

Had events turned out differently, Kyushu might be linked with Hiroshima and Nagasaki in modern memory as sites of mass nuclear death. For, had the war continued into the November invasion, some American leaders planned to use atomic weapons as tactical devices, directed against enemy soldiers, in that attack. General Marshall, earlier appalled by the prospect of killing non-combatants with nuclear weapons, was a strong supporter of this tactical-nuclear strategy. . . .

Ultimately, to understand, to rue, and even to deplore the use of the A-bomb are separable, and not necessarily linked, judgments. To fail to understand the reasons for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is regrettable. To judge those actions by a set of ethical standards usually abandoned in World War II and sometimes revived in later years is appropriate. But to ascribe those moral standards to the leaders and citizens of the United States, or the other major powers, during World War II is to distort the history of that terrible war and to misinterpret the important decisions made in it.



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See also Chapters 4, 5, and 12.

C H A P T E R

12

History and Memory: The Legacy of World War II



World War II has had, and continues to have, an enormous impact on virtually all facets of American life. It has shaped the thoughts and actions of Americans since 1945 in much the same way the Civil War shaped American thoughts and actions for decades after 1865. This concluding chapter explores some of the areas and ways in which it has done so.

At least as important as the war itself in the shaping of American thoughts and values are the memories of the war that Americans came to hold in the years after 1945. As many of the authors in this chapter note, those memories differed substantially from what had actually occurred during the war, and with the belief system that had existed at that time. Indeed, issues that appear historically important about the war today differ substantially from issues considered important while the war was in progress. As with other major events in history, World War II has been consistently reinterpreted in light of changing postwar concerns. But contemporary Americans often disagree with each other on these reinterpretations. This has resulted in numerous conflicts over the war's meaning and "lessons." Changing and conflicting memories of the war have thus resulted in changing and conflicting meanings, making memory itself an important subject for historical study.

Below you will find excerpts from six recent historical works that explore in different ways questions of memory and meaning regarding World War II. Questions emerging from these essays are both numerous and extremely relevant to your lives today. How, for example, do your values differ from the values of the World War II era? How have these differences affected memories of World War II and the appropriate historical "lessons" of that conflict? How have historical events since 1945 affected such values, memories, and lessons? Are any of these lessons valid, or are they all distortions of the past? What, in other words, can history "teach" us, if anything? How exactly does the present affect memories of the past, and what is the proper relationship between the two? How does all of this relate to conflicting interpretations of World War II events and issues? In more general terms, what is the nature of historical inquiry and historical memory, what is the importance of each in your lives today, and what insights do these essays provide in helping you to answer these questions?

the heavy bombing of Japanese cities—the terror-bombing and the destruction of military and industrial installations—and the strangling naval blockade, including mining operations. . . .

[But these] did not *promise* that the November 1945 invasion would be unnecessary, or that bombing alone would make the decisive difference. For all understood that this bombing would occur *within* the context of the ongoing blockade, and that such linked devastation, while adding to the substance of Japan's defeat, did not automatically translate into Japan's surrender. Better than many later analysts, the Joint Chiefs well understood the gap between the conditions for defeat and the production of an actual surrender, because the chiefs knew that enemy leaders did not automatically surrender when defeat was both inevitable and possibly near.

If heavy bombing could contribute to surrender before the planned Kyushu invasion, however, and Arnold and the other Joint Chiefs hoped in mid-July that it would, they were neither assuming nor suggesting that they thought that the A-bomb was unnecessary. For Arnold, as for the other military chiefs before and even shortly after Hiroshima, heavy bombing was not a substitute—but a supplement—to the A-bomb. And the A-bomb was, in turn, for them, a supplement to heavy bombing. In their pre-Hiroshima thinking, conventional heavy bombing may even have seemed a more powerful contributor to ultimate victory than the A-bomb. . . .

Amid the strangling naval blockade, and without the A-bomb, perhaps the heavy bombing of Japanese cities in August, September, and October 1945 would have forced Japan to surrender before November. . . .

But the question remains, to be asked even after nearly a half-century, whether Japan's military leaders would have been willing to surrender, or whether they would have insisted on fighting at Kyushu and perhaps at Honshu, too? The movement from recognizing defeat to offering surrender can be jagged, and the process can be filled with self-deception, the quest for glory, and the faith in hope. Surrender, for many leaders, can be the most devastating failure—an event to be resisted at great cost to self and others. . . .

Had American leaders been willing to risk prolonging the war, there is no question that a naval blockade, as King later wrote, "would in the *course of time*, have starved the Japanese into submission through lack of oil, rice, medicine, and other materials. . . .

The siege strategy (without the A-bomb) might have produced the desired Japanese surrender by 1 November. The probabilities are not very high (maybe 25–30 percent) because the crucial problems, in this counterfactual history, are whether Japan's peace forces would have pushed ardently for surrender, whether the emperor would have intervened if his government had been divided, whether the militarists would have yielded to his sense of necessity, whether the government would have accepted defeat and moved to surrender, and whether Japanese military leaders in the field would have abided by the Tokyo government's order. That whole process would have involved many contingencies and have required the Japanese government to deal directly with the United States.

—*Single and Multiple Alternatives*. There is good reason to have serious doubts that any single "alternative"—trying a non-combat demonstration, guaranteeing the emperor, pursuing peace feelers, awaiting Soviet entry, or continuing heavy

conventional bombing and the blockade—would *alone* have produced surrender before November without the use of the A-bomb. But it does seem very likely, though certainly not definite, that a synergistic combination of guaranteeing the emperor, awaiting Soviet entry, and continuing the siege strategy would have ended the war in time to avoid the November invasion. And quite possibly, in the absence of a guarantee of the emperor, the impact of Soviet entry amid the strangling blockade and the heavy bombing of cities could have accomplished that goal without dropping the atomic bomb.

There was, then, more probably than not, a missed opportunity to end the war without the A-bomb and without the November invasion. And it is virtually definite, had the Kyushu invasion occurred with these other strategies, and without the A-bomb, that Japan would have surrendered well before the March 1946 invasion. Such conclusions, though emerging from the uneasy realm of counterfactual history, do place in question the contention that the atomic bomb was necessary. These conclusions challenge that concept of "necessity" and require that its meanings be carefully spelled out, that the implied costs be carefully expressed and analyzed, and that scholars and laypeople, in discussing these issues, carefully distinguish between what now seems known, what was known or believed before Hiroshima, and whether the pre-Hiroshima processes of decision making and analysis were adequate, on ethical and international-political grounds, to the important actions being taken.

To dwell upon the process of decision making alone would be unduly mechanistic, but it is certainly important to recognize that the A-bomb decision, contrary to some contentions, was not "carefully considered" and that the movement toward the November invasion, despite Truman's desires, was not fully and critically examined in his presence. He never sought "carefully" to consider the use of the A-bomb, nor did he feel any need to hold a meeting with advisers on whether it should be used, because he and they all assumed that it would be used. The process that he followed implemented that assumption. The question of the invasion was far more troubling to him. Had Japan not surrendered by the summer or early autumn, probably Truman would have returned to another session with his military advisers to discuss the necessity for the November invasion. At such a meeting, perhaps they would have served him better than they did in mid-June, at the special White House session, where they smoothed over earlier differences and thus presented the siege strategy with the Kyushu invasion of November as the only reasonable approach. . . .

World War II was a terribly bloody war. It killed many millions and maimed many more. It helped transform morality. It ushered in the atomic age. It dramatized the dark side of human capacity and prompted some to redefine "human nature." In America, the war—with its barbarism—was a helpful midwife in the shift in liberal sensibility from the optimistic rationality of John Dewey to the emphasis on the pessimistic irrationality of Reinhold Niebuhr. For some, the names of Buchenwald, Dachau, and Auschwitz would be joined, perhaps uneasily, to Dresden, Hamburg, and Tokyo, and occasionally also to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They were not moral equivalents, because intentional genocide and intentional mass killing of some non-combatants were not morally identical, but all were powerful testimonials to the fact of massive deaths organized by nation-states, implemented by modern warriors, and endorsed by their civilian populations.

and then in the Franck Committee Report of 11 June, leading to its rejection by the Scientific Advisory Panel on 16 June and by the Interim Committee on 21 June. Each time, this proposal was speedily disposed of because, variously, the bomb might not work, a dud might embolden the Japanese, or Allied POWs might be moved into the demonstration area and be killed by the bomb. Because each of these risks was deeply troubling, and because there was *no strong desire* (and usually no desire) to avoid the combat use of the bomb, the alternative of a non-combat demonstration was easily rejected. . . .

In retrospect, given what we now know of the strong opposition among the "militarists" in the Japanese government even after two atomic bombings and Soviet entry, it is difficult to believe that a non-combat demonstration, even if preceded by a warning, would have produced a surrender before 1 November 1945 and the likely invasion of Kyushu. At best, the probabilities seem slight—maybe 5 or 10 percent. And the likelihood is even skimpier of a warning, without such a demonstration, being successful.

Alternative II: Modification of Unconditional Surrender and Guarantee of the Emperor. Some American leaders, most notably Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew and Secretary of War Stimson, pleaded for this strategy—not as an alternative to the A-bomb, but rather as a way, they hoped, of avoiding the invasion. Grew did not even know of the bomb, and Stimson hoped that a guarantee of the emperor, *together* with the A-bomb and heavy conventional bombing, as well as the blockade, might produce a surrender before 1 November. Grew and Stimson lost on the guarantee because Truman and James F. Byrnes, the new secretary of state, feared a political backlash in America, where Hirohito was likened to Hitler and judged a war criminal, and because Truman and Byrnes feared that such modified surrender terms might also embolden the Japanese to fight on for better terms.

Some analysts have argued that maintenance of the imperial system was the only issue blocking a Japanese surrender in late July or early August (before the A-bomb), and that American leaders knew this or should have known it. Such an interpretation of the Japanese position is ill-founded. The Japanese government was badly split both on how and whether to end the war, and even the Japanese "peace" forces were unsure, unsteady, and uncertain. . . .

Given the power of the militarists and their desire, it is *quite unlikely*—but not impossible—that an American guarantee of the imperial system would have produced a Japanese surrender before 1 November on terms acceptable to the United States. Certainly, given American plans for the political reconstruction of Japan and the destruction of Japanese militarism, postwar occupation was essential—even at the price of a prolonged war. Very probably, American concessions on all *four* conditions (the emperor, postwar occupation, self-disarmament, and war trials) could have produced a speedy surrender. But that would not have been the victory that American leaders, as well as much of the public, desired. War is fought for political purposes, and World War II, as historians have come to understand, certainly had its politics, influenced by a desire to shape the postwar world.

Alternative III: Pursuit of Japanese Peace Feelers. During the summer, Japanese middle-level diplomats and military attachés in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe approached intermediaries and American officials to try to move toward a surrender. . . .

. . . These peace feelers were, unfortunately, usually directed by Japanese officials through non-American intermediaries, and there was no evidence that these Japanese were acting on authority from their government. In fact, they were not. At best, they had loose approval from some peace forces within the sharply divided Japanese government, but the "Magic" intercepts (America's decoding of top-secret Japanese messages) revealed that the government in Tokyo could not agree on specific terms and that the militarists in the government wanted far more than a guarantee of the emperor. . . .

Had the A-bomb not been dropped and had the informal discussions ("back channels") in Switzerland continued for a few more months, while America pummeled Japan from the air and tightened its naval strangulation, perhaps a surrender with a guarantee of the emperor could have been secured before November. But that would have required Japan's powerful militarists to give up their hope for one more battle and sharply cut back their demands for a peace settlement. There is little evidence, only slim hope, that the militarists would have shown such tractability and so redefined honor and necessity unless other events, very painful events, intervened to help, or propel, them to accede to what Emperor Hirohito on 10 August justified as a surrender "to save the nation from destruction."

Alternative IV: Awaiting Soviet Entry into the War. No top American leader (Truman, Marshall, Byrnes, Stimson, Leahy, Forrestal, King, or Arnold) generally saw Soviet entry into the war as likely to be decisive *without* the A-bomb, before the scheduled invasion. Some analysts have cited—incorrectly, I think—two sources in order to reach a contrary conclusion: that Soviet entry was foreseen as likely to be decisive *without* the bomb. . . .

In retrospect, we can conclude that Soviet entry on 15 August (without the A-bomb) might well (maybe 20–30 percent probability) have produced a surrender before 1 November. But let me stress that this is a conclusion based on what we now know, not on what American leaders believed at the time. Had they closely, empathetically, and imaginatively read the intercepted and decoded Sato-Togo cables, perhaps American leaders might have anticipated the profound psychological shock that Soviet entry into the war produced among Japanese leaders, many of whom were hoping until that fateful day of 8 August 1945 that the Soviets might be entreated to remain outside the Pacific war. To distinguish psychological shock from military significance required subtlety and perhaps the willingness to speculate about the uneasiness and vulnerability of the enemy. No American leader—including Stimson, who had argued for a guarantee of the emperor—had the inclination, and perhaps the capacity, in the last weeks of July and the early days of August to engage in such analysis.

In retrospect, we can conclude that American leaders' unwillingness to delay the bomb's use and await Soviet entry, and then, if necessary, to delay the A-bombing for a longer period, may well have been a "missed opportunity." But such a possibility was not adequately understood in late July or early August. And delaying the A-bomb would have seemed a very risky, and unnecessary, gamble—far too risky for men not seeking to avoid its use. . . .

Alternative V: Bombing and Blockade—The Strategy of Siege Without the Atomic Bomb. Probably the most likely way of achieving a Japanese surrender before November 1945 (without the A-bomb) was by continuing the siege strategy of

this framework, the motive of intimidating the Soviet Union is usually cited as primary, though sometimes analysts define it as secondary but essential, and occasionally historians also stress bureaucratic interests as playing a controlling role in the decision to drop the A-bomb on Japan. By implication, and often by assertion, the revisionists are quite sure that the war against Japan could have been ended without the bomb, that ulterior motives blocked other approaches, and that the use of the bomb was clearly immoral.

Between these two schools, a third has emerged, employing parts of the revisionist and orthodox analyses to conclude in a new synthesis: that the A-bomb was conceived as a legitimate weapon to be used against the enemy; that this assumption under President Franklin D. Roosevelt went largely unexamined and unchallenged, that Truman comfortably inherited this assumption, and that it also fit his inclinations and desires; and that the combat use of the bomb on Japan even came to seem both necessary and desirable. For President Harry S. Truman, the bomb could help end the war on American terms, possibly avoid the dreaded invasions, punish the Japanese for Pearl Harbor and their mistreatment of POWs, fulfill bureaucratic needs, conform to the desires of the American people, and also intimidate the Soviets, perhaps making them tractable in Eastern Europe.

According to this formulation, the atomic bomb might well have been used against Japan on the same days, in the same ways, even if the Bolshevik Revolution had never occurred and the Soviet Union had not existed. But the prospect of intimidating the Soviet Union added another reason, a kind of bonus, or what some would call over-determination. In turn, the prospects of this bonus may have blocked some policymakers from reconsidering in July or early August the use of the atomic bomb; but there is no reason to conclude that such a reconsideration—had it occurred—would have produced a different policy. In short, the combat use of the A-bomb was, unfortunately, virtually inevitable. Truman's commitment to its use was, basically, the implementation of the assumption that he had inherited. For President Truman and his top advisers in 1945, the use of the atomic bomb was never a question. For them, the important question was how militarily to produce Japan's surrender, and sometimes what kind of surrender was likely. All had come by mid-June 1945, if not somewhat earlier, to endorse the military strategy of invading Kyushu in early November 1945. On 18 June 1945, urged by his united military advisers, Truman had approved full planning for this invasion . . .

In 1945, American leaders were not seeking to avoid the use of the A-bomb. Its use did not create ethical or political problems for them. Thus, they easily rejected or never considered most of the so-called alternatives to the bomb: 1) a non-combat demonstration as a dramatic warning; 2) modification of the unconditional-surrender demand and an explicit guarantee of the imperial system; 3) pursuit of Japan's peace feelers; 4) a delay of the A-bomb until well after Soviet entry into the war; and 5) reliance (without the A-bomb) on heavy conventional bombing and a naval blockade. American leaders felt no incentive to pursue these strategies as *alternatives to dropping the bomb on Japan*.

Even by framing a post-Hiroshima analysis in terms of *alternatives* to the use of the A-bomb, there is some risk of distorting history by seeming—though not intending—to imply that American leaders before Hiroshima considered these various approaches, with the single exception of a non-combat demonstration, as alternatives

to the bomb. They did not. In examining these so-called alternatives, post-Hiroshima analysts can conclude that these strategies, with various probabilities, *might* have served as alternatives to the bomb by producing a surrender before November 1945. But that is the view from a *post*, not *pre*, Hiroshima perspective. In the pre-Hiroshima months, when and if these strategies were considered, and delaying use of the bomb went unconsidered, they were not examined (with the exception of the non-combat demonstration) in terms of avoiding the use of the bomb but sometimes assessed within the context of *avoiding the invasion*. Even the siege strategy of bombing and blockade, though often linked to the November invasion, raised for policymakers the hope that it might compel a Japanese surrender before the November invasion. Put bluntly, for American leaders, avoiding the dread invasion, even if "only" twenty-five thousand Americans might die in the attack, was a major concern. Avoiding the use of the bomb was never a real concern for policymakers.

After the fact, however, avoiding the use of that weapon is properly an analytical theme for historians who seek to understand, explain, and assess the use of the A-bomb in August 1945. In conducting that historical study, they must be careful not to conflate their morality, that the bomb was a terrible weapon to be avoided, with the beliefs of American leaders before Hiroshima. Such a conflation, though tempting to some analysts, gravely misunderstands Truman and his associates in the pre-Hiroshima world. Such a conflation greatly distorts the past and makes understanding the use of the bomb very difficult, because it leads analysts to search for some hidden ulterior motive that compelled policymakers to overcome their scruples to use the bomb. Policymakers did not have such scruples—and there is no need to look for overwhelming hidden motives. Their primary motives were not hidden.

Only had American leaders viewed the bomb as profoundly immoral, or (like the Franck Committee) had they feared the postwar consequences of the bomb's combat use, might they have sought ways not to use it. They did not regard it as profoundly immoral, they were largely inured to the mass killing of the enemy, and they also looked forward to the A-bomb's international-political benefits—intimidating the Soviets. American leaders also knew that they might risk a great outcry at home if they did not use the bomb. How could they have justified spending \$2 billion on the Manhattan Project, and even diverting scarce wartime resources to that project, and then not using the A-bomb against a hated enemy—especially if the war continued past 1 November 1945 and thousands of Americans died in the invasion? Such lurking domestic-political reasons easily blended into very powerful patriotic motives and easily found additional support in personal and bureaucratic reasons for those American leaders such as Stimson and Marshall, as well as the new president, all of whom bore particular responsibility for the A-bomb project.

Despite these general explanations, there is still need to look closely at *each* of these so-called alternatives and ask two questions: Why were they not pursued *instead* of the bomb? And what might have happened if *one or more* had instead been pursued? Answers to the first question are strictly historical; but answers to the second (what might have happened if?), though greatly influenced by evidence, must necessarily remain somewhat speculative. They rest, in part, on projections of trends, actors' behavior, and events into a future that did not occur.

Alternative 1: Non-combat Demonstration. This alternative was really only raised on two sets of occasions—at the 31 May 1945 Interim Committee lunch

The only analyst to consider the "no warning" position in depth is Lawrence Freedman of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. In a 1978 article, "The Strategy of Hiroshima," he concludes: "As more thought was given to the most effective use of the bomb, the strategy evolved from a simple one based on maximizing the impact of the bomb's destructive power to one aimed at maximizing its shock value. To achieve this it became necessary to distinguish the use of this new weapon from conventional strategic bombing." . . .

Robert Oppenheimer sensed the true potentialities of the new bomb. It was not just an extension of LeMay's conventional bombing campaign; it was something new under the sun. Lawrence Freedman observes, "It was on the basis of this spectacular quality that those considering the use of the bomb began to move away from the previous, implicit, strategy of cumulative pressure to one of maximum shock." Maximum shock demanded maximum surprise; a specific warning would have eliminated this factor.

It was precisely the shock of the bombs and the assumption that more were coming that brought about Japan's surrender *at that time*. The emperor, by mid-June, agreed with the peace party that the time to give up had arrived. He could not, however, despite his godlike stature, simply impose his will on a military machine determined to fight a decisive battle of the homeland, and capable of governing by assassination if thwarted. Kido, Suzuki, Togo could have been assassinated and the emperor taken into protective custody in order to keep fighting.

The shock of the atom gave the emperor the leverage he needed to compel compliance with his decision. . . .

Anami and others made convincing arguments that the United States could not have more bombs. Nagasaki, when it came so soon after, was equally a shock. These shocks were fundamental to ending the stalemate in the cabinet and the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, and needed to convince Anami, Toyoda, and Umezu not to join Hatanaka, Iida, and the other insurgents who assassinated the commander of the Palace Guard and attempted to reverse the emperor's decision. . . .

The point at issue here is not what *defeated* Japan; naval, army, and air forces can all claim much credit. Nor is it *when* Japan realized it was defeated; this happened at various times, some admitting defeat after the loss of Saipan, others after MacArthur retook the Philippines, or after Iwo Jima or Okinawa. What is at issue is the trigger that motivated the emperor to surrender and emasculated military opposition. No revisionist historian even begins to come to grips with the best evidence here. . . .

Henry Stimson and the Interim Committee did not perceive the true fulcrum of Japanese decision making in this crisis; the effect of bombs on the Japanese *people* was largely irrelevant. The people were kept in the dark about how destructive the atom had been. But the leaders knew, and they were shaken. Robert Butow captures the essence of the event:

The revulsion with which these *samurai*-inspired men viewed defeat and surrender often made them blind to all other considerations. Their thinking processes were befuddled by the emphasis they placed upon the ability of the spirit to triumph miraculously over the power of material force. These men, who had once been the wardens of the prison in which they had confined the whole nation, had now joined the ranks of the inmates. The real significance of the explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet dash into Manchuria was that these events produced a shock great enough to crack the walls

of the prison. Even this shock did not result in an escape but it did force everyone, the guards and guarded alike, to face the full and glaring light of day—to acknowledge a fact which could no longer be denied. It was not that the military men had suddenly become reasonable . . . it was rather that they, like the machinery of government with which they had been tinkering, had momentarily been caught off balance.

In the furious controversy over surrender that shook the Japanese government in the first days of August 1945, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the decisive event. . . .

. . . Evidence that the emperor made his firm decision to recommend peace after the Hiroshima bombing and before the Nagasaki bombing has been available for decades. The sticking point during this interim was not the will of the emperor; it was the refusal of Anami and the military to give up their hopes for a decisive battle of the homeland, at which they would finally convince the United States to back off and negotiate.

No account of the deliberations in the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, or in the Japanese cabinet, on 9 August warrants the belief that absent Nagasaki, the emperor would have been able to prevail when he finally declared himself. *Japan's Longest Day* is quite clear: the Hiroshima bomb, the Soviet entry into the war, and the Nagasaki bomb were *together* insufficient to move the military. Only the Emperor's opinion, stated twice, ended the war. How can one believe any lesser trauma could have been effective? . . .

Everything we know about the death throes of the Japanese empire indicates that even with the modification of the unconditional surrender doctrine to allow continuation of the emperor, even with the devastation caused by conventional bombing and two atomic bombs, even with the feared entry of the Soviet Union, surrender hung by a thread. Twice the emperor had to direct his ministers to accept the Potsdam terms. When they finally gave in, obedience by the fanatical junior officers was not assured. . . .

Hiroshima was no Dresden. The Japanese, even more than the Germans, threatened to fight to the last death and take tens of thousands of Allied soldiers with them. Churchill was right on this matter, and the quotation Walzer uses from Churchill to show the latter's insensitivity instead goes precisely to the heart of the reason for using the atomic bombs: "To avert a vast, indefinite butchery . . . at the cost of a few explosions seemed, after all our toils and perils, a miracle of deliverance."

Averting a vast indefinite butchery even at the cost of several hundred thousand noncombatant casualties was worth it. The doctrine of noncombatant immunity needs contemporary rethinking. In previous times when soldiers were volunteers, in the business of soldiering for money, a distinction between them and ordinary folk had some moral force. In times when soldiers are mostly conscripts, when noncombatants are often as implicated in the war-fighting policies and economies of the state as those in uniform, it is not self-evident why the lives of conscripts should be valued less than their fellow-citizens. In the case at issue here, Japanese citizens were not abject (and hence innocent) victims of a militaristic regime. . . .

How *do* justice and revenge differ? Is it not true that the people and factories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the rest of Japan, armed Tojo's butchers and sent them forth on their campaigns of pillage, rape, and murder? . . .

... [H]ad Hiroshima not become a shrine to the peaceminded, the anguish of Japan's victims might be more on our consciences.

And it is not just their anguish; it is their sheer numbers. Only after several years of study did I realize that, for some reason, I could find no one who had put together comprehensive figures showing the extent of Japanese-caused *deaths*. Statistics of the numbers who died at Hitler's hands are in every account of his crimes. The same for victims of Stalin. Deaths during World War II's battles in the European-African theaters are readily available. Why is there no similar compilation for deaths caused by the Japanese? Perhaps that would be more difficult to compile than Hitler's statistics. Japan did conquer more different and far-flung territories and put Allied captives in 424 prison camps scattered over one-quarter of the globe.

Nevertheless, it is possible to put together an estimate of how many people perished at Japanese hands. John Dower gives death figures for nine countries in his book: a United Nations (UN) document covers four other countries. Problem cases are China, where estimates of deaths from 1931 to 1945 range from two to thirty million; the Burma-Siam railway, where Murakami Hyoe gives a low estimate of 32,000, the Associated Press lists 116,000; and the Dutch East Indies, where the UN lists three million for Java, one million for the other islands; but the probable error must be high. I use the lowest figure in all cases except China, where ten million is a consensus figure, and the Burma-Siam railway, where I use the figure of the Allied War Graves Registration Unit:

Deaths Attributable to the Japanese Empire, 1931-1945

| | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| China | 10,000,000 |
| Java (Dutch Indies) | 3,000,000 |
| Outer Islands | 1,000,000 |
| Philippines | 120,000 |
| India | 180,000 |
| Bengal famine | 1,500,000 |
| Korea | 70,000 |
| Burma-Siam railway | 82,500 |
| Indonesia, Europeans | 30,000 |
| Malaya | 100,000 |
| Vietnam | 1,000,000 |
| Australia | 30,000 |
| New Zealand | 10,000 |
| <u>United States</u> | <u>100,000</u> |
| Total | 17,222,500 |

The summary cannot do justice to the details. From the viewpoint of seeking justice, Pearl Harbor is no big deal; a mere 2,400 casualties. This pales before seventeen million. At least ten million of these occurred between 7 December 1941 and 30 August 1945. During these forty-five months, 200,000 to 300,000 persons died each month at Japanese hands. The last months were in many ways the worst; starvation and disease aggravated the usual beatings, beheadings, and battle deaths. It is plausible to hold that upwards of 250,000 people, mostly Asian but some

Westerners, would have died each month the Japanese Empire struggled in its death throes beyond July 1945. . . .

Overshadowing every other consideration, continuation of the Pacific War, had Truman not used atomic bombs in August, would have produced unmitigated evil. The extent of the evil would have depended on the duration of the war. Hiroshima cultists' fanaticism blinds them to everything except the casualties from the atom. The prospect, however, was for far greater casualties, from (1) continued Japanese mistreatment of prisoners and slave laborers; (2) intensified disruption of food supplies and transportation throughout the empire; (3) continued land and sea battles with losses like that of the *Indianapolis*; and (4) continued conventional bombing by Gen. Curtis LeMay's B-29s. These things together would have produced *monthly death rates* well in excess of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki total. . . .

Possession of nuclear weapons did reinforce American messianism and truculence. Gar Alperovitz and Kai Bird may be right in believing that without nuclear weapons, the United States might not have rearmaged Germany nor intervened in the Korean War. But this is irrelevant to the Hiroshima question. Truman did not let this genie out of the bottle. The United States would have had nuclear weapons as soon as it did no matter who was president. And in all probability, any president would have made ending the war quickly with minimum loss of life his top priority, would have known from intercepts that the Japanese peace party was impotent and the dominant generals were determined to fight a final battle of the homeland, and would have brought the new weapon into play exactly as Truman did. One would hope, however, that with the war over, a different president might not have succumbed so quickly to the chimera of national security, or have gone off as eagerly in search of places to intervene against Communism.

One argument against use of the bomb against Japan does score. Karel van Wolferen is assuredly right that if the bombs had not been dropped, the Japanese cult of victimhood could not have grown as fast.

Were There Viable Alternatives to Dropping the Atomic Bomb?

BARTON J. BERNSTEIN

7th. 11/3. *alternative school*

Few events in modern American history have attracted as much attention, and provoked as much dispute, as the use of the atomic bomb. The analysis of the use of that weapon has had a curious, and often polemical, history. One school ("orthodox") stresses that the atomic bombing was necessary, and that not using it would have been unconscionable. Another school ("revisionist") argues that the atomic bombing was unnecessary, that American leaders knew that Japan was near defeat and hence near surrender, and that the bomb was used for an ulterior purpose. In

From Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 229-230, 235-238, 240-244, 247-260, 262, 269.

The inferno of hate was stilled only by the inferno of the atom.

The preponderance of evidence shows that *at the time of decision* the Truman administration believed, with good reason, that invasion plans threatened an unacceptable loss of life, to Japanese as much as to Americans. Hiroshima cultists deny this and go beyond it to claim that whatever Truman thought, postwar investigation showed Kyushu defenses to have been weak, and OLYMPIC [Planned Invasion of Kyushu] if it had gone forward would not have been traumatic. . . .

Harry Truman ordered the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki primarily to end the war as soon as possible and save lives. This conclusion is compelled by the evidence, and yet there are challenges to this motivation. The most powerful challenge is based on the belief that atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, and nowhere else, because of American racism. . . .

There are two intractable facts that destroy this argument: (1) Hiroshima cultists cannot challenge the timetable that made the first bomb available only after Germany had surrendered, leaving Japan as the sole Axis power yet to be overwhelmed. What evidence anywhere implies that the United States would not have used atomic weapons on Germany had it been still a belligerent, when the bombs were developed precisely out of fear Germany would get them first, and when the Allies obliterated Dresden and several other towns as thoroughly as the atom destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki? (2) The directive issued to Col. Paul Tibbets in September 1944 instructed him to train *two* bomber groups to make simultaneous drops on Germany and Japan. This also is unanswerable.

Japan's sense of victimization is so deeply rooted that the racism argument cannot be successfully countered in that country. There is no justification for its acceptance elsewhere.

Then there is the atomic diplomacy argument, the main stock in trade of some American Hiroshima cultists: Truman dropped the bomb to intimidate the Soviet Union. This possesses a kernel of truth. Anticommunism and anti-Sovietism had burgeoned in 1920s America, receded during the war, and began growing in 1944 as the Russians occupied Eastern Europe. President Truman, James Byrnes, Ambassador Averell Harriman, and a few others worried about the extension of Soviet power, and welcomed the clout that possession of nuclear weapons gave the United States. But uneasiness about the Soviets in the summer of 1945 was not a full-blown cold war. Checkmating Soviet moves did not dominate the Truman White House until much later. . . .

Atomic diplomacy and other cultist variants purport to show a White House fixated on Russia, or strongly racist, or dominated by bureaucrats. One cannot quarrel with the claim that many bureaucratic and personal motives of the makers of the bomb were brought to bear upon the president; these analyses do not, however, remove the pressure point of *decision*, which lay with the president. He ordered the dropping of the first bombs "as available" as surely as he ordered cancellation of the third. And the White House was fixated on securing Japan's surrender, on terms that would obviate recrudescence of militarism, as quickly and with as few casualties as possible.

Almost as important in the theology of Hiroshima cultists as the atomic diplomacy and racism doctrines is the claim that the unconditional surrender policy kept Japan from capitulating. Had this policy been repudiated, we are told, the bombs

Careful inspection of the attitudes of leaders of the Japanese peace party yields different conclusions. They saw in the Potsdam terms an acceptable alternative to the destruction Japan would otherwise sustain.

Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori was foremost among them. He felt that the phrase "Following are our terms" clearly indicated that there *were* terms, that surrender was not without conditions. . . .

. . . [O]n the big strategic question: Did substantially carrying out Roosevelt's unconditional surrender doctrine in the Pacific War teach Japan a lesson, eradicate militarism, promote "peace in our time"? The answer is "perhaps." But had Truman officially abandoned the doctrine, the war party, not the peace party, would have benefited. Anami, Umezu and Toyoda would have been better able to resist pressure from the emperor: "Look, now the Americans are backing down. If we just hold out long enough to severely punish their invasion forces we can get an armistice with no occupation, no war crimes trials, no American-conducted disarmament." As Brian Villa emphasizes in his discussion of the final tense moments, "There was present the eternal dilemma of truce making, the endless truism, 'If the enemy is weak, concessions are unnecessary, if he appears strong, concessions look like a confession of weakness.'"

Thus, what Hiroshima cultists insist was a viable alternative for Truman to end the war early without using the bomb—retaining the emperor—was really no alternative at all. It would not have converted the Japanese military to surrender, but would instead have stiffened their resolve to fight the decisive battle of the homeland. Had the United States been willing to grant *all* of Anami's demands, the determination of the military to fight it out would have been even more intensified. Even if the emperor could have overpowered the military before Hiroshima and secured a cease fire on the basis of softening of the unconditional surrender demand, it would not have been wise. A Japanese conviction that they had not really been defeated would have taken firm hold. . . .

In the interrogations of Japanese leaders conducted by the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, and by MacArthur's G-2, I have been unable to find any Japanese leaders who claim that the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki could have been avoided, and Japan brought to surrender, by a nonlethal demonstration of the bomb. Instead, there is abundant testimony that the Japanese military even minimized the significance of the damage at Hiroshima. Fortunately the civilian elite, the peace party, knew that something disastrous had occurred; and the emperor used it to face down Anami.

Hiroshima cultists never come to grips with the very cogent reasons why the Interim Committee and its scientific advisers rejected the idea of a demonstration. . . . The pressure point of the argument is whether a nonlethal demonstration could have produced the triumph of the peace party and the acquiescence of the militarists. On this matter, the pro-demonstration argument is bankrupt. Its supporters do not even attempt to analyze the proposal from the Japanese viewpoint as of the summer of 1945; they assume a strictly Western point of view. . . .

But what about a warning?

Many scientists and philosophers felt a warning was called for; the very sober General Marshall felt the same way; even the Far Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office took that point of view. Stimson and his advisers, and hence Truman,

halted atomic

there was considerable uncertainty until the force of the test was actually experienced. Byrnes seems genuinely to have wanted Russia to enter the war prior to mid-July. Almost surely the combination of news of the Emperor's intervention (July 13) with the news of the successful test immediately thereafter (July 16) crystallized the final decisions: Now the bomb might end the war not only before an invasion but also before the Red Army moved into Manchuria.

In this regard, Truman's strong interest in the Manchurian question—perhaps partly because of its importance to many Republicans—probably also played a role. In any event, both European and Asian issues appear to have weighed heavily on the minds of American leaders in the final weeks before Hiroshima. However, we simply do not have enough information to make a final judgment as to emphasis—and we will probably never know what passed between Truman and Byrnes in their unrecorded private discussions.

Dropping the Bomb Was Necessary and Justifiable

ROBERT P. NEWMAN

On aggressive / aristocratic culture tone

Thesis in de la school

I take the meaning of "cult" from *Merriam-Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*: "a great devotion to a person, idea, or thing; esp. such a devotion regarded as literary or intellectual fad." The intellectual idea to which Hiroshima cultists are devoted is that since Japan was about to surrender when the bombs were dropped, the slaughter of innocents at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not motivated by military reasons. It was instead motivated primarily by the desire to intimidate the Russians (so-called atomic diplomacy), by racism (we did not drop the bomb on Germany), by the desire of Robert Oppenheimer and company to experiment with a new toy, by the fear of Secretary of War Henry Stimson and others that Congress would investigate if their \$2 billion dollar expenditure was found not useful, or by the sheer unthinking momentum of a bureaucratic juggernaut (Manhattan Project).

This cult has a shrine, a holy day, a distinctive rhetoric of victimization (it can also be called a Japanese-as-victim cult), various items of scripture (John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, The Franck Report, P.M.S. Blackett's 1949, *Fear, War, and the Bomb*), and, in Japan, support from a powerful constituency (Marxist). As with other cults, it is ahistorical. Its devotees elevate fugitive and unrepresentative events to cosmic status. And most of all, *they believe*.

The Hiroshima cult is the mirror image of the nuclear cult—those evangelists of the 1950s and 1960s who saw the energy of the atom as the means to make the desert bloom, to air condition whole cities for pennies (the electricity would be too cheap to meter), to power an airplane across the oceans on a thinbful of fuel, and to do other wonderful things. Daniel Ford dealt with these matters in his 1982 book, *The Cult of the Atom*. This cult has demonstrated its bankruptcy.

But the Hiroshima cult is not bankrupt. It gained ascendancy in 1994 in the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, and its faithful still flock to the shrine in Japan. This

book is about how things got that way, and it is judgemental. My focus, however, is not on the cultists as such; rather it is on the arguments they use to proselytize. . . . [E]ven ULTRA, * accurate as it was in revealing Japanese reinforcement on Kyushu, missed a few troops. At the end of fighting, the Japanese had 900,000 soldiers defending Kyushu, with more to come, opposing the 766,700 Americans readying for the invasion.

General Marshall was following the ULTRA decrypts; they jarred him out of his complacent 31,000 thirty-day estimate as given the president on 18 June. Truman claims in a letter dated 12 January 1953 that he had asked Marshall at Potsdam "what it will cost in lives to land on the Tokyo plain and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that such an invasion would cost at a minimum one quarter of a million casualties, and might cost as much as a million, on the American side, with an equal number of the enemy."

Many historians write this estimate off as self-serving, nothing more than wishful reconstruction of a failing memory. Perhaps. But the laughably unrealistic underestimates *put on paper* by casualty-shy military people certainly do not command the high ground of credibility. Marshall may have given such an estimate orally. Truman may have accurately remembered. Those who are so certain that landing on Kyushu would have been a walk (meaning only 31,000 casualties at D plus 30) must engage the ULTRA intelligence, as well as the confident beliefs of the Imperial Japanese Army commanders that they could not only have severely damaged the first wave attack, but beaten it back so convincingly that the United States would have sued for peace. . . .

Even with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the Soviet entry, and with an impressive (though outnumbered) American invasion fleet shaping up, surrender barely came off in mid-August. Despite the final submission of War Minister Anami, Army Chief of Staff Umezu, and Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda, who had been the three Supreme Council holdouts, army hotheads got out of control. Dissident forces seized the Imperial Compound the night before the emperor's broadcast, turned the place inside out trying to find the recording of his surrender rescript, assassinated Lt. Gen. Mori Takeshi (commander of the Imperial Guard at the palace), attempted to assassinate Premier Suzuki Kantaro and burned down his house when they found he had escaped, and tried to take over the radio station that was to broadcast the emperor's surrender the next day.

The sticking point in Japanese surrender in August 1945 was *not* the terms of surrender; it was the still unknown ability of the emperor to make a surrender of any kind hold.

John Dower has the ultimate answer to those who tell us now that peace was there to be had in 1944 and early 1945 if we had only modified the unconditional surrender rhetoric, and signaled acceptance of the emperor: "The suggestion that there may have been serious lost opportunities for a peace settlement in 1944 or early 1945 remains almost unbelievable, and the small murmurs about peace which Iriye [Newman: in his rose-tinted book *Power and Culture*] seizes upon seem as candles set against an inferno of hate."

and subsequent invasion had gone forward, at the time it was officially estimated that the number of lives which might have been lost (and therefore possibly saved by the atomic bomb) was of the order of magnitude of 20,000 to 26,000 for Kyushu, and a maximum of 46,000 in the unlikely event of a full invasion in 1946.

However, even these numbers confuse the central issues (as do other nonofficial estimates). The fact is if the war could have been ended by clarifying the terms and/or the Russian shock, there would have been no lives lost in an invasion. Fighting was reduced as both sides regrouped, and the most that may be said is that the atomic bombs may have saved the lives which might have been lost in the time it would have taken to arrange the final surrender terms. . . .

In the decades since World War II, writers who have defended the bombings have repeatedly pointed to the hard-line Japanese army faction which was opposed to surrender and which was clearly preparing to defend against a possible invasion. Some have even offered dramatic, detailed descriptions of battles which in theory might possibly have been fought. The intricacies of various arguments are taken up in the Afterword, but the essential points to note here are rather straightforward:

In the first place it is an obvious non sequitur to argue from the fact that preparations were going forward that what was "planned" was also what, in fact, was likely to happen. The U.S. military, after all, was also engaged in preparations and plans for an invasion. It is quite clear that the Japanese both wished to be prepared for an invasion and wanted to make sure U.S. officials believed they would fight to the death if invaded.

Much more important, no knowledgeable historian would dispute the idea that so long as the Emperor's position was in doubt—as it was throughout this entire period—the Japanese would likely have resisted to the end. The army faction held all the cards so long as the Emperor was threatened. And so long as the Russians were neutral they could also argue it was not totally insane to continue the war.

Nor is it surprising that after the war some Japanese leaders honestly recalled that they had planned to fight on. That is, in fact, what they had expected to do, given that U.S. policy continued to threaten the Emperor. This was what the fundamental debate was all about inside the U.S. government—and precisely why American military leaders urged the president to offer Japan assurances for the Emperor.

Put another way, eliminating the political-psychological props holding up the army faction and securing the shock of a Red Army attack were the central thrust of top intelligence and other advice throughout the summer. That even without such changes so many U.S. military leaders felt the war could have been ended before a November landing only underscores the narrow focus of some arguments which point to opposition to surrender within Japan yet ignore or downplay the options available to U.S. leaders at the time.

Nor, contrary to some theories, did political considerations compel the president's choices. . . .

Perhaps it is here, most poignantly, that we confront our own reluctance to ask the difficult questions—for even if one were to accept the most inflated estimates of lives saved by the atomic bomb, the fact remains that it was an act of violent destruction aimed deliberately at large concentrations of noncombatants.

We do not like to speak of such things. "The knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness," professor of psychiatry Judith Herman

observes, but it "is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level." . . .

There are, of course, historians who still disagree with the judgment that the war would have ended in any event before an invasion. Also, some general scholars have not as yet caught up with the modern expert research findings. However, it is difficult to believe that Japan would have fought on once the Russians actually attacked and once assurances for the Emperor were actually given. And it is very difficult—given what we now know—to believe that in the end assurances would not have been given if the alternative was an invasion. Truman and Byrnes, as Stimson noted, were hardly "obdurate" about the point. . . .

. . . [T]he modern evidence does not support the view that diplomatic considerations were merely a "bonus" in the minds of top U.S. officials. Although it is impossible to reach a full and final answer to the question of emphasis, what we now know even more strongly suggests—but does not as yet definitively prove—that diplomatic factors were of far greater significance. The most important points concern Byrnes' attitude and his influence on the president—especially when compared with virtually all the other top advisers (and Churchill). Some matters are no longer in doubt:

- First, in general Byrnes clearly saw the weapon as important to his diplomacy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

- Second, of particular significance are features of the context established during the two weeks in Germany. It is no longer seriously disputed that Byrnes and the president took a hard-line position on a variety of issues during the Potsdam discussion because of—in anticipation of—the atomic bomb. This fact itself set the terms of reference for the next stage of decision-making. . . .

- Third, it was in this specific context—and at this specific time—that Byrnes arranged for the elimination of language offering assurances for the Emperor.

- Fourth, it is beyond question that once the atomic bomb was successfully tested, Byrnes saw it as a way to end the war before the Red Army entered Manchuria—and urgently attempted both to get a surrender and to stall the Russians. . . .

- My own view has shifted slightly in recent years. By the early 1960s it was clear that the Potsdam conference had been postponed in order to have the weapon tested before negotiating with Stalin. It was also obvious from the Stimson diaries that as early as May 16 Truman himself believed that the United States would "hold more cards in our hands later than now"—and that by June 6 the president had "postponed [the Big Three meeting] . . . on purpose to give us more time." Stimson had first brought information to the president about the atomic bomb because of its bearing on the crisis over Poland. And at the end of May, according to Szilard, Byrnes saw the bomb as a way to make Russia more manageable in Europe. . . .

In the early 1980s I was impressed by the research Robert Messer had done on Byrnes' concerns—especially his demonstration that having been sent by Roosevelt to sell the Yalta agreement to the Senate and to the American public, Byrnes had a strong interest in achieving a satisfactory settlement in Eastern Europe. Moreover, Byrnes' personal political stature now rested almost entirely on his performance as secretary of state—and in general it is evident that the bomb appeared critical in this regard as well.

Although it still seems clear that considerations related to Europe established key aspects of the diplomatic context as Potsdam and the Alamogordo test approached,

Upon just war theory, we were not necessary
justified uses of force, by Mark A. Stoler
Major Problems in the History of World War II, 2003

Scholars disagree very sharply over the questions of why the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan and whether this action was justified. For nearly four decades Gar Alperovitz has been one of the leading revisionist critics, arguing that the bombs were dropped primarily to intimidate the Soviet Union, that their use was not necessary to avoid a costly invasion of the home islands and obtain Japanese surrender, and that claims to the contrary by Truman and his associates constitute a deception and enduring myth. The first essay is taken from Alperovitz's most recent and comprehensive work on the subject.

Numerous historians have challenged such conclusions. They strongly defend Truman's decision as motivated by a desire to end the war as quickly as possible and with minimum U.S. casualties, and they conclude that the atomic bombs were both necessary and effective in this regard. In the second essay, Robert P. Newman of the University of Pittsburgh explains why and directly counters Alperovitz's conclusions. Whereas Alperovitz labels Newman's conclusions a myth, Newman labels Alperovitz's work part of an ahistorical "cult."

During the 1970s, historians Barton Bernstein of Stanford University and Martin Sherwin of Tufts University took a middle ground by arguing that Truman and his advisers inherited policies from Roosevelt, that they were primarily motivated by a desire to end the war as quickly as possible and with minimal U.S. casualties, but that impressing the Soviets with the new weapon constituted a "diplomatic bonus." In the third essay, Bernstein summarizes this argument and then examines what in hindsight appear to be alternatives to using the bomb. In the process he analyzes why these alternatives were not seriously considered at the time, tries to assess whether they could have worked, and emphasizes the different contexts of 1945 and the present.

Dropping the Atomic Bomb Was Neither Necessary Nor Justifiable

GAR ALPEROVITZ

Tuesday 11/1

Quite simply, it is not true that the atomic bomb was used because it was the only way to save the "hundreds of thousands" or "millions" of lives as was subsequently claimed. The readily available options were to modify the surrender terms and/or await the shock of the Russian attack. Three months remained before a November Kyushu landing could take place even in theory; there were six to seven months before the spring invasion of Honshu could begin under the existing planning assumptions.

If we accept the conclusion of either the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (which did not even assume a modification of the unconditional surrender formula or the impact of a Russian declaration of war) or the War Department study which judged the war would almost certainly have ended when the Red Army attacked—then in retrospect, minimally, the bombings were, as Hanson Baldwin put it, a "mistake."

From Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Random House, 1995), 629–636, 645, 665–668. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

However, the evidence—especially from the MAGIC intercepts, the records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the 1945 intelligence studies, numerous statements by military leaders close to the decision process, and the Leahy, Stimson, Forrestal, McCloy, and Brown diaries—allows us to go beyond this. It is impossible to peer into the hearts and minds of men fifty years after the fact. Nevertheless, although matters of nuance and degree can be endlessly debated, it is quite clear that alternatives to using the bomb existed—and that the president and his advisers were aware of them. . . .

Modern evidence . . . suggests not only that the president and [Secretary of State James] Byrnes knew Japan was on the verge of surrender, but that once the new weapon had been successfully tested, rushing to end the war before an expected mid-August Red Army attack was indisputably a major concern. . . .

It is sometimes held that no real "decision" to use the atomic bomb ever took place, that the "momentum" of war (or of bureaucracy, etc.) produced the bombings—and that, besides, there is no surviving contemporaneous evidence that anyone directly challenged the decision. . . .

The truth is that at least three very clear and explicit decisions (and probably more) were made which set the terms of reference for the bomb's subsequent seemingly "inevitable" use. Indeed, once they were made, they so tightly framed the remaining issues as to make it all but impossible thereafter to oppose the bombings.

The first decision involved rejection of the recommendation that to offer any meaningful possibility of surrender a statement to Japan would have to allow enough time for the development of a serious response. As we have seen, a conscious choice not to allow a meaningful interval was made early on—and explicitly reaffirmed at Potsdam.

The second and more fundamental choice was the decision not to offer Japan assurances for the Emperor. Once this decision had been made—and the Japanese were allowed to believe the Emperor might be removed and possibly hanged as a war criminal—it was obvious to all concerned that the fighting would continue. . . .

The decision to delete assurances for the Emperor from the Potsdam Proclamation was one relegated to political authority. Once the president had made his choice on this matter—and since it was known that therefore the fighting would now unquestionably continue—the basic military options were narrowed to two: The only choice now was to use the bomb or go forward with an invasion.

In this situation the silence and seeming momentum of events is not difficult to comprehend. For any official—military or civilian—to oppose the bombing in these circumstances would have been absurd. It would have been equivalent to arguing for a bloody invasion. It would also have been to challenge the president after he had made his decision quite clear.

The third fundamental choice has now also been fully documented. It was the decision not to test the impact of the Russian declaration of war—indeed, to weaken the military challenge posed to Japan by attempting to put off an event which all understood would have extraordinary impact. This decision, too, was made at the political level. . . .

All of this also obviously bears on the issue of the number of lives which may possibly have been saved by the atomic bomb. As we have seen, over the last decade scholars working in very different fields—Barton Bernstein, Rufus E. Miles, Jr., and John Ray Skates—all separately have demonstrated that even if the first landing

evidence

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U.S. did not