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# America's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan

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AMERICA'S DECISION TO DROP THE ATOMIC BOMB ON JAPAN

A Thesis

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Louisiana State University and  
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By  
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## ABSTRACT

During the time President Truman authorized the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, the United States was preparing to invade the Japanese homeland. The brutality and the suicidal defenses of the Japanese military had shown American planners that there was plenty of fight left in a supposedly defeated enemy. Senior military and civilian leaders presented Truman with several options to force the surrender of Japan. The options included the tightening of the naval blockade and aerial bombardment of Japan, invasion, a negotiated peace settlement, and the atomic bomb became an option, once bomb became operational.

Truman received recommendations, advice and proposals from civilian and military leaders within the first two months of taking office after President Roosevelt died. Only after meeting with the senior leadership to discuss the various options did Truman authorize the planning and execution of the invasion of Japan. However, the extremely large casualty estimates presented by the Chiefs of Staff remained a concern for Truman, especially in the wake of the bloody battles on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. These estimates became the driving factor for Truman's ultimate decision to use the new weapon against Japan and to end the war before anymore Americans service members died unnecessarily.

The decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan was only Truman's decision to make. All the other leaders provided their recommendations and advice based on the events that shaped the brutalities of the war in the Pacific. At no time did Truman receive advice on not using the atomic bomb. Critics and military leaders' disapproval of his decision came after the war had ended. To this day, Truman's decision remains a

controversial topic among scholars and will continue to be a source of debate well into the future.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima and followed up with a second atomic attack on Nagasaki three days later. After nearly four bloody years of war with the United States, the Japanese Empire surrendered in the face of unimaginable force and certain destruction. President Harry S. Truman's decision to use the new weapon ultimately avoided the estimated 250,000 casualties that the United States would have suffered during the invasion of Japan. Additionally, Truman's decision spared perhaps millions of Japanese soldiers and civilians from a bloody fight-to-the-death battle on the Japanese homeland. Nonetheless, the use of the atomic bomb became the most controversial event of World War 2 and has generated vast scholarly literature.<sup>1</sup>

While Truman made the final decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan, the origins of the weapon began during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Shortly after the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939, Albert Einstein had endorsed a famous letter from Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard to Roosevelt that outlined Nazi Germany's efforts to develop an atomic weapon; that letter, in turn led to the creation of the United States atomic weapons program known as the Manhattan Project. Code-named S-1, the development of the atomic bomb was the "largest scientific-industrial undertaking in History"<sup>2</sup> and thought to be the best-kept secret of the war. Only after the conflict did the United States learn that the Soviet Union had penetrated the Manhattan Project early on and had complete knowledge of the development of the atomic bomb.

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent analysis of the conflicting views, see J. Samuel Walker, "Recent Literature of Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground," *Diplomatic History* Vol. 29, (April 2005): pp. 311 – 334.

<sup>2</sup> David McCullough, *Truman*, p.378.

The basis for America's atomic weapons program was the fear that Germany was developing its own atomic weapon. German scientists, in fact, were actively engaged in atomic research, but they were unable to determine the right amount of uranium needed to sustain a reaction and could not manufacture enough fissionable material to produce a bomb. Only after Germany's surrender in 1945 did the United States learn that German scientists had been far from developing an atomic bomb. Japanese scientists concluded in 1943 that the development of an atomic bomb was possible and Prime Minister Hideki Tojo granted unlimited funds and resources to them, but a B-29 raid on Tokyo in April 1945 destroyed the research facilities and ended Japan's efforts in developing an atomic bomb.<sup>3</sup>

When President Roosevelt died in April 1945, only a few senior military and civilian officials knew about the atomic weapons program. Truman learned about the project only after taking office. Thereafter, Secretary of War Henry Stimson and James F. Byrnes, Truman's personal representative for atomic matters and future Secretary of State, constantly kept the new president informed on the research and development of the atomic bomb and it fell to him to decide how best way end the Pacific War. While scientists achieved great results in developing the new weapon, the atomic bomb remained untested and lacked reliability as an option towards achieving a Japanese surrender in the early summer of 1945.

By mid-1945, American forces were driving the once powerful and victorious Imperial Japanese military war machine across the Pacific Ocean toward Japan. With no offensive capabilities left, Japan could not escape ultimate defeat. However, Japanese units refused to retreat or surrender and continued to fight against overwhelming odds. In many of the island campaigns, American forces had to destroy entire Japanese garrisons to achieve victory. During what turned out to be the final two battles in the war, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the United States

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<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, pp. 252-253.

suffered the greatest number of casualties of the entire war. Japanese defenders used their experiences from previous battles to perfect their suicidal defenses and tactics, which gave the American planners a horrifying idea of what to expect during an invasion of Japan itself. Having correctly identified the landing areas that the American planned to use, the Japanese deployed hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians into prepared defenses in southern Kyushu. The so-called defeated Japanese planned to meet the American invasion force head-on and at equal strength.

His civilian and military advisors presented Truman with several options that would force the unconditional surrender of Japan. Those options include the tightening of the naval blockade in conjunction with the aerial bombardment of the Japanese home islands, a two-phased invasion of Japan, and a negotiated surrender that would revise the unconditional surrender demand and guarantee the safety of the Japanese Emperor. Truman's advisors could not agree on how long any of the options would take to end the war. After hearing all the views and projected casualty figures from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Truman approved the plans for the invasion of Japan. The estimated 250,000 American casualties during the invasion became the determinant of Truman's final decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan.

The successful testing of the atomic bomb on July 16, 1945 in the remote New Mexico desert provided Truman with an option that could make an invasion unnecessary and save countless lives. The planning and preparation for the invasion of Japan continued as Truman finalized his decision to drop the bomb. Once the Big Three issued the Potsdam Declaration to the Japanese government, the fate of Japan was in the hands of its leaders. Even though elements in the Japanese government were secretly trying to get the Soviets to mediate a peace settlement, at no time did they address the United States or any other government that issued the



declaration about terms of surrender. Instead, Japan defiantly rejected the Allies' demand and continued preparing for its suicidal defense.

Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb gave many scholars and leaders the opportunity to criticize his decision-making process and the need to drop the bomb on a defeated enemy. Over the years, scholars have provided a number of reasons as to why Truman decided to use this new weapon. Three schools of thought came from this controversial decision. The first are the traditional interpretations, which reiterate that the dropping of the bomb was necessary to stop the invasion of Japan and save American lives. The second interpretations are from the revisionists, who argue that the bomb was not necessary because that Japanese were already defeated and on the verge of surrender. Additionally, revisionists contend that the leaders did not attempt to change the American demand for unconditional surrender and dropping the bomb was racially motivated. The final interpretations for scholars are the middle-ground views. These views challenged both the views of the traditionalists and the revisionists. While middle-ground scholars differ on their arguments, they do support the decision to drop the bomb to end the war and to save lives. However, they do believe Truman had more choices than just the bomb or an invasion. In the end, none of the advisors close to Truman ever recommended against using the weapon. All opposition came following its use, when the alternate choice to invade Japan and suffer a quarter of a million casualties was only a memory.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> J. Samuel Walker, "Recent Literature of Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground," *Diplomatic History* Vol. 29, pp. 311 – 334.

## CHAPTER 2

### JAPANESE RESISTANCE

The military situation in the spring of 1945 was one of great despair for the once powerful Japanese Empire. The Imperial Navy, having achieved in 1941 complete surprise against the United States in crippling its Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor, was no longer a major threat. Most of the Imperial Navy lay at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean or anchored in Japanese ports waiting for a final decisive battle. The Imperial Army that had defeated U.S. forces in the Philippines and the British and Dutch forces in Asia either experienced disastrous defeats in its retreat to the Japanese home islands or remained on the Asian mainland to face a possible Soviet invasion. While the Japanese military was not capable of conducting offensive operations, it was capable of defending the homeland against the anticipated American invasion. The bloody, fight-to-the-death battles on Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa were only a sample of what the American invasion force would face on the beaches of Kyushu and throughout the Japanese home islands. Japan began to mobilize its entire population for a decisive battle that would mean victory or total annihilation for the Japanese people.

The Japanese naval, ground, and air forces enjoyed complete military success over ill-prepared British and American forces until mid-1942. The American naval forces had recovered from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and were poised to stop the Japanese advance into the South Pacific. On June 5, 1942, during the battle of Midway, the Imperial Navy suffered its worst defeat of the war to date, when an American carrier squadron surprised the Japanese fleet and sank four irreplaceable aircraft carriers.<sup>1</sup> With the loss of these carriers, the Japanese lost their ability to maintain air and sea supremacy in the South Pacific necessary to provide vital air support to Imperial ground and naval forces against the ever-

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<sup>1</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War 1931-1945*, p. 143.

growing American military. The American invasion of Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, was the beginning of a series of bloody campaigns against the Japanese that would place them on the defensive for the remainder of the war.

While the Japanese military could not match the enormous firepower of the United States, victory did not come easily or cheaply for the American forces. Japanese soldiers refused to surrender, even against overwhelming odds and certain death. The Warrior Code the Japanese followed did not allow surrender; instead, it glorified death in battle. In death, the spirit of the fallen soldiers would find its place among those of fellow warriors in the patriots' memorial, the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. Any Japanese soldier who surrendered or fell prisoner was a disgrace to his Divine Emperor and to his family. Japanese leaders ordered and expected every soldier to embrace death instead of surrender. As the soldier's manual, *The Field Service Code*, stated, "If alive, do not suffer the disgrace of becoming a prisoner; in death, do not leave behind a name soiled by misdeeds."<sup>2</sup>

American soldiers and marines faced this fanatical, fight-to-the-death attitude on every island they conquered. The bloody suicidal fighting got only worse once the Japanese lost freedom of maneuver on the sea and in the air, and island garrisons could no longer receive adequate reinforcements. During the battle for the Marianas Islands in 1944, U.S forces gained complete control of the sea and air by destroying the Japanese Combined Fleet, leaving the isolated Japanese at the mercy of the Americans. On Saipan, Guam, and Tinian the American invaders had to kill virtually every Japanese soldier in order to secure those islands.<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito, Commander of the 43d Division defending Saipan, reported to Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) that he had issued orders to his troops stating they "will

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas B. Allen, *Codename Downfall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan and why Truman Dropped the Bomb*, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Saburo Hayashi, *Kogun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War*, pp. 107-108.

advance to attack the American forces and will all die an honorable death. Each man will kill ten Americans.”<sup>4</sup> The results were catastrophic. Japanese troops on Saipan forced local civilians to share the same fate of death before dishonor, shooting woman and children as they ran towards American lines attending to flee. Japanese soldiers killed an estimated 10,000 Saipan civilian with grenades, bayonets, shootings, or by forcing them off cliffs into the ocean. Tokyo responded by referring to the murders and suicides as great sacrifices for Japan before its final victory.<sup>5</sup>

With the fall of the Marianas Islands, the United States built airfields that could support the large B-29 Superfortress bombers that now could bring the war directly to Japan and other Japanese-held islands. In response, the IGHQ began issuing directives to reinforce the defenses of the Japanese homeland. The “Plan for the Conduct of Future Operations” issued on July 24, 1944, focused on four major points. The first part called for shoreline defense of the Philippine Islands, Formosa, Ryukyu Islands, the Japanese homeland, and the Kurile Islands. The second element of the plan called for massive counter attacks by sea, land, and air forces as the Americans attempted to advance through those crucial areas, which were termed “*Sho-Go*” Operations. The last two points dealt with stopping the B-29 attacks on Japan from American aircraft operating from China and rerouting shipping closer to shore in order to provide better protection.<sup>6</sup>

The first decisive battle occurred in the Philippine Islands starting in October 1944, with the American invasion of Leyte. The Japanese battle plan focused on using the Fourteenth Area Army, commanded by General Tomoyuki Yamashita, to attack the invasion force on Leyte. At the same time, the Japanese planned to send the Combined Fleet into Leyte Gulf to engage the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> Hayashi, *Kogun*, pp. 114 – 115.

invasion fleet in a deadly crossfire. The Americans intercepted and destroyed the Japanese fleet before reaching its objective, leaving the American invasion force unmolested by sea to concentrate on the ground campaign and gaining air supremacy. The Japanese started the battle with rough parity in air power, but, without replacement planes and pilots, they quickly lost control of the skies over Leyte and the rest of the Philippines.<sup>7</sup> During the battle for the Philippines, the Japanese fought with the same ferocity they had used on previous islands, except for one condition: General Yamashita's forces did not conduct final suicidal charges to end the campaigns. On Leyte, he ordered his division commander to conserve his forces and use guerrilla tactics to resist the Americans. On Luzon, the Fourteenth Area Army also did not use the fight-to-the-death tactics. Japanese forces tied down a large number of American troops for the remainder of the war by following a "resistance to the last, killing ten soldiers to one" tactic.<sup>8</sup>

For the Japanese, Iwo Jima provided a base for early warning radar and airfields for their fighter aircraft attacking B-29s en route to bomb Japan. In preparation for an anticipated American invasion, Lieutenant General Kuribayashi Tadamichi, commander of Iwo Jima, evacuated all civilians and transformed the volcanic island into a massive fortress of prepared defenses. This was a new Japanese tactic for island defenses. From concrete bunkers, reinforced caves, and miles of tunnels, Japanese defenders engaged the U.S. Marines. Kuribayashi's forces had "no do-or-die stands on the beaches, no reckless banzai charges, not even a large scale counterattack – simply a stubborn, sustained defense designed to inflict maximum casualties and wear down the invaders."<sup>9</sup> Even after a sustained bombardment of several days, the marine invasion force encountered a Japanese defense that was virtually unscratched by the naval and air assaults. In addition to the change in ground defenses, the Japanese made liberal use of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 122 – 127.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, pp. 494 – 495.

organized kamikaze units. The bloody battle for Iwo Jima ended with the largest casualty numbers in the history for the U.S. Marine Corps from a single campaign and was “the only battle of the war where American casualties exceeded the Japanese dead, 27,499 to 23,300.”<sup>10</sup>

Okinawa was not simply another island occupied by Japanese soldiers. It was part of Japan, only 350 miles southwest of the main islands and well within range of kamikaze airfields on the Japanese southern island of Kyushu. As his counterpart had done on Iwo Jima, Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima, the 32d Army Commander, pulled his troops from the beaches and established a system of “strong concentric defensive perimeters.”<sup>11</sup> The battle on Okinawa was like no other campaign in the war. The Japanese defenders fought from prepared positions and conducted massive counter attacks, which usually ended with tremendous loss of life of both sides. Kamikazes stationed on Kyushu attacked the American invasion fleet in waves, destroying vital ammunition ships and keeping the carrier-based planes occupied with defending the fleet. The U.S. fleet suffered more losses during the battle of Okinawa from kamikazes than from conventional forces; in all, the Japanese sank twenty-nine ships, damaged 120 others, and killed 3,048 enemy sailors while wounding another 6,035.<sup>12</sup> In defense of Okinawa, the Imperial Navy deployed the battleship *Yamato*, along with several smaller warships, on a suicide mission into the American fleet. Lacking vital air support, American carrier planes quickly sunk the *Yamato* and the rest of her fleet. The Japanese garrison on Okinawa fought almost to the last man. In the end, 110,000 Japanese soldiers died and leaving 10,755 prisoners. In addition to

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<sup>10</sup> Paul D. Walker, *Truman's Dilemma*, pp. 130 – 131.

<sup>11</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, p. 533.

<sup>12</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, p. 144.

military casualties, an estimated 160,000 civilians died, either at the hands of the brutal Japanese military or as a member of the Patriotic Defense Units.<sup>13</sup>

The strict no surrender belief, combined with a sense of racial superiority, influenced Japanese treatment of enemy prisoners of war and the civilian populations of conquered countries. Japanese brutality towards captured enemy soldiers and in occupied territories began before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the fall of the Philippines. In 1937, China received the brunt of the Japanese hatred for foreigners. Japan deployed a large number of soldiers to that country to deal with an incident involving Chinese troops near Peking. With troops in place, the Japanese began combat operation to bring China under complete Japanese control. The Chinese capital of Nanking fell in December 1937 to an unrelenting Japanese army. For over thirty days, Japanese soldiers raped, tortured, and murdered over 350,000 Chinese men, women, and children.<sup>14</sup> The Japanese military had a “three-all” policy in handling the Chinese: “kill all, burn all, and destroy all.” By August 1945, this barbaric policy had resulted in the deaths of millions of Chinese and reduced the population in the occupied territory from 44 million to an estimated 25 million inhabitants.<sup>15</sup>

To the Japanese, the Chinese were not human and using them as guinea pigs, test dummies, and as live targets was common practice. The murder of Chinese prisoners was not the sole practice of the Japanese field armies. Extensive medical research and experiments used Chinese, Koreans, Mongolians, and later Americans as test subjects. The majority of these experiments occurred in the “notorious” Unit 731, where doctors conducted bacterial warfare research on living subjects. Other medical atrocities included surgeons’ shooting prisoners just

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<sup>13</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, pp. 198 - 199.

<sup>14</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, pp. 38 – 39.

<sup>15</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, p. 157.

to practice removing the bullet and the amputation of healthy limbs. One Japanese doctor confessed at the end of the war that “it was all for the Emperor.”<sup>16</sup>

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was America’s first experience with Japan’s trickery and brutality. As the Japanese expanded its empire in the Pacific, a large number of American, British, and Australian soldiers became prisoners of war and suffered years of torment and the constant fear of death at the hands of their captors. The fall of the Philippine in May 1942 forced some 20,000 U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines into captivity-less than 60 percent survived. Thousands of these men died on the brutal Bataan Death March. Japanese soldiers shot, bayoneted, beheaded, or clubbed to death, any prisoner who could not keep up or tried to run for water.<sup>17</sup> Hino Ashihei, a Japanese war correspondent who witnessed the Bataan surrender, expressed his admiration for the conduct of Japanese soldiers. “Those soldiers went on to commit what Westerners viewed as atrocities and the Japanese saw as acceptable behavior, for their captives were enemies who had shamed themselves by being taken prisoner.”<sup>18</sup>

Following the daring Doolittle Raid over Tokyo in April 1942, the Japanese government was able to encourage even more hatred towards Americans. An “ex post facto law” made it legal to convict and execute three of the Doolittle raiders. As a result, when the Americans increased the bombing raids over Japan, downed B-29 crewmembers were “shot, bayoneted, decapitated, buried alive, or killed as boiling water was poured over them.” The inhuman treatment of captured airmen did not just come at the hand of the Imperial Army, Japanese citizens killed downed crewmembers by beatings, beheadings, or with bows and arrows, and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, pp. 396-397.

<sup>18</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, pp. 163-164.



medical personnel continued to subject American airmen to brutal experiments that guaranteed certain death.<sup>19</sup>

The number of U.S. personnel killed in captivity was a matter of deep concern to American authorities. By the end of the war, the Japanese had captured 24,992 U.S. military personnel of whom 8,634 died in captivity, a staggering 35 percent. Nazi Germany, on the other hand captured 93,653 U.S. service members of whom only 833 died a dramatically different death rate of 0.9 percent.<sup>20</sup> From the beginning of the war, the Allies knew of the atrocities the Japanese were committing. For the safety of the Allied prisoners of war still in captivity, however, the American and British governments kept the reports from the public out of fear that the Japanese would retaliate and execute more prisoners. In addition to Japanese reprisals, the Allies believed their own soldiers would conduct their own form of vengeance on captured Japanese soldiers. This would cause more reprisals and revenge killing on both sides. More importantly, revenge killings by Allied troops would deny their claim to “moral superiority.” What made it even more difficult for the U.S. soldiers and Marines to maintain the moral high ground was the Japanese routinely tricked advancing American units into accepting their surrender and then attacked them once within range.<sup>21</sup> A veteran of the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa wrote, “After taking a position we routinely shot both the dead and wounded enemy troops in the head, to make sure they were dead. Survival was hard enough without taking chances being humane to men who fought so savagely.”<sup>22</sup>

By the spring of 1945, the American public and the world knew about some of the Japanese atrocities. Washington released details of the Bataan Death March in 1944 and pictures

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<sup>19</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The end of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, pp. 158-161.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

of Japanese soldiers beheading captured American airmen in May 1945. After the war, investigators learned the Japanese Vice War Minister sent a message to all prison camp commanders on March 17, 1945 which stated: "Prisoners of war must be prevented by all means available from falling into enemy hands...they should be kept alive to the last wherever their labor is needed."<sup>23</sup> Many of the American prisoners of war believed that once the United States invaded Japan, their fate would be sealed. Knowing the Japanese intentions for handling captured American military personnel and the lists of atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers, President Truman's ultimate decision to use the atomic weapons instead of an invasion possibly spared the lives of thousands of American prisoners.

While the defensive perimeter of Japan was fighting *Sho-Go* operations as part of a delaying tactic, the Imperial General Headquarters was preparing a suicidal defense of the Japanese homeland. The defense plan *Ketsu-Go* called for destruction of the invasion fleet before enemy landings on the beaches with a combined air and sea attack. Furthermore, the plan divided Japan into seven additional defensive zones. To maximize the effectiveness of the limited resources available, the high command concentrated most of their assets on defending Kyushu and the Yokohama-Tokyo region on Honshu.<sup>24</sup> The basic concept of the overall defense plan was to make the invasion of Japan as bloody as possible. After the victories at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the American public started to question the extremely high casualty cost of taking those islands. The Japanese government saw this as an opportunity to force a more favorable peace settlement. By refusing to accept the unconditional surrender, Japanese officials believed

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

that forcing an invasion and creating more “casualties and destroying the morale of green units, America would be more flexible in her terms for ending the war.”<sup>25</sup>

The Imperial General Staff used the lessons learned from previous island campaigns and the Normandy invasion to analyze where the Americans would land and how to defend against it. From previous landings, the Japanese learned that the Americans targeted areas where large number of forces could land at once, usually close to their overall objective. The capture of an airfield had priority early in the assaults, in order to place it back into operation quickly and provide close air support for ground troops. The invasion site had to offer room to maneuver, so the Americans could exploit their overwhelming advantage in heavy equipment. Unlike the Japanese, the Americans would not use surprise as a tactic; moreover, they would not avoid well-prepared defenses. After reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of all the possible landing sites, the General Staff concluded that the Americans would land on Kyushu in vicinity of Miyazaki, Ariake Bay, and the Satsuma Peninsula. Those three sites offered nearby airfields, the Miyakonojo plain for maneuver, and a protective harbor within Kagoshima Bay.<sup>26</sup>

On June 6, 1945, Japan’s Supreme Council for the Direction of the War met to discuss the Army’s plan for the Decisive Battle. Lieutenant General Torashiro Kawabe, the Army’s Vice Chief of Staff, told the group that the tactics used to defend Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa had proved disastrous and that the Decisive Battle plan for Japan was “altogether different.” The Japanese labeled their defensive strategy as a Decisive Battle, which in reality was a plan for attritional warfare. While Japan had sustained tremendous losses, the Imperial Army remained a powerful fighting force with many and of its aircraft and airfields still operational. Kawabe emphasized that kamikazes would attack and destroy a quarter of the invasion force at sea, then

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<sup>25</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, p. 211.

<sup>26</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 167-168.

focus their attacks on the troopships coming ashore. Those invaders who survived would die on the beaches. The Emperor received that “fight-to-the-end plan” on June 8 and gave his tacit approval.<sup>27</sup> The Imperial General Headquarters then issued a directive on June 20 ordering field commanders to engage the enemy in close combat at the shoreline to neutralize his superior firepower.<sup>28</sup>

The Japanese defensive build-up was massive. Some fourteen divisions and eleven brigades moved into the Kyushu region. The Imperial Headquarters established three armies to defend Kyushu: the 56<sup>th</sup> in the north, the 57<sup>th</sup> on the southeast coast, and 40<sup>th</sup> on the southwest coast. The 16<sup>th</sup> Area Army had overall responsibility for the defense of Kyushu and concentrated its forces on the projected invasion sites at Miyazaki, Ariake Bay, and Satsuma Peninsula. In his final instructions for the so-called “Ketsu Operation,” Lieutenant General Isamu Yokoyama, Sixteenth Area Army Commander, ordered all coastal units to “fight to the death where they stood.” Each division would maintain a regiment size reserve. He ordered the use of tanks in support of a counterattack and as mobile artillery only. He emphasized that the Americans would deploy tremendous firepower, including tank, napalm, and naval bombardments to break Japanese defense.<sup>29</sup>

The primary weapons the Japanese planned to deploy against the American invasion fleet were the special attack units, which had first appeared during the battle of Leyte when the Japanese tried to stop the American landings with kamikaze attacks. To the Japanese, “a successful mission ended when they blew themselves up against an American ship.” The original suicide units consisted of navy and army aircraft with a bomb attached to each. The pilots flew their planes into enemy warships causing significant damage to the ships and crew.

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<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, p. 170.

<sup>28</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-174.

In January 1945, Japan's Supreme Council for the Direction of the War decided to make suicide attacks a basic weapon and ordered Japan's industry to "concentrate on converting all armament production to special attack weapons of a few major types."<sup>30</sup> While the Kamikaze plane remained the primary threat in the Japanese arsenal, the Japanese built various suicide weapons for use during the Decisive Battle, such as midget submarines that carried torpedoes or had packed bows with explosives and detonated on impact much like the *Kaiten* human torpedoes, which men piloted into enemy ships. The Imperial Navy also organized Water's Edge Surprise Attack Forces that consisted of suicide explosive-laden swimmers who would destroy enemy landing crafts. Marine Advanced Units consisted of high-speed boats armed with two depth charges to attack enemy troop transports off shore.<sup>31</sup>

In the Decisive Battle for Japan, the Imperial Headquarters planned to deploy the "entire air strength into the battle on Kyushu." This tactic would deny air support for the defense of Tokyo. Nevertheless, the Japanese planned to "saturate" the invasion area with hundreds of kamikazes. During the battle of the Philippines, suicide planes had used the mountainous terrain to enhance the elements of surprise, something they had lacked in long flights over water at Okinawa. The terrain on Kyushu would provide Japanese pilots excellent concealment en route to the packed enemy troopships close to shore. Based on the experiences at Okinawa and because of a lack of veteran pilots, the Japanese estimated that only one out of six planes of the 4000 available aircraft would hit an enemy ship, but the potential for causing mass casualties remained high.<sup>32</sup>

As on Okinawa, the Japanese Government planned to mobilize the entire civilian population into combat units, Special Guard Forces, Independent Companies, and Civilian

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<sup>30</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, p. 183.

<sup>31</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-184.

Volunteer Corps. The military issued training manuals called “*People’s Handbook of Resistance Combat*,” which provided instruction on how to employ Molotov cocktails against tanks, how to use a rifle, and how to improvise weapons in the absence of small arms. Military trainers told mobilized schoolchildren, “Even killing just one American soldier will do. You must prepare to use the awls for self-defense. You must aim at the enemy’s abdomen.” Additionally, teachers told children, “If you don’t kill at least one enemy soldier, you do not deserve to die.”<sup>33</sup> With the countrywide mobilization, the Japanese leadership guaranteed that many civilians would die in the ensuing invasion since American troops would have “to treat all Japanese as combatants or fail to do so at their peril.”<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the Pacific War, the Japanese fought with such ferocity and determination that the thought of invading the Japanese homeland was frightful. The campaigns the Americans waged across the Pacific only hardened Japanese readiness to die for their Emperor. The Japanese willingness to accept “fatality rates of 98.8 percent in the Aleutians, 99.7 percent at Tarawa, 98.4 percent at Kwajalein, and 97 percent on Saipan” forced the United States to take a closer look at invading Japan.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>34</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, p. 190.

<sup>35</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, p. 207.

## CHAPTER 3

### AMERICA'S OPTIONS IN DEFEATING THE JAPANESE EMPIRE

President Harry S. Truman took office on April 12, 1945, following the death of President Roosevelt. The desperate struggle with the Japanese Empire continued with no end in sight, while the war with Nazi Germany was coming to a victorious close. After the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, U.S. military leaders focused their planning efforts and available resources on the swift defeat of Japan. To force the Japanese to accept unconditional surrender, senior U.S. military and civilian leaders needed just to agree on how to defeat Japan. They discussed several options, including an intensification of the naval blockade and aerial bombardment of the Japanese Homeland, invasion, a negotiated peace, and dropping the newly developed atomic bomb. In order to accomplish any of the options, the United States had to tighten the naval blockade and sustain the continuous aerial bombardment campaign of the Japanese Homeland.

The United States had been planning for a possible conflict with Japan since 1905, after the Japanese defeated the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War. American planners had developed a series of contingency plans for conflicts with all wars against potential enemies, not just Japan. Each plan referred to countries by a designated color: red for Great Britain, black for Germany, green for Mexico, and orange for Japan. The early version of the "Orange Plan" assumed that Japan would invade the Philippines, a vital location for a U.S. naval base for any offensive campaign against Japan. However, army and navy leaders could not agree on how to defend the Philippines. The Army wanted the defendable Manila Bay as a base; the navy preferred Olongapo located on Subic Bay, for its easy access to an invading fleet, and did not want the American fleet "bottled up" in Manila Bay. The navy in the end chose Pearl Harbor as

its primary base in the Pacific, while the army continued to fortify Manila Bay. To make the situation worse, the U.S. Congress would not allocate funding for bases in the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

After years of debates and revisions, U.S. military planners in 1924 officially accepted a version of the Orange Plan, which called for bases in the Philippines, a “decisive naval battle” with the Imperial Navy, a naval blockade of the Japanese Homeland, interdiction of Japanese trade with China and the East Indies, and forcing the Japanese Government into negotiations. The Orange Plan did not call for an invasion of Japan. With the development of land-based aircraft, later versions addressed the need to recapture vital islands “to prevent their use by the Japanese as air bases” against the American fleet. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese made America’s strategy of defeating Japan vastly more difficult to implement. The Japanese conquered all the islands the United States needed to execute War Plan Orange and crippled the fleet tasked to defeat the Imperial Navy and to blockade Japan.<sup>2</sup>

The strategy of defeating Japan through a naval blockade and strategic bombing was not a new concept; it was the basis of the previous Orange Plan and later Rainbow Plan. The primary advocates of this strategy were Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Fleet, and Admiral William D. Leahy, Chief of Staff to the President. Both men believed that the United States could force Japan to “accept our terms merely by our suffocating naval blockade and our devastating air assault.”<sup>3</sup> The Japanese cities were already under intense aerial bombardment and American submarines were sinking Japanese shipping at will, which denied Japan of vital war-making materials and food for its population. By the summer of 1945, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, pp. 54 - 55.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas B. Allen, *Codename Downfall: The Secret Plan o Invade Japan and Why Truman Dropped the Bomb*, pp. 23 – 24.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Feis, *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific*, p. 5.



United States was in a better position to intensify both the blockade of the Japanese home islands and the bombing of Japanese cities from recently conquered islands.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States did not have the naval or air forces available to blockade Japan effectively. Furthermore, the American submarine fleet was not in any condition to wage war on Japan. On December 7, a few hours after the Japanese attack ended, President Roosevelt authorized the use of unrestricted submarine warfare against Japanese merchant shipping. His decision ended the international agreement the United States, Britain, and Japan had signed at the London disarmament conference of 1930. At the conference, all parties agreed that submarines, “may not sink, or render incapable of navigation, a merchant vessel without having first placed passengers, crew and ship’s papers in a place of safety.”<sup>4</sup>

American naval doctrine prior to World War II centered on deploying submarines as scouts, ambushers, and as a first-line of defense against an enemy fleet, but not as lone hunters hunting unarmed merchant ships. American submarine warfare in 1942 produced disappointing results. Not only did the U.S. submarine fleet fail to influence the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, but also it sank only 180 Japanese ships totaling 725,000 tons. Since U.S. submarines were not targeting merchant ships, the Japanese overcame those losses and even increased their tanker fleet. The U.S. Navy changed tactics in 1943 to concentrating more on tankers and other merchant ships and less on the capital warships, a shift that took an increasing toll on Japan’s oil imports and disrupted its ability to reinforce isolated island garrisons. By the end of 1944, two-thirds of Japan’s tanker fleet and half of its merchant fleet were lost to U.S. submarines and bulk imports to the home islands were down to 40 percent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, p. 479.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 480 – 487.

While U.S. submarines were destroying the Japanese merchant fleet on the high seas around Japan, Tokyo used the shallow Sea of Japan as a secured lake against them. The Japanese mined the narrow entrances to the sea, which allowed Japanese shipping to continue to bring vital supplies to Japan from the Korea Peninsula without the constant fear of attack. That all changed in June 1945, when nine U.S. submarines entered the Sea of Japan through the Tsushima Straits and sank twenty-eight Japanese ships at the cost of one American submarine. To reduce further Japanese shipping, B-29s mined the Korean ports of Pusan, Seisen, and Rashin forcing the Japanese to move materials by rail to less functional ports. American submarines thus had a devastating impact of Japanese lines of communication and were a vital component of America's strategy to the defeat of Japan.<sup>6</sup>

As U.S. submarines sank Japanese ships at will, the U.S Pacific Fleet was conducting operations against the remaining Japanese warships and against key coastal targets. In July 1945, Admiral William Halsey sent Task Force 38, comprised of three battle groups built around fourteen aircraft carriers, to conduct a series of air attacks and naval bombardments against Japan. The carrier planes focused their strikes on coalmines and transportation facilities in northern Honshu and Hokkaido. These strikes caught northern ports "clogged with shipping diverted from mined harbors to the south," and sank along with their vital coal cargo. Further strikes destroyed the inter-island rail and sea system that moved the coal to Japanese industries. These attacks by Halsey's planes proved to be the "most devastating single strategic-bombing success of all the campaigns against Japan."<sup>7</sup>

The second part of Halsey's plan was to have the fleet's battleships bombard Japanese coastal targets, while Task Force 38 concentrated on destroying the remaining warships in the

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<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, pp. 154 - 156.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Imperial Navy. During the last month of the war, Halsey's battleships fired thousands of sixteen-inch shells into several Japanese coastal cities and his carrier planes sank or damaged the remainder of Japan's battleships, heavy cruisers, and aircraft carriers. Besides the destruction of the Japanese fleet and Japan's coal facilities, the attacks on the Japanese homeland had two additional effects. They allowed the Soviet Navy greater access to the Sea of Japan without interference from the Imperial Navy and, more importantly, the Japanese people saw first hand that their military could not stop the American advance. Except for the constant aerial bombardment and the relentless fire bombing of their cities, the Japanese did not experience the full power of the American offensive. However, once American warships tightened the blockade and appeared off shore to fire directly onto the Japanese coast, the realization that the war was lost spread throughout Japan.<sup>8</sup>

To make the naval blockade more effective, the American military had to destroy Japanese war industries and, in that regard, the biggest obstacle was the Pacific Ocean. After the swift Japanese victories in 1941 and 1942, the United States no longer had air bases within striking distance of Japan. The only option at first was to build bases in China and conduct limited strikes against Japanese targets. Major General Claire L. Chennault was the driving force behind the plan for "early sustained bombing of Japan," called Operation MATTERHORN. The first B-29 bases were ready to conduct operations in June 1944, under the control of the XX Bomber Command but early results were meager. The B-29s could only a payload of only "two-tons" of bombs, and flying at night or high altitudes hitting targets difficult. Because of the tremendous logistical requirements to sustain the B-29s in China and their ineffectiveness against targets in Japan, American planners turned to the Marianas as an operating base for the B-29s.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 158 – 159.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, pp. 80 – 81.

The fall of the Mariana Island in June 1944 provided the United States with valuable bases within striking distance of Tokyo. More importantly, these bases were safe from Japanese attacks and easily resupplied by cargo ships. The XXI Bomber Command, commanded by Major General Haywood S. Hansell, began missions against Japan in October 1944. The early attempts to bomb Japan from the Marianas proved just as ineffective as the China based B-29s. Hansell continued the practice of conducting so-called high-altitude precision bombing even after these tactics had not produced acceptable results. In addition to the losses caused by maintenance problems and enemy action, the B-29 missions failed because Hansell had “poor intelligence about Japanese industry and lacked maps.”<sup>10</sup> Japanese authorities, moreover, dispersed the industrial equipment and machinery throughout the nearby cities to limit the effects of the bombings. “The line between military and civilian, residential, and industrial was often non-existent.”<sup>11</sup> From 30,000 feet, furthermore, pilots seldom had visual sighting of the target, radar was useless, and the high winds at that altitude scattered B-29’s formations. His successor, General Curtis LeMay, assumed command in January 1945, and continued to use the same tactics, with equally unsatisfactory results.<sup>12</sup>

A few weeks into his mission, LeMay realized that he would have to change tactics. LeMay decided that low-level incendiary raids against Japanese cities was only way to destroy their production capabilities. LeMay had no illusions: this was a shift from precision bombing to area, or saturation bombing. The ordinance of choice was the newly invented MK-69 incendiary bomb, filled with “jellied gasoline” called napalm. These 6lbs bombs were small and stuck to everything they touched. To increase accuracy and bomb payloads, LeMay ordered his pilots to fly between 5,000 and 8,000 feet. He also had all the machine guns removed from the bombers,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>12</sup> Paul D. Walker, *Truman’s Dilemma: Invasion or the Bomb*, pp. 192 -196.

since the missions were at night and the capabilities of the Japanese night fighters were poor, and that allowed the B-29s to deliver more incendiary bombs on each mission. The first of these deadly raids occurred in March 1945 with the fire bombing of Tokyo. LeMay's bombers dropped 1,665 tons of incendiary canisters and high explosives from 279 B-29s, which created a tremendous firestorm that burned a large area of Tokyo. These raids became the template for further raids on more Japanese cities.<sup>13</sup>

The primary mission of the XXI Bomber Command was the destruction of Japanese cities. Following the all out incendiary raids in March 1945, LeMay had to terminate his operations temporarily because he "literally ran out of bombs,"<sup>14</sup> but when the ordinance became available, he resumed the incendiary raids. On the nights of May 25-26, 1945, his bombers struck a large area in Tokyo that housed residential, industrial, commercial, and military targets. The results were devastating as strong winds spread the firestorm through twenty square miles of the city, destroying the symbols of Japanese imperialism. Among the destroyed government buildings were the War Ministry, Navy Ministry, Army General Staff Headquarters, official residence of the war minister, Transportation Ministry, and the Greater East Asia Ministry. The greatest impact was that the bombing destroyed the Imperial Palace, and barely missed the Emperor and Empress. Throughout the American bombing campaign, the Japanese believed "that the Imperial Palace was immune from the foe; few had believed that its survival until 25<sup>th</sup> May was attributed to sheer luck."<sup>15</sup>

By mid-June 1945, the B-29s had exhausted the original list of targets on the "Selected Urban Industrial Concentrations" by destroying or damaging these urban areas. The capture of Okinawa by U.S. forces on June 21, 1945, allowed the XXI Bomber Command to expand its

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<sup>13</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 62 - 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74 - 75.

campaigns to the entire Japanese homeland. LeMay targeted cities that would burn easily, cities that had a direct effect on Japan's war industry, and transportation facilities. During the last two months of the war, U.S. bombers completed the destruction of Japan's petroleum industry, chemical industries, aircraft plants, and ball-bearing plants. To help reduce civilian casualties and cause psychological effects, LeMay began dropping leaflets on potential targets prior to a raid. The idea was to show the residence of targeted cities that "America was not fighting the Japanese people." The number of civilian casualties dropped significantly in cities that received leaflet drops.<sup>16</sup>

While the naval blockade and aerial bombardment devastated Japan's war economy, American planners were busy studying a possible invasion of the Japanese mainland. As early as April 1943, the U.S. Joint War Plans Committee produced a draft plan, JWPC 15, that only confirmed what the Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided, that to achieve "the unconditional surrender of Japan might require actual invasion of the Japanese homeland." JWPC 15 centered primarily on defeat of the Japanese Army in Eastern China, where the United States would establish bases to bomb Japan, and had an established naval blockade. However, the "demonstrated impotence" of the Chinese troops against the Japanese concerned American planners that an invasion would have to come from across the Pacific, since the Japanese would maintain control of the Asian coast. In November 1943, U.S. planners presented the Chiefs of Staff with a strategy to defeat Japan that called for the invasion of Hokkaido in 1945 and Honshu in early 1946. To support the invasion of Japan, planners recommended that Admiral Nimitz receive priority in support for the capture of the Mariana Islands "for use as strategic bomber bases to pound Japan" and that General MacArthur continue his drive toward the Philippine

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 149 – 154.

Islands. None of the U.S. senior military leaders liked the plan. However, they agreed, “that the proposed plan to defeat Japan had to be reconsidered.”<sup>17</sup>

Since America’s entry into World War II, its strategic priority had been the European Theater and defeating Nazi Germany. The last German offensive in the winter of 1944 caught the Allied planners by surprise, which forced the United States to flood Europe with reinforcements to replace the sudden losses in troops and equipment. Material and personnel projected for the Pacific Theater went directly to Europe, while planners in the Pacific delayed the assault on Japan. During the Yalta Conference in February 1945, General Marshall and Admiral King presented President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill with a revised plan that called for the invasion of Kyushu, rather than Hokkaido, with a follow-on assault on Honshu. Both operations depended heavily on the defeat of Germany and the redeployment of troops and equipment.<sup>18</sup>

The planning for the invasion of Japan was unlike that for any of the previous operations against the Japanese. This time American soldiers and marines would invade Japanese soil and fight an enemy that had already proven its willingness to fight to the last man, woman, and child. Military planners saw in the recent battle of Okinawa, 350 miles away from the Japanese islands, an indication of how the Japanese would defend their homeland. The mobilization of the civilian population on Okinawa showed that the invasion force would face not only the stubborn Japanese military, but a potentially hostile population as well. It was clear to the planners that “Japan had plenty of fight left in her and that surrender was still not an option.”<sup>19</sup>

On May 25, 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the operational plan Operation DOWNFALL, the invasion of Japan, to General MacArthur, the Commander in Chief U.S.

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<sup>17</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, pp. 129 - 132.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134 – 135.

<sup>19</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, p. 149.

Army Forces Pacific and to Admiral Nimitz, the Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet. DOWNFALL was to be a two-phased operation consisting of Operation OLYMPIC, the invasion of Kyushu, and Operation CORONET, the invasion of Honshu. The U.S. Sixth Army received the mission to conduct the amphibious and ground operations, with a target date of November 1, 1945. The primary tasks of the Sixth were to “seize and occupy southern Kyushu as far north as the general line Tsuno-Sendai; establish air forces and naval facilities for support of the CORONET Operations.”<sup>20</sup> MacArthur’s intent was to secure only the southern third of Kyushu, which was enough to construct airfields, improve ports and to build a base of operations to support the CORONET phase of the operation. The Sixth Army’s ground forces consisted of 650,000 soldiers and marines organized into three corps that would land on three beachheads at Miyazaki, Ariake Bay and Kushikino.<sup>21</sup>

Military planners projected March 1, 1946, as the date for the opening of second phase of Operation DOWNFALL to begin. The invasion of Honshu was the decisive effort that would force the Japanese into accepting unconditional surrender. Operation CORONET planned for the largest invasion force ever assembled, which included the entire U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, four U.S. Air Forces and three armies that totaled over 1.5 million personnel. Due to the magnitude of the operation, MacArthur designated the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies as the army headquarters responsible for the planning and execution of the invasion. The primary task the commanders received was “to destroy hostile forces and occupy the TOKYO-YOKOHAMA area.”<sup>22</sup> Like the invasion of Kyushu, MacArthur intended to secure what was necessary to establish a base of operations on Honshu. It would reinforce the blockade and provide a platform for future operations, and permitting American forces to “block off the

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<sup>20</sup> Steven T. Ross, *U.S. War Plans: 1938-1945*, pp. 362 – 363.

<sup>21</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp 118 - 121.

<sup>22</sup> Ross, *War Plans*, p. 365.



rest off the remaining areas and just starve the defenders into submission.” The lessons learned from the battles of Okinawa and Iwo Jima was still fresh MacArthur’s mind, and he did not want to repeat the slaughter of thousands of American soldiers.<sup>23</sup>

The fight in the Pacific war was intense and brutal compared to the war in Europe. The high numbers of casualties shocked military leadership. At Guadalcanal, American forces suffered over 1500 killed with many more wounded and at the Battle of Tarawa in November 1943, which lasted only seventy-two hours, there were casualties of over 1000 U.S. marines and sailors. American commanders began questioning the strategy of the amphibious assaults and even considered the use of chemical weapons in future operations. Shortly after the battle, Major General William N. Porter, Chief of the Army’s chemical warfare service, attributed the “greatest importance” to them. “We have an overwhelming advantage in the use of gas,” he wrote. “Properly used gas could shorten the war in the Pacific and prevent loss of many American lives.”<sup>24</sup> This view was not isolated; General Marshall himself considered using chemical weapons against the Japanese defenses on Okinawa following the enormous casualties sustained during the Iwo Jima invasion. He told Secretary of War Henry Stimson in May 1945, “The character of the weapon was no less humane than phosphorous and flame throwers and need not be used against dense populations or civilians – merely against those last pockets of resistance which had to be wiped out but had no other military significance.”<sup>25</sup>

United States’ policy on the use of chemical weapons throughout the war was that they would be employed only in retaliation against a poison gas attack on U.S. forces or their Allies. As the fighting moved closer to the Japanese homeland, military leaders began looking at ways to use these weapons offensively and possibly save American lives. Project Sphinx was the

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<sup>23</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, pp. 151 – 157.

<sup>24</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

code-name for the United States chemical response option to a Japanese gas attack against U.S. forces. In view of the suicidal Japanese resistance and the increasing casualty rates the U.S. forces were sustaining, however, the American military authorities began stockpiling tons of newly developed gas munitions on the Philippines and Okinawa for possible use during the invasion of Japan. General Joseph Stilwell, Commander of the Tenth Army on Okinawa, favored it. “We are not bound in any way not to use it,” he pointed out to Marshall, “and stigma of using it on the civilian population can be avoided by restricting it to military targets.” Shifting opinion about the use of poison gas was visible on the American home front. On March 11, 1945, the *Chicago Tribune* posted an article entitled “You Can Cook them with Gas.” The article furthered argued that, “the use of gas might save the lives of many hundreds of Americans and of some of the Japanese as well.”<sup>26</sup>

While the use of tactical atomic weapons never appeared in any written strategic invasion plans, senior military leaders longingly considered their potential value. “We would have to exterminate them, almost man by man,” Marshall recalled. “So we thought the bomb would be a wonderful weapon as a protection and preparation for landings.”<sup>27</sup> To support the invasion of Kyushu, military planners wanted to use several tactical atomic bombs to supplement the conventional forces. In an interview many years after the war, Marshall described how the bombs would have supported the invasion. “In the original plans for the invasion of Japan, we wanted nine atomic bombs for three attacks. Two were to be used for each attacking army, or six in all, in the initial attack. And then we were planning on using the other three against the Japanese reserves which we were sure would pour into the areas.”<sup>28</sup> Had the United States used these weapons in support of the planned invasion, “several million Japanese and Americans

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 177 – 179.

<sup>27</sup> David McCullough, *Truman*, p.441.

<sup>28</sup> Feis, *Japan Subdued*, p. 10.

would be directly affected by the nuclear fallout or residual blast radiation on Kyushu.”<sup>29</sup>

Military planners thus anticipated utilizing all available resources - material, personnel, and weapons - in the invasion of Japan. The use of tactical atomic weapons was untested and their effects on military operations were uncertain.

The fourth option to force the Japanese into accepting the terms of the unconditional surrender was to drop atomic bombs on selected Japanese military targets. In May 1945, Marshall authorized General “Hap” Arnold and General Leslie R. Groves to form a targeting committee comprised of Air Force and Manhattan Engineer District personnel. The committee established four evaluation criteria that would narrow down the list of available targets. These criteria were, first, that “the targets should be places that the bombing would most adversely affect the will of the Japanese people to continue the war”, secondly, places that contained “important headquarters, or troop concentrations, or centers of production of military equipment and supplies.” The third criteria required that the target “should not have been previously bombed” so that the full effect would be clear. Lastly, “the first target should be sufficiently large enough to contain the complete blast of the weapon so that its power can be measured.”<sup>30</sup>

The Targeting Committee recommended three targets based on the established evaluation criteria. The first was the ancient capital of Kyoto, a large industrial city that could effectively demonstrate the bombs’ capabilities. The committee selected Hiroshima because it was the home of the Southern Headquarters and depot for Japan’s homeland Army, a large naval port, and an industrial center. Finally, the port city of Niigata was an industrial center and a primary seaport on the Sea of Japan. Secretary of War Stimson rejected targeting Kyoto and wanted it

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<sup>29</sup> D. M. Giangreco, “Casualty Projections for the U.S. Invasion of Japan, 1945 – 1946: Planning and Policy Implications.” *Journal of Military History*, p. 850.

<sup>30</sup> Walter S. Schoenberber, *Decision of Destiny*, pp. 182-193.

removed because of its religious and artistic significance.<sup>31</sup> President Truman agreed with Stimson and the committee replaced it with the Kokura Arsenal, which contained the largest ammunition plants in Japan. Truman later stated that, “I wanted to make sure that it would be used as a weapon of war in the manner prescribed by the laws of war. That meant that I wanted it dropped on a military target.”<sup>32</sup>

The decision to use the bomb was never the issue; the primary concern was how to use the new weapon against Japan. Secretary Stimson and General Marshall wanted the best option that would end the war quickly in order to stop the needless slaughter of Americans. Members of the Targeting Committee, the Interim Committee, a scientific panel, and military leaders considered several options, among them a technical demonstration of the weapon’s destructive power in an isolated area or even in Tokyo Bay and a warning to the Japanese. The various committees disregarded this option for a number of reasons. For instance, Dr. Isidor Rabi from Columbia University, a troubleshooter for Dr. Oppenheimer at Los Alamos, pointed out that the Japanese did not have any technical experts who could measure and report on what they had witnessed. “It would take someone who understood the theory to realize what he was seeing. You would have to build a model town to make a realistic demonstration.”<sup>33</sup>

The recommendation of the scientific panel varied from a technical demonstration to direct military action to force a quick end to the war. After debating the use of a demonstration with a warning to Tokyo, the panel rejected the idea and reported that it had “no acceptable alternative to direct military use.” The Scientific Panel failed to agree on conducting a tactical demonstration, since there was only one bomb available at the time. If the bomb failed to work, the demonstration would have the opposite effect on the Japanese and fortify their spirit of

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<sup>31</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, p. 436.

<sup>32</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman, Volume One: Year of Decisions*, p.420.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, p. 66.

resistance even further. Providing the Japanese with advance warning of selected target sites could subject American prisoners of war to further hardships or their captures might move them into the attack area.<sup>34</sup>

The final option the United States considered was the use of diplomatic channels to pressure the Japanese to accept unconditional surrender. The proponents of this option wanted to give the Japanese a guarantee of the safety of the Emperor. Truman did not consider this option seriously, since the Japanese had attacked America while peace negotiations were going on in 1941. He had no respect for the apparent Japanese peace initiatives. He told Winston Churchill “that he did not think that the Japanese had any military honor left after Pearl Harbor.”<sup>35</sup> Ever since President Roosevelt had announced to reporters, in 1943, that the Allied objective was the “unconditional surrender of the Axis Powers,” the United States had insisted that Japan accept those terms. The exact terms imposed following unconditional surrender became a major point of contention during the final months of the war with Japan and still exists today.<sup>36</sup>

The peace faction within the Japanese government began to gather momentum in 1944 after General Hideki Tojo’s Government resigned following the U.S invasion of the Marianas. Members of the new government headed by General Koiso Kuniaki operated under the constant fear of assassination if they took a view different from that of the military leaders, who still controlled the government. The military believed that a “decisive military success” would give the Japanese a better chance for a negotiated peace, instead of an unconditional surrender. However, the loss of the Philippines ended the military’s attempts for a victory and aided in the resignation of Koiso’s government following the invasion of Okinawa.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, p. 394.

<sup>35</sup> Donovan, *Conflict*, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> Spector, *Eagle*, pp. 222 - 223.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547.

Admiral Suzuki Kantaro replaced Koiso as Premier and quickly selected as his foreign minister Togo Shigenori, who had served in that position during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Togo's sole purpose in serving as Foreign Minister "was to end the war as soon as possible" and he believed that the best way to achieve that was through improving Japan's relations with the Soviet Union, even though Moscow announced in April 1945 that it would not renew Russo-Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941. Togo wanted to know if the Soviets would honor the one-year notification agreement that would keep the pact in place for another year and give him time to pressure them to mediate on Japan's behalf with the United States. While probing Soviet intentions towards Japan, Togo held secret meetings with select members of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War (SCDW), known as the Big Six. "The guarding of secrecy was vital," Togo later wrote, "because it was certain that should the discussions at the meetings become known at the lower levels, fanatical opposition would be raised by some of the military officers, and the effort to make peace would be seriously hampered or even frustrated."<sup>38</sup>

To make Togo's job even more difficult, there was a division among the members. The peace group, led by Togo, who had the support of two generals, believed that any thought of a victory on the home island "was illusory" and Japan's position would continue to worsen. The war group, which included the supported of several powerful military leaders, maintained that continuing the struggle would allow the Japanese better terms of surrender. The government considered using China, Switzerland, Sweden, and even the Vatican as mediators, but these countries could not influence the decision-makers of the United States the way the Soviet Union might. Once Germany surrendered in May 1945, the SCDW's interest of the Soviet option intensified. Army leaders hoped for a renewal of the Neutrality Pact, because it would permit a

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<sup>38</sup> Schoenberber, *Decision*, pp. 164-165.

redeployment of troops from Manchuria to the home islands.<sup>39</sup> While the Navy thought that, it might be able to acquire fuel from the USSR. Togo, however, saw the futility of attempting any rapprochement with the Soviet Union. “It was too late,” he realized, Japan was no longer in a position to confront the Soviet Union and the Stalin regime knew it. At best, the Japanese could only hope that the Soviet s would mediate on their behalf, but only after providing significant concessions in return.<sup>40</sup>

While the Japanese made cautious overtures to the Soviets, the reached agreement on new national policy. The “Fundamental Policy to be Followed Henceforth in the Conduct of the War” endorsed the “army’s final, comprehensive demand that the nation engage the enemy on Japan’s own shores, for only thus ... could the imperial land be preserved and the national policy maintained.”<sup>41</sup> Emperor Hirohito accepted this policy without saying a word, which further pushed the Japanese towards the Decisive Battle that the military leaders wanted. The Fundamental Policy discouraged, but did not stop the advocates of peace. Neither Foreign Minister Togo nor the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Kido took the new fight-to-the-death policy seriously, “for they expected the deteriorating military situation to cut away the basis for such a last-ditch defense.”<sup>42</sup>

When the United States announced on June 22, 1945 that Okinawa was secure on June 22, 1945, Emperor Hirohito told the SCDW that he desired that “concrete plans to end the war, unhampered by existing policy, be speedily studied and that efforts be made to implement them.”<sup>43</sup> The Japanese had already tried to open talks with the Soviet ambassador to Japan, Jacob A. Malik, to gain Russian mediation, and Togo now used the Japanese Ambassador in

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<sup>39</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> Schoenberber, *Decision*, pp. 165 - 166.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, p. 102.

Moscow, Sato Naotake, to sound the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav M. Molotov. To aid in seeking a mediated peace, the Emperor offered to send Prince Konoye as a special Imperial Envoy to Moscow to convey the Emperor's wish to end the war. "However, as long as America and England insist on unconditional surrender our country has no alternative but to see through in an all-out effort for the sake of survival and the honor of the Homeland."<sup>44</sup> The Soviets refused to meet with the Imperial Envoy. The negotiations between Malik and Japan's negotiator Hirota Hira and talks between Sato and Molotov were fruitless, since the Soviets had no intentions in brokering a peaceful end to Pacific War.<sup>45</sup>

Washington demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan, but policy makers and military planners were concerned that the Japanese would fight to the last man, rather than accept that humiliation. That, at least, was the logical conclusion to which Japan's public conduct led. Furthermore, at no time during Tokyo's attempts to put out peace feelers did the Japanese Government contact the United States about a potential settlement. The United States and Britain were aware of the Japanese token peace movement, since American cryptographers had broken Japanese ciphers earlier in the war, but the common theme of these deciphered messages between Ambassador Sato, in Moscow and Foreign Minister Togo was that Japan would never accept unconditional surrender. American leaders had to rely on the proven fact that the Japanese army preferred death to surrender. American analysts, moreover, concluded that Tokyo might well put out such "peace overtures" simply to cause tension among the Allies. Those overtures went unanswered by the Soviets, who had pledged at the Yalta Conference in February to enter the war against Japan three months after the surrender of Germany.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Feis, *Japan Subdued*, p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> Schoenberber, *Decision*, pp. 166 - 169.

<sup>46</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, p.413.



Within the American Government, there were two views on how to get the Japanese to accept unconditional surrender. The “retentionists” view wanted to redefine the terms to allow them to retain the Emperor as a figurehead. Joseph C. Grew, former ambassador to Tokyo and now the Acting Secretary of State, was the leading advocate of this view and presented it to President Truman on May 28, 1945. Grew’s argument centered on the need to keep the Emperor in place to make the demilitarization of over 2 million Japanese troops easier and to minimize friction between the Japanese people and American occupation forces. Truman was receptive and suggested that Grew consult the chiefs of staff and services. Both Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal agreed, but their main issue with Grew’s proposal was when to send such a revised surrender terms to the Japanese. The consensus was to issue the updated terms only after the fall of Okinawa, prior to that the Japanese military might use it as a sign of a “crumbling American Resolve.”<sup>47</sup>

The opposing view was from the “abolitionists,” who believed that the ruthless Japanese warrior system and the current political system were the same. The only way to ensure that Japan did not pose a threat in the future was to eliminate both systems, which included removal of the Emperor. Assistant Secretary of States Dean Acheson and former Secretary of State Cordell Hull were the main advocates of this view. Their opinion, along with other opponents of Grew’s proposal, was that “a failure to extirpate the Imperial system would assure an eventual regrowth of a political culture bent on conquest.”<sup>48</sup> When Secretary of State Byrnes asked Hull for his opinion of a revised declaration that included keeping the emperor, Hull was not pleased about the possible change in US demands. He stated, “The statement sounded too much like appeasement of Japan, especially after the resolute stand we had maintained on unconditional

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<sup>47</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 214-216.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

surrender.”<sup>49</sup> The American people and members of congress felt strongly about removing Hirohito and trying him as a war criminal. “Hirohito must go, was a familiar theme in much of the war time press.”<sup>50</sup>

The options the American leadership had to force the Japanese into accepting unconditional surrender were complex and had no clear-cut solution. By the time Truman left for the Big Three Conference in Potsdam, American forces were staging for the final assault onto the Japanese mainland. The sustained air bombardment and naval blockade of Japan had not broken the fighting spirit of the Japanese. Even with all the military means available to the Allies, some senior American leader still pushed to end the war through a negotiated surrender short of unconditional surrender. When Truman finally issued the Japanese an ultimatum at the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference, the fate of the Emperor remained unclear and the Japanese had to decide to accept the ultimatum or fight their Decisive Battle to the last man.

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<sup>49</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, Volume II*, p. 1594.

<sup>50</sup> Donavon, *Conflict*, p. 91.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DEBATE

The decision to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese Empire was not an easy task for President Truman. The day he was sworn into office, Secretary of War Stimson brought to light a secret weapon that could end the war. In his memoirs, Truman stated, “My knowledge of these developments had come about only after I became President, when Secretary Stimson had given me the full story.”<sup>1</sup> Stimson was overall responsible for the atomic bomb project, known as S-1. As Vice-President, Truman was not well informed about on going military operations and was totally unaware that the United States was developing atomic weapons. That all changed on April 24, 1945, when Stimson along with General Groves, the project manager, briefed the new president on the development of atomic energy and what domestic and international issues the United States could face. Following the meeting, Truman authorized Stimson to form a committee of experts to serve as advisors to the President on all aspects of this new weapon.<sup>2</sup> Later that year prior to the Potsdam Conference in July, Truman met with his senior advisors several times to get their recommendations and opinions on current plans for defeating Japan, minimizing American casualties, and how to deal with the Russians.

The idea of the Interim Committee was already in the making when Stimson got authority to officially form it. The members selected to serve on the committee were all civilians and represented various areas within the United States government. The eight members included; Secretary of War Stimson, George L. Harrison, Stimson’s special consultant, James F. Byrnes, the President’s special representative, Ralph Bard, Under Secretary of the Navy, William L. Clayton, Assistant Secretary of State, and finally three prominent scientists Vannevar Bush,

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<sup>1</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman, Volume One: Year of Decisions*, p.419.

<sup>2</sup> Elting E. Morison, *Turmoil and Tradition: A Study of the Life and Times of Henry L. Stimson*, pp. 623 – 624.

President of the Carnegie Institute in Washington, Karl T. Compton, President of M.I.T., and James B. Conant, President of Harvard. Additionally, Stimson appointed an advisory panel of scientists to assist the Interim Committee member's on the technical aspects of the new weapon. The selected physicists included Robert Oppenheimer, head of the Los Alamos Laboratory, Ernest Lawrence, from the Radiation Laboratory at the University of California at Berkeley, Arthur Compton and Enrico Fermi, both from the University of Chicago. The main purpose of the committee and its members was to advise the President on any questions that relate to the new weapon and to provide an independent recommendation on how to employ the weapon against Japan, if at all.<sup>3</sup>

The Interim Committee met informally several times, the first time was on May 9, 1945 in the Pentagon at Stimson's office. Stimson opened the meeting by stating, "Gentlemen, it is our responsibility to recommend action that may turn the course of civilization."<sup>4</sup> The Secretary of War laid out the committee's agenda that involved the studying and reporting on the many problems that were involved in the project. These problems included the current wartime controls, recommendations on postwar research, development, controls and needed legislation. At no time during the meeting did Stimson tell the committee members that their task was to decide to use the bomb or not. The main purpose of this informal meeting was to educate all the members on S-1 and have them prepared for the formal meeting on May 31.<sup>5</sup>

The entire Interim Committee, scientific panel and select military representatives met for the first time as a group on May 31 and again on Jun 1. Stimson reiterated the committee's purpose and the significance of the new weapon. He emphasized that the committee would provide its findings and recommendations to him as advisors and it was he and General

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<sup>3</sup> David McCullough, *Truman*, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Walter S. Schoenberber, *Decision of Destiny*, pp 124 – 125.

Marshall's responsibility to provide the best and most accurate recommendations for military use to the President. As in the informal meetings, Stimson identified several topics to discuss that included the future use of the atomic bomb as weaponry, international competition, research and development, weapons and material control, and possible use in nonmilitary ways. The committee then received a detailed description of the possible effects of the destructive power. However, the committee had to understand that the development of the weapon was still under way and most of their analysis was a prediction of the weapons destructive capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

The scientists of the Committee: Lawrence, Oppenheimer and both the Comptons believed the United States should continue its dominance in the field of nuclear development and weapons production. The United States needed to produce enough weapons and material to establish stockpiles for future military and industrial use. They also believed that unrestricted research in the postwar would insure that the U.S. maintained its edge in the development and stockpiling of nuclear material. The major security concern was with the involvement of the Soviet Union and how much of the research information they should receive. Oppenheimer, Lawrence, and Karl Compton favored giving Russia the basic information on the project. However, Bush believed the United States could not remain ahead of the Russians in an arms race if we gave them this information. General Marshall and Arthur Compton took the military view and pointed out that the "uncooperative attitude of Russia" stems from their own security issues. Marshall and Compton favored cooperation between "like-minded nations" so the United States could improve its political relationship with Russia.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion then turned to how to use the bomb against Japan and then considered alternatives to its direct military use that included giving "detailed advanced warning" to the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 132 – 133.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp 133 – 134.

Japanese or a demonstration of the weapon in an isolated area of Japan. After debating each alternative, the Advisory Panel of scientists “reported that, we can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.” The Committee adopted this statement as their recommendation to the Secretary of War.<sup>8</sup>

After two days of discussing the various topics, the Interim Committee and scientific panel, “Recommended that the bomb should be used as soon as possible in the war with Japan, without warning, and against a target that would reveal its devastating strength.”<sup>9</sup> Following the Committee’s decision, Byrnes reported to the President with the recommended decision. Stimson waited another five days to deliver the official recommendation to Truman at a conference, where the two discussed the impact of the bomb on Soviet-American relations, sending senators to tour the Clinton Works in Tennessee, and restrict the Air Force to only precision bombing of Japan. According to Stimson, the decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan was made by Truman after Byrnes briefed him several days before and the question was never an issue after that.<sup>10</sup>

While the Interim Committee was busy formulating its recommendations on how to use the bomb and future policy, several scientists from the Metallurgical Laboratory in Chicago drafted a memo against the employment of the bomb against Japan. These scientists included Leo Szilard, who helped convince Roosevelt that the United States needed to research nuclear weapons and James Franck, who was the Chairman of the Chicago Scientists’ Committee or the Franck Committee. Their primary concern was that, by introducing the world to nuclear energy with a sudden attack on Japan, they would start an arms race with the Soviet Union. Instead,

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, *Turmoil*, pp. 625 – 626.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.625.

<sup>10</sup> Schoenberger, *Decision*, pp. 144 – 145.

they favored international control on nuclear material and an early demonstration of the weapon's capabilities. Without a demonstration, the United States would not know how the American people or the world felt about such a weapon. With a demonstration, other nations would share responsibility of using the atomic bomb against Japan. Truman told Clark Clifford, former White House Counsel to Truman, 1946 – 50, "that he had considered it, and came to the conclusion that a demonstration would not suffice after a war of such terrible carnage, that Japanese lives would have to be sacrificed to save many more American and Japanese lives."<sup>11</sup> The recommendations of the Franck's Committee did not address any new issues, nor did it change the recommendations of the Interim Committee.<sup>12</sup>

On June 18, 1945, President Truman called together a number of his military and civilian advisors to discuss the campaign against Japan. The Joint Strategy Meeting consisted of Admiral William D. Leahy, General George C. Marshall, Admiral E. A. King, Secretary of War Stimson, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, Assistant Secretary of the Navy John J. McCloy, Brigadier General McFarland, Secretary of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker, representing General Arnold.<sup>13</sup>

Truman began the meeting with the purpose of receiving detailed information on issues concerning the campaign against Japan that were outlined in Admiral Leahy's June 14 memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff. The specific information Truman wanted included: the number of men and ships required to defeat Japan, estimated time and expected casualties for the invasion of Japan, estimated time and casualties from forcing a Japanese surrender through aerial bombardment and a naval blockade, the role of the Russians, and what could our allies provide

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<sup>11</sup> Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Feis, *Japan Subdued*, pp. 40 – 43.

<sup>13</sup> White House Conference, minutes, 18 June 1945, in Harry S. Truman Presidential Museum & Library, HST, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*. Hereafter cited as White House Conference, 18 June 1945.

for the defeat of Japan. With the high amount of casualties sustained in Okinawa, the President wanted to make his decision based on the best option that “economizing to the maximum extent possible in loss of American lives.” Furthermore, “economy in the use of time and in money cost is comparatively unimportant.”<sup>14</sup>

General Marshall followed the President by reading a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the President to the entire staff. The memorandum explained that General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz concurred with the Chiefs of Staff recommendation of November 1, 1945 as D-Day for the invasion of Kyushu. The Chiefs believed by the target date preparations would be complete; the Allied air power would have destroyed all Japanese industries and majority of its cities; the remaining Japanese Navy would not be a threat; and U.S air and naval forces would have cut the ability of the Japanese to send reinforcements from the mainland. Additionally, the earlier the date would minimize the time the Japanese had to prepare their defenses and after November the weather would delay any Allied amphibious operations. Kyushu was essential for any further operations against Japan. It would serve as the lodgment site for the blockade and bombardment of Japan, which were all part of the strategy of strangulation and the least costly in American lives. The Chiefs could not give a good estimate of potential casualties for the Kyushu invasion. The memo stated, “Our experience in the Pacific war is so diverse as to casualties that it is considered wrong to give any estimate in numbers.”<sup>15</sup>

The Marshall further read that the United States was currently employing all available resources against Japan with no easing of the on going aerial bombardment and blockade against the Japanese homeland. The agreement amongst the Joint Chiefs was to let the Russians take

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas B. Allen, *Codename Downfall: The secret plan to invade Japan – and why Truman dropped the Bomb*, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> White House Conference, 18 June 1945.



care of the Japanese forces in Manchuria and let the Chinese, with U.S. support, take care of their own country.<sup>16</sup>

Following Marshall's reading of the memorandum, the discussion continued with the pending invasion of Japan and Operation DOWNFALL. General Marshall was in concurrence with the Chief's selection of Kyushu as the site for the invasion. Admiral King added that the capture of Kyushu was vital to any blockade and "followed logically after Okinawa." In addition to Kyushu, King believed that the preparation for the battle against the Tokyo Plains should continue, but not executed. The Allies would need to assess the loss of Kyushu, the effects of the blockade, and the impact of a Russian invasion on the Japanese leadership. The President, Marshall, and King all agreed that any action by the Russians would have an impact and the decision to invade Honshu could wait.<sup>17</sup>

There were no clear estimates of the number of casualties the United States could expect to sustain during the invasion of Kyushu or Honshu. Each member of Truman's staff and each of the senior military leaders had their own estimate that ranged from 40,000 to over 220,000 killed or wounded. Admiral Leahy used the 35 percent casualty rate of the Okinawa invasion as his comparison of the expected casualty figure. By using Leahy's 35 percent and MacArthur's estimated total force of 681,000 personnel, the casualty rate would reach an estimated 238,350 Americans killed, wounded, or missing. While using Marshall's estimated total force strength of 766,700 this would place the expected casualty rate over a quarter of a million.<sup>18</sup>

After addressing the possible influence of a "submerged class" that opposed the war in Japan and any references to altering the unconditional surrender demand, Truman gave his approval for the invasion on Kyushu. "This was a formidable conception, all of us realized that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Allen, *Codename Downfall*, p. 211

the fighting would be fierce and losses heavy.”<sup>19</sup> Truman “hoped that there was a possibility of preventing an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other.”<sup>20</sup> Only after Truman approved the invasion plans and personally singled out for his opinion did McCloy raise the question of the atomic bomb. Up until then, the issue of the atomic bomb did not come up for discussion. McCloy believed that if the United States warned the Japanese of the bomb, it might provide a political solution and make the invasion unnecessary. Even if the Japanese still refused to surrender, “Our moral position will be stronger if we give the warning,” McCloy added.<sup>21</sup>

The idea to have the Russians enter the war against Japan was not a decision made by Truman. President Roosevelt made the decision in February 1945 at the Yalta Conference with Stalin. Stalin agreed to enter the war two to three months after the surrender of Germany, to recognize that Manchuria was part of China, and to negotiate a treaty of friendship and alliance with Nationalist Chinese government. Roosevelt accepted these agreements and in return would restore territory lost to the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War along with the Kurile Islands. In addition to these agreements, the Soviets and Americans agreed to better cooperation in planning and preparations against Japan. While the Russians seemed willing to establish a joint Soviet-American plan against Japan, cooperation fell apart shortly after the Yalta Conference ended and further joint planning seemed unlikely.<sup>22</sup>

Once Truman took office in April 1945, the requirement of having the Russians open a second front against Japan was beginning to resurface within Truman’s staff. Admiral King voiced his opinion at the White House conference on June 18, that “regardless of the desirability of the Russians entering the war, they were not indispensable and he did not think we should go

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<sup>19</sup> Truman, *Memoirs*, p. 314.

<sup>20</sup> White House Conference, 18 June 1945.

<sup>21</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, p. 390.

<sup>22</sup> Schoenberger, *Decision*, pp. 73 – 75.

so far as to beg them to come in.”<sup>23</sup> Even though, the United States leadership was frustrated with the lack of Soviet cooperation and their failure to follow agreements made at Yalta, President Truman still planned to push for a Soviet declaration of war against Japan at the upcoming conference at Potsdam. General Alexei E. Antonov, the Soviet Chief of Staff, met with the American and British Chiefs during the Potsdam Conference and briefed the Combined Chiefs on the status of his forces and on Soviet military objectives against the Japanese in Manchuria. The Soviets primary objective was the “destruction of the Japanese Army in Manchuria, the occupation of the Liaotung Peninsula, followed by a Soviet withdrawal after the defeat of the Japanese.”<sup>24</sup>

President Truman went to the Potsdam Conference with several key points to discuss with Stalin, which was the political future of Eastern Europe, the occupation and dismantling of Germany, and a Russian commitment in the war against Japan. Of the three points, Truman considered a commitment from the Russians to enter the war against Japan as his main focus. The conference began on July 17 with an informal meeting between Truman and Stalin, where they discussed several key issues, to include the Soviet’s entering the Pacific War. In his diary, Truman wrote, “He’ll be in the Jap war on August 15.”<sup>25</sup> The next day on July 18, Stalin shared with Truman a message from Sato, the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow, which requested a meeting between the Soviets and Prince Konoye to discuss a possible peace settlement. However, Truman already knew about the Sato message and other Japanese peace overtures from deciphered Japanese communications.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Herbert Feis, *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific*, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Diary*, 17 July 1945, HST, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*.

<sup>26</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, pp. 419 – 425.

Truman did not spend his entire time in Potsdam talking with Stalin; he took the opportunity to meet with General Eisenhower and General Bradley to discuss the best strategy for defeating Japan. Truman never asked them for their opinion or recommendation on using the bomb against the Japanese. Bradley believed that Truman already planned to drop the bomb. Eisenhower opposed using the bomb against a defeated nation and even expressed to Stimson that the United States should not be the first to use it. Eisenhower would later state that his opposition to the bomb was “personal and based on no analysis of the subject.” When Truman asked about the Soviets entering the war, Eisenhower gave the same advice as Admiral King about not begging the Russians to enter the war. However, the only thing that could stop the Russians from entering the Pacific War now was an immediate Japanese surrender.<sup>27</sup>

On July 16, 1945, the United States and the rest of civilization entered the nuclear age, with the first atomic explosion in the New Mexico desert. The official report from General Groves did not reach Secretary of War Stimson until July 21, by special courier. After reviewing it with Marshall, Stimson went behind closed doors with Truman and Byrnes to further discuss the report. General Groves stated, “The test was successful beyond the most optimistic expectations of anyone.” Groves concluded with, “We are all fully conscious that our real goal is still before us. The battle test is what counts in the war with Japan.”<sup>28</sup> There was a feeling of relief once Stimson finished reading the report. After all the manpower, resources and \$2 billion dollars spent, the weapon worked far beyond everyone’s imagination. The United States now had a weapon that could force Japan to surrender or face complete destruction.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>28</sup> General Leslie R. Groves to Secretary of War, 18 July 1945, HST, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*.

<sup>29</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, pp. 430 - 432.

Truman's next task was how to tell Stalin that the United States now possessed the most powerful weapon every built. From 1941- 1945, the United States and Britain had worked in secret cooperation without the knowledge of the rest of the Allies to produce this new bomb. Once he knew the bomb worked, Truman decided to inform Stalin. At the conclusion of a conference session on July 24, Truman approached Stalin and told him that we had a new weapon of unusual destructive force." Stalin replied with, "He was glad to here it and hoped we would make good use of it against the Japanese."<sup>30</sup>

President Truman was not alone when he decided to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese, even though the final decision was his alone. Upon taking office, senior civilian and military advisors connected with the project continuously briefed him on the bombs capabilities and provide valuable recommendations on its use. However, all the recommendations Truman's advisors provided were only based on assumptions, since no one was sure if the weapon would even work. Following the successful atomic test and with input from his advisors, Truman set in motion the mission to deploy the first nuclear weapon ever used against another country.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p 442.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DECISION

President Truman made his final decision to drop the atomic bomb on pre-selected Japanese cities on July 24, 1945. Orders authorizing the bombs use went out the next day. This historic decision occurred two days before the United States, Great Britain, and Nationalist China issued the Potsdam Declaration to the Japanese Government. Truman was aware of the destructive capabilities of this secret new weapon and the political and international consequences that could follow once the secret was out. For the previous three months, Truman received recommendations, advice, assumptions, estimates, and options from his military and civilian advisors on how and when to deploy the weapon. Even after all of these briefings, Truman could not overlook the large number of casualties the United States had already sustained during its war with Japan and the estimated quarter of a million more casualties expected during the invasion of Japan. Despite the hopeless military situation, the Japanese government continued to fight on and prepared for the anticipated American invasion.

The number of American casualties remained the top concern for President Truman. During each operation, the Japanese continued fighting to the last man, thus inflicting enormous amounts of casualties against their American attackers. The bloody battles at Iwo Jima and Okinawa gave Truman and other leaders examples of what to expect during the invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. Following the fall of Okinawa, the official Japanese casualty count was 110,000 killed, and only 10,755 mostly wounded prisoners. The Americans suffered, 11,933 killed and another 39,119 wounded. American casualty counts, including the results from the large number of kamikaze attacks against the invasion fleet, only further solidified Japan's determination to fight to the death. After three and a half years of war, Truman realized that the

American public and congressional leaders would not accept those losses suffered at Iwo Jima and Okinawa and would demand answers. With the expected high casualty rate for the invasion of Japan, Truman's decision to use the bomb instead of an invasion averted the need to waste the lives of thousands of American soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

The surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945 presented Truman and military leaders with pressures from the American people and Congress to demobilize millions of service members in Europe. In fact, 72 percent of Americans expected a partial redeployment and demobilization of European forces. For the United States, the war was only half over and Truman reminded the public of the final objective ahead of them, the unconditional surrender of Japan. In the radio broadcast to the people announcing Germany's surrender, Truman "called upon every American to stick to his post until the last battle is won."<sup>2</sup> To prepare for OPERATION DOWNFALL and demilitarization, military planners had to transfer a large number of troops from Europe to the Pacific and demobilize two million troops. The Army planned to transfer fifteen divisions and twenty-three air groups to the Pacific. It moved another twenty-one divisions back to the United States to serve as the strategic reserve, and left another 400,000 occupation troops in war torn Europe.<sup>3</sup>

The War Department issued a demobilization plan in September 1944 that would demobilize individuals instead of whole units. This new plan established a point system that discharged eligible soldiers who reached 85 points and not retained by the needs of the military. The idea was to discharge the soldiers with the longest time served in combat units and reassign all others to occupation duty or shipped to Pacific Theater bound units. Some of the point criteria included: length of service, overseas tours, battle campaigns, decorations, and number of

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<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Walker, *Truman's Dilemma: Invasion or the Bomb*, pp. 150 – 152.

<sup>2</sup> David McCullough, *Truman*, p. 382.

<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, pp. 122 – 124.

dependents. Once Germany surrendered, a large number of units destined for Japan rotated out a majority of their combat hardened officers and noncommissioned officers for less experienced leadership. Some divisions lost between 20 to 85 percent of their trained personnel. To get European units back to combat readiness, General Eisenhower estimated it would take at least six months. However, the army's hard-pressed training plan allowed for only eight weeks of training that focused on combat against the Japanese. By the time the Japanese surrendered, several U.S Army units had even less training time to prepare for the invasion. An unnamed officer in the G-3 Section of the Army Ground Forces Headquarters stated, "The capitulation of Hirohito on 14 August saved our necks .... It would have been absolutely impossible for us to have sent well-trained teams to the Pacific for participation in the scheduled invasion of Japan."<sup>4</sup>

While the American public expected a partial demobilization of forces after Germany's surrender, a large portion of America believed that Emperor Hirohito was responsible for the war in the Pacific. This view was evident in a May 1945 poll that 33 percent favored the Emperor's execution, 17 percent wanted him to stand trial, 11 percent wanted imprisonment, 9 percent believed in exile, and 11 percent saw him as a figurehead. Truman reaffirmed this feeling during his address to congress on June 1 that demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan, which received a standing ovation from Congress.<sup>5</sup>

Following the successful test of the atomic bomb, Truman now had another option that would save many American lives and shorten the war. An option he did not have at his meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on June 18, when he approved their plan for the invasion of Japan. Truman still had the option to shelve the atomic bomb and go ahead with the invasion. However, he was aware of the political and public consequences that decision would cause.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 124 – 126.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 215.



First, the American people would demand explanations and accountability for the needless loss of life during the invasion of Japan, when it was avoidable with a secret weapon. Secondly, the military and administration would have to explain why the government spent two billion dollars of the taxpayer's dollars on weapon research that had no application during the war. To aid in his ultimate concerns and decision, the availability of the atomic bomb provided Truman the only means that would end the war quickly with the least amount of American casualties. Like President Roosevelt, Truman never really considered or even received advice from his staff about not using the atomic bomb.<sup>6</sup>

Several of Truman's advisors and scientists close to the atomic project believed that dropping the bomb on Japan would have a drastic impact on the international community following the war. However, Truman's primary concern was not on how his decision was going to effect foreign relations before the Japanese surrender, but how to prevent more American casualties. In an interview with William Hillman and Morton Royce in 1955, Truman stated that, "as far as the bomb is concerned I ordered its use for a military reason – for no other cause – and it saved the lives of a great many of our soldiers. That is all I had in mind."<sup>7</sup>

Several advisors close to Truman had mixed views about giving information about the bomb to the Soviets. Marshall wanted to know what the Soviets intentions were before providing them design information. While Byrnes believed the bomb would give the United States better advantage in international diplomacy, the United States would no longer need the Russian Army in Manchuria, and having this new weapon would keep the Soviets in line after the war. When Truman informed Stalin of this new weapon on July 24 following a session at the

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<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, pp. 48 – 49.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with former President Truman in 1955, n.d., in Truman Presidential Museum & Library, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*. Hillman was a newspaperman and Royce was a former professor from Georgetown University. Both were hired by Truman to assist in writing his memoirs.

Potsdam Conference, he believed that Stalin did not understand the significance. Only after the war did the United States learn that the Soviets had infiltrated the Manhattan Project early on and were constructing their own atomic weapon.<sup>8</sup>

Another instrument the United States had at its disposal, to assist Truman in his decision to use the atomic bomb, was in the intelligence field. Through a secret code-breaking effort called Magic for diplomatic traffic and Ultra for naval and military traffic, the U.S. intelligence community had the capability of intercepting and reading coded Japanese radio traffic from senior Japanese leaders in Tokyo to their units in the field and diplomats abroad. Even prior to Pearl Harbor, American intelligence agencies were busy trying to break the Japanese naval signals named JN25 by the Americans. These efforts did not produce significant results in deciphering the Imperial codes. Staying with the tradition of changing codes before major operations, the Japanese military changed its codes, which the U.S. named JH25b, just prior to their attack on the Pacific Fleet. This new code was impenetrable at first, but the United States would break the code in early 1942, prior to the Battle of Midway.<sup>9</sup>

The success American cryptologists had in breaking the Japanese codes was largely due to the over confidence and arrogance of Japanese leaders, who believed that their codes remained unbroken. The common practice for most nations was to use a certain code for a certain length of time and then replace it at random intervals. This practice would prevent their enemies from finding commonalities within the coded messages and breaking them. However, the Japanese expanded their territorial gains so quickly and covered a large part of the south Pacific that the distance between garrisons prevented the timely distribution of new codes. As the United States gained control of the sea and air in the Pacific, the Japanese efforts to supply their units with

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert Feis, *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Lewin, *The American Magic: Codes, Ciphers, and the Defeat of Japan*, pp. 81 – 83.

updated codes became useless and then hopeless. The isolated Japanese garrisons continued use of their old codes gave the Americans the ability to break the most recent codes by comparing newer versions with the older ones. The inability of the Japanese to change their codes and their assumption that the codes remained unbreakable, allowed the Americans to ease drop on their military and diplomatic radio communications for the remainder of the war.<sup>10</sup>

The Magic intercepts provided the Allies with detailed information about the Japanese government's view towards unconditional surrender and their attempts to keep the Soviets out of the war. To relieve American military pressure, the Japanese government tried to negotiate a peace settlement between Germany and the Soviets in late 1944. This would allow the Germans to concentrate their war efforts against the British and American forces. To counter the shift in forces, the Japanese believed that the Americans would divert forces and materials from the Pacific and reinforce Europe. During the course of a few months, the Allies intercepted forty-one messages between the Japanese Foreign Minister Shigemitsu in Tokyo and Ambassador Sato in Moscow which detailed their plans. However, Magic revealed that the Soviets were not interested in any negotiated peace settlement for the Germans. Later, the ability to read Japanese diplomatic traffic kept the Americans abreast on the Soviet's intentions for the Far East.<sup>11</sup>

Once the Soviets informed Tokyo that they would not renew the Non-Aggression Pact with them, intercepts provided the United States with details of how fruitless the Japanese attempts to get the Russians to renew the treaty or assist in mediating on behalf of Japan were. Like previous attempts, the Soviets refused to accept the Japanese offers and stalled any attempts to meet with Stalin. The possibility of a Russian invasion into Manchuria grew as Japanese intelligence reports identified an increasing number of Soviet military trains heading east.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 84 – 86.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 271 – 272.

Ambassador Sato used these intelligence reports to assess his efforts to secure Soviet mediation and keep the Soviet Army out of the war. With the anticipated military build-up of Soviet forces completed by July or August, Sato reported to Tokyo on June 8, “that if Russia entered the war against Japan there would be no hope of saving the Emperor.”<sup>12</sup>

Magic intercept showed that the Japanese government remained firm at not accepting the Allied demand of unconditional surrender. Even after advice from Japanese embassies and consulates, Foreign Minister Togo continued to insist that Japan would continue to fight on unless the Americans recognized “Japan’s honor and existence” and negotiated a more acceptable surrender that preserved the Emperor’s position. However, the military still maintained a controllable influence over the Supreme War Counsel, which split the decision makers on the issue of peace. With the Magic intercepts and the ferocity with which the Japanese military was fighting, the United States had no indication that the Japanese “armed services were ready to haul down the flag except on terms strictly honorable conditions.” Truman needed to decide which of the two options would end the war quicker with the least amount of American casualties. Executing the planned invasion or demonstrating to the Japanese that further resistance was suicidal by dropping the recently tested atomic bomb were his options.<sup>13</sup>

While Magic was busy deciphering radio traffic between Japanese diplomats, the United States was employing Ultra to intercept and listen in on the Japanese military communications. Ultra revealed to the Americans that the Japanese military had no intentions of surrendering and preparations were underway to defend against an American invasion of Japan. A U.S. intelligence report from April 1945 outlined that the Japanese were forming new combat units in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 272 – 274.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 277 – 279.

southern Kyushu and all defensive preparations concentrated on the projected U.S. landing sites. The report further highlighted that all reinforcements went to the defense of Japan and the island garrisons were on their own. “Troops guarding the close approaches to Japan are dying in place in desperate delaying actions,” the report warned. However, the report grossly underestimated the Japanese troop strength on Kyushu. General Marshall briefed President Truman on June 18 that the Japanese had roughly 350,000 troops on Kyushu. The Japanese actually deployed 600,000 troops consisting of 14 divisions, seven mixed brigades and three tank brigades by late July.<sup>14</sup>

Ultra intercepts provided American decision-makers with every indication that the Japanese were preparing for a fight to the finish stance. More importantly, Ultra laid out in detail Japan’s defense strategy, order of battle, and their planned use for the dreaded kamikazes. Through the Military Intelligence Services (MIS) of the War Department and the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Truman and other senior leaders in the War and State Department continuously received the disturbing reports regarding the massive Japanese troop build up and civilian mobilization on the Japanese homeland. While Truman based his decision on June 18 to go ahead with the invasion of Kyushu on an estimated a 350,000 Japanese defenders, later intelligence reports showed a drastic increase in the numbers and concentrations of Japanese troops on Kyushu and around Tokyo. In one report in early August, the MIC stated that the Japanese had 560,000 troops on Kyushu organized into three armies that totaled forty-two divisions. Another report from the JIC showed that, the Japanese

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas B. Allen, *Codename Downfall: The secret plan to invade Japan – and why Truman dropped the Bomb*, pp. 222 – 223.

would have 2.6 million men on the Home Island by October 15, including 625,000 soldiers defending Kyushu.<sup>15</sup>

All Ultra intercepts indicated to the American leaders that Japanese forces on Kyushu had increased in strength and positioned near the projected beachhead. In addition to the troop buildup, Ultra provided detailed information about how the Japanese planned to mobilize its population and deploy its growing kamikaze and Kaiten forces. As on Okinawa, the Japanese planned to mobilize its population into Patriotic Citizens Fighting Corps and deploy them into direct combat against the Americans. However, these civilian corps received little to no combat training or weapons. Another Japanese planning strategy was to preserve the remaining aircraft until the Allied invasion, by dispersing the aircraft throughout the countryside located near airfields. The U.S. intelligence community confirmed this strategy from intercepted Japanese messages that “touted” their success of dispersing the aircraft. Additionally, Ultra identified three major Imperial Navy air command and the locations for a majority of the deadly Kaitens and other suicide vehicles the Japanese intended to employ against U.S. troopships and landing crafts.<sup>16</sup>

The United States knew through the numerous Magic and Ultra intercepts that the Japanese would never submit to the Allied demand of unconditional surrender. The military and civilian leaders that advised Truman also knew that since the start of the war, no Japanese unit had ever surrendered thus contributing to the huge loss of American lives. The already approved invasion of Japan projected another quarter of a million American casualties and that still did not guarantee a Japanese surrender. Following the successful testing of the atomic bomb and two days before Japan received the Potsdam Declaration, Truman met with his advisors one last time

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<sup>15</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 198 – 203.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204 – 207.

on July 24, to consider giving his final approval for dropping the bomb. After hearing the estimated casualty figures again and the reality that the Japanese would kill the 168,500 Allied prisoners of war, including 15,000 Americans prisoners, once the invasion began, Truman authorized the dropping of the atomic bomb.<sup>17</sup>

On July 26, Truman with the concurrence of Winston Churchill and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek issued the Potsdam Declaration to the Japanese government. The joint declaration called for “the Government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all the Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurance of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.”<sup>18</sup> The ultimatum did not address the meaning of “utter destruction” or that the United States possessed a weapon that could destroy an entire city. More importantly, it did not mention the fate of the Emperor. Article 12 of the declaration read, “The occupying forces of the Allies shall be withdrawn from Japan as soon as these objectives have been accomplished and there has been established in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese people a peacefully inclined and responsible government.”<sup>19</sup>

The Japanese government remained split on the acceptance of the allied demand. Togo believed the ultimatum was not a call for unconditional surrender, but some of the articles needed clarification and wanted to enter negotiations with the Allies. However, the military members of the SCDW wanted an immediate reply from the Japanese government condemning the Potsdam Declaration. With pressure coming from the military leaders, Prime Minister Suzuki responded on July 28 with a printed statement that the Japanese officials “decided to

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<sup>17</sup> Walker, *Dilemma*, p. 212.

<sup>18</sup> The Potsdam Declaration, July 26, in Truman Presidential Museum & Library, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*. Hereafter cited as Potsdam Declaration.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

*mokusatsu* the declaration, to kill it with silence.” The next day, Suzuki held a press conference and further explained his previous response. “I consider the joint declaration of the three powers to be a rehash of the Cairo Declaration. The government does not regard it as a thing of any great value; the government will just ignore (*mokusatsu*) it. We will press forward resolutely to carry the war to a successful conclusion.”<sup>20</sup>

By rejecting the Allied demand to surrender, the Japanese government decided to pursue their fight-to-the-death strategy and subjected the Japanese people to “utter destruction.” Following the public condemnation of the declaration made by the Japanese, Truman gave the final authorization for the atomic bomb. At 7:48 AM on July 31, 1945, President Truman hand wrote out the order to deploy the weapon. The message read, “Suggestion approved. Release when ready but not sooner than August 2.” Six days later, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima.<sup>21</sup>

The 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group, 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force, commanded by General Carl Spaatz, received the directive to drop the bomb on July 25, 1945 from General Thomas T. Handy, the Acting Chief of Staff. The Directive ordered the “20<sup>th</sup> Air Force will deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945 on one of the targets: Hiroshima, Kokura, Nagata and Nagasaki.”<sup>22</sup> On August 6, 1945, a single B-29 called the *Enola Gay*, appeared over Hiroshima and released the first atomic bomb. The explosion and firestorm that followed destroyed approximately 60 percent of the city, killed or wounded 200,000 people, including an estimated 80,000 that died instantly. Truman received news of the successful bombing of Hiroshima while aboard the *U.S.S. Augusta* returning to the United States

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<sup>20</sup> Walter S. Schoenberger, *Decision of Destiny*, pp. 250 – 251.

<sup>21</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, p. 448.

<sup>22</sup> Directive from General Tomas T. Handy to General Carl Spaatz, July 25, 1945, in Truman Presidential Museum & Library, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*.



following the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference. The President's reaction was one of excitement and exhilaration, for he knew the war would soon be over. In his excitement, Truman announced to the crew the news of the new weapon and turned and told Byrnes, "It's time for us to get home."<sup>23</sup>

Following the destruction of Hiroshima and his notification, Truman authorized a prepared press release to the American people. Within the statement, Truman vaguely described the details of the destructive power of the atomic bomb. He did present a detailed picture of the massive effort and circumstances that lead to the development of the new weapon. In closing, Truman reaffirmed his commitment to ending the war with Japan. He announced,

"We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war."<sup>24</sup>

There were no debates on the dropping of the second atomic bomb; the directive that General Spaatz received on July 25 authorized him to continue with the bombings. To try to limit civilian casualties, the United States dropped thousands of leaflets on Japanese cities, following the first atomic bomb, as part of a psychological effort to force a Japanese surrender. These leaflets outlined how the Japanese government refuses to surrender and that Japan faces complete destruction with this new weapon. Additionally, the leaflets told the Japanese people to "evacuate your cities"<sup>25</sup> On August 9, a lone B-29, called *Bock's Car*, dropped the second atomic bomb on the port city of Nagasaki. While the second bomb was more powerful than the one dropped on Hiroshima, the explosion only killed approximately 36,000 people. The main

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<sup>23</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, pp. 454 - 455.

<sup>24</sup> White House Press Release, August 6, 1945, in Truman Presidential Museum & Library, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*.

<sup>25</sup> Leaflets Dropped on Japanese Cities, n.d., in Truman Presidential Museum & Library, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History*.

reason for the low casualty count was that the bombardier released the bomb two miles off target and the numerous valleys and ridges around Nagasaki protected it against the affects of the explosion.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to the second atomic bombing on August 9, the weight of the Soviet invasion into Manchuria hit the Japanese Kwantung Army in a three-prong attack. The invasion followed the Soviets declaration of war against Japan that Stalin had promised Truman at the Potsdam conference. Within three days, the Japanese military and population experienced the weight of the Allied effort to force the Japanese Government into accepting the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. President Truman addressed the American people following the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and expressed that the United States would continue to use the bomb to shorten the war and save the lives of the American soldiers designated to invade Japan. He further warned the Japanese that, “we shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan’s power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us.”<sup>27</sup>

The Japanese Supreme Council for the Direction of the War continued to remain split over accepting the Allied ultimatum. Togo, Yonai, and Suzuki all agreed that Japan should accept the Potsdam Declaration under one “Imperial condition” that addressed the preservation of the Emperor. However, Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda believed that, in order to accept the declaration, Japan needed to insist on preservation of the Emperor, self-disarmament, and Japan would prosecute its own war criminals; no Allied troops would occupy Japan. Having already experienced the force of an atomic explosion on Hiroshima and the disintegration of the Kwantung Army against the Soviet invasion, the three military members of the council still refused to accept surrender. War Minister Anami, “called for one last great battle on Japanese

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<sup>26</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 283 – 286.

<sup>27</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, pp. 457 – 459.

soil – as demanded by the national honor, as demanded by the honor of the living and the dead.” Then Anami asked, “Would it not be wondrous for this whole nation to be destroyed like a beautiful flower?”<sup>28</sup> The news of a second atomic bomb exploding above Nagasaki caused the council to break up and reconvened that night with the Emperor. After further debate on which option to pursue, Prime Minister Suzuki asked the Emperor to decide for the council. The Emperor stated, “the time has come when we must bear the unbearable.... I swallow my own tears and give my sanction to the proposal to accept the Allied proclamation on the basis outlined by the Foreign Minister.”<sup>29</sup>

The Japanese transmitted their acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration to the Allies on August 10, less than 24 hours after the destruction on Nagasaki. Once Truman learned of the Japanese response, his next decision related to the status of the Emperor. Truman’s advisors remained split on how to deal with the Emperor. Stimson and Leahy both agreed that it would be beneficial to the United States if the Emperor stayed. Byrnes remained strongly against any change to unconditional surrender terms and believed the Emperor should go. Truman finally decided that, “from the moment of surrender the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to the rule of the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers.”<sup>30</sup> While the United States notified the other Allied nations, Truman stopped any further use of atomic bombs. The official Japanese surrender came on August 14.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of surrender did not come easily for all members of the military. During the night of August 14, elements of the Military Affairs Bureau tried to stage a coup and to stop the Emperor’s prerecorded surrender broadcast scheduled for release the next day. The plan called

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>29</sup> Frank, *Downfall*, pp 290 – 296.

<sup>30</sup> Feis, *Japan Subdued*, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> McCullough, *Truman*, pp. 460 – 462.

for the Imperial Guard Division and the Eastern Army to rise up and save the Emperor from the corrupt elements that were advising the Emperor. Fortunately, for the survival of Japan, the Eastern Army managed to disperse the revolt before any organized resistance could form. The Emperors message to his people went out on August 15, followed by the organized surrender of the remainder of the Japanese forces.<sup>32</sup>

The formal surrender of the Japanese Empire occurred on September 2, 1945 aboard the *U.S.S. Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay. The capitulation of Japan ended the bloody Pacific War and cancelled the need for the invasion of Japan. By dropping the atomic bombs, President Truman accomplished what no other commander could do; he forced the surrender of the Japanese Empire. More importantly, his decision saved the lives of thousands of Americans, Chinese, Soviets, and Japanese who lived to tell the story of their generation.

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<sup>32</sup> Saburo Hayashi, *Kogun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War*, pp. 181 – 182.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan was the single most important decision President Truman made during the Pacific War. Ultimately, the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced the Japanese to surrender. The war ended just weeks before the United States' scheduled invasion of the Japanese Homeland, which saved an estimated one quarter of a million Americans. Truman's final decision, however, came only after discussing and evaluating with his senior civilian and military leaders each option the United States had in forcing the capitulation of the Japanese Empire.

The United States entered World War II only after the Japanese deliberately attacked the American Pacific Fleet, anchored in Pearl Harbor, without a declaration of war. A Japanese peace envoy was meeting with American officials in Washington at the same time as the attack, which added to the deception. Following the near destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Japanese forces quickly eliminated majority of the Allied forces in the Philippines, Asia, and the rest of the South Pacific, leaving the Japanese virtually unmolested to concentrate their forces on Australia and the Asian mainland. The Japanese final conquest of Australia, Burma, and the rest of China would have succeeded if not for the determination of the American people, who wanted to avenge the events of December 7, 1941.

Along with the embarrassing attack at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese brutal treatment of Allied prisoners of war, and the fight-to-the-death attitude of the Japanese military prevented the United States from seriously pursuing a negotiated peace settlement. The Japanese leadership forced upon their military and civilian population that surrender was the ultimate crime and in doing so, would dishonor themselves, their families, and the Emperor. Japanese units

continuously demonstrated their determination not to live in dishonor by surrendering to the enemy and chose to fight on, even in the face of certain death. This mindset paved the way for mass suicidal charges and kamikaze attacks against U.S. forces. These tactics and beliefs only aided in the complete destruction of entire Japanese island garrisons throughout the Pacific Theater. The United States suffered tremendous casualties in pushing the Japanese back towards their Homeland. These facts gave Truman and American military planners the grim estimate of what to expect during the invasion of Japan.

The defeat of Japan was never in question. However, the length of the war and its cost in human lives were of great concern. By the time Truman took office in April 1945, the Japanese offensive capability was gone. The majority of Japan's Imperial Navy sat on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean or anchored in isolated Japanese harbors with little fuel. American air supremacy and superiority left the Japanese limited amounts of obsolete aircraft and untrained pilots. However, Japan did possess an enormous land Army that still controlled much of the Chinese mainland and was preparing for the decisive battle on the shores of Japan. The Japanese took lessons learned from previous landings and used them in preparing for the American invasion. Japanese planners strategically identified the landing zones the Americans planned to use and designed their defense around those key areas. The battle plan included the extensive use of suicide squads to attack the Allied troop transports before they could reach the shore. Once ashore, the Americans would face the full force of the Japanese Army and a hostile population that was not willing to surrender.

Only after taking office, did President Truman learn about the secret development of the atomic bomb and its potential destructive power. However, Truman did not consider it an option because it remained untested. The Chiefs of Staff presented Truman the projected U.S. casualty

figures for the proposed invasion of Japan. Even after the bloody battles on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the Chiefs could not give Truman a reliable casualty figure for the proposed invasion. The accepted figure settled around two hundred and fifty thousand American casualties. Truman approved the invasion of Japan only after hearing the arguments for revising the unconditional surrender terms and tightening the naval and air blockade.

The United States began the development of the atomic bomb as a weapon prior to Truman taking office. Truman inherited the responsibility for the decision to order the bombs deployment only after Roosevelt's death. Secretary Stimson provided Truman with constant updates of the weapon's development and the final recommendations from the Interim Committee and the Advisory Panel of scientist. Both groups recommended that the United States should use the bomb at the earliest opportunity, without a technical demonstration and without warning. However, Truman's decision to drop the bomb did not become a real option until its successful test in the New Mexico desert on July 16, 1945. The success of the test not only proved that the tremendous cost of development this weapon was not a waste of money, but it gave Truman an alternative to invading the Japanese homeland and ending the war sooner.

By the time the Allies issued Potsdam Declaration, there were no indications that the Japanese were willing to surrender. There were numerous diplomatic messages deciphered between the Japanese Foreign minister and his ambassador in Moscow hinting at a mediated peace through the Soviets. Tokyo never directly or indirectly approached the United States government to clarify the meaning of unconditional surrender or the fate of the Emperor. Furthermore, the Japanese Government constantly sought clarification of the Soviets' intentions towards Japan and the renewal of their Non-Aggression Pact, even as Soviet forces massed on the Manchurian border. Without the fear of a Soviet invasion, the Japanese intended to redeploy

the Kwantung Army in defense of the Japanese Homeland. While other decoded messages provided the allies with detailed plans of the Japanese defenses and orders to kill the prisoners of war once the invasion began. The Japanese government's immediate rejection of the ultimatum left little doubt that Japan intended to fight to the end.

The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced Japan to surrender and stopped an invasion that would have killed hundreds of thousands of Americans and possibly saved the destruction of Japan itself. All the options available to Truman were viable and could have eventually forced the Japanese to surrender. To Truman, the cost of American lives was too great to sacrifice when the United States had the means to end the war. Truman's decision to this day remains one of the most controversial decisions of the Twentieth Century.



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