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An American dilemma : understanding the decision to use atomic bombs on Japan

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AN AMERICAN DILEMMA:
UNDERSTANDING THE DECISION TO USE ATOMIC BOMBS ON JAPAN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Todd Milo Jenkins

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ABSTRACT

AN AMERICAN DILEMMA: UNDERSTANDING THE DECISION TO USE ATOMIC BOMBS ON JAPAN

By Todd M. Jenkins

This thesis addresses the continuing debate about the decision by the United States to drop two atomic bombs on Japan in the closing days of World War II. The lively debate has been waged between orthodox and revisionist historians. Orthodox historians tend to take President Truman at his word and find that the United States was justified in using atomic weapons. Revisionist historians generally blame Truman for rushing to use the new weapon, and for using the weapon to influence foreign policy with Russia rather than to end the war with Japan. Adopting this conspiratorial view, some have referred to the bombings as the American Holocaust.

This thesis examines the atomic decision using three criteria: political considerations, military necessity, and moral interpretations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the wise advise and sage counsel Dr. Reynolds has provided as I have endeavored to bring this thesis to fruition. I would also be remiss if I did not recognize the hours of support and encouragement offered by my wife and editor-in-chief, Sara. At the risk of waxing philosophical, I would also like to dedicate this work to the fine souls who fought in the world's most brutal conflict. May my sons, Joshua and David, never witness the hatred and atrocities that engulfed this planet in the nightmare years of World War II.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used.¹

President Harry Truman

World War II has been the topic of a tremendous volume of literature. No other conflict of this century has had such an impact on the people of the world. The struggle and its aftermath was so far reaching that it is indeed the most significant event of the 20th Century. Within the literature that pertains to the United States' involvement in the conflict, there are two actions that have received the most critical attention. These are the surprise bombing of American forces at Pearl Harbor and the destruction of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the first, and only, atomic bomb attacks. While the first incident continues to confound students of military history for the gross unpreparedness and negligence of the "sleeping giant," the latter intrigues its audience with the question of whether the United

¹Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1955), 419.

States was justified in using these weapons of mass destruction.

President Truman, the man who ultimately decided to use the atomic bomb, believed that without the atomic bomb the United States might have to invade the islands of Japan causing heavy U.S. casualties. The issues and subsequent decision to deploy atomic weapons in 1945 seemed clear and logical to President Truman. Perhaps the issues were clear to him, but many have questioned his actions since that time. It may well be that no other presidential decision has been questioned or defended as often as this one.

Some revisionist historians have accused President Truman of rushing to use the newfound weapon without understanding all the political ramifications. Others have attempted to prove that the weapon was not necessary to end the war and that, therefore, the bombing was immoral. Indeed, President Truman has been accused of using the weapon for diplomatic rather than military purposes, thereby initiating and rapidly escalating the Cold War that followed World War II. On the other side of the debate are orthodox historians who claim the decision to use atomic weapons brought about the conclusion of the long and bloody conflict.

The motivations that led the United States to drop atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 have been debated for five decades by

both professional and armchair students of history. In that time, important questions have been raised. Why was the atomic bomb used and, more importantly, was it necessary for the defeat of Japan? Were other options actively pursued? What influence did the atomic bomb have on the United States foreign policy? At the heart of the debate lies the question of whether the U.S. actions were justified. This thesis will address these questions and explore the motivations behind this controversial decision.

This debate continues some fifty years after the fact and remains a source of considerable scholarly attention. Several recent incidents demonstrate just how volatile this topic has remained. The Smithsonian Institution struggled with the appropriate manner in which to display artifacts related to the use of the atomic bomb.² Several groups called for the portrayal of the atomic bombing as a barbaric act against the Japanese, who were represented as victims of a war-time holocaust. Others called for the national presentation to hail the decision as saving American lives and as the instru-

²In a recent commentary, noted author and scholar Barton Bernstein addressed the issues of the Smithsonian debate. In describing the ongoing debate, he stated, "Americans and other visitors to the exhibit have a right to know, and to worry about, certain crucial matters." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 3, 1995.

ment which ended the tragic war.³ There has also been open speculation in the media about whether President Clinton will apologize to the Japanese for the bombings. Veterans groups expressed outrage at such a possibility. After much wrangling and emotional argument, the Smithsonian opened a rather bland exhibit practically devoid of commentary on the decision.

The debate has been so far reaching that even the U.S. Postal Service was caught up in the fray. A proposed commemorative stamp celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II had the illustration of an atomic mushroom cloud. The proposed stamp met such a wave of protest that it was canceled before production. Holiday greetings via mushroom cloud do seem highly inappropriate regardless of one's view on the dropping of the bomb.

Whether the United States or any nation should use, under any circumstance, such a dreadful weapon continues to intrigue and to haunt the human mind and heart. The pursuit remains relevant, for the use of atomic weapons not only brought an

³Commenting on the exhibit, historian Michael J. Hogan stated, "The *Enola Gay* controversy proved again that history is contested terrain, particularly when public presentation of the past collides with living memory." "The *Enola Gay* Controversy: History, Memory and the Politics of Presentation," *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996), 231. This work is an interesting compilation of articles written by prominent historians on the atomic debate, which were presented in the 1995 Spring edition of *Diplomatic History* and reproduced for this publication.

end to a global conflict but the flash over Hiroshima ushered in a new era in which we all live, the atomic age. That action forever changed the nature of warfare and significantly affected the course of world history. The postwar period cannot be fully addressed without understanding the new dynamics brought about by the atomic bomb.

One reason that the debate persists is that the evidence, though insightful and useful, is insufficient to bring the dialogue to a definitive conclusion.⁴ This is not to say that the quantity of evidence is insufficient, but rather that the strict secrecy in which the atomic bomb was created leaves us without sufficient evidence to ensure "concrete" conclusions. This lack of evidence has produced a wide range of historical observations concerning the political process that controlled the development and use of atomic energy. Though the evidence may be incomplete, we should not be led to believe that the study in this field is merely speculative. The evidence that has come to light is sufficient to produce reasonable and satisfying conclusions.

Throughout World War II, Allied and Axis powers continued to introduce new and devastating weapons. The Germans devel-

⁴Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bomb and the American Foreign Policy, 1941-1945: An Historiographical Controversy," *Peace and Change* 2 (Spring 1974): 1.

oped the V-1 and V-2 bombs which terrorized Britain. The Japanese, in final desperation, skillfully wielded the Divine Wind Special Attack Corps (*kamikaze*) which struck fear and dread in the hearts of many Allied sailors serving in the Pacific War. The Allies perfected the deadly art of strategic bombing that terrorized whole populations and gutted entire cities in Europe and the islands of Japan. These new weapons of terror were deployed in large numbers and were used in coordinated attacks which often brought devastating results.

Whether the attacks came over the Pacific in waves of *kamikaze* planes or over an industrial city in incendiary bomb raids, the combined efforts brought tremendous loss of life and destruction not seen in previous wars. "But the atomic bomb was more than a weapon of terrible destruction," said Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, "it was a psychological weapon."⁵ It was a weapon capable of producing such mass destruction that it would forever change the nature of warfare. No longer was there the need for a coordinated attack consisting of thousands of weapons and trained personnel. One nine-man crew, one bomber and one bomb was all that

⁵Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), 630.

was necessary to devastate a city and its inhabitants and bring a nation to its knees.⁶

World War II was a period of international lawlessness on a grand scale; therefore, much of the history of that conflict is marked by war-time atrocities which occurred on all levels and by all nations. Even so, the belligerents were committed to abiding by certain international principles, military and political, while engaging in the war. There were some accepted limits to warfare that the Allied and Axis powers were not willing to violate. The Geneva Convention stood as an international agreement by which all participants were expected to abide. Biological and chemical weapons, for

⁶This point was vividly presented in the *Strategic Bombing Survey Report* that was released in 1946. The report was the result of an investigative committee appointed by President Truman to examine the effects of strategic bombing. The report stated, "The Survey has estimated that the damage and casualties caused at Hiroshima by the one atomic bomb dropped from a single plane would have required 220 B-29's carrying 1,200 tons of incendiary bombs, 400 tons of high explosive bombs, and 500 tons of anti-personnel fragmentation bombs, if conventional weapons, rather than an atomic bomb, had been used." This document was reproduced in Michael B. Stoff, et. al. eds., *The Manhattan Project: A Documentary Introduction to the Atomic Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 243. Though not a comprehensive work, this book is an excellent primary source for many of the documents related to this issue.

example, were not employed by the major armies against one another.⁷

The dreadful effects of gas warfare, as witnessed in World War I, convinced future combatants that these weapons were too inhumane, even for war. Furthermore, the military effectiveness of gas warfare was in question and there was a concern that opening Pandora's box might bring a deadly retaliatory strike by the enemy. Both sides possessed poison gas weapons yet did not deploy them on the battlefield thus honoring an informal international agreement. This international agreement contained no framework with which to evaluate the new and devastating weapons of modern warfare. In a brutal war that resulted in the death of fifty million people, how was any warring nation to determine which, if any, of these new weapons was unacceptable?⁸

The following thesis will examine the atomic issues from three vantage points. First, the decision to use atomic

⁷The Italians did use poison gas in their conquest of Ethiopia and the Japanese deployed poison gas in their conflict in China. These weapons, though, were selectively deployed and were not extended to other theaters of operation against Allied troops.

⁸Barton J. Bernstein discusses the issue of poison gas in his article, "Why We Didn't Use Poison Gas in WW II," *American Heritage* 36 (August-September 1985): 40-46. The author noted that although some American military strategists contemplated its use, President Roosevelt absolutely rejected this, describing the use of gas as morally repugnant.

weapons was a political decision. Was it politically justifiable? How did internal and international politics affect the atomic bomb decision? Second, was the decision militarily justified? Specifically, was there a necessity for using the atomic bomb? Third, was the decision moral? This question is distinct from the first two in that it explores the moral responsibilities of national actions.

The atomic decision did not come about in isolation so naturally some issues discussed in this thesis will overlap. The fields are distinct, however, and allow separate investigations and conclusions.

It serves no purpose to analyze this decision from a strictly moralistic or academic approach. While we cannot callously disregard the fate of those who perished, suffered and continue to suffer from the effects of the blinding light, heat, and radiation of atomic energy, if we endeavor to study this topic only from the moralistic ivory tower perspective, ignoring the realities of modern nation-state relations, then no true lesson can be learned or applied to future nuclear issues. Hopefully, the lessons of the past will reveal themselves to those who study with scholarly attention and a humane conscience.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIRTH OF ATOMIC ENERGY

From January 1939, until American troops finally entered Germany and took into custody a number of the senior German scientists, we faced the definite possibility that Germany would produce a nuclear weapon before we could.⁹

General Leslie Groves

To understand the awesome decision that faced President Truman in August 1945, some attention must be given to the relevant events that preceded his decision to use atomic weapons. The story of the development of the atomic bomb is fascinating and has been the source of many books and articles. It is a human as well as a scientific story. This project involved prominent personalities, precise planning and great scientific leaps by the scientific community.¹⁰ With the United States fighting on two fronts, the decision to use precious funds and material, which were both in short supply in 1942 and afterwards, was a bold one. The fact that such a tremendous effort went into a theoretical program indicates

⁹Leslie R. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 185.

¹⁰For a detailed account of the development of the atomic bomb, see James P. Baxter, *Scientists Against Time* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1946).

that the strategic planners thought that an atomic payoff was worth the gamble.

The gamble was born out of fear that Nazi Germany might be the first to develop this weapon of awesome destruction and drastically tip the balance of the war. This fear was not ill-founded for in Hitler's Germany, on the eve of war in Europe, physicists Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann first witnessed the fission of the uranium nucleus. The breakthrough came in December 1938 while the physicists were working at the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute in Berlin. The news quickly spread and the experiment was replicated in many laboratories around the globe. It is interesting to note that a group of European physicists, fleeing the turmoil in Europe, brought the news of atomic energy to the politicians in Washington.

The theory of atomic energy was not new, but the breakthrough in 1938, coupled with the growing military aggressiveness of Hitler's Germany, brought great urgency to the issue. Physicists could predict, theoretically, the tremendous amount of energy which could be released in the splitting of an atom and the ensuing chain reaction. It was clear to many physicists that this energy could be harnessed into a weapon of unprecedented destruction.

European physicists Enrico Fermi and Leo Szilard informally led the mission of scientists who encouraged the United States to enter the atomic race with the intention of countering the Nazi effort. Though the fission discovery brought the power of the atom closer to the battlefield, the chain reaction was still on the chalkboard and bringing the final weapon to fruition was well beyond the scope of one laboratory or university. The research and development, the scientists argued, would demand a massive effort on a scale that would require the funds and organization of the national government.

Fermi and Szilard enlisted the help of the most respected man of science of that day, Albert Einstein, to make the official presentation to the U.S. government. Einstein recognized the danger in lagging behind in atomic research and wrote a letter, on behalf of the concerned physicists, addressed to President Franklin Roosevelt, dated August 2, 1939. In the letter Einstein stated:

Some recent work . . . leads me to expect the element uranium may be turned into a new and important source of energy in the immediate future. Certain aspects of the situation which has arisen seem to call for watchfulness and, if necessary, quick action on the part of the administration. . . . This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs . . . extremely powerful bombs of a new type.¹¹

¹¹Einstein letter dated August 2, 1939, as reproduced in Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, 18-19.

The president was made fully aware of these developments on October 11, 1939. At the time, though Roosevelt saw the need for the government to follow up on this initiative, he was having difficulties convincing Congress to appropriate the funds for a much-needed military buildup let alone an expensive long-term scientific project.

Though funds were lacking, the groundwork for the project was laid in 1940 and 1941 through the efforts of Vannevar Bush, Director of the new Office of Scientific Research and Development. With the organizational groups in place, the project came to life shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, when the funds became available in anticipation of building and using the atomic weapon in the war. The highly secret project was given to the United States Army to administer and named the Manhattan Engineer District, which came to be known as the Manhattan Project. Major General Leslie R. Groves, a West Point educated engineer, was placed in command of the project and served energetically in that capacity.

Many universities and corporations were included in the immense project that would employ the full-time work of hundreds of thousands of people at a cost of two billion dollars. The project called for large industrial plant operations to yield fissionable material out of uranium as well as laboratories to engineer and assemble a bomb that

would fit into a B-29 superfortress for delivery. The project, code named "S-1" for easy reference among the top policy-makers, was actually developing two weapons: a uranium bomb made of U-235, the fissionable material which had to be separated from thousands of tons of uranium, and a bomb made out of plutonium, a man-made substance produced from the fission of U-235 in a reactor. In addition to the universities and existing industrial complexes that were contributing to the project, three new sites were created by the government for the sole purpose of furthering nuclear development. Much of the manufacturing of fissionable material took place at Hanford, Washington, and at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The major scientific site was at Los Alamos, New Mexico. J. Robert Oppenheimer, a gifted and controversial scientist, was appointed as the Scientific Director of Los Alamos.¹²

The project proceeded at a furious pace, and on December 2, 1942 the first chain reaction was accomplished by scientists Szilard and Fermi at the University of Chicago. Theory had become fact and the realization of the atomic bomb was one step closer. The following two and a half years found the

¹²Vincent C. Jones has written an excellent account of the United States Army's function in the development of the nuclear weapon entitled, *Manhattan: The Army and the Atomic Bomb* (Washington D.C.: United States Army, 1988). Chapters 5-9 discuss the separate plant sites and their individual contributions to the project.

members of the project perfecting theories, designing detonation devices, and obtaining fissionable material as quickly as the industrial process would allow. The Army Air Corps was also hard at work. A flight crew was organized around pilot Colonel Paul Tibbits. The crew performed many hours of practice bombing runs in Utah and in the Caribbean. During the final stages of development, the unit transferred to the island of Tinian, in the Pacific, from where they would embark on the flight to Hiroshima on the B-29 bomber named *Enola Gay*.

The work on the Manhattan project was accomplished under strict secrecy, but it did not proceed in a vacuum. Scientists the world over knew of the atomic theories. As the Allies feared, the Germans attempted to develop atomic energy but were ultimately frustrated in their efforts. As the war progressed and Hitler's resources began drying up, less emphasis was placed on the German atomic program. Japan made a half-hearted attempt at nuclear development, but lacked the resources and industry to produce the weapon.¹³ Russia was late in starting its nuclear research program but received valuable information through Soviet spy Klaus Fuchs, a

¹³For a complete discussion on the Japanese efforts to develop the bomb, see Lee Fleming Reese, "Yes: Japan had the bomb," *Education* 112 (Fall 1991): 77-93.

scientist working at Los Alamos.¹⁴ With the help of their spies, the Soviets would not lag far behind Allied efforts and would test their own nuclear device in 1949.

It has been well documented that British and Canadian scientists collaborated on the development of the atomic bomb. The decision though, to drop the atomic bomb was an American decision. Allied consensus existed but the true decision of if, when and where the bomb would be deployed belonged to the United States. The vast majority of the effort to develop the weapon was accomplished within the United States, with American funds and in American laboratories and industrial complexes. The atomic program was such a vast effort that the United States was the only nation with the industrial base, the funds and the facilities, free from Axis attack, to produce this new weapon in such a short period of time. The weapon, for all intents and purposes, belonged to the United States. For this reason, the issues addressed in this paper relate to the decision to drop the American bomb.

The element of timing is critical to understanding the decision to use the bomb. The atomic bomb was pursued in

¹⁴A former Soviet spymaster, Anatoli Sudoplatov, has recently charged that scientific director Robert Oppenheimer also collaborated with the Soviets in providing nuclear secrets. This interesting claim appears in his recently released book, *Special Task* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1994).

legitimate response to the Nazi attempt to build the weapon. As the United States entered the conflict in 1941, the Allies were clearly in a disadvantageous position. Had the weapon been developed at a more desperate hour of the struggle, perhaps the atomic bomb would have been seen as the miracle weapon that saved the West, much as Hitler had hoped his miracle weapons would save Germany from defeat. Had the weapon been developed in late 1945, it might have been too late for use. The U.S. had slated the invasion of Kyushu for November 1945, but this would have given the Soviet Army three months in which to conduct a major offensive against Japanese forces on the mainland. Continued fire bombing of Japan's cities and a naval blockade would have crippled Japan even further. These developments, which would have brought greater destruction to the military and civilian populations, in conjunction with what Tokyo would have seen as obvious preparations for the massive invasion of Japan proper, might have prompted the Japanese officials to surrender before the invasion date or the use of the atomic weapon. As fate would have it, the weapon was ready for use on schedule, in August 1945, as had been predicted one year earlier. It arrived at a time when the Allies were clearly in a superior military position but before the other developments which might have

forced surrender had a chance to significantly influence Tokyo.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The decision whether or not to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never even an issue. There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; nor did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise.¹⁵

Prime Minister Winston Churchill

The atomic bomb was a scientific breakthrough in weaponry dropped on Japan by the U.S. Army Air Corps. It was not, however, a scientific or strictly military decision to use the atomic bomb. Both of these communities were part of a chain of command that led to the civilian government at Washington. Ultimately, dropping the atomic bomb was a civilian government's effort to use the new bomb in the most effective manner during wartime. Though many participated in the decision, President Truman, at the head of the government, bears the ultimate responsibility for this momentous decision. As the political decision is critiqued, it is important to understand the circumstances which the president faced in 1945.

¹⁵Winston S. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Muffin, 1953), 639.

Truman's first responsibility was to the nation which he served and represented.¹⁶ The situation in which President Roosevelt and then Truman found themselves was historically unique. There was no historical precedent to guide either Roosevelt or Truman in managing this new weapon of mass destruction, but both men recognized that they were entering a new era where the nature of military power and world diplomacy would be dramatically and forever altered. Never in the history of humankind had such a weapon of vast destruction been devised which would so greatly tip the balance of power in favor of the possessing nation.

Though academic, the question of which Axis or Allied leader would have acted differently from Truman is still relevant. It is fair to ask if any other major world leader would have refrained from using atomic weapons during the long and brutal Second World War. Is there any serious doubt that Hitler, Stalin or the Japanese military hardliners would have hesitated to use this weapon had it been developed for their nation's arsenals? Churchill, whose country had much earlier, and without much reservation, embraced terror bombing as an

¹⁶A Gallup Poll taken on August 26, 1945 found that 85% of those polled approved the use of the atomic bomb on Japanese cities. If Truman was expected to reflect the will of the American people, then this poll suggests that he did so. As reproduced by Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, 257.

acceptable act in total war, expressed no reservations about deploying nuclear weapons. Must the United States be held to a higher standard than that of the other belligerents? In fact, many have come to believe that the United States should have acted in a different manner than the other warring states. In theory, perhaps so, but one must judge the decision in the context in which it was made.

Though the scientific and production processes of the Manhattan Project were carried on with minor disruptions, the same cannot be said of the political process which controlled the developing weapon. In April 1945, President Roosevelt, who saw the need to pursue the atomic bomb and supported its development, died. The popular four-term president was gone and in his place stood a relative newcomer to national office, Harry S. Truman. Truman had been a surprise nominee at the 1944 Democratic Convention. Not a newcomer to politics, Truman had served a number of years in the U.S. Senate prior to taking the office of Vice-President. Truman had been vice-president only four months when the responsibility for leading the nation fell upon his shoulders. He and President Roosevelt had communicated very little during the four months they served together and Truman had never been briefed on the atomic bomb project. Certainly President Roosevelt can be criticized in this regard. He should have briefed his vice-

president on the immense project that the government had undertaken if for no other reason than to avoid the situation in which Truman found himself. The situation that Truman faced as he assumed the presidency would have been staggering under peacetime circumstances, let alone while the world was at war.

Not until after Truman had held his first cabinet meeting did he learn from Secretary of War Henry Stimson of the new weapon that would be added to the "arsenal of democracy" in the near future. On April 25th, Stimson gave the new president a message which stated, "Within four months we shall in all probability have completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb which could destroy a whole city."¹⁷

Truman also had to consider the approaching post-war situation. With Europe and Japan in ruins, a massive financial and political effort would be necessary to restore some level of pre-war stability to those areas. The "unholy" alliance that held the Allied powers together in the face of German aggression was showing signs of stress and division. The new president had to contend with a Russian government which appeared to be breaking promises made at Yalta, or at

¹⁷Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Harpers Magazine* (Feb. 1947): 26.

least violating the spirit of the alliance, particularly with regard to Poland. Though Truman still wanted the Soviet Army to assist in the final military campaign against Japan's Imperial Army, he did not want to see Asia fall into the Russian sphere of influence. In the eyes of many in the West, communism was quickly returning to its villainous pre-war position and filling the void left by the defeated Germany in Europe. It must be remembered that the atomic decision was not made in isolation, but was one of many issues and pressures demanding the president's time and attention.¹⁸ The atomic bomb was just one piece, albeit a large piece, of the complicated and dangerous world puzzle in 1945.

By the time Truman inherited the Manhattan Project, it had developed a momentum all its own. In fact, by the time Truman learned of the weapon it was practically ready for use. The project was over three years old and was the culmination of a colossal effort. This momentum does not justify its use but it was a contributing factor in the decision. By August

¹⁸Author William Lanoutte described some of the pressures exerted on the new president. "The president was pushed and pulled by strong personalities who were determined to have a hand in shaping policy. Acting Secretary of State Grew believed that diplomacy would win the war. . . when Byrnes succeeded Grew in July, however, his preoccupation with both domestic politics and U.S.-Soviet relations changed the department's focus." Quoted in "Why We Dropped the Bomb," *Civilization* (January-February 1995): 39.

1945, Allied bombing and destruction of whole cities in Japan and Europe was well established.¹⁹ The real question facing Truman was not "if" the weapon should be used but "when." From the inception of the Manhattan Project, there was an assumption that the weapon would be used in combat. This assumption was never seriously challenged within either the Roosevelt or the Truman administrations. This point was vividly made by Henry Stimson when he said, "At no time, from 1941 to 1945 did I ever hear it suggested by the President, or any other responsible member of the government, that atomic energy should not be used in the war."²⁰ The bomb, like all bombs, was made to be used. Barring any compelling reason for resisting such use, the bomb was going to be dropped. Therefore, it was less a case of Truman making a decision to use the bomb than one of permitting its deployment to proceed as planned. President Roosevelt had put the project in motion and the assumption that it would be used was never challenged on an official level.

¹⁹Historian Fletcher Knebel made this point, "With such obliteration of cities as accepted mode of warfare on both sides, it was difficult for most military chieftains to believe that a new weapon of destruction presented ethical questions not found in TNT and the fire bomb." *No High Ground* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 98-99.

²⁰Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," 98.

It should be noted that to the policy makers the atomic bomb was seen as the equivalent of a very large conventional bomb. It was unique for the amount of destructive power it delivered in one bomb, not for the radiation that accompanied the explosion. Atomic physicists knew the hazard of radiation, but with the atomic endeavor still in its infancy, the far reaching effects of radiation were not well understood. The physicists predicted dangerous levels of radiation only within the immediate area of the blast. Not much attention was given to this byproduct of the bomb, for no one within the immediate area of the blast was expected to survive. For this reason, radiation poisoning was a topic of little discussion.²¹ No one in that era could have predicted the long-term suffering, that would be inflicted by radiation poisoning. Their lack of knowledge does not exonerate the policy makers from the responsibility for the terrible consequences of their decision, but it is only fair to point out that they were not fully aware of how severe they would be.

The United States had strictly followed a policy of not initiating gas warfare on the battlefield. Having abided by this principle during the war, it seems evident that the policy-makers were unaware of the serious biological impact of

²¹Jones, *Manhattan: The Army and the Atomic Bomb*, 283-284.

the new weapon. Had the knowledge of the radiation poisoning been available, would this have altered their decision? Such speculation is interesting, but there is no evidence to indicate what, if any, policy changes would have been made.

When Truman was briefed on the project, he did what most bureaucrats do; he called for a committee to review the issues. To his credit, Truman realized the significance of the new weapon and sought the advice and counsel of individuals who had knowledge of the project. He asked Secretary of War Stimson to organize a committee to examine the issues surrounding nuclear energy. The problems facing the United States were not only how and when to deploy the new weapon, but how the technology would be controlled after the war. Stimson organized a seven-member Interim Committee which consisted of Stimson, the president's personal representative James F. Byrnes²², Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development Vannevar Bush, Under Secretary of State William L. Clayton, President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Karl T. Compton and President of Harvard University James B. Conant. The seven committee members had impressive credentials and were familiar with the project.

²²James Byrnes had not yet assumed the responsibilities of the Secretary of State.

Within the Interim Committee, the Scientific Advisory Committee was created to represent the vast scientific community working on the project. This impressive four member panel included the Scientific Director at Los Alamos, J. Robert Oppenheimer; director of the scientific effort at the Metallurgical Laboratory in Chicago, Arthur H. Compton; world renowned physicist Enrico Fermi; and Nobel Prize-winning physicist Ernest O. Lawrence. Secretary Stimson chaired the Interim Committee and all advice from these committees came to the president through him. If any one man oversaw the project from inception to explosion, it was Secretary Stimson.

The committees met separately and then on May 31, 1945, met together in Stimson's office at the Pentagon. The committees continued to discuss the issues of nuclear energy at various times and places through June 12. The members of the scientific panel argued that an atomic bomb test, witnessed by Japanese as well as other world representatives, should precede an attack on Japan. If the test proved insufficient to bring Japan to its senses, then an attack should be preceded by a warning which would detail the target

site, thus allowing non-combatants to leave the target area.²³

These points were countered by some on the Interim Committee who reasoned that a test on a deserted island, or other neutral site, would not demonstrate the full devastation that the weapon could bring to bear on an entire city. If the weapon failed, which was conceivable at this experimental stage, the result might further stiffen Japanese resolve. Also, advance warning of the intended target site might greatly complicate the delivery of the weapon. While Allied aircraft dominated the skies over Japan, the atomic bomb was still in the experimental stage and any complications arising from an all-out Japanese effort to defend the target site would greatly complicate the aerial bombing. With advance notice, the Japanese might also move American POWs into the target area.

In the end, the counterpoints prevailed. Stimson briefed the president on the committee's deliberations, which called for the atomic bomb to be dropped as soon as possible and without warning with the hope that this new destructive power would "shock" Japan into immediate surrender and thereby

²³The discussion of these issues is located in the Interim Committee Log and personal notes. Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, Parts 3 and 4.

eliminate the need for an invasion of Japan proper. To display the power of the new weapon, the committee report advised, "The most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by worker's houses."²⁴ Though the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6th, the deliberations had been delivered to the president earlier by the "jury," the members of the committees. The committees had spoken, and barring an unforeseen event that would put the bomb's use in doubt, the committees gave the president no reason to refrain from using it.

The individuals who sat on the committees were capable of providing sound counsel. This advisory system was flawed, however, in that there were no military advisors formally attached to it. Of course, the president was advised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on a regular basis and the committee members were briefed on the general military situation in the Pacific. But the committee, which would have a great influence on the president's decision, lacked the appropriate military opinions which might have led the committee to provide the president with other options. Oppenheimer made this point when he stated, "We didn't know beans about the military situation in Japan. We didn't know whether they

²⁴Interim Committee Minutes, 31 May 1945, Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, 117.

could be caused to surrender by other means or whether the invasion was really inevitable."²⁵

After the president had been briefed on the decision of the Interim Committee, he may have been misled to believe that opinion was unanimous among the senior staff working on the Manhattan Project. Some were deeply concerned about the new weapon they had helped to create. They were concerned with how this new energy would make its debut on the world stage and its effect on global relations and stability. Some of the scientists working on the Manhattan Project at the University of Chicago unofficially organized the Committee of Social and Political Implications and put their concerns to paper in the "Frank Report." The report did not so much address the moral issues of atomic energy as it discussed the global instability which might result from the use of such a destructive force. The committee advised against an unannounced use of the weapon, stating its case on three grounds: unannounced use would sacrifice world support, precipitate an arms race, and prejudice the international effort for control. The report stated,

²⁵Oppenheimer Hearings, 34, as quoted by Herbert Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 44.

It may be very difficult to persuade the world that a nation which was capable of secretly preparing and suddenly releasing a weapon as indiscriminate as the rocket bomb and a million times more destructive, is to be trusted.²⁶

Because of the strict secrecy requirements of the project and the informal nature of the Frank group, these recommendations never made their way to Stimson's desk, much less the president's attention, prior to the bombings. The contents of the letter were known to the four members of the Scientific Advisory Committee but their ultimate recommendation indicates that the Frank Report was disregarded. It is doubtful, though, that the report alone would have averted the use of the atomic weapon. The strict secrecy, the compartmentalization that surrounded the weapon's development and the bureaucratic nature of federal government restricted the channels to the president and gave the false impression of unity among the major players involved on the project.

President Truman was working within a huge bureaucracy. Some recent historical research has centered on the bureaucratic nature of the federal government and its impact on the atomic bomb decision. These researchers have argued that the main policy makers were often ill informed and that the "real" power to guide national policy within the government lay with

²⁶The Frank Report, June 11, 1945. Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, 142.

the bureaucrats. Their point is that the atomic bomb was the result of bureaucratic policies rather than national policy made by senior elected and appointed policy makers.²⁷ This view attempts to show that the president did not so much make a decision but rather accepted a decision which had already been made. The bureaucratic machine was working on that assumption and would not be derailed unless the president intervened. Once the atomic program began in 1942, the decision to use the weapons was to some degree a foregone conclusion. According to this theory, the decision was as much a bureaucratic outcome as a presidential directive.²⁸

By July 1945, seven years after the fission of the uranium nucleus in Berlin and after the investment of three and a half years of intense research and development, two billion dollars and countless hours of labor, the United States had produced 100 pounds of fissionable material. This was sufficient for the production of three atomic bombs. No

²⁷"Organizational process as well as internal politics affects war termination. Much of the machinery of the warring states is geared to prosecuting the war, not ending it. . . So, air forces drop bombs while foreign offices exchange notes, each according to its own standard operating procedure. And it is difficult to get them to act in concert and to change what they are doing or stop altogether." Leon V. Sigal, *Fighting to a Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1988), 24.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 206-211.

evidence exists to support the notion that the decision to use the bomb was significantly influenced by the large cost of developing the weapon. It seems likely that it was only a small motivating factor in the equation. The President must have known that after the war the public would want some accounting of the large amount of state treasure spent on this program. As with the bureaucratic argument, this argument concerning the expense of the weapon only added to the momentum with which the bomb was handed to Truman.

The momentum was furthered along by the success of the Trinity Test on July 16, 1945, when the first atomic device was exploded at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The President was notified of the success at Alamogordo while en route to Potsdam, Germany, to consult with the Allied Leaders.

The conference at Potsdam and the subsequent declaration are important events in the debate. At Potsdam Stalin was first officially briefed on the new weapon by the president.²⁹ The briefing was sketchy and incomplete, but Stalin

²⁹The issue of just how much information concerning the atomic bomb would be shared with the Soviet leader was the subject of great debate. Secretary of War Stimson discussed this topic at a combined policy committee on July 4, 1945, shortly before the Potsdam meeting. The minutes from the meeting state in part, "The chairman (Secretary of War Stimson) said he was thinking of an earlier period, viz., the forthcoming meeting with Stalin. His own opinion had been very much influenced by the probable use (of the bomb) within a few weeks after the meeting. If nothing was said at this

already knew of the atomic bomb through Soviet spies at Alamogordo. The declaration that followed the conference was an ultimatum to the Japanese nation. At Potsdam, the Allied leaders discussed the problems facing them in postwar Europe and the continued Japanese resistance in the Pacific. The Allied leaders all agreed that the new weapon should be used against Japan to hasten surrender. Though Truman found new confidence with the news of Trinity, he still called upon Stalin to honor his commitment to enter the war against Japan. Stalin replied by reaffirming Soviet entry in the Pacific War by August 15th, 1945.

It must be remembered that at this stage of the conflict, Japan still fielded nearly five million soldiers, and it was assumed that some of the best fighting units were stationed along the Russian border in Manchuria. Truman's continued

meeting about the T.A. (Tube Alloys, a code name for the atomic bomb) weapon, its subsequent use might have a serious effect on the relations of frankness between the three great Allies. . . The president might say that the work was being done on the development of atomic fission for war purposes, that good progress had been made; and that an attempt to use a weapon would be made shortly, though it was not certain that it would succeed. If it did succeed, it would be necessary for a discussion to be held on the best method of handling the development in the interest of world peace and not for destruction." This quote is taken from the "Minutes of a Meeting of the Combined Policy Committee (Washington)," July 4, 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1945*, Vol. 2 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 13.

effort to bring Russia into the Pacific War, though subdued following the Trinity test, demonstrated his lack of absolute faith that the atomic weapon by itself would be sufficient to bring the Japanese surrender. The Americans were relying on the shock value of the atomic bomb and the Russian entry into the war to undermine Japanese morale. In addition, if the United States found it had to invade Japan, Truman wanted the Soviet Army to tie down the Japanese forces committed to China on the mainland.

At the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference, the president issued the Potsdam Declaration,³⁰ an ultimatum to Japan that the "rain of terror" on their cities would continue unabated if they did not surrender immediately.³¹ Prior to the release of the declaration, the president had been urged

³⁰A portion of the declaration explained that the devastation of the Japanese homeland would continue if the war continued. "The full application of our military power, backed by our resolve, will mean the inevitable and complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces and just as inevitably the utter destruction of the Japanese homeland." Quoted from the "Potsdam Declaration," July 26, 1945, *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949*, Vol. 3 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 1204-1205.

³¹Historian Herbert Feis stated: "Thus there is irony in the contrast between the two edges or faces of the fate prepared for the Japanese at Potsdam. Seldom has so crushing and relentless a combination of forces been arrayed against an enemy; seldom, at the end of so awful a war, has so large a residue of toleration remained." *Japan Subdued* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 52.

to clarify the issue of the Imperial House by modifying the unconditional surrender war aim of the Allies. The unconditional surrender policy provided wonderful propaganda, but it backfired on the Allies in practice. Some analysts in the State Department felt that Japan would surrender if the Allies indicated that the Emperor would not be removed from power following the war. This argument in favor of modifying the surrender policy seemed logical but was politically risky for the new president.

Truman inherited the policy from Roosevelt, who first pronounced it while meeting with Churchill at the Casablanca Conference on January 24, 1943. From the earliest days of the war, President Roosevelt had called for total victory. The president refined this wartime rhetoric at the Casablanca Conference where he called for the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers. The origin of the president's remarks, which some think came as a surprise to Churchill, has been the subject of considerable debate.³² Roosevelt stated that he made the remark on the spur of the moment, thinking back to the American Civil War and General Grant's demand for unconditional surrender. The policy was a propaganda slogan to

³² Sean Dennis Cashman, *America, Roosevelt, and World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 102. The issues and problems of unconditional surrender are expertly addressed by the author in this interesting work.

bolster support on the home front. Churchill and Stalin, though not specifically consulted, did not oppose the condition placed on the Axis powers.³³

There were few precedents for an unconditional surrender of an entire nation prior to 1943. The legal meaning of the policy was unclear, as most modern wars were concluded through negotiation. Roosevelt had elevated the war to an Armageddon-type conflict between all that was evil and all that was good. He stated, "No compromise can end this conflict. There never had been--there never can be--successful compromise between good and evil."³⁴ Early in the conflict the president rejected the notion of negotiation and the announcement at the Casablanca Conference only reinforced the Allied war aim.

³³Though the policy was not publicly challenged, it was a matter of private dialogue with Stalin. Secretary Stimson reported in 1943 that, "The department has been informed by the British embassy that when the question of a joint declaration to the German people on the basis of unconditional surrender arose at Tehran, Marshal Stalin expressed the opinion that this would be bad tactics as far as Germany was concerned, and that he suggested the three governments work out terms together with a view of making them known generally to the German people." "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant)," December 24, 1943. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1944*, Vol. 1, 484-485.

³⁴War Messages of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 9 December 1941, as quoted by Anne Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender: The Impact of the Casablanca Policy upon World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 17.

Critics of the harsh surrender terms blame the policy for prolonging the war. The policy detailed the inflexible manner in which the war should end, but it did not explore the conditions of post-war treatment of the defeated nations. Denied hope and some expectation of civility following the war, perhaps the moderates within the Axis governments were unable or unwilling to exert themselves for such an uncertain future. In effect, the unconditional surrender policy may have created greater resistance and intensified the war at a time when the warring nations should have been agreeing on surrender terms.³⁵ The policy united forces within the defeated country which might otherwise have been at odds.

³⁵FDR was aware of these criticisms on the policy that he practically forced upon the Allies. In a memorandum to the president, Secretary Stimson explained, "Mr. Molotov on his own initiative brought up with the ambassador, on Dec. 31, the definition of the term 'unconditional surrender' and inquired what was the attitude of this government on the question. It is my understanding that the Soviet interest in this matter is not based on any desire to weaken the principle of unconditional surrender or to offer milder terms to enemy countries but rather on the belief that the present undefined term 'unconditional surrender' affords enemy propaganda an opportunity to play on the natural fear of the unknown in the minds of their own people and consequently stiffens their will to fight. As I understand it, the Soviet government believes that some definition, however general or severe of the conditions of surrender which will be imposed on the enemy countries would deprive the enemy of this propaganda advantage and subsequently weaken the morale of the armed forces and people." "Memorandum by Secretary of State to President Roosevelt," January 1944, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1944*, Vol. 1, 493.

There were those in the government who argued that unconditional surrender had prolonged the fighting in Europe well past its logical concluding point. Allied strategists argued that had the terms under which the Germans could hope to find themselves after the war been delineated, senseless death and destruction could have been avoided. Truman was advised by some that the same held true for Japan. Among this group was the insightful Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew, a former ambassador to Japan for ten years, who argued that if the president could, in the Potsdam Declaration, assure the Japanese that the constitutional monarchy of the Emperor would remain intact, further hostilities might be averted.³⁶

Grew stated:

The really important point in all this, however, seems to me to be just this: . . . that there will be no guarantee whatsoever that the millions of Japanese soldiers throughout East Asia will stop fighting, and the mopping up of those tremendous areas would of course be a very long and costly process. If at that time however the Emperor could be led to issue an Imperial Rescript, . . . that is the one thing that might do the trick and it might save the lives of tens of thousands of our fighting men.³⁷

³⁶Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 224-226.

³⁷Quoted from a letter from Joseph Grew to Randall Gould in April 1945, as quoted by Masanori Nakamura in *The Japanese Monarchy* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), 69.

Grew felt that the president had already lost an opportunity to end the war earlier. Grew felt that the issue of the Imperial House should have been clarified by the President in a declaration following the devastating fire-bombing of Tokyo in May. He added,

I furthermore believed that if such a statement could be formulated and issued shortly after the great devastation of Tokyo by our B-29 attacks on or about May 26, 1945, the hands of the Emperor and his peace-minded advisers would be greatly strengthened in the face of the intransigent militarists and that the process leading to an early surrender might even then be set in motion by such a statement.³⁸

He felt that Truman could have taken advantage of the demoralizing bombing and removed a main stumbling block on the path to Japanese capitulation.

Among those opposing Grew were State Department deputies Dean Acheson and Archibald Macleish. Acheson described their differences by stating,

I was soon engaged in a sharp difference of opinion with Joe Grew regarding the future of the Emperor in Japan; Grew argued for his retention as the main stabilizing factor in Japan; I argued that he should be removed because he was a weak leader who had yielded to the military demand for war and who could not be relied upon.³⁹

³⁸Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1953), 1421-1422.

³⁹Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 112.

Supporters of the surrender policy argued that only the utter destruction of the aggressive military regimes in Germany and Japan would prevent their rise from the ashes. They recalled how Hitler had used the "stab in the back" charge regarding Germany's defeat in World War I during his rise to power. The idea that complete victory was necessary was not new, for the Allies had been calling for the utter and total destruction of the enemy; but having formalized the policy of unconditional surrender, it now became much harder to back away from the inflexible war aim.

Grew was ultimately upstaged by his newly appointed boss, James Byrnes. Byrnes discouraged the clarification, stating that it would be unwise to give the impression of appeasement by settling for anything less than unconditional surrender.⁴⁰ Truman's concern was the political price he would pay for such a statement. In 1945, with resentment running high against the Emperor among the American people, some were urging harsh treatment.⁴¹ Had Truman appeared to alter Roosevelt's

⁴⁰Robert L. Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 87-92.

⁴¹"The American people maintained an image of the Emperor as the sovereign leader of the 'land of the rising sun,' now seen as the principal enemy of the United States. Hirohito was thus synonymous with the brutal Japanese military, and it was therefore taboo to make any favorable comments about him

policy, he would have opened his new presidency to strong public criticism. In taking the oath of office, Truman promised to follow Roosevelt's policies and thus placed himself in an awkward position to publicly challenge the well established goal of unconditional surrender. Yet in the end, a small compromise was made.⁴² Japanese diplomat Toshikazu Kase pointed out that:

The United States. . . insisted upon the formula of unconditional surrender but intended to accord us in substance modified treatment. We in turn were prepared to accept unconditional surrender in substance but were anxious to obtain the formula, or appearance of a negotiated peace. It was the task of our diplomacy to adjust the difference between these two standpoints which, after all, was largely psychological.⁴³

It does seem frustrating that the two nations could not address the issues on which they agreed and hasten war termination. Concerning the issue of the Emperor, the declaration stated only that the occupying Allied forces would withdraw from Japan once "there has been established in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese

in public that might conflict with this popular view." Nakamura, *The Japanese Monarchy*, 18.

⁴²"America was no more irrevocably committed to Japan's surrender than the Japanese were to fighting to the very end." Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American war, 1941-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 213.

⁴³Toshikazu Kase, *Journey to the Missouri* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 203.

people a peacefully inclined and responsible government."⁴⁴ The president was unwilling to address publicly the issue of surrender terms, but he had stated that his overriding policy was to end the war as soon as possible. What he really meant was that he wanted the war to end as soon as possible under strict Allied conditions.

Truman, therefore, inherited a condition that he was in little position to change. Modifying surrender terms at this point of the war would have had the air of "appeasement" which would have been very unpopular at home, even if he had been able to persuade Churchill and Stalin to accept the shift in Allied policy. The choice before Truman was difficult. There was reason to calm the Japanese fears concerning their Emperor.⁴⁵ Doing so, however, would have created an outcry from an American public that had endorsed the unconditional surrender policy and in general had little sympathy for the

⁴⁴"Proclamation Defining Terms of Surrender," dated 26 July 1945. Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, 215.

⁴⁵"The absence of any mention of the Emperor in the Potsdam Proclamation posed a serious problem for the end-of-war party in Japan since preservation of the imperial house was the one prerequisite on which all of their efforts to date had been based. . . . The one thing they could not do was sign a death warrant for the imperial house." Robert J. C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 140-141.

Japanese or their Emperor after three and a half years of bloody warfare.

Perhaps Roosevelt would have had the political courage to change the policy in the face of public opposition, but nothing in his behavior before his death indicated that he was contemplating a modification to his unconditional surrender policy. For Truman, new to the presidency and understandably hyper-sensitive to public opinion, any unpopular modification would have been difficult.⁴⁶ If fault is to be found concerning the surrender policy of the Allies, that fault should be leveled at Roosevelt. He initiated it and was the only person in the position to modify it, prior to his death.⁴⁷ The surrender policy, therefore, was determined more by domestic political concerns than by international realities.

As in the Frank Report, some have argued that Truman should have also provided the Japanese with an explicit

⁴⁶"Emotions and enthusiasms engendered by the war seem to have blurred the realism of the planners." Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender*, 261.

⁴⁷"There was nothing in President Roosevelt's language prior to his death that would indicate that he wanted to modify the policy. "Despite severe criticism of the policy by political opponents and even by members of his own Cabinet and by his military advisers, the President consistently refused all demands or suggestions to retract or modify the demand. Again and again in speeches and communiques throughout the war he repeated the phrase. He refused all suggestions of compromise, and until his death his war aim remained the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan." Ibid., 12.

warning of the new weapon and the dire consequences of continuing the fight. This argument seems somewhat unfounded, for the declaration did promise the total destruction of Japan by the combined weight of the Allied military effort. It seems doubtful that the added clarification about the atomic bomb would have changed Japanese policy, but it might have put the United States in a stronger moral position following the war.

Truman was also advised that a warning would lessen the shock value of the atomic attack. With the tremendous amount of rhetoric and propaganda employed by all the belligerents throughout the war, it seems unlikely that any warning, no matter how graphic in detail, would have moved the military factions in Japan to surrender. It is ironic, though, that the United States, outraged by the surprise military attack on Pearl Harbor, would deliver a surprise super-weapon without a more specific warning, but a state of war did not exist between Japan and the United States when American forces were attacked in 1941. The United States, though, did have the opportunity to explicitly warn the Japanese, yet failed to do so.

The Japanese response to the Potsdam Declaration came on July 28, when Prime Minister Suzuki stated that the Declaration would be ignored. He stated,

I believe the Joint Proclamation by the three countries is nothing but a rehash of the Cairo Declaration. As for the government, it does not find any important value in it, and there is no other recourse but to ignore it entirely and resolutely fight for the successful conclusion of the war.⁴⁸

With this answer to the Allied ultimatum, the new and devastating American weapon was unleashed on the Japanese homeland. On August 6th and 9th, 1945, the United States attacked the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic weapons, leaving an estimated 210,000 people dead or dying under the now infamous mushroom clouds.⁴⁹

It is surprising that among the volumes of critical essays on the debate at hand, so little fault has been placed on the Japanese government. The vast majority of criticism has been leveled at the United States and its missed opportunities. This discussion would be incomplete without exploring the responsibility of the Japanese leadership in the tragedy.⁵⁰ In July 1945, when the Allies delivered the Potsdam

⁴⁸"The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam)," *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, Vol 2, 1293.

⁴⁹John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 298. Dower is a professor of international cooperation and global stability at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His book has been critically acclaimed and is an excellent exploration of the vicious nature of the Pacific War.

⁵⁰Daikichi Irokawa, a history professor at Tokyo University of Economics recently commented, "For a long time, it was strictly taboo to suggest that the Emperor was responsible for

Declaration, Japan was a defeated nation. The once-impressive Imperial Navy lay scattered across the Pacific Ocean floor. The Imperial air forces suffered as badly, with their veteran pilots lost in the war along with their once technologically superior aircraft. The nation's air defense was decimated to the point that the Allies had complete control of the air space above Japan. The Imperial Army, tenacious though it was, had suffered appalling losses in a series of consecutive military defeats in the Pacific since 1943.⁵¹ Though some in the civilian government wanted to seek a negotiated peace, the military faction refused to relinquish its stranglehold on national policy making.⁵² The military leaders were hoping for one last great victory against the American forces that would enable Japan to seek a more honorable conclusion to the

this tragic war, but things have changed, and there are many of us saying that Emperor Showa (Hirohito) could have prevented the war in the first place and could have brought about a surrender long before the atomic bomb was used." Quoted from an interview printed in the *Washington Post*, July 28, 1995.

⁵¹Historian Robert J. C. Butow stated, "Although an objective appraisal of the situation would have forced the admission that neither a military nor a diplomatic victory was at all likely at this late stage, Japan's military authorities chose to ignore such implications even when they understood the facts." Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, 76-77.

⁵²The Big Six, the ruling cabinet which met with the Emperor, were: the Prime Minister, the Foreign Affairs Minister, the Minister of War, the Minister of the Navy, and the Army and Navy Chiefs of Staff.

conflict.⁵³ Ultimately, the Japanese political process was hopelessly flawed and precluded the Prime Minister from seeking an end to hostilities.

The flawed constitution that empowered the military was a product of the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Without calling on the expertise of a constitutional lawyer, some generalities illustrate the weakness of the Japanese government. The Emperor had been restored to the throne to reign, not rule. This was certainly true of Emperor Hirohito before and during the Second World War. He did not initiate government policy and seldom spoke during imperial meetings with government leaders. Hirohito was the spiritual, not political, leader of his nation.⁵⁴

The Prime Minister and the military leaders were ultimately responsible to the Emperor, but the military was not responsible to the Prime Minister. Therefore, the actions of the nation's military, by law, were not restrained by any civilian political controls. Indeed, the reverse came closer to the mark. Throughout the 1930's and 1940's, the civilian

⁵³On this point Butow stated, "Not all the militarists were blind. Many of them, in fact, knew that there was little or no chance of their achieving so smashing a success that the Pacific War would end gloriously for Japan, but they were confident of at least winning an operational victory in the decisive battle for the homeland." Ibid., 95.

⁵⁴Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 271.

government had to react to the will of the military in crafting national and foreign policy and perform damage control once the military embarked on a new campaign. Much of the war in China saw a dual diplomacy employed by the government. While the civilian government often supported the military in its aggressive actions, it was seeking a cessation of hostilities, which was bleeding the nation of its young men. The military, however, pursued policies which made a negotiated peace practically impossible.

As the war with the Allies dragged on and the military situation became hopeless, the impotent civilian government could do little to end the conflict so long as the military powers continued the fight.⁵⁵ Though some diplomats wanted to approach the United States directly, the military only allowed a futile last minute diplomatic dialogue with the Soviets.⁵⁶ There were some unauthorized, low-level Japanese peace initiatives made in Switzerland in 1945, but they were

⁵⁵"Although the Japanese committed themselves to hostilities with grave misgivings, they gave virtually no serious thought to how the conflict might be terminated. . . .By the autumn of 1944 it was absolutely clear to leaders on both sides that Japan was doomed and yet the struggle dragged on for another year." John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 293-294.

⁵⁶The internal struggle that existed in the Japanese government over foreign policy is described well by Sigal, *Fighting to a Finish*, chapter 2.

unsuccessful.⁵⁷ The Japanese waited in vain for Stalin, who would not serve as mediator at this late point in the conflict.⁵⁸ Diplomat Kase stated, "Had Suzuki been more steadfast or his advisors less stupid we might have been spared the atomic attack."⁵⁹

In effect, the military answered to no one but themselves. By law they reported to the Emperor, but Emperor was reluctant to censure the actions of the military.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷"In spite of the unusual opportunity which existed in Switzerland during the spring and summer of 1945, the Japanese government was too involved in trying to find a way out of its difficulties through the Soviet Union to heed the warnings or exploit the efforts of either Fujimuro or Okamoto. At the same time the United States and its Allies were too concerned with winning the Soviets to their side to pay more than cursory attention to the unauthorized feelers being set in motion in far-off Berne, Zurich, and Basel." Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, 111.

Pennsylvania State University History Professor Robert James Maddox, expounding on the reception of the peace feelers stated that the feelers ". . . led American officials to assume that those involved were either well-intentioned individuals acting alone or that they were being orchestrated by Tokyo. Grew characterized such 'peace feelers' as familiar weapons of psychological warfare designed to divide the Allies." Robert James Maddox, "The Biggest Decision: Why we had to drop the bomb," *American Heritage* (May-June 1995): 73.

⁵⁸"If the Japanese had approached Washington rather than Moscow in late 1944, they would have found the United States more than ready with a peace plan." Iriye, *Power and Culture*, 225.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 211.

⁶⁰It is interesting to note that following the atomic bomb attacks, the indecision within the government offered the Emperor a rare opportunity to exert his limited power. "The

Japanese political system failed the Japanese people, for it allowed death and destruction to continue far beyond what their civilian government should have permitted. Therefore, the military leadership had much to answer for to the people whom they could not defend.⁶¹ Having failed militarily, they could have stepped aside and allowed the Prime Minister a freer hand to seek a negotiated settlement to end the war earlier, thus saving the senseless bloodshed that followed.⁶²

impact of the Hiroshima attack was to bring further urgency and lubrication to the machinery of achieving peace, primarily by contributing to a situation which permitted the Prime Minister to bring the Emperor overtly and directly into a position where his decision for immediate acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration could be used to override the remaining objectors. Thus, although the atomic bombs changed no notes for the Supreme War Direction Council concerning the Potsdam terms, they did foreshorten the war and expedite the peace." Strategic Bombing Report, 1946. Stoff, *The Manhattan Project*, 271.

⁶¹"In the end it was not Japan's residual military strength but its political weakness that prolonged war termination--the inability of Japanese leaders to resolve divisions within the cabinet and the Big Six." Sigal, *Fighting to a Finish*, 280.

⁶²Not only did the military not step aside, some military officials resisted until the very end. "The events in Japan on the night of August 14-15 clearly show, the atomic bomb had not yet ended the war. Even with Hiroshima and Nagasaki destroyed and a 'rain of ruin' threatened, many senior Japanese army and navy officers still wanted the decisive battle. Had the military coup succeeded, the war would have gone on, the decisive battle would have been fought, and hundreds of thousands of Americans and Japanese lives would have been lost." Thomas Allen and Norman Polmar, *Code-Name Down-Fall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan and Why Truman Dropped the Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 291.

This argument has, of course, been simplified, but certainly the flawed constitution and the reluctance of the military leaders to end a conflict that was clearly lost were in large part responsible for the ruin of two of Japan's cities by atomic bombs.⁶³

The atomic bombs did allow the Emperor an opportunity not normally afforded him. The political crisis which developed allowed the Emperor to exert his will upon the government when the government was in a dreadful deadlock.⁶⁴ Japanese diplomat Kase stated, "The Imperial verdict was announced and the issue was now clear. . . .The nation whose fate had hung by a hair was saved by the explicit command of the Emperor."⁶⁵ That Hirohito's decision to intervene was heavily influenced by the atomic bomb attacks is evident by his statement in the Imperial rescript proclaiming surrender which referred to "a new and most cruel bomb." The Imperial intervention was so unusual that Kase further stated, "As I

⁶³Noted Historian Akira Iriye stated, "The Potsdam declaration should have been accepted immediately and unequivocally by the Japanese government, for it gave them just what they were seeking, a peace on the basis of something other than an unconditional surrender." *Power and Culture*, 263.

⁶⁴"Nonetheless, the evidence is that neither the atomic bombings nor Soviet entry caused anyone in the cabinet or the high command to change his convictions about war termination." Sigal, *Fighting to a Finish*, 278.

⁶⁵Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 235.

look back, it was a miracle that the surrender was brought about without serious mishap. . . If we had attempted it sooner I am certain it would have ended in a fiasco."⁶⁶ In this way, Kase seemed to be endorsing the American decision to drop the atomic bombs, for it brought about the condition which allowed for the peace movement in the Japanese government to move forward. Without the political crisis brought about by the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the emperor probably would not have had the opportunity to intervene and the war would have raged on in further futility.⁶⁷

Among the longest lasting debates within the atomic issue is that concerning "atomic diplomacy."⁶⁸ This issue has

⁶⁶Ibid., 264.

⁶⁷"The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet Union's declaration of war did not produce Japan's decision to surrender, for that decision--in embryo--had long been taking shape. What these events did do was to create that unusual atmosphere in which the theretofore static factor of the Emperor could be made active in such an extraordinary way as to work what was virtually a political miracle." Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, 231.

⁶⁸Scholar and noted expert on the atomic bombing research, Barton J. Bernstein stated, "Few events in recent American foreign policy have generated as much scholarly controversy as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima." Bernstein is a prolific author with great understanding of the complex issues surrounding this topic. His Article entitled, "The Atomic Bomb and American Foreign Policy, 1941-1945: An Historiographical Controversy," *Peace and Change* 2 (Spring 1974): 1-16, is an excellent resource for those who wish to follow the historiography of the atomic diplomacy debate.

played such a large role in this overall debate that some attention will here be given to the historiography of atomic diplomacy. This issue, born shortly after the end of the war, became a serious historical problem in the 1960's and continues to be the source of much scholarly attention. While Truman stated that ending the war on Allied terms as soon as possible and saving Allied lives were his only considerations, revisionists have suggested that other forces greatly influenced his decision.

Within this debate, and found in most every historical dialogue, are two general schools of thought: the orthodox and the revisionist. Orthodox historians basically support the president's statements on his use of the atomic bomb and support the notion that the United States was justified in using atomic weapons. The revisionists, on the other hand, have argued that the Soviet Union was the "real target" of the atomic attacks. The "pure" revisionists have argued that a conspiracy was created at the White House and have condemned the use of the bomb as unnecessary and therefore immoral. The moderate revisionists have agreed that the bomb was unnecessary and immoral but do not ascribe to the dark, conspiratorial thesis. They claim that the president's actions were naive and short sighted. The dialogue between the two schools has

been lively as scholarly volleys have kept the debate interesting.⁶⁹

Some degree of uneasiness concerning the atomic bomb decision appears to have existed within the administration, for no sooner had the war ended than a defense was mounted by some of the atomic players to justify their actions to the public. With the publication in 1946 of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, many Americans were, for the first time, beginning to picture the devastation that existed below the billowing mushroom clouds.⁷⁰ Some White House officials began to feel the pressure to "set the record straight." Compton and Stimson, in an effort to justify the U.S. decision, quickly published articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Magazine*, hoping to reach a large audience.⁷¹ The authors

⁶⁹Historian J. Samuel Walker stated, "The events that led to Hiroshima are so innately interesting, so vital to understanding subsequent developments, so politically and morally ambiguous, and so much a part of popular mythology that it seems certain that they will perpetually occupy the attention of and stir discord among scholars of World War II and the nuclear age." Walker offers an authoritative history of the atomic dialogue in, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," *Diplomatic History* 14 (Winter 1990): 114.

⁷⁰The contents of Hersey's book first appeared in installments in *The New Yorker* magazine. John Hersey, "Hiroshima," *The New Yorker* (August 1946): 15-26.

⁷¹Karl Compton, "If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used," *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1946): 54-56. Henry Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Harper's Magazine* (Fall 1947): 97-107.

basically argued that the bomb was the lesser of two evils. Destroying two Japanese cities was preferable to the expected casualties from the planned invasion of the Japanese homeland.⁷² Even with these reassurances, not long after the bomb was dropped questions began to surface concerning the motivations behind the bombings. The early challengers, mild though their doubts were, included Norman Cousins and Thomas K. Finletter who published "A Beginning of Sanity" in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1946.⁷³ Others who began to probe and ask questions were P.M.S. Blackett, Carl Marzani, William Appleman Williams, and D.F. Fleming.⁷⁴

Herbert Feis, a retired State Department official, was the first to make a serious study of the topic in 1961 with his publication of *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific*. Although he did not think that the bomb was necessary to end the war, he agreed that the bombing was justified militarily with the aim of ending the war as

⁷²Barton J. Bernstein, "Seizing the Contested Terrain of Early Nuclear History," *Diplomatic History* 17 (Winter 1993): 35-72.

⁷³Cousins and Finletter, "Beginning From Sanity," *Saturday Review* (June 1946): 5-9.

⁷⁴P.M.S. Blackett, *Military and Political Consequences of Atomic Energy* (London, 1948); Carl Marzani, *We Can Be Friends* (New York, 1952); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, 1959); and D.F. Fleming, *The Cold War and its Origins* (Garden City, 1961).

soon as possible.⁷⁵ Though he rejected the notion that the main target of the atomic bomb was the Soviet Union, he did state:

It may be also . . . that Churchill and Truman and some of their colleagues conceived that besides bringing the war to a quick end, it would improve the chances of arranging a satisfactory peace. For would not the same dramatic proof of western power that shocked Japan into surrender impress the Russians as well? . . . We were not only subduing Japanese aggressors, we were perhaps monitoring the emergent Russian aggression.⁷⁶

His argument was challenged four years later by Gar Alperovitz in his now classic work, *Atomic Diplomacy*. Not only did Alperovitz reject the orthodox view but he boldly stated that the decision to bomb Japan was not motivated by military but rather diplomatic concerns. The author stated, "Although military considerations were not primary, as we have seen, unquestionably political considerations related to Russia played a major role in the decision."⁷⁷ He claimed that the atomic bomb was used to impress the Soviet Union of the new-

⁷⁵Though he was not a proponent of atomic diplomacy, Feis stated, "In short, the bomb, it may have been thought or hoped, would not only subdue the Japanese aggressors, but perhaps also monitor Russian Behavior." *Japan Subdued*, 194.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 182.

⁷⁷Alperovitz first published his book in 1965. A revised and updated version where the author defended his thesis from those who have attacked it since then was published in 1985. This quote comes from the latter edition. Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 287.

found power of the United States. He further claimed that the bomb was an extension of Truman's new "get tough" policy on the Soviet Union and that Truman expected the atomic display to win postwar concessions and check Soviet aggression. Alperovitz described an "atomic showdown" and a "strategy of delay" where the political and diplomatic promises of atomic energy outweighed the administration's serious efforts to seek options to atomic bombing. These options included modifying the unconditional surrender policy, delaying the bombing until the full impact of the Soviet entry into the war was felt by the Japanese government and exploring peace initiatives. Additionally, he argued that the administration knew that Japan was on the verge of collapse and the use of the atomic bomb was therefore unjustifiable.⁷⁸

In making this argument, most revisionists cite the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, conducted after the end of hostilities, which claimed that Japan would have capitulated without the use of atomic weapons before the scheduled invasion in November, 1945. The revisionists have relied too heavily on this document. The Bombing Survey conclusions were made

⁷⁸Lisle A. Rose, *Dubious Victory: The United States and the End of World War II* (Kent, Oh: Kent State University Press, 1973), 366. Rose argued that Japan was so paralyzed by the naval blockade and aerial bombardment that "she simply could not have continued the war beyond mid-autumn."

following a careful study of the Japanese military capabilities by the occupation forces in Japan. In hindsight, it appears obvious that Japan would have surrendered by year's end, but this information was not available to policy makers before the end of the war. Though their perceptions may have been faulty, it is unfair to criticize the administration on the basis of information not available at the time. Through MAGIC and ULTRA intercepts, the administration knew that Japan was seeking a negotiated peace through the mediation of Stalin, but other questions remained."⁹

A series of Truman's notes and letters were released in the 1980's and it was hoped that more light would be shed on key issues of the debate. While the notes and letters aided historians in understanding Truman's thinking, they were far from conclusive on the issue of atomic diplomacy. Some notes appeared to give the impression that the president knew the bomb was not necessary to end the war while other notes made

⁹Robert James Maddox, professor of history at Pennsylvania State University explained that, "MAGIC intercepts informed them (the Truman administration) that the Foreign Office continued to seek Russian mediation even after Hiroshima. ULTRA provided evidence of such an imposing buildup on Kyushu that General Marshall began. . . to question whether it (the invasion) should be mounted there at all. Neither source gave reason to believe that surrender was imminent before the bomb was used." *Weapons For Victory: The Hiroshima Decision Fifty Years Later* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 149.

it appear that the president thought the war with Japan might continue for another year.⁸⁰ In the end, insufficient evidence exists to indicate just what Truman was thinking in July and August 1945 concerning the connection between the atomic bomb and the Soviet Union.

The best argument that has emerged from the atomic diplomacy debate has come from a meeting of the orthodox and revisionist schools of thought. Many scholars have agreed with Alperovitz that the bomb did provide political leverage, but most believe that this issue was secondary to the military concerns of ending the war and saving lives.⁸¹ The greatest contribution of the revisionists has been the light they have shed on the issue of foreign policy and the decision to use the atomic bomb. Most have rejected Alperovitz's claim that diplomatic concerns were the primary motivations for the decision, but certainly it was a substantial consideration in

⁸⁰These new publications were expertly reviewed by Robert L. Messer, "New Evidence on Truman's Decision," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 412 (August 1985): 50-56.

⁸¹Two of these noted scholars are Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic bomb and the Grand Alliance* (New York, 1975) and Barton J. Bernstein, "Roosevelt, Truman and the Atomic Bomb, 1941-1945: A Reinterpretation," *Political Science Quarterly* 90 (Spring 1975): 23-69.

the overall equation.⁸² The atomic bomb was used primarily to "shock" the Japanese government into ending the war as soon as possible and any subsequent effect that it had on the Stalin and the Soviet Union was desirable but not crucial to the decision.⁸³

Having addressed the major issues concerning the political considerations of the atomic bomb decision, what conclusions can be drawn? There were significant problems associated with the political decision to use the atomic weapon. For example, the United States missed an opportunity to seek war termination before the use of atomic weapons. The Allied unconditional surrender policy prolonged the conflict that

⁸²Japanese historian Sadao Asada has written an interesting article on this debate as it has evolved historiographically in Japan. He stated that there have developed two camps of thought in Japan. Some researchers adhere to the moderate atomic diplomacy model while others stress the inertia inherent in the atomic program. In describing the United States' decision he eloquently stated, "It was war itself that dehumanized the victors and the vanquished alike. Behind the A-bomb decision was the brutal logic of war which inexorably forced the issue as in a Greek drama that is played to the catastrophic end." "Japanese Perceptions of the A-bomb Decision, 1945-1980," *The American Military and the Far East*, edited by Joe Dixon, (Washington D.C.: United States Air Force Academy, 1980), 219.

⁸³Ronald H. Spector, in his work on the Pacific War, stated that the atomic bomb "provided the necessary shock which finally galvanized the peace faction among Japanese leaders to take action and the Emperor decisively to intervene in the peace process." *Eagle Against the Sun* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 558.

should have terminated by early 1945 when it was clear that Japan was defeated militarily and economically. The only question that remained was the manner in which Japan would seek an end to the war. Unconditional surrender "masked" the Allied intentions for Japan following the war. The failure to clarify the role of the Emperor at Potsdam only bolstered Japanese resolve to fight to the bitter end. Time has shown that Joseph Grew possessed the insight and understanding of the Japanese which could have spared many lives needlessly taken at the end of the war. Unfortunately, his advice was not heeded.⁸⁴

Though this opportunity should have been seized by the United States, President Truman's choice to stay the course is understandable. The decision to pursue the bomb had been made in 1942 when President Roosevelt initiated the project in the face of German aggression. Truman inherited the assumption that the weapon would be used. He also inherited the former president's advisors, who also held that assumption. The

⁸⁴"In the summer of 1945, the victorious Americans owed the Japanese people an experiment in negotiation. To use the atomic bomb, to kill and terrorize civilians, without even attempting such an experiment, was a double crime." claims Michael Walzer, a professor of social studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., who has written a thought-provoking book dealing with the morality of various wars. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 268.

insulated, bureaucratic and secret manner in which the atomic bomb was created made it less likely that basic assumptions would be re-examined, as the secrecy surrounding the project restricted the channels of communication leading to the president. Following a long and bitter struggle, the U.S. public was in no mood for appeasement or leniency. The new president was not in a political position to modify the surrender policy nor detail the Emperor's role following the war, without suffering serious domestic criticism. Truman's decision reflected the mood and the wishes of the American public to end the conflict and stop the killing of U.S. soldiers.

Japan, like the United States, also missed opportunities to end the conflict before Hiroshima. Its flawed constitution and misguided foreign policy put Japanese citizens in great peril during the last two years of the war.⁸⁵ The survival of the emperor system was the only ground that the Japanese military leaders held in common with the civilian leaders.

⁸⁵Herbert P. Bix, an historian of Japan, takes exception to the view that the emperor played a passive role in governmental affairs. Bix stated, "When the final crisis was fully upon him (the emperor), the only option left was surrender without negotiations. Again, it was not so much the Allied policy of unconditional surrender that prolonged the Pacific war, as it was the unrealistic and incompetent actions of Japan's highest leaders." "Japan's Delayed Surrender: A Reinterpretation," *Hiroshima in America*, 112-113.

The Army was demanding other concessions as well and it seems unlikely that this modification alone would have appeased the military hardliners.⁸⁶

The Soviet Union did factor into the atomic decision, but only as a secondary benefit to forcing Japan's surrender. It does not seem unusual that Truman would be concerned with Soviet reaction to the atomic bombings. The new weapons would profoundly influence U.S. foreign policy. That the atomic weapons would also curb Soviet aggression was viewed as desirable, but not fundamental to the decision. The inhabitants of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not perish because the United States wanted to intimidate the Soviet Union. These cities were bombed for the purpose of ending the war quickly.

The atomic bombs were politically justified for they brought about the desired surrender of Japan. The bombings forced a crisis in Japan which allowed the Emperor to sue for peace. Though mistakes and misjudgments were made by U.S. policy makers, there was no rush to judgement. The decision

⁸⁶On this issue, noted Historian Robert James Maddox stated, "The proposition that the Japanese would have capitulated in June or July if only Washington has extended a promise about the emperor rests on the fallacy that this was the sole obstacle to peace. Far from it. The very idea of surrender was alien to the Japanese samurai tradition. To give in without a last-ditch struggle, especially to racial inferiors, was virtually unthinkable." *Weapons For Victory*, 146.

was a matter of high level internal debate and scrutiny. Many qualified advisors counseled the President to take this action with the intention of shocking Japan into surrender. The atomic decision was not a perfect political decision but was the result of a logical effort conducted by reasonable men during a horrific war.

CHAPTER 4

MILITARY NECESSITY

The dominant factor of 1945 was war, and that therefore, necessarily, the dominant objective was victory. If victory could be speeded up by using the bomb, it should be used.⁸⁷

Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson

The decision to use atomic weapons was ultimately a political choice. At the core of that decision, though, was the question of military necessity. In early 1945, the United States was in its fourth year of costly and brutal war. Though eventual Allied victory was not in doubt by that time, Germany and Japan continued to fight with determination and ferocity.⁸⁸ Since the United States was at war, the overriding objective was victory. The atomic bombs were added to

⁸⁷Stimson, *On Active Service in Peace and War*, 629-630.

⁸⁸The losses on Saipan, for example, in June 1944 illustrated this determination. Historian James Stokesbury wrote: "Of perhaps 30,000 people on the island--soldiers, sailors, and Japanese civilians--about 27,000 died, including thousands of civilians who committed suicide along with the last soldiers." James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 337. The Horrendous losses on Iwo Jima and Okinawa also played a significant factor in the bomb decision and will be addressed later in this chapter.

the American arsenal and deployed with that objective in mind, as the weapons were natural extensions of existing strategic bombing operations. The mere possession of the atom bomb did not justify its use, for only military necessity could justify such a weapon. Since Japan had not given up the fight and continued to inflict severe casualties, there did appear to be a military necessity for the continued bombing campaign which would soon include atomic weapons. But if Japan was on the verge of defeat in August 1945, could the United States be justified in using such horrific force? Was it necessary to drop the atomic bombs on Japanese cities in order to elicit a surrender? To answer these questions, an understanding of the military situation facing the United States in 1945 is essential.

In April 1945, President Truman took the oath of office. He later stated that the two goals that propelled him through his 1945 term in office were the aims of saving American lives and ending the war as soon as possible. In May 1945, the war with Germany came to a close with the capture of Berlin by the Red Army. The outcome of the Pacific War was not in doubt, but no one could predict with any authority how soon that conflict would end. Though victory was assured, the consensus among Truman's military advisors was that there were months, if not years, of fighting ahead and that it might be necessary

to invade the Japanese homeland, costing heavy Allied casualties, before Japan would surrender.⁸⁹

Concerning the strategy for exacting Japan's surrender, a difference of opinion ran along service lines. As is the case in the military branches of most nations, there existed in the U.S. military a natural rivalry between the army and naval services. In peace time, this rivalry is waged over budgets, allocations of material and personnel. In times of war, the struggle continues, but with each seeking strategies which would credit their respective services with the accolades of victory. As the United States was entering the final stages of war against Japan, the military strategists were seeking the most expeditious manner of forcing Japan's surrender while keeping Allied casualties to a minimum.⁹⁰

⁸⁹McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival* (New York: Random House, 1988), 58-63.

⁹⁰Leon V. Sigal has written an excellent book which explores the bureaucratic relationships within national governments and how those relationships often influence national policy. On the inter-service rivalry he stated, "The battle within the U.S. government to spell out conditions of unconditional surrender was subordinated to a struggle over military strategy that took place amid intensified competition among the armed services over roles and missions, capabilities, and budget shares. In that competition each service anticipated that a favorable decision on strategy would benefit it over its rivals after the war by strengthening its claim to credit for victory." Sigal, *Fighting to a Finish*, 286.

As could be expected, the Navy called for further blockades and aerial bombardments of Japan proper. Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations, and Admiral William Leahy, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thought the continued naval blockade and air assaults on Japan would eventually force surrender, if given time.⁹¹ There were already signs of coal shortages and famine in rural areas of Japan and little hope of relief, for nine-tenths of Japanese shipping had been eliminated by Allied unrestricted submarine warfare. This particular strategy was appealing, for it anticipated low Allied casualties; but the war termination date remained uncertain. Countering the Navy's vision, the Army called for the storming of the Japanese islands, arguing that Japan would not surrender until the nation was actually occupied. Generals Douglas MacArthur, Commander of U.S. Army Forces in the Pacific, and George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, argued that Allied bombing alone proved insufficient to end the European war and nothing short of an invasion would bring about the Japanese surrender.

As the military strategists were planning the final stages of the Pacific War, they had to incorporate two long-standing Allied war objectives. The Allies were calling for

⁹¹William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1950), 234-285.

the unconditional surrender of Japan and seeking a resolution to the war "as soon as possible." If time had not been a factor, the tried-and-true medieval tactic of surrounding and laying siege to the island nation would have been the logical battle plan, as the Navy had suggested. Unfortunately, no one could predict with certainty when Japan would finally surrender under such a siege. In light of this, it seemed prudent to plan for the invasion of the islands. The problem facing the invasion strategists was the likelihood of high casualty rates.

If recent fighting in the Pacific was any indication of what the Allies could expect on the Japanese homeland, then an invasion appeared to be a costly strategy indeed. Concerning U.S. casualties, President Truman later stated that, "General Marshall told me that it might cost one half million lives to force the enemy's surrender on his home grounds."⁹² Recent scholarship has questioned this number of casualties.⁹³ Even if the predicted half million casualties was an inflated estimate, a conservative estimate of ten to twenty thousand

⁹²Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman*, 417.

⁹³The issue of projected casualties has been explored by many historians, to include Barton Bernstein. This issue was recently addressed by historian John Ray who stated, "The record does not support the postwar claims of huge Allied casualties to be suffered in the invasion of Japan." In a *San Francisco Chronicle* article of Jan. 31, 1995.

casualties was still sufficient reason to seek other courses of action.⁹⁴ The admirals feared that the troops landing on Kyushu might suffer as high as thirty-five percent casualties, as was seen in the battle for Okinawa. Though Japan's fighting capacity had diminished, the recent battles for Iwo Jima and Okinawa illustrated that the Japanese had not lost their will to fight. U.S. forces suffered much heavier than expected casualties at these battles and once again it was demonstrated on the battlefield that Japan was willing to suffer appalling losses while inflicting serious Allied casualties.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Peter Maslowski, professor of history at the University of Nebraska and co-author of *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* stated, "And perhaps most important, the United States did not have to expend the life of a single serviceman in the invasion. Even if Truman understood that the War Department's highest casualty estimate was fewer than 200,000, no president could have accepted 40,000 Americans dead and another 150,000 wounded when he had an alternative that might entail no casualties." *Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 3, 107.

⁹⁵Mitsusharu Noda, navy enlisted man for Admiral Nagumo's headquarters, fighting in the Saipan battle, June 15-July 9, 1944, described an example of the Japanese commitment to fighting the enemy. "I saw a group of four or five men, Japanese, crawling toward each other on their hands and knees. Their heads were now all close together. One of them held a grenade upward in his right hand. . . I heard "long live the emperor!" and the explosion of a hand grenade at the same instant. Several men were blown away, dismembered at once into bits of flesh. . . it was a horrific way to die. Those were my thoughts as I lost consciousness." Noda was quoted by Haruko Cook, assistant professor of history at Marymount

The battle of Okinawa began on April 1, 1945, and was the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. Harry Truman was sworn into office twelve days later and the battle raged for the following three months. Armed with 1600 planes, Vice-Admiral Takijiro Onishi's Kamikaze attack forces bloodied the American fleet, inflicting heavy casualties and substantial fleet damage.⁹⁶ The attacks sunk 22 warships and damaged 368 others, including carriers and battleships. It was the greatest loss of life suffered in one campaign in U.S. naval history. The casualty rate included a total Allied dead of 12,274, with an additional 36,707 wounded. An estimated 75,000 Japanese soldiers lost their lives, with civilian dead estimated at 60,000.⁹⁷ The civilian dead included group

College and co-author of *Japan at War: An Oral history*. "The Myth of the Saipan Suicides," *Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 3, 15.

⁹⁶Ensign Ichizo Uayashi, assigned to the Special Attack Corps, wrote a letter to his mother on the eve of his death which demonstrated the absolute commitment that so many loyal Imperial troops had to the emperor and the Japanese homeland. He wrote, "Please do not grieve for me, mother. It will be glorious to die in action. I am grateful to be able to die in a battle to determine the destiny of our country. . . I wish that you could be here in person to see the wonderful spirit and morale at this base. . . There will be no clouds of doubt or fear when I make the final plunge." Reproduced by Cpt. Rikihei Inoguchi and Cdm. Tadashi Nakajima, *The Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze force in World War II* (Annapolis: Annapolis Naval Institute Press, 1958), 204.

⁹⁷James and William Belote, *Typhoon of Steel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 310-313.

suicides that further demonstrated Japanese determination to fight and die. Shigeaki Kinjo, a survivor of the Okinawa assault, described the macabre scene among the civilian population:

A strange scene began to unfold right in front of me. One of the village leaders, a middle-aged man, snapped off a sapling . . . Once he had the stick in his hands, he turned into a madman. Striking his wife and children over and over again, bludgeoning them to death. That was the beginning of the tragedy I saw. As if by a chain reaction, it spread from one family to the next. We all must die that way. Everyone seemed to think so. People began to raise their hands against their loved ones."⁸

If the battle of Okinawa indicated the level of commitment and resistance the Allied troops could expect in the Japanese islands, it was a terrible precursor to the scheduled invasion."⁹

Two months earlier, an equally difficult battle had been waged on the tiny island of Iwo Jima. The island was 4.5 miles long by 2.5 miles wide. The Japanese defended the

⁸Quoted in Haruko Taya and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 365.

⁹Author Murray Sayle described the importance that Okinawa played in the decision by stating, "The island was invaded on April 1, 1945, and finally secured on June 22nd. In the sense that the stubborn Japanese resistance on Okinawa, without any air cover, resupply, or reinforcements, gave some credibility, on both sides, to the myth of Japan's decisive battle of the homeland, and so kept the war going until the bomb was ready. Okinawa made Hiroshima possible." Murray Sayle, "Did the Bomb End the War?," *The New Yorker* (31 July 1995): 52.

island with a 21,000-man garrison in well-fortified defensive positions linked by a interconnecting maze of tunnels. The battle began on February 16, 1945, and was scheduled to last five days but instead lasted one month. The Japanese withheld the *banzai* charges of earlier battles and opted to wage an excellent defensive battle. Even with a massive pre-invasion bombardment from the air and sea, the Japanese were able to inflict heavy U.S. casualties with 6,821 men dead and nearly 20,000 wounded. The Japanese lost the entire 21,000-man garrison save about two hundred wounded. This battle was the first time in the war that the U.S. had suffered greater casualties than the enemy.¹⁰⁰ The Americans were winning the Pacific battles but the price of victory continued to escalate even as Japan's military might was waning.

These two battles illustrate that though Japan was crippled in 1945, the nation was far from defenseless. In fact, the Imperial Army had demonstrated that it had the ability and the commitment to make the Allies pay a heavy price for success.¹⁰¹ The military leaders in Japan were

¹⁰⁰Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 498-503.

¹⁰¹By any count, late summer of 1944 to late summer 1945 was the killing year. This was obviously true for the Japanese forces, who were thrown by their desperate generals and admirals into one hopeless confrontation after another. On the U.S. side, over half of all losses suffered in the Pacific (including prisoners of war who died in captivity)

willing to sacrifice the nation in order to obtain some form of honorable war resolution.¹⁰² The Army was seeking one last opportunity to defeat or at least inflict massive casualties upon the Allies on the very beaches of their homeland. With such a victory, they argued, Japan would be in a better position to seek negotiations on terms other than unconditional surrender. Toshikazu Kase, a career Foreign Service officer in the Japanese government, made this observation of his people's determination to resist an invasion:

As there were no guns or swords to arm them with, they were told to improvise spears out of sharpened bamboo sticks! Men and women were herded together and compelled to drill with these primitive weapons morning and evening. . . . A phalanx of bamboo spears was to be arrayed against the massed strength of superfortresses and tanks.¹⁰³

occurred between July 1944 and July 1945." Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 299-300.

¹⁰²Living in a provincial town in Japan, Toki Tanaka related how the Japanese civilians were preparing to repel an invasion. She explained that, "As the war dragged on, we attended the drills of the reservists' association. We practiced with bamboo spears on the school ground under the blazing hot sun. Some fainted from the heat. Men made the spears for us and hung up dolls made of straw, shaped like men. We wrapped our heads with Hachimaki and wore the sash of the national defense woman's association across our chests. We did our best. If you opposed anything about the war, of course, you were a traitor. You had to say, 'yes, yes,' whatever the subject. But when I thought about my husband's hardship at the front, doing that much seemed natural." Haruko and Theodore Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 184.

¹⁰³Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 141.

Japan seemed to be preparing for national suicide if invaded.

Ultimately, the president agreed that it was unlikely that Japan would surrender unless the home islands were occupied. He approved operation OLYMPIC, an invasion of the southern island of Kyushu, scheduled for 1 November 1945. The invasion of the southern island was considered necessary to enforce the naval blockade and to prepare for the final thrust into the Tokyo plain with operation CORONET, planned for March 1946 or beyond. In the face of grim casualty predictions, the president was hoping that Soviet entry into the war and stepped-up pressure by Chinese forces on the mainland might make the invasion of the Tokyo plain unnecessary.

Revisionists like Gar Alperovitz have argued that Japan was on the verge of collapse and that surrender was only months or even weeks away in August 1945.¹⁰⁴ The Strategic Bombing Survey is often quoted as proof that Japan was near

¹⁰⁴Alperovitz stated, "Clearly, Japan was defeated and preparing to surrender before the atomic bomb was used. Though the question of timing was in dispute, it is also certain that this was generally understood in the U.S. government at the time." *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb: And the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 19. Alperovitz seems convinced that the U.S. government had a crystal ball that detailed every move the Japanese were going to make. Was this the same crystal ball that predicted that Germany would collapse before December 1944. Even with the assistance of MAGIC and ULTRA, a great deal of uncertainty existed on when and how the Japanese would exit the war.

capitulation and that the bombing was not necessary. This criticism is unfair, for the Allied leaders did not have the information contained in the Survey prior to their decision. The Americans knew that Japan was in a desperate position, but their experience to date demonstrated that if any lesson had been learned during the war, it was the willingness of one's enemy to suffer and persevere even in dire circumstances. Indeed, enemy nations not only survived but continued to fight under improbable conditions.

One of great strategic mistakes committed by all nations in the war was underestimating the resolve of the enemy troops and civilians to hold out and resist. The Japanese were continually frustrated from the 1930's up through the end of the war with the stubborn resistance in China. The Imperial Army had repeatedly promised victory in China, but was ultimately denied that victory by a clearly inferior force which demonstrated time and again that it could survive to fight another day.

The Germans also underestimated their opponents. Britain was in its darkest hour in 1940. The British Army narrowly escaped annihilation at Dunkirk, but most of the Army's heavy equipment was left behind. The island nation had little with which to defend itself had Operation Sea Lion commenced in earnest. Admiral Doenitz's wolfpacks cut much of Britain's

supply line to the outside world. Nonetheless, throughout the terror bombing of the Luftwaffe, the British managed to hold on and fight back. Many international observers believed Britain would ultimately fall prey to Hitler's war machine. Referring to yet another lesson, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 came within sixty miles of Moscow, smashing the Red Army in the process. The blitzkrieg was accomplished with amazing speed and precision, yet the Soviet Union did not collapse. The German planners seemingly calculated every facet of the invasion, but they grossly miscalculated the Russian spirit and ability to survive and fight under appalling conditions.

The Allies were no better at estimating their enemies' tenacity. The protracted fighting in the last months of the Third Reich, in the face of certain defeat, illustrated that the Nazi-led nation was willing to fight to the bitter end. Motivated by both fear and honor, the Germans put up a fierce battle for Berlin lasting two and a half weeks. This difficult battle took place even after Allied strategic bombing had nearly gutted the city. Prior to the actual advance on Berlin, the city sustained the largest artillery barrage of the entire war. Even after this pounding, the Germans waged a spirited defense of the capital city. Marshall V. I. Chuikov of the Red Army recalled: "Fighting was very fierce in

almost all sectors. Obviously, the enemy had spared no effort to prepare the city's defenses. Every block abounded with fire points. . . . The Germans resisted stubbornly."¹⁰⁵ Determined to continue the fight, the German High Command marched children in front of the advancing Soviet troops. This final act of defiance took even the Russians by surprise. In his war journal Chuikov lamented, "Is this the way to fight, even when the situation is desperate? Who could send children to their deaths?"¹⁰⁶ In the summer of 1945, the American President and military strategists had every reason to believe that the path to ultimate victory in the Pacific ran through Tokyo, with heavy casualties to be expected on both sides.

It is interesting to note that General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was not a major player in the Manhattan project or in the Pacific campaign, did not favor the weapon's use. Eisenhower stated his opposition, "First on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opin-

¹⁰⁵V.I. Chuikov, *The End of the Third Reich* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 201-203.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 218.

ion."¹⁰⁷ This view is interesting given Eisenhower's experience in Europe. Like Japan, Germany was a defeated nation long before the hostilities ended. The fighting lasted much longer than any post-war compensation could justify. As has been argued, this did not stop the Germans from fighting to the very end. Eisenhower had a luxury in Europe that Admiral Chester Nimitz and General MacArthur did not have in the Pacific. Eisenhower chose to avoid the battle of Berlin knowing that the Russian Army would fight it for him. As the American commander, he saw no reason to lose American lives in a battle that was not needed to defeat the German Army but yet was necessary to bring the European war to a close. But he had that option knowing that the Soviets would follow through with the difficult task. Though Germany was a defeated nation, her army fought with tenacity and courage. Germany's reluctant capitulation just six months before the atomic bombing, confirmed the notion that a defeated nation was capable of fighting to the end while inflicting serious casualties. Truman knew that if Tokyo held out like Berlin, he would have to send in U.S. forces to take the city. He did not have another nation's army on which he could rely.

¹⁰⁷Quoted by Stephen E. Ambrose in *Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 426.

Eisenhower objected to the atomic bombing yet his experience in Europe would tend to support it.

The American experience in the Europe and in the Pacific up to August 1945 only reinforced the lesson of nationalistic will to resist imminent defeat.¹⁰⁸ Concerning the issue of Japanese resistance, Joseph Grew, Under Secretary of State and former ambassador to Japan for ten years, stated,

Some of my colleagues in Tokyo proved to their satisfaction several years ago that Japan must crack economically within six months. I disagreed. Unfortunately, they left out of the consideration several factors such as the fanatical psychology of the Japanese, their capacity to integrate the entire country in total war and their ability to subsist and to fight on a shoestring.¹⁰⁹

The policy of unconditional surrender that the Allies adopted in 1943 was a political decision by President Roosevelt, but it had profound military implications. Militarily, the danger inherent in the unconditional surrender policy was a prolonged war.¹¹⁰ The strict policy left military and

¹⁰⁸A diary entry made in March 1945 by Eiko Mikami, a reporter for Japan's Domei news agency illustrated the national commitment to fight on. A portion of the entry reads, "Send us 1,000 bombers, we will fight back. I will sharpen my teeth and nails to fight the enemy. Even my cat Take is Japanese, so she will fight with her claws." *Reuters News Service*, August 14, 1995.

¹⁰⁹Letter from Grew to a friend in 1943 as quoted in Nakamura, *The Japanese Monarchy*, 19.

¹¹⁰Historian Anne Armstrong stated, "However, of those who have published their evaluation or have contributed letters or interviews to this study, the overwhelming majority of

political leaders with little latitude in which to maneuver diplomatically by denying the defeated military forces an honorable exit from the conflict. The moderates within the beleaguered governments, who might have asserted themselves with greater resolve to end the war sooner, were given no incentive by the Allies to do so. The policy denied military honor and civilian hope and discouraged political change. Unconditional surrender only united the enemy forces in stiff resistance to an uncompromising policy. The policy did not serve the military well, for it prolonged the futile fighting.¹¹¹

Some have argued that the atomic bombs should not have been dropped on Japanese cities but directed at strictly military targets. By this stage of the conflict, though, Japan did not have isolated military targets. Had the Imperial Navy survived until August 1945, perhaps a fleet would have been a suitable target. The crux of this argument, though, revolves around the issue of strategic bombing. Allied strategic

generals and military analysts, both Allied and Axis, seem agreed that unconditional surrender did prolong the war." *Unconditional Surrender*, 157. Her work is a thorough analysis of the Allied policy in World War II.

¹¹¹"Militarily, this strategy lengthened the war, demanded the commitment of more resources, and increased casualties on all sides." Raymond G. O'Connor, *Diplomacy for Victory: FDR and Unconditional Surrender* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), 103.

bombing was the direct attack on the enemy state with the intention of depriving that state of the means and will to continue the fight. To appreciate the atomic bomb decision, it must be understood that the bombings were a natural extension of the existing policy of strategic bombing.

The bomber was a fairly ineffective strategic weapon at the beginning of World War I but by the end of the war it had proven itself a potent weapon.¹¹² During World War I many of the air attacks on cities were to demonstrate just how vulnerable the enemy's capitals were. Every belligerent capital city in Europe, except Rome, was attacked by air.¹¹³ During the inter-war period, theorists like Italian Colonel Giulio Douhet expounded on the nature of bombers in future wars. Douhet saw a dual mission for the bomber in future conflicts. First, vital strategic sources would be targeted to impair the enemy's ability to fight. Second, a campaign of terror which would create mass hysteria ultimately leading to capitulation.

¹¹²Author Lee Kennett stated, "At war's end, the bomber had emerged in the popular mind--with some justification--as the most dangerous weapon the conflict had spawned. This was a weapon from which no one was safe. It could penetrate frontiers at will and reach across entire nations." Lee Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1982), 37.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 34.

Efforts were made to ban or limit air warfare between the wars in Europe, but no binding agreement came to fruition. Along with the overall military buildup in Europe in the 1930's, air forces grew in number and were modernized. While some theorists emphasized the terror tactics of strategic bombing, U.S. strategists steered away from this policy. They emphasized striking industrial targets through precision bombing.

As the war in Europe began, the German Luftwaffe may have intended to restrict strategic bombing to military targets, yet much of Warsaw was pounded due to the lack of precision bombing and the "blurring" of targets in an era of total warfare.¹¹⁴ With the collapse of Poland, air warfare escalated at a slow pace until the bombing of the Dutch city of Rotterdam. The German bombing nearly gutted the city at the very moment the city was surrendering. Strategic bombing escalated quickly following that display. During the German air blitz on England, strategists waited to see how the civilian population would react. There was no mass hysteria as was first envisioned. Indeed, after the initial bewilderment, the cities' populations carried on rather well with most

¹¹⁴Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 8.

residents not even seeking underground shelters during the raids.

The British did not have as wide a national debate concerning the strategic bombing of civilian targets as did the Americans early in the conflict. The British found themselves up against a wall so quickly in World War II that they had few means with which to resist Nazi Germany. The British Navy could not protect the British colonies or assist in the war in Europe. The Royal Navy had its hands full just keeping the sea lanes open to the beleaguered island nation. The Army was in tatters following the hasty retreat from France and did not have the weapons with which to re-enter the continental conflict.

The only weapon that the British had to strike back at Hitler was the bomber. The technology for precision bombing did not exist, certainly not as the current generation has come to expect from the examples of the Gulf War precision bombing. Further complicating accuracy was the decision for night bombing. British Bomber Command suffered too high a casualty rate during day raids, so the decision was made to operate at night. The darkness of night improved the bomber survival rate, but the decreased visibility further complicated payload delivery. While the British officially targeted production and transportation sites, the lack of a sophisti-

cated delivery system made strategic bombing quite indiscriminate.¹¹⁵ As the war raged on, collateral civilian casualties became an accepted byproduct of the war. England was fighting for national survival and was willing to use terror bombing on civilians in an effort to resist invasion and to punish the aggressors.

Not only was the bomber a weapon of war, it also was a means of retaliation. Strategic bombing greatly bolstered Allied morale as the bombers were seen as avenging angels striking back at the barbaric enemy. The suggestion has been made that night bombing did more for British morale than it damaged Germany's war machine.¹¹⁶ This was also witnessed as the United States entered the war and sought to punish Japan with the Doolittle Raid. The raid did little damage, but it cheered Americans and disconcerted a surprised enemy.

It is interesting to note the transformation which took place among the American civilian population. Americans were outraged at the strategic bombing of Chinese cities by Japanese bombers in the 1930's. Again there was outrage over Axis

¹¹⁵Historian Ronald Schaffer stated: "Official policy against indiscriminate bombing was so broadly interpreted and so frequently breached as to become almost meaningless." *Wings of Judgement: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xii.

¹¹⁶Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilizations*, 31-32.

bombings in Europe in 1940 and 1941. As America was dragged into the conflict, perceptions began to change.¹¹⁷ The callous nature of the war led to general acceptance among the public and national policy makers as the Allied strategy was endorsed.

The political and military legitimacy of bombing enemy cities had been resolved long before the atomic bomb was detonated over Hiroshima. Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo were vivid examples of the death and destruction that Allied bombers could unleash. Fires burned with such intensity that even the oxygen ignited and created winds of up to one hundred miles an hour. Hamburg was destroyed in one night in 1943 with 45,000 casualties. 35,000 perished in February 1945 in the bombing of Dresden. Over 83,000 died on March 9, 1945, when Tokyo was fire bombed by General Curtis LeMay's Pacific air force. Napalm had helped to burn 16 square miles of Tokyo. Prior to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, approximate-

¹¹⁷"The firebombing of Dresden had helped set a precedent for the U.S. air force, supported by the American people, to intentionally kill mass numbers of Japanese citizens. The earlier moral insistence on noncombatant immunity crumbled during the savage war." Barton Bernstein, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered" *Foreign Affairs* 74 (January 1995): 140.

ly 500,000 Japanese were killed in Allied bombings and 13 million were made homeless.¹¹⁸

The decision to bomb enemy cities was an inevitable product of modern warfare. The mechanization of modern war called upon each warring nation to have the support of a vast industrial complex to produce weapons of war in great numbers. Even though these factories were operated by civilians, they produced the instruments of death that the armies in the field would use to seek and destroy the enemy. If the production could be curtailed or completely disrupted by air interdiction, the armies in the field would not have the weapons needed to continue the fight. It was argued that national economies were so interconnected that all production in some way contributed to the war effort. Following this logic, every enemy industrial center became a legitimate military target. This was particularly compounded in Japan by the fact that the wartime economy was completely dominated by the

¹¹⁸In describing the horrors of fire bombing, Michael Sherry stated, "It was a process of destruction, not a simple act. As the American bombers poured gasoline and chemicals into the inferno, the observer could see the destruction take place and watch the thing come alive, becoming some living, grotesque organism, ever changing its shape, dimensions, colors, and directions. . . . The superheated vapors rushing ahead of the wall of flames killed or knocked unconscious its victims even before the flames reached them, just as entire block fronts burst into flames before the main body of the fire reached them." Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 275-276.

government. Every effort of the nation was focused on the singular goal of pursuing the war to a successful conclusion.¹¹⁹ Therefore, total warfare gave the American bombers carte blanche to attack all national production centers and the cities in which they resided. In addition, Japan was organizing the People's Volunteer Corps from the population at large to defend the home islands. According to the strategists, if Japan was mobilizing its civilian population for an invasion, civilians became legitimate military targets of strategic bombing as well.

Therefore, the belligerents pursued a course of attacking the enemy's production and the nation's will to fight by terror bombing. Strategic and terror bombing were incorporated into Allied plans in both the Pacific and European theaters of war. Twenty-four percent of the Allied bombs dropped in Europe were dropped on civilian targets. In Germany, sixty-one German cities were attacked leaving 7.5 million homeless.¹²⁰ In Japan, over sixty major cities, densely populated urban center, were attacked. Japan was so devastated by

¹¹⁹The topic of total war in Japan and its effects on every aspect of civilian life is expertly discussed by Michael A. Barnhart in *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹²⁰James Fuller, *The Second World War: 1939-45* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1962), 226-29.

August 1945 that few cities remained as legitimate targets for the flying fortresses.¹²¹

By 1945, the policy of saturation bombing as an instrument for precision and terror bombing was well established. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were both military and civilian targets and became the objectives of strategic and terror bombing. The atomic bombing of these cities was inspired by the pursuit of the existing military objective of reducing Japanese cities.¹²² The atomic bombs were new super weapons but they were not deployed in a new manner. They were extensions of the war on enemy cities.¹²³ It is the task of every nation's

¹²¹"In the final weeks of the war against Japan, the bombers seemed to be having the same difficulty they had experienced over Germany; they were running out of targets worthy of their powers of destruction." Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing*, 175.

¹²²"Today, few Americans know much about what happened at Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, and scores of other cities during World War II. The atomic bomb's use. . . has largely obliterated awareness of the bomber's earlier toll." Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 357.

¹²³"Both Hiroshima and Nagasaki were dual targets, containing installations of military value and sizable civilian populations; as such, they were no different from other cities that B-29's had deluged with incendiaries. And in their immediately perceptible results, the nuclear attacks resembled the conventional fire raids. . . . So while the bomb itself was new and extraordinary, no new or extraordinary use was made of it. Nuclear fission replaced incendiary and high explosives in an ongoing, escalating air offensive. To many partisans of strategic bombing, the mushroom cloud was like the fire storm, a milestone in the realization of a doctrine a half-century old." Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing*,

wartime industry to build bigger and better weapons to be deployed on the field of battle. Thousands of new and modified weapons were produced during World War II by the nations at war. When a new weapon, such as an improved aircraft or bomb, was deemed important to the war effort, little time was wasted in getting the new weapon from the engineer's blueprints, off the factory floor and into the hands of the fighting forces. Militarily, little time or energy was spent in considering the morality of these new weapons.¹²⁴ The armed forces and the war industry behind them left this to the historians of future ages. As Secretary Stimson implied in the chapter introductory quote, if the new weapon brought victory closer, then the weapon should be produced and deployed.¹²⁵

176-177.

¹²⁴John Dower illustrated this point by stating, "Just as these new technologies permitted killing at greater and greater distances, so also did there take place an increasing psychological distancing between one's side and the enemy. The enemy became remote, monolithic . . . The new capability for rapidly killing large numbers of people was accompanied, almost inevitably, by a general acceptance of the belief that in the 'total war' of the modern age it was necessary and even proper to do so, with little distinction made any longer between combatants and noncombatants." Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 294.

¹²⁵Historian Herbert Feis agreed with the Secretary by stating, "The primary and sustaining aim for the start of the great exertion to make the bomb was military, and the impelling reason for the decision to use it was military--to end

The atomic bombing by the United States in August 1945 was justified on the basis of military necessity. Japan had demonstrated that Imperial troops and subjects were committed to resisting the Allies. The entire Allied experience with Germany in Europe and Japan in the Pacific attested that the enemy would fight until the entire country was defeated and occupied. Regardless of the estimated casualty rate for the invasion of Japan, the recent battles of the Pacific illustrated that Japan still possessed potent weapons capable of inflicting serious battle casualties. One can only imagine the popular outrage to which Truman would have been subjected if the war had dragged on another six months with high casualties because the atomic bomb was not employed.

The unconditional surrender policy of the Allies was foolish, for it fed the Japanese propaganda machine and only prolonged the war. Failing to modify the surrender policy, the atomic bombs arrived in the U.S. arsenal with the assumption that they would be deployed in order to end the war. The bombs were new weapons, but they were used to carry out the well-established policy of strategic bombing. It was hoped that Japan's diminished ability to continue the battle and the

the war victoriously as soon as possible." Feis, *Japan Subdued*, 181.

sheer terror of this new weapon would bring surrender, thus saving U.S. soldiers from an invasion of the home islands.

Though Japan was a defeated nation in 1945, the Imperial forces continued to wage a brutal conflict. Expecting high casualties in an invasion of the Japanese islands, military officials believed it necessary to pursue other avenues to force capitulation. In keeping with the objectives of ending the conflict as soon as possible with the fewest possible casualties, the atomic weapons served both military needs. In the cold logic of war, Japanese casualties, military and civilian, were greatly preferred to U.S. casualties.

CHAPTER 5

MORAL INTERPRETATIONS

I made one great mistake in my life--when I signed the letter to President Roosevelt recommending that atom bombs be made.¹²⁶

Albert Einstein

One of the great icons of the twentieth century is the brilliant Albert Einstein. Like the scientists of the Frank group, Einstein, who helped initiate the U.S. atomic program, also came to question the use and the subsequent control of the atomic bomb. While theory dealt with hypothesis, chalkboards and experiment, void of moralistic soul searching, the reality of the atomic device raised troubling ethical questions.¹²⁷

¹²⁶Albert Einstein as quoted by Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein, the Life and Times* (New York: World Pub. Co., 1971), 554.

¹²⁷Paul Boyer, professor of history and director of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin aptly stated, "One reason we have trouble coming to terms with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I think, lies in the fact that our bombing of those cities is not easily assimilated into the prevailing public view of World War II as the 'good war'--a noble struggle against forces that threatened not only Western values but also the very survival of civilization. . . the popular image of the war plays down certain awkward facts. . . the cultural fallout of the A-bomb." "The bomb and the 'Good War,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 4, 1995): A36.

The military and political considerations concerning the birth and use of atomic energy are valid subjects of research. Issues of morality, individually and nationally, also need examination.¹²⁸ Compared to military and political considerations, moral questions are more nebulous and therefore more difficult to analyze. Moral Standards have not remained constant throughout time and vary from group to group and person to person. No single moral code unifies the human race, therefore the process of analyzing the moral implications of the atomic bomb decision becomes somewhat cloudy. Although challenging, it is difficult to ignore the moral question in analyzing this decision that took the lives of so many human beings in such an indiscriminate manner.¹²⁹

¹²⁸John W. Dower, professor of history and international cooperation at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, stated, "It seems excruciatingly difficult to separate our truly heroic from our horrendous deeds." Dower is concerned with what he terms "historical amnesia" and the American propensity to forget past misdeeds. In describing the debate surrounding the Smithsonian atomic bomb display, Dower quipped that the Smithsonian surrendered unconditionally to their critics. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 1995): B1-B2.

¹²⁹Historian Paul Boyer, professor of history and director of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, explains one of the reasons that the atomic debate continues to be a topic of great debate. Boyer stated, "One reason we have trouble coming to terms with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I think, lies in the fact that our bombing of those cities is not easily assimilated into the prevailing public view of World War II as the 'good war'--a noble struggle against forces that threatened not only Western

Civilians and the truly innocent have suffered in every major conflict since the beginning of time. This collateral damage is an unfortunate reality of war, but at the heart of this debate is the deliberate targeting of civilians as a national strategy.¹³⁰ One argument in favor of total warfare is that the workers employed by the various war industries were "legitimate" targets, for they directly or indirectly provided the instruments of war and logistical support to the troops fighting in the field. Even if this logic is accepted, it does not necessarily follow that the elderly and infirm, as well as the children of the employed workers, were also

values but also the very survival of civilization . . . the popular image of the war plays down certain awkward facts . . . cultural fallout of the A-bomb." Paul Boyer, "The Bomb and the 'Good War,'" *The Chronicle for Higher Education* (August 1995): 36.

¹³⁰Michiko Yamaoka, a Hiroshima survivor seriously injured in the war stated, "When I went to America I had a deep hatred toward America. . . . When I talked about how I suffered, I was often told, 'Well, you attacked Pearl Harbor!' I didn't understand much English then, and it's probably just as well. From the American point of view, they dropped that bomb in order to end the war faster, in order to create more damage faster. But it's inexcusable to harm human beings in this way. I wonder what kind of education there is now in America about atomic bombs. They're still making them, aren't they?" Michiko's story was recounted by Cook and Cook, *Japan at War*, 387.

legitimate targets of war.¹³¹ Though Hiroshima and Nagasaki contained military targets, the majority of the bombing victims were civilian: the old, the young and women.¹³²

When one sees the graphic photographs of the bombing casualties that reveal the scarred, horribly burned and lifeless bodies of children victimized by the bombing, one ponders just how the indiscriminate killing of the truly innocent could ever be justified.¹³³ These children bore absolutely no responsibility for the war and yet their flesh

¹³¹The historians Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin expressed their difficulty with this "war logic." They state, "Hiroshima was chosen as a target precisely because it had been very low on the previous spring's campaign of conventional bombing, and therefore was a pristine target on which to measure the destructive powers of the atomic bomb. Defining Hiroshima as a 'military' target is analogous to calling San Francisco a 'military' target because it has a port and contains the Presidio." Quoted from a letter dated July 14, 1995, by the authors representing the Historians' Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima, to Secretary I. Michael Heyman, Secretary to the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C. as reproduced by Martin Sherwin on a World Wide Web news site.

¹³²Author Thomas Powers stated, "The exact number of dead can never be known, because whole families--indeed, whole districts--were wiped out by the bombs; because the war had created a floating population of refugees throughout Japan." Thomas Powers, "Was it Right?", *Atlantic Monthly* (July 1995): 20.

¹³³Author Murray Sayle, in describing some of the memorabilia located at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park described "a diorama in which a mother and child stagger, ragged, blackened, and bleeding, through a realistic inferno. . . if you defend the atomic bomb, defend this." His challenge to the defenders is immense. Sayle, "Did the Bomb end the War?," 42.

melted from their bodies when exposed to the intense heat of the bomb blast that radiated at temperatures bordering on 5,400 degrees Fahrenheit at the epicenter of the detonation.¹³⁴

Morally, it is quite impossible to justify the use of such an indiscriminate weapons as the atomic bomb and the firebombs dropped on Tokyo. The cities that were bombed did possess legitimate military targets, but they also contained playgrounds, schools and hospitals. Inadvertent civilian casualties, though tragic, are a calculated risk taken into account in every major conflict. But deliberate targeting that disregards the collateral civilian deaths in such staggering numbers cannot be morally justified.

Having argued that the atomic bombing cannot be justified on a purely moral level, perhaps a closer examination of that

¹³⁴John Treat has written an interesting book which discusses Japanese atomic bomb literature. He notes that "each (author) tells us, as if that place both permits and curbs the words to follow, where he was on the morning of August 6 or 9, 1945. This "where" is expressed in a measure of how far from, or close to, ground zero the writer stood or sat or slept. . . . The distinction of less than a few feet is a detail the significance of which many of us who were not there may easily fail to note. In fact, it is of literally vital significance, for as with Dante's circles, to be in one rather than the another can mean the difference of which of the fires we are to endure. . . no sin condemns one to languish there, only the collective mistake of having lived next door to each other." John Whittier Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), ix - x.

era may shed some light on how this decision came to be accepted by the participants. The mere possession of a super weapon and a declaration of war does not automatically justify the use of that weapon. It should be remembered, though, that the issue of bombing civilians had been addressed much earlier in the global conflict. All major powers in the war bombed city centers where civilians lived and worked. Though initially reluctant to target civilians, both the United States military and civilian public came to accept strategic bombing as a legitimate weapon of war in the desperate struggle.¹³⁵ In 1944 and 1945, as military and civilian leaders in Washington were deciding on the appropriate use of the atomic bomb, the ethical dilemma of civilian bombing had already been ad-

¹³⁵"The final year of agony dramatically revealed the altered nature of modern war. The traditional psychological factors which made ending wars difficult - pride on all sides, desperation and mental paralysis on the part of the losers, the winner's drive for revenge and unequivocal victory--were now webbed to unprecedented forces of destruction. War hates were not new to the mid-twentieth century, nor were race hates or the killing of non-combatants. . . . The techniques of mobilizing and sustaining such sentiments at fever pitch had, however, advanced at quantum leaps in the twentieth century. . . . Such developments went hand in hand with breathtaking advances in technologies of destruction, especially in air power and firepower. Simultaneously, there occurred an erosion of 'old-fashioned' constraints on the legitimate targets of war." Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 294.

dressed.¹³⁶ As World War II degenerated into total warfare, all major industries and the cities in which they resided became targets, even though they were situated far behind the established lines of conflict. By 1945, strategic and terror bombing had been endorsed and practiced by all major powers. Though the acceptance of civilian bombing as a national strategy does not morally justify it, it is helpful to note that all belligerents in the conflict found use for it in the era of modern warfare.

Some have argued that the bombing of Japan with nuclear weapons was racially motivated.¹³⁷ The Manhattan Project was designed to compete with the perceived German effort to build a weapon of mass destruction. There seems little doubt that had the weapon been available prior to Germany's exit from the conflict, at least one German city would have lain in ruin from the devastating effects of an atomic weapon. Though

¹³⁶Author Fletcher Knebel made this insightful point. "With such obliteration of cities an accepted mode of warfare on both sides, it was difficult for most military chieftains to believe that a new weapon of destruction presented ethical questions not found in TNT and the fire bomb." *No Higher Ground* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 98-99.

¹³⁷John W. Dower has critically addressed the issue of race in WW II in his well received book. He states, "To scores of millions of participants, the war was also a race war. It exposed raw prejudices and was fueled by racial pride, arrogance and rage on many sides." Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 4.

Japanese cities were not the originally intended targets for the atomic bomb, they were seen as legitimate enemy targets in August 1945.

That many U.S. citizens held racist views denigrating the Japanese and other nationalities cannot be disputed, but this is no sociological revelation. The Second World War, the largest conflict in history, which claimed 50 million lives, was waged during one of the most nationalistic periods of human experience. Racism existed in the United States prior to and following World War II, with racial tensions peaking during the brutal conflict. The Allied propaganda effort fueled these racist sentiments in an attempt to dehumanize the enemy.¹³⁸

Prior to the outbreak of war in 1941, the United States had a shameful record of anti-Japanese racism on the West coast. There was anti-Japanese legislation, local and federal, dating back to the late 19th century involving such

¹³⁸Ronald Takaki stated, "The United States was defining the Japanese enemy as demons, savages, subhumans and beasts. Comic books portrayed the Japanese as loathsome buck-toothed little yellow savages." *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Little & Brown, 1995), 73. Takaki explores the racial aspects of the Pacific War, charging that during the war, the United States harkened back to a "frontier mentality" where the American Indians, like the Japanese, were targeted for annihilation.

matters as school segregation and immigration restrictions.¹³⁹ Following the formal declaration of war, unrealistic racist fears led to the harsh internment of Japanese-Americans. While racism surely existed in the United States, America, however, had no monopoly on racism.¹⁴⁰ One of the major forces compelling all belligerents to go to war was the belief that each race and culture was superior to those of the enemy nation or nations. Nationalistic, and often explicitly racist, sentiments enveloped the globe and were reflected in the propaganda and actions of the Japanese, Germans, British, Italians and Russians. Labelling the United States and its leaders¹⁴¹ as racist is a valuable issue for analysis only if linked to the fact that all the warring nations exhibited racial prejudice.

There are two points that need to be made in regard to the issues of racism and the use of the atomic bomb. First,

¹³⁹Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 408-411.

¹⁴⁰In describing the racism that existed on both sides of the Pacific, author John Dower quoted a wartime Japanese political leader describing the Yamato race. Chikuhei Nakajima stated, "There are superior and inferior races in the world, and it is our sacred duty to lead and enlighten the inferior ones. . . The sole superior race in the world." *War Without Mercy*, 217.

¹⁴¹"Although he was critical of wartime hysteria as it related to Japanese-American internment, Truman was also swept into the anti-Japanese maelstrom of race hate and revenge." Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb*, 75.

racism existed globally, so it seems unfair to emphasize racism in America without placing it in the proper perspective. The second and more important point is to respond to the charge that the United States had a greater propensity to bomb the Japanese because of these racist wartime sentiments. There is no evidence to support this. The atomic bombs were an extension of the strategic bombing campaign already playing a significant role in Allied strategy. The Allies were capable and willing to destroy European cities, as well as Japanese cities. The degree of hatred for the Japanese, as well as the Germans, reached fever pitch in America during the war not due to an ingrained or cultural bias but because the Japanese and Germans were killing, and committing atrocities, against Americans in large numbers. For example, more than a quarter of the 140,000 Allied prisoners taken by the Japanese in the Pacific War died of starvation, neglect, torture and summary execution.¹⁴² The Allied and Axis nations all shared

¹⁴²Historian Gavan Daws has written a compelling though unsettling book concerning POWs in the Pacific theater. In his book, the author explores the race hatred that was expressed on both sides of the Pacific ocean during the war. He stated, "In German prison camps, the POW death rate was only 4 percent. In Japanese prison camps, it was 27 percent. The Japanese camps were seven times more lethal. To be a prisoner of the Japanese was like being caught in a Twentieth-Century version of the Black Plague." Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (New York: William Morrow, 1995), 361.

feelings of mutual contempt generated from strong feelings of national superiority. Racism flourished globally during World War II but it is unfair to single out American racism for there is no compelling evidence to indicate that the Americans had a greater propensity for killing Japanese over Germans or Italians. Once the conflict terminated and the war propaganda ceased, the defeated countries found the Americans to be more generous and less vengeful than they had reason to expect given the ruthless nature of the prolonged war. The two behaviors were not schizophrenic examples of nation state relations, but the difference between wartime and peacetime behavior.

Revenge, an emotion capable of evoking strong reaction, was a factor in the strategic bombing policy of the Allies.¹⁴³ Memories of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor continued to fester like an open wound in the American mind and the war atrocities committed in the Pacific theater only

¹⁴³"After four costly years of war, Americans in high office were eager to crush the enemy and bring the boys home. Public feeling was running so high against the Japanese and their wartime behavior--the slaughter of civilians at Nanking, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the Bataan death march, the barbaric treatment of Allied POWs that many American leaders were in no mood to take additional casualties." William Lanouette, "Why We Dropped the Bomb," *Civilization* (Jan/Feb 1995), 32.

further encouraged the national desire for revenge.¹⁴⁴ This eased political and civilian acceptance of strategic bombing as a legitimate tool of modern warfare.¹⁴⁵ In a war that inflicted such enormous casualties and witnessed such horrendous war crimes over a prolonged period of time, it would be unusual and perhaps unrealistic not to find revenge to be a strong influence in national policy.¹⁴⁶

In recent years, there has been an attempt to call the atomic bombing the American Holocaust, comparing the bombings

¹⁴⁴"The American people were determined to continue and extend their assaults until the Japanese submitted to our will. Some were ruled by vengeful fury--by a wish to make the Japanese suffer because of the suffering they had caused--in recall of the attack on Pearl harbor, the march of the American captives at Bataan, the fighting in the jungles of Guadalcanal, and the death of comrades under suicide attacks." Feis, *Japan Subdued*, 51.

¹⁴⁵Historian Michael Sherry explained why bombing appealed to the American public. "For a nation that coveted not territory but influence and revenge, air power was an ideal weapon. It promised punishment, meted out too impersonally to compel close attention to the motive of revenge, and with no danger of the enemy would retaliate in kind." Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 175. In his book, Sherry explored the shifts in American views on strategic bombing from the outcry against it in the 1930's in China by Japanese forces to the acceptance of utter destruction of enemy cities as the war pressed on. Sherry claimed that racism did indeed influence this policy as it was affected by the war propaganda that literally dehumanized the Japanese people.

¹⁴⁶"He (Truman) seems to have believed that, given Japanese aggression, the Americans could do anything at all to win (and shorten the agony of the war). Along with most of his advisors, he accepted the 'war is hell' doctrine." Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 264-265.

to the Jewish Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis. These comparisons have been made with increasing frequency in editorials and commentaries published in various publications nationwide.¹⁴⁷ This comparison, while provocative, is utterly inappropriate. Allied strategic bombing did kill innocent civilians, but the bombing campaign was aimed at bringing the war to a close, not the annihilation of the Japanese race.

Strategic bombing was viewed as a necessary evil to win the war. The Nazis, using their perverse ideology, targeted the Jews for genocide. The Allies targeted Axis cities as centers of production and anticipated that the terror associated with the bombings would cause the civilian inhabitants to apply pressure on their respective governments to end the war

¹⁴⁷"World War II was a terrible 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.' . . . For some, the names of Buchenwald, Dachau and Auschwitz would be joined, perhaps uneasily, to Dresden, Hamburg and Tokyo, and occasionally 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." Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender," *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 78-79. This article appears in an excellent collection of recent essays presented in the Spring 1995 edition of *Diplomatic History* and published in book form by editor Michael J. Hogan. The articles represent some of the current historical problems facing the debate at hand.

and consequently the bombings. The Holocaust, spurred on by a political ideology, occurred outside the international conflict, while the Allied bombing campaign targeted enemy cities and populations to end the war. It is tragic that innocent civilians perished in the hell created on the ground by Allied bombers, but the comparison to the Holocaust is purposefully inflammatory and does not assist in the historical analysis of these two events, for the events do not share a common motivation. It is an attempt to simplify and vilify where the only similarities between the two events is that they were both tragedies of immense proportion. The Nazi murders of Jews did not cease until the German political and military command structure was physically defeated. By contrast, the Allied bombing ceased the moment the hostilities between the warring nations came to a close.

Some presidential advisors and revisionists have argued that it would have been more ethical to allow the war to continue without the use of atomic bombs. Admirals William Leahy and Ernest J. King made a compelling argument that naval blockade and strategic bombing, could have ended the war without an invasion, if given time.¹⁴⁸ General LeMay and

¹⁴⁸"The possibility that the carnage in Hiroshima and Nagasaki might have brought the war to a speedier end made these mass killings expedient, perhaps, but no less morally disturbing. This does not mean, however, that it would have

General "Hap" Arnold, the Commander in Chief of the Army Air Corps, expected to destroy all Japanese cities before the end of the fall. In reality, though, the continued conventional bombing and the anticipated and imminent starvation that would have resulted from the blockade would most probably have inflicted more casualties on the Japanese than the combined efforts of the atomic weapons.¹⁴⁹

The well-known picture of "the Kiss" in New York's Time Square celebrating the end of the war is an illustration of the intense desire in the United States to end the conflict. The sheer euphoria seen in that picture and many others of that time indicate that war termination was a powerful motivator in the American mind. The American public was eager to stop the killing and that desire certainly influenced Truman to pursue a policy of ending the war as soon as possi-

been any more ethical to go on fire-bombing Japanese cities, as Curtis LeMay, an opponent of the A-bomb strategy, wanted. . . . Truman's decision to drop the bombs was the climax of a horrible strategy, started by Germany and Japan, that had left much of Europe, parts of China, and most of Japan in ruins. Ian Buruma, "The War Over The Bomb," *New York Review of Books* (September 21, 1995), 34. In the article, the author was reviewing some of the recently released works which deal with the atomic bomb issue.

¹⁴⁹"The real question is not whether an invasion would have been a ghastly human tragedy, to which the answer is surely yes, but whether Hoover, Leahy, King and others were right when they said that bombing and blockade would end the war. . . . The bombing was cruel, but it ended a greater, longer cruelty. Powers, "Was It Right?," 22-23.

ble. Having suffered over 1.5 million casualties, the Americans wanted the war to end at almost any cost, except more American lives.

It may well be that morality is not constant, but fluctuates from one's point of view and between moments of peace and monumental conflict in history. In this debate, those who label President Truman as immoral seem to be looking for a scapegoat. If Truman's decision to use atomic weapons was immoral, then the greater part of the American nation that supported strategic bombing was immoral as well. The unfortunate truth is that strategic bombing was accepted by all the belligerents of World War II as a legitimate military strategy tacitly endorsed by their civilian populations. Is it therefore appropriate to label all the major powers as immoral?¹⁵⁰ Perhaps Truman should be labelled as a man of the tumultuous times in which he lived. What the revisionists are really demanding of Truman is that he should have raised himself above his own times and acted in a way that was contrary to expectations.

¹⁵⁰ "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 the war is to distort the history of that terrible war and to misinterpret the important decisions made in it." Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender," 79.

The decision to bomb civilians early in the war and by atomic attack in 1945 was Machiavellian, a strategy of accepting a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater evil. If it could be shown, and it cannot, that the Allies could not have defeated the Axis powers without strategic bombing, would the policy be less troubling morally? We do know, however, that the bombings contributed to bringing an end to a war of aggression and set the stage for a world of greater democracy and stability. Looked at in this way, the Allies can be seen as embracing a policy of the ends justifying the means. The atomic bomb, as a part of strategic bombing, did end the war and stopped the killing. In the brutal logic that evolved during World War II, killing enemy civilians became preferable to the death of American servicemen and women.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The town is/was situated in a valley . . . As you stand in the middle of town, for miles on every side nothing rises above the level of your knees except for the shell of an occasional building.

Observation of Hiroshima by
U.S. Naval Ensign Osborn Elliot
November 1945¹⁵¹

The Second World War was as brutal and inhumane a conflict as humanity has ever witnessed. That conflict is remembered for the heroic as well as the horrific actions of the combatants. The conclusions that emerge from all the available atomic bomb evidence are far from simple but do lend themselves to satisfactory conclusions.

There were many forces at play in the decision making process. The concern that fostered it and the effort that went into building the nuclear weapon were founded on a real Nazi threat. Since the threat was real, the assumption from the beginning of the Manhattan Project was that the new weapon would be used to attain an Allied victory. The increasing effectiveness of saturation bombing brought enemy industrial

¹⁵¹Osborn Elliot wrote about Hiroshima when he visited it in November 1945. *Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 3, 109.

centers and their populations into harm's way, as never before in earlier conflicts. The long range of the bombers took death and destruction far beyond the established battle lines of the conflict. The viciousness and magnitude of the war induced callousness on the part of policy makers and the public, who desperately sought an end to the deaths of their fathers, sons and daughters in uniform. From the beginning of the war, civilians were targets of enemy air attacks; but as the war progressed, bombing civilians became a common practice.

In the process of deciding to use the atomic bomb, the United States undoubtedly made mistakes. It is fair, however, to differentiate between reasonable mistakes made in an era of crisis and malicious disregard for human life. There was no "rush to judgment" as the U.S. policy makers deliberated on the new weapon. Granted, there was not a wide debate within the government due to the nature of the top secret project, but the issue was deliberated by educated men. The deliberations were not without passion, and the Interim Committee and civilian government were comprised of relatively wise and morally conscious men representing various fields of study and expertise.

In 1945, there was no compelling reason not to use the bomb. The bomb was an extension of the policy of targeting

enemy industrial centers for destruction. Nationalistic fervor in this era of "total war" made city centers and their civilian workers ripe targets from the air. Cities had been bombed since the war began and as the atrocities and great loss of life continued to mount, outrage over civilian casualties subsided.

Various decisions in the bureaucratic process that led up to the deployment of the bomb can be questioned. A test explosion and a more specific warning to the Japanese would have strengthened the moral position of the United States. A clarification of the position of the Imperial House in the post war era should have been offered to the Japanese. Also, the politically popular, but diplomatically difficult, unconditional surrender policy did not serve the nation well. Though it may have been a morale booster early in the war, the uncompromising policy only prolonged the war past its natural concluding point.

But while these clarifications and compromises could have been made--and in retrospect it appears that some of them should have been--it seems unreasonable for President Truman to bear the brunt of the criticism heaped on him by various historians. By the time the bomb was delivered, the new president's hands were politically tied. He had inherited a program well in progress, with substantial momentum, and had

pledged to wage the war in the same fashion as his predecessor. Truman could not easily risk the appearance of appeasement or leniency to a war-weary public or the U.S. Allies. The only advice Truman received opposing the use of the bomb related to the manner in which the war in the Pacific would be won and was not argued on moral grounds. Those espousing blockade and continued conventional bombing were not concerned with civilian casualties but with the prosecution of the war and post war credit for victory in the Pacific. Truman was never provided with a compelling reason to block the bomb's use.

Atomic diplomacy did play a part in the decision making process, but in a secondary role. The American leaders knew that they were ushering in a new era of super weapons which would heavily influence their relationships with the Soviet Union and the rest of the world. That the bomb would influence and even intimidate the Soviet Union was beneficial, but the most desired international effect in 1945 was the surrender of the Japanese forces, as soon as possible. Though the Soviet Union was looming on the horizon as an American post war enemy, the overriding concern for Truman was stopping the return of Americans from the Pacific in flag draped coffins.

Joseph Grew emerges as the American who not only understood the Japanese position well, but was in a position to

influence American relations with the island nation. In offering wise advise, Grew transcended the wartime vindictiveness which stood in the way of a termination of hostilities before August, 1945. Unfortunately, his suggestions for compromise were not accepted.

While the Americans can be criticized for missed opportunities, clearly the Japanese military leaders bear primary responsibility for prolonging the suffering of their own nation's citizens. Even the hardliners in Tokyo had to admit that the island nation was doomed by mid 1944, yet they pursued a policy of national suicide shrouded in the ancient warrior tradition. The Japanese government should have approached the United States and not the Soviet Union in 1945. Had the Japanese been more willing to seek an end to the conflict, many cities would have been saved from the fire bombings as well as the atomic bombings. Having failed to defend its citizens, the only logical and humane course to pursue should have been peace. Both countries failed to exploit a more direct diplomatic approach to ending the conflict.¹⁵²

¹⁵²"The bomb was not a military weapon in the sense that it lessened Japan's ability to defend the homeland; it was a psychological weapon aimed at Japan's military leaders. . . . Those who still search for an explanation of why the atomic bombs were used against an already defeated nation Japan need look no further than the conflict between America's rigorous

Thus the United States was justified politically, even-though some diplomatic opportunities were missed, while the evidence supporting the military necessity of the bomb is overwhelming. The bombings were clearly justified on these grounds due to continued Japanese resistance and their demonstrated ability to inflict heavy Allied casualties. As the Pacific island campaign illustrated, the Japanese military and civilian populations appeared committed to fighting to the bitter end.

The entire Allied experience attested to the fact that, barring a dramatic development, Tokyo, like Berlin, would have to be occupied before final victory could be achieved. The planned invasion of Japan would be accomplished only through high casualty rates as seen earlier on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Truman and the country were in no mood to "wait and see" if Tokyo would capitulate before the planned invasion. Regardless of total projected Allied losses in the planned invasion, at that late point in the war and given the uncertainties of a global conflict, Truman did not want to risk the lives of

insistence on unconditional surrender and the irrational, suicidal, and hopeless nature of Japan's last defense." John Ray Skates, *The Invasion of Japan: An Alternative to the Bomb* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 257. Mr. Skates is a professor of history at the University of Southern Mississippi.

ten marines, let alone tens of thousands, if an alternative existed.

An alternative did exist. And from the point of view that brought about the end of the war, it was successful. The atomic bomb ended the Pacific War. The bomb allowed Hirohito an historic opportunity to interject himself directly into the situation and bring the hostilities to a close. No doubt the Soviet entry into the Pacific war also played heavily in the Japanese decision to capitulate, but the physical and psychological damage rendered by the atomic bombs forced the Japanese hand. In addition to the evidence of two devastated cities, trepidation of future nuclear strikes, with Tokyo rumored as the third target, brought the stalemate in Tokyo to a critical point.¹⁵³

There is no method of morally justifying the horrific manner in which this weapon vaporized and melted soldier and civilian alike, but this leaves the historian with a bigger problem. It is unfair to single out Truman, his advisors and the airmen of the Enola Gay as immoral men because most Americans in 1945 supported the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a catalyst for ending the war. Even though most Americans did not know of the horrors of an atomic bomb blast,

¹⁵³This issue was explored in a recent commentary by Barton Bernstein in *The San Jose Mercury*, August 4, 1996.

they knew that the Allies had been bombing Axis cities effectively since 1943 and they also knew that men, women and children were dying in those air raids. Is history, therefore, left to label 1945 America as immoral?

To extrapolate this argument one step further, all major powers in the war accepted strategic/terror bombing as a legitimate tool of modern warfare. In this era of great nationalistic pride, is it appropriate to label the late 1930's through the mid 1940's as an era in which the entire planet went mad? This conclusion seems unsatisfactory, too.

Though terror bombing was an immoral practice, it was not necessarily implemented by immoral individuals, void of any obligation to humankind. The length of the war, which generated enormous casualties, and the utter brutality, witnessed by all participants, contributed to a general willingness to punish the enemy and a callousness towards human suffering. This brutality persuaded otherwise moral individuals to accept a strategy of implementing any means in order to reach the desperately desired end of the war. Once the war was terminated, as the war-time uncertainties disappeared and the killing stopped, these same individuals returned to embrace a higher code of conduct. The war presented dilemmas not witnessed in subsequent generations. At the risk of being overdramatic, the future of humanity was

at stake in the struggle seen in World War II. Fifty million people vanished from the earth, demonstrating most vividly man's inhumanity to man. These circumstances permitted American leaders to think that they were employing a lesser evil to vanquish a greater evil.

Finally, that the United States did not make a perfect decision can certainly be argued. Dropping the atomic bombs was not America's finest hour. A review of the evidence indicates, however, that there were considerable obstacles in the path of making a better decision. Truman had no lesson from the past to guide him in the new era of atomic energy. As their elected representative, Truman reflected American interests and was most concerned with American lives.¹⁵⁴ As the American President, he sought the advice of qualified committee members from the military, academic and scientific fields on the issue of the new weapon.

¹⁵⁴"Truman and Stimson and others involved in this decision were humane individuals. They had humanity's interests at heart in describing their actions, and yet except in a very general sense their accounts evaded the major point. Those who participated in making this decision were operating near the end of the world's greatest war neither in the interests of humanity as a whole nor of Japanese humanity specifically. They acted primarily for the humanity of the United States. It was frequently said and widely believed that for them any number of enemy dead was preferable to the death of one United States citizen." Walter S. Schoenberger, *Decision of Destiny* (Columbus: National Geographic, 1969), 303.

It is unfair to hold the United States and its policy makers to higher standards than those demanded of rest of the world in 1945. Historians who criticize U.S. policy makers neglect to see that these men were the products of their time. Some have demanded that Truman and his advisors, despite having witnessed the most atrocious war in human experience, should have elevated themselves above their time and place to a higher plateau of morality. That was not reality in 1945. Germany fought to the bitter end and Japan appeared ready to commit national suicide rather than accept defeat. Germany and Japan would most certainly have used atomic weapons if available before the war's end. The United States had committed itself, just as the other major powers had done, to waging a total war that included the pursuit of any avenue which would bring about victory. Though the Italian philosopher lived centuries before, the worldwide political era of the 1940's belonged to Machiavelli. Difficult political ends justified the use of barbaric means.

The misjudgments and missed opportunities were not the results of careless policy makers but rather the results of intelligent men working with imperfect information in a time of crisis. Use of the atomic bomb was a reasonable response for Truman and his top policy makers in 1945. Truman's decision-making process was a logical, though flawed, model.

Misjudgments were made not by immoral men conspiring against humanity but by reasonable individuals operating in a time of international lawlessness and great uncertainty. The desire to end the war and save American lives by avoiding a costly invasion was the overriding objective. The momentum behind the bomb project and the willingness to punish the enemy contributed to the atomic decision. The war that culminated in the use of atomic weapons was a terrible conflict that tarnished all participating nations. All nations committed misdeeds of various degrees and all nations bombed civilians as legitimate targets of war. Though tarnished, the United States made a reasonable decision given the brutal international arena in which it was a player.

Mastake Asaeda, who as a child survived the atomic bomb but lost his mother and sister, has asked, "Why do not humanity and science make the same rate of progress. In my heart these unanswered problems continue to smolder."¹⁵⁵ The United States remains the only nation to have used the atomic bomb in battle. Perhaps the reluctance to use this ultimate weapon in later conflicts is a sign that the horrors of an

¹⁵⁵Mastake Asaeda's quote comes from a tragic but insightful book written by Dr. Arata Osada and entitled, *Children of the A-Bomb* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1959), 122.

atomic attack continue to haunt us from the ashes of Hiroshima
and Nagasaki.

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