The Dropping of the Atomic Bombs on Japan: A Brief Status Report of Recent Interpretations

HAYASHI Yoshikatsu*

The aim of this short essay is to introduce briefly recent interpretations regarding reasons why the Harry S. Truman administration dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the beginning of August in 1945. The present author will focus on arguments advocated mainly among American scholars and pick up some of the controversial and significant interpretations from his own viewpoint. Therefore, this is not by any means a comprehensive survey dealing with the reasons for the dropping of the atomic bombs.¹

Harry S. Truman issued a message on the way back to Washington D.C. from Potsdam to the American people that the United States had dropped a special bomb on Hiroshima on August 6. He informed them of the bomb which “had more power than 20,000 tons of TNT,” and continued that “the Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold.” Subsequently, he confessed that the special bomb was “an atomic bomb.” Truman added that “it was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that

ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth.”

Consequently, the atomic bomb was dropped.

However, the leaders of the Japanese government did not accept the Potsdam Declaration even after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. While they were deliberating whether they would accept unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers, the Soviet Union, despite having concluded a neutrality treaty with Japan in 1941, declared war on Japan right after the dropping of the atomic bomb. She had already informed the Japanese government of the abolishment of the treaty a few months ago. Nevertheless, the leaders looked on the Soviet Union as an arbitrator between Japan and the Allied Powers. Joseph Stalin participated in the war against Japan on August 7 in order to keep the prizes of war which had been guaranteed in the Yalta Agreement in exchange for her participation in the war. He wanted to take part in the war before Japan would surrender as result of the atomic bomb.

With the Soviet invasion into Manchuria, the Japanese elite leaders once again gathered to deliberate their response to the Potsdam Declaration. In the midst of their deliberations on August 9, the news broke that the second atomic bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki. Subsequently, the emperor intervened in the conference to urge the leaders to decide to surrender to the Allied Powers. The news was a shock to the Japanese leaders. Finally, on August 10, the Japanese government accepted the above declaration “with the understanding that the said Declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogative of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler.” On the same day, Truman ordered the American military not to drop more atomic bombs without his clear approval. At the end of August in 1945, General Douglas MacArthur flew into Tokyo to take over the Japanese government, and on September 2, the representatives of the Japanese government signed the papers of surrender on the USS Missouri, and World War II was over.

In the United States, the response to the news regarding the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was overwhelming. Eighty-five percent of the American people in the Gallop public opinion polls at the end of August in 1945 supported the government’s decision to drop the atomic bombs. However, some pacifist groups, scientists of atomic energy, and religious groups began to criticize the U.S. government for the indiscriminate slaughter of non-

---


combatants by the atomic bombs. They also blamed the government for not warning the Japanese clearly prior to the bombing.\textsuperscript{4} Besides, in July of 1946, taking into consideration various testimonies obtained from Japanese civil as well as military leaders, the final report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey concluded as followed: “Based on detailed investigation of all the facts, and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey’s opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”\textsuperscript{5} In addition, journalist John Hersey wrote a series of articles dealing with the disastrous realities of six local victims of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima in the \textit{New Yorker} in August 1946. Subsequently, his series of essays was published in a book form.\textsuperscript{6} His reportage had a strong influence on the American people in general, and there arose doubts concerning the wisdom of government’s dropping the atomic bombs in the final days before Japanese capitulation.

Under these circumstances, James B. Conant, president of Harvard University and one of the advocates of producing the atomic bomb during the war, found it necessary to take measures to respond to the criticism. He persuaded Henry L. Stimson, the former Secretary of War in charge of the development of the atomic bomb, to write an essay dealing with the government’s decision to use the atomic bombs, in order to suppress criticism against the government.\textsuperscript{7} The article included reasons why the government justifiably decided to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The high government officials regarded the atomic bomb as “a new and tremendously powerful explosive, as legitimate as any other of the deadly explosive weapons of modern war.” The Japanese government “might determine resistance to the end,” with “an armed force of five million men and five thousand suicide aircraft.” To fight against such Japanese combatants, in addition to the sea blockade of the homeland and intensified strategic air bombardments on cities, the American forces planned the invasions of the southern island of Kyushu and the main island of Honshu. Such operations “might be expected to cost over a million casualties, to American forces alone.”

In the meantime, the Interim Committee organized under the direction of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Truman made the following recommendations to the president concerning the possible atomic bomb. “(1) The bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible. (2) It should be used on a dual target plant surrounding by or adjacent to houses and other buildings most susceptible to damage, and (3) It should be used without prior warning [of the nature of the weapon].” These conclusions were based on the assumption that the Japanese “must be administered a tremendous shock which would carry convincing proof of our power to destroy the Empire.” The Japanese were given the last chance to surrender in the Potsdam ultimatum of July 26 in which the Allied powers pledged to bring prompt and utter destruction to Japan in case of its continuation of military resistance. The Japanese ruling oligarchy rejected the ultimatum, and the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which “were active working parts of the Japanese war effort” on August 6 and on August 9 respectively. Henry L. Stimson concluded that all the evidence he discussed in the article indicated that “the controlling factor in the final Japanese decision to accept our terms of surrender was the atomic bomb.” He added that “this deliberate, premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent choice,” which stopped “the fire raids, and the strangling blockade” and “the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies.”

What Henry L. Stimson insisted in the article was that the atomic bombs had accomplished the objective of ending the war with Japan as soon as possible with the fewest victims of American soldiers. Historian J. Samuel Walker maintained that “more than any other single publication, Stimson’s article influenced popular views about Truman’s decision to use the bomb. The information it provided and the respect that its author commanded made its arguments seem unassailable.” Consequently, it received wide circulation and acclaim among the American public. “The most vivid of the article’s arguments was that the use of the bomb prevented over 1 million American casualties by making an invasion unnecessary.” According to Walker, the source of Stimson’s figure was not clear, but after the publication of the paper the number of the victims “became indelibly etched into the mythology of the decision to use the bomb.” His interpretation has become the official stance on the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan and has since been regarded as the orthodox thesis. Also, his interpretation has turned out to be a major target for critics of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan.

In the 1960s, new-left historians who emerged against the background of the anti-Vietnam war movement, questioned the U.S. government’s “imperial” foreign policies in pursuit of the expansion of its economic, political and military interests.

In the field of recent American foreign policy, for example, they made efforts to trace the origins of the cold war in which the Soviet Union has been conventionally blamed for its aggressive policies toward East European countries. The scholars criticized the U.S. government for the so-called Open-Door imperialism in the area where the Soviet Union had dominated. Consequently, the expansive economic policy caused conflicts with the communist powers, which meant the beginning of the cold war.

In the context of such a critical tendency in the academia, political scientist Gar Alperovitz published a book entitled *Atomic Diplomacy* in 1965, and challenged the traditional interpretation of the atomic bombing dropping which has been accepted since Stimson’s article was released in 1947. Based on diaries and private papers of Truman, Stimson, and other high officials in the government, Alperovitz insisted that the United States dropped the bombs with a diplomatic purpose against the Soviet Union rather than for the military victory over Japan. The Truman administration knew that Japan had been prepared to surrender if it was allowed to keep the emperor system intact. Nevertheless, the United States ignored such Japanese last-minute attempts to finish the war, and chose to threaten the Soviet Union in order to win concessions in diplomatic negotiations and to check the communist expansion in Eastern Europe by showing off the explosion of the atomic bombs.  

On the other hand, historian Martin J. Sherwin accepted the idea that anti-Soviet attitudes existed in the decision to use the atomic bombs, but he insisted that this was only a secondary cause for the bomb. The primary motivation behind the bomb was to end the war as quickly as possible with the fewest victims, according to Sherwin.  Historian Barton J. Bernstein also included Alperovitz’s interpretation when he mentioned the reasons for Truman’s decision. According to Bernstein, Truman believed that “the bomb could help end the war on American terms, possibly avoid the dreaded invasions, punish the Japanese for Pearl Harbor and their mistreatment of POWs, fulfill bureaucratic needs, conform to the desires of the American people, and also intimidate the Soviets, perhaps making them tractable in Eastern Europe.” [italics in the original]

Historian Michael Kort maintained that although such revisionist interpretations spread among historians through the 1980s and the 1990s, because of the availability of new documents in Japan and in Russia as well as in the


United States, the historiographical ground began to change in recent years. Based on these recent studies, he pointed out ten “key questions” concerning the subject. It goes without saying that these questions are entwined with each other. The present author would like to introduce major issues related to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan.

One of the main reasons why revisionist historians criticized the dropping of the atomic bombs is based on the assumption that Japan had been ready to surrender before the atomic bomb was actually used against Hiroshima, let alone against Nagasaki. They relied on the aforementioned USSBS conclusion that Japan would have surrendered without atomic bombs, Soviet entry into the war against Japan, and the scheduled invasion of the homeland. However, historian Robert P. Newman investigated the USSBS files thoroughly, and revealed the majority of Japanese leaders who had cooperated with the inquiry team denied the idea of the “early surrender hypothesis” and believed that the war would have lasted beyond November 1 of 1945 because the army would not admit Japan’s defeat. He quoted Konoye Fumimaro, former prime minister and close aide to the emperor, as saying that “the really big thing was to overcome the army,” meaning that the army had been the strongest resistant group against the surrender. Denying the conclusion of the survey report, Newman concluded that the USSBS had “no time for thoughtful investigations familiar with Japanese history to formulate really probing questions, nor to assimilate what was learned in early interviews and use it to sharpen later ones.” Newman is very critical of the historians who paid little attention to the quality of the analysis drawn from the survey report.

Here is another example. Barton J. Bernstein maintained that “the survey’s conclusions were undercut by crucial evidence that the survey basically ignored,” and quoted Suzuki Kantaro, the Japanese last prime minister during the war, as testifying after the war that “the Supreme War Council had proceeded with the one plan of fighting a decisive battle at the landing point and was making every possible preparation to meet such a landing. They proceeded with that plan until the atomic bomb was dropped.” Former foreign minister Togo Shigenori also informed American questioners of the survey team that “the bomb made a powerful difference,” and “propelled the emperor to push more ardently for peace” in his recollection of events. Moreover, military historian Gian P. Gentile

16. The testimonies are quoted in Barton J. Bernstein, “Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern
also examined the United States strategic bombing survey of Germany and Japan, and insisted that the latter’s conclusions were influenced by “increasing Cold War tensions” and a dominant member of the team Paul Nitze’s “pre-Hiroshima predictions” that “even without atomic bomb, Japan was likely to surrender in a matter of months.” And he added that it was necessary for historians to use the survey critically “in their attempt to better understand a crucial period of the past.”

The conclusion of the survey team that Japan would have capitulated without dropping the atomic bombs, Soviet entry and the scheduled homeland invasion operations served as primary evidence to support the revisionist argument, and therefore, the afore-mentioned analyses distinctly undermined their basis in a profound way. It seems to me that their analyses suggest the importance of a critical approach to the treatment of historical data and documents.

Besides, revisionist historians insisted that the U.S. government had known through intercepted correspondences between foreign minister Togo Shigenori and ambassador Sato Naotake in Moscow that Japan had been planning to terminate the war by way of Soviet intermediaries. On the basis of their communications, revisionists claimed that the United States had not needed to drop the atomic bombs in order to secure capitulation from the Japanese government.

However, historian Robert Maddox, for instance, denied the revisionists’ claim that the Togo cable of July 12, 1945 was a clear indication that the emperor had determined to surrender. He mentioned that John Weckering, who had prepared for transmittal of the MAGIC intercepts, judged that the Japanese war leaders were “making a coordinated effort to stave off defeat through Russian intervention and an appeal to war weariness in the United States.” Consequently, Maddox observed that there was “no evidence that the Japanese were prepared to surrender on anything resembling the terms even the most lenient American policy could make.” Here is another example which refuted the revisionist interpretation. On July 21, Togo responded to the ambassador in Moscow that “with regard to unconditional surrender...we are unable to consent to it under any circumstances whatsoever. Even if the war drags on and it becomes clear that it will take much more bloodshed, the whole country as one man will pit itself against the enemy in accordance with the Imperial Will so long as the enemy demands unconditional


surrender.” This statement means that even in the last days of the war the Japanese top leaders denied unconditional surrender and sought a negotiated settlement in order to preserve the emperor system in disregard of civilian victims at home.19

At the same time, it was known to the United States through intercepted ULTRA information that the number of Japanese troops concentrated in Kyushu was on the rise. Historian Edward J. Drea, analyzing the U.S. army’s code-breaking operation in the southwest Pacific theater, revealed the correspondence among the Japanese military forces with respect to their future military operations to defend the homeland against the prospective invasion of enemy troops. On the basis of his findings in intercepted ULTRA reports, Drea made it clear that the massive buildup of Japanese forces in Kyushu had been carried out in anticipation of the U.S. invasion. This information was forwarded to the decision makers in Washington. As a result, the U.S. leaders assumed that the Japanese war leaders were determined to fight to the last ditch.20 Another historian Richard B. Frank also quoted an analysis of deliberations in Japan’s inner circle through MAGIC intercepts, and maintained that “until the Japanese leaders realized that an invasion cannot be repelled, there is little likelihood that they will accept any peace terms satisfactory to the Allies.” The pessimistic prospect for the planned invasion was shared with the U.S. leaders in Washington, who assumed that the Japanese were willing to fight back against the homeland attack.21

Edward J. Drea and Richard B. Frank were quite familiar with recently declassified documents and succeeded in revealing the debates and correspondences among Japanese high-level military and civil officials. Consequently, with this reliable evidence they proposed rebuttals against revisionist arguments that the Japanese ruling elite was ready to finish the war. According to these scholars, the U.S. leaders had been familiar with the latest information about Japan’s deployment of troops in Kyushu, and they judged that the increase indicated the enemy’s determination to fight to the last even in the homeland without capitulation.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the press conference held after the meeting with Winston Churchill in Casablanca in 1943, demanded the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers. Roosevelt’s statement meant that the U.S. government would


not allow the emperor system to continue and Hirohito to remain on the throne after the Japanese surrender. However, Gar Alperovitz insisted that had the United States been willing to guarantee the Japanese leaders the retention of the emperor system, Japan almost certainly would have surrendered before August 6 when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. It was true that high-ranking civilian and military advisors recommended Truman to modify unconditional surrender in order to allow the Japanese to retain the emperor system with the hope of Japan’s immediate capitulation. But Secretary of State James Byrnes, who had been newly appointed by Truman and had had more influence on him than other advisors, opposed any specific reference to the emperor in the Potsdam Declaration because of his concern about the critical public opinion against the emperor that regarded him as a major war criminal. Consequently, there was no particular mention about the emperor in the ultimatum of July 26 which claimed “the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland” without delay. Did the policy of unconditional surrender prolong the war against Japan?

In analyzing the process of war termination in Japan, historian Herbert P. Bix pointed out that “it was not so much the Allied policy of unconditional surrender that prolonged the Pacific war, as it was the unrealistic and incompetent actions of Japan’s highest leaders.” He mentioned that they had missed some opportunities to let the lost war end because they were preoccupied with the fate of the imperial house in the case of unconditional surrender. Bix mentioned some missed opportunities for the Japanese leaders to end the war before the atomic bombs were dropped. The first occasion was during February in 1945, “when Prince Konoe made his report and military intelligence officers alerted them to the likelihood of the Soviet Union entering the war against Japan by mid-summer.” The second opportunity emerged in the wake of the defeat at Okinawa and Germany unconditional surrender in May. And the last opportunities were lost when the Suzuki cabinet rejected the Potsdam Declaration and when they wasted the interval between the release of the declaration and the dropping of the bomb.

In addition, J. Samuel Walker revealed that traditionalist scholars have made it clear that in the final stage of the war the Japanese government was “too divided and too indecisive to accept” the proclamation to end the war. Historian Robert P. Newman examined the unconditional surrender policy from the U.S. and Japanese viewpoints. In his book, he clarified that there were severe controversies between

the pacifist group and the belligerent group in the Supreme War Council as to how they interpreted the phrases used in the ultimatum declaration.\textsuperscript{25} It was difficult to assume that the Japanese ruling elite would reach a consensus about the decision to capitulate.

Moreover, Asada Sadao of Doshisha University examined the decision-making process of the Japanese high-ranking leaders including the emperor that led the country into surrender. In so doing, he clarified that the prime minister overcame the deadlock of the Supreme War Council by way of “sacred decision” in cooperation with the emperor, which was quite an unprecedented political act in Japan. In June the emperor had hoped that the war would end soon. Asada also indicated that there was “no missed opportunity for an earlier peace” judging from intransigence of the military leaders. They demanded more lenient surrender conditions “even after the two atomic bombs and Soviet entry into the war.” \textsuperscript{26} In addition, Asada maintained that they regarded the atomic bomb as “a golden opportunity given by Heaven for Japan to end the war” and as “a means for the military to save face.” Since the war ended as a result of the atomic bombs, they never found it necessary to take responsibility for leading the country into the war and for causing devastating hardships to the people involved.\textsuperscript{26} Using Japanese primary sources, Asada was very critical of the hard-core militarists who were not to take responsibility for the slow decision-making.

In the meantime, Robert J. Maddox, for instance, quoted Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall as concluding after examining the intercepted cable among the Japanese high officials that they were still making efforts to use the Soviet Union as the mediator and to reach a negotiated peace. Truman also determined that the Japanese peace feelers and the proposed Konoe’s mission to Moscow were their gesture to protract the war in order to gain better terms for ending the war. It was disclosed that even Joseph Grew, who was highly estimated by revisionist historians due to his claim for mitigating the demand for unconditional surrender, acknowledged that the top Japanese leaders sought Soviet assistance and war weariness in America to avoid its defeat.\textsuperscript{27}

Once again, on the basis of recent literature of the subject, it is fair to summarize that the Japanese ruling elite was not able to come up with the consensual agreement among themselves, and had overlooked opportunities to


end the war. It seems to me intriguing to know more about their debates in terms of their war responsibility.

As the present author mentioned in the prior paragraph, Henry L. Stimson maintained in the famous article that the dropping of the atomic bombs had saved more than one million American soldiers without any pre-meditated invasion of the homeland. This figure has been accepted among the American people since it was published in 1947. In the middle of the 1990s, however, as the so-called Enola Gay controversy broke out, this figure became once more the point at issue in terms of justification of the dropping of the atomic bombs. For instance, Barton Bernstein maintained that “there is solid evidence.....that military planners before Hiroshima had placed the number at 46,000 and sometimes as low as about 20,000 American lives.” He regarded the higher numbers of American casualties as exaggerations in order for Truman and his advisors to justify their decision to use the atomic bombs and to save lives of American soldiers. “When Truman approved the order of July 24 to use atomic bombs, he had never received a high-level report suggesting half a million or even a quarter million U.S. dead.”

However, military historian D. M. Giangreco, based on declassified military-related documents, revealed how casualty projections for the invasion of Japan were figured out by U.S. war leaders. According to his explanation, the Joint Planning Staff adopted the “Saipan ratio” in predicting the figure of victims in military operations. This was resulted in the combat in Saipan where “approximately one American killed and several wounded were needed to exterminate several Japanese soldiers.” This formula provided “the basis for the Army and War Department manpower policy for 1945.” Giangreco made it clear that “the statistical possibility of a million casualties, combined with the experience of combat attrition of line infantry units in both Europe and the Pacific, had already prompted the Army and War Department manpower policy for 1945, and thus, the pace for the big jump in Selective Service inductions and expansion of the training base in the U.S.”

Moreover, Giangreco mentioned in another article that Truman had read a memo sent from the former president Herbert Hoover predicting that “the cost to America from an invasion of Japan could run from 500,000 to 1,000,000 lives.” And Truman, who was monitoring the rising casualty figures from Okinawa, was very much worried about the creation of “another Okinawa” in the discussion with the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the Kyushu operation. This meant that Truman’s prediction of the “magnitude of the 28. Bernstein, “A Postwar Myth: 500,000 Lives Saved,” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, (June-July, 1986): 38, 42.
fighting” was very high. Stimson sent a memo to the president informing him that “we shall in my opinion have to go through with an even more bitter finish fight than in Germany. We shall incur the losses incident to such a war and we shall have to leave the Japanese islands ever more thoroughly destroyed than was the case with Germany.” The high-ranking officials shared the common understanding that the invasion of Japan indicated “an even more bitter finish fight than Germany” which “had cost roughly a million American all-causes casualties to defeat the Nazis.” Thus, Giangreco proved that the figure of the casualty estimates in the case of the invasion of Japanese homeland was much higher than Barton J. Bernstein had maintained.  

Giangreco’s contention of the high figure of estimated casualties was based on the method that the American military leaders exercised, and Truman and other advisers understood a dire prospect for the invasion of the homeland. This is a result of the remarkable development of the combination of diplomatic history and military history. It requires historians to have expert and technical knowledge about the subject in order to judge the value of his interpretation.

In the final days before Japan’s surrender, two atomic bombs were dropped on August 6 and 9, and in the interval of the two bombs the Soviet Union declared war on Japan against the latter’s wish for the role of a mediator with the Allied powers. There have been controversies among scholars as to which impact was perceived more important than the other one on the part of the Japanese leaders. In the 1990s, it seems fair to say that the traditional school of scholars tended to emphasize more the impact of the atomic bombing in the Japanese decision-making process. For instance, Robert J. Maddox, quoting statements of high officials including the emperor, maintained that “the use of the atomic bomb had materially hastened V-J Day.” Historian Asada Sadao insisted that the emperor, who had decided to conclude the war in June 1945 at the time of the battle of Okinawa, informed Kido Koichi, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, that he would finish the war immediately right after the Hiroshima bomb. In addition, Asada asserted that the premier Suzuki Kantaro made up his mind to end the war “before he was informed of the Soviet entry into the war on the following day.” [emphasis by Asada] Additionally, in his book dealing with the last days of the Japanese empire, Richard B. Frank concluded that despite his admitting the significance of


the Soviet intervention “the atomic bomb played the more critical role because it undermined the fundamental premise that the United States would have to invade Japan to secure a decision.”

Some scholars, however, insisted that the Soviet entry into the war had more impact on the Japanese ruling elite than the dropping of the atomic bombing. The main advocate of this scholarly group is Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, a professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Hasegawa asserted that “the Soviet invasion had a more important effect on Japan’s decision to surrender.” At the same time, he regarded the emperor’s “sacred decision” as the most important immediate cause for the capitulation which was motivated by “a sense of personal survival and deep responsibility to maintain the imperial house.” Hasegawa’s insistence was totally based on close analysis of testimonies of Japanese war leaders including the emperor which refuted aforementioned interpretations presented by Frank and Asada. For instance, examining Deputy Chief of Staff Kawabe’s diaries, Hasegawa drew the conclusion that “there is no question but that the news of the Soviet attack gave him a much bigger shock than the news of the atomic bomb.” Hasegawa also quoted the imperial rescript on August 17 for the Japanese troops and revealed that the emperor was afraid of “incur[ring] even more damage to ourselves” and “endangering the very foundation of the empire’s existence” i.e. “our glorious kokutai” as a result of the Soviet entry into the war.

As for the contentious issue discussed in the previous paragraph, historian Michael D. Gordin approached from America’s standpoint. According to Gordin, the American decision-makers came to adopt the “shock strategy” in order to get Japan to accept unconditional surrender. The United States found it necessary to give a tremendous shock to the Japanese ruling elite to comply with total capitulation within one year after Germany surrender. In this context, it was the atomic bomb that was available for the United States in carrying out the “shock strategy” most effectively. Besides, by the summer of 1945, strategic bombing had also turned out to be America’s air raid operations by B-29s from Tinian Island. The U.S. leaders additionally considered the Soviet entry into the war as another shock to the Japanese ruling oligarchy which had attempted to use the


country as a reliable mediator. Thus, both the dropping of the atomic bomb and the participation of the Soviet Union in the war contributed eventually to America’s shock strategy, which finally forced the high-level Japanese leaders to accept unconditional surrender.\(^{34}\)

It is hard to decide which element, the atomic bombs or Soviet entry into the war, had a more serious impact on the Japanese oligarchy in their final judgment. In dealing with a question like this, analyzing Japanese documents is essential to make the case. It seems to me that Hasegawa’s scrutiny is more stimulating because he tried to investigate the emperor’s motivation behind his “sacred decision.” No one will be able to know about it, but historical research will be continued.

Here is another topic which has been neglected by scholars among important topics concerning the atomic bomb, i.e. to what extent American decision-makers understood radiation effects on human beings before the decision to drop the atomic bomb. Historian Michael Kort summarized the previous state of studies of the subject as following: “the full impact of its destructive power, especially the extent to which radiation would kill long after the explosion, was not fully understood.”\(^{35}\) Historian Sean L. Malloy, especially investigating documents restored in the Nuclear Testing Archive in Nevada, disclosed that “human and animal studies conducted by scientists and physicians attached to the Manhattan Project during the war generated a great deal of information about the biological effects of nuclear radiation.” Why did this crucial evidence not attract the attention of the decision-makers in deciding to drop the atomic bomb? Malloy pointed out that General Leslie R. Groves in charge of the project had insisted on a “policy of compartmentalization that strictly limited communication between scientists working at the many various Manhattan Project facilities” in the hope to complete the atomic bomb without giving thought on potential after effects of radiation. The members of the Interim Committee were not informed of “lingering and delayed effects on the survivors” of the bomb’s initial radiation. Consequently, though the “immediate and long-term biological effects on victims of the bomb” were predictable, high-level officials such as Truman, Stimson, and Byrnes who involved themselves in the critical decision had little knowledge about the issue even while they were at the Potsdam Conference. Malloy also submitted a counterfactual question: if Truman and his advisers had known about radiation and its aftereffects, “might they have handled the bomb differently?” His answer was that there was a possibility that they might make a different

---


choice about how the bomb was used.\textsuperscript{36}

The question about to what extent the American decision-makers had accurate knowledge about radiation is important especially in appraising the moral aspect of using the atomic bomb. The present author finds it very important to gain more information about this subject with further investigation.

In addition to the conventional controversial aspects of the atomic bombings, there emerged a new approach to the issue of Truman’s decision in the 1990s. Historian Ronald Takaki attempted to explain Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb in terms of his sense of masculinity. Since Truman had been ridiculed as a sissy in his childhood, he disguised himself as a manly character in his behavior. Besides, inheriting the legacy of frontier life where power had been bragged about and highly respected, Truman determined to prove himself a resolute and in-charge executive, taking full responsibility for his post. Reflecting this attitude toward issues in international politics from a masculine perspective, Truman ordered the use of the atomic bomb, which he thought was a symbol of manliness.\textsuperscript{37}

Ronald Takaki did not explain the academic theories behind the so-called psychohistorical perspective, Young-Gun Ko and Jin-Young Kim, scholars of psychohistory, aimed to “identify the relationship between the childhood experiences of Truman and his historical decision to drop the atomic bomb.” The theory behind this approach is based on psychoanalyst Eric H. Erick’s book entitled \textit{Life History and the Historical Moment} published in 1975. They pointed out that Truman’s “vulnerable masculinity” which “originated in the relationship with his dominant mother” had existed under his decision to drop the bombs. “As a symbol of almighty power or absolute masculinity, the atomic bomb might appear to Truman with femiphobia as an oracle that could cure his inferiority feelings.” Moreover, the scholars emphasized that “in Truman’s psychological world the Japanese female, children and old people [who lived in Hiroshima] are associated with his bad self which he unconsciously wished to eradicate.” In the final analysis, it seems to them that his life illustrated a typical example of the politician who “trie[d] to deal with femiphobia through reaction formation.”\textsuperscript{38}

There were some presidents of the United States who were seriously examined from the psychohistorical perspective. It is hard to judge whether there was

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{36} Sean L. Malloy, “‘A Very Pleasant Way to Die’: Radiation Effects and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb against Japan,” \textit{Diplomatic History}, 36, no. 3 (June 2012): 515–545.


\end{flushleft}
certain relationship between upbringing in childhood and behavior in adulthood. Especially when the person in question was a president that possessed strong power, it will be necessary for him to take other elements into consideration whenever he had to make final decisions. Nevertheless, this perspective will enrich our understanding of his decision and actions.

In the final analysis, the author would like to comment about the present state of the historiography of the subject which he has introduced thus far in the paper. It is a remarkable development that a number of new studies have emerged in the past twenty years as governmental, military and private documents started to be declassified in the public archives and be available to scholars. As for the issue of casualty estimates in the case of homeland operations, D. M. Giangreco, using the declassified documents, clarified how military officers figured out the number of war casualties and denied the conventional interpretation which insisted on relatively low figures. Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, examining closely the Japanese documents, asserted that the Soviet entry into the war had more impact on the Japanese decision-makers than the atomic bombs did. Herbert P. Bix also made clear that the Japanese leaders were responsible for the delayed decision to surrender during which the atomic bombs had been used. The controversy concerning individual topics in the use of the atomic bombs may continue among scholars, but the author finds it important and recommendable to analyze the decision-making process in the inner circle of the Japanese leadership by exploring new documents. Especially, the author is also interested in knowing more about how the Japanese ruling leaders tried to end the lost war when the people were suffering from devastated daily lives under severe bombardments and the atomic bombs. It is significant to remember that only the Japanese decision-makers had to determine when and how they accepted unconditional surrender despite tremendous attacks from the Allied powers.

As a result of the examination of the recent historiography of the subject, it is fair to conclude that Stimson’s explanation of why Truman dropped the atomic bombs has been dominant in the community of American scholars. It is a general consensus that the Truman administration dropped the atomic bombs to end the war as quickly as possible with the minimum sacrifice of American soldiers. The interpretation that the atomic bombs forced the Japanese leaders to accept unconditional surrender is one thing, but the contention that the dropping of the atomic bombs was morally justifiable is another thing. It goes without saying that there are some studies touching upon moral complexities and individual agonies in using the atomic bombs. The present author, however, has not discussed moral responsibility of American decision-makers for using the atomic bombs and for opening up Pandora’s box leading to the nuclear race in the future generation. Even after the reasons why the atomic bombs were dropped at the end of the war were made clear, historians will continue to question of the
wisdom of using them against human beings.