YES

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The Biggest Decision: Why We Had to Drop the Atomic Bomb

On the morning of August 6, 1945, the American B-29 Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later another B-29, *Bock's Car,* released one over Nagasaki. Both caused enormous casualties and physical destruction. These two cataclysmic events have preyed upon the American conscience ever since. The furor over the Smithsonian Institution's *Enola Gay* exhibit and over the mushroom-cloud postage stamp last autumn are merely the most obvious examples. Harry S. Truman and other officials claimed that the bombs caused Japan to surrender, thereby avoiding a bloody invasion. Critics have accused them of at best failing to explore alternatives, at worst of using the bombs primarily to make the Soviet Union "more manageable" rather than to defeat a Japan they knew already was on the verge of capitulation.

By any rational calculation Japan was a beaten nation by the summer of 1945. Conventional bombing had reduced many of its cities to rubble, blockade had strangled its importation of vitally needed materials, and its navy had sustained such heavy losses as to be powerless to interfere with the invasion everyone knew was coming. By late June advancing American forces had completed the conquest of Okinawa, which lay only 350 miles from the southernmost Japanese home island of Kyushu. They now stood poised for the final onslaught.

Rational calculations did not determine Japan's position. Although a peace faction within the government wished to end the war—provided certain conditions were met—militants were prepared to fight on regardless of consequences. They claimed to welcome an invasion of the home islands, promising to inflict such hideous casualties that the United States would retreat from its announced policy of unconditional surrender. The militarists held effective power over the government and were capable of defying the emperor, as they had in the past, on the ground that his civilian advisers were misleading him.

Okinawa provided a preview of what invasion of the home islands would entail. Since April 1 the Japanese had fought with a ferocity that mocked any notion that their will to resist was eroding. They had inflicted nearly 50,000 casualties on the invaders, many resulting from the first large-scale use of kamikazes. They also had dispatched the superbattleship *Yamato* on a suicide mission to Okinawa, where, after attacking American ships offshore, it was to plunge ashore to become a huge, doomed steel fortress. *Yamato* was sunk shortly after leaving port, but its mission symbolized Japan's willingness to sacrifice everything in an apparently hopeless cause.

The Japanese could be expected to defend their sacred homeland with even greater fervor, and kamikazes flying at short range promised to be even more devastating than at Okinawa. The Japanese had more than 2,000,000 troops in the home islands, were training millions of irregulars, and for some time had been conserving aircraft that might have been used to protect Japanese cities against American bombers.

Reports from Tokyo indicated that Japan meant to fight the war to a finish. On June 8 an imperial conference adopted "The Fundamental Policy to Be Followed Henceforth in the Conduct of the War," which pledged to "prosecute the war to the bitter end in order to uphold the national polity, protect the imperial land, and accomplish the objectives for which we went to war." Truman had no reason to believe that the proclamation meant anything other than what it said.

Against this background, while fighting on Okinawa still continued, the President had his naval chief of staff, Adm. William D. Leahy, notify the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the Secretaries of War and Navy that a meeting would be held at the White House on June 18. The night before the conference Truman wrote in his diary that "I have to decide Japanese strategy—shall we invade Japan proper or shall we bomb and blockade? That is my hardest decision to date. But I'll make it when I have all the facts."

Truman met with the chiefs at three-thirty in the afternoon. Present were Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall, Army Air Force's Gen. Ira C. Eaker (sitting in for the Army Air Force's chief of staff, Henry H. Arnold, who was on an inspection tour of installations in the Pacific), Navy Chief of Staff Adm. Ernest J. King, Leahy (also a member of the JCS), Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy. Truman opened the meeting, then asked Marshall for his views. Marshall was the dominant figure on the JCS. He was Truman's most trusted military adviser, as he had been President Franklin D. Roosevelt's.

Marshall reported that the chiefs, supported by the Pacific commanders Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, agreed that an invasion of Kyushu "appears to be the least costly worthwhile operation following Okinawa." Lodgment in Kyushu, he said, was necessary to make blockade and bombardment more effective and to serve as a staging area for the invasion of Japan's main island of Honshu. The chiefs recommended a target date of

November 1 for the first phase, code-named Olympic, because delay would give the Japanese more time to prepare and because bad weather might postpone the invasion "and hence the end of the war" for up to six months. Marshall said that in his opinion, Olympic was "the only course to pursue." The chiefs also proposed that Operation Cornet be launched against Honshu on March 1, 1946.

Leahy's memorandum calling the meeting had asked for casualty projections which that invasion might be expected to produce. Marshall stated that campaigns in the Pacific had been so diverse "it is considered wrong" to make total estimates. All he would say was that casualties during the first thirty days on Kyushu should not exceed those sustained in taking Luzon in the Philippines—31,000 men killed, wounded, or missing in action. "It is a grim fact," Marshall said, "that there is not an easy, bloodless way to victory in war." Leahy estimated a higher casualty rate similar to Okinawa, and King guessed somewhere in between.

King and Eaker, speaking for the Navy and the Army Air Forces respectively, endorsed Marshall's proposals. King said that he had become convinced that Kyushu was "the key to the success of any siege operations." He recommended that "we should do Kyushu now" and begin preparations for invading Honshu. Eaker "agreed completely" with Marshall. He said he had just received a message from Arnold also expressing "complete agreement." Air Force plans called for the use of forty groups of heavy bombers, which "could not be deployed without the use of airfields on Kyushu." Stimson and Forrestal concurred.

Truman summed up. He considered "the Kyushu plan all right from the military standpoint" and directed the chiefs to "go ahead with it." He said he "had hoped that there was a possibility of preventing an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other," but "he was clear on the situation now" and was "quite sure" the chiefs should proceed with the plan. Just before the meeting adjourned, McCloy raised the possibility of avoiding an invasion by warning the Japanese that the United States would employ atomic weapons if there were no surrender. The ensuing discussion was inconclusive because the first test was a month away and no one could be sure the weapons would work.

In his memoirs Truman claimed that using atomic bombs prevented an invasion that would have cost 500,000 American lives. Other officials mentioned the same or even higher figures. Critics have assailed such statements as gross exaggerations designed to forestall scrutiny of Truman's real motives. They have given wide publicity to a report prepared by the Joint War Plans Committee (JWPC) for the chiefs' meeting with Truman. The committee estimated that the invasion of Kyushu, followed by that of Honshu, as the chiefs proposed, would cost approximately 40,000 dead, 150,000 wounded, and 3,500 missing in action for a total of 193,500 casualties.

That those responsible for a decision should exaggerate the consequences of alternatives is commonplace. Some who cite the JWPC report profess to see more sinister motives, insisting that such "low" casualty projections call into

question the very idea that atomic bombs were used to avoid heavy losses. By discrediting that justification as a cover-up, they seek to bolster their contention that the bombs really were used to permit the employment of "atomic diplomacy" against the Soviet Union.

The notion that 193,500 anticipated casualties were too insignificant to have caused Truman to resort to atomic bombs might seem bizarre to anyone other than an academic, but let it pass. Those who have cited the JWPC report in countless op-ed pieces in newspapers and in magazine articles have created a myth by omitting key considerations: First, the report itself is studded with qualifications that casualties "are not subject to accurate estimate" and that the projection "is admittedly only an educated guess." Second, the figures never were conveyed to Truman. They were excised at high military echelons, which is why Marshall cited only estimates for the first thirty days on Kyushu. And indeed, subsequent Japanese troop buildups on Kyushu rendered the JWPC estimates totally irrelevant by the time the first atomic bomb was dropped.

Another myth that has attained wide attention is that at least several of Truman's top military advisers later informed him that using atomic bombs against Japan would be militarily unnecessary or immoral, or both. There is no persuasive evidence that any of them did so. None of the Joint Chiefs ever made such a claim, although one inventive author has tried to make it appear that Leahy did by braiding together several unrelated passages from the admiral's memoirs. Actually, two days after Hiroshima, Truman told aides that Leahy had "said up to the last that it wouldn't go off."

Neither MacArthur nor Nimitz ever communicated to Truman any change of mind about the need for invasion or expressed reservations about using the bombs. When first informed about their imminent use only days before Hiroshima, MacArthur responded with a lecture on the future of atomic warfare and even after Hiroshima strongly recommended that the invasion go forward. Nimitz, from whose jurisdiction the atomic strikes would be launched, was notified in early 1945. "This sounds fine," he told the courier, "but this is only February. Can't we get one sooner?" Nimitz later would join Air Force generals Carl D. Spaatz, Nathan Twining, and Curtis LeMay in recommending that a third bomb be dropped on Tokyo.

Only Dwight D. Eisenhower later claimed to have remonstrated against the use of the bomb. In his *Crusade in Europe*, published in 1948, he wrote that when Secretary Stimson informed him during the Potsdam Conference of plans to use the bomb, he replied that he hoped "we would never have to use such a thing against any enemy," because he did not want the United States to be the first to use such a weapon. He added, "My views were merely personal and immediate reactions; they were not based on any analysis of the subject."

Eisenhower's recollections grew more colorful as the years went on. A later account of his meeting with Stimson had it taking place at Ike's headquarters in Frankfurt on the very day news arrived of the successful

atomic test in New Mexico. "We'd had a nice evening at headquarters in Germany," he remembered. Then, after dinner, "Stimson got this cable saying that the bomb had been perfected and was ready to be dropped. The cable was in code . . . 'the lamb is born' or some damn thing like that." In this version Eisenhower claimed to have protested vehemently that "the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing." "Well," Eisenhower concluded, "the old gentleman got furious."

The best that can be said about Eisenhower's memory is that it had become flawed by the passage of time. Stimson was in Potsdam and Eisenhower in Frankfurt on July 16, when word came of the successful test. Aside from a brief conversation at a flag-raising ceremony in Berlin on July 20, the only other time they met was at Ike's headquarters on July 27. By then orders already had been sent to the Pacific to use the bombs if Japan had not yet surrendered. Notes made by one of Stimson's aides indicate that there was a discussion of atomic bombs, but there is no mention of any protest on Eisenhower's part. Even if there had been, two factors must be kept in mind. Eisenhower had commanded Allied forces in Europe, and his opinion on how close Japan was to surrender would have carried no special weight. More important, Stimson left for home immediately after the meeting and could not have personally conveyed Ike's sentiments to the President, who did not return to Washington until after Hiroshima.

On July 8 the Combined Intelligence Committee submitted to the American and British Combined Chiefs of Staff a report entitled "Estimate of the Enemy Situation." The committee predicted that as Japan's position continued to deteriorate, it might "make a serious effort to use the USSR [then a neutral] as a mediator in ending the war." Tokyo also would put out "intermittent peace feelers" to "weaken the determination of the United Nations to fight to the bitter end, or to create inter-allied dissension." While the Japanese people would be willing to make large concessions to end the war, "For a surrender to be acceptable to the Japanese army, it would be necessary for the military leaders to believe that it would not entail discrediting warrior tradition and that it would permit the ultimate resurgence of a military Japan."

Small wonder that American officials remained unimpressed when Japan proceeded to do exactly what the committee predicted. On July 12 Japanese Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo instructed Ambassador Naotaki Sato in Moscow to inform the Soviets that the emperor wished to send a personal envoy, Prince Fuminaro Konoye, in an attempt "to restore peace with all possible speed." Although he realized Konoye could not reach Moscow before the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov left to attend a Big Three meeting scheduled to begin in Potsdam on the fifteenth, Togo sought to have negotiations begin as soon as they returned.

American officials had long since been able to read Japanese diplomatic traffic through a process known as the MAGIC intercepts. Army intelligence (G-2) prepared for General Marshall its interpretation of Togo's message the

next day. The report listed several possible constructions, the most probable being that the Japanese "governing clique" was making a coordinated effort to "stave off defeat" through Soviet intervention and an "appeal to war weariness in the United States." The report added that Undersecretary of State Joseph C. Grew, who had spent ten years in Japan as ambassador, "agrees with these conclusions."

Some have claimed that Togo's overture to the Soviet Union, together with attempts by some minor Japanese officials in Switzerland and other neutral countries to get peace talks started through the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), constituted clear evidence that the Japanese were near surrender. Their sole prerequisite was retention of their sacred emperor, whose unique cultural/religious status within the Japanese polity they would not compromise. If only the United States had extended assurances about the emperor, according to this view, much bloodshed and the atomic bombs would have been unnecessary.

A careful reading of the MAGIC intercepts of subsequent exchanges between Togo and Sato provides no evidence that retention of the emperor was the sole obstacle to peace. What they show instead is that the Japanese Foreign Office was trying to cut a deal through the Soviet Union that would have permitted Japan to retain its political system and its prewar empire intact. Even the most lenient American official could not have countenanced such a settlement.

Togo on July 17 informed Sato that "we are not asking the Russians' mediation in *anything like unconditional surrender* [emphasis added]." During the following weeks Sato pleaded with his superiors to abandon hope of Soviet intercession and to approach the United States directly to find out what peace terms would be offered. "There is . . . no alternative but immediate unconditional surrender," he cabled on July 31, and he bluntly informed Togo that "your way of looking at things and the actual situation in the Eastern Area may be seen to be absolutely contradictory." The Foreign Ministry ignored his pleas and continued to seek Soviet help even after Hiroshima.

"Peace feelers" by Japanese officials abroad seemed no more promising from the American point of view. Although several of the consular personnel and military attachés engaged in these activities claimed important connections at home, none produced verification. Had the Japanese government sought only an assurance about the emperor, all it had to do was grant one of these men authority to begin talks through the OSS. Its failure to do so led American officials to assume that those involved were either well-meaning individuals acting alone or that they were being orchestrated by Tokyo. Grew characterized such "peace feelers" as "familiar weapons of psychological warfare" designed to "divide the Allies."

Some American officials, such as Stimson and Grew, nonetheless wanted to signal the Japanese that they might retain the emperorship in the form of a constitutional monarchy. Such an assurance might remove the last stumbling block to surrender, if not when it was issued, then later. Only an imperial rescript would bring about an orderly surrender, they argued, without which

Japanese forces would fight to the last man regardless of what the government in Tokyo did. Besides, the emperor could serve as a stabilizing factor during the transition to peacetime.

There were many arguments against an American initiative. Some opposed retaining such an undemocratic institution on principle and because they feared it might later serve as a rallying point for future militarism. Should that happen, as one assistant Secretary of State put it, "those lives already spent will have been sacrificed in vain, and lives will be lost again in the future." Japanese hard-liners were certain to exploit an overture as evidence that losses sustained at Okinawa had weakened American resolve and to argue that continued resistance would bring further concessions. Stalin, who earlier had told an American envoy that he favored abolishing the emperorship because the ineffectual Hirohito might be succeeded by "an energetic and vigorous figure who could cause trouble," was just as certain to interpret it as a treacherous effort to end the war before the Soviets could share in the spoils.

There were domestic considerations as well. Roosevelt had announced the unconditional surrender policy in early 1943, and it since had become a slogan of the war. He also had advocated that peoples everywhere should have the right to choose their own form of government, and Truman had publicly pledged to carry out his predecessor's legacies. For him to have formally *guaranteed* continuance of the emperorship, as opposed to merely accepting it on American terms pending free elections, as he later did, would have constituted a blatant repudiation of his own promises.

Nor was that all. Regardless of the emperor's actual role in Japanese aggression, which is still debated, much wartime propaganda had encouraged Americans to regard Hirohito as no less a war criminal than Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini. Although Truman said on several occasions that he had no objection to retaining the emperor, he understandably refused to make the first move. The ultimatum he issued from Potsdam on July 26 did not refer specifically to the emperorship. All it said was that occupation forces would be removed after "a peaceful and responsible" government had been established according to the "freely expressed will of the Japanese people." When the Japanese rejected the ultimatum rather than at last inquire whether they might retain the emperor, Truman permitted the plans for using the bombs to go forward.

Reliance on MAGIC intercepts and the "peace feelers" to gauge how near Japan was to surrender is misleading in any case. The army, not the Foreign Office, controlled the situation. Intercepts of Japanese military communications, designated ULTRA, provided no reason to believe the army was even considering surrender. Japanese Imperial Headquarters had correctly guessed that the next operation after Okinawa would be Kyushu and was making every effort to bolster its defenses there.

General Marshall reported on July 24 that there were "approximately 500,000 troops in Kyushu" and that more were on the way. ULTRA identified new units arriving almost daily. MacArthur's G-2 reported on July 29 that "this threatening development, if not checked, may grow to a point where we attack on a ratio of one (1) to one (1) which is not the recipe for victory." By

the time the first atomic bomb fell, ULTRA indicated that there were 560,000 troops in southern Kyushu (the actual figure was closer to 900,000), and projections for November 1 placed the number at 680,000. A report, for medical purposes, of July 31 estimated that total battle and non-battle casualties might run as high as 394,859 *for the Kyushu operation alone.* This figure did not include those men expected to be killed outright, for obviously they would require no medical attention. Marshall regarded Japanese defenses as so formidable that even after Hiroshima he asked MacArthur to consider alternate landing sites and began contemplating the use of atomic bombs as tactical weapons to support the invasion.

The thirty-day casualty projection of 31,000 Marshall had given Truman at the June 18 strategy meeting had become meaningless. It had been based on the assumption that the Japanese had about 350,000 defenders in Kyushu and that naval and air interdiction would preclude significant reinforcement. But the Japanese buildup since that time meant that the defenders would have nearly twice the number of troops available by "X-day" than earlier assumed. The assertion that apprehensions about casualties are insufficient to explain Truman's use of the bombs, therefore, cannot be taken seriously. On the contrary, as Winston Churchill wrote after a conversation with him at Potsdam, Truman was tormented by "the terrible responsibilities that rested upon him in regard to the unlimited effusions of American blood."

Some historians have argued that while the first bomb *might* have been required to achieve Japanese surrender, dropping the second constituted a needless barbarism. The record shows otherwise. American officials believed more than one bomb would be necessary because they assumed Japanese hard-liners would minimize the first explosion or attempt to explain it away as some sort of natural catastrophe, precisely what they did. The Japanese minister of war, for instance, at first refused even to admit that the Hiroshima bomb was atomic. A few hours after Nagasaki he told the cabinet that "the Americans appeared to have one hundred atomic bombs . . . they could drop three per day. The next target might well be Tokyo."

Even after both bombs had fallen and Russia entered the war, Japanese militants insisted on such lenient peace terms that moderates knew there was no sense even transmitting them to the United States. Hirohito had to intervene personally on two occasions during the next few days to induce hard-liners to abandon their conditions and to accept the American stipulation that the emperor's authority "shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers." That the militarists would have accepted such a settlement before the bombs is farfetched, to say the least.

Some writers have argued that the cumulative effects of battlefield defeats, conventional bombing, and naval blockade already had defeated Japan. Even without extending assurances about the emperor, all the United States had to do was wait. The most frequently cited basis for this contention is the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey,* published in 1946, which stated

that Japan would have surrendered by November 1 "even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated." Recent scholarship by the historian Robert P. Newman and others has demonstrated that the survey was "cooked" by those who prepared it to arrive at such a conclusion. No matter. This or any other document based on information available only after the war ended is irrelevant with regard to what Truman could have known at the time.

What often goes unremarked is that when the bombs were dropped, fighting was still going on in the Philippines, China, and elsewhere. Every day that the war continued thousands of prisoners of war had to live and die in abysmal conditions, and there were rumors that the Japanese intended to slaughter them if the homeland was invaded. Truman was Commander in Chief of the American armed forces, and he had a duty to the men under his command not shared by those sitting in moral judgment decades later. Available evidence points to the conclusion that he acted for the reason he said he did: to end a bloody war that would have become far bloodier had invasion proved necessary. One can only imagine what would have happened if tens of thousands of American boys had died or been wounded on Japanese soil and then it had become known that Truman had chosen not to use weapons that might have ended the war months sooner.

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa

Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan

Assessing the Roads Not Taken

The end of the Pacific War was marked by the intense drama of two races: the first between Stalin and Truman to see who could force Japan to surrender and on what terms; and the second between the peace party and the war party in Japan on the question of whether to end the war and on what conditions. To the very end, the two races were inextricably linked. But what if things had been different? Would the outcome have changed if the key players had taken alternative paths? Below I explore some counterfactual suppositions to shed light on major issues that determined the outcome of the war.

What if Truman had accepted a provision in the Potsdam ultimatum allowing the Japanese to retain a constitutional monarchy? This alternative was supported by Stimson, Grew, Forrestal, Leahy, McCloy, and possibly Marshall. Churchill also favored this provision, and it was part of Stimson's original draft of the Potsdam Proclamation. Undoubtedly, a promise to retain the monarchy would have strengthened the peace party's receptivity of the Potsdam ultimatum. It would have led to intense discussion much earlier among Japanese policymakers on whether or not to accept the Potsdam terms, and it would have considerably diminished Japan's reliance on Moscow's mediation.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of this provision would not have immediately led to Japan's surrender, since those who adhered to the mythical notion of the *kokutai* would have strenuously opposed the acceptance of the Potsdam terms, even if it meant the preservation of the monarchy. Certainly, the three war hawks in the Big Six would have objected on the grounds that the Potsdam Proclamation would spell the end of the armed forces. But peace advocates could have accused the war party of endangering the future of the imperial house by insisting on additional conditions. Thus, the inclusion of this provision would have hastened Japan's surrender, though it is doubtful that Japan would have capitulated before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the Soviet Union entered the war. The possibility of accepting the Potsdam terms might have been raised immediately after the atomic bombing on Hiroshima. This provision might have

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tipped the balance in favor of the peace party after the Soviet invasion, thus speeding up the termination of the war.

Why, then, didn't Truman accept this provision? One explanation was that he was concerned with how the public would react to a policy of appeasement. Domestic public opinion polls indicated an overwhelmingly negative sentiment against the emperor, and inevitably Archibald McLeish, Dean Acheson, and others would have raised strident voices of protest. Byrnes had warned that a compromise with the emperor would lead to the crucifixion of the president.

But would it have? Although public opinion polls were overwhelmingly against the emperor, newspaper commentaries were evenly split between those who advocated the abolition of the emperor system and those who argued that the preservation of the monarchical system could be compatible with eradication of Japanese militarism. Truman could have justified his decision on two powerful grounds. First, he could have argued that ending the war earlier would save the lives of American soldiers. Second, he could have explained that this decision was necessary to prevent Soviet expansion in Asia, though he would have had to present this argument carefully so as not to provoke a strong reaction from the Soviet Union.

Truman's refusal to include this provision was motivated not only by his concern with domestic repercussions but also by his own deep conviction that America should avenge the humiliation of Pearl Harbor. Anything short of unconditional surrender was not acceptable to Truman. The buck indeed stopped at the president. Thus, as long as Truman firmly held to his conviction, this counterfactual supposition was not a real alternative.

But the story does not end here. Another important, hidden reason motivated Truman's decision not to include this provision. Truman knew that the unconditional surrender demand without any promise to preserve a constitutional monarchy would be rejected by the Japanese. He needed Japan's refusal to justify the use of the atomic bomb. Thus so long as he was committed to using the atomic bomb, he could not include the provision promising a constitutional monarchy.

What if Truman had asked Stalin to sign the Potsdam Proclamation without a promise of constitutional monarchy? In this case, Japanese policymakers would have realized that their last hope to terminate the war through Moscow's mediation was dashed. They would have been forced to confront squarely the issue of whether to accept the Potsdam surrender terms. The ambiguity of the emperor's position, however, still remained, and therefore the division among policymakers was inevitable, making it likely that neither the cabinet nor the Big Six would have been able to resolve the differences.

Japan's delay in giving the Allies a definite reply would surely have led to the dropping of the atomic bombs and Soviet participation in the war. Would Japan have surrendered after the first atomic bomb? The absence of a promise to preserve the monarchical system in the Potsdam terms would have prevented the peace party, including Hirohito and Kido, from acting decisively to accept surrender. Ultimately, the Soviet invasion of Manchuria would still have provided the coup de grace.

What if Truman had invited Stalin to sign the Potsdam Proclamation and included the promise to allow the Japanese to maintain a constitutional monarchy? This would have forced Japanese policymakers to confront the issue of whether to accept the Potsdam terms. Undoubtedly, the army would have insisted, if not on the continuation of the war, at least on attaching three additional conditions to the Potsdam Proclamation in order to ensure its own survival. But the promise of preserving the monarchical system might have prompted members of the peace party to intercede to end the war before the first atomic bomb, although there is no guarantee that their argument would have silenced the war party. The most crucial issue here is how the emperor would have reacted to the Potsdam terms had they contained the promise of a constitutional monarchy and been signed by Stalin in addition to Truman, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek. Undoubtedly, he would have been more disposed to the Potsdam terms, but the promise of a constitutional monarchy alone might not have induced the emperor to hasten to accept the ultimatum. A shock was needed. It is difficult to say if the Hiroshima bomb alone was sufficient, or whether the combination of the Hiroshima bomb and Soviet entry into the war was needed to convince the emperor to accept surrender. Either way, surrender would have come earlier than it did, thus shortening the war by several days.

Nevertheless, these counterfactual suppositions were not in the realm of possibility, since Truman and Byrnes would never have accepted them, for the reasons stated in the first counterfactual. The atomic bomb provided them with the solution to previously unsolvable dilemmas. Once the solution was found to square the circle, Truman and Byrnes never deviated from their objectives. An alternative was available, but they chose not to take it.

This counterfactual was dubious for another reason. If Stalin had been asked to join the ultimatum, he would never have agreed to promise a constitutional monarchy. Stalin's most important objective in the Pacific War was to join the conflict. The promise of a constitutional monarchy might have hastened Japan's surrender before the Soviet tanks crossed the Manchurian border—a disaster he would have avoided at all costs. This was why Stalin's own version of the joint ultimatum included the unconditional surrender demand. Had Stalin been invited to join the ultimatum that included the provision allowing Japan to retain a constitutional monarchy, he would have fought tooth and nail to scratch that provision. Ironically, both Stalin and Truman had vested interests in keeping unconditional surrender for different reasons.

What if Hiranuma had not made an amendment at the imperial conference on August 10, and the Japanese government had proposed accepting the Potsdam Proclamation "with the understanding that it did not include any demand for a change in the status of the emperor under the national law"? Hiranuma's amendment was an egregious mistake. Although the three war hawks in the Big Six attached three additional conditions to acceptance, they lacked the intellectual acumen to connect their misgivings to the fundamental core of the *kokutai* debate. Without Hiranuma's amendment the emperor would have supported the one-conditional acceptance of the Potsdam terms as formulated at the first imperial conference;

this condition was compatible, albeit narrowly, with a constitutional monarchy that Stimson, Leahy, Forrestal, and Grew would have accepted. If we believe Ballantine, Byrnes and Truman might have accepted the provision. But Hiranuma's amendment made it impossible for the American policymakers to accept this condition without compromising the fundamental objectives of the war.

On the other hand, given Truman's deep feelings against the emperor, even the original one condition—retention of the emperor's status in the national laws—or even the Foreign Ministry's original formula (the preservation of the imperial house) might have been rejected by Truman and Byrnes. Nevertheless, either formula might have been accepted by Grew, Dooman, and Ballantine, and would have strengthened the position advocated by Stimson, Leahy, Forrestal, and McCloy that Japan's first reply should be accepted.

What if the Byrnes Note had contained a clear indication that the United States would allow the Japanese to retain a constitutional monarchy with the current dynasty? The rejection of Japan's conditional acceptance of the Potsdam terms as amended by Hiranuma was not incompatible with the promise of a constitutional monarchy. The lack of this promise triggered the war party's backlash and endangered the peace parry's chances of ending the war early. Had the Byrnes Note included the guarantee of a constitutional monarchy under the current dynasty, Suzuki would not have temporarily defected to the war party, and Yonai would not have remained silent on August 12. War advocates would have opposed the Byrnes Note as incompatible with the *kokutai.* Nevertheless, a promise to preserve the monarchy would have taken the wind out of their sails, especially, given that the emperor would have more actively intervened for the acceptance of the Byrnes Note. Stalin would have opposed the Byrnes Note if it included the provision for a constitutional monarchy, but Truman was prepared to attain Japan's surrender without the Soviet Union anyway. This scenario thus might have resulted in Japan's surrender on August 12 or 13 instead of August 14.

Without the atomic bombs and without the Soviet entry into the war, would Japan have surrendered before November 1, the day Operation Olympic was scheduled to begin? The *United States Strategic Bombing Survey,* published in 1946, concluded that Japan would have surrendered before November 1 without the atomic bombs and without Soviet entry into the war. This conclusion has become the foundation on which revisionist historians have constructed their argument that the atomic bombs were not necessary for Japan's surrender. Since Barton Bernstein has persuasively demonstrated in his critique of the *Survey* that its conclusion is not supported by its own evidence, I need not dwell on this supposition. The main objective of the study's principal author, Paul Nitze, was to prove that conventional bombings, coupled with the naval blockade, would have induced Japan to surrender before November 1. But Nitze's conclusion was repeatedly contradicted by the evidence provided in the *Survey* itself. For instance, to the question, "How much longer do you think the war might have continued had the atomic bomb not been dropped?" Prince Konoe answered: "Probably it would have lasted all this

year." Bernstein introduced numerous other testimonies by Toyoda, Kido, Suzuki, Hiranuma, Sakomizu, and others to contradict the *Survey*'s conclusion. As Bernstein asserts, the *Survey* is "an unreliable guide."

The Japanese leaders knew that Japan was losing the war. But defeat and surrender are not synonymous. Surrender is a political act. Without the twin shocks of the atomic bombs and Soviet entry into the war, the Japanese would never have accepted surrender in August.

Would Japan have surrendered before November 1 on the basis of Soviet entry alone, without the atomic bomb? Japanese historian Asada Sadao contends that without the atomic bombs but with Soviet entry into the war, "there was a possibility that Japan would not have surrendered before November 1." To Asada the shock value was crucial. Whereas the Japanese anticipated Soviet entry into the war, Asada argues, the atomic bombs came as a complete shock. By contrast, Bernstein states: "In view of the great impact of Soviet entry . . . in a situation of heavy conventional bombing and a strangling blockade, it does seem quite probable—indeed, far more likely than not—that Japan would have surrendered before November without the use of the A-bomb but after Soviet intervention in the war. In that sense . . . there may have been a serious 'missed opportunity' in 1945 to avoid the costly invasion of Kyushu without dropping the atomic bomb by awaiting Soviet entry."

The importance to Japan of Soviet neutrality is crucial in this context. Japan relied on Soviet neutrality both militarily and diplomatically. Diplomatically, Japan pinned its last hope on Moscow's mediation for the termination of the war. Once the Soviets entered the war, Japan was forced to make a decision on the Potsdam terms. Militarily as well, Japan's Ketsu-go strategy was predicated on Soviet neutrality; indeed, it was for this reason that the Military Affairs Bureau of the Army Ministry constantly overruled the intelligence section's warning that a Soviet invasion might be imminent. Manchuria was not written off, as Asada claims; rather, the military was confident that Japan could keep the Soviets neutral, at least for a while. When the Soviets invaded Manchuria, the military was taken by complete surprise. Despite the bravado that the war must continue, the Soviet invasion undermined the confidence of the army, punching a fatal hole in its strategic plan. The military's insistence on the continuation of war lost its rationale.

More important, however, were the political implications of the Soviet expansion in the Far East. Without Japan's surrender, it is reasonable to assume that the Soviets would have completed the occupation of Manchuria, southern Sakhalin, the entire Kurils, and possibly half of Korea by the beginning of September. Inevitably, the Soviet invasion of Hokkaido would have been raised as a pressing issue to be settled between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States might have resisted the Soviet operation against Hokkaido, but given the Soviets' military strength, and given the enormous casualty figures the American high command had estimated for Olympic, the United States might have conceded the division of Hokkaido as Stalin had envisaged. Even if the United States succeeded in resisting Stalin's pressure, Soviet military conquests in the rest of the Far East might have led Truman to

concede some degree of Soviet participation in Japan's postwar occupation. Whatever the United States might or might not have done regarding the Soviet operation in Hokkaido or the postwar occupation of Japan, Japanese leaders were well aware of the danger of allowing Soviet expansion to continue beyond Manchuria, Korea, Sakhalin, and the Kurils. It was for this reason that the Japanese policymakers came together at the last moment to surrender under the Potsdam terms, that the military's insistence on continuing the war collapsed, and that the military accepted surrender relatively easily. Japan's decision to surrender was above all a political decision, not a military one. Therefore, even without the atomic bombs, the war most likely would have ended shortly after Soviet entry into the war—before November 1.

Would Japan have surrendered before November 1 on the basis of the atomic bomb alone, without the Soviet entry into the war? The two bombs alone would most likely not have prompted the Japanese to surrender, so long as they still had hope that Moscow would mediate peace. The Hiroshima bombing did not significantly change Japan's policy, though it did inject a sense of urgency into the peace party's initiative to end the war. Without the Soviet entry into the war, it is not likely that the Nagasaki bomb would have changed the situation. Anami's warning that the United States might have 100 atomic bombs and that the next target might be Tokyo had no discernible impact on the debate. Even after the Nagasaki bomb, Japan would most likely have still waited for Moscow's answer to the Konoe mission.

The most likely scenario would have been that while waiting for the answer from Moscow, Japan would have been shocked by the Soviet invasion in Manchuria sometime in the middle of August, and would have sued for peace on the Potsdam terms. In this case, then, we would have debated endlessly whether the two atomic bombs preceding the Soviet invasion or the Soviet entry would have had a more decisive impact on Japan's decision to surrender, although in this case, too, clearly Soviet entry would have had a more decisive impact.

Richard Frank, who argues that the atomic bombings had a greater impact on Japan's decision to surrender than Soviet involvement in the war, relies exclusively on contemporary sources and discounts postwar testimonies. He emphasizes especially the importance of Hirohito's statement at the first imperial conference, the Imperial Rescript on August 15, and Suzuki's statements made during cabinet meetings. This methodology, though admirable, does not support Frank's conclusion. Hirohito's reference to the atomic bomb at the imperial conference comes from Takeshita's diary, which must be based on hearsay. None of the participants who actually attended the imperial conference remembers the emperor's referring to the atomic bomb. The Imperial Rescript on August 15 does refer to the use of the "cruel new bomb" as one of the reasons for the termination of the war, with no mention of Soviet entry into the war. But during his meeting with the three marshals on August 14, the emperor referred to both the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war as the decisive reasons for ending the war. Moreover, the Imperial Rescript to the Soldiers and Officers issued on August 17 refers to Soviet entry

as the major reason for ending the war and makes no reference to the atomic bomb. In contemporary records from August 6 to August 15 two sources (the Imperial Rescript on August 15 and Suzuki's statement at the August 13 cabinet meeting) refer only to the impact of the atomic bomb, three sources only to Soviet entry (Konoe on August 9, Suzuki's statement to his doctor on August 13, and the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Officers on August 17), and seven sources both to the atomic bomb and Soviet involvement. Contemporary evidence does not support Frank's contention.

Without Soviet participation in the war in the middle of August, the United States would have faced the question of whether to use the third bomb sometime after August 19, and then the fourth bomb in the beginning of September, most likely on Kokura and Niigata. It is hard to say how many atomic bombs it would have taken to convince Japanese policymakers to abandon their approach to Moscow. It is possible to argue, though impossible to prove, that the Japanese military would still have argued for the continuation of the war after a third or even a fourth bomb.

Could Japan have withstood the attacks of seven atomic bombs before November 1? Would Truman and Stimson have had the resolve to use seven atomic bombs in succession? What would have been the impact of these bombs on Japanese public opinion? Would the continued use of the bombs have solidified or eroded the resolve of the Japanese to fight on? Would it have hopelessly alienated the Japanese from the United States to the point that it would be difficult to impose the American occupation on Japan? Would it have encouraged the Japanese to welcome the Soviet occupation instead? These are the questions we cannot answer with certainty.

On the basis of available evidence, however, it is clear that the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki alone were not decisive in inducing Japan to surrender. Despite their destructive power, the atomic bombs were not sufficient to change the direction of Japanese diplomacy. The Soviet invasion was. Without the Soviet entry into the war, the Japanese would have continued to fight until numerous atomic bombs, a successful allied invasion of the home islands, or continued aerial bombardments, combined with a naval blockade, rendered them incapable of doing so.

Legacies

The Bomb in American Memory

After the war was over, each nation began constructing its own story about how the war ended. Americans still cling to the myth that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided the knockout punch to the Japanese government. The decision to use the bomb saved not only American soldiers but also the Japanese, according to this narrative. The myth serves to justify Truman's decision and ease the collective American conscience. To this extent, it is important to American national identity. But as this book demonstrates, this myth cannot be supported by historical facts. Evidence makes clear that there were alternatives to the use of the bomb, alternatives that the Truman administration for reasons of its own declined to pursue. And it is

here, in the evidence of roads not taken, that the question of moral responsibility comes to the fore. Until his death, Truman continually came back to this question and repeatedly justified his decision, inventing a fiction that he himself later came to believe. That he spoke so often to justify his actions shows how much his decision to use the bomb haunted him.

On August 10 the Japanese government sent a letter of protest through the Swiss legation to the United States government. This letter declared the American use of the atomic bombs to be a violation of Articles 22 and 23 of the Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, which prohibited the use of cruel weapons. It declared "in the name of the Japanese Imperial Government as well as in the name of humanity and civilization" that "the use of the atomic bombs, which surpass the indiscriminate cruelty of any other existing weapons and projectiles," was a crime against humanity, and demanded that "the further use of such inhumane weapons be immediately ceased." Needless to say, Truman did not respond to this letter. After Japan accepted the American occupation and became an important ally of the United States, the Japanese government has never raised any protest about the American use of the atomic bombs. The August 10 letter remains the only, and now forgotten, protest lodged by the Japanese government against the use of the atomic bomb.

To be sure, the Japanese government was guilty of its own atrocities in violation of the laws governing the conduct of war. The Nanking Massacre of 1937, biological experiments conducted by the infamous Unit 731, the Bataan March, and the numerous instances of cruel treatment of POWs represent only a few examples of Japanese atrocities. Nevertheless, the moral lapses of the Japanese do not excuse those of the United States and the Allies. After all, morality by definition is an absolute rather than a relative standard. The forgotten letter that the Japanese government sent to the United States government on August 10 deserves serious consideration. Justifying Hiroshima and Nagasaki by making a historically unsustainable argument that the atomic bombs ended the war is no longer tenable. Our self-image as Americans is tested by how we can come to terms with the decision to drop the bomb. Although much of what revisionist historians argue is faulty and based on tendentious use of sources, they nonetheless deserve credit for raising an important moral issue that challenges the standard American narrative of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Stalinist Past

Soviet historians, and patriotic Russian historians after the collapse of the Soviet Union, justify the Soviet violation of the Neutrality Pact by arguing that it brought the Pacific War to a close, thus ending the suffering of the oppressed people of Asia and the useless sacrifices of the Japanese themselves. But this book shows that Stalin's policy was motivated by expansionist geopolitical designs. The Soviet leader pursued his imperialistic policy with Machiavellian ruthlessness, deviousness, and cunning. In the end he managed to enter the war and occupy those territories to which he felt entitled. Although he briefly flirted with the idea of invading Hokkaido, and did violate the provision of the Yalta Agreement to secure a treaty with the Chinese as the prerequisite for entry into the war, Stalin by and large respected the Yalta

limit. But by occupying the southern Kurils, which had never belonged to Russia until the last days of August and the beginning of September 1945, he created an intractable territorial dispute known as "the Northern Territories question" that has prevented rapprochement between Russia and Japan to this day. The Russian government and the majority of Russians even now continue to cling to the myth that the occupation of the southern Kurils was Russia's justifiable act of repossessing its lost territory.

Stalin's decisions in the Pacific War are but one of many entries in the ledger of his brutal regime. Although his imperialism was not the worst of his crimes compared with the Great Purge and collectivization, it represented part and parcel of the Stalin regime. Certainly, his conniving against the Japanese and the blatant land-grabbing that he engaged in during the closing weeks of the war are nothing to praise. Although the crimes committed by Stalin have been exposed and the new Russia is making valiant strides by shedding itself of the remnants of the Stalinist past, the Russians, with the exception of a few courageous historians, have not squarely faced the historical fact that Stalin's policy toward Japan in the waning months of the Pacific War was an example of the leader's expansionistic foreign policy. Unless the Russians come to this realization, the process of cleansing themselves of the Stalinist past will never be completed.

The Mythology of Victimization and the Role of Hirohito

It took the Japanese a little while to realize that what happened to the Kurils during the confused period between August 15 and September 5 amounted to annexation of Japan's inherent territory, an act that violated the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo Declaration. But the humiliation the Japanese suffered in the four-week Soviet-Japanese War was not entirely a result of the Soviet occupation of the Kurils. The Soviet occupation of the Kurils represented the last of many wrongs that the Soviets perpetrated on the Japanese, beginning with the violation of the Neutrality Pact, the invasion of Manchuria, Korea, southern Sakhalin, and the deportation and imprisonment of more than 640,000 prisoners of war. The "Northern Territories question" that the Japanese have demanded be resolved in the postwar period before any rapprochement with the Soviet Union (and Russia after 1991) is a mere symbol of their deep-seated resentment of and hostility toward the Russians who betrayed Japan when it desperately needed their help in ending the war.

Together with the Soviet war against Japan, Hiroshima and Nagasaki have instilled in the Japanese a sense of victimization. What Gilbert Rozman calls the Hiroshima syndrome and the Northern Territories syndrome are an inverted form of nationalism. As such they have prevented the Japanese from coming to terms with their own culpability in causing the war in Asia. Before August 14, 1945, the Japanese leaders had ample opportunities to surrender, for instance, at the German capitulation, the fall of Okinawa, the issuance of the Potsdam Proclamation, the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and Soviet entry into the war. Few in Japan have condemned the policymakers who delayed Japan's surrender. Had the Japanese government accepted the Potsdam Proclamation unconditionally immediately after it was issued, as Sato and Matsumoto argued, the atomic bombs would not have been used, and the war would have

ended before the Soviets entered the conflict. Japanese policymakers who were in the position to make decisions—not only the militant advocates of war but also those who belonged to the peace party, including Suzuki, Togo, Kido, and Hirohito himself—must bear the responsibility for the war's destructive end more than the American president and the Soviet dictator.

In postwar Japan, Hirohito has been portrayed as the savior of the Japanese people and the nation for his "sacred decisions" to end the war. Indeed, without the emperor's personal intervention, Japan would not have surrendered. The cabinet and the Big Six were hopelessly divided, unable to make a decision. Only the emperor broke the stalemate. His determination and leadership at the two imperial conferences and his steadfast support for the termination of the war after the decisive meeting with Kido on August 9 were crucial factors leading to Japan's surrender.

This does not mean, however, that the emperor was, in Asada's words, "Japan's foremost peace advocate, increasingly articulate and urgent in expressing his wish for peace." He was, as all other Japanese leaders at that time, still pinning his hope on Moscow's mediation, rejecting the unconditional surrender demanded by the Potsdam Proclamation until the Soviet entry into the war. After the Soviets joined the fight, he finally changed his mind to accept the Potsdam terms. In Japan it has been taboo to question the motivation that led Hirohito to accept surrender. But the findings of this book call for a reexamination of his role in the ending of the Pacific War. His delay in accepting the Allied terms ensured the use of the bomb and Soviet entry into the war.

Although Hirohito's initiative after August 9 should be noted, his motivation for ending the war was not as noble as the "sacred decision" myth would have us believe. His primary concern was above all the preservation of the imperial house. He even flirted with the idea of clinging to his political role. Despite the myth that he said he did not care what happened to him personally, it is likely that he was also in fact deeply concerned about the safety of his family and his own security. At the crucial imperial conference of August 10, Hiranuma did not mince words in asking Hirohito to take responsibility for the tragedy that had befallen Japan. As Konoe, some of the emperor's own relatives, and Grew, the most ardent supporter of the Japanese monarchy, argued, Hirohito should have abdicated at the end of the war to make a clean break with the Showa period that marked anything but what "Showa" meant: enlightened peace. His continuing reign made Japan's culpability in the war ambiguous and contributed to the nation's inability to come to terms with the past.

Thus this is a story with no heroes but no real villains, either—just men. The ending of the Pacific War was in the last analysis a human drama whose dynamics were determined by the very human characteristics of those involved: ambition, fear, vanity, anger, and prejudice. With each successive decision, the number of remaining alternatives steadily diminished, constraining ever further the possibilities, until the dropping of the bomb and the destruction of the Japanese state became all but inevitable. The Pacific War could very well have ended differently had the men involved made different choices. But they did not.

So they left it for us to live with the legacies of the war. The question is, Do we have the courage to overcome them?