute favourite eras in history—a time unique in its chaos, unparalleled among civil wars, with hundreds of belligerent parties vying for control. As a teenager, I read James Clavell's *Shōgun* (along with what I would imagine is half of all other Japanese history nerds in the western world), and got completely hooked on the intrigue and insanity that took place during this epic struggle, and I've wanted to reproduce it since then. Model UN is a great outlet for historical reenactments, and is another great passion of mine, so this conference was an obvious choice for me.

Crisis councils thrive on intrigue, but the Sengoku Jidai is in another league. What all of the famous battles belie is a set of political maneuverings and interconnections so utterly confusing that my analysts and I struggled to choose a basic narrative for this committee. However, what shines through is a cast of characters so vibrant that they practically call out to be played in a debate setting. I am not a proponent of what many call "great man" history, a method where history is analyzed as something which is shaped by a few exemplary people scattered through time. History is also influenced by common people, whose whims often overwhelm those of their masters. If anything, Sengoku is an example of that: while there were many "great men," they invariably could not control the chaos in which they were embroiled. We have tried to represent in this committee a balanced view of the Sengoku Jidai—while everyone at the table is a famous character, many of the crises you will be dealing with will involve the role of commoners, women, and foreigners in Japanese life.

My goal for this conference is to force you to make hard choices, and to accept great sacrifice as the price of victory. Only one can become Shōgun, but no one rules alone. You must therefore make alliances—and watch your back. Only one can become Shōgun, but your enemies will not let you take control freely, so you must be willing to lose something. Can you sacrifice your honour, your people, your friends? Only one can become Shōgun, but to harness that power is a feat that only a truly great leader can accomplish—will you squander your good fortune? At such a great cost, you must always question whether you can cleanse yourself of the deeds you will have to commit to have it—if the seat of absolute power is worth its price in blood.

Who are we kidding, of course it is.

See you on the battlefield,  
***Mercer Pommer***





Photo: Wikimedia

## ***Historical Context***

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Ōnin war is over, leaving Japan in tatters, and there is no clear victor. The capital is nearly destroyed, the military power of every province is depleted, and the fate of the Shōgunate is uncertain. What is clear is that the Ashikaga clan is no longer powerful enough to hold the country alone. The Hosokawa clan has installed itself as puppet master, controlling the real power in what's left of Kyōtō. Every minor lord with designs on power sees the opportunity, whether to defend the Shōgunate and secure a spot at court, or to conquer it and take its power themselves. But how did we get here? After more than a century of prosperity and peace under the Ashikaga Shōgunate (a period referred to as the Muromachi, so named because of one of the early Shōgun's residence on Muro-machi street in Kyōtō), how did the state of affairs devolve into war?

Let's dive in.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF JAPAN

Japan as a formalized state began during the Nara period in the 8th century CE, when the Emperor Genmei established a formal capital, styled after the great Chinese cities of the age like Chang'an.<sup>1</sup> The imperial family, which was believed to be descended from the sun Kami (a god, goddess, or spirit in the Japanese Shinto religion) Amaterasu, held immense power in this era. Their influence was comparable to that of their Chinese counterparts, but it quickly began to wane. In the 10th century, a new class of warriors, the samurai, gained significant influence. They immersed themselves in court, intermarried with the imperial family, and even influenced the Emperor. One of these families, the Taira, had very close ties to the Emperor, but overstepped their bounds when they put a young scion, Antoku, on the throne (he was 2 at the time).<sup>2</sup> In response to this coup, the other clans, led by the powerful Minamoto, rose up in what became known as the Genpei war. This was the first great Japanese civil war—the first war of the samurai.

Ultimately, the war was lost by the Taira at the decisive naval battle of Dan-no-Ura, where the young emperor Antoku was killed, and two pieces of the holy imperial regalia—the sword and the jewel—were lost at sea.<sup>3</sup> After their victory, the Minamoto took control of the capital, and their leader, Minamoto no Yoritomo, was granted the title of Shōgun. Though power technically still resided with the emperor, all of it was delegated to the Shōgun, the supreme military leader of the entire country.<sup>4</sup> Since the Emperor no longer had any power, they could be forced to make whoever controlled the gates of the Imperial palace Shōgun through force of arms. Until the Meiji Restoration of 1868, this was the system—the Shōgunate ruled supreme.

## THE ŌNIN WAR

Two hundred and fifty years later, Japan had seen relative peace under the Kamakura Shōgunate (founded by the Minamoto after their defeat of the Taira, and controlled by Hōjō regents for most of that time) and their successors, the Ashikaga, who descended from the Minamoto. However, the Ashikaga were weak, and relied on loyalty from other clans, rather than real wealth or land holdings. Two of these, the Hosokawa and the Yamana, had a bitter rivalry—the Yamana were jealous of the wealth and influence enjoyed by the Hosokawa, but weren't strong enough to oppose them mili-

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1 Lucien Ellington, *Asia in Focus: Japan* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 28.

2 Brett L. Walker, *A Concise History of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 54.

3 Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai, A Military History* (MacMillan, 1977), 77-81.

4 Walker, *Concise History*, 56.

tarily.<sup>5</sup> An opportunity came for lord Yamana during a succession dispute among the Ashikaga: the Shōgun, Yoshimasa, had no heir, so he convinced his brother Yoshimi to leave the ascetic life of a monk to rule after him. However, at this time, a son, Yoshihisa, was born to the Shōgun and lord Yamana saw his opportunity. While the Hosokawa supported the bid of Yoshimi, as they had worked together in the past and maintained close ties, the Yamana supported the infant.<sup>6</sup> Fighting swiftly broke out in Kyōtō, and expanded to the countryside. More and more clans took sides, and tried to expand their influence, but after ten years of fighting, there was no clear winner, Kyōtō laid in ruins, and many of the clans were left militarily exhausted. This war was called the Ōnin war, named for the reign of the emperor at the time.

## ANOTHER BLOODY SUCCESSION WAR

Once the dust finally settled in 1473, Ashikaga Yoshihisa had triumphed over his rival Ashikaga Yoshimi for succession of their father's Shōgunate but Japan remained divided. The wounds of the Ōnin War were never fully healed. In the years to follow, the trenches and moats around Kyōtō were filled in, and the palaces restored, but the fighting and damage had already begun to spread across the country<sup>7</sup>. It fuelled further chaos in the form of the ikki uprisings; in neighbouring provinces, groups of devout Buddhist monks, villagers, and magistrates rose up against their daimyo.<sup>8</sup> However, this peace wouldn't last for long, as Yoshihisa died childless in 1489, survived only by his adopted heir, Ashikaga Yoshitane, the son of Yoshimi. For many daimyo, notably Hosokawa Masamoto, this was unacceptable, so he instead supported the claim of Ashikaga Yoshizumi, nephew and adopted son of Yoshimasa (Yoshihisa's grandfather).<sup>9</sup> In 1490, Yoshitane's claim was confirmed, and he made Masamoto's rival, Hatakeyama Manasaga, kanrei (Shōgun's deputy),<sup>10</sup> an office for which they had previously competed. With several personal grievances between himself and Masanaga, and having lost the office of kanrei to him, for Masamoto it was a matter of personal honor.<sup>11</sup> In 1493, Masamoto went to war against the Shōgun, took Yoshitane prisoner, and forced Masanaga to commit suicide. With his rivals out of the way, the Hosokawa clan now claimed enormous influence

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5 Ibid., 69.

6 Ibid.

7 Mary Berry, *Culture of Civil War in Kyōtō* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 35.

8 Nam-lin Hur, “‘War and Faith: Ikkō Ikki in Late Muromachi Japan’ by Carol Tsang,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 35, no. 1 (2009).

9 Berry, *Civil War in Kyōtō*, 48.

10 Kenneth A. Grossberg, “Bakufu Bugyōnin: The Size of the Lower Bureaucracy in Muromachi Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 4 (1976): 652.

11 Berry, *Civil War in Kyōtō*, 48-49.

over the Shōgunate—a position which was now held by 14 year old Yoshizumi.

## **RYO-HOSOKAWA WAR**

Hosokawa Masamoto did not have any children, so he adopted a young nobleman of the house of Kujō who took the name Hosokawa Sumiyuki—a choice which caused outcry amongst Masamoto's retainers. In response, he backtracked and adopted a second son, Hosokawa Sumimoto, from another branch of the Hosokawa (coincidentally, both were born in 1489).<sup>12</sup> This led to a drawn out succession crisis known as the Ryo-Hosokawa War. The support for Sumimoto first became bloody in 1504, when one of his retainers rose up to usurp Masamoto. By 1506, they had achieved success, and driven Masamoto out of the capital. In 1507, Sumiyuki killed him (in the bath) and drove Sumimoto out, forcing the Shōgun to recognize him as rightful head of the Hosokawa.<sup>13</sup> The following month, Sumimoto struck back, first sending troops after Sumiyuki's holdings and into Kyōtō itself, forcing Sumiyuki to commit suicide.

Though the Hosokawa were prosperous and powerful, jealousy abounded, and another scion of the house, Hosokawa Takakuni, took control of the capital. He became kanrei and exiled Shōgun Yoshizumi, restoring the formerly exiled Yoshitane to the Shōgunate. As Takakuni's power grew, so did Yoshitane's shrink. Consequently, in 1521 he fled Kyōtō and was replaced by Yoshiharu, son of Yoshizumi.<sup>14</sup> In 1527, Takakuni was driven from Kyōtō by Hosokawa Harumoto, son of Sumimoto, and committed suicide after his army was defeated in battle.

Takakuni, however, would have his revenge through his foster son, Ujitsuna, who raised an army in 1543. In 1546, Ashikaga Yoshiharu was forced to resign, and his eldest son, Ashikaga Yoshiteru, ascended to the Shōgunate in exile. Ujitsuna fought a long campaign against Harumoto, which ended when Harumoto's trusted retainer, Miyoshi Nagayoshi, betrayed him. In 1549, Nagayoshi usurped control of Kyōtō, and, after securing his rule in 1553, appointed Ujitsuna as kanrei. Though Ujitsuna ruled in name, in practice he was a complete puppet of the powerful Nagayoshi.<sup>15</sup>

## **A NOTE ON TECHNOLOGY**

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12 Ibid., 50.

13 Ibid., 51.

14 Grossberg, “Bakufu Bugyōnin,” 653.

15 Berry, *Civil War in Kyōtō*, 45-48.



The Sengoku Jidai was a time of change for Japan in terms of how wars were fought. Just as the Genpei war was unique in that it was the first war of the Samurai, Sengoku broke convention by utilizing unusual tactics, many of which would have been called dishonourable in previous conflicts, and with the advent of new technologies. Previously, guns had not been introduced to Japan, but as the European traders came, some daimyo gained access to the matchlock, which required little training and allowed for total devastation on the battlefield when used correctly. Gunpowder provided an opportunity for subterfuge, as sieges could now be broken with the strategic use of firebombs (in a civilization built out of wood and paper, this was the ultimate dishonourable tactic). Naval battles benefited from the use of gunpowder-based weapons as well, with bombs and cannons allowing for quick victories. While one of the main weapons used in the Genpei war was the Naginata, a vicious polearm, it required many years of intense training to use properly, training which samurai would have had access to, but foot soldiers did not. In the Sengoku Jidai, one of the most common weapons was the Yari, a straight spear which was much easier to train recruits in. Thus, large armies of light foot soldiers could be raised to fight effectively. However, this increased the bloodiness of the Sengoku as more untrained soldiers were on the battlefield than trained ones.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

It is now 1554, and the whole archipelago is destabilized. Miyoshi Nagayoshi holds the real power in Kyōtō, the rightful Shōgun Yoshiteru is in exile, the Hosokawa are disgraced, and every clan wants the coveted position they once held. In the West, control of the island of Kyūshū is shared between the lords of the Shimazu in the south, and the Ōtomo in the north. The Shimazu maintain vital trade routes with the Ryukyuan islands, China, and the West while the Ōtomo sit on the critical strait of Shimonoseki. To their East, in southwestern Honshū, Lord Mori expands his navy and influence along the coast. In the Northwest of Honshū, tension between the Uesugi and the Takeda is beginning to turn into a fierce rivalry. To their North, the proud Date clan seeks to expand their territory to the prosperous lands of the south. In the centre of Honshū, the once great Hōjō clan, the influential Imagawa, and the Takeda have formed an uneasy pact, in an attempt to bring order to a chaotic land. Meanwhile, a minor house, the Ōda, and their only ally, the Matsudaira (later Tokugawa), have attempted to carve out some land from the powerful clans that surround them. Everywhere, ninjas are available for hire to the richest and most influential clans, pirates raid the coasts, and Buddhist radicals, the Ikkō Ikki, rise in every province. In such a state of chaos, every clan will try to gain the



advantage over their rivals—the Shimazu and the Ōtomo; the Takeda and the Uesugi; the Date, Mori, Hōjō, Imagawa, Ikkō Ikki, and the unlikeliest of houses, the Ōda. It is unlikely that they will all survive the Sengoku Jidai, the age of war.

## ***Characters***

**織田信長** Ōda Nobunaga, “The Demon General”: A minor daimyō with great ambition, Nobunaga rose through the ranks of his family with cunning and ruthlessness, and has his sights set on the expansion of the Ōda clan. A man of wrath and occasional acts of cruelty, Ōda was not a man to take lightly in diplomacy or war. Though many accused him of using dishonourable tactics that did not befit a samurai, their words were often cut short—along with their lives.

**豊臣秀吉** Toyotomi Hideyoshi, “The Great Unifier”: Once a simple sandal bearer for Lord Ōda and a boy of the peasant class, he showed potential in battle, and a keen eye for logistics, tactics, and strategy. With the increasing trust of his lords, Hideyoshi rose among the ranks of his army to hold a privileged position at the table, where his unique mind provided an edge that many other clans lacked.

**徳川家康** Tokugawa Ieyasu, “The Light of the East”: The daimyō of a minor house, and a trusted retainer of Lord Ōda, he used his limited resources to help bolster his liege. Known for being extremely cunning and supremely patient, Ieyasu had a knack for creating alliances with the right people at the right time (and remaining intensely loyal to his oldest friends), but betraying them when they were weakened. Because of this, he was not well liked—something which didn't bother a man who had garnered such fear and respect.

**北条氏康** Hōjō Ujiyasu, “The Lion of Sagami”: The daimyō of the Hōjō house after his father's death, he was revered as a fearsome warrior and a cunning man. Famed for his battle tactics and strategies which rivalled those of Nobunaga, Ujiyasu sought to expand his family's once-great influence and territory and restore respect for the name of Hōjō.

**今川義元** Imagawa Yoshimoto, "The Lonely Buffoon": The eleventh head of the Imagawa and one of the three feared daimyō of the central Tōkaidō region. His power came from his family alliances, connections, and pacts with the Hōjō and Takeda houses, but he himself was known as sluggish and cowardly.

**細川晴元** Hosokawa Harumoto, "Kanrei": Recently defeated, ousted from his position as caretaker of the shogunate, and reeling from a succession war in his family, Harumoto seeks vengeance against those who betrayed him, and the restoration of the power that his house once held. He controls the central province of Ōmi, and from there seeks allies, resources, and troops to help him in his plan. He may lack what first made his house great, but it is a cornered animal that is the most dangerous.

**伊達政宗** Date Masamune, "The One-Eyed Dragon": A fierce warrior of the North, a master at the acquisition of territory through cleverness and intelligence. Focusing primarily on diplomacy, sabotage, and bribery, he was known to be brutal and aggressive. The Date clan were renowned for their use of massive nodachi field swords, and their penchant for using them to relocate their enemies' heads to the ground.

**武田信玄** Takeda Shingen, "The Tiger of Kai": A master of cavalry with unparalleled military skill and a large domain in eastern Honshū, Shingen usurped his clan from his father and led it to greater heights than his predecessors could have imagined. His rivalry with his neighbour, Uesugi Kenshin, is the stuff of legend. Shingen's men believed that he was unable to lose a battle. He has yet to give them any reason to doubt their faith.

**上杉謙信** Uesugi Kenshin, "The Dragon of Echigo": One of the most powerful daimyō of northeastern Honshū, and a bitter rival of his neighbour, Takeda Shingen. A devout buddhist, a skilled administrator, and a man of great honour, Kenshin had such prowess in battle that his men called him "The God of War," believing him to be the avatar of Bishamonten (a buddhist war deity).

**毛利元就** Mōri Motonari "The Peerless Strategist": The master of an incomparable navy and a prominent daimyō in the west Chūgoku region. Considered a fearless daredevil, he often won heavy outnumbered battles with very few casualties, and was known for his balance in diplomacy and conquest.

**大友宗麟** Ōtomo Sōrin "Don Francisco": A western daimyō who controlled the vital strategic strait, Shimonoseki, between the islands of Kyūshū and Honshū. He had prosperous trade connections with both the Chinese and European powers, the ear of the powerful Jesuit order, and access to the powerful technology they brought with them.

**島津義弘** Shimazu Yoshihiro, "The Devil Shimazu": Being the second son of his house, his older brother was daimyō, but his political cunning allowed him to maintain control and advance his own interests. He used the Shimazu's unique connection to the Ryūkyūan islands as a source of valuable resources, and crushed many of the smaller clans surrounding him against long odds, all while managing his complicated family dynamics.

**お市** Oichi, "The Battle Flower": The younger sister of Ōda Nobunaga, she was renowned for her beauty and her resolve. She clung strongly to her own beliefs and was stubborn to change. Gentle but ambitious, cunning but prudent, she used her many gifts to advance the causes of both her house and herself.

**服部半蔵** Hattori Hanzō, "The Demon": A skilled ninja, a master of intrigue, subterfuge, and assassination. Hanzō was believed by many to be a demon, a master of the shadows whose sword cut precisely and with lethal force against any who would oppose his liege, Tokugawa Ieyasu.

**蓮如** Rennyo "The Master of the Lamp of Wisdom": Head priest of the Hongan-ji Temple of the Jōdo Shinshū sect of Buddhism. Though he preached faith and peace, he sparked the radical Buddhist Ikkō Ikki uprisings, influenced armies of deadly warrior monks, and controlled a fortress many be-

lieved to be impregnable: Ishiyama Hongan-ji.

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