

“Gifts from Heaven”: The Meaning of the American Victory over Japan, 1945

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Author’s note: This is the third of three articles for *The Objective Standard* dealing with the role of ideas in military history. The first two dealt with General William T. Sherman’s march through the South in the American Civil War and the British appeasement of Hitler in the late 1930s. The material in these articles will appear in my forthcoming book, *Nothing Less than Victory: Military Offense and the Lessons of History from the Greco-Persian Wars to World War II* (Princeton University Press).

This essay is dedicated to General Paul Tibbets (February 23, 1915–November 1, 2007). Colonel Tibbets, commander of the B-29 “Enola Gay,” dropped the first atomic bomb and brought a speedy end to the war.

Between 1889 and 1931, a cancerous tumor took root in the western Pacific Ocean. A nation of seventy million people systematically implanted, into their minds and their culture, an ideology of sacrifice to an Emperor-god. The cancer soon metastasized into a continental war, launched first against Manchuria in 1931, then against China in 1937. In 1941, a coordinated campaign of attacks was launched against the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, as well as the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya, Indonesia, and the islands of Guam, Wake, and Midway. By 1942, the cancer had reached the Aleutian Islands, New Guinea, and Burma—and it threatened Australia, India, and the west coast of America. The seemingly invincible Japanese Empire of the Rising Sun controlled one-seventh of the earth’s surface.

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By the end of 1945, however, the Japanese had lost it all. Surrounded by an impregnable armada, they lay prostrate before merciless American bombers. The best of their youth had killed themselves in suicide attacks. Their fleet was sunk. More than sixty cities had been firebombed. Two cities had been atom-bombed. They were militarily defeated and psychologically shattered, and they faced the possibility of a famine that could kill millions.

Rather than starvation, however, something entirely different followed. Over the next five years, under stern American guidance, and with zeal as great as that with which they had once armed for battle, the Japanese reformed their nation. They adopted a new constitution, purged their schools of religious and military indoctrination, and abandoned aggressive warfare. Imperial subjects became citizens; “divine” decrees were replaced with rights-respecting laws; rulers became administrators; feudal cartels became corporations; propaganda organs became newspapers; women achieved suffrage; and students learned the principles of self-reliance and self-government. Hiroshima, formerly the headquarters of a fanatical military force, became a world center for nonviolence. Those who had once marched feverishly for war now marched passionately for peace.

What stood between the attacks of 1941 and the rebirth of Japan as a civilized nation were five years of merciless warfare, the incineration by napalm and nuclear attack of nearly 400,000 Japanese civilians, an intransigent demand for unconditional surrender, and six years of postwar military occupation by the United States. The result was the most benevolent turnaround of an entire nation in history.

The victory over Japan remains America’s greatest foreign policy success. Today, we take for granted a peaceful, productive, mutually beneficial relationship with the Japanese people. But this friendship was earned with blood, struggle, and an unrepentant drive to victory. The beneficent occupation of Japan—during which not one American was killed in hostile military action—and the corresponding billions in American aid were entirely post-surrender phenomena. Prior to their surrender, the Japanese could expect nothing but death from the Americans.

If there is one historical event that every American should study, beyond the American Revolution and the Civil War, it is America’s victory over Japan in World War II. Even more than the victory in Europe in the same war—in which we divided Germany with the Soviets—the victory over Japan remains the cardinal example of a complete, unambiguous, and fundamentally unshared *American* military victory.

The story begins with the cultural background to the Japanese attacks, and the intransigent American drive to victory.

The Cultural Background to the Japanese “Social Pathology”

The rise of a malignant State—or, in contrast, the creation of a government that protects the rights of its people—does not happen in a cultural vacuum. Japanese scholar Eiji Takamae poses the right question: “What social pathology propelled Japan on its course of aggression, leading to defeat and occupation by foreign armies?”¹ This pathology—what Tsurumi Kazuko called the “socialization for death”—can be found in virulent sacrificial ideas that the Japanese deliberately inculcated in themselves and their children over the decades preceding the war.²

The historical starting point for Japan’s relations with the modern Western world was in 1853, when American Commodore Matthew Perry sailed four coal-burning ships into Japan and presented a letter from President Millard Fillmore demanding that Japanese ports be opened to U.S. trade. Prior to this gunboat diplomacy, Japan had been closed to outsiders and ruled by military leaders, the shoguns. The shoguns, who were selected by a sort of consensus between noble houses, were much more important than the Japanese emperor. Over the next decade the shoguns signed treaties with the Americans, Russians, French, and British, dramatically expanding Japan’s trade with the West.

The Japanese grappled with foreign influences—especially Western technology and trade—that could conflict with their traditional values. On the one hand, the Japanese wanted Western technology, in order to maintain a position of strength in a world dominated by European powers. Japan soon built a navy, for instance, modeled on Western navies. On the other hand, many Japanese wanted to maintain their traditional values, rituals, and feudal hierarchies, and to prevent the encroachment of Western ideas—especially individualism—that they considered to be incompatible with their culture. Over time they grafted the products of Western culture onto a feudal society that was dominated by traditional warrior ideals, powerful clan ties, coercive economic cartels, a land system akin to sharecropping, and strong family and state power over individuals.

In 1868, in what is known as the Meiji Restoration, dissident samurai warriors drove out the shogun and elevated an Imperial dynasty into preeminence. An imperial decree of 1870 declared the emperor to be a living god, and his throne to be a holy office.³ In the past, the emperor had been powerless, perhaps even a hostage taken by Japan’s military rulers to maintain their power. Now he was refashioned

into the nominal head of the nation, the divine anchor for its military rulers, and the living embodiment of the “Yamato race” and the *kokutai*, the Japanese “national essence.”

In the following decades, Japanese leaders created a mythology in which Japan had been founded by divine action, and the imperial throne occupied from time immemorial, by a direct line of succession from the sun goddess Amaterasu. This national mythology was consciously influenced by Shinto, “a cluster of beliefs and customs of the Japanese people centering on the *kami*, a term which designates spiritual entities, forces, or qualities that are believed to exist everywhere, in man and in nature.” A good person is supposed to live in harmony with such forces.⁴ Japanese leaders used Shinto—the dominant religion in Japan—to legitimize the political sovereignty of the emperor, nationalizing Shinto shrines and directing rituals in those shrines to venerate him.⁵ In time, the Japanese came to think of the emperor as a deity whose throne was of ancient origins and whose wish was to be obeyed.

The emperor, the people, and the land were unified in the cult of the holy *kokutai*—Japan’s “national essence,” “national polity,” or “fundamental structure.” The *kokutai* was considered to be the mystical essence of the Nation, akin to the Platonic Form of the Nation, and immutable despite outward changes in Japan’s government. “*Kokutai*” was a central concept linking the spiritualism of Shinto with a transcendent conception of the Nation. *Kokutai Shinto* was a system of ideas derived from Shinto mythology, promulgated through Shinto shrines, and adapted to the Japanese nationalistic context.

Enforced by the government, *Kokutai Shinto* developed into the national cult of “State Shinto.” State Shinto leveraged the context of religious mysticism given it by traditional Shinto in order to mandate Emperor-worship, to demand obedience to his word as an unquestioned absolute, and to inculcate the Japanese with a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of both the emperor and the *kokutai*.⁶

The Meiji Constitution of 1889 codified this mythology into law. It defined the emperor as the highest authority over Japan: “The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal”; “The Imperial Throne shall be succeeded by Imperial male descendants, according to the provisions of the Imperial House Law”; “The Emperor is sacred and inviolable.” The connection to the military was central: “The Emperor has the supreme command of the Army and Navy”; “The Emperor declares war, makes peace, and concludes treaties”; “Japanese subjects are amenable to service in the Army or Navy, according to the provisions of law.”⁷

The Meiji Constitution had a specific source. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Japanese debated what kind of constitution they wanted, and, as part of the process, sent representatives overseas to gather information about Western constitutions. They ultimately rejected the English and American options—along with notions of individual rights and popular consent—in favor of Prussian-based authoritarianism. The Meiji Constitution brought German nationalism to Japan and merged it into the existing feudal and patriarchal social organization, with the blessings of Shinto. The Germanic conception of the political State—accepted by the Japanese—was of a Nation that was headed by an Emperor to whom all must subordinate their lives.⁸

There were no individual rights in such a conception and no limits as to the overall power of government. There were no citizens in Japan, only subjects of the emperor whose minds and bodies were subordinated to his embodiment of the *kokutai*. The Japanese people were told that “the way of the subject is to be loyal to the Emperor in disregard of self, thereby supporting the Imperial throne coextensive with the Heavens and with the Earth.”⁹ The Imperial “wish” became law, disseminated through rescripts (written statements or decrees) and written into each subject’s mind as a moral absolute—recited, memorized, believed, and accepted as a divine commandment.

It would be a mistake to think of the emperor as the direct ruler of the nation, however, for he was conceived as a god, and gods do not often interact with men. The emperor reigned, he did not rule, and he did so in aloof isolation from his subjects. The Meiji Constitution established a legislature, the Diet, which served at the behest of the emperor. It also placed the authority of the emperor behind a warrior class, which grew in political power over decades—and to which the emperor owed his position. The ancient relationship between the warriors and the emperor was reconstituted. The emperor’s wish became the means to legitimize the decisions of a military clique—who saw themselves as the guardians of the Nation.

The key to the power that the emperor and the military held over Japanese culture was the system of government schools. In 1890, the emperor issued one of the most important documents in modern Japanese history, the Imperial Rescript on Education. The purpose of the rescript was to “counteract . . . interest on the part of the masses in things Western and a corresponding neglect of Japan’s traditional culture.”¹⁰ This decree bound every child to a system of education that focused on worshipful obedience to the Emperor, sacrifice to the Nation, warrior virtues, and military training. School principals would recite the rescript before

their students in a rigid ritual, and mispronunciation of a single word could end in suicide.¹¹

Every Japanese child went through this indoctrination. From the moment he could speak, veneration of the imperial throne and duty to the state were drummed into him. To learn grammar he wrote out, in longhand, lesson books extolling service to the emperor. He learned *kodo*, the imperial way, and was told that morality was *on*, his obligation to his emperor and his parents. It was drummed into him that the emperor was the embodiment of the kokutai, and that the Nation was greater than any of the individuals who comprised it. He learned that spreading the emperor's dominion was honor, and that defeat was dishonor, which was worse than death. He memorized the emperor's words—especially the Rescript on Education—and recited its tenets before an image of the emperor. He looked to the emperor as the source and standard for moral judgments.¹² He dreamed of fighting for the emperor.

The educational focal point for the students was the imperial portraits. In a position of worship, and with an attitude of penitent obedience, children faced the portraits, which were ceremonially uncovered while they recited the Educational Rescript. The emperor's image took on the status of a religious icon in their minds. Honor guards watched over the portraits, and teachers died trying to save them from fires. After the sinking of the battleship *Yamato* in 1945, a surviving sailor reported that a comrade had locked himself and the imperial portrait in his cabin as the ship went down, in order to protect the emperor's image.¹³

As a result, fanatical military ideals resonated with people on the street—*educated* people—trained from their earliest days in “blind submission to the Throne and the Imperial state.”¹⁴ Historian John Dower relates how an imperial subject, upon hearing that the emperor was to speak on the radio for the first time, knelt and repeated the words of her youth as they rose in her mind: “Should any emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State.”¹⁵ This was the moral law she had deeply absorbed. She did not want to die—but she and millions of others were ready to do so if the emperor so wished.

The response of individual Japanese to this “socialization for death” took many forms, ranging from militant fanaticism to weary resignation, from undying imperial loyalty to a willingness to ridicule the emperor's defeat or even replace him after the war. But, although not every Japanese civilian was a mindless fanatic, none could fully escape the ideas drilled into him from childhood under the state system of education. Those who rose to control the political system, and to set the basic direction of the nation, were the most extreme—that is, the most

principled—of those fanatics. Any doubts people might have had were drowned in the tsunami of their indoctrination and the cultural environment it created. If all else failed, and someone forgot his position as a subject by questioning either the emperor or the actions of the military, the state security forces—charged with maintaining ideological conformity—would take direct action.

With this political, social, and educational system in place, and motivated to attain a place of dominance in Asia, the Japanese set out to conquer an empire, “as befitted their destiny as a superior race.”¹⁶

In 1894–1895, a war on mainland Asia left Japan with control over parts of China. But this was followed by a humiliating retreat from Liaotung Peninsula in Manchuria, a retreat that was not forced by the military success of Japan’s foes, but that was agreed to under diplomatic pressure from European nations. Many Japanese were highly motivated to regain what they believed had been unjustly taken from them in 1895; their victory in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War allowed them to do so. A negotiated peace, the so-called Treaty of Portsmouth, brokered by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt (for which he won the Nobel Prize), somewhat affirmed the Japanese position. But it also required the Japanese to give up territorial claims in Asia that many thought they should keep, including Manchuria. Once again, the peace did not satisfy the desire among the Japanese to control the Asian mainland—and to oppose the spread of “things Western” in Asia.

During World War I, Japan supported England, the United States, and France, by attacking German colonies in the Far East, and became a player on the international scene when given a victor’s position at the Paris Peace Conference after the war. But many European leaders—who were interested in developing their Asian colonies—began to see Japan as a competitor who would cut into their share of the “Chinese Melon.”¹⁷ A motivated group of Japanese recognized that increased European influences due to colonization in the Far East would endanger their way of life, and they renewed their commitment to take control of Asia.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the most radical elements of the military leadership solidified their hold over Japanese society. They had fashioned the emperor into a source of legitimacy for their decisions, and made him a point of focus for the imperial subjects. But military officers did not all agree on the best way to serve the emperor. Factions formed within the army over which policies would best protect the holy Japanese “national essence” and preserve its traditional values. Some officers favored an outright invasion of Asia, whereas others favored slower

or more indirect action. Everyone agreed about the ultimate aims, however; they disagreed only about the best methods by which to achieve those aims.

The invasion of Manchuria in 1931 by the Kwantang army—acting without orders from the government in Tokyo—broke the treaty that had ended the Russo-Japanese War in 1905.¹⁸ This ominous action demonstrated the ability of the army to act independent of political control, should they decide that they better served the Nation than did their government. Political leaders were unable to demand the withdrawal of the army, precisely because its commanders purported to act in service to the emperor, and in the interest of the holy *kokutai*.

In October 1931, a conspiracy of officers rose against the government in Tokyo and in support of the army on Manchuria. The minister of war in Tokyo sent a radio communication to the army, excerpted here:

1. The Kwantang Army is to refrain from any new project such as becoming independent from the Imperial army and seizing control of Manchuria and Mongolia.
2. The general situation is developing according to the intentions of the army, so you may be completely reassured.¹⁹

The commander of the Kwantang army replied that he had acted as he had “for the country.” Because the different factions agreed on the aims—the aggrandizement of the nation and the emperor—and because so many soldiers sympathized with the rebels, there was no effective opposition to the unauthorized attack. Critics collapsed into awe and respect when they recognized that the army acted as it had in order to achieve the fundamental aims that all agreed were proper.

Some military officers opposed aggression as a means to aggrandize the state. They offered the last serious challenge to a policy of war. But they remained sympathetic to the overall aims of their more radical comrades—and were thus unable to end the aggression in Manchuria. In February 1936, a rebellion by these anti-aggression officers in Tokyo led army leaders to issue a statement, in the name of the emperor, that included: “Your action has been recognized as motivated by your sincere feelings to seek manifestation of the national essence (*kokutai*).” The statement continued: “The present state of manifestation of *kokutai* is such that we feel unbearably awed.”²⁰ The leaders were “awed” before the nationalistic feelings of the rebels—just as the rebels were awed before the feelings of those officers advocating aggressive war in Manchuria. Everybody was in awe of anybody who shared his feelings for the “national essence.”

As always, when conflicts arise between people ascribing to the same basic premises, those who uphold those premises more consistently win, while those

who compromise and take a more “moderate” position lose. The end result in Japan in the 1930s was the triumph of the radicals for violent expansion. Those who advocated the naked essence of their indoctrination—military conquest—rose to control the government. They took the country to war.

In 1937, Japan launched its war against China, this time with the full approval of the Tokyo government. Military force was to be used to rid Asia of the Western influences that many Japanese saw as threats to their traditional values and to the expanding rule of the emperor. By this point plans for a wider war—which required a population ready to sacrifice and die at the behest of the leadership—were underway.

At each step, the supremacy of the emperor, and the duties of his subjects to him, were reinforced through propaganda and imperial decrees. In March 1937, the Education Ministry released the “Cardinal Principles of the National Polity” (*kokutai no hongī*), which reaffirmed the central position of the 1890 Rescript on Education in Japanese life. The emperor was now referred to as a “deity incarnate.” In July 1941, the government published the *Shimmin no Michi* (“The Way of the Subject”), which reaffirmed the national mythology of the emperor as having descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu, and defined the ruling “national polity” (*kokutai*) as a “theocracy” in which “the way of the subject is to be loyal to the Emperor in disregard of self, thereby supporting the Imperial Throne co-extensively with the Heavens and the Earth.” This handbook for subject-hood denounced “individualism, liberalism, utilitarianism, and imperialism” as threats to the Japanese virtues of filial piety and of sacrifice to the national polity and the emperor.²¹

As he went forth to serve His Majesty the Emperor, every Japanese soldier carried his duties in the form of the *Senjinkun* or Field Service Code, a guide for fighting the emperor’s war:

The battlefield is where the Imperial Army, acting under the Imperial command, displays its true character, conquering whenever it attacks, winning whenever it engages in combat, in order to spread the Imperial Way far and wide so that the enemy may look up in awe to the august virtues of His Majesty.²²

That true character was revealed on December 13, 1937, when the emperor’s holy warriors entered Nanking, China. The “Rape of Nanking” was a rampage that killed some 300,000 Chinese—nearly double the deaths caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki *combined*. Thousands of women were gang-raped and forced into military prostitution. Thousands of Chinese civilians were herded and machine-gunned, used for bayonet practice, buried alive, doused with

gasoline and burned, or decapitated with swords before smiling Japanese troops, their heads then publicly displayed. The Japanese media covered the killing contests; the *Japan Advertiser* ran pictures of two officers who competed to see who would be the first to kill one hundred men with a sword.²³

In sum, World War II in the Pacific was launched by a nation whose highest ideals were violently hostile to human life. Japan's religious-political philosophy held the emperor as a god, subordinated the individual to the state, elevated mythology and ritual over rational thought, adopted aggression as its basic foreign policy, and justified the rape and torture of the "inferior" people it conquered. This morality of death was leading Japan to the brink of national suicide.

(One of the reasons often cited by apologists for the growing confrontation between Japan and the United States was the American-British-Dutch oil embargo against Japan, begun in July 1941. Although many Japanese regarded the embargo as an act of war, the embargo did not cause the Japanese attack on Manchuria in 1931 or the Rape of Nanking in 1937. The huge Japanese navy certainly needed oil by the thousands of tons, but the navy itself and Japan's military conquests were the consequences of the ideas that led the Japanese to wage war. When these ideas were abandoned after their defeat in 1945, the Japanese would acquire all the oil they needed—through production and trade.)

The December 7, 1941 attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor was only one prong of a coordinated campaign in Asia and across the Pacific Ocean. U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt detailed the campaign the very next day in his rhetorically powerful request for a declaration of war:

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. . . .

Yesterday the Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night the Japanese attacked Wake Island. And this morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island.²⁴

On that same Monday, December 8, the Japanese emperor issued an imperial rescript on the war—another "divine wish" designed to reemphasize the position of each Japanese as an imperial subject. The emperor again demanded their subservience, which the Empire of Japan would need in order to sustain its planned aggression. The population bowed their heads in awe and submission, prepared to sacrifice and die.

By mid-1942, the Japanese controlled an area of the Pacific and Asia that was six times larger than the United States. The Americans had retreated from the Philippines, and General Douglas MacArthur was ordered to reestablish his base in Australia. Thousands of Americans, including American General Jonathan Wainwright, were herded like animals in the Bataan Death March. Brave Filipinos were subjected to a long nightmare of brutal occupation and jungle warfare. Attacks on Australia and India were looming. The Japanese home islands were far beyond the capacity of American forces to reach effectively.

To roll back and end Japan’s drive for empire would require much more than a military defense. To permanently end its bloodlust, serious changes would have to be made *inside* Japan. Before such changes could be made, however, Japan would have to be thoroughly defeated militarily.

The American Drive to Victory

At the start of World War II, Americans were woefully unprepared for war—because they did not desire war. In the wake of World War I, they wanted one thing: “normalcy,” to pursue prosperity through private enterprise. “The business of America is business” summed up this attitude. Whether or not Roosevelt was eager to shift the American public’s focus from his failed New Deal to the war with Japan, it was the Japanese who, in fact, started the war. The complex sneak attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor had been planned well in advance. Roosevelt recognized the nature of the attack in his request for a declaration of war:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. . . .

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu. . . .

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us. No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory.

I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounded determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.²⁵

The president's statement was first and foremost an accurate identification of the reality of the situation. Since the attack, he said, "a state of war *has existed* between the United States and the Japanese Empire." Roosevelt did not call the war into being. He did not ask Congress to start a war, but rather to formally recognize that war had begun. Congress issued a Declaration of War within the hour. The Japanese had committed aggression, willfully and with forethought, and Roosevelt correctly identified this action as the initiation of war. "Hostilities exist," and Americans would not blink at the danger; rather, they would be energized by the knowledge that they were in the right.

Roosevelt's words were directed outward, against the threat, not inward at American losses. He established a *goal-directed* posture with respect to Japan. He did not wallow in the details of the carnage in Hawaii, nor call the American people virtuous for having suffered. He did not harp on the need to take care of our wounded, nor dwell on the patriotism of those who gave blood (both of which were assumed). The entirety of his report about the damage was contained in three short sentences. Roosevelt wanted Americans to focus their efforts toward eliminating the threat, toward making "very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us." And he wanted Japan to know that we had no intention of backing down from this goal.

The goal to be achieved was "absolute victory," or "the inevitable triumph." Its achievement required four key steps:

1. identify the enemy;
2. decide to defeat him;

3. define victory;

4. and commit, over time, to achieve that victory.

Roosevelt’s speech accomplished the first two of these vital steps—the cognitive act of identifying the enemy and the decision to act on that identification. The remaining steps were more complex.

Note that “achieving victory” would have been insufficient as a goal, for it would have failed to specify the nature of “victory.” To achieve victory, one must first know what victory *is*. Does victory consist in pushing the enemy back to his own soil? Getting him to attend peace talks? Forcing him to stand down for the moment? Holding democratic elections in his country?

The question was: What specifically would constitute victory for America? The answer was: the total and permanent destruction of Japan’s will and capacity to fight. The war had begun with a conscious decision by the Japanese to attack—following years of energetic work to build a force capable of dominating the Pacific. Ending this threat would require a conscious decision by the Japanese—including their leadership, army, and population at large—to renounce aggression totally and permanently. The war was made possible by Japan’s aggression-oriented ideology and its military machinery. Ending this threat would require Japan’s repudiation of that ideology along with its thorough and permanent disarmament. Victory would mean *the permanent reversal of the Japanese decision and commitment to fight*, demonstrated in action. The full meaning of these (and other) requirements of American victory was integrated into three words: Japan’s *unconditional surrender*.

The decision by the United States to achieve unconditional surrender would have to be reiterated and renewed over years of struggle and tens of thousands of casualties. Roosevelt held to his commitment for the remaining three years of his life, refusing all suggestions to dilute the goal or negotiate for a partial victory. “Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us” was his commitment. Despite his many attacks on individual rights in America—such as his coercive wealth redistribution programs—when it came to war with Germany and Japan, he did the one thing required to end the war permanently: He established victory as the goal, he defined it, and he remained committed to it. And following his lead, America set forth to achieve this victory.

Roosevelt reaffirmed this commitment in January 1943 at the Casablanca Conference with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill:

The President and the Prime Minister, after a complete survey of the world situation, are more than ever determined that peace can come to the world only by a

total elimination of German and Japanese war power. This involves the simple formula of placing the objective of this war in terms of an unconditional surrender by Germany, Italy and Japan. Unconditional surrender means not the destruction of the German populace, nor of the Italian and Japanese populace, but does mean *the destruction of a philosophy* in Germany, Italy and Japan which is based on the conquest and subjugation of other peoples.²⁶

This so-called “simple formula” was the product of true leadership, a way of focusing the American people on a clear goal, one that would remove the underlying causes of the war. While still at Casablanca, Roosevelt stated, in front of some fifty reporters:

I think we have all had it in our hearts and heads before, but I don't think that it has ever been put down on paper by the Prime Minister and myself, and that is the determination that peace can come to the world only by the total elimination of German, Japanese and Italian war power.

Although unconditional surrender had been discussed many times, it was at Casablanca that the goal was made public. Roosevelt continued: “The elimination of German, Japanese and Italian war power means the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy and Japan.”²⁷

The achievement of victory through the unconditional surrender of the enemy became the unwavering goal of America. At the First Quebec Conference, in August 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill set a timetable for the surrender of Japan: It was to occur within one year of the surrender of Germany. The goal was to get the job done before the American public wearied of the war and could be influenced to back down from their commitment to eliminate the threats they faced.

The demand for unconditional surrender was restated on November 27, 1943, in Cairo, where Roosevelt, Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of China issued a statement that included the following:

The Three Great Allies [the United States, Britain, and China] are fighting this war to restrain and punish the aggression of Japan. They covet no gain for themselves and have no thought of territorial expansion.

It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the First World War in 1914, and that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. . . .

With these objectives in view the three Allies, in harmony with those of the United Nations at war with Japan, will continue to persevere in the serious and prolonged operations necessary to procure the unconditional surrender of Japan.

We will return later to the full meaning and function of “unconditional surrender.” Suffice it here to note that Roosevelt, speaking to Secretary of War Stimson in reference to Germany, said, “The German people as a whole must have it driven into them that the whole nation had been engaged in an unlawful conspiracy.” He had also said, at an earlier press conference, that “practically all Germans deny the fact that they surrendered during the last war, but this time they are going to know it. And so are the Japs.”²⁸ Roosevelt, as an assistant secretary of the navy under Woodrow Wilson during the First World War, had seen the destructive consequences of the failure to defeat Germany in 1918. He was determined not to repeat this error.

“Victory,” and the drive to unconditional surrender, became an integrating idea for millions of people. Americans planted Victory Gardens, and flashed the Victory Sign. The Office of War Information, a propaganda arm of the U.S. government, set out to keep the idea of unconditional surrender alive. A June 1945 pamphlet stated: “Only Unconditional Surrender can lead to the smashing of militaristic hopes and ambitions” in Japan.²⁹ According to a survey at the time, Americans thought by a margin of nine to one that Japan must be “completely beaten.” By the time Harry S Truman took office in April 1945, he might have been impeached had he tried to deviate from this formula.

The Japanese Decision to Surrender

The months after Pearl Harbor were some of the darkest moments in American history. The destruction of the U.S. Air Force at Manila, General Douglas MacArthur’s retreat from the Philippines, and the Bataan Death March remain some of the saddest. At that time, the Americans did not have the capacity to end the Japanese onslaught. Even two years after Pearl Harbor, the Americans had advanced only some two hundred miles up from the south. One journalist commented that, at that rate, they would get to Tokyo by 1960.³⁰

But, early difficulties aside, the Americans *were* on their way to Tokyo—of that everyone was certain. Americans were driving toward victory over tyranny—a far different goal than expanding the reign of His Majesty the Emperor. While the Japanese were bound to rituals and seeking death for the emperor, the Americans were focused on winning the war and returning home alive. For the American

soldiers, who valued their lives, defeat in battle one day meant they could still fight for their lives the next; for many Japanese soldiers, a defeat in battle ended in ritual suicide. Throughout the war, American forces grew in experience while the best of the Japanese—especially their pilots—died at their own hands. And, given their rational commitment to material prosperity through private property, the Americans greatly outproduced the Japanese in terms of weaponry. The Japanese economic cartels could not compete with American free enterprise—and Japan’s suicidal culture could not compete with America’s positive sense of life.

By mid-1944, the war had turned unalterably against Japan. In July 1944, the Americans took Saipan and the Marianas. The government of Tōjō Hidecki fell, and Japan’s management of the war was reorganized under the six-member Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, or the “Big Six.”

The Big Six could approach the emperor for his sanction only after they had reached unanimous agreement. Without exception he then approved their decision. The military controlled three of the six positions, and they could deadlock the council or force the removal of the prime minister—the nominal head of the Big Six—at any time. In lieu of a unanimous vote, a decision would not be issued—and absent a specific decision to end the war, the military continued fighting. The effects of the overwhelming American onslaught on Japan in the last months of the war can be understood only with reference to the ideas that motivated the Japanese leadership—and the consequent paralysis in Japanese political decision making that developed prior to the dropping of the atom bombs.

In the last months of 1944, MacArthur swept up from Australia and around Japanese troops on New Guinea, and returned to the Philippines. In February and March 1945, Admiral Chester Nimitz moved his navy toward Japan from the east and took the island of Iwo Jima in some of the most brutal fighting of the war. These movements placed Japanese cities within the reach of American bombers. On April 4, 1945, the U.S. commands were unified into the U.S. Army Forces in the Pacific (USAFPAC), and MacArthur was placed in overall command.

In early 1945, the Americans stepped up their bombing of Japanese cities. But high-altitude bombing missions remained long, dangerous, and ineffective; the jet stream blew bombs off course and made it impossible to destroy industrial targets with precision from six miles high. A study of British night bombing in Europe showed that only 20 percent of dropped bombs landed within *five miles* of their targets. Unable to destroy Japanese industries, Air Force commander General Haywood Hansell Jr. was replaced by General Curtis LeMay. On the night of March 9–10, 1945, LeMay took a huge gamble, which many of his officers

opposed as excessively risky for American forces. High-altitude bombers, designed to fly at more than 30,000 feet, flew over Tokyo at 5,000 feet, overloaded with incendiary bombs that would be dropped directly on population centers closely packed with balsa wood homes. After pacing all night, LeMay learned that his mission had been a success: A horrendous firestorm aided by 25-knot winds blowing in from the west had killed more than 80,000 Japanese.

By summer, bombing missions over Japan were the safest combat duty in the Pacific theater. Until this point, American commanders agreed that Japan could be defeated only with a land invasion. But LeMay was beginning to doubt conventional wisdom; in April he wrote that “the destruction of Japan’s ability to wage war is within the capability of this command.”³¹ Perhaps it would not be necessary to spill rivers of American blood in a land invasion.

The Japanese had no defense against the American bombing. But though they were, in fact, defeated, their warrior ideals led them to evade that fact, and they were still able to kill Americans—as they had at Iwo Jima and Okinawa—which they thought was the route to a negotiated settlement. Japanese leaders recognized American material superiority, but many remained convinced that the Americans’ will to fight would collapse—if the Japanese people were willing to make the final assault on the home islands deadly enough. Many Japanese officers were obsessed with the idea of a “final battle” against an American invasion, a denouement that would allow them to preserve the Japanese “national essence.”

The result was the basic Japanese strategy of 1945. Issued in January 1945, *Ketsu-Go*—the “Decisive Defensive Plan for the Homeland”—was a plan for a final battle on the Japanese homeland. When Okinawa fell in June, the civilian and military authorities issued the “Fundamental Policy for the Conduct of the War,” backed by an imperial war rescript, which instructed the nation to fight to the death with no surrender. When the anticipated American invasion began, the Japanese hoped to force a negotiated settlement by causing unacceptable casualties for the Americans. All that was needed was for millions of Japanese civilians to be willing to throw their bodies at the Americans in a last charge to protect the Emperor and the Nation.³²

The *banzai* charge was of ancient origin. Americans had seen it at Saipan, where the last remnants of a defeated Japanese defensive force drank a final toast, armed themselves with bayonets, pistols, and sharpened sticks, and charged American armored positions. They did not expect to defeat the Americans, but to die and preserve their “honor.” To motivate Japanese civilians to die for the emperor, government propaganda praised soldiers and civilians who died at Saipan as heroes.

A national *banzai* charge would be a suicidal “decisive engagement” against an American invasion of Japan—the final spasm of a suicidal ideology. “One hundred million deaths rather than surrender” was a popular saying, especially in the military.³³

For many Japanese leaders, an American invasion—and the deaths of millions of Japanese civilians—were an energizing *hope*. *Kamikaze* pilots related how “the dream and hope always persisted. . . . [u]sually unwarranted as they were.”³⁴ The hope was pure, morbid fantasy—the culmination of the national mythology that they had been injecting into themselves for two generations. For Japan, “victory” had become nothing more than the sight of thousands of dead Americans, piled on top of millions of dead Japanese.

No issue better illustrates the difference between the Japanese and the Americans during World War II than their attitudes toward an American invasion of the Japanese home islands. The Americans dreaded the idea of such an invasion, and would have done anything to win without it. Many in the Japanese military leadership longed for such carnage—as it was their final hope of forcing the Americans to accept Japan’s existence as an empire. Americans remembered that battles such as Saipan and Okinawa had required them to kill more than 97 percent of the Japanese defenders. Japanese leaders saw this willingness to die as their great strength—especially when multiplied by millions of Japanese civilians. Trapped between their ideals—which demanded no surrender—and the American power converging on them, a suicidal final charge was their only option.

Army Minister Anami Korechika embodied the inability of the Japanese leadership to reconcile its military ideals with the stark reality of defeat. A staunch supporter of traditional *Bushido* warrior ideals, skilled in archery and swordsmanship, Anami also recognized that intransigence by the Japanese in the face of an American land invasion would lead to mass death. He tried to control the most fanatical officers in the Ministry of War—but he also sympathized with them deeply. He believed that the loss of the imperial line would mean the loss of Japan’s very identity as a nation—the *kokutai*—which was worth more than the lives of all of the emperor’s subjects. To avoid this, he was willing to commit any evasion, to embrace any apparition of hope, and to sacrifice any number of Japanese civilians. This was true nationalism—the Nation “transcended” any individual lives—and the Emperor was its divine embodiment. In his mind, if the Japanese people had the will to fight to the death, the Nation might be saved.

The Japanese leaders were not the only ones in denial of their failure. The Japanese population was also disconnected from reality by an endless stream of

propaganda that consistently misrepresented the military position of the Japanese and exhorted them to sacrifice. After the surrender in 1945, Kodama Yoshio, a political figure in prison awaiting trial as a war criminal, wrote his book *I Was Defeated* as a statement for his trial:

Although the nation was resigned to the fact that the decisive battle on the Japanese home islands could not be avoided . . . they still thought that the Combined Fleet of the Japanese Navy was undamaged and expected that a deadly blow would be inflicted sometime either by the Japanese Navy or the landbased *Kamikaze* suicide planes upon the enemy’s task forces. Neither did the nation know that the Combined Fleet had already been destroyed and neither could they imagine the pitiful picture of rickety Japanese training planes loaded with bombs headed unwaveringly towards an imposing array of enemy dreadnaughts [big-gun battleships].³⁵

A “Die for the Emperor” propaganda campaign on Japan took advantage of the indoctrination to which the Japanese had been exposed since birth. Motivated by their indoctrination, and misled by the propaganda, Japanese forces on the southern island of Kyushu swelled to 900,000. They dug into caves and prepared to fight from every hole and rock in the mountains. Without a whimper of popular protest, Hiroshima was made the southern command center for the Japanese Second Army Group, which would coordinate the suicidal “decisive operation” to kill Americans. The government established Area Special Policing Units, charged with “a seamless fusion of the military, the government, and the people.” Officials prepared to call one million civilians in Kyushu alone into active service. They suspended all schooling beyond the sixth grade for one year, so that middle-school- and high-school-aged children could assist in the decisive battle against the Americans.³⁶ Women lined up with sharpened sticks and prepared to drive the Americans back. There were no marches for peace, no calls in the press for the leadership to give up its obsession with military glory, no vigils for Americans killed at Bataan, no questioning of the emperor’s rescripts. Instead, the Japanese continued to work diligently at the Mitsubishi Steel and Arms Works in Nagasaki to churn out materials for weapons.

Surrender or death were the only choices open to the Japanese. These pitiless alternatives were made explicit by American and British leaders, who offered the Japanese one last chance to accept unconditional surrender and end the war. In July 1945, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Soviet dictator Josef Stalin met at Potsdam, an area in Germany south of Berlin and inside the Soviet zone of occupation. The statement of their commitment to unconditional surrender was the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, 1945. Since Russia had not yet entered the Pacific war, the

leaders of only three nations—the United States, Great Britain, and China—signed the statement. Although international approval of the allies was high, there was no broad international coalition to sign it, and the Japanese continued to maintain embassies in many countries—including Russia.

The thirteen-point Potsdam ultimatum, the “Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender,” included the following:

The result of the futile and senseless German resistance to the might of the aroused free peoples of the world stands forth in awful clarity as an example to the people of Japan. The might that now converges on Japan is immeasurably greater than that which, when applied to the resisting Nazis, necessarily laid waste to the lands, the industry and the method of life of the whole German people. 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 devastation of the Japanese homeland.

The time has come for Japan to decide whether she will continue to be controlled by those self-willed militaristic advisers whose unintelligent calculations have brought the Empire of Japan to the threshold of annihilation, or whether she will follow the path of reason.

Following are our terms. We will not deviate from them. There are no alternatives. We shall brook no delay. . . .

We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation, but stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners. . . .

We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.³⁷

The ultimatum accomplished several things. It accurately represented the facts of Japan’s situation, and it compared that situation to the awful precedent set in Germany. It made the basic American demand clear for both the Japanese and the world. It gave Japanese leaders a chance to save the lives of their own people by giving in to the armada facing them. It stated that the intention of the victors was not to destroy the population of Japan, but to bring justice to war criminals. And, as an ultimatum, it eliminated any possibility of negotiations between the Americans and the Japanese.

When the Japanese received the ultimatum, the Japanese leadership was unable to agree on a formal reply. With the (English-language) newspapers indicating that

the leadership would “ignore” the ultimatum, the “prompt and utter destruction” that the President had promised would soon follow. (“Ignore” was an inadequate translation of the Japanese word *mokusatsu*, which defies translation without context. It could mean “consider” it, or “table” it, or “take it under advisement”—it was not a rejection. Mistranslation aside, the Japanese leadership was unable to make a coherent statement on the ultimatum, which was effectively the same as rejecting it. They did not correct the mistranslation or even state that they were formulating a reply.)

During the two weeks that followed Potsdam, the Japanese Big Six engaged in a series of meetings. Their dominant concern was to protect the Japanese “national essence” by preserving the imperial system and the position of the military. Many Japanese leaders still thought that they could cause enough casualties during an American invasion that the Americans would accept an agreement leaving Japan under Imperial control. It was a measure of the Japanese mind-set—and of the need for them to see a demonstration of American will—that many Japanese read the Potsdam ultimatum as a *weakening* of American resolve.³⁸ They reasoned that if the Americans truly had the will to win they would not ask for their defeated enemy’s agreement in the matter.

The evasions of the Japanese leadership became more fervent as the crisis became more inescapable. Japanese leaders remained trapped between the irrational demand of their ideals to fight to the death and the glaring fact of their defeat. The Big Six were politically deadlocked between a hard-line faction, represented by Army Minister Anami, who would agree to no terms with the Americans, and a faction who wanted to petition for peace, albeit with conditions to preserve the Imperial household. Without unanimous agreement, the Big Six could not issue a decision. Absent a specific decision to surrender, frantic preparations for the final battle continued. Meanwhile, the Japanese emperor ordered the preservation of the symbolic imperial regalia—a mirror, a jewel, and a sword. His priority in the face of destruction was on preserving the physical symbols of the Imperial household, not on preventing the deaths of his subjects.³⁹

Japanese leaders continued to grasp at any straw, however irrational, to find hope of victory. Some were so deluded as to think that the Russians—who had taken control of Eastern Europe and were assembling a massive army to sweep across Asia—would actually enter the war on Japan’s behalf. Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori (not to be confused with former prime minister Tōjō Hidecki) instructed Sato Neotake, the ambassador to Russia, to induce the Russians to adopt a vague, undefined “favorable attitude” toward Japan.⁴⁰ One section of Sato’s answer

to Tōgō's ridiculous assignment summed up the issue concisely: "If the Japanese Empire is really faced with the necessity of terminating the war, we must first of all make up our minds to terminate the war. Unless we make up our own minds, there is absolutely no point in sounding to the views of the Soviet Government."⁴¹ As Sato realized, the Japanese leaders were utterly incoherent in their thinking and unable to communicate intelligible instructions to their representatives.

There were still no voices in Japan arguing openly for peace, no prominent or effective "Peace Party." Critics of American policy have charged that the American demand for unconditional surrender made it impossible for such a faction to gain influence. Had the Americans been willing to compromise a bit, they have argued, the Japanese might have come to terms, and many lives might have been spared. But the evidence does not support this view. In January 1942, when Tōgō stated before the Japanese Diet that it was necessary to work for peace, his remarks raised a storm of protest and were stricken from the minutes.⁴² Prime Minister Tōjō Hidecki had faced opposition over his aggressive policies, but the fall of his government in July 1944 was not enough to allow open opposition to the war to coalesce. The "Yoshida Anti-War Group" was a loose-knit group of people who wanted a negotiated end of the war—in order to preserve the traditional aristocratic state. But it remained underground, and "in practical terms the results of its activities were negligible."⁴³

In early 1945, Okada Keisuke—one of the *jūshin*, or former prime ministers—advised the emperor to consider ending the war. But he urged the use of *kamikaze* attacks to achieve the victory needed to bargain for favorable terms.⁴⁴ Only former prime minister Prince Konoye Fumimaro spoke out in favor of peace, in a "Memorial to the Throne" that urged the emperor to end the war. His argument was that the war had unleashed radical social forces that threatened to incite a socialist revolution in Japan. "Regrettably, I think that defeat is inevitable. . . . More than defeat itself, what we must be concerned about from the standpoint of preserving the *kokutai* is the communist revolution which may accompany defeat."⁴⁵ The Americans, he thought, were far less of a threat to the "national essence" than the communists. Surrendering to the Americans, he reasoned, might be the only way to save the *kokutai*.

But Japan was not a country where one could speak this way with impunity. Two months later, two former officials and a journalist who had helped prepare the "Memorial," including former prime minister Yoshida Shigeru, were arrested. Yoshida was imprisoned for forty-five days and forced to apologize: "Not having thought the matter through sufficiently, I slandered the military, and for this

I offer my sincere apologies. I hope you will excuse me on this point. Henceforth I shall revise my mental attitude, and desire to cooperate as a subject in the execution of this war.”⁴⁶

In April 1945, Admiral Suzuki Kantarō became prime minister. Several commentators have claimed that the emperor ordered Suzuki to make peace. Suzuki himself, however, said at his war crimes trial that he “did not receive any direct order from the Emperor” to end the war—only that he had somehow understood that that was what the emperor wanted. Robert Butow notes that, in reference to discussions leading up to the forming of the Suzuki government, one adviser said: “Suzuki could not just openly declare he was going to end the war, but (and it was a significant ‘but’) that was clearly his intention.” Suzuki, however, signed statements as prime minister pledging to mobilize the nation for a last charge—so that “the one hundred million” (shorthand for the seventy million Japanese subjects) would throw their bodies forward in defense of the emperor.⁴⁷ On June 6, Suzuki had supported the “Fundamental Policy”—that every man, woman, and child should fight to the death. These were his real intentions. The emperor himself issued a rescript on June 9, 1945, ordering his subjects to “smash the inordinate ambitions of enemy nations” and “achieve the goals of the war.”⁴⁸

It is the actions of these men that matter, not their alleged inner thoughts. They actively, repeatedly, and over years promoted the deaths of millions, as a matter of policy and of deep-seated commitment. *After* the American victory they claimed to have wanted to end the war—the emperor most of all—but no one said it openly at the time, least of all the emperor.

In mid-1945, the government continued to disavow any statement that even hinted at an entreaty to peace. When a Japanese military attaché to Sweden insinuated that peace might be sought by Japan, the Tokyo government corrected the statements: “As we have said before, Japan is firmly determined to prosecute the Greater East Asia war to the very end.”⁴⁹

While the Japanese leadership remained committed to the war, the United States began to fulfill its promise of “prompt and utter destruction.” On August 6, 1945, the city of Hiroshima was obliterated by a uranium fission bomb. (The first—by milliseconds—of more than one hundred thousand to die were officers in the Japanese Second Army Group, who would have commanded the anticipated suicide charge in southern Japan.) President Truman issued a statement that day, subsequently dropped as leaflets on Japan: If the Japanese leaders did not accept the Potsdam ultimatum, “they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth.”⁵⁰

The atomic bomb was an unprecedented shock to the Japanese leadership. Prior to Hiroshima, General Anami had maintained that the United States had no such bomb. The Japanese Technology Board had advised that even if Americans had such a bomb, the “unstable” device could not be transported across the Pacific.⁵¹ Once the bomb fell, its existence—and the American will to use it—could not be denied. Still, Anami refused to give up hope for an invasion and claimed that the Hiroshima bomb was the only one the Americans had.

On August 7, the emperor may have expressed his desire, in private, to his chief aide, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal of Japan Kido Koichi, to bring about an end to the war, to “bow to the inevitable” in order to avoid “another tragedy like this.” This alleged desire of the emperor was revealed in Kido’s later recollections, which were likely self-sacrificial statements made by him with the intention of protecting the emperor from prosecution as a war criminal.⁵² Whether or not the emperor desired to end the war after the Hiroshima bomb, the fact remains that he chose neither to do nor to say anything to end the war. Even after Hiroshima, the Big Six remained deadlocked—and the emperor, silent.

On August 8, two days after Hiroshima, the Russians attacked Japanese positions in Asia, where six million Japanese troops and civilians were stationed. Both Roosevelt and Truman had urged Stalin to enter the Asian war in order to open a second front against Japan and to prevent the return of Japanese troops to the main islands. Russia’s overwhelming attack also threatened Japan’s northern islands with Soviet occupation, which would likely be followed by the communist revolution the Japanese leadership feared. Still, Japan did not surrender.

On the morning of August 9, 1945, at 10:30 a.m.—three days after Hiroshima—the Big Six again convened. Anami continued to argue against any form of capitulation. He maintained that the Americans had no other atomic bombs, an understandable conclusion for him, since he would have used them immediately had he been in their shoes. In the interpretation of historian Sadao Asada, Anami became “almost irrational,” declaring, in essence: “The appearance of the atomic bomb does not spell the end of war. . . . We are confident about a decisive homeland battle against American forces. . . . [T]here will be some chance as long as we keep on fighting for the honor of the Yamato race.”⁵³ In his mind, millions of Japanese men, women, and children could still save the “national essence”—if only they had the will to fight and die.

Word of the bombing of Nagasaki came while the Big Six were in recess. When they reconvened at 2:30 p.m., Anami had revised his position again. He had first denied that the Americans had an atomic bomb, and later conceded that

they had one. Now, in the wake of Nagasaki, he admitted that the United States might have one hundred atomic bombs and could drop three every day. Prime Minister Suzuki and others came to believe that the Americans, instead of invading of Japan, would just keep dropping atomic bombs. Anami, Suzuki, Tōgō, and their fellows were finally forced to recognize reality—that the Americans were willing and able to remain offshore and bomb Japan into the bedrock. The rumor spread that Tokyo was to be next, on August 12, three days after Nagasaki.

This complete loss of hope was vital to forcing Japan’s decision to surrender. As long as the leadership saw even a slim chance of preserving their system, they would grasp at that chance. They had hoped desperately for an American land invasion, but that hope dissipated with the incendiary attacks and atomic bombs. There would be no chance to preserve their system: no great battle, no *Banzai* charge, no honor, no “Nation” to live on—only “prompt and utter destruction.”

The Big Six met until 10:00 p.m.—but remained deadlocked. Three of the six were willing to accept the Potsdam declaration, with the proviso that the imperial house be maintained. The other three—including General Anami—demanded further conditions that would have preserved the position of the military in Japan. With no decision possible, Prime Minister Suzuki requested a meeting late that evening—in the emperor’s presence. The emperor, in full dress uniform, heard Foreign Minister Tōgō argue for the acceptance of Potsdam, and Army Minister Anami argue against it. Suzuki then stepped forward and made an unprecedented request: that the emperor decide. Until this point, the emperor had always confirmed only what the Big Six had unanimously agreed upon.

In making his “sacred decision,” the emperor chided the army for its failure and noted that the new and terrible bombs would bring only suffering to the Japanese people. He accepted that events did not allow the war to continue—and he expressed his wish for Japan to accept the Potsdam Declaration. This open admission of defeat was vital to securing the organized surrender of millions of Japanese troops—but even with the emperor’s wish for surrender, Anami later had to threaten rebellious officers that anyone who attempted to disrupt the surrender “will have to cut me down first.”⁵⁴

On August 10, while thousands of U.S. planes bombed Tokyo and other cities, Japanese leaders sent word to the Americans that they would accept the Potsdam ultimatum—but that the imperial house was to remain sovereign over Japan. The next day, August 11, the Americans replied that the emperor would be subject to their orders. This signaled the American intent to preserve the emperor as sovereign—while subordinating him and his subjects to the will of the Americans.

On August 14, the Japanese government accepted the Potsdam ultimatum, thereby surrendering to the United States. This political decision to submit to the will of the victors had yet to be communicated to the army and the populace. On August 15, for the first time in history, the emperor's recorded voice emanated from radios across Japan. He told his subjects that circumstances had not turned out to their advantage—again blaming the army for failing to prevail—and that they would have to “endure the unendurable.” His subjects bowed before the radios and wept—many in relief, they having expected the emperor's broadcast to be a call to fight to their deaths. For millions of Japanese, the meaning of the American victory was liberation from death. Physically, and psychologically, they were given back their lives.⁵⁵

The American decision to retain the emperor has been widely criticized—and with good reason. Emperor Hirohito was very aware of war planning; during the fervent war years, he was apprised regularly of Japan's military resources, sometimes seeing multiple drafts of statements and orders.⁵⁶ He repeatedly expressed his desire for further military conquest. He ordered his people to prepare for suicidal charges in his name. He could have expressed a wish to end the war earlier, and forced the leadership to confront the need for surrender. He did not. He was a war criminal if anyone was, and he deserved to be executed if anyone did.

But as a means of achieving a full and organized surrender, the decision was appropriate. The Japanese people overwhelmingly wanted to retain their imperial system, and American leaders knew that to demand its destruction would likely result in a communist insurgency and civil war. Retaining the emperor did not mean that Japan was to be ruled by a Prussian-style all-powerful autocrat. Instead, the emperor was to become a British-style figurehead, subordinated to American will and then constitutionally neutered.

The emperor accepted his new position fully. On September 2, 1945—the day the Japanese surrender was signed on the deck of the battleship USS *Missouri*—the emperor made his commitment to the surrender public. He issued a rescript commanding his subjects “to lay down their arms and faithfully carry out all the provisions of the instrument of surrender.”⁵⁷ During the occupation to come, he denied his status as a deity, accepted a new political constitution, and remade himself into a private man, expressing his desire to return to his chosen field of study, marine biology.

As for Army Minister Anami: Given the emperor's sacred decision to end the war, Anami was trapped between his loyalty to the imperial throne and his sympathy for junior officers who shared his *Bushido* ideal of fighting to the end. Some

officers demanded that the emperor be replaced with someone who might better promote the “national essence” by prosecuting the war. But Anami refused to countenance such a coup, and thereby prevented a potentially devastating military rebellion. The morning after the acceptance of Potsdam, Anami committed the final act toward which his entire life had been oriented: He committed suicide, by disemboweling himself, leaving behind a poem of apology to the emperor for his “great crime.”⁵⁸

The shock of the air attacks—and the intransigence of the United States in its demands—had made the issue of surrender an either–or proposition for the Japanese. Sixty years of indoctrination had created a cultural straitjacket that could be removed by nothing less than such power and intransigence. It blew apart like a threadbare fabric that had restrained its victims by no means other than their unwillingness to cast it aside. Freed from Anami and his suicidal ideology, the Japanese could, with American guidance, remake themselves and their country with values that affirmed their newfound desire to live.

The Occupation

During the six years and eight months following their surrender, from September 2, 1945, until April 1952, the Japanese lived under American military occupation, commanded by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). Until March 1951, this was General Douglas MacArthur. All of Japan was under American control; there was no division of the country, no “Communist North Japan.” The Japanese were strictly censored and placed under tight economic control until fundamental reforms had taken hold. Their government, their religious shrines, and their schools were subordinated to American *diktat*. SCAP’s mission was to enforce the surrender and to eliminate the possibility that Japan would again threaten the world.⁵⁹

To reiterate, during the occupation not one American soldier was killed in Japan as the result of hostile action. There were no insurgencies or terror campaigns, nor was there international pressure to “give Japan back to the Japanese.” In mid-1945, when 500,000 troops were considered necessary for the occupation, MacArthur was criticized for saying that in six months only 200,000 troops would be needed. But he was correct—and that number fell to 102,000 by 1948. As MacArthur reported: “In the accomplishment of the extraordinarily difficult and dangerous surrender in Japan, unique in the annals of history, not a shot was necessary, not a drop of Allied blood was shed.”⁶⁰

MacArthur's initial orders were found in the "Basic Initial Post Surrender Directive to Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers for the Occupation and Control of Japan," which was issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and based on the Potsdam Declaration:

The basis of your power and authority over Japan is the directive signed by the President of the United States designating you as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers and the Instrument of Surrender, executed by command of the Emperor of Japan. These documents, in turn, are based upon the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945, the reply of the Secretary of State on 11 August 1945 to the Japanese communication of 10 August 1945 and the final Japanese communication on 14 August 1945. Pursuant to these documents your authority over Japan, as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, is supreme for the purpose of carrying out the surrender. . . .

As Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers your mission will be to assure that the surrender is vigorously enforced and to initiate appropriate action to achieve the objectives of the United Nations. . . .

There must be eliminated for all time the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest, for we insist that a new order of peace, security and justice will be impossible until irresponsible militarism is driven from the world.

The occupation began with an open recognition of the status of the Japanese as a *defeated* people. This concept of defeat, driven deeply into the bedrock of the Japanese mind, established an entirely one-sided relationship with the Americans. The occupation was *forced* upon the Japanese; it was not the result of negotiations with them. The initial order continued:

By appropriate means you will make clear to all levels of the Japanese population the fact of their defeat. They must be made to realize that their suffering and defeat have been brought upon them by the lawless and irresponsible aggression of Japan, and that only when militarism has been eliminated from Japanese life and institutions will Japan be admitted to the family of nations.⁶¹

All attempts by the Japanese to bargain were cut off. When Japanese officials stated to Truman their desire to control their own foreign embassies, he replied that all instructions "will be communicated by the Supreme Commander at appropriate times determined by him." There was to be no appeal to Washington over MacArthur's head. When Japanese officials tried to instruct the Americans as to the best way to occupy Japan—by keeping American troops out of Tokyo, by letting the Japanese disarm themselves, by allowing officers to keep their

ceremonial swords, and by dispatching food immediately—President Truman correctly identified this as an attempt by the defeated to bargain with the victors as equals. He issued this clarification to MacArthur:

[Y]ou will exercise your authority as you deem proper to carry out your mission. Our relations with the Japanese do not rest on a contractual basis, but on unconditional surrender. Since your authority is supreme, you will not entertain any questions on the part of the Japanese as to its scope.⁶²

Under the occupation, all Japanese laws were subordinated to American military command, and the United States would not accept any suggestions as to its limits. SCAP's supreme authority had been established and defined in the Potsdam Declaration, in the Japanese and American communication that followed it, in the Instrument of Surrender signed by the emperor, and in two post-surrender orders. (During the international war crimes trials in Japan, America did, to some extent, bend to international pressure and accept the forums of “international law,” but this was never allowed to circumvent the authority of SCAP.) The final authority in Japan during the occupation was SCAP.

Unconditional surrender was entirely different from an armistice agreement reached by negotiations. Unconditional surrender began with a *demand*; the alternative was surrender or death, not a choice between negotiating points. There was no contract between the Americans and the Japanese, no negotiated agreements, and no supervening authority over the Americans. There could be no claims that the Americans had violated any contract, akin to the claims to mistreatment raised by the Germans after World War I in Europe.

This American dominance over a vanquished people was overwhelmingly accepted within the U.S. government—and those who misunderstood the situation could find themselves sidelined. During one top-secret meeting, a high-level State Department official with a long history of service in Japan suggested that “international law” applied to the occupation, which he claimed was a contract between Japan and the United States. The Japanese, he said, had not really surrendered unconditionally given this verbiage of the Potsdam Declaration: “the following are our terms.” Within three days he was replaced with someone who understood the policy.⁶³ The Americans were as intransigent in their enforcement of unconditional surrender as they had been in achieving it.

Part of the meaning of unconditional surrender was that the Americans assumed no responsibility for the welfare of the defeated Japanese. The initial orders to MacArthur made this clear:

13. You will not assume any responsibility for the economic rehabilitation of Japan or the strengthening of the Japanese economy. You will make it clear to the Japanese people that:

- a. You assume no obligations to maintain, or have maintained, any particular standard of living in Japan, and
- b. That the standard of living will depend upon the thoroughness with which Japan rids itself of all militaristic ambitions, redirects the use of its human and natural resources wholly and solely for purposes of peaceful living, administers adequate economic and financial controls, and cooperates with the occupying forces and the governments they represent.⁶⁴

Given the starvation in countries that Japan had raped, the Japanese had no special right to food. The Americans actually charged the Japanese for many costs of the occupation.⁶⁵ But MacArthur soon became an ardent advocate for American aid, which eventually totaled more than twenty billion dollars. He also opposed reparations, demanded by some nations, in the form of moving industrial machinery.⁶⁶ He recognized that it was in American self-interest to see Japan achieve prosperity and to prevent its looting by other nations. But the essential point is that the surrender came first, before any aid. Prior to the surrender, the Americans dropped napalm and atom bombs, not food, on Japanese civilians.

The goals of the occupation reached far deeper than economic matters. The special barbarity of the last year of the war had led American and British leaders to realize that serious change in Japan would require a “decisive rupture with the authoritarian past.”⁶⁷ The Americans intended to permanently end Japan’s will and capacity to wage war. An American training film for Americans in Japan displayed this purpose in bold letters: “THIS IS JAPAN’S LAST WAR.”⁶⁸ Americans at home saw the effort in the *Saturday Evening Post*: “The G.I. is Civilizing the Jap.”⁶⁹

From the outset, there was never any doubt in the minds of the Japanese that they had brought this misery on themselves. As John Dower put it:

Because the defeat was so shattering, the surrender so unconditional, the disgrace of the militarists so complete, the misery the “holy war” had brought home so personal, starting over involved not merely reconstructing buildings but also rethinking what it meant to speak of a good life and good society.⁷⁰

A new Japanese periodical, *Shinsei*, or *New Life*, wrote that “make-believe and slippery excuses no longer work. The old Japan has been completely defeated. Completely. We must engrave this in our hearts and embark from here on a new-born Japan.”⁷¹ And so they did.

Per the directives of the occupation, the reforms proceeded at breakneck speed. On October 4, 1945, MacArthur released his “Civil Liberties Directive,” which was followed by a flurry of more specific directives. The imperial secret police were eliminated; schools were reformed; trade unions were empowered to challenge the feudal economic cartels (the *zaibatsu*); feudal tenancy in the countryside was broken, and many Japanese became small landowners.⁷² Women were emancipated, given suffrage and employment opportunities, and the first female officers were soon inducted into the Tokyo Police Department.⁷³ When Prime Minister Higashikuni Naruhiko and his entire cabinet resigned in protest, the Japanese Diet selected a new prime minister. SCAP told him to accept the directives.

The most important mission of the occupation, however, was the elimination of militarism from Japanese culture. This would require putting an end to emperor worship and religious indoctrination—especially in the schools. Toward this end, two major reforms were required: Shinto as a state cult had to be eradicated, and schools had to be purged of indoctrination for service to the state.

Shinto had been made the national religion in 1882, and was legally tied to political practice in the Meiji Constitution of 1889. Whether or not this connection of religion and state was consistent with the central tenets of Shinto, the Japanese government indisputably employed Shinto mythology to build a national religious cult and used Shinto shrines for political purposes. American leaders in 1945 recognized the danger of State Shinto—Shinto enforced by the Japanese government and used to support military aggression. A public statement by John Carter Vincent, chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs in the State Department, set a policy that distinguished between the private practice of Shintoism and its politicized form. In response to an inquiry by SCAP, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes replied via telegram, quoting Vincent:

Shintoism, insofar as it is a religion of individual Japanese, is not to be interfered with. Shintoism, however, insofar as it is directed by the Japanese government, and as a measure enforced from above by the government, is to be done away with. . . . [T]here will be no place for Shintoism in the schools. Shintoism as a state religion—National Shinto, that is—will go . . . Our policy on this goes beyond Shinto . . . The dissemination of Japanese militaristic and ultra-nationalistic ideology in any form will be completely suppressed.⁷⁴

State-mandated Shinto—the forcing of the Japanese people to believe this mythology and follow its rituals—was the cardinal means by which the Japanese government was able to motivate the population to engage in suicidal military aggression.⁷⁵ Accordingly, although MacArthur’s so-called Shinto Directive left

the shrines open—a very important issue to many Japanese—it severed the connection between Shinto and the government. Shinto was reduced from a political mandate to a private matter; this was key to ending the sacrificial, collectivist, nationalistic mindset that had infected the Japanese people.

Not only was State Shinto prohibited; nationalistic ideologies as such were prohibited. “The dissemination of Japanese militaristic and ultra-nationalistic ideology and propaganda in any form will be prohibited and completely suppressed,” said the initial orders given to MacArthur.

As soon as practicable educational institutions will be reopened. As rapidly as possible, all teachers who have been active exponents of militant nationalism and aggression and those who continue actively to oppose the purposes of the military occupation will be replaced by acceptable and qualified successors. Japanese military and para-military training and drill in all schools will be forbidden. You will assure that curricula acceptable to you are employed in all schools. . . .⁷⁶

On October 22, 1945, SCAP directed the Japanese to end militaristic teaching, to empower teachers to write their own courses, to reinstate teachers fired for opposing the government, and to dismiss teachers who refused to cooperate.⁷⁷ Directives in October and December 1945 ended courses in “morals” that were actually platforms for indoctrinating students into Shintoism.⁷⁸ Textbooks were rewritten. Students were taught the importance of challenging dogma, and of forming their own judgments. The “school-sponsored or school-directed ceremonies of bowing to the imperial palace . . . [and] shouting ‘Long live the Emperor’” were ended.⁷⁹ In the words of Eiji Takemae, the Americans undertook “an exercise in moral and psychological disarmament balanced by a positive project of institutional reform.”⁸⁰

Acting energetically, Japanese educators worked with Americans to excise the cancer of imperial indoctrination from their classrooms. Before public assemblies, teachers, in tears, apologized for their past activities. The emperor’s household instructed schools to eliminate the practice of bowing to the emperor’s image, recalled the imperial portraits, and asked that photographs of the emperor be placed alongside others, if school officials cared to hang them at all.⁸¹ In one high school, students boycotted classes, thereby forcing their militaristic principal to resign; in another, female students denounced their male principal.⁸² In 1948, the Educational Rescript of 1890 was rendered null and void by an act of the Japanese Diet.

Young children would learn new lessons in school. There is a powerful photo, in Eiji Takemae’s book, of schoolchildren sitting in rows, learning their lessons from a teacher.⁸³ It was a typical schoolroom scene—except that the children were sitting outside, in rubble. Their school had been bombed, and the ruins were proof



United States War Department Poster. Reproduced in William P. Woodard, *The Allied Occupation of Japan and Japanese Religions 1945–1952* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), frontispiece.

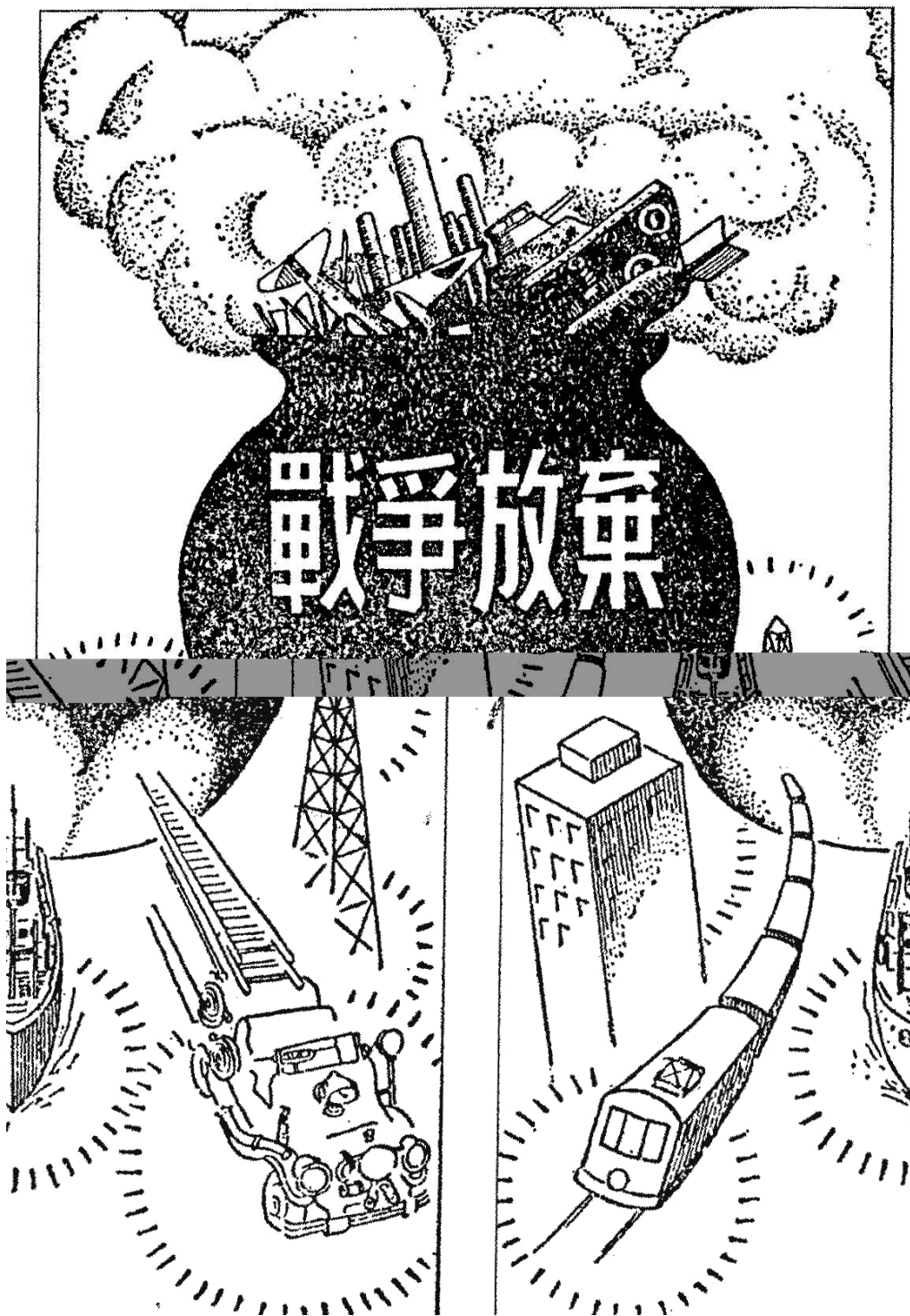
positive of what war had brought them. “All this, thanks to the war” was the real meaning of their lessons.⁸⁴ The bombs cleared a physical, intellectual, and moral space into which better ideas could take root and blossom.

The breaking of existing structures of thought and practice could be painful. John Dower writes of one Yuri Hajime, who lost his father, brother, and uncle in the war, and who, at age thirteen, was bombed out of his home. Yuri had an immaculately kept language book that he had meticulously copied by hand in school. After the Japanese surrendered, he was told to black out the sections of the book containing the now-discredited ideas of Imperialist Japan. The result left him in tears—but, in Dower’s words, it also “left him with a lasting awareness that knowledge could be challenged.” The “jumble of contending values” that remained was a step toward finding a sense of personal judgment and freeing himself from the “indoctrinating power of the state.”⁸⁵

What were the results of these educational reforms? Theodore Geisel—also known as Dr. Seuss—visited Japan eight years after the surrender and asked students what they wanted to be when they grew up. The children drew hundreds of pictures of doctors, statesmen, teachers, nurses, and even wrestlers. Only one student wanted to be a soldier—and he wanted to be General MacArthur.⁸⁶ The values of these children were already far different from those of their parents a decade earlier, when the Japanese dreamed of dying on the battlefield for an Emperor-god.

Previous generations of Japanese had formed deeply entrenched mental connections about the nature of the world and their place in it, connections based on the divinity of the “Emperor,” the importance of “national essence,” and the supremacy of the “Yamato race.” The Americans proceeded to blast those connections and to replace them with connections to reality. The Big Lie that had been the basis for, and the centerpiece of, Japanese culture for decades had been blown to pieces, and the truth of the situation now lay bare. One Japanese magazine, in its 1946 New Year’s issue, published a photo of the Hiroshima mushroom cloud, and titled it “Truth that Emerged from Lies.”⁸⁷

The Japanese were reconsidering their long-standing beliefs and coming to see knowledge as the by-product of mental effort rather than the absorption of dogma; virtue as productiveness rather than destruction; their lives and happiness as values to be pursued rather than sacrificed; political leaders as administrators rather than rulers; factories as sources of wealth rather than weapons; women as equal under the law rather than second-class citizens; and America as a country to be emulated rather than feared.



Drawing from a booklet, *The Story of the New Constitution*, issued by the Ministry of Education in 1947, and used in a middle-school text to illustrate the “renunciation of war.” Arms are melted down, and used for productive purposes. Reproduced and discussed in John Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, p. 399.

The American victory simultaneously demonstrated the efficacy of American values and enabled the Japanese to begin embracing them. This resulted in a surge of intellectual activity that ushered American ideals into Japanese culture. Americans and their ideals became objects of emulation. The Japanese notion of one's "duty" to serve the state was abandoned and replaced with the American principle of the individual's right to his life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness—principles mentioned in Article 13 of the new constitution. The virtue of mindless obedience was abandoned and replaced with the virtue of rational thinking. Intellectuals began to argue for *individualism*, recognizing the need for an "autonomous sense of self."⁸⁸ These were the seeds that would eventually give rise to the marvel of peace, wealth, and prosperity that is Japan today.

Even the views of the Japanese toward their returning soldiers changed. Rather than being greeted with veneration, the soldiers were often treated with contempt.⁸⁹ Prior to the defeat, "thanks to our fighting men" (*heitaisan no okage desu*) conveyed sincere praise for the rise of Japan; after the defeat, the phrase came to be used sarcastically with respect to the destruction all around them. Military uniforms were called "defeat suits." Surplus military boots were called "defeat shoes." Smoking pipes, made from shell casings, were called "defeat pipes."⁹⁰

Evidence of the Japanese renunciation of war abounded. Publications changed their titles: *War Technology* magazine was renamed *Peace Industry*; *Wartime Women* became *Ladies' Graphics*; *Wartime Economy* became *Investment Economy*.⁹¹ Schoolbooks were written on the theme "the renunciation of war," and lessons were altered as necessary to remove the old, destructive ideas. "Everyone serving for construction" was a bit of wartime propaganda used in school lessons to orient a student's thoughts toward the good of the Nation. This phrase was replaced by "construct a nation of peace" and children—including the emperor's son—wrote such phrases as part of their calligraphy lessons.⁹²

As Japan remade itself into a peaceful nation, many Japanese remembered that they had needed an outside force to bring their freedom into existence. The residents of Nagasaki gave a doll in a glass case to the Americans, and even sponsored a "Miss Atomic Bomb" contest.⁹³ A cartoonist depicted his shackles being cut by U.S. Air Force scissors; he commented: "We must not forget that we did not shed a drop of blood, or raise a sweat, to cut those chains." The cartoonist himself had drawn virulent propaganda cartoons before the war; once liberated from government censors by the Americans, he began using his pen for a noble purpose.

Economically—in the field of material values—the victory marked the success of production and trade over force, loot, and slavery. Japan's lack of natural

鎖は切斷された



Cartoon by Katō Etsurō, from his booklet *Okurareta Kukumei*, roughly “The Revolution We Have Been Given,” published in August 1946 by Kobarutosha. Note the U.S. Air Force star on the scissors and Japanese war leaders running off in the distance. The context of the cartoon is MacArthur’s “Civil Liberties Directive” directive of October 4, 1945. Reproduced and discussed in John Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, pp. 65-71.

resources—once a pretext for its aggression—was now no impediment to its economic growth. Bad ideas led the Japanese to seize what they needed in 1941, with the result of utter failure. After the American victory, good ideas directed the Japanese to produce and purchase what they needed, with the result being spectacular success. The Mitsubishi Corporation, for instance, which had manufactured weapons for aggression, rebuilt and retooled its factories to manufacture life-promoting goods. Under the old values, famine was always just around the corner. Under the new values, prosperity was the reward of virtue.

Vital to the permanent lifting of the veil of evasion was the creation of a new political constitution for Japan. It began as an American document—written in English—which the Japanese had no choice but to accept. In the end, it was embraced by the Japanese—translated into their language, politically deliberated, and sanctioned by their emperor in his last official act. In essence, the constitution corrected the errors of 1889, when individual rights had been rejected in favor of Prussian statism.

From September 1945 to January 1946, the “Constitutional Problem Investigation Committee,” a subcommittee of the Japanese Diet, drafted a constitutional proposal. The changes they proposed making to the Meiji Constitution, however, were mere window dressings, intended to preserve their traditional imperial government until the Americans left. When the committee presented its proposal to SCAP, it was told that the proposal was “wholly unacceptable to the Supreme Commander,” who knew that a complete constitutional overhaul was in order, and that most Japanese actually wanted it.⁹⁴ SCAP became a voice upholding the desire of the Japanese people to reform their constitution—in opposition to their leadership, which often opposed such reform.

It was essential to preventing disorder in Japan that the imperial office be maintained. It was key, however, to the constitutional reforms to turn the emperor into a figurehead. The emperor did his part; on January 1, 1946, he issued a statement denying that he was an “incarnate deity.”

On February 3, 1946, MacArthur ordered his Government Section to write a new constitution and to have it ready in one week. He gave them three broad guidelines as to what it should entail: (1) the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with an emperor (who was to be a mere figurehead); (2) the renunciation of war; and (3) the repudiation of feudalism. Twenty-four Americans worked feverishly and completed the document in one week. SCAP accepted the draft on February 11 and made virtually no changes. (MacArthur was highly motivated to

get the job done quickly, before a potentially meddlesome international committee began to meet.)

The draft was presented to the Japanese committee members, who were told to accept it with no changes to its form or content. They were stunned, but did what they were told and presented it to the Diet as if it were their own recommendation. During the following months there was much haggling, intentional obfuscation, and twisting of verbiage when the English was translated into Japanese—and SCAP even conceded a point or two (e.g., a unicameral legislature). But the resulting document was American in origin, English in its basic organization, and a repudiation of the German-influenced authoritarianism Japan had lived under for sixty years. The Japanese Diet adopted it overwhelmingly, and in November 1946 the emperor, in his last official act, publicly ratified it.

As the new constitution went into effect on May 3, 1947, a Japanese band played *The Stars and Stripes Forever* in front of the Imperial Palace—where fanatical subjects of the emperor had once committed suicide. Not until years later did it become public knowledge that MacArthur’s staff had written the constitution; the document was initially presented as a Japanese achievement. But it remains to this day the law of the land in Japan—and in that sense it *is* their achievement.

Article 9 warrants reproduction here:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

The constitution was the climax of the occupation, for it was now impossible for the Japanese ever to regress back into tyranny without a conscious public decision to do so. This was a triumph for the United States military, not only because of the victory that made it possible, but also because the occupation itself was under *military* command.

When MacArthur left Japan in 1951, the Japanese hailed him as a hero, the man who brought them a new life. In the end, this is not fully accurate, for it is the Japanese who have created a new life for themselves—a life that is now in its third generation after “Japan’s Last War.” America ended a threat to its own liberty, and in doing so excised the cancer that had consumed Japanese culture. The American

victory and occupation shined a light on a truly human path to the future and freed the best within the Japanese to rise and to prosper.

The Meaning of the Victory as Unconditional Surrender

Why was America's victory over Japan so complete and such a resounding and lasting success? The answer lies in the nature of the motive behind Japan's assault and in the nature of the surrender that America demanded and achieved.

All wars begin with a political decision, and a commitment, to use horrific violence to achieve certain ends. This is the political "will to war"—a decision and a commitment to fight for superiority over an enemy.⁹⁵ Wars do not just "break out" or "happen"; they are waged consciously and intentionally by nations that undertake vigorous, long-term, highly organized action with the support of the population.

Although it is possible in a brief, small-scale conflict for a leader to act independently of the political leadership (e.g., a commander may order a military unit to attack an enemy position in a remote territory, as did a Japanese army commander in the initial attack of Manchuria in 1931), the waging of a major war lasting years requires popular support. The ultimate cause of wars is in the ideas—especially moral ideas—that dominate a nation's culture and that motivate a population to support the war. If, by and large, a population accepts ideas akin to those that prevailed in Japan during the 1930s, it will be motivated to wage war on the orders of leaders who promise glory, loot, vengeance, or aggrandizement of a "greater" race, nation, or deity. Conversely, a nation of free people, who are outraged by a premeditated attack and see themselves as worthy of defense, will act to end the attacks against them.

The will to war in Japan—meaning, the commitment by the population and the leadership to support the war over years—was founded on the idea that there is something greater than each individual—such as an Emperor-god, a Nation, or a Race—to which each individual owes his life. Wholesale indoctrination of the Japanese people with this idea is ultimately what gave rise to the horrific aggression they perpetrated on the world. If Japan were to lose its will to war, its people would have to repudiate this idea.

This understanding of the causes of war leads us logically to the proper goal of a defensive war: to demand that the leadership, the people, and the culture renounce the decision and commitment to fight, and to demonstrate that renunciation through long-term action. To achieve this goal, the victors must defeat the

aggressor nation, demand its unconditional surrender, and thereby discredit the ideas that gave rise to its aggression.

It is vital to distinguish between *defeat* and *surrender*.⁹⁶ A military defeat is a *fact*, the point at which a nation has no chance of triumphing in war. It is a fact that the Japanese were no longer able to fight effectively after mid-1944. But they continued the war because they had not accepted this fact and its implications. Surrender is a *decision* to recognize the fact of defeat, to accept the will of the victors, and to demonstrate such recognition and acceptance in action. It is never enough to defeat the armed forces of an aggressive nation, for they are only the consequence and not the cause of the nation's will to war. Unless the underlying causes of its aggression are confronted and discredited, and unless the nation's population repudiates the basic ideas that motivated it to initiate force, the nation will rearm and return to battle.

Surrender is the recognition of the fact of defeat. For the Japanese surrender to be objective, the defeat had to be real. It is a sad consequence of the war with Japan that the Japanese population had to witness the defeat close-up, through horrifying violence. But this was necessary. Had their government surrendered before they were devastated by the American air war, the surrender could have been seen as a sellout, akin to Germany's acceptance of the armistice in 1918. As it was, several rebellions began within the military; a peaceful, organized surrender was not a foregone conclusion. But once the defeat was recognized as real, surrender offered the only hope for recovery.

For the Americans, the pursuit of unconditional surrender was a *goal-directed activity*. It was a straight line of action to a specific, defined end. This had implications for the victors and for the vanquished. Once the Japanese surrendered, the war was over, and the Americans demonstrated their essential benevolence toward the Japanese by allowing them to achieve their own prosperity. Japan was neither looted nor enslaved. For the Americans back home, unconditional surrender allowed conditions to return to normal. War requires extraordinary measures: fearsome, organized killing on the part of the military, and state-of-emergency laws and procedures on the part of the citizenry. Once the surrender was achieved, the numerous rules in effect during World War II—from mandatory blackouts to the internment of Japanese American citizens—came to an end or were reversed over time. America's goal-directed defensive war was just that, and once the goal had been achieved, Americans returned to normal life.

Unconditional surrender as a goal also served as a motivational formula and a point of focus for millions of people. It prevented internal disagreements—the

healthy result of men thinking independently—from undercutting the basic mission itself, especially when the enemy would see any wavering as weakness. The goal of unconditional surrender can pressure a politician to maintain a difficult position in difficult times—which some critics have seen as dangerous, in that a leader motivated by the “rhetoric” of unconditional surrender might squander an opportunity to end a war early. But unconditional surrender pressures leaders not to end the fighting at the price of leaving the causes of the war in place.

Some critics of the unconditional surrender policy in World War II have claimed that American and British intransigence cost thousands of lives, by extending the war past the point where a negotiated “cessation of hostilities” was possible. But this claim is an equivocation, for a cessation of hostilities is not the same thing as a proper, long-term “peace.” A cessation of hostilities by a negotiated armistice leaves those who started the last war in power, free from discredit, and legitimated as a government worthy of negotiations. Such negotiations—controlled by the same military fanatics who refused to surrender—would have legitimized their positions, empowered them to put down internal opposition, and *strengthened* the underlying causes of the war.

Writer Ann Armstrong has criticized unconditional surrender by citing military officers on both sides of the European conflict who claimed that this demand prevented anti-Nazi factions from rising up against Hitler. Among those officers cited by Armstrong is the German General Alfred Jodl, chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command under Hitler, who said the following after he signed the German surrender on May 7, 1945:

With this signature, the German people and the armed forces are, for better or worse, delivered into the victors’ hands.

In this war, which has lasted more than five years, both have achieved and suffered more than perhaps any other people in the world. In this hour, I can only express the hope that the victor will treat them generously.⁹⁷

That Jodl could still consider the war to be something “achieved” by the German people—that he saw their suffering as worthy of discussion, but not the suffering and slaughter of their many millions of victims—demonstrated his unrepentant attitude. Unconditional surrender, as a goal and principle, prevented the Allies from making terms with such men, and from sowing the seeds of the next conflict by leaving them in place.

Armstrong implied as much when she cited the British military strategist—and fascist supporter of Hitler—John Frederick Charles Fuller, who compared

World War II in August 1945 with World War I in 1918: “[W]hereas in 1918 President Wilson’s Fourteen Points offered a fire escape to the beaten Germans, in 1945 (*sic*) President Roosevelt’s Unconditional Surrender offered nothing less than total incineration.”⁹⁸

One is at a loss whether to begin by noting the results of the 1918 “fire escape” offered to the Germans—a return to war in twenty years—or by asking why the enemy generals of 1945 chose the certainty of continental incineration over an admission of defeat. Should America have left them in control of Germany? Should Jodl have commanded a new German armed forces—and brought them to further “achievements?” Should another fire escape have been offered to those who had once again set the world ablaze?

The same situation existed in Japan, and the necessity of unconditional surrender applied there as well. After the war, former prime minister Yoshida Shigeru called the war an “historic stumble” and an aberration—and he advocated the restoration of conditions in the early Meiji Dynasty. State Department official Dean Acheson knew that the war was not an “aberration” but rather a consequence of Japan’s false ideology. He stated American policy succinctly: “[T]he economic and social system in Japan which makes for a will to war will be changed so that the will to war will not continue.”⁹⁹ Unconditional surrender forced Yoshida to accept the fact that there would be no return to the conditions that had caused the war.

World War II was a dire emergency—a time when the lives of entire populations were constantly threatened, when deaths were measured in the tens of thousands per day. It was vital to end the emergency as quickly as possible. But it was also imperative to avoid shortcuts that would endanger the postwar peace—the kind of shortcuts that, following World War I, led to Nazi Germany. Unconditional surrender demanded that the underlying causes of the war be eliminated. And it worked: The causes were eliminated, and there has been no hint of aggression from Japan since.

The deepest reason for the success of the victory—and the need for unconditional surrender—is philosophical, and relates to the mental connections formed by the Japanese. They formed deep integrations about the nature of the world and their place in it. The “Emperor,” the “Nation,” the “national essence,” the “Yamato race”—these were monolithic abstractions that loomed over the Japanese like gods. The Americans set out to smash those integrations and to replace them with new ideas and norms of conduct. Breaking the power of the emperor as an “incarnate deity” in the minds of the Japanese was vital to lifting the veil of evasion that had subordinated the minds of the Japanese to authority. To return the

Japanese to cognitive contact with reality required an end to the emperor's wish as the source and standard of morality, and an end to a religious myth as the core curriculum in the schools.

The result would be a reorientation of the minds of the Japanese, as their existing concepts were smashed and rebuilt. Consider the concept "war." For Japanese youth in the 1930s—and for the civilians back home—"war" meant "pleasing the Emperor," "honor through sacrifice for the Nation," "venerating one's ancestors," and achieving "renown" among one's fellows. Warriors who committed suicide rather than surrender were considered to be "spiritually pure." Sacrifice to the State, glory to the Emperor, and duty to the Nation were the values inculcated since childhood. Aggressive war was a virtuous activity by which a soldier achieved these values, for the Emperor, his Nation, his family, and his comrades. The conceptual integration he has made is "war" as duty to the Emperor, service to the Nation, veneration of his ancestors, honor, glory, and goodness. War for him did not mean defending freedom; it meant spreading the reign of His Majesty and the Nation.

But what did "war," "honor," "glory," and "goodness" mean in the lands where Japanese soldiers had pursued those ideals? The Rapes of Nanking and Manila, the Bataan Death March, the millions looted, enslaved, subjugated, and murdered—for them war meant starvation, suffering, rape, and death. This is the true meaning of military aggression. Wrapped in a veil of ignorance, however, the Japanese back home heard of their glorious advance. They did not know that their fleet was sunk, and that their capacity to fight was effectively gone—and when they heard of these things, they erected mental apparitions, recited imperial rescripts, and implemented censorship to obscure the truth.

The Americans brought this fundamental meaning of war home to the Japanese civilians. The overhead bombings were not a conceptual perversion. They were the real meaning of the war launched by the Japanese. This is what the Japanese had been doing to others. The firebombings of Japan were the start of this educational process—they concretized the idea of war and made it impossible to claim that there was goodness in such horror. The bombings smashed the false integrations on which the Japanese had been raised. This allowed them to re-integrate the concept "war" into its essentials: blood, smoke, rubble, fear, scars, screaming death. War was now a horror to be rejected, not an ideal to be sought.¹⁰⁰ This was a truth that the Americans knew all along—which is why they wanted to end it and get back home.

The victory brought the Japanese back to cognitive contact with reality. It broke the connections between sacrifice and glory, death and honor, the emperor's wish and goodness. The effects of this reached deeply into their moral outlook and led them to redefine their basic values. Japanese writer Sakaguchi Ango's prose poem "On Decadence"—which bore witness to the firebombings—also gave voice to this transformation of values, and its connection to the self-deception that had come from lies.

The heroes of the special attack corps [*kamikaze*] are mere apparitions; human history will begin with those who have become black marketeers. Widows being held up as apostles of virtue are mere apparitions; human history will begin with those who adopt visions of renewal. And finally the Emperor, he too is a mere apparition; a true imperial history will begin with the emperor becoming a common man.¹⁰¹

In Sakaguchi's words, history had not truly begun before Japan's defeat. The pseudo-history of Japan to this point was a series of evasions, myths, apparitions, and propaganda. The reorientation of the Japanese to reality—the demonstration of the true meaning of their militaristic ideals—led to deep changes to Japanese values. The veils of evasion that had shrouded the cancer that infected Japanese society were ripped open, and a morality of death was replaced by a morality of life.

The American victory had profoundly positive effects on the Japanese. The following story indicates the effects of the victory both on a single individual and on Japanese culture in general. On August 15, 1945, a Japanese businessman, Ogawa Kikumatsu, heard the radio broadcast in which the emperor admitted Japan's defeat at the hands the Americans. Now imagine that you heard the emperor's broadcast—that your country was defeated and about to be occupied by foreign troops—what would you think? What would come to your mind?

Ogawa, his eyes wet with emotion, set to work figuring out how he could make a yen on the situation. He asked himself: What is every Japanese person going to need from this point onward? What is cheap, easy to mass-produce, and small enough to fit in one's back pocket?

His answer was: an English phrase book. Hundreds of thousands of Americans were on the way, and the Japanese would need help communicating with them. Ogawa sold the idea to a publisher, and in three days or less (so the story goes) he produced a 32-page guide to English. By December, three and a half million copies had been sold.¹⁰² The first three entries were: "Thank you!" "Thank you awfully!" "How do you do?" (They were transliterated phonetically as: *San kyu!* *San kyu ofuri!* *Hau dei* [or, *hou dei dou*]!)

Perhaps there was no better portent for Japan's future than this: Upon hearing of his country's defeat and surrender, Ogawa's first thought—to get rich—was a benevolent, productive act taken as thousands of Americans prepared to arrive.

Of course, the Japanese experienced pain during the readjustment that commenced in 1945—pain caused by the material devastation of the war, which itself was caused by Japan's acceptance of a morality of sacrifice. But because the United States proudly upheld the rightness of its actions, properly blamed the Japanese for causing their own miseries, and refrained from retribution after the war, the gratitude of the Japanese toward the Americans was immense. The sight of confident and benevolent Americans—rather than the murdering rapists they had been told to expect—was further evidence of the contradiction between the claims of the Japanese government and reality.

The Japanese were able to trust the Americans in a way that was never possible for the victims of their own army. The Americans took no systematic vengeance against the Japanese, in any way akin to what the Japanese had done to American prisoners, and to Nanking and Manila. Once the surrender was demonstrated in action, and the reforms had been completed, it was in the best interests of the Americans to see the Japanese reenter the world as rational, productive, and friendly people. This was the self-interested benevolence brought to the Japanese by the Americans.

The Japanese, in turn, embraced the best of the Western values now in their reach, and Japan became a staunch U.S. ally and a robust economic competitor. When the war with America began in 1941, the *Worker Encouragement Press*, a propaganda rag, published a drawing of Japanese people kneeling in worship before the Imperial Palace. On September 1, 1945, the day before the Instrument of Surrender was signed, the publication, in its new "Guide to Recovery" issue, published the same drawing, with a new title: "We have cried all we can—now let's smile and stand up."¹⁰³ And so they did.

No one can predict the future—but we can consider the past three generations of peaceful coexistence with Japan and give thanks for the actions of the Americans who, in August 1945, sought, demanded, and achieved the unconditional surrender of their enemy. General Douglas MacArthur said it best, in his speech before Congress in 1951: "[O]nce war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory, not prolonged indecision. In war there is no substitute for victory."

Epilogue: The Controversy over the Atomic Bombs

The controversy around the American use of atomic weapons refuses to die, despite the fact that on the morning of August 9 the Japanese were not willing to surrender but by late evening they were. The most important reason was their utter helplessness before the American air war and the shock of the atomic bombs. Most scholars have correctly recognized both the motive behind the American decision to use the bomb—to save American lives—and the effect it had on Japan—its decision to surrender. We have direct testimony from Kodama Yoshio, writing immediately after the war:

[T]he dropping of the atomic bomb threw the Government and the clique within the Imperial Palace into the throes of fear. The leaders of the Japanese Army and Navy, however, were even more greatly taken aback at the appearance of this new weapon. Almost simultaneously with the dropping of the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. As a result, the Government and the clique within the Imperial Household completely lost all will to continue the war . . . stunned by the appearance of the atomic bomb, and paralyzed of all feeling by the round-the-clock air raids of the enemy, the nation had no more ability left to feel consternated by the Soviet Union's attack on Japan.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, in the decades following the war, the historical revisionists got busy. The fiftieth anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing saw renewed attacks on the conclusion that the bombs were dropped to save U.S. lives. Revisionists claimed that the decision to use the bomb was driven by ulterior motives—such as the desire to manipulate the Soviets, hatred of the Japanese, racism, and imperialism. The revisionists' claims have been briefly summarized by historian Robert James Maddox, who correctly concluded that “revisionist allegations are based on pervasive misuses of the historical record and should not be taken seriously.”¹⁰⁵

Early criticism of the bombs can be found in the memoirs of Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew, as well as Secretary of War Henry Stimson.¹⁰⁶ But the most influential criticism with respect to American motives comes from Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy* (1965), which claims that the bombs were used to shape postwar diplomacy with the Soviets. They were the first act of the Cold War, he claimed, not the last act of World War II. (Alperovitz was anticipated by Blackett's *Fear, War and the Bomb*, published in 1948.)¹⁰⁷

The postwar world was surely on Truman's mind at Potsdam in July 1945; he would have been short-sighted indeed were it not. But the evidence overwhelmingly shows that his main goal was to avoid the horrendous casualties that would

have resulted from a land invasion of Japan. Americans knew that 76,000 Japanese soldiers on Okinawa had killed or wounded 70,000 Americans.¹⁰⁸ To avoid such carnage on a vastly greater scale was Truman's primary concern.

But did American leaders have knowledge of other options that would have eliminated the need for killing thousands at Hiroshima and Nagasaki? For instance, should the Americans have blockaded Japan and waited for surrender? Undoubtedly a blockade would have worked eventually—perhaps four months later, in December. Would that have been reason to forgo use of the bombs?

First off, *ten thousand* American POWs would likely have died in those four months, worked to death while starving in subhuman prison camps. These captured Americans had not started World War II; they did not deserve to suffer and die. There is no rational moral basis for saving the lives of a suicidal people by sacrificing Americans. Saving the lives of those American soldiers *in and of itself* was sufficient reason to use the bombs.

But there is more. Hundreds of thousands of people were dying every month in the Asian war started by the Japanese. A four-month delay could have cost more than a million Asian lives. As Richard Frank put it, the Japanese civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki

held no stronger right not to be slaughtered than did the vast numbers of Chinese and other Asian noncombatants, the Japanese noncombatants in Soviet captivity in Asia, or the Japanese noncombatants (not to mention Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees) who would have perished of starvation and disease in the final agony of the blockade.¹⁰⁹

And a four-month blockade could have cost the lives of one or two million Japanese. The Japanese were already living below sustenance levels—a famine would have killed far more than did the bombs. (The U.S. Army Air Force planned to drop up to one hundred thousand tons of conventional bombs every month on Japan—the explosive equivalent, over four months, of more than *twenty* Hiroshima bombs.) Had the Americans wished to commit genocide, a blockade would have been the most effective way to do so. But such a slow squeeze would also have given the Japanese government time to react, to adjust its policies, and to put down what little domestic opposition might have dared come into the open.

All told, the cost of a four-month delay in ending the war could have reached three million lives—including thousands of Americans.

There is more. With four additional months to position their troops, the Soviets would have taken control of some northern islands—Sakhalin Island for certain, probably Hokkaido, and perhaps northern Honshu. Japan might have been

divided, and two generations of northern Japanese forced to live under the Soviets. The bombs likely prevented the Soviet enslavement of twenty million Japanese.

Weeping over the dead in Hiroshima and Nagasaki while neglecting those who would have died had the war continued is not an act of compassion. It is an act of evasion.

Some revisionists claim that America dropped the atom bombs not out of military necessity but from ulterior motives, such as vengeance or racial hatred. All evidence—including that of the occupation that followed—indicates that the Americans had not acted on such irrational motives. Further, such claims evade the nature of the Japanese war effort. The Japanese military machine was dispersed throughout civilian areas and was never limited to troops. It was impossible to bomb factories without hitting civilians. And, beyond this tactical issue, victory required civilian renunciation of the war effort, which was nowhere to be found. Hiroshima was the headquarters of the Japanese Second Army, charged with commanding the suicidal defense of southern Japan. Civilians did not protest the thousands of troops in their city—they joined in the military effort. The survivors of the atomic bombs became advocates for peace only *after* the bombs fell—when it was safe to hold such opinions and to act on them.

Another claim from the revisionists is that that U.S. officials invented high projections of casualties in order to justify use of the bombs. Certainly U.S. officials disagreed about casualty estimates—that is why they are called estimates. Thanks to the victory, all such estimates remained conjectural—and the men they represented remained alive. In June of 1945, Americans estimated that more than 300,000 Japanese defenders would greet them on the southern island of Kyushu. By July this estimate was revised to 600,000. After the war, Americans discovered that 900,000 trained defenders had been ready on the southern island of Kyushu alone.¹¹⁰

With that in mind, let us consider the corresponding estimates for American casualties. The lowest computations put American casualties, in the first ninety days of an invasion in the south, at 132,385, with 25,741 killed and missing. The 1945 estimate of William Shockley (who later invented the transistor) put American casualties at 1.7 to 4 million, with 400,000 to 800,000 dead. The gruesome experiences of Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa show that his estimates were not out of line. Later apologists did *not* invent the higher figures. It was the revisionists who invented the fiction that the war would have ended quickly without the bombs or an invasion.¹¹¹

Some revisionists also claim that America could have demonstrated the frightening power of the atom bomb in an uninhabited area. This ignores the many obvious problems with this strategy, including the possibility of a dud that would have proven a point opposite of that intended. But the decisive issue in this regard was that the Japanese leadership needed to know that Americans had not only the *capacity*, but also the *will* to act. American weakness of will was central to Japanese thinking—the *Ketsu-Go* plan depended on breaking the American will to sustain casualties. To the Japanese military fanatics, a demonstration of the bomb would have shown them precisely that we did not have the will to use it. It would have been a demonstration of our weakness—which would have strengthened their resolve.

Yet another claim of the revisionists is that Japan was already defeated, and that the bombs were unnecessary. Although it is true that the Japanese were materially defeated by 1944, they had not reversed their decision and commitment to fight; they had not accepted the fact of defeat and surrendered. Even after the bombing of Nagasaki, the Big Six could not agree to sue for peace, and many Japanese military officers retained their commitment to fight. The emperor's decision that the Japanese would lay down their arms was vital to securing the organized surrender of millions of troops—and that became possible only after Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

But the objection to the use of the bomb that deserves the most emphatic repudiation is the claim that it is an inherently immoral weapon. All weapons—from bowie knives to hydrogen bombs—are tools designed to kill, and there is a scale of potential damage within which each weapon falls. Atom bombs are at the high end of that scale; they can quickly kill a lot of people—which is precisely why they were the right weapons for the job that needed to be done in 1945. To end World War II, America needed to kill a lot of Japanese quickly, and in a visibly shocking way. The use of a weapon cannot be inherently immoral; moral matters are properly determined by reference to an objective standard of value (in this case, innocent American lives) and the best means to uphold or protect that value (in this case, atomic bombs).

Moral right was on the side of those who wanted to protect themselves from the brutality of the Imperialist Japanese bloodlust—and to end the threat permanently. It would have been blatantly immoral and fundamentally unjust to sacrifice innocent American lives in order to protect the lives of the Japanese aggressors. America's moral responsibility was to liberate the American prisoners—who were being starved and worked to death in mines—and to destroy the source of the war.

Japan’s moral responsibility was to admit that it had started a horrible war and to surrender unconditionally.¹¹² America’s use of the atomic bombs ensured that each side fulfilled its moral responsibility. The results over the past six decades speak for themselves.

The Americans fighting the war—the soldiers who were ordered to prepare for the invasion of Japan—had very different views of the bombs than do the revisionists. Paul Fussell, an American soldier in Europe, was ordered to the Pacific not long before the would-be American land invasion. His essay “Thank God for the Atom Bomb” emphasized the “experience, sheer vulgar experience” of combat that separated those who praised the use of the bomb from its critics. He and his fellow soldiers thought they were going to die in Japan, and they were right—until the bombs were dropped. Similarly, an American army medic in Europe, Technical Sergeant Arnold Taylor, was ordered after Germany surrendered to join the 82nd Airborne Division for the impending invasion of Japan. He shipped out on an aircraft carrier—but was spared the agony of seeing thousands of fellow soldiers die.¹¹³ The bombs literally saved the lives of these men—and tens of thousands of others like them.

For those Japanese who wished for an end to the bloodbath, what fell out of the sky on those two days in 1945 were, in the words of Japanese Navy Minister Yonai Misumasa, “gifts from heaven.” Hisatsune Sakomizu, chief cabinet secretary of Japan, said after the war: “The atomic bomb was a golden opportunity given by Heaven for Japan to end the war.” Okura Kimmochi, president of the Technological Research Mobilization Office, wrote before the surrender:

I think it is better for our country to suffer a total defeat than to win total victory . . . in the case of Japan’s total defeat, the armed forces would be abolished, but the Japanese people will rise to the occasion during the next several decades to reform themselves into a truly splendid people. . . . the great humiliation [the bomb] is nothing but an admonition administered by Heaven to our country.¹¹⁴

The *tenya*—“heaven-sent blessings”—that fell from the sky were indeed gifts, but they were not from heaven; they were from America. In protecting the lives and rights of her citizens, America smashed the infrastructure of Japan’s sacrificial indoctrination machine; this empowered the Japanese to break the chains of tyranny and to drown out the discredited exhortations of the suicidal past.

Endnotes

1. Eiji Takemae, *The Allied Occupation of Japan* (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. xxx f.
2. Cited in John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 87.
3. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 372.
4. William P. Woodard, *The Allied Occupation of Japan 1945–1952 and Japanese Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 10, italics added. Pages 9–13 discuss Shinto and related terms.
5. On the idea of *kokutai* in relation to the mythology of Shinto, see John S. Brownlee, “Four Stages of the Japanese *Kokutai* (National essence),” JSAC Conference, University of British Columbia, 2000, <http://www.iar.ubc.ca/centres/cjr/seminars/semi2000/jsac2000/brownlee.pdf>.
6. Woodard’s conclusion that the “The Kokutai Cult was not a form of Shinto” does not follow, given that it “derived from Shinto mythology,” raised “a traditional religious concept . . . to the status of a religio-political absolute,” and was practiced using the shrines and priests of Shinto. Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 9–13.
7. Meiji Constitution, articles 1, 2, 3, 11, 13, 20. *Hanover Historical Texts Project*, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/1889con.html>.
8. Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 346, 358.
9. From *The Way of the Subject*, August 1941, in Dower, *Embracing*, p. 277.
10. For discussion of the Educational Rescript and educational reforms under the occupation, see Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 347–71; Woodard *Allied Occupation*, pp. 164–75; Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 244–50.
11. Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, p. 165. See note 1 for the suicide of Jiro Ishiroku.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 164; Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 347.
13. Yoshida Mitsuru, *Requiem for the Battleship Yamato*, translated by Richard H. Minear (Seattle: University of Washington, 1985), p. 107; Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 415–16.
14. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 357.
15. Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 33–34.
16. John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (NY: Random House, 1986), p. 264.
17. John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936–1945* (New York: Modern Library, 1970), p. 7.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 8. Chap. 1 summarizes these events, including the army in Manchuria, which acted “to the dismay of not only the world but Tokyo itself.”
19. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
21. Dower, *Embracing*, p. 277.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War Two* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) has documented this gruesome story. A committee of foreigners established a “safe zone” inside the city, and saved thousands. The Japanese government has never properly admitted to the slaughter.
24. <http://www.espeeches.com/fdr.htm>.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Ann Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender: The Impact of the Casablanca Policy upon World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), p. 12, emphasis added.
27. Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (NY: Random House, 1999), p. 27.
28. Robert James Maddox, *Weapons for Victory* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1995), p. 11.

29. J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of the Atomic Bombs against Japan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004), p. 46.
30. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 27.
31. Saki Dockrill and Lawrence Freedman, “Hiroshima: A Strategy of Shock,” in *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima: The Second World War in the Pacific 1941–1945*, edited by Saki Dockrill (New York: St. Martin’s, 1994), p. 195.
32. For the *Ketsu-Go* plan, in English, see *Reports of General MacArthur: Japanese Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area*, vol. II, part II (Washington, DC: 1966), 601–7.
33. Yoshida, *Requiem*, p. 109 for the saying.
34. Rikihei Inoguchi, Tadashi Nakajima, and Roger Pineau, *The Divine Wind* (Annapolis, MD: Bantam, 1960), p. 58.
35. Kodama Yoshio, *I Was Defeated*, translation arranged by Taro Fukuda (Japan: Radiopress, 1959), p. 174. His life encompassed plots against the Japanese government, cooperation with American occupation authorities, and organized crime.
36. Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 188–89.
37. <http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c06.html>. The site has many constitutional documents important to Japan.
38. Robert J. C. Butow, *Japan’s Decision to Surrender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1954), p. 146, note 14.
39. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 235. The emperor confirmed the order in his statement the *Showa Tenno Doluhekuroku*, dictated in March and April 1946.
40. Frank, *Downfall*, 113.
41. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 225, who reproduces intercepted communications on pp. 221–239; Butow, *Japan’s Decision*, pp. 56–57.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 8, note 1.
43. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 220–21; John Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878–1954*, 2nd printing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1988), pp. 227–72.
44. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 24–25.
45. For the Konoye Memorial, Dower, *Empire*, pp. 259–65; the text is at pp. 260–64. Butow, *Japan’s Decision*, pp. 47–50.
46. Dower, *Empire*, p. 271. His arrest is detailed on pp. 265–272.
47. All quotes from Butow, *Japan’s Decision*, pp. 66, 68.
48. Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 91–92, 96; Hans Bix, “Japan’s Delayed Surrender: A Reinterpretation,” in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, edited by Michael Hogan (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 80–115; originally in *Diplomatic History*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1995), pp. 197–225.
49. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 113.
50. Butow, *Japan’s Decision*, p. 151.
51. Sadao Asada, “The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan’s Decision to Surrender—A Reconsideration,” in *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 67, no. 4 (1998), p. 505.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 487.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 494. The three August 9–10 meetings are reconstructed on pp. 490–96.
54. Toland, *Rising Sun*, p. 833.
55. Discussed by Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 88–89.
56. Peter Wetzler, *Imperial Tradition and Military Decision Making in Prewar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 1998), pp. 50–57.
57. Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, p. 8, citing SCAP document *Political Reorientation of Japan*, September 1945–September 1948, Report of the Government Section.
58. Toland, *Rising Sun*, p. 847.
59. A brief overview of the American occupation is in Paul J. Bailey, *Postwar Japan: 1945 to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 21–66.

60. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 56–57.
61. The Potsdam principles were issued in longer form in the “U.S. Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan,” (SWNCC-150/4/A) on September 22. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive cited here, JCS1380/15, was the third of the three major control documents for the occupation. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 226–27; Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 73–75.
62. Theodore Cohen, *Remaking Japan: the American Occupation as New Deal* (NY: Free Press, 1987), pp. 57, 59.
63. Cohen, *Remaking Japan*, pp. 8–9. The meeting was of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee Subcommittee on the Far East (SWNCCFE), August 29, 1945, which Cohen writes was the only question ever raised about limits to Occupation authority. Eugene Dooman, special assistant to Undersecretary of State Joseph C. Grew, raised the matter; his replacement was John Vincent Carter, who sent the Shinto telegram cited above.
64. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1380/15, II.13.
65. Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 115, 420.
66. Herbert Passim, “The Occupation—Some Reflections,” in *Showa: The Japan of Hirohito*, edited by Carol Gluck and Stephen Graubard (New York: Norton, 1990/1992), p. 111; Ikuhiko Hata, “The Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952,” in *The American Military and the Far East: Proceedings of the Ninth Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy, 1–3 October 1980*, edited by Joe C. Dixon (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 99, for reports of Japanese machinery rusting on Shanghai docks.
67. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 347.
68. Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 215–16. The movie was *Our Job in Japan*, by the War Department, November 1945.
69. Dower, *Embracing*, p. 217; *Saturday Evening Post*, December 15, 1945.
70. Dower, *Embracing*, p. 25.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
72. Hata, “Occupation,” pp. 96–97 for MacArthur’s eleven categories of early occupation objectives. The October 4, 1945, Civil Liberties Directive (SCAPIN-93) was the start.
73. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 300 for a photo of a 1947 graduating class.
74. Reproduced and discussed in Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 54–56. See also my article “‘No Substitute for Victory’: The Defeat of Islamic Totalitarianism,” in *The Objective Standard*, vol. 1, no. 4, Winter 2006–2007, p. 52.
75. Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 66–68.
76. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS 1380/15, I.10.
77. The “Administration of the Educational System of Japan” directive (SCAPIN-178). Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, pp. 349–51 for “dangerous” courses that were eliminated.
78. “The Suspension of Courses in Morals (*Shushin*)” (SCAPIN-519) of December 31.
79. Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, p. 171, quoting from a Ministry of Education notice of June 3, 1947.
80. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 347.
81. Woodard, *Allied Occupation*, p. 168. The notice was dated May 13, 1946.
82. Dower, *Embracing*, p. 242.
83. Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 362.
84. Butow, *Japan’s Decision*, pp. 41, 80.
85. Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 247, 157; Eiji, *Allied Occupation*, p. 361, on the student’s activities.
86. Manchester, *American Caesar*, p. 603, reported in *Life Magazine*, August 22, 1955.
87. Dower, *Embracing*, p. 171.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–84 on the first reforms; p. 29 on contempt for returning soldiers.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–71.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 176–77 for a reproduction of a school lesson by Akahito, the emperor who succeeded Hirohito.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
95. The Prussian military theorist Clausewitz put it this way: War is “an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will.” Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (New York: Routledge, 2004), section I.1.2, p. 75. Clausewitz, deeply influenced by German philosophy, may have accepted *voluntarism*, the idea that the “will” is just such a faculty. But the “will” to war is not a separate faculty in a person’s psychology.
96. Noted in Asada, “Shock,” p. 479.
97. Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 143; Jodl’s statement is in Everett Holles, *Unconditional Surrender* (NY: Howell Soskins Publishers, 1945), p. 13.
98. Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 155. The “(sic)” is in the original.
99. Dower, *Empire*, pp. 277–78; Dower, *Embracing*, p. 77.
100. See my article “The Moral Goodness of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima,” *The Undercurrent*, April 2006, <http://www.the-undercurrent.com/index.php?p=/000105.html>.
101. Sakaguchi Ango, “On Decadence” trans. I. Smith, at <http://mcel.pacificu.edu/aspac/papers/scholars/Smith/SAKAGUCHI.html>; Dower, *Embracing*, pp. 155–56 for discussion.
102. Dower, *Embracing*, p. 187–88.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
104. Kodama, *I Was Defeated*, p. 175.
105. Maddox, *Weapons*.
106. Cited in Asada, “Shock,” pp. 500–501.
107. Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation With Soviet Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Patrick M. S. Blackett, *Fear, War and the Bomb* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949). For responses, see Asada, “Shock”; Maddox, *Weapons*; and Freedman and Dockrill, “Hiroshima.” Donald Kagan, “Why America Dropped the Bomb,” *Commentary*, vol. 100, no. 3 (September 1995), pp. 17–23; and responses, *Commentary*, vol. 100, no. 6 (December 1995), pp. 3–14.
108. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 71.
109. *Ibid.*, pp. 359–60.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 191 for the 900,000 figure.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 340–42, and note to page 342.
112. The prisoners’ horrific experiences were recorded by George Weller, *First into Nagasaki: The Censored Eyewitness Dispatches on Post-Atomic Japan and its Prisoners of War* (New York: Crown, 2006).
113. Paul Fussell, *Thank God for the Atom Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990). From a private correspondence with Mr. Taylor’s daughter, Hannah Krening.
114. Asada, “Shock,” pp. 507, 509.