

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

# Ending the Pacific War: The New History

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In 1945, and for approximately two decades thereafter, no significant American controversy attended the use of atomic weapons to end the Pacific War. A national consensus assembled around three basic premises: (a) the use of the weapons was justified; (b) the weapons ended the war; and (c) that in at least a rough utilitarian sense, employment of the weapons was morally justified as saving more lives than they cost (Walker 1990, 2005; Bernstein 1995). The historian Michael Sherry branded this as “The Patriotic Orthodoxy” (Sherry 1996).

Beginning in the mid-1960s challenges appeared to “The Patriotic Orthodoxy.” The pejorative label “revisionists” was sometimes pelted at these challengers, but a more accurate term is just critics. The critics developed a canon of tenets that, in their purest incarnation, likewise formed a trio: (a) Japan’s strategic situation in the summer of 1945 was catastrophically hopeless; (b) Japan’s leaders recognized their hopeless situation and were seeking to surrender; and (c) American leaders, thanks to the breaking of Japanese diplomatic codes, knew Japan hovered on the verge of surrender when they unleashed needless nuclear devastation. The critics mustered a number of reasons for the unwarranted use of atomic weapons, but the most provocative by far marches under the banner “atomic diplomacy”: the real target of the weapons was not Japan, but the Soviet Union (Walker 1990, 2005; Bernstein 1995).

These two rival narratives clashed along a cultural fault line most spectacularly in the “Enola Gay” controversy in 1995 over the proposed text of a Smithsonian Institution exhibit of the fuselage of the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb. Ironically, just as this public spectacle erupted, new evidence emerged in three areas. While Japanese historians found the “atomic diplomacy” thesis congenial, many experienced discomfort to the degree the thesis obscured or even absolved the emperor and the militarists of responsibility. These scholars delved into archives and newly available sources to provide a far more nuanced portrait of decision making in Japan. Concurrently, the declassification of radio intelligence-related information fundamen-

tally transformed understanding of American decision-making. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union liberated startling disclosures about Soviet plans. What follows is a short exploration of how this vastly enhanced body of evidence points to new insights and interpretations reflected in a trove of publications dated from 1995 (in addition to those cited below, see Newman 1995; Maddox 1995, 2007; Bix 2000; Allen and Polmar 2003; Hasegawa 2007; Miscamble 2007; Kort 2007; Malloy 2008; Rotter 2008; Campbell and Radchenko 2008).

In January 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt publically fixed the American war aim as the “unconditional surrender” of the Axis Powers. The US Department of State’s Committee on Post War Programs (Japan) emphasized the potent legal significance of “unconditional surrender” in November 1944: “While there may be different interpretations as to just what is meant by ‘unconditional surrender’, there would seem inherent in the expression the right of the victors to impose whatever items they wish upon the vanquished.” The committee went on to add: “The unconditional surrender of Japan would make it possible for the United Nations to assume supreme authority with respect to Japan and to exercise powers beyond those given a military occupant by international law” (US Department of State 1963, pp. 1275–1285). By 1945, planners, armed with the critically enhanced legal authority that “unconditional surrender” afforded, fashioned a breathtakingly radical plan for an occupation and internal reordering of Japan and German that would assure that these nations never again posed a threat. “Unconditional surrender” thus was not merely a slogan or a readily disposable diplomatic card; it formed the indispensable foundation for an enduring peace (Dallek 1979, pp. 373–376; Gilbert 1986, pp. 300–301, 309–310; Pearlman 1996, pp. 1–8).

The newly created Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) bore the duty of devising a military strategy to secure the national war aim. The navy, led by the commander in chief, Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, had studied war with Japan for decades. One fundamental principle that emerged from this analysis was that an invasion of the Japanese home islands was the path of absolute folly. The navy concluded the US could never project a sufficiently large trans-Pacific expeditionary force to overwhelm the Japanese. Further, the alternately steep or soaked terrain of the home islands would negate American advantages in firepower and mobility. Any invasion thus would produce politically unacceptable casualties. But the US Army, led by General of the Armies George C. Marshall, believed the critical element was time. Hence, as explained in Richard Frank’s *Downfall* (1999), the army advocated an invasion of the Japanese home islands as the swiftest means of ending the war (pp. 20–37).

In April 1945, after nearly a year’s worth of bitter argument, the JCS reached not a consensus but a highly unstable compromise. The ongoing Navy-preferred strategy of bombardment and blockade would continue at greater intensity until November 1945. At that point, it would merge with the army vision: a two-phase *initial* invasion of Japan (Operation Downfall) aimed first at Southern Kyushu about 1 November (Operations Olympic), and second at the Tokyo region about 1 March 1946 (Operation Coronet).

The JCS formally adopted a paper providing the rationale for this plan. That paper noted in effect that no Japanese government had surrendered to a foreign power in Japan’s history, a span of 2,600 years. No Japanese military unit had surrendered in the entire course of the Pacific War. Therefore, the JCS concluded that there was no guarantee the US could find a Japanese government that would surrender and even if it did, that Japan’s armed forces would comply with the surrender order; thus, the JCS

identified the ultimate American nightmare. It was not “the invasion of Japan,” but the prospect that there would be no organized capitulation of Japan’s government and armed forces. Indeed, “the invasion of Japan” only encompassed a fraction of the potential costs of finally subduing Japan if the US and its allies had to defeat Japan’s armed forces, estimated at about 4.5 to 5 million strong, in the home islands, on the Asian continent, and across the Pacific (Joint Chiefs of Staff 924/15, 25 April 1945).

Comprehending this fundamental point is the first vital step to understanding why the highly emotional debate over potential casualties to end the war is misguided. Without certainty of complete surrender of Japan and her armed forces, there was no predictable scenario for the length and severity of the final phase of the war. Given that situation, American (and Allied) casualties could run anywhere along a vast continuum, from the hundreds of thousands to well more than a million. At a critical point in August 1945, Secretary of War Henry Stimson pointed out to President Harry S. Truman that absent compliance of Japan’s armed forces with a surrender order, the US could face campaigns *outside* the home islands where casualties could equal twenty Iwo Jimas or Okinawas – analogies sketching a loss range of 600,000 to just below one million (Stimson 1945).

The second issue that makes the hotly charged casualty debate problematic is that there was no reliable method of predicting casualties in 1945 even for discrete campaigns. Such estimates were always problematic because of the multitude of variables that affected casualties, many of which could not be accurately known in advance. Most of the stabs at “casualty estimates” for final campaigns avoided precise numbers for the type of analogy Stimson presented to Truman in August 1945. The lack of a guarantee for an organized capitulation of all of Japan’s armed forces, coupled with the absence of a valid model for individual campaign casualty projections, left military and civilian officials alike adrift with well-merited fears of frightful losses roused by war experienced to date – and common sense. The prime manifestation of this situation emerged in preparations for inducting vast numbers of draftees and for the training of massive numbers of infantry replacements to allow the armed forces to absorb over a million casualties for the year after May 1945. The fear of huge losses was both real and reasonable and undoubtedly animated American leaders even if an exact projection remained elusive (Frank 1999, pp. 134–139, 339–343).

Unfortunately, in 1945 Japanese leaders did not perceive their situation as catastrophically hopeless. On the contrary, they devised a military–political strategy they called the *Ketsu Go* (“Operation Decisive”) that they confidently expected would deliver their version of a satisfactory end to the war – one that would preserve the ultranationalist and militarist old order in Japan. *Ketsu Go* contained a fundamental premise: Americans, for all their material power, possessed only brittle morale. Japanese leaders believed that by defeating or inflicting high casualties on the initial invasion of the home islands, they could break American morale and secure a negotiated end of the war to their taste.

Shrewd staff work deduced that the US would choose to invade rather than only follow a strategy of blockade and bombardment. Since American combat power depended vitally on air and sea components, not massive ground forces, and as more than half the US air strength was ground-based, the Japanese calculated that an invasion must come within range of American air bases ashore. Further appraisal projected that by mid-summer 1945, the US would occupy Okinawa. Simple calculations of

American fighter-plane range from Okinawa showed the target for the first invasion would be Southern Kyushu. A glance at the topographic map of Kyushu readily yielded the likely invasion beaches. The Japanese conducted a huge buildup of forces in Japan, but concentrated their units to meet an invasion in Southern Kyushu and around Tokyo – precisely the two initial American invasion targets. The Japanese were confident in the prospects for *Ketsu Go*.

In the spring, Japan implemented a series of national laws designed to form a seamless unity of the armed forces, government, and the people. All males aged 15 to 60 and all females aged 17 to 40 were drafted into a huge national militia. With Okinawa as the prototype, these individuals were mustered into units to serve in combat support and then combat roles. In June, an Imperial Conference (one held before the emperor) formally sanctified the *Ketsu Go* “Fight to the Finish” strategy. The staff papers presented to the policy makers in preparation for this conference also told them something else: even if *Ketsu Go* produced a military and diplomatic success, the nation’s desperate food situation by the winter of 1945–1946 would kill vast numbers of people. *Ketsu Go* thus involved the virtual obliteration of meaningful distinctions between combatants and noncombatants within the homeland and contemplated stupendous numbers of Japanese casualties, not just those on the battlefield (Butow 1954, pp. 99–102; Frank 1999, pp. 95–96, 350–352; Drea 2009, p. 250).

As historian Robert Butow pointed out in 1954, the fate of Japan rested in the hands of only eight men (pp. 9–10). These were the emperor and his principle adviser Marquis Koichi Kido and an inner cabinet of the government of Admiral Kantaro Suzuki called the “Big Six”: Prime Minister Suzuki, Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo, Army Minister General Korechika Anami, Navy Minister Admiral Mitsumasa Yonai, Chief of the Army General Staff General Yoshijiro Umezu, and Chief of the Navy General Staff, Admiral Soemu Toyoda.

There is no record whatsoever that any of these eight men proposed a set of concrete terms or circumstances in which Japan would capitulate prior to Hiroshima. More significantly, none of the seven survivors (Anami committed suicide), even after the war, claimed that there was any specific term or set of terms and circumstances that would have prompted Japan to surrender prior to Hiroshima. The evidence available shows that in June, a memorandum from Kido to the emperor proposed that the emperor intervene not to surrender, but to initiate mediation by a third party. The mediation would look to settle the war on a general framework that echoed the Treaty of Versailles: Japan might have to give up her overseas conquests and experience disarmament for a time, but the old order in Japan would remain in charge. Certainly, there would be no occupation and no internal reform (Butow 1954, pp. 112–115; Bix 1995, p. 212; Frank 1999, pp. 96–98).

At the emperor’s bidding, Japan initiated tentative steps to secure the Soviet Union as a mediator to procure a negotiated end to the war – but not to surrender. The feeble effort went nowhere. The “Big Six” never agreed on what terms might be offered to the Soviet Union to act as mediator, much less on terms to end the war. Nor did the emperor intervene decisively to lay down terms for mediation or for ending the war.

This brings us to the role of “Magic,” the code name for the massive Allied code-breaking effort. The products of code breaking were delivered daily to senior leaders in two documents. One with the self-explanatory title of “The Magic Diplomatic

Summary,” the other called “The Magic Far East Summary” addressed military developments. It is important to understand that “Magic” not only shines light into what American policymakers knew, but it also provides a priceless source of authentic insight into Japanese diplomatic and military matters.

Because President Truman, Secretary of State James Byrnes and the members of the JCS were at the Potsdam Conference in Germany during crucial days of July 1945, one important historical question has been whether the “Magic Summaries” with their revealing evidence were actually seen by policymakers at the time. A report contained in the National Archives collections on radio intelligence discloses that a special detachment was established in 1944 to deliver the two summaries. The distribution list was identical for both the “Magic Diplomatic Summary” and “Magic Far East Summary” – in other words, any party receiving the one also received the other. Special messengers customarily personally delivered the daily edition of each summary from a locked pouch. At the same time, the messengers recovered the prior day’s edition. All but one file copy was destroyed (Department of the Navy, n.d., SRH-132)

During the Potsdam Conference, the summaries continued to be forwarded by courier from Washington. Communications logs reveal this normally took three days. But when evidence appeared of the emperor’s support for a diplomatic initiative to the Soviet Union, arrangements were made for prompt forwarding of radio intelligence for Truman through his chief of staff, Admiral William Leahy. Leahy got the accelerated intelligence via the dedicated secure radio links in place for such transmission to the JCS (Frank 1999, pp. 240–241, 413n).

The “Magic Diplomatic Summary” divulged a series of messages from Japanese envoys in Western Europe eager to present themselves to American representatives as “peace entrepreneurs.” But “Magic” demonstrated that not one of these individuals acted with official sanction. Some accounts have highlighted the exertions of these “peace entrepreneurs” as demonstrating Japan’s proximity to surrender, but the reality is that they were valueless as an indicator of the thinking of Japan’s leaders – and American leaders knew this from “Magic.” Another stream of messages from diplomats of neutral nations in Japan showed four messages suggesting Japan might be prepared to surrender, but these were overwhelmed by no less than thirteen that did not (Alperovitz 1995, pp. 29–30; Frank 1999, pp. 106–108, 240–241, 244).

The key evidence on just how close Japan was to peace prior to Hiroshima then and now is the exchange between Ambassador Naotake Sato in Moscow and Foreign Minister Togo in Tokyo on the only diplomatic initiative that carried official sanction. Sato’s dispatches read like a cross-examination on behalf of the American government. Sato ridiculed the notion that the Soviets would assist Japan by mediation. He challenged the bona fides of the whole effort, pointing out the official policy of Japan was the “Fight to the Finish” ratified at an Imperial Conference. Who then authorized his efforts? Togo’s evasive reply – he could not claim the super-secret probe represented the policy of more than the tiny inner elite – cited vague authorization from some “directing powers.” But Sato’s main theme was terms. In what remains as the most incisive rebuttal to later arguments about Japan’s proximity to surrender, Sato underscored that if Japan was serious about ending the war, she must present a set of terms. Without them, Sato warned it would be impossible even to arouse Soviet interest in mediation (Frank 1999, pp. 221–232, 235–238).

Togo could not provide terms for the fundamental reason that the men who controlled Japan could not agree on terms. Togo stated emphatically on July 17, 1945 that Japan “was not seeking the Russians’ mediation for anything like an unconditional surrender.” Sato then sent two messages that prompted the most significant exchange of the dialogue. He flatly told Togo that Japan’s best realistic hope was for unconditional surrender, modified to the extent of permitting the continuation of the imperial institution. The editors of the “Magic Diplomatic Summary” appreciated the supreme importance of this message and made it clear that this was the proposition to which Togo responded on July 21 – but that response was an emphatic rejection. Togo did not provide even a hint that a guarantee of the imperial institution would be a useful step toward securing Japan’s surrender. This evidence puts a stake through the heart of the argument that only a failure to provide guarantee of the imperial institution prevented a Japanese surrender before Hiroshima. Perhaps even more telling about this controversy is that this exchange has been in the public record since 1978 but has never been addressed by any of the critics.

But the futility of diplomacy was not the only information “Magic” revealed. Side-by-side with a relative freshet of diplomatic intercepts was a torrent of military intercepts. These intercepts carried enormous political implications because of the dominant role of Japan’s uniformed leaders in dictating national policy. The military intercepts, without exception, demonstrated that Japan was girding for an Armageddon battle. Worse yet, the intercepts revealed an appalling picture of the buildup on Kyushu exactly at the planned November landing sites for Operation Olympic. As one intelligence officer noted, instead of the original projection that the invaders would heavily outnumber the defenders, “Magic” now demonstrated the attackers would be going in at a ratio of one-to-one, which, as one intelligence officer phrased it, was “not the recipe for victory” (Frank 1999, pp. 197–213, 273–277).

Accompanying the release of the “Magic” intercepts was the revelation of their impact on top American officers. General Marshall sent a message to the senior army officer in the Pacific, General of the Armies Douglas MacArthur, on August 7, basically asking whether Olympic still appeared viable in light of the new intelligence. MacArthur replied that he did not believe the intelligence and that, therefore, the invasion plan was still valid. Admiral King seized upon this exchange to ask for the view of the senior naval officer in the Pacific, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz. But King well knew that since a private message in May, Nimitz had withdrawn support for the proposed invasion. Thus, the plan to attack Kyushu in November was under siege in what proved to be the final days of the war – not because it appeared unnecessary but because it appeared unthinkable to anyone who credited “Magic” (CINCPAC, n.d.).

In another important revelation about American military policy, a new targeting directive for the strategic bombing campaign was issued on August 11. It reoriented the attacks away from urban incendiary attacks that had struck 64 cities in Japan and placed priority on attacks on Japanese transportation, particularly the rail system. What was not appreciated by American planners, who merely attempted to replicate the lessons of the bombing campaign in Europe, was that a combination of demographics, food shortages, and the destruction of all other means of mass transportation translated into the fact that rail bombing promised to bring on mass famine in Japan.

An atomic bomb virtually destroyed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. In the early morning of August 9, the Soviet Union entered the war with a massive offensive in Manchuria pitting over 1.5 million Soviet troops against about 713,000 Japanese (Glantz 2003, pp. 40, 60). A few hours later, a second atomic bomb inflicted tremendous damage on Nagasaki. The issue of the number of immediate and latent deaths caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki forms its own controversy and is a highly politicized matter in Japan. A short discussion of the evidence and the arguments may be found in Frank's *Downfall* (1999, pp. 285–287) which concludes that the number is huge, but that the plausible range of deaths fell between 100,000 to 200,000. Recently, historian John Dower characterized fatality figures of 130,000 to 140,000 for Hiroshima and 75,000 for Nagasaki as the “most recent and generally accepted estimates.” This yields a range of 205,000 to 215,000. Dower notes figures as high as 390,000 have been presented, but like Frank, finds these speculative (Dower 2010, pp. 199, 500n). Basically, as Frank explains, figures over the low 200,000 range are of dubious providence as they depend upon using highly speculative population totals for Hiroshima and Nagasaki (for example, Hiroshima numbers vastly above the number of persons entitled to a rice ration) paired with obviously selective “survivor counts.”

It took 24 hours for Tokyo to learn of the damage to Hiroshima and the American announcement that it was caused by an atomic bomb. The reaction of Japan's uniformed leaders to the news demonstrates that far from being completely unmoved, they instantly erected not one, but two, lines of defense against the American claim. First, they argued that whatever struck Hiroshima, it was not an atomic bomb. Second, even if it was an atomic bomb, the difficulty of manufacturing fissionable material to power the weapon meant the US could not have that many bombs, or that the bombs would not be that powerful – and maybe international pressure would dissuade the US from further employment of such weapons. The reasoning about the weapons themselves was the fruit of Japan's own efforts to build an atomic bomb. These exertions provided no useable weapon but did instruct Japan's leaders in the difficulty of producing fissionable material. This revelation also demonstrates the futility of any single demonstration of an atomic weapon (Freedman and Dockrill 1994, p. 203).

The Big Six finally met for the first time to contemplate ending the war in the morning of August 9. According to Admiral Toyoda, the meeting started with what he characterized as a “bullish” attitude for continuing the war (Asada 1998, pp. 490–491). During the meeting came word of the Nagasaki bombing, news that struck at the arguments dismissing or downplaying the threat posed by the American atomic arsenal. By the end of the marathon session, the Big Six split. Two or possibly three members were prepared to accept unconditional surrender with the sole additional term (“one condition”) of a guarantee of the continuation of the imperial institution. Three, perhaps four members held out for “four conditions” for surrender: continuance of the imperial institution, Japanese self-disarmament, Japan to conduct “so-called” war crimes trails, and no occupation (Butow 1954). This meeting is customarily presented as ending in a three to three split. There is credible evidence that Navy Minister Yonai actually sided with the four conditions, not the one condition offer (Frank 1999).

When Prime Minister Suzuki met with Kido after this session, Suzuki presented the “four conditions” as the agreement of the Big Six. This was presumably because the

Big Six could only act on unanimous agreement, and the “four conditions” were the lowest common denominator of concord. Kido found the “four conditions” offer acceptable. Since Kido was the alter ego of the emperor, does this damn the emperor and Kido as firm allies of the most recalcitrant elements in the Big Six? Probably not, for the more compelling alternate explanation is that the emperor and Kido remained profoundly concerned about whether Japan’s armed forces would comply with the surrender (fears that events swiftly confirmed were well-grounded), and the “four conditions” offer carried the approval of the military members of the Big Six – above all War Minister Anami.

When word of the “four conditions” offer spread to the handful of other leaders within the inner elite, several immediately confronted Kido with the argument that the allies would treat such a response as tantamount to a refusal to surrender. Sometime in the afternoon of August 9, the emperor agreed (Frank 1999, 291 and notes). That night an Imperial Conference was conducted. Key military members insisted that the war not only must but could continue. The chief of the Imperial Army General Staff, General Umezu, whose opinion the emperor respected, insisted that Soviet intervention was unfavorable but did not invalidate *Ketsu Go*. After listening to extended debate, the emperor announced his support for the “one condition” offer.

But then the story took another twist exposed by the new history. As communicated to the United States and its allies, the Japan’s official message conditioned acceptance of the Potsdam declaration on “the understanding that the said declaration does not compromise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as Sovereign Ruler.” As American State Department officials immediately recognized, and later Japanese historians pointed out, this was not just a request for maintenance of a constitutional monarchy. The “prerogatives ... as Sovereign Ruler” language under Japanese law actually set as the pivotal Japanese condition for surrender that the allies agree to supremacy of the emperor not only over any Japanese government, *but over the commander of the occupation*. In other words, any proposed reforms would be subject to the emperor’s veto.

Despite the keen interest of American officials in deploying the emperor’s authority to secure the surrender of Japan’s armed forces, they had no intention of permitting the emperor to be the final arbiter of the occupation program. Accordingly, the response (named the Byrnes Note after Secretary of State James Byrnes) stated that “From the moment of surrender the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the supreme commander of the allied powers.” The note added that the ultimate form of Japan’s government would be “established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people” (Frank 1999, pp. 296, 301–302; Bix 2000, pp. 516–519; Hasegawa 2005, pp. 199–200, 343–344n).

While the Byrnes Note implied much, it did not, as sometimes charged, oblige the occupation authorities to retain Emperor Hirohito on the throne. The Potsdam Proclamation guaranteed that the Japanese people would ultimately choose their own form of government, a proviso that plainly allowed for the continuation of the imperial institution if this is what the Japanese people chose. The Byrnes Note only clarified that the emperor as well as Japanese government would be subordinate to the supreme allied commander of the occupation. Not only does the plain language of these two key documents not support the theory that the United States and its allies promised to retain Hirohito on the throne to secure the Japanese surrender, as John

Dower has pointed out, early on in the occupation the US made it clear to Japanese officials that the surrender had been unconditional and “by initially keeping deliberately vague the future status of both the imperial institution and Emperor Hirohito personally, they were able to more effectively pressure the Japanese elites into actively cooperating with basic initial reform edicts” (Dower 1996, n. 34). Dower further elaborated that there was never any serious consideration of deposing Hirohito much less trying him as a war criminal. This was not, however, because of any legal guarantees, but because of the theory and policy developed before the surrender at MacArthur’s headquarters that the emperor could be used as a “wedge” between the “militarists” and the “people” to obtain surrender and then to implement occupation reforms (Dower 1999, pp. 277–301).

It took a second Imperial Conference and second intervention of the emperor on August 14 to accept the Byrnes Note. On August 15, 1945, the Emperor broadcast by radio his decision to the Japanese people and the world (Butow 1954, pp. 207–208, 248; Frank 1999, pp. 314–315, 320; Hasegawa 2005, pp. 238–240). But the war had not ended. Soviet combat operations continued in Manchuria. Moreover, the Soviets unleashed an amphibious assault on the Kuril Islands – which thanks to other new revelations we now know was in preparation for a landing by Soviet forces on Hokkaido, the northernmost home island. Only fierce Japanese resistance on Sakhalin Island and President Truman’s insistence on meticulous adherence to prior agreements saved Hokkaido from Soviet invasion and probable occupation. Had this happened, almost certainly the Soviets would have obtained some occupation zone in a divided Japan (Frank 1999, pp. 322–324; Glantz 2003, pp. 280–307; Hasegawa 2005, pp. 271–285).

Soviet intervention leads to an important factual and moral issue which the critics of the use of atomic weapons habitually treat with silent. Sources stand divided on how many Japanese nationals fell into Soviet hands and how many of these perished. They agree, however, that both numbers are very massive. When Dower first addressed the issue, he reported Japanese government figures of 1.3 million Japanese nationals falling into Soviet hands, with 374,041 (including approximately 60,000 civilians) unaccounted for after Soviet repatriation of the others (Dower 1986, pp. 298–299, 363n). Nimmo calculated that 2.7 million Japanese entered Soviet captivity and ultimately 347,000 died or were never accounted for (Nimmo 1998, pp. 115–117). Takamae (2002) stated that the Soviets captured 1.7 million Japanese, of whom no ultimate accounting could be provided for some 300,000 to 500,000 (these figures do not include combat deaths). In his more recent work, Dower provides a range of 1.6 to 1.7 million Japanese falling into Soviet custody, and implies number of dead or unaccounted for totaled 400,000. Included in this figure were 179,000 civilians and 66,000 military personnel who died in the first winter after the war in Manchuria (Dower 1999, pp. 50–51).

What these studies point to is a conclusion absent from the customary debates: Soviet intervention probably killed more Japanese, including more noncombatants, than the atomic bombs. Further, as noted it would have been virtually impossible to deny the Soviets an occupation zone if they seized part of Hokkaido. Based on what happened on the Asian continent, any Soviet occupation would have produced its own further massive death toll. The failure to acknowledge these facts, of course, creates the false impression that Soviet intervention cost only the lives of military personnel whereas atomic weapons also killed large numbers of noncombatants.

Another vital element of this history customarily evaded by critics of the use of atomic weapons is that, affirming the fears in both Tokyo and Washington, the compliance of Japan's armed forces with the surrender was far from automatic. Much attention has been paid to a failed military *coup d'état* mounted by mid-grade officers on the night of August 14–15 in Tokyo. Far more significant were two other events. Two of the three major overseas commands of the Imperial Army, one in China and the other Southeast Asia, announced they would not comply with the surrender order. Between them, they controlled a quarter to a third of all Japanese military personnel. Then the Japanese defenders in the Kurils – who defied a direct order from the emperor to halt – came very close to crushing the initial Soviet landing. On August 19, there was near panic in Tokyo over the fear that news of such a “victory” in the Kurils would cause an unraveling of compliance with the surrender. It was touch and go for at least five days after August 15 before it became clear that Japan's armed forces would all surrender (Frank 1999, pp. 326–329; Hasegawa 2005, pp. 271–285).

As the discussion of the number of Japanese dying in Soviet captivity or potentially dying in a Soviet occupation zone indicates, the moral dimensions of the end of the Pacific War cannot be overlooked – but they harbor far more complexity than usually recognized. The moral controversy habitually pivots around deaths from atomic bombs versus potential lives lost in an invasion and the conventional air attacks. But a meaningful debate must significantly expand these horizons.

The strategy supported vocally by the US Navy (and quietly by many Army Air Force officers) of bombardment and blockade is rarely addressed outside the context of the incendiary raids on Japanese cities. In reality, that strategy ultimately aimed to compel the surrender of Japan by killing or threatening to kill Japanese by the millions through starvation. Thus, this strategy represented the most draconian American means of ending the war – not the much more attenuated capabilities of existing atomic weaponry. On August 11, the new targeting directive to the B-29 commands aimed to shift priorities from incendiary attacks to bombing Japan's internal communication system. Given the matrix of Japan's desperate food shortage and the supreme importance of the rail system for moving food from surplus to deficit areas, the rail-bombing scheme threatened to plunge Japan into true famine that may have compelled surrender, but at a cost of many hundred thousands or millions of lives.

Another neglected topic is the deliberate choice of Japan's leadership in the spring of 1945 to obliterate the distinction between combatants and noncombatants with the creation of the mass militia of male and female adults. That ruling elite also adopted *Ketsu Go* knowing that even if it succeeded, the inevitable consequences included mass deaths from starvation in 1945–1946.

Yet another conspicuous lacuna in the discussions of the moral questions surrounding the end of the war arises from the failure to provide a cost accounting for Japanese and other Asian civilians due to Soviet intervention. The numbers of Japanese civilian deaths in Soviet hands has been noted. But abstaining from use of atomic weapons and permitting the Soviets to achieve their goals means almost certainly that all of Korea would have fallen into the Soviet orbit, and subsequently the regime of Kim Il Sung and his heirs. That presumably means no Korean War, but at the cost of a dire fate for the Korean people. The Soviets also would have presumably landed on Hokkaido and undoubtedly would have been entitled to impose a Stalinist apparatus on Japanese occupation zone, sharply boosting the Japanese death toll.

Finally, such exercises customarily omit any consideration for the fact that the number of Asians dying each day under Japanese occupation totaled from over three thousand to perhaps six thousand or more in China alone. Total monthly deaths for those trapped under Japanese domination, overwhelmingly Asian non-combatants, certainly reached 100,000, and may have approached 200,000. In *Imperial Japan's Defeat*, Werner Gruhl (2007) calculates total Allied dead per week in 1945 was 113,000 (Frank 1999, pp. 162–163; Gruhl 2007, pp. 19, 62, 205). Thus, speculations that the war could have been ended without atomic weapons in a period of weeks or months after mid-August 1945 all involve ignoring the reality that this requires accepting larger numbers of deaths among actual noncombatants.

In sum, the “moral” universe reflected in a vast swath of the critical literature on the end of the Pacific War reflects not a comprehensive scrutiny of all relevant considerations, but effectively erects a hierarchy of victimhood in which the sole segment of humanity entitled to absolute immunity from harm comprises a group of combatants and noncombatants in two cities of the aggressor nation. The death and suffering of actual noncombatants in the victim nations – not to mention Japanese noncombatants falling into Soviet hands or Japanese adults converted into combatants or offered up as famine victims by the callousness of Japanese leaders – are customarily not even mentioned.

The conventional dispute over the causes of the Japanese surrender pits the atomic bombs against Soviet entry, but there was more at play than just these two events. After the war, preserving Hirohito’s seat on the throne animated a Japanese effort to conceal or downplay two other factors. The first was that the emperor, Kido, and others feared something more than atomic bombs or Soviet intervention. On August 13, Navy Minister Yonai labeled the bombs and Soviet intervention as “gifts from the gods” because, he disclosed, “this way we don’t have to say that we have quit the war because of domestic circumstances.” Yonai’s comment explains a telling but veiled admission by the emperor. In both the imperial rescripts (proclamations) issued by Emperor Hirohito, the famous one of August 15 broadcast by radio to the whole nation, and the less well known one to the armed forces on August 17, he alludes to the “domestic” situation. These are all references back to the issue raised by Kido in June: the deteriorating situation brought on by blockade and bombing could trigger an internal revolt that would topple not only Hirohito from his throne, but also destroy the whole imperial institution.

The second issue the Japanese were eager to conceal was the uncertain compliance of the armed forces with the surrender. Keeping Hirohito on the throne after the war required that any question be stilled about the possibility of an internal revolt by disgruntled subjects, or that the armed forces might ignore his orders. It was only later disclosures from “Magic” and long concealed Japanese sources that dragged these factors into full light.

The next important point to understand is that the conventional view that ending the war required only one decision in Tokyo reflects a myopic vision that confuses a near miraculous deliverance as an inevitable outcome. Ending the war, or more precisely ending all *combat*, really required two steps: someone with legitimate authority had to make the political decision that Japan would surrender and then Japan’s armed forces had to comply with that decision. Finally, the surest guide to analyzing what

ended the war is to look at the contemporary evidence, not recollections withered by time or distorted by postwar agendas.

The fact is that the legal government of Japan, the Suzuki cabinet, of its own accord never agreed to surrender on acceptable terms. The legitimate authority that produced the surrender of Japan was the emperor. Looking at his contemporary statements, he repeatedly underscored three points. The first of these is concern over the “domestic situation.” He also explicitly cited two military factors: inadequate preparation to resist the expected American invasion and the vast destructiveness of atomic and conventional air attacks. In making the most important decision of his life in the early morning of August 10 that Japan should surrender, there is no evidence whatsoever that he mentioned Soviet intervention – not just the official records which might well be deemed suspect as subject to manipulation, but nowhere in the myriad secondary and tertiary sources such as diaries of lesser officials where such admissions (like Yonai’s comments to his aide on August 13) would have been documented if they existed. In the imperial rescript broadcast on August 15, he referred to atomic bombs, but made no reference to Soviet intervention.

The August 17 imperial rescript to the armed forces is silent on atomic weapons, but does refer to Soviet entry into the war. Does this signify that Soviet entry, not atomic bombs, was the real reason for surrender? The answer rests in understanding that ending the war required two steps. At the same time the emperor ordered the rescript of August 15 prepared, he also ordered drafting of the rescript to the armed forces that was issued on August 17 – a powerful piece of evidence on his doubts about compliance. Toshi Hasegawa’s *Racing the Enemy* (2005) makes the important point that both rescripts were prepared at the same time, but the rescript to the armed forces was not issued for several days (Hasegawa 2005, pp. 240, 250). As the diary of the vice chief of staff of the Imperial Army indicates, both he and other top officers doubted compliance with a surrender order even from the emperor. Events, as we have seen, soon validated their doubts. Once the circumstance and timing of the August 17 rescript is understood, the reason for highlighting Soviet intervention over the atomic bombs is obvious: Soviet intervention directly threatened and was understandable to recalcitrant overseas commanders; atomic bombs were not understood and posed no similar threat to overseas commands.

In this analysis, the primacy of place goes to the atomic bombs over Soviet intervention. They moved the emperor and without his intervention, the surrender process would have never started. But Soviet intervention was also important. It is the factor that weighs heavily on enforcing compliance with the surrender and without such compliance the fighting would not have halted. Both of these factors, however, worked jointly with the cumulative effects of the blockade and bombardment strategy that undermined the confidence of key leaders about the preservation of the imperial institution in the face of revolt from within.

What then beckons as topics for further exploration? One important issue is exactly how complacent Japanese uniformed and civilian leaders were over the prospect of massive civilian deaths from starvation in 1946, even if *Ketsu Go* achieved its goal of a negotiated peace. This is closely connected to the real role of the “domestic situation” as a key catalyst pushing Emperor Hirohito, Kido, Yonai, and other leaders to ending the war in August 1945. Even with only the evidence now available, it seems reasonable to foresee future discussions of these events moving beyond a rigidly confined

controversy over the primacy of atomic weapons or Soviet intervention in obtaining the surrender of Japan and her armed forces. A search of the archives of the former Soviet Union may yield information on the numbers and fate of the hundreds of thousands of Japanese who remain missing in Soviet captivity in 1945. Finally, further exploration of the multiple implications for other Asian peoples of the continuation of the war for weeks or months beyond August 1945 would add vital context to what promises to be a long enduring controversy.

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