On the morning of August 6, 1945, the B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay* released a single bomb that substantially destroyed the city of Hiroshima. Its power was vividly, though inaccurately, described in the flash report transmitted from the nearby Kure Naval Station to the navy minister:

(1) Today 3 B-29s flew over Hiroshima at a high altitude at about 08:25 and dropped several bombs.... A terrific explosion accompanied by flame and smoke occurred at an altitude of 500 to 600 meters. The concussion was beyond imagination and demolished practically every house in the city. (2) Present estimate of damage. About 80% of the city was wiped out, destroyed, or burned.... Casualties have been estimated at 100,000 persons.1

---


Throughout this article I have adopted the normal Japanese practice of giving family names first (with the exception of works that have appeared in English).

Later on the same day Lieutenant General Miyazaki Shuichi, head of the Operations Division of the Army General Staff, wrote in his diary that "it may be the so-called atomic bomb." His conjecture was confirmed shortly after 1:00 a.m. on August 7 when the Domei News Agency received President Truman’s statement by short-wave broadcast. In it the president announced that the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was more powerful than 20,000 tons of TNT, and he warned that if Japan failed to accept immediately the terms of the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, 1945, it "may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth."4

This essay reexamines how the shock of the atomic bombs galvanized the "peace party"—Emperor Hirohito himself, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Kido Koichi, Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori, Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa, and (with some reservations) Prime Minister Suzuki Kantaro—to take actions that led to the termination of the Pacific War. Their efforts met implacable opposition from the military chiefs—Army Minister Anami Korechika, Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu Yoshijiro, and Chief of the Naval General Staff Toyoda Soemu—who refused to admit defeat and clamored for a decisive homeland battle against invading American forces. It was these military leaders, especially Anami, who constituted the most volatile forces arrayed against Japan’s surrender.

In both the United States and Japan, it is often argued that Japan was virtually a defeated nation in August 1945 and thus

---


4. The gist of this paper was presented at the meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations held in Annapolis, Md., in June 1995 and the meeting of the Japan Association of International Relations held in Hiroshima in October 1995. A summary was published in the liberal-progressive monthly journal Sekai, No. 616 (1995), 232–242. An early Japanese version was presented at the International Conference on the Close of the Pacific War, held in Ito, Japan, in August 1995 and was later published as Asada Sadao, “Gembaku toka no sho geki to kofuku no kettei” (The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender”) in Hosoya Chihiro et al., eds., Taiheiyo senso no shuketsu [The close of the Pacific War] (Tokyo, 1997), 195–221.
the atomic bombings were not necessary. This argument confuses “defeat” with “surrender”: Defeat is a military fait accompli, whereas surrender is the formal acceptance of defeat by the nation’s leaders, an act of decision-making. After the loss of Saipan in early July 1944 brought Japan within range of B-29 bombers, its defeat had become certain, and Japan’s leaders knew this. But because its governmental machinery was, to a large extent, controlled by the military and hampered by a cumbersome system that required unanimity of views for any decision, Japanese leaders had failed to translate defeat into surrender. In the end it was the atomic bomb, closely followed by the Soviet Union’s entry into the war, that compelled Japan to surrender. This article, focusing microscopically on August 6 through 14, 1945, reconstructs the Japanese decision-making process in the aftermath of Hiroshima.

Historians and the Sources

There is an enormous literature on the A-bomb decision, yet relatively little has been written about the impact of the bomb on Japan’s leaders. Robert J. C. Butow’s classic monograph, Japan’s Decision to Surrender (1954), has largely stood the test of time. In fact, his work seemed so definitive that few historians have attempted to go over the same ground. To my knowledge, only two studies since Butow’s have analyzed the decision to surrender utilizing Japanese sources. Herbert P. Bix’s 1995 article, “Japan’s Delayed Surrender,” focuses on Emperor Hirohito’s responsibility for delaying Japan’s surrender primarily during the months before Hiroshima, in contrast to this article’s argument that the emperor’s “sacred decision” in the aftermath of the bombs made it finally possible for a divided

5. The cabinet system, as inaugurated in 1889, in practice required a unanimity of views among its members for any decision making. The army and navy ministers were privileged members and, by resigning and refusing to name their successors, they could overthrow the government.


7. Robert J. C. Butow, Japan’s Decision to Surrender (Stanford, Calif., 1954). This book was translated into Japanese and was well received: Butow, Shushen gaishi: Mujoken kofuku made no kei, trans. Oi Atsushi (Tokyo, 1958).
government to surrender. Lawrence Freedman and Saki Dockrill, in "Hiroshima: A Strategy of Shock" (1994), argue that the United States pursued "a clear and coherent strategy of 'shock,'" which was successful. The present article attempts to provide much more detailed and comprehensive analysis of the decision-making process in Japan leading to its surrender.

Other broader works that are germane to this article include Barton J. Bernstein's three reflective essays that appeared on the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "The Atomic Bombs Reconsidered," in particular, attracted considerable attention in Japan when its translation appeared in the respected monthly journal Chuo Koron (February 1995). Leon V. Sigal, in Fighting to a Finish (1988), presents a good analysis of bureaucratic politics but minimizes the "psychological impact of the atomic bomb." Paul Kecskemeti's Strategic Surrender (1958) contains a shrewd theoretical analysis of the U.S. surrender policy toward Japan.

The review above shows that there are few recent American historians who deal with the impact of the bomb on the Japanese government. Instead they have been preoccupied with the historiographical controversy between "orthodox historians," typified by Herbert Feis (1961), and "revisionists," led by Gar Alperovitz and more recently Martin Sherwin. The for-

14. Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam; The Use of the
mer contend that the bomb was necessary as a military means to hasten the end of the war with Japan, while scholars of the latter—the "atomic diplomacy" school—claim the bomb was meant as a political-diplomatic threat aimed against the Soviet Union in the emerging Cold War. Bernstein advances a third interpretation, arguing that the bomb, although primarily aimed at the speedy surrender of Japan, had the "bonus" effect of intimidating the Soviet Union. In the heat generated by this debate, American historians have neglected the Japanese side of the picture. Concentrating on the motives behind the use of the bombs, they have slighted the effects of the bomb.

Strange as it may seem, Japanese historians have written little on this subject. Because of a strong sense of nuclear victimization, it has been difficult until very recently for Japanese scholars to discuss the atomic bombing in the context of ending the Pacific War. The "orthodox" interpretation in Japan has reflected the American "revisionist" view. Long before Alperovitz's Atomic Diplomacy appeared in 1965, Japanese historians had come under the influence of British Nobel laureate P. M. S. Blackett, whose Fear, War and the Bomb (1949) anticipated Alperovitz's arguments. (Blackett's book was translated into Japanese in 1951 and has often been cited.) Finally, in 1995 a Japanese translation of Alperovitz's The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb appeared, but the Japanese reading public paid more attention to the translation of Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial (1995), which appealed to the emotionally charged atmosphere of the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.


Let us sample what Japanese historians have written. A widely read survey by Toyama Shigeki et al., Showashi [History of the Showa period] (1959), quotes Blackett approvingly: "The dropping of the atomic bombs was not so much the last military act of the Second World War as the first major operation of the Cold War with Russia."\(^{19}\) The "atomic diplomacy" thesis has filtered down even to junior high school history textbooks. A typical sample reads: "As the Soviet Union’s entry into the war became imminent, the United States dropped the atomic bombs to gain supremacy over the Soviet Union after the war."\(^{20}\)

Among monographs, perhaps the most quoted book is Nishijima Ariatsu’s Gembaku wa naze toka saretaka? [Why were the atomic bombs dropped?], originally published in 1968 and reissued in 1985. Recapitulating the Blackett thesis, Nishijima argues that "the most important thing" was that Hiroshima-Nagasaki residents were "killed as human guinea pigs for the sake of [America’s] anti-Communist, hegemonic policy."\(^{21}\) Similarly, Taiheiyo sensoshi [A history of the Pacific War] (1973), compiled by a group of left-wing historians, states that "500,000 citizens [of Hiroshima and Nagasaki] were utterly meaninglessly sacrificed for America’s cruel political purposes."\(^{22}\) Here, the sense of victimization takes precedence over historical analysis.

This is not to say that more objective scholarship has been absent.\(^{23}\) In the well-researched joint work edited by Hayashi Shigeru, Nihon shusenshi [History of Japan’s surrender] (1962), the authors reveal an interesting ambivalence. They quote extensively from Herbert Feis (1961) for their narratives of the

---

21. Nishijima Ariatsu, Gembaku wa naze toka saretaka: Nihon kofuku o meguru senryaku to gaiko [Why were the atomic bombs dropped? The strategy and diplomacy of Japanese surrender] (Tokyo, 1968, 1985; same pagination in both editions), 146–148. The author does not seem to have used English-language sources.
Manhattan Project and the decision to use the bomb, but, when it comes to assessing the significance of the bomb, they base their interpretation on Blackett.24 Arai Shin‘ichi has drawn on American works and the unpublished Stimson diaries for *Gembaku toka e no michi* [The road leading to the use of the atomic bomb] (1985), which leans toward the “atomic diplomacy” thesis and is the only scholarly monograph written by a Japanese historian.25 The eminent political scientist, Nagai Yonosuke, has published a brilliant theoretical analysis of the American decision to drop the bomb (1978) that tends to support the “orthodox” American interpretation.26

One thing is clear: Like their American colleagues, Japanese historians have not studied sufficiently the crucial period from Hiroshima to the surrender.27 It may well be that while the “atomic diplomacy” thesis heightens the Japanese sense of victimization, it also accords with their general unwillingness to come to grips with their responsibility for the Pacific War and its consequences. Consciously or unconsciously, historians have been affected by this climate of opinion—until recently. On August 6, 1995, on the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima, the *New York Times* quoted—or actually misquoted—from the embryonic version of this article, calling me, in an ironic twist of logic, a “Japanese revisionist.” It observed that such “revisionists” are still “a tiny minority” but “the taboos are breaking down in Japan.”28 The disappearance of the “taboos” coincided, domestically, with Emperor Hirohito’s death in 1989 and, externally, with the end of the Cold War.

Because of the nature of Japanese documentary source ma-

25. Arai Shin‘ichi, *Gembaku toka e no michi* [The road leading to the use of the atomic bomb] (Tokyo, 1985).
27. For further discussion on the subject, see Hatano Sumio’s thoughtful historiographical essay and his exhaustive bibliography, both contained in volume 6 of Gaimusho [Foreign Ministry], ed., *Shusen shiroku* [Historical record relating to the termination of the war] (6 vols., Tokyo, originally 1952; annotated and expanded version, 1977–1978), 6: 230–253, 259–293.
terials concerning the decision to surrender, historians face enormous handicaps and frustrations. In the weeks before General Douglas MacArthur's arrival, the Japanese government destroyed much of its archives for fear that the materials might be used in the trials of war criminals. In addition to surviving official records, historians are forced to utilize such materials as post-surrender memoirs, testaments, and postwar "interrogations" of Japanese officials. Problematic manuscript sources include "Interrogations" and "Statements" (interviews) of Japanese military and civilian officials conducted from 1948 to 1950 by the Military History Section of G-2 of General MacArthur's General Headquarters (the United States Army, Far East Command). In these "statements," Japanese officials often contradicted themselves, and they were obviously anxious to please their American questioners.29 They were also eager to defend the emperor and protect the imperial institution.

Among published sources, Kido Koichi's diaries, meticulously edited by a group of scholars at the University of Tokyo, are the most reliable. Kido, as Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, had special access to the emperor. He was a realist par excellence; some would call him an opportunist. In this article he figures as the foremost "peacemonger," in Toshikazu Kase's words.30 A wealth of various source materials—contemporaneous government documents, diaries, memoranda, and excerpts from

29. "Interrogations of Japanese Officials on World War II" (2 vols.; hereafter cited as "Interrogations") and "Statements of Japanese Officials on World War II" (4 vols.; hereafter cited as "Statements"). These interviews were conducted in preparation for General Douglas MacArthur's official war history, Reports of General MacArthur: Japanese Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1966). Portions of the original Japanese versions are available at the Library, Military History Department, Institute of Defense Studies; a complete English translation is available at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. For the nature of the problems the historian faces, see Barton J. Bernstein, "Compelling Japan's Surrender Without the A-Bomb, Soviet Entry or Invasion: Reconsidering the US Bombing Survey's Early-Surrender Conclusions," Journal of Strategic Studies, 18 (1995), 109–137. Butow's Japan's Decision to Surrender is an example of what a critical use of these documents can yield. Whenever sources appear dubious and whenever it has been possible, I have attempted to check them with more reliable materials.

memoirs—are conveniently collected in Foreign Ministry, ed., *Shusen shiroku* [Historical record of the end of the war], published in 1952 and republished with additions and new annotations in six volumes in 1977–1978. A more critical collection of documents is Kurihara Ken and Hatano Sumio, eds., *Shusen kosaku no kiroku* [Record of the efforts to end the war] (2 vols., 1975). A useful volume based on oral history is Yomiuri Shimbunsha, ed., *Showashi no tenno* [The Emperor in the history of the Showa period] (volume 4, 1968). The Japanese army’s mentality is revealed in the Army General Staff, comp., *Haisen no kiroku* [A record of the defeat] (1979). Finally, the most important memoir is one by Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori, which has been translated into English. These and other materials enable the historian to reinterpret the shock of the bomb and Japan’s decision to surrender.

**The Atomic Bomb as an “External Pressure”**

On August 7 a San Francisco broadcast carried the announcement by President Truman that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. As soon as Foreign Minister Togo learned of this through the Foreign Ministry’s short-wave receiver, he tried to get the facts from the army ministry. (Aerial bombings were a purely military matter, and the heads of the armed services exercised sole jurisdiction over reports of air-raid damages.) The army denied that there was any atomic bombing, maintaining that “although the United States claims it to be an atomic bomb, it actually appears to be a conventional bomb with extraordinary destructive power.” While

---

32. Kurihara Ken and Hatano Sumio, eds., *Shusen kosaku no kiroku* [Record of the efforts to end the war] (2 vols., Tokyo, 1975).
34. Sanbo Honbu, comp., *Haisen no kiroku* [A record of the defeat] (Tokyo, 1979).
Togo recognized the possibility that the United States had exaggerated the bomb for propaganda purposes, he was impressed that American radio broadcasting was "rampant" and "massive." He probably recalled that the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, 1945, had threatened Japan with "prompt and utter destruction." Galvanized by a sense of urgency, he took the initiative in convening an emergency meeting of key cabinet ministers on the afternoon of August 7.37

Deliberations at this cabinet meeting can be reconstructed from Togo's memoirs and other sources. The bombing of Hiroshima was the subject of discussion. Togo tried to find a breakthrough to surrender by quoting at great length American radio reports about the bomb. The U.S. government claimed that it had now "added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction," and that, unless Japan surrendered, the United States would keep dropping atomic bombs until Japan was extinct. Togo was resorting to the time-honored device of making the most of "external pressure"—the atomic bomb—to counter the army, which was adamant for a "decisive battle on the homeland" against an American invasion. In a line of argument that was to be repeated by the peace party, Togo reasoned that "the introduction of a new weapon, which had drastically altered the whole military situation, offered the military ample grounds for ending the war." He proposed that surrender be considered at once on the basis of terms presented in the Potsdam Declaration. (When those in the peace party talked about "accepting the Potsdam terms," they meant acceptance with one crucial condition: retention of the emperor system.) However, the military authorities refused to concede that the United States had used an atomic weapon. Given the army's intransigence, it was impossible for the cabinet to take up Togo's proposal.38

About noon on August 7, Kido Koichi, the emperor's most important adviser ("the eyes and ears of the Throne"),39 re-
ceived a report that "the United States had used an atomic bomb against Hiroshima, causing extremely serious damage and 130,000 casualties." In an audience with Emperor Hirohito at 1:30, Kido noted how worried the emperor was. Hirohito, a scientist specializing in marine biology, was quick to grasp the destructive power of the atomic bomb. The emperor peppered Kido with questions about the bomb. He had been apprised by court attendants of the Hiroshima bomb on the afternoon of August 6 and was informed the following morning that it was an atomic bomb. He demanded more details from the government and the army about the devastation of Hiroshima and was "strongly displeased" that he was not getting enough information.

According to Kido's postwar recollections, Hirohito told him: "Now that things have come to this impasse, we must bow to the inevitable. No matter what happens to my safety, we should lose no time in ending the war so as not to have another tragedy like this." After Kido departed, Hirohito asked his military aide-de-camp almost every hour about the extent of the damage in Hiroshima. The emperor, who had already concluded in June 1945 that the war must end soon, was from this time forward Japan's foremost peace advocate, increasingly articulate and urgent in expressing his wish for peace.

The first to take concrete action to terminate the war was Foreign Minister Togo, a dour-faced, outspoken, and resolute man. On the morning of August 8, with Suzuki's approval, Togo took it upon himself to visit the Imperial Palace and make a direct appeal to the emperor in his underground air-raid shelter. According to his postwar account (in September 1945), Togo reported in detail that American and British broadcasts were "most enthusiastically" repeating news of the atomic bomb. Characteristically, he invoked the enemy's broadcast to buttress his case for a prompt surrender. "The atomic bomb,"

---

42. Kido nikki: Tokyo saibanki, 421.
Togo said, "has not only revolutionized modern warfare but has also brought about a great social upheaval and transformation of the daily lives of ordinary individuals as well. This is to be used as the turning point in bringing an end to the war"—on condition, of course, that the emperor system be retained. Emphasizing the urgency of the situation, Togo said that the United States would continue to drop atomic bombs on Japanese cities, as President Truman had warned, unless Japan ended the war at once. As Togo recalled in his memoirs, Hirohito emphatically concurred. "That is just so," he replied, and went on to divulge his own firm determination:

Now that such a new weapon has appeared, it has become less and less possible to continue the war. We must not miss a chance to terminate the war by bargaining [with the Allied powers] for more favorable conditions now. Besides, however much we consult about [surrender] terms we desire, we shall not be able to come to an agreement. So my wish is to make such arrangements as will end the war as soon as possible.44

In these words the emperor expressed his conviction that a speedy surrender was the only feasible way to save Japan. Hirohito urged Togo to "do his utmost to bring about a prompt termination of the war" and commanded him to apprise Prime Minister Suzuki of his wish. The emperor had deep trust in Suzuki, a seventy-eight-year-old retired admiral, who had served as his grand chamberlain from 1929 to 1936. In compliance with the imperial wish, Togo met Suzuki and proposed that, "given the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the Supreme War Council be convened with all dispatch." This council was Japan's inner war cabinet, consisting of the "Big Six"—the prime minister, foreign minister, army and navy ministers, and chiefs of the army and naval general staffs. However, there was one full day's delay because some of the military members of the Supreme War Council were not available earlier—a strange, almost criminal excuse when time was so urgent.45

---

44. Togo, Jidai no ichimen, 342; Togo, The Cause of Japan, 315–316; Gaimusho, ed., Shushen shiroku, 4: 60; Kurihara and Hatano, eds., Shusen kosaku, 2: 356; Fujita, Jijucho no kaiso, 126.
On the night of August 8, Suzuki told Sakomizu Hisatsune, chief cabinet secretary, "Now that we know it was an atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, I will give my views on the termination of the war at tomorrow's Supreme War Council, and I want you to make preparations for me." After the war Suzuki recalled: "The atomic bomb provided an additional reason for surrender as well as an extremely favorable opportunity to commence peace talks. I believed such an opportunity could not be afforded by B-29 bombings alone." The hitherto vacillating and sphinx-like Suzuki had finally made up his mind. It is important to note that Suzuki did so before he was informed of the Soviet entry into the war early on the following day. Sakomizu also felt that "the army will admit that now that the atomic bomb has come into existence, it precludes war between a nation that possesses the atomic bomb and one that does not." However, the army was not to be so easily swayed.

Japan's "Longest Day"—and Night

At dawn on August 9, Tokyo intercepted a TASS broadcast that the Soviet Union had declared war. Within hours the Red Army's mechanized forces bypassed or overwhelmed Japanese units on the Manchurian border and threw the Kwantung Army into confusion. The Japanese government’s panic was now complete. Until the moment of the Soviet entry, Tokyo had been trying to obtain Soviet mediation for favorable surrender terms from the United States; now this last hope was dashed. Prime Minister Suzuki’s military estimate was that Japan would be able to hold out against the Soviets in Manchuria for at least two months. However, Lieutenant General Ikeda Sumihisa, who had been transferred from vice-chief of staff of the Kwantung Army to head the Cabinet’s Compre-
hensive Planning Bureau just two weeks earlier, flabbergasted Suzuki by stating that "Chaochou [capital of Manchukuo] will fall into Russian hands in two weeks"; the Kwantung Army had been reduced to a skeleton after the cream had been redeployed to the Pacific theater and the homeland since the latter part of 1944.\(^{51}\)

The effects of the "twin shocks"—the atomic bombing and the Soviet entry—were profound. Early that morning, Togo visited Suzuki to inform him of the Soviet entry. Suzuki concurred that the government must end the war at once. On his way back to the Foreign Ministry, Togo stopped at the navy ministry and told Navy Minister Yonai what he had said to Suzuki.\(^ {52}\)

Hirohito, having been apprised of the Soviet entry by Suzuki, summoned Lord Privy Seal Kido to his underground air-raid shelter at 9:55 a.m. In light of the Soviet entry, Hirohito said, it was all the more urgent to find means to end the war. He commanded Kido to "have a heart-to-heart talk" with Prime Minister Suzuki at once. Coincidentally, Suzuki had just arrived at the palace, so Kido immediately conveyed the imperial wish to him, emphasizing the importance of immediately accepting the Potsdam terms. Suzuki assured Kido of his determination to end the war speedily, and at 10:55 Kido again had an audience with the emperor to assure him that "the prime minister agrees there is no other way."\(^ {53}\)

Meanwhile, the Supreme War Council had convened at 10:30 a.m., August 9, in an atmosphere of "impatience, frenzy, and bewilderment," as recalled by Fujita Hisanori, the grand chamberlain.\(^ {54}\) It was arguably Japan’s most fateful day—and night. All the members of the council recognized that it was impossible to continue the war much longer, but would they be able to come to a decision for surrender? To reach that decision, the government machinery required that the Supreme War Council and the cabinet achieve unanimity of views. If any military member(s) chose to oppose, either no decision would


\(^{52}\) Togo, *jidai no ichimen*, 342; Togo, *Cause of Japan*, 316.

\(^{53}\) Kido kankei bunsho, 87; Kido nikki, 2: 1223; Kido Koichi, May 17, 1949, "Statements."

\(^{54}\) Fujita, *jiyucho*, 129.
be reached or the Suzuki cabinet would collapse; in either case, a swift surrender would be aborted.

Prime Minister Suzuki opened the meeting by observing: "Just when we were smarting from the extremely great shock of the Hiroshima bomb, the Soviet Union entered the war. Continuation of the war is totally impossible, and whether willing or not we have no choice but to accept the Potsdam terms." Foreign Minister Togo, known for his logical mind, forcefully stated that Japan must immediately accept the Potsdam terms with the sole condition being that the Allies "guarantee the emperor's position." He informed the council members of the emperor's conviction that, since the atomic bomb had made its appearance, continuation of the war had become utterly impossible.

What the peace party had been worrying about most was how many more A-bombs the United States had in readiness. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the Supreme War Council meeting, "a rather bullish atmosphere" prevailed, as Admiral Toyoda Soemu, Chief of the Naval General Staff, recalled in his memoirs. "To be sure, the damage of the atomic bomb is extremely heavy, but it is questionable whether the United States will be able to use more bombs in rapid succession." Although the proceedings of the council meeting do not exist, it appears that Army Minister Anami indulged in wishful thinking when he said that the bomb dropped on Hiroshima was the only atomic bomb the United States possessed.

At precisely this moment, just before 1:00 p.m., news reached the meeting that a second atomic bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki. The impact of another set of "twin shocks—Hiroshima and Nagasaki—was devastating. Suzuki now began to fear that "the United States, instead of staging the invasion of Japan, will keep on dropping atomic bombs." Although Japan had measures to cope with the American invasion, nothing could be done about the continuation of atomic bombings.

We must pause here to ask whether the Nagasaki bomb was necessary. The Hiroshima bomb had already jolted Japan's

---

peace party to move toward surrender. The strategic value of a second bomb was minimal. With all land communications severed between Tokyo and Hiroshima, the full extent of the Hiroshima disaster had not yet sunk in among leaders in Tokyo; there had been an interval of only three days between the two bombs. On the other hand, from the standpoint of its shock effect, the political impact of the Nagasaki bomb cannot be denied. Army Minister Anami’s wishful thinking was shattered; if two bombs were available, then maybe there were three or even four. In fact, rumor had it that Tokyo would be atomic-bombed on August 12 and that many more cities would be incinerated. The Nagasaki bomb, which instantly killed approximately 35,000 to 40,000 people, was unnecessary to induce Japan to surrender, but it probably had confirmatory effects.

The news of the Nagasaki bombing notwithstanding, a heated argument continued at the Supreme War Council. Togo, who strongly urged surrender, with the one condition regarding the emperor system, was supported by Navy Minister Yonai, a taciturn admiral known for his liberal views and avowed connections with the navy’s “peace maneuvers” (behind-the-scenes political activities centering on Admiral Okada Keisuke and Rear Admiral Takagi Sokichi). But Army Minister Anami adamantly objected.

It is difficult to grasp Anami’s position. In Bernstein’s apt expression, he was “the keystone in the arch of power that could lead to peace or prolonged war.” Anami was a straightforward man, a typical samurai warrior and a master at archery

58. Surprisingly, Army Minister Anami seems to have given some credence to the make-believe account that the United States had a stockpile of one hundred atomic bombs and that Tokyo would be the target for the next atomic bombing. The source of this fabrication was a P-51 fighter pilot by the name of Marcus McDila who had been downed and captured on August 8. (The United States, of course, had completed only two bombs at that time.) Gaimusho, ed., Shusen shiroku, 4: 119–120; Boeicho Boei Kensa Shitsu (War History Office, Defense Agency), Senshi sosho: Daihon’ei rikugunbu [War history series: Imperial General Headquarters, The Army] (Tokyo, 1975), 10: 418, 437. Okura Kimmochi, president of the Technological Research Mobilization Office, also heard a similar rumor. Naisei Kenkyukai and Nihon Kindai Shiryo Kenkyukai, eds., Okura Kimmochi nikki [Diaries] (Tokyo, 1971), 4: 321.

59. There was no separate decision to use the second bomb; the local commander was ordered to use additional bombs as they became ready.
and swordsmanship. His loyalty to the emperor was unquestioned; he had served as Hirohito’s military aide-de-camp from 1929 through 1933. And he knew the emperor wished the war brought to an end. It is on record that he had met Togo at the army minister’s official residence on the evening of August 7 from 6:30 to 9:00, had had a heart-to-heart talk with Togo, and had conceded that “defeat was a matter of time.”60 However, when he left his office on the morning of August 9 to attend the Supreme War Council meeting, he told Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff Kawabe Torashiro: “Upon my word I assure you it is going to be a hell of a stormy meeting!”61

At the Supreme War Council, Anami in his calmer moments seemed ready to accept the Potsdam terms “in principle” but with certain conditions. At his more belligerent moments, he cried out for a decisive homeland battle. The fact was that Anami, “the darling of the Army,” commanded the full confidence of young officers, and he was now under strong pressure from these fire-eating subordinates. Whatever his inner thoughts, Anami insisted not only on the preservation of the imperial institution but also on the “three additional conditions”: (1) that there be no military occupation of the homeland by the Allies; (2) that the armed forces be allowed to disarm and demobilize themselves voluntarily; and (3) that war criminals be prosecuted by the Japanese government. These were “absolute” conditions, Anami said, and Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu Yoshijiro and Chief of the Naval General Staff Toyoda supported Anami. These military chiefs contended that retention of the emperor system was inconceivable if Japan’s homeland were occupied by foreign troops and the Japanese forces disbanded.62 In reality, however, they were trying to save their own skins. Of course, the “three additional conditions” flew in the face of the Potsdam Declaration, and it was apparent that the United States, its resolve bolstered by the

atomic bombs and the Soviet entry, would have rejected these conditions. Insisting on them would have meant fighting to the last. The Supreme War Council failed to break the three-to-three deadlock. Suzuki, Togo, and Yonai insisted on terminating the war on the sole condition concerning the emperor system, while Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda called for a decisive homeland battle unless the United States accepted the three additional conditions as well.

The climax in the final act of the surrender drama came in two emergency cabinet meetings, followed by an imperial conference that lasted into the wee hours of the morning of August 10. At 2:30 p.m., August 9, the first of the cabinet meetings convened but reached an impasse, requiring a second meeting at 6:00 p.m. Suzuki opened the first meeting, and Togo spoke up: There was no hope of obtaining the “three additional conditions.” Anami fiercely opposed Togo and Suzuki. In fact, Anami’s utterances became almost irrational. As recalled by those who attended the meetings, Anami declared: “The appearance of the atomic bomb does not spell the end of war.... We are confident about a decisive homeland battle against American forces.” He admitted that “given the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry, there is no chance of winning on the basis of mathematical calculation,” but he nevertheless declared that “there will be some chance as long as we keep on fighting for the honor of the Yamato race.... If we go on like this and surrender, the Yamato race would be as good as dead spiritually.” Such was the mentality of the Japanese military. Urged by middle-echelon and young officers who were “half mad,” Anami would not retreat from making the last sacrificial homeland battle.

During the cabinet meeting in the evening of August 9, Navy Minister Yonai bluntly stated that Japan had no chance and urged a rational decision, pointing out that Japan had lost the battles of Saipan, Luzon, Leyte, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

Anami retorted that, although Japan had lost battles, it had not yet lost the war. Now on the defensive, Anami said that all he could promise was one massive blow against the invading American forces; what he counted on was that American casualties would be so heavy as to shake American morale and induce a compromise peace. Again, the three-to-three stalemate totally paralyzed the government’s decision-making.\(^65\)

As the last measure, Suzuki—in accordance with a scenario that he had worked out between Kido, Hirohito, and himself—requested shortly before midnight that an imperial conference be convened in the underground air-raid shelter of the Imperial Palace.\(^66\) Suzuki and Togo, of course, knew where the imperial wish lay. Attending the conference were the members of the Supreme War Council and President of the Privy Council Hiranuma Kiichiro, with Suzuki presiding. Dressed in full army uniform and wearing white gloves, the emperor sat in front of a table covered with a gold-colored tablecloth. In his presence, Togo and Anami reenacted their confrontation. Hirohito patiently heard out the heated arguments for some two hours. Once again, a three-to-three deadlock ensued.\(^67\)

Then, in an act unprecedented in modern Japanese history, the prime minister stepped up to the emperor’s seat, bowed deeply, and submitted the matter for an imperial decision. Hirohito saw that only his direct intervention could save the situation. Breaking his customary silence, he made the “sacred decision.” Speaking with emotion but in a quiet tone of voice, Hirohito said he agreed with Togo, ruling that the Potsdam terms be accepted. “Especially since the appearance of the atomic bomb,” he said, continuation of war spelled needless suffering for his subjects and Japan’s ruin as a nation. He reprimanded the army and pointed out the discrepancy between its promise and performance, referring to the army’s failure to complete defense preparations for the Kujukuri coastal plain, a key point to repel an American invasion of the Kanto (Tokyo) Plain. Thus at 2:30 a.m. on August 10, the “sacred decision” was made to accept the Potsdam terms on one condition: the “pre-

\(^{65}\) Gaimusho, ed., Shusen shiroku, 4: 124.
\(^{66}\) Hata Ikuhiko, Showa tenno itsutsu no ketsudan [The five decisions of Showa Emperor] (Tokyo, 1994), 71.
\(^{67}\) Gaimusho, ed., Shusen shiroku, 4: 122–142, 139, 142.
rogative of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler." The decision was subsequently ratified by the cabinet. Later the same day, the Foreign Ministry relayed the message of conditional surrender to the American government through the Swiss and Swedish governments.

As is well known, however, a second intervention by the emperor became necessary on August 14 to resolve the deadlock over the American government’s intentionally ambiguous reply, stating that the “authority” of the emperor “shall be subject to” the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers. Togo was for accepting the American condition, which he said protected the imperial institution, but Anami opposed it most strenuously and demanded a last-ditch homeland battle rather than accepting the American reply. To break the impasse, Hirohito intervened once again, concurring with Togo’s view. Finally, at noon on August 15, the emperor broadcast to the nation and to the world at large the rescript of surrender. The war was finally over.

The Atomic Bomb as a “Gift from Heaven”

In a postwar interview (in November 1945), Kido explained the decision to surrender in the following words: “The feeling that the emperor and I had about the atomic bombing was that the psychological moment we had long waited for had finally arrived to resolutely carry out the termination of the war. . . . We felt that if we took the occasion and utilized the psychological shock of the bomb to follow through, we might perhaps succeed in ending the war” (emphasis mine). In the same interview Kido went so far as to say that the U.S. government, by using the atomic bomb, actually intended to “assist” Japan’s peace party:

68. Ibid., 139, 142; Sanbo Honbu, comp., Haisen no kiroku, 362.
I surmise that the atomic bomb was dropped with the intention of posing a grave threat to Japanese leaders and the people at large, forcefully compelling them to end the war. And certainly the bomb had that effect. However, we of the peace party had already been scheming for a termination of the war, and it is not correct to say that we were driven by the atomic bomb to end the war. Rather, it might be said that we of the peace party were assisted by the atomic bomb in our endeavor to end the war.72 (emphasis mine)

Unknowingly, Kido proved correct about the intentions of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, who considered the bomb a "profound psychological shock." In his memoirs, Stimson wrote that the American leaders had expected the bomb to "produce exactly the kind of shock on the Japanese ruling oligarchy, strengthening the position of those who wished peace, and weakening that of the military party."73 This "strategy of shock" worked, for it encouraged the peace party to redouble its efforts to bring about the decision for surrender. That Stimson held a high view of Japanese "liberals"—a word that he used interchangeably with the "peace party" and "moderates"—is clear from an important memorandum he submitted to President Truman on July 2, 1945. In it he wrote that "[Japanese] liberals yielded [to the militarists] only at the point of the pistol" and that after the war they could be "depended upon for [Japan's] reconstruction as a responsible member of the family of nations."74

Aside from its terrible destructive power at ground zero, then, the bomb was effective in the hands of Japan's peace party as a political expedient. Prime Minister Suzuki called it "a most convenient pretext" for ending the war immediately. In that the peace party needed and obtained America's "assistance" in its struggle against the military to end the war, it may

72. Ibid.
73. Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, On Active Service in Peace and War (New York, 1948), 626. Stimson and his colleagues had been following the power struggle within the Japanese government through intercepted Japanese cable messages.
perhaps be said that there was a tacit political "linkage" between conservative American statesmen such as Stimson and Japan's "peace party," which, in Stimson's mind, broadly included such leaders as Togo, Kido, Yonai, former prime minister Konoe Fumimaro, and former foreign minister Shidehara Kijuro. What both groups had in common was the unquestioning acceptance of the atomic bomb as an instrument for terminating the war, and this linkage rested on the atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus viewed, it is understandable that the destruction visited by the bombs did not provoke violent anti-American feelings or a strong sense of victimization among the Japanese leaders in the years immediately following the surrender.

The atomic bomb also saved Japan's ruling elite from an impending domestic crisis. On August 12 Navy Minister Yonai unburdened himself to his trusted subordinate, Rear Admiral Takagi Sokichi, who had been involved in the navy's peace maneuvers.

Perhaps the way I am putting this is inadequate, but I think that the use of the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry into the war are gifts from Heaven. . . . The main reason I have been insisting on saving the situation [surrendering] is neither fear of an enemy attack nor even the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry into the war. Above all, it is the alarming state of domestic affairs. It is good fortune that we can now save the situation without bringing such domestic affairs into the open.\(^75\) (emphasis mine)

To call the atomic bomb, which took so many lives, a "gift from Heaven" would seem perverted. Callous as this may sound, Yonai was more alarmed about an impending political crisis, even a military coup d'etat (like the February 26 Uprising of 1936), than about the atomic bomb.\(^76\) After the war Kido stated that "a large-scale revolt by the military could easily have been anticipated." Peace advocates such as Kido and Yonai found in the bombs the "external pressure" needed to forestall


\(^76\) Takagi, *Takagi oboegaki*, 227.
a domestic commotion. Former prime minister Konoe dreaded a communist revolution if the war continued and the decisive homeland battle took place.\textsuperscript{77} To avoid such an eventuality, the peace party used the two sets of “twin shocks”—the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry, Hiroshima and Nagasaki—to bring about speedy acceptance of the Potsdam terms.

\textbf{The Vacillating Emperor}

It must be stressed again that the bomb did not “produce the decision” to end the war, nor did it set in motion the political process that led to Japan’s surrender. Japan’s informal, secret “peace maneuvers” had begun as early as March 1943, when Hirohito first intimated to Kido his wish for peace.\textsuperscript{78} But, in the absence of any clear directions from above, nothing came of the various uncoordinated, hesitant “peace feelers” through various foreign channels.\textsuperscript{79} In fact, Hirohito himself was vacillating. During the battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944 he hoped to “give a telling blow to the enemy so that we may find room for a compromise peace.”\textsuperscript{80} In mid-February 1945 he told Konoe that there still was a chance; he expected to negotiate peace terms after having given the enemy one final blow.\textsuperscript{81} By early May, however, he had reversed himself and almost embarrassed Kido by urging a prompt peace: “The sooner the better,” he said.\textsuperscript{82} Kido’s diary entry of June 9, 1945, contains the first clear

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{77} Tominaga, ed., \textit{Gendaishi shiryo, 39: Taiheiyo senso (5)}, 743, 745; Takagi, \textit{Takagi oboegaki}, 180, 198, 227.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Kido nikki}, 1: 28–29, 2: 1020; \textit{Kido kankei bunsho}, 46. The position of Hirohito is critically treated in the following works: Tanaka Nobumasa, \textit{Dokyumento showa tenno}, Vol. 5: \textit{Haisen 2} [A documentary history of Showa Emperor, Vol. 5: Defeat] (7 vols., Tokyo, 1988); Yamada Akira and Koketsu Atsushi, \textit{O sosugita seidan: Showa tenno no senso shido to senso sekinin} [The sacred decision that came too late: Showa Emperor’s war guidance and war responsibility] (Tokyo, 1991); and Yoshida Yutaka, \textit{Showa tenno no shusenshi} [A history of Showa Emperor’s war termination] (Tokyo, 1992). Bix’s “Japan’s Delayed Surrender” relies heavily on these works.


\textsuperscript{80} Terasaki Hidenari and Mariko Terasaki Miller, eds., \textit{Showa tenno dokuhakuroku, Terasaki Hidenari goyogakari nikki} [Monologues of Showa Emperor and the diaries of Terasaki Hidenari] (Tokyo, 1991), 101–102.

\textsuperscript{81} Takagi, \textit{Takagi oboegaki}, 227–228.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 228–229; Hosokawa Morisada, \textit{Joho tenno ni tassezu} [Information that never reached the emperor] (2 vols., Tokyo, 1953), 2: 385.
\end{quote}
indication that Hirohito had decided to think seriously of peace.83 Distressed by the débacle of the battle of Okinawa, the emperor took an unprecedented step on June 22 when he told the Supreme War Council: “I desire that concrete plans to end the war, unhampered by existing policy, be speedily studied and that efforts be made to implement them”84 (emphasis mine). This meant a significant turnabout, but the “Big Six” failed to reach an agreement because Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda insisted that Japan had not yet lost the war and pinned their last hope on a decisive homeland battle.85 In the end it was the Hiroshima bomb that compelled them to face the reality of defeat.

Thus, the atomic bombing was crucial in accelerating the peace process. The impact of the bomb was such that it brought further urgency to the governmental machinery for achieving peace, enabling the prime minister to bring Hirohito directly into a position where his “sacred decision” for surrender could override the diehards. In the apt words of Robert Butow, the atomic bombing, followed by the Soviet entry, had created “that unusual atmosphere in which the heretofore static power of the emperor could be made active in such an extraordinary way as to work what was virtually a political miracle.”86

Missed Opportunities

Some have argued that if the United States had only modified its “unconditional surrender” formula and explicitly guaranteed the continuation of the imperial institution, Japan would have surrendered earlier, before the use of the atomic bomb. This was the view of Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew, who urged President Truman to include an announcement to this effect in the Potsdam Declaration. An early draft of the proclamation, submitted to Truman on July 2, contained an explicit assurance of “a constitutional monarchy under the present dynasty.” However, this passage was deleted from the fi-

85. Sakomizu, Dai Nihon teikoku, 28.
86. Kido Nikki: Tokyo saibanki, 444; Butow, Japan’s Decision to Surrender, 231.
nal Potsdam Declaration for fear of domestic backlash in the United States and also of strengthening the hands of the military diehards in Japan.\(^8^7\)

After the war Grew maintained that, had his advice been followed, Japan would have surrendered without the use of atomic bombs, and Stimson agreed in his memoirs.\(^8^8\) In time the Grew-Stimson view came to be firmly accepted by some American and Japanese historians. For example, Sherwin and Alperovitz argue that the decision to use the bomb "delayed the end of war." They contend that, because of the availability of the bomb, Washington delayed modification of the unconditional surrender formula.\(^8^9\) However, as has been noted, Japan's military chiefs were intransigent about the "three additional conditions" even after the two bombs and the Soviet entry into the war. Most likely there was no missed opportunity for an earlier peace.

Another case for an alleged missed opportunity relates to Truman's "failure" to exploit Japan's bumbling efforts in July to seek Soviet mediation for favorable surrender terms. The United States had been eavesdropping on telegraphic exchanges between Foreign Minister Togo and Ambassador Sato Naotake in Moscow through intercepted cable messages. Alperovitz makes much of Togo's cable to Sato dated July 12, which conveyed Hirohito's message "that the war be concluded speedily."\(^9^0\) In a similar vein, Nishijima Ariatsu contends that Truman, knowing of the Tokyo-Moscow exchanges, lost "a golden opportunity for a negotiated peace with Japan" and instead dropped the bombs.\(^9^1\)

\(^9^0\) Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*, 165, 233–237, 248, 412, 519, 536. For Ambassador Sato's negative reaction to this telegram, see Sato Naotake, *Kaiko hachiju- nen* [Recollection of eighty years] (Tokyo, 1964), 490–491.
\(^9^1\) Nishijima, *Gembaku*, 224–226.
What the deciphered Japanese dispatches reveal, however, were indecision and contradiction in Tokyo; the Japanese government could never agree on surrender terms. The cable messages went round and round: Togo, under pressure from the military, repeated that Japan could never accept an unconditional surrender, while the more realistic Sato entreated for "specific" mediation terms and "a concrete plan for terminating the war." As was to be expected, the Soviet response was chilly: Solomon A. Lozovsky, Deputy Foreign Commissar, replied that the emperor's message "contained mere generalities and no concrete proposal." In the end the Soviet government flatly rejected the Japanese proposal to send the emperor's special emissary, Konoe Fumimaro, to Moscow on the ground that the Japanese proposal was too "opaque" regarding surrender conditions. Through these efforts Japan merely wasted valuable time. There is thus very little likelihood of any missed opportunity here.

If any opportunity were missed, it may have been Japan's failure to accept the Potsdam Declaration of July 26. Togo at once noted from its wording ("The following are our terms...") that it actually amounted to a "conditional surrender." Although it said nothing about the emperor system, he interpreted the declaration as offering the basis of a negotiated peace. The upper echelons of the Foreign Ministry were agreed that the Potsdam terms be accepted at once. However, the Japanese military found the Potsdam terms unacceptable because they contained the "three conditions": Allied trial of Japanese war criminals, demobilization and disarmament of Japanese forces by the Allies, and an Allied military occupation of Japan. Japan's military chiefs had been watching with increasing fear the Allies' stern treatment of Nazi leaders and German war criminals. Likewise, the Potsdam terms demanded the eradication of Japanese "militarism" and the elimination of military leaders.

Apprehensive about the military’s opposition, Togo took pains to persuade the Supreme War Council and the cabinet on July 27 that nothing be done pending Moscow’s reply to Tokyo’s mediation proposal. Togo’s wait-and-see policy notwithstanding, Prime Minister Suzuki, under pressure from the army and navy command, floundered and announced, to Togo’s great dismay, that the Japanese government would “ignore” (mokusatsu) the Potsdam terms. (The unfortunate word has been variously translated as “withhold comment,” “treat with silent contempt,” “ignore with contempt,” “unworthy of public notice,” and even “reject”). The consequences were swift and devastating: Japan’s seeming rejection gave the United States the pretext for dropping the atom bomb.

The Bomb or Soviet Entry?

As to the relative weight of the atomic bombing compared with the Soviet entry in inducing Japan’s surrender, there has been lively controversy among historians. While Robert Butow, Herbert Feis, and Barton Bernstein have tended to regard the bomb as the decisive factor in Japan’s surrender, Gar Alperovitz and Robert L. Messer have tended to emphasize the Soviet entry. Japanese historians generally regard the Soviet entry as having had “the greatest impact.” It is difficult to determine which factor was more important. Because the Soviet entry came on the heels of the Hiroshima bomb, it is hard to separate the impacts of the two events. The foregoing analysis, however, would suggest the primacy of the Hiroshima bomb; the Soviet entry, coming as it did when the bomb had already shaken Japan’s ruling elite, served as a confirmation and coup de grace.

From a political and diplomatic viewpoint the Soviet entry was indeed a serious blow to Japan; it dashed the last hope of

96. For example, Alperovitz and Messer, “Marshall, Truman, and the Decision to Drop the Bomb,” 204–206. Among American scholars, Paul Kecskemeti has persuasively argued that the Soviet entry was “the main factor that determined the timing of Japan’s surrender”; Strategic Surrender, 198–199 (emphasis mine).
Soviet peace mediation. But it did not come as a total surprise, which the atomic bomb assuredly was. When he received the report of the Soviet entry, Army Minister Anami was heard to remark, "The inevitable has come at last." The army had been aware since the German surrender in May that the Soviets had been transferring powerful forces with offensive equipment to Siberia.

The truth of the matter is that the Soviet entry spelled the strategic bankruptcy of Japan. In late June and early July 1945 the members of the Supreme War Council agreed that Soviet entry into the war would "determine the fate of our Empire." In a similar vein, Kawabe Torashiro, deputy chief of the army general staff, had categorically stated at the imperial conference that "the absolute maintenance of peace in our relations with the Soviet Union is one of the fundamental conditions for continuing the war with the United States." This notwithstanding, when Kawabe was faced with the reality of the Soviet entry, he wrote in his diary: "To save the honor of the Yamato race, there is no way but to keep on fighting. At this critical moment, I don't even want to consider peace or surrender."

From the viewpoint of the shock effect, then, it may be argued that the bomb had greater impact on Japanese leaders than did the Soviet entry into the war. After all, the Soviet invasion of Manchuria gave them an indirect shock, whereas the use of the atomic bomb on their homeland gave them the direct threat of the atomic extinction of the Japanese people.

The shock of the bomb was all the greater because it came as a "surprise attack." Kawabe later admitted that, although "we have long worried about the question of Soviet entry, a surprise attack with this new [atomic] weapon was beyond our wildest

dreams.” Oki Misao, chief secretary of the House of Representatives, wrote in his diary, “There is nothing we can do about the appearance of the atomic bomb. That nullifies everything. All our efforts until now have come to naught.”

As noted, even the hitherto vacillating Suzuki said before the Soviet entry that he had made up his mind for surrender. In addition, we have Kido’s postwar testimony: “I believe that with the atomic bomb alone we could have brought the war to an end. But the Soviet entry into the war made it that much easier.” Going a step further, Sakomizu Hisatsune, chief cabinet secretary, later testified, “I am sure we could have ended the war in a similar way if the Russian declaration of the war had not taken place at all.” The foregoing would seem to suggest the relative importance of the bomb’s shock.

The A-Bomb Saves the Army’s “Face”

From the beginning the army tried to minimize the A-bomb’s damage, and Army Minister Anami even denied that it was an atomic bomb. At the cabinet meeting on the morning of August 7, he asked: “Is it not a matter of common knowledge among Japanese physicists that it will take several more years before an atomic bomb can be developed?” Even the representatives of the Technology Board, whose task it was to mobilize the nation’s scientific and technological resources, stated: “No matter how advanced American technology may be, it is quite impossible for the Americans to bring such an unstable weapon as an atomic device to Japan, across the Pacific.”

However, some army leaders were aware that an atomic bomb had been dropped. As noted before, head of the Operations Division Miyazaki wrote in his diary on August 6, “it may be the so-called atomic bomb.” Lieutenant General Kawabe, one of the few army men familiar with Japanese atomic research, suspected that the weapon was an atomic bomb even before he

103. Kawabe, Kaikoroku, 155; Oki nikki, 334.
learned of Truman’s statement. He recalled having heard about the atomic bomb from Dr. Nishina Yoshio, leader of the Japanese A-bomb project, and could not help shuddering.  

It was hastily decided by the Imperial General Headquarters to dispatch to Hiroshima an investigative commission with Dr. Nishina as an expert member. On the evening of August 8, Nishina reported: “We regret to say that it certainly was an atomic bomb.” The full, official report did not reach the Imperial General Headquarters until August 10. The question then became whether or not to acknowledge the A-bomb publicly. The Cabinet Board of Information and the Foreign Ministry were for announcing the truth, but the military flatly opposed this idea for fear that such an announcement would shake the morale of the people. In the end, the government equivocated and announced that it was just a “new type of bomb”; only after the end of the war did the Japanese people learn the truth about the atomic bomb.

Despite the “twin shocks” of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, the army men still insisted on a fight to the finish. In the end they accepted surrender partly because the atomic bomb paradoxically helped them save “face.” There was a strong feeling among the army’s leaders that Japan had been “overwhelmed by America’s scientific prowess.” On August 8 Miyazaki wrote, “Technically Japan seems about half a century behind” the United States. Colonel Ogata Ken’ichi, military aide-de-camp to the emperor, unburdened himself in his diary: “Our foe must be given credit for the great power of the atomic bomb and remarkable progress in science and technology. I admit I must admire their achievement.”

By saving the army men’s “face,” such attitudes toward America’s scientific achievements smoothed their acceptance of surrender. At the cabinet meeting of August 9, Ishiguro Tadaatsu, minister of agriculture and commerce, tried to per-

---

111. Miyazaki diary, Aug. 8, 1945.
suade the military: "We have lost a scientific war. The people may be dissatisfied with the military for the defeat. But if we say we lost a scientific war, the people will understand."\(^{113}\)

After the war Kido stated: "If military leaders could convince themselves that they were defeated by the power of science but not because of lack of spiritual power or strategic errors, this could save their face to some extent."\(^ {114}\) In fact, some army men accepted the argument that "the Japanese military would never lose a war, but now that Japanese science has been beaten, we must end the war just as soon as possible." Along the same lines, Sakomizu, chief cabinet secretary, recalled:

The atomic bomb was a golden opportunity given by Heaven for Japan to end the war. There were those who said that the Japanese armed forces were not defeated. It was in science that Japan was defeated, so the military will not bring shame on themselves by surrendering.

He added that "in ending the war, the idea was to put the responsibility for defeat solely on the atomic bomb, not on the military. This was a clever pretext." From that viewpoint, the endeavor to end the war may be said to have been "a search for ways to save the military's face," although such a face-saving argument was not needed for the highest army officials, Anami and Umezu.\(^ {115}\)

As Sakomizu recollected, "It was commonly understood at that time that the invention of the atomic bomb spelled the end of the war. The power that possessed the atomic bomb will win the war."\(^ {116}\) In point of fact, the Japanese government and the military had embarked on research on the bomb. Prime Minister Tojo Hideki took a personal interest in the Japanese bomb project, believing that "the atomic bomb would spell the difference between life and death in this war." It was the con-

---

114. *Kido niki* (*Tokyo saibanki*), 443.
sensus among Japan’s nuclear physicists, however, that no country would be able to develop an atomic bomb during the course of the war. Since government officials believed this forecast, the Hiroshima bomb caught them completely off their guard.117

There is no doubt that the Japanese military would not have hesitated to use the atomic bomb in the unlikely event that Japan had developed one. Colonel Ogata confided to his diary:

Is there not somehow a way to invent a new weapon that would forestall the enemy? If we had such a weapon, it will be no problem to attack [and recapture] Iwo Jima, the Ryukyus, and the Marianas... It would then be possible to annihilate the enemy’s task force and attack the mainland of the United States, thus turning the tables and affording a golden opportunity to reverse the tide of war. Oh, what a pity!118

Ogata was engaging in pure fantasy, but what underlies this diary entry is the stark military logic that did not question the legitimacy of using the atomic bomb as a winning weapon.

Conclusion

The above analysis has shown that in August 1945 Japan’s peace party made the maximum political use of the atomic bomb to end the war. To them the bomb was “a gift from Heaven,” “a golden opportunity,” and “a psychological moment” to end the war; they saw the bomb as “assisting” their peace efforts and as a means for the military to save face. But such a utilitarian viewpoint, which regarded the atomic bomb merely as an expedient for inducing surrender, hardly prompted an awareness of the transformation wrought in the fabric of international society by the appearance of the nuclear weapon. Regarding the bomb as if it were a natural calamity also inhibited soul-searching reflection on the war that Japan had started and lost. An embodiment of scientific advances that went be-

Beyond their imagination, the superbomb protected Japan’s ruling elite from squarely facing the agonies of their nation’s unprecedented surrender.

On August 15, 1945, the day the emperor’s rescript of surrender was broadcast, Murobuse Koshin, a liberal journalist of the old generation, lamented that all “responsibility” had been placed on two “unexpected events,” the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry into the war. “Nothing is said about the government’s ignorance, mistakes, and impotence.” The government’s responsibility for the war and defeat was thus conveniently shelved.

Although most observers pondered the meaning of the atomic bomb in terms of Japan’s surrender, Okura Kimmochi, the president of the Technological Research Mobilization Office, recorded on August 7 his thoughts on the bomb’s impact for the next several decades to come:

As far as I am concerned, I think it is better for our country to suffer a total defeat than to win a total victory in the present Greater East Asian War. During the past ten years the military domination of our country has been flagrant, and the reins of government have been totally controlled by the military. What would happen if Japan were to win the war in such a situation? Inevitably Japan would come under both internal and external attacks and the nation would go to pieces. On the other hand, in case of Japan’s total defeat, the armed forces will be abolished, but the Japanese people will rise to the occasion during the next several decades to reform themselves into truly a splendid people.... I believe that the great humiliation [of the atomic bomb] is nothing but an admonition administered by Heaven to our country.”

Okura was already envisaging the future of a peaceful postwar Japan immediately after he learned about the Hiroshima bomb. However, his vision, which reminds one of Stimson’s prospect for a “liberal” postwar Japan, was a minority view. On September 9 an Asahi correspondent reported that in America and England there was a rising distrust toward Japan: “Does Japan truly realize that it has been defeated?” “Japanese state-

120. Okura Kimmochi nikki, 4: 319.
ments, both at home and abroad, do not refer to Japan's war responsibility, attributing the cause of its defeat solely to the atomic bomb."

A year later, on August 15, 1946, Mark Gayn, an American newsman and eyewitness reporter, shrewdly observed in his diary:

In vain, on this historic day for Japan, I looked for soul-searching, for penitence, for a sign that the lessons of defeat had been taken to heart. The Premier has issued a statement filled with generalities. The press has contented itself with pious phrases . . . This would have been a good day for the Japanese press to begin telling the people the real and complete story of the war and defeat."

Today, fifty-three years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the question of Japan's "war responsibility" still remains with the nation.

Perhaps no account of Japan's surrender decision is complete without counterfactuals, however risky they may be. This essay has shown that conventional bombing by B-29s alone would not have driven Hirohito to say "we must bow to the inevitable and surrender as speedily as possible." The crucial actor here was the Japanese military, and only the shock of the bombs followed by the Soviet entry could have thrown them off balance and led to surrender — and this narrowly.

We must then ask this question: Without the use of the atomic bomb, but with Soviet entry and with continued strategic bombing and naval blockade, would Japan have surrendered before November 1—the day scheduled for the U.S. invasion of Kyushu?

Available Japanese data do not provide a conclusive answer. In June 1945 Japanese leaders agreed that food shortages would become critical in the autumn and toward the onset of the cold season; the country had suffered a "disastrous" fail-

123. Ian Buruma, Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan (New York, 1994). For the changing memory and imagery of the atomic bomb over the past fifty years, see Asada, "The Mushroom Cloud and National Psyches."
ure of its rice crop. On the other hand, we must consider
that fanaticism was not restricted to the military; the men and
women in the street were thoroughly indoctrinated. Women
practiced how to face American tanks with bamboo spears. Per-
haps civilian morale had not deteriorated as much as the rul-
ing elite had feared. In all probability Japan could not have
endured the winter of 1945-1946, but there was a possibility
that Japan would not have surrendered before November 1.
Most assuredly, Japanese sources do not support the ex post facto
contention of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (1946) that
"in all probability" Japan would have surrendered before No-
vember 1 "even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped,
even if Russia had not entered the war and even if no invasion
had been planned or contemplated."126

To repulse the landing of American forces, the Sixteenth
Area Army in Kyushu had been built up to 900,000 soldiers.
They were to give a crushing blow to the first wave of an Amer-
ican invasion.127 In the process, they were to die glorious deaths
on the beaches and in the interior—in kamikaze planes as hu-
man rockets, in midget submarines as human torpedoes, and
in suicide charges by ground units. On the American side, the
Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, began to fear
such massive Japanese attacks, causing huge American casual-
ties, and came to consider the tactical use of atomic bombs (six
to nine) to assist and support the invading American forces.128
It may be said that Japan's surrender, coming as it did in Au-
gust, forestalled sacrifices on both sides far surpassing those at
Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This essay suggests that, given the intransigence of the

126. Cited in Feis, The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II, 191. For a de-
tailed critique, see Bernstein, "Compelling Japan's Surrender," 113-148. See also
Robert P. Newman, "Ending the War with Japan: Paul Nitze's 'Early Sur-
127. Edward J. Drea, MacArthur's Ultra: Codebreaking and the War against Japan,
1942-1945 (Lawrence, Kans., 1992), 216-225; John Ray Skates, The Invasion of
Japan: Alternative to the Bomb (Columbia, S.C., 1994).
128. See Barton J. Bernstein, "Eclipsed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Early
149-173; Marc Gallicchio, "After Nagasaki: General Marshall's Plan for Tactical
Japanese military, there were few "missed opportunities" for earlier peace and that the alternatives available to President Truman in the summer of 1945 were limited. In the end, Japan needed "external pressure" in the form of the atomic bombs for its government to decide to surrender. Whether or not the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was morally justified is the question that has been debated ever since in Japan and the United States—in fact, the world over—but this is a question that is beyond the scope of this essay and better discussed in the ethical context of just and unjust wars, moral and immoral wars.\footnote{129}

\footnote{129. Michael Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations} (New York, 1977), states: "In the summer of 1945, the victorious Americans owed the Japanese people an experiment in negotiations. To use the atomic bomb... without even attempting such an experiment, was a double crime" (pp. 263–268). Would such an "experiment" have met conditions demanded by Japanese military? Martin Sherwin's "Hiroshima at Fifty" offers yet another scenario: Stimson could have declared that "our nation is too moral" to use the atomic weapon and dissuaded President Truman from using it.