

THE ATOMIC BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA:  
A REASONABLE AND JUST DECISION

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ABSTRACT

The judgments of historians regarding the atomic bombing of Hiroshima during World War II can be grouped into two opposing camps: those who believe President Truman made the right choice and those who decry that decision, believing that other options were ignored and the motives presented for dropping the bomb were suspect. Many critics of the atomic bombing also argue that the decision failed to meet the “discrimination” and “proportionality” criteria set forth in Just War Theory (specifically, *jus in bello* or conduct during war) and, therefore, must be deemed an immoral act.

In examining whether the atomic bombing was a reasonable decision, this thesis analyzes the important variables and competing interests that President Truman considered and concludes that the atomic bombing was a sensible and rational choice and, therefore, reasonable. In determining whether the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was a just decision, this thesis examines that fateful decision through the prism of Just War Theory and the Natural Law traditions of the individual’s Right to Life and the state’s Right to Independence and concludes that it was a just decision.

This inquiry uses a qualitative approach to study the available information and interpretations related to the Hiroshima bombing. It compares and contrasts historical records, evidence, and the views of leading historians. It then applies the relevant criteria to the facts to determine the appropriate conclusion.

The detailed review and analysis of the history behind the Hiroshima bombing reveal that President Truman was a prisoner of circumstances that existed in the summer of 1945. The options available to him were distressing and his decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, considering the dire situation, was well within reason and, admirably, proved prescient. As well, this thesis establishes that the moral impermissibility of directly attacking non-combatants is not an absolute rule that must be followed in all cases. That prohibition must be considered in the light of the state's right to defend itself and others against aggression. Seen through this prism, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was morally justified.

This thesis concludes that our continuing possession of nuclear weapons is evidence not only of a world suffering from insecurity, but an acknowledgement that such weapons have important utility, such as for deterrence and defense purposes, and that in extreme circumstances, we must be willing to deploy them.

For Margaret Louise Wilson

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Nearly 65 years after the United States dropped the atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, that fateful decision continues to be one of the most important and controversial events of the past century. There are obvious reasons for this: it was the first time a nuclear weapon was used in war; a hundred thousand people perished in the attack; it purportedly forced Japan to surrender, thereby ending World War II; and it ushered in the era of nuclear deterrence. The Hiroshima bombing serves as a reminder to all of the consequences of nuclear confrontation. With many more nations nowadays possessing nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear confrontation real, the annihilation of millions of people and our way of life are at stake.

Today, lingering unease over how the subject of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima should be addressed resulted in President Obama's trip to Japan last November 2009 to be overshadowed by the controversy surrounding his declining an invitation to visit the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima. Along with many Japanese, peace activists worldwide called for Obama to visit Hiroshima as a way to highlight the President's own call for a world free of nuclear weapons. However, on the eve of the 65th anniversary of the first atomic bombing, no sitting American president has gone to Hiroshima or Nagasaki; similarly, no Japanese prime minister has ever visited or apologized for the surprise attack on

Pearl Harbor while in office (Harden 2009). Indeed, feelings about the Hiroshima bombing in Japan and the U.S. continue to be shrouded in controversy involving nationalism, historical writing and interpretation, and assigning responsibility.

It is for these reasons that an analysis of whether the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was a reasonable and just decision is apropos. For absent a deeper understanding of the events of the time and the factors considered in using the atomic bomb, decision-makers today are liable to make errors in judgment that could have enormous consequences. A well-argued viewpoint, no matter the position taken, provides guidance that may assist decision-makers when they are faced with similar important questions. Even if one may disagree with a particular viewpoint, the arguments raised and the factors considered serve as guideposts that will assist an individual in making a decision deliberately.

With this in mind, the conclusion arrived at here, specifically, that the Hiroshima bombing was a reasonable and just decision, and the lessons learned in this analysis, such as the type of scenarios where the use of nuclear weapons may be permissible, hopefully may serve as a guide to decision-makers in future grave conflicts.

### **A Reasonable Decision**

The judgments of historians and writers regarding the atomic bombing of Hiroshima can be grouped into two opposing camps: those who believe President Truman made the right choice and those who decry that decision, believing that

other options were ignored and the motives presented for dropping the bomb were suspect. In examining whether the atomic bombing was a reasonable decision, this thesis will analyze the important variables and competing interests that President Truman considered and conclude that the atomic bombing was a sensible and rational choice and, therefore, reasonable.

The dictionary definition of the term “reasonable” include sensible, rational, governed by reason in acting or thinking, moderate, and fair (Funk & Wagnall’s, Text ed). Other definitions of reasonable include “of having sound judgment,” “based on good sense,” and “as much as is appropriate” (Webster’s II). To help describe the term, one dictionary entry provided the following example: “a police officer may use reasonable force to gain entry.” Focusing on this example in relation to evicting a renter who is delinquent on paying rent, force that may be deemed reasonable to gain entry presumably include all the strength an individual officer can muster to open a locked door, the use of certain devices such as a crowbar to pry open a window, or a battering ram to enter a blocked entrance. On the other hand, however, an officer using his patrol car to crash into a locked front door to gain entry in this instance may likely be deemed heavy-handed and lacking good sense. Using a car to force entry, on its face, certainly appears not to be an action based on reason and sound judgment because using such heavy force under those circumstances appears to be much more than appropriate. One could argue that using that much force to evict a renter is

illogical because it would likely cause severe damage to the house and possibly physical harm to its occupants. If the aim is eviction of the delinquent occupants so that the house can be rented again to others, doing severe damage to the house defeats the ultimate purpose of having it available for rent.

In other circumstances, however, such as when a house is on fire and lives are in danger, what we deem to be reasonable actions by a police officer or other first responders change. We appreciate the emergency nature of the situation more and align our thinking and judgment accordingly. To save lives, we would probably view an officer ramming his police car into the garage door of a burning house to gain entry to be a reasonable action. The nature of the situation—lives at stake—requires quick and forceful action by the police officer. We make this judgment considering new facts at hand. We do this everyday, that is make decisions, both consequential and inconsequential, based on what we are faced with at that particular moment in time. It is a matter of weighing competing interests and making a judgment, under this or a different circumstance, that we will do one thing or another.

Similarly, our justice system is based on the notion of weighing evidence provided at trial and judging beyond a reasonable doubt whether the defendant is guilty (Feinman 2000, 325-26). Members of a jury are not asked to decide based on absolute certainty but by making reasonable inferences and conclusions. “Our jurisprudence has the ‘reasonable man’ standard” (Krauthammer 2009).

Requiring absolute certainty in criminal trials would be an unreasonable hurdle for the prosecution to meet.

Jury members may come to the deliberations with differing viewpoints, but generally at the end of this process they, as one voice, come to a decision regarding guilt or innocence. Juries weigh the evidence to determine whether a defendant may be guilty of offenses ranging from first- or second-degree homicide, voluntary or involuntary manslaughter, or negligent homicide charges. Each of these charges contains criteria that must be met before a guilty verdict can be rendered. In the same way, judges during sentencing consider factors such as defendant's intent in committing the crime, remorse after having been found guilty, and severity of the crime (Feinman 2000, 326-29). The aim is to ensure that punishment is congruent with the offense committed. Trials conclude daily in our criminal justice system, demonstrating that juries and judges make important decisions based on sound reasoning, supported by a deep analysis of the evidence and facts at hand. They make informed judgments based on the evidence presented. Of course, their judgments are not final but may be appealed to a higher court, typically an appeals court, which is tasked with reviewing such matters. An appeals court generally sustains a jury or judge's verdict unless it is obviously in error. Overturning verdicts are not taken lightly. Deference is generally given to the decisions reached by the judge and jury who were directly involved in the trial itself.

The recent economic recession is another great example. Proposals put forth by policy makers to reverse the economic downturn kept changing in light of the worsening unemployment and overall economic data. The desire for new federal spending, however, was tempered by record deficits facing the economy (Quinn 2009). In the end, the intent was to help as broad a number of people as possible, engendering huge deficits at the expense of future generations who will be faced with record federal debt. This is because, in the realm of politics, decisions made at the highest levels concerning very important questions almost always involve the balancing of competing interests and making a judgment based on the best information available. Absent this laborious process, decisions would seem to be made capriciously and irrationally—descriptions that are more consonant with the absolute, tyrannical rule of Kings centuries ago than the democratic society that we live in today.

In this regard, the circumstances under which President Truman made the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima should be appreciated. That period in history is very complex. Although Japan had lost a string of battles, its leaders resisted surrender and vowed to fight to the bitter end. For Americans, the pressure to end the war as quickly as possible, especially after having achieved victory in Europe, was overwhelming; it meant saving countless lives in a war of attrition against Japanese forces. President Truman, faced with enormous responsibilities, had to weigh important variables and competing interests in

making the momentous decision to bomb Hiroshima. President Truman analyzed the evidence and facts available to him as commander-in-chief and made what most people believed at that time to be the correct choice. The burden of showing that Truman should not have dropped the atomic bomb therefore rests with the contrarians. Similar to an appeals court reviewing a guilty verdict handed down by a jury, absent reliable information or arguments that Truman's bombing of Hiroshima was clearly a supreme error in judgment, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima should stand as a reasonable decision.

### **A Just Decision**

In order to understand whether the Hiroshima bombing was ultimately "just," we must first determine whether that decision was reasonable. This is because a decision that is on its face "unreasonable" would not merit further investigation as to whether it is just. On the other hand, a reasonable decision does not necessarily mean that it is a just decision. The former requires an analysis that typically involves the balancing of competing interests, while decisions to be determined whether they are just involve issues of morality that require a different set of criteria, in this case based on principles of "Just War" Theory and Natural Law tradition. Having taken the position in this thesis that the atomic bombing was a reasonable decision, the discussion necessarily turns on whether it was just.

Many critics of the atomic bombing argue that the decision failed to meet

the “discrimination” and “proportionality” criteria set forth in Just War Theory (*jus in bello*) and, therefore, must be deemed an immoral act. In determining whether the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was a just decision, this thesis will examine that fateful decision through the prism of Just War Theory and the Natural Law tradition of the individual’s Right to Life and the state’s Right to Independence and conclude that it was a just decision.

Just War Theory is based on the notion that a nation’s action in war is “legitimate when it serves morally legitimate purposes” (Amstutz 2005, 110). This tradition sees war making and the prosecution of war as not intrinsically evil but as a recognized instrument in the conduct between nations. The question to be answered in Just War Theory is whether the actions and purposes undertaken during war are morally justifiable. To assist in this endeavor, Just War Theory provides two main parts: “*jus ad bellum*, the justice of going to war, and the *jus in bello*, justice in wartime” (Amstutz 2005, 110). Each part has a set of criteria that must be met for an action to be considered just.

In *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, and Cases in Global Politics*, Professor Mark Amstutz summarizes the elements of *jus ad bellum*:

1. *Just Cause*: The only legitimate justification for war is to deter aggression, to defend against unjust attack, or to right a grievous wrong. . . . Aggression is immoral and gives rise to a just cause to resist by force.
2. *Competent authority*: The use of force is morally permissible only when it is legitimate, that is, authorized by government.
3. *Right intention*: A war is just only if it seeks to restore a just

peace. The goal of war must be to right the evil that justifies war in the first instance.

4. *Limited objectives*: A war is just only if its goals are limited. An unconditional, unlimited war of attrition is morally unacceptable. Additionally, goals and means must be proportionate.

5. *Last resort*: Before a state can legitimately resort to war, it must exhaust all peaceful means.

6. *Reasonable hope of success*: The use of force against an aggressor must have a reasonable chance of success. A war that is unlikely to achieve its limited goals is immoral. (Amstutz 2005, 111)

The criteria under *jus in bello* are:

1. *Discrimination*: Military force must be applied only against the political leadership and military forces of the state. Every effort must be made to discriminate between combatants and noncombatants, soldiers and civilians, to minimize civilian casualties. Direct attacks against civilian targets, such as neighborhoods, hospitals, and schools, are morally impermissible. Indiscriminate destruction of cities is similarly impermissible.

2. *Proportionality*: The destruction inflicted by military forces in war must be proportional to the goals they are seeking to realize. An indiscriminate war of attrition that seeks to eliminate the enemy altogether is not morally justified. The goal should be to use the minimum level of violence to achieve the limited aims of a war. (2005, 111)

Amstutz notes that the discrimination criterion above allows for civilian casualties so long as “they are an unintentional by-product of the intentional targeting of military forces” (2005, 111nb).

Because the Hiroshima bombing falls within the ambit of American political and military conduct during war (*jus in bello*), it is not necessary to analyze the criteria justifying the American declaration of war against Japan (*jus ad bellum*) on December 8, 1941. There is hardly any argument against U.S.

participation in the war, especially since American entry was an act of self-defense in response to the Pearl Harbor attack. Therefore, the second part of this thesis focuses on the discrimination and proportionality criteria in *jus in bello* or war-conduct law.

Analyzing the conduct of a nation during war to determine if it was just is at times much more difficult than judging that its entry in the war was justified or not. This is partly because as the war drags on and casualties of combatant nations multiply, the urge to defeat the enemy by all means necessary also heightens. Each side may begin to portray the other as barbaric, sub-human, and deserving of no leniency. There was plenty of such propaganda between the U.S. and Japan during the war (Takaki 1995, 71-72).

More recently, questions are being raised regarding whether American conduct in the war in Afghanistan is being prosecuted according to Just War Theory. As with American entry in World War II against Japan, there is hardly any doubt that the war on terror against the Taliban and al-Qaeda being waged in Afghanistan is for a just cause. It is the news of innocent civilian casualties of American bombings that concerns the military, general public, and ethicists alike. For instance, in recent speeches, Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasized the importance of limiting innocent casualties: “Each time an errant bomb or a bomb accurately aimed but against the wrong target kills or hurts civilians, we risk setting our strategy back months, if not years” (Jaffe

2010). The U.S. military recognizes the damage that such operations cause and, as a result, compensates the victims' families about \$1,500 for each fatality (Tracy 2007).

The Israeli military campaign against the Hamas government in Gaza last January 2009 also raises concerns regarding the ethics of bombing ostensibly military targets that inevitably cause the deaths of innocent civilians (Witte 2009). Hamas rockets and mortar shells that were launched from Gaza and exploded in Israeli towns precipitated Israel's incursion into Gaza. It is arguable that Israel's reaction to the shelling of its civilian population was an act of self-defense meeting the first part of Just War Theory. Many, however, have questioned whether Israeli bombings and on-the-ground operations in Gaza that caused at least a thousand civilian deaths are morally justified. Gaza's compact geography and the 1.5 million Palestinians crowded in it are factors adding to that grim accounting. Civilian casualties are inevitable when Hamas fighters and Israeli soldiers engage in the streets and alleyways of Gaza's slums. How else is Israel supposed to react and fight? Should it disengage from firing a missile intended for a high-ranking Hamas militant because his office is in a civilian neighborhood? An affirmative answer would mean giving practical immunity Hamas. A negative answer, however, would essentially hand the Israeli military a license to cause untold damage to the civilian population in Gaza.

Some writers have pointed out that blame for the hundreds of Palestinian

deaths, deemed as “collateral damage,” should be placed with the Hamas militants because they intentionally use civilians as a cover against Israeli attacks (Bronner 2009). Others are even more extreme, claiming that since the Palestinians in Gaza elected and continue to support the Hamas government, they are themselves culpable for the actions of Hamas militants, implying that Palestinian civilians may be fair target for Israel (Tavernise 2009). As well, there were a few times when Israel’s government threatened “disproportionate” and “excessive” retaliation to Hamas rocket attacks as a means of deterring further Hamas bombings (Richarz 2009). Is Israel bound by the proportionality criteria under *jus in bello*? If Israel responds proportionately (*i.e.*, tit-for-tat) to Hamas attacks and that strategy fails to stop such attacks, does the proportionality criteria preclude Israel from “upping the ante” by responding more harshly and may be disproportionately in order to convince Hamas to change its aberrant behavior? After all, societies generally use a graduated system of penalties as a deterrent to criminal behavior. For example, petty larceny and assault convictions receive different sentences. As well, a second or third conviction for criminal behavior typically carries harsher punishment. The often cited “third strike and you’re out” law in some states is a prime example. Should Israel be able to use the full force of its military might in order to stop attacks on its civilian population, unbounded by the constraints of *jus in bello*?

These cases show that the issue of determining whether a nation’s actions

comply with the discrimination and proportionality criteria under *jus in bello* is a rather difficult exercise. These are issues that had been debated in the past, are discussed today, and no doubt will be argued in the future. Each situation is different because the facts underlying it are almost always never the same. In many cases, it is a matter of recognizing what is necessary versus excessive. In President Truman's case, a close analysis of the facts and the events preceding the Hiroshima bombing, including carefully studying the arguments of revisionist historians, leads to the conclusion that Truman's fateful decision met the criteria of discrimination and proportionality and, therefore, was just.

## CHAPTER 2: THE LAST YEAR OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nothing exists in a vacuum. Even mundane decisions we make in our everyday lives are generally done for one reason or another. When questioned, we tend to couch our replies by reciting the facts and the situation we were faced with at that time and then rationalize our actions considering those facts. This context is no different for our nation's leaders who shoulder heavy responsibilities and are sometimes called upon to make decisions that change the course of history. Our leaders typically make decisions by considering the situation they face, all the facts at hand, the options available, and the myriad of possibilities and consequences, good and bad, that may result from their actions. In essence, everyone is a creature of the situation he or she confronts; we react to different scenarios differently. Understanding what transpired during the last year of the Pacific War is therefore essential in making sense as to why the Hiroshima bombing happened. This chapter places the Hiroshima bombing in a historical context, thereby allowing readers a better understanding of why certain actions were or were not taken. A review of the important events of the Pacific War follows.

The last year of the Pacific War saw the tide turning against Japan. By July 1944, Japan had lost the battle for Saipan, a tiny island in the Pacific, which is part of the Mariana islands, 1300 miles away from Tokyo. The latter

description is significant because the relative proximity of Tokyo from Saipan was well within the range of American B-29 bomber planes. The term “fire bombing” would soon enter the American lexicon. In the nearly four-week battle for Saipan, American forces there lost 3,000 men, while Japan lost ten-fold, 31,600 soldiers (Winters 2009, 54). The latter number is out of a total of 32,000 Japanese soldiers stationed there (Willmott 2002, 147). In the fighting, American troops witnessed Japanese soldiers commit suicide to avoid capture. Robert B. Sheeks, a marine who fought in Saipan, recalled: “Some of the Japanese troops . . . either blew themselves up by hand grenade, or put a rifle under their chin and pulled the trigger with a toe” (Smith 2002, 187). The historian John Costello notes that countless civilian Japanese men, women, and children living in Saipan also committed mass suicide by hurling themselves from Morubi Bluffs, which are cliffs reaching 800 feet high (1981, 484). Japanese propaganda told them that if they were captured alive, they would be fed to gorillas brought by the Americans (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 135). Believing this and other false propaganda, a total of 22,000 Japanese civilians in Saipan killed themselves rather than be captured (Willmott 2002, 147). The total loss of life in Saipan, an island a mere 13 by 6 mile in area, was more than 50,000 (Costello 1981, 484).

On July 21, 1944, the Americans landed in Guam and then in Tinian three days later (Willmott 2002, 150). In Guam, 3,500 Japanese fighters lost their lives, compared to 1,500 American soldiers. Even when the Japanese soldiers were dug

in and on the defensive, their casualty rates were typically multiples of the American losses. One major reason for such disparity is that in the face of defeat, Japanese soldiers lost their lives in futile, suicidal attacks, “hurling themselves vainly into machine-gun fire,” for instance, rather than surrendering. Tiny though these islands are, they were crucial in serving as launching pads for American bomber planes flown to attack mainland Japan. The Enola Gay, the B-29 bomber that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, flew from Tinian, an island consisting of “flat rolling sugar-cane fields” (Costello 1981, 485-86).

Just a month prior, Japan lost the battle of the Philippine Sea. The American victory there was overwhelming: Japan counted three aircraft carriers and nearly half of its planes destroyed, while the Americans saw no ships lost and only 130 planes destroyed (Winters 2009, 57). So many Japanese planes were lost in one day that American pilots dubbed the battle for the skies: “The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot” (Costello 1981, 480). The American victory in the Philippine Sea and the Marianas made the Japanese positions in the western Pacific vulnerable. It “marked the end of the Pacific war in positional terms” (Willmott 2002, 161). From that point on, the Americans were firmly on the offensive, able to dictate when, where, and how the fighting would occur, whether by air, land, or sea.

October 1944 witnessed the greatest naval battle in history: The Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. At least 282 ships took part and nearly 190,000

sailors on both sides participated (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 143). General Douglas MacArthur's triumphant return to the Philippines was the backdrop of this encounter for the ages. As he had promised the Filipino people after escaping the Japanese onslaught of Corregidor island in 1942, Gen. MacArthur, on October 20, 1944, announced his return by walking on the shores of Leyte. The decisive battle of Leyte Gulf, spanning several days, saw the enormous American naval advantage arrayed against the Japanese fleet. The Japanese Imperial Navy for this effort assembled 7 battleships, 4 carriers, 20 cruisers, and 29 destroyers, along with 150 planes. The U.S. Navy, on the other hand, had an overwhelming force of 12 battleships, 32 carriers, 23 cruisers, 100 destroyers, protected overhead by 1,400 fighter planes. Japan was clearly outmatched that Admiral Onishi, who had assumed command of Japanese Air Fleet, implemented the plan requiring suicide strikes (kamikaze) against American ships. Losing nearly half of her total fighter planes and the best fighter pilots in the battle of the Philippine Sea, Admiral Onishi likely reckoned that the "relatively unskilled pilots" (Costello 1981, 500) he had at his disposal would serve a better purpose by slamming their bomb-laden planes onto American ships. It was probably better to lose such pilots this way rather than being shot down without having done any damage at all to enemy ships or fighter planes. The outcome greatly favored the U.S. The Americans suffered 2,800 deaths, while more than 10,000 Japanese navy men and airmen died in the battle (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 143-44). The American victory was so

decisive that after the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the Japanese Imperial Navy “was reduced to coast guard status and was barely able to perform even that role” (Willmott 2002, 173).

The even smaller island of Iwo Jima, eight square miles of black volcanic soil, was the next major battle that occurred early the following year, from February 19 to March 26, 1945. Iwo Jima lay between Tokyo and Saipan, about 700 miles equidistant from either location. Japan considered Iwo Jima within its inner defense perimeter and was actually part of Tokyo prefecture and therefore of significant value. With the loss of Saipan a few months before, a Japanese victory in Iwo Jima would enable her to continue harassing American bomber planes that take off from Saipan. As well, it would allow Japanese intelligence personnel in Iwo Jima to forward information and provide at least a two-hour warning to authorities in Tokyo about impending American aerial bombings of Japanese cities (Winters 2009, 63).

The aerial bombing of Iwo Jima started months before the actual landing of marines on February 19, 1945. Iwo Jima was garrisoned with 22,000 Japanese soldiers, hiding in intricately built caves that spanned the entire island. The caves in many cases allowed Japanese soldiers to attack by sneaking behind enemy lines. Milo Cumpston, a marine assigned to a demolition squad in Iwo Jima, recalled that “it was only going to be a two-day operation. And I was there for thirty-five days” (Smith 2004, 445). The fighting was heavy, costing 2,000

marines their lives the first day alone (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 201). American seizure of Iwo Jima cost the lives of 6,140 marines, with 24,000 wounded (Winters 2009, 61). As in Saipan, most Japanese soldiers fought to the death, while others, including the Japanese general Kuribayashi Tadamichi, committed suicide. Bill Hastings, another marine, remembered: “They usually choose death to surrender . . . . They usually kill themselves with a bayonet, but we did find a few that hung themselves” (Smith 2004, 457). Out of 22,000 Japanese soldiers in Iwo Jima, only 212 were captured alive (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 201).

One of the saddest chapters of the Pacific War occurred on the night of March 9, 1945 in Tokyo, while the fighting on Iwo Jima was raging. It was a very windy night, with violent gusts of up to 65 miles per hour. In the first chapter of his book, *Downfall*, historian Robert Frank chronicles, through the eyes of survivors, the story of the fire bombing of Tokyo. In great detail, Frank describes Japanese dwellings, primarily made of wood, with thousands packed into one square mile, allowing for at least 100,000 residents to live in that area (1999, 9). Many Tokyo residents worked in manufacturing and factories related to the war effort. Tokyo then was industrial as much as it was commercial. Compared to the type of zoning regulations imposed by urban planning departments nowadays, in Tokyo circa 1945, industrial, commercial, and residential areas flowed into each other seamlessly. Frank explains it as “[e]ach factory was like a tree radiating a web of roots throughout the surrounding living

areas from which it drew both workers and parts” (1999, 7). Historian Michael Bess notes that “the decentralized nature of this mode of production had been specifically devised to thwart American attacks against large factories” (2006, 104).

That night through the early morning hours on March 10th, American B-29s released more than 1600 tons of incendiaries over a target area covering ten square miles. Tokyo was on fire. The fire bombing destroyed more than a quarter million homes and left a million people homeless. More significantly the fire bombing killed at least 100,000 Japanese men, women, and children, a number that is “sometimes challenged as too low,” (Frank 1999, 18) primarily because the intense heat turned flesh into ash and thousands of burned victims were swept out to sea in their attempts to find shelter in the rivers, leaving them uncounted. This was not the first or last attempt at fire bombing Tokyo. In fact, the incendiary attack of Tokyo on April 13, 1945 succeeded in destroying the main research facility of Japan’s atomic bomb program and a later attack put a centrifuging separator in flames (Frank 1999, 253). The official United States Army Air Forces post-war history of the fire bombing of Japanese cities during the last five months of the war claims that the attacks resulted in 310,000 Japanese dead, 412,000 injured, and rendered 9.2 million Japanese homeless (Hastings 2008, 317).

April 1945 brought the U.S. one step closer to its goal of forcing the

surrender of the Japanese empire. The battlefield this time would be Okinawa, which Japan annexed in 1879. Okinawa, an island 67 miles long with an average width of 6 miles, is much larger than Saipan. Native Okinawans are not culturally or racially Japanese. Nonetheless, local Okinawans remained loyal to the Japanese cause, seeing the Americans as foreign invaders (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 203). Okinawa was the next step in the American pursuit of invading Japan via Kyushu, the southern main island. Okinawa lay just south of Kyushu and its seizure would place American troops within 350 miles of the Japanese homeland.

The battle for Okinawa lasted from April 1 to June 22, 1945. The fighting was brutal, leaving 18,140 Americans dead, including 82,000 wounded (Winters 2009, 77). Marine sergeant David Bowman remembered the fighting in Okinawa:

We were close to Naha . . . in kind of a recessed part of the coast, like a small bay. . . . [I]t was about dark when all of a sudden all hell broke loose. Later we found out that there were 350 Japs in boats trying to sneak behind us to make a landing. . . . [W]e hopped to it and my battalion was instrumental in mopping up those Japs, and like I say, there were about 350. (Smith 2004, 151)

The Japanese dead were estimated to be 127,000 (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 209). Including Okinawans, Japanese, British, and Americans, the battle claimed a total of more than 237,000 lives (Winters 2009, 77), 75,000 of them civilians (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 209). Some 7,400 Japanese troops surrendered rather than commit suicide (Willmot 2002, 192). The latter figure, which is comparatively large, may have signaled a better understanding on the part of some Japanese that

in the face of certain defeat, surrender was the more rational, more difficult, and ultimately, more humane choice. The battle for Okinawa ended in the Americans' favor, but no outright celebrations were held (Spector 1985, 240). All who had seen the terrible fighting there—ships lost to kamikaze attacks, flushing of enemy positions via flamethrowers, hand-to-hand combat in underground caves, and survived—appreciated the enormous costs in capturing Okinawa, which size is dwarfed by the main islands of Japan proper. In short, after Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, the Americans were now well aware of the even more tremendous sacrifice necessary to invade Japan.

Sensing the impending American invasion, on April 8, 1945 the Japanese Army issued *Ketsu-Go*, the Decisive Operations Plan. It envisioned an all-out defense of the Japanese homeland, focusing on fortifying the Tokyo area and Kyushu, the likely invasion targets. In defending Kyushu, military planners “envisioned full-scale mobilization of the population to attack the Americans with homemade weapons—pitchforks, shovels, improvised explosives, and whatever else came to hand” (Rotter 2008, 185). *Ketsu-go* also “ordered soldiers to abandon the wounded, not to retreat, to be prepared to fight even with their bare hands, and not to hesitate to kill Japanese residents, women, elderly, and children, who might be used as a shield for the approaching enemy” (Hasegawa 2005, 96). Moreover, *Ketsu-Go* was not merely a plan on paper for by April 1945, “16 divisions had been transferred from Manchuria to the homeland defense”

(Hasegawa 2005, 85). Although Japan by April had lost a series of battles, suffered through the massive fire bombings, and was under attack in Okinawa, enemy forces had not yet set foot on her sacred soil. It would have been inconceivable for Japan to raise the white flag then considering that the Japanese empire continued to hold on to substantial overseas possessions, including Korea and China, and the nearly unlimited supply of soldiers and civilians willing to die for the motherland. As Minister of War Anami was quoted in early May 1945: “Japan is not losing the war, since we have not lost any homeland territory. I object to conducting negotiations on the assumption that we are defeated” (Hasegawa 2005, 73).

*Ketsu-Go* committed nearly 2.9 million soldiers, 292,000 horses, and 27,500 motor vehicles in the defense of Japan (Frank 1999, 85). It also called for a “comprehensive devotion to *tokko* (special attack or suicide) tactics” (Frank 1999, 85) to be used on land. As well, under the National Resistance Program, commanders were given authority to call civilians, able-bodied men and women, to combat. It is plausible therefore that, under mortal threat, nearly all of the Japanese people would be called on to fight. In fact, the Japanese *Diet* (parliament) on June 12, 1945 passed the “Voluntary Soldier Duty” law, which drafted into military service “all males between . . . fifteen and sixty, and able-bodied women between . . . seventeen and forty” (Winters 2009, 94). The civilian fighting force totaled 32 million Japanese people. Anticipating an invasion of

Kyushu, “[Japanese c]ommanders assigned large groups of soldiers and civilian volunteers . . . , asking ‘all able-bodied Japanese, regardless of sex’ to ‘be prepared to sacrifice his . . . life in suicide attacks on enemy . . . forces’” (Zeiler 2004, 177). And from the American military’s first hand knowledge of the fighting spirit of Japanese soldiers, including civilians in Okinawa who fought alongside Japanese soldiers, to witnessing the willingness of Japanese civilians in Saipan to commit mass suicides as directed by the Japanese military propaganda rather than be captured, there was little doubt that in an invasion of Japan they would face millions of Japanese soldiers and tens of millions more civilians who were determined to fight to the death for the honor of defending their home soil. The *Ketsu-Go* directive appeared to be a mere formality.

On April 12, 1945, Vice President Truman took charge after the passing of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). Soon after, President Truman reiterated the American position that the war aim is the unconditional surrender of all Axis Powers, including Japan. Germany surrendered unconditionally on May 8, 1945, allowing the Allies, primarily the U.S. and Great Britain, to focus on defeating Japan. In response to the news of Hitler’s death and Germany’s surrender, Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki in a radio address appealed to his people “to continue fighting the war with the spirit of a kamikaze pilot,” while Japanese Foreign Minister Togo added that Germany’s unconditional surrender would not affect the “Empire’s determination to pursue the war against the United

States and Britain” (Hasegawa 2005, 68). Therefore, even the two individuals who historians count as members of the “peace party” were publicly calling for its citizens to fight to the death by, among other things, imitating the exploits of a kamikaze pilot.

FDR first uttered the phrase “unconditional surrender” during the Casablanca Conference with British Prime Minister Churchill in January 1943. Surrendering unconditionally meant the victor would possess complete authority in its attempt to rehabilitate the losing side. The American people “were overwhelmingly convinced that the failure to reorder German society after World War I was the seed of the second world war in a generation, and they resolved not to make the mistake again” (Frank 1999, 26). The main thrust was postwar reform of Germany and the Axis powers to ensure that “fascism and militarism [would] be uprooted and their societies democratized” (Frank 1999, 27). In Germany’s case, the Allies drew boundaries within Germany to set up their particular administrative sectors. For many Americans, it seemed only fair that the same demand be exacted upon Japan. She was after all the clear aggressor in the Pacific War. There were others, however, who thought that the Japanese situation differed somewhat, one that required a more nuanced approach. They believed that the Japanese would actually fight harder if the demand for unconditional surrender remained Allied policy and without assurances that the Japanese monarchy would be allowed to remain. Some, including Prime Minister

Churchill, thought that some allowances to the policy “might be a means of shortening the war” (Spector 1985, 546). To address this matter, President Truman set up a high-level committee, composed of Secretary of War Stimson, Navy Secretary James Forrestal, and Under-Secretary of State Joseph Grew. The committee returned with a draft surrender demand language calling for the complete surrender of all Japanese forces, occupation of Japan by Allied forces, and hinting at the possibility of retaining the Japanese Imperial Dynasty. President Truman took this draft with him to Potsdam in July.

Meanwhile, planning for the invasion of Japan continued apace. By late May 1945, a mere two and one-half months before the Hiroshima bombing, the plan for the invasion of Japan, called Downfall, was issued (Kort 2007, 123). Downfall had two main successive parts: Olympic, which was the operational plan for invading Kyushu, Japan’s southern island; and Coronet, the operational plan for invading the Tokyo area later on. Olympic was tentatively set for November 1, 1945, with Operation Coronet around March 1, the following spring. The American plan for invading Kyushu involved massive commitments of 766,700 troops, 134,000 vehicles, and nearly 1.5 million tons of material. Olympic required 12 divisions and more than 1,300 ships. Operation Coronet was even more impressive, requiring more than 1 million troops, 190,000 vehicles and more than 2.6 million tons of material (Frank 1999, 118). Downfall, as planned by Gen. MacArthur’s staff, envisioned fighting determined Japanese defenders

and confronting “a fanatically hostile population” (Frank 1999, 118).

The White House meeting on June 18, 1945 called by President Truman discussed in part the casualty estimates for Olympic. Several such estimates were cited for President Truman, ranging from 31,000 during the first 30 days of invasion, to over 268,000 casualties for the length of the operation (Spector 1985, 583). Robert Frank sums up the historical record, noting that “[a] plain reading of the minutes of this meeting discloses that . . . Truman *never* got an unambiguous or unanimous answer to his fundamental question about casualties” (Spector 1985, 144) (emphasis in the original). For instance, George Marshall, the Army chief of staff, felt that the casualty projections tended to be “speculative” (Spector 1985, 147). One reason is because The Joint Chiefs of Staff had not formally recognized any one specific way of projecting casualty rates (Spector 1985, 135). Additionally, former President Herbert Hoover’s memorandum to Truman on May 30, two days after their meeting, urged the abandonment of the unconditional surrender demand on Japan, in part because it would avoid an invasion that would result in one-half to a million American troop deaths (Spector 1985, 133). Nevertheless, President Truman came away from the June 18, 1945 White House meeting assured that the Joint Chiefs of Staff was of one mind in pursuing Olympic and therefore on that day approved the invasion of Kyushu (Spector 1985, 144). As proof that casualty projections in an invasion were much discussed and argued, as late as July 26, eleven days before the Hiroshima

bombing, the Shockley memorandum estimated that an invasion of Japan would cost five to ten million Japanese deaths and between 1.7 to 4 million American casualties, including 400,000 to 800,000 dead (Frank 1999, 340).

### **The Manhattan Project**

Since 1941, scientists and workers numbering more than 120,000 in dispersed areas of the U.S. and Canada had been hard at work on the Manhattan Project, developing the atomic bomb for use against the Axis powers (Zeiler 2004, 181). By late May 1945, work on the Manhattan Project was coming to fruition. General Leslie Groves, who was in charge of the Project, set up an Interim Committee composed of Secretary of War Stimson, Harvard president James Conant, M.I.T. president Karl T. Compton, Secretary of State designate James F. Byrnes, and other prominent individuals to advise President Truman on the use of the yet unproven secret weapon. The Interim Committee reviewed possible alternatives, such as announcing the bombing location, which would have allowed the enemy to clear out the target area. However, in the end, the Committee concluded that “the most desirable target would be a vital plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers’ houses” (Frank 1999, 257). James F. Byrnes provided this recommendation to Truman, to which the latter assented.

There were, however, others who dissented with the manner in which the atomic bomb should be used. For example, a group of scientists working in the

Chicago Metallurgical Laboratory published on June 11, 1945 what later came to be known as the Franck Report, after its leader, James Franck, who was a Nobel Laureate in chemistry. The Franck Report was primarily interested in obtaining international control over atomic weapons after the war. It did not argue against dropping the atomic bomb on Japan (Levine 1995, 162). The group believed that if the U.S. unilaterally used the atomic bomb against Japan, it would be very difficult to convince others who may later possess atomic weapons capability to relinquish control of such weapons to an international body. Therefore, the Franck Report urged that the U.S. demonstrate the use of the bomb for all others to witness on an uninhabited location and then only after a warning is given should the U.S., under United Nations authority, use the atomic bomb against Japan (Frank 1999, 259-60). The scientific panel headed by Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, which was advising the Interim Committee, reviewed the Franck Report's recommendations and, on June 16, 1945, "reported its members did not believe 'a technical demonstration' would have the necessary effect on Japan and that therefore 'we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use'" (Kort 2007, 51-52). The Interim Committee members believed that a faulty demonstration would have catastrophic consequences for the morale of the American public. As well, Japan would likely have treated any ultimatum that may be issued by the Allies demanding unconditional surrender following a faulty demonstration to be unconvincing.

On July 16, 1945, the Trinity test in Alamogordo, New Mexico succeeded in detonating a plutonium bomb with an unprecedented force of at least 18,000 tons of TNT (Kort 2007, 123).

### **Japanese Endgame Maneuverings**

By summer 1945, Japan faced daunting challenges. The successive military losses caused cracks within the government and military. Some, like Ambassador Sato, who was at that time serving in Moscow, urged his government to surrender provided that the Imperial dynasty was allowed to survive. Others, especially in the military, desired to inflict major losses to the Americans in their attack on Kyushu in order to gain better footing in any eventual peace settlement. Their distaste for the Allied demand of unconditional surrender was so great that they were willing to fight to the bitter end. Some attempted to enlist the Soviet Union to mediate an end to the war. Intercepted diplomatic messages between Japanese officials, however, did nothing but confirm for the Americans that Japan was not going to surrender. For example, on July 21, in response to Ambassador Sato's earnest advice to surrender, Foreign Minister Togo dismissed the notion, cabling back: "Even if war drags on and it becomes clear that it will entail much more bloodshed, if the enemy demands unconditional surrender, the whole country, as one man, will pit itself against him in accordance with the Imperial Will" (Costello 1981, 578). Less than a week later, finding the Russians unwilling to mediate between Japan and the U.S., Togo again cabled Sato and

requested that he inform the Russians that Japan “will have no choice but to consider another course of action” (Costello 1981, 578). The Americans took this, along with many intercepts from other Japanese diplomats, that the Japanese government was determined to fight to the end. Compared to Japanese attempts at having the Russians serve as mediators, the Americans’ conclusion regarding Japan’s intention culled from the intercepted cables was grounded in reality. For the Americans, Japanese diplomatic maneuverings was not very credible because during the same period, Japan was reinforcing its military defensive capabilities in Kyushu, having correctly predicted America’s next move (specifically, Olympic). For instance as President Truman was on his way to Europe to attend the Potsdam Conference, he received intelligence reports that Japanese troop levels in Kyushu “had been increased by 2 new divisions and were expecting another 4” (Zeiler 2004, 177). By the time he returned home from Potsdam, “Kyushu’s manpower had climbed to 600,000 personnel, and ULTRA decrypts hinted at even more” (Zeiler 2004, 177).

### **Potsdam Conference and the Ultimatum**

The Potsdam Conference was held outside Berlin from July 16 to August 2, 1945. The last great summit of WWII, the Potsdam Conference intended to address issues surrounding the defeat of Germany, Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, and the endgame in the Pacific War. Soviet intransigence, as evidenced by her reneging on promises made at the Yalta Conference to hold free elections

in Poland and other countries freed from Nazi occupation, was a sore point for the Americans and the British. Prime Minister Churchill was especially alarmed by Soviet “territorial ambitions” (Costello 1981, 580). Soon after the Potsdam Conference began, President Truman was briefed on the successful detonation of the atomic bomb in Alamogordo, New Mexico. The news was a trump card that President Truman held close to his chest. Secretary of State designate James F. Byrnes, however, was much more proactive in his advice, noting to the President that the new weapon “might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war” (Costello 1981, 582). Historians have cited Byrnes’s statement as evidence that the Hiroshima bombing was in good part intended to impress the Russians and gain a favorable position in any future deliberations.

On July 24, President Truman approved the draft plan ordering the bombing of the targets, which “were listed in the sequence Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, and Nagasaki” (Frank 1999, 262). Kyoto, the cultural and traditional capital of Japan, was removed from the target list at the insistence of Secretary of War Stimson, who had traveled in Japan and appreciated the significance of that city to Japan’s culture and history. Nagasaki, unfortunately, took its place. Hiroshima remained the primary target for several reasons; for instance, because the city remained undamaged from fire bombings, Hiroshima provided to the Americans a visual test of how destructive the bomb would be. Also, Hiroshima housed the headquarters of Japan’s Fifth Division and was a “primary port of

embarkation.” Military targets in Hiroshima included the Army Reception center, a large military airport, Army ordnance, clothing, and food depots, several shipyards and ship building companies, the Japan Steel Company, railroad yards, and aircraft factories. Hiroshima’s “ammunitions depot was one of the country’s largest” (Rotter 2008, 194). There were about 43,000 soldiers stationed in Hiroshima, among nearly 290,000 civilians. The ratio of soldiers to civilians “gave Hiroshima the highest density of servicemen to civilians among Japan’s large urban areas” (Frank 1999, 263).

On July 26, the Americans, the British, and the Chinese, who had been fighting Japan, in the Chinese’s case since 1937, issued the Potsdam Declaration (Hastings 2008, 469-70). The draft of the declaration that President Truman took with him to the Conference essentially remained unchanged. The Potsdam Declaration first of all provided Japan the “opportunity to end [the] war.” It reminded Japan that the will of the Allied nations remained steadfast, for there remained a “prodigious” land, sea, and air forces of the Allies, and promised to “strike the final blows upon Japan. . . . until she ceases to resist.” The Declaration cited Germany’s surrender as a rational and humane act and that this should serve “as an example to the people of Japan.” Further, it firmly stated that continued fighting would “mean the inevitable and complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces and . . . the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland.” It therefore urged Japan to take a course different from that imposed by “self-willed

militaristic advisers” and “follow the path of reason.” The Declaration then presented the Allied terms, warning that “[w]e will not deviate from them. There are no alternatives. We shall brook no delay.” The Allied terms of surrender included the elimination of Japanese militarism and war-making capabilities, the imposition of a new order based on “peace, security and justice,” and the occupation of Japan by Allied forces necessary to sustain this new order. It assured Japan that the Allies did not “intend to enslave” or “destroy” the Japanese people, but that war criminals faced prosecution. The Allies insisted that democracy, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights be allowed to flourish in this new order. It also promised the “[e]ventual Japanese participation in world trade relations” and the withdrawal of occupying forces “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.” Finally and most importantly, the Potsdam Declaration again urged Japan to surrender unconditionally and accept the terms therein “now,” and repeated its warning that “[t]he alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction” (Hastings 2008, 469-70).

The Japanese response to the ultimatum was the equivalent of a “no comment” (Hastings 2008, 471). Specifically, because the Potsdam Declaration only reiterated the Allies’ previous demand of unconditional surrender, Prime Minister Suzuki proclaimed that the “government does not think it has serious

value. We can only ignore it. We shall do our utmost to see the war to the bitter end” (Hastings 2008, 471). Prime Minister Suzuki used the term “*mokusatsu*,” which means “to kill with silence” (Levine 1995, 163). The Japanese military, headed by Army Minister Anami, wanted a response openly rejecting the Allied ultimatum (Levine 1995, 163). The Americans meanwhile took the Japanese government’s lack of a positive response as rejection of the Potsdam Declaration. As the New York Times declared on July 30, 1945, “Japan Officially Turns Down Allied Surrender Terms Ultimatum” (Costello 1981, 587). Having ignored its last chance at ending the war, President Truman commented that “[t]here was no alternative now” (Costello 1981, 588). On July 30, President Truman approved the order to use the bomb, writing to Secretary Stimson: “Release when ready but not sooner than August 2” (Costello 1981, 589). Clear skies over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 brought forth once more what Dr. Oppenheimer observed on July 16 at the successful test detonation in Alamogordo, New Mexico: “If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One. . . . I am become Death, Shatterer of Worlds” (Spector 1985, 552). The atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima, killing upwards of 100,000 people.

### **Japanese Surrender**

On August 8, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and began invading Manchuria. The following day, Nagasaki suffered the second atomic bombing in

history. That same day, August 9th, Japan's Supreme Council for Direction of the War reached an impasse on whether to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. War Minister Anami, Army Chief of Staff Umeda, and Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda believed that if "proper anti-aircraft measures were taken," (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 253) Japan could successfully defend against another atomic bombing. Even after the Nagasaki atomic bombing, General Anami resisted surrendering and insisted on "one last great battle on Japanese soil—as demanded by the national honor, as demanded by the honor of the living and the dead" (McCullough 1992, 458). The other three members of the Supreme Council, however, realized that surrendering was the only answer. Emperor Hirohito broke the deadlock, stating that "my people must suffer no longer," (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 253) and Japan must therefore surrender. Upon hearing the American reply repeating the Potsdam Declaration's term that the ultimate form of government in Japan must be decided by the Japanese people, again without explicit guarantees that the monarchy will be retained, members of the Supreme Council and the cabinet vacillated, and some expressed their desire to continue fighting. It was then, on August 14, that Emperor Hirohito again broke the deadlock, ordering the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. At noon, the following day, the Emperor's voice recording announced Japan's surrender by radio, specifically stating as follows:

. . . the enemy had begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the

power of which to so damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in the ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also would lead to the extinction of civilization. How are we to save Our subjects? By accepting the joint [Potsdam] proclamation of the powers. (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 253)

Thus ending World War II.

### CHAPTER 3: THE ORTHODOX AND REVISIONIST VIEWPOINTS

Most historical writings and commentary soon after Japanese surrender believed that the atomic bombing of Japan was the primary reason that ended the war and that there were no other options available; therefore, its use was unquestionably necessary. Americans were weary of the war that had lasted more than three and one-half years on two different fronts. Many thought that the manner in which the Japanese conducted itself during the war was deserving of the punishment and horror inflicted upon it by the atomic bomb. As the argument went, the enemy would have surely used such weapons had it possessed them and, in fact, the Japanese had an atomic bomb research program headed by the brilliant, Dr. Yoshio Nishina (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 246). Therefore, considering that it was the Japanese that dragged the U.S. into war in response to a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor and the well-documented atrocities committed by the Japanese against American soldiers and the conquered local population alike during the war, the Bataan Death March for example, the Japanese were thought of as not particularly deserving of mercy. More importantly, the atomic bomb saved hundreds of thousands of American and Japanese lives by averting a costly invasion of Japan that had no guarantee of forcing a surrender, a point frequently cited by President Truman during and after his term in office. Moreover, by ending the war in August 1945, it freed nations from Japanese subjugation much

sooner, considering that millions had been under Japanese occupation all throughout the war that had its beginnings in July 1937 when Japan invaded China. For instance, in reply to a letter from a University of Chicago professor requesting information as to the circumstances under which the decision was made to drop the atomic bomb, President Truman ended his response by summarizing the arguments for the decision he made, noting that “dropping the bombs ended the war, saved lives, and gave the free nations a chance to face the facts” (Merrill 1995, 526). This was the prevailing or “orthodox” viewpoint at the time.

Later, however, many historians began to question whether President Truman made the right decision in using the atomic bomb. Some decried the decision believing that other options to induce Japan’s surrender were ignored and the motives presented by the prevailing viewpoint were suspect. One of the earliest and most well-known work that presented the alternative or “revisionist” view is Gar Alperovitz’s *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*, published in 1965. In its second expanded edition published in 1994, Gar Alperovitz more confidently links the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima to the events that occurred in Eastern Europe after German capitulation. Poland presented Truman with a difficult dilemma. The agreement made during the Yalta Conference in February 1945 between FDR, Churchill, and Stalin, according to Alperovitz, was vague as to allow the Russians to impose a government in Poland

that was undoubtedly pro-Soviet. Truman, however, insisted that the plain language of the Yalta agreement called for free elections in Poland to determine its post-war government. Sensing that Russia was not amenable to American verbal protestations, high-level officials such as Averell Harriman, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, and General John R. Deane, Chief of the U.S. Military Mission to Moscow, urged a more confrontational approach with the Russians by using “American economic aid . . . to force the Russians to accept American policies, in both the military and the political fields” (Alperovitz 1994, 78). Truman, believing Soviet actions in Poland required a tougher response, agreed with Ambassador Harriman’s recommendations. As a result, American policy focused on the Lend-Lease aid that “had been provided according to Soviet requests and American resources, with very little question raised about supporting evidence for Soviet requirements” (Alperovitz 1994, 83). Truman ordered a sharp cutback on Lend-Lease aid, which greatly affected Soviet wartime economic planning. It was a calculated effort to make the Russians bend to American wishes. Unfortunately, the American effort failed miserably in that Premier Stalin clearly saw the aid cutback as a blatant attempt at coercion. Stalin responded by “rul[ing] out an agreed decision on the Polish question” (Alperovitz 1994, 87). At this point, Stalin knew that the Americans needed Russian participation in the Pacific War and would not risk the relationship over what looked like a done deal in Poland. Stalin, therefore, correctly guessed that the U.S. would retreat and

restore aid.

Alperovitz believes that Stalin's dismissal of the American economic threat was a blow to the Truman administration. Rather than change strategy, however, the Truman administration sought to further increase pressure on the Russians. Many within the administration called for a face-to-face meeting with Stalin in May 1945, another summit so soon after Yalta, to impress upon him personally how Truman placed great importance on free elections in Poland and Eastern Europe in general. They believed that tough personal diplomacy would do the job. Alperovitz, however, claims that Truman, at the urging of close advisors such as Secretary of State-designate James F. Byrnes, took a different tack, delaying such a meeting/showdown until mid-July 1945, sufficient time to see how the new powerful weapon to be tested in Alamogordo, New Mexico would perform, thereby providing Truman with the "mastercard" in dealing with Stalin.

For Alperovitz, the successful atomic testing in Alamogordo gave President Truman new confidence in his approach to the Russians during the Potsdam Conference. So much so that the Potsdam Declaration, which was primarily crafted by the U.S., pointedly excluded the Russians as signatories. According to this view, the U.S. by that time no longer needed Soviet help in forcing a Japanese surrender because it possessed this powerful new weapon. More importantly, Alperovitz theorizes that by having this mastercard, all efforts

to seek other alternatives to dropping the bomb against Japan simply melted away. For example, certain Japanese solicitations for peace were ignored or at least not followed through purposefully. As well, calls for other ways to induce Japanese surrender short of an invasion, such as continued fire bombings and/or a complete naval blockade of Japan were set aside. Lastly, appeals for a negotiated peace with Japan, such as a surrender conditioned on the Emperor being retained were somewhat disregarded. All of these options essentially became subsumed under the overarching goal of “impressing” the Russians by a demonstration of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, thereby making the Russians more “manageable” in Europe (Alperovitz 1994, 290).

Other historians such as John Ray Skates believe that since Japan was already defeated by May 1945, considering that the Imperial Navy served no greater a force than a typical coast guard authority and American planes effectively controlled Japanese skies, a softening of the unconditional surrender demand would have ended the war sooner, thus averting the atomic bombing. In *The Invasion of Japan, Alternative to the Bomb*, published in 1994, Skates asserts that the American insistence on the unconditional surrender of Japan prolonged the Pacific War needlessly. Had the U.S. explicitly allowed for the Emperor to continue to be the head of the Japanese polity, Japan would have surrendered much earlier than August 1945. This point is frequently cited by those who believe that the Japanese peace feelers in Switzerland and Portugal and the

intercepted Japanese diplomatic messages indicating Japanese attempts at a negotiated peace during the summer of 1945 clearly and viably represented the wishes of the Japanese government. Skates claims that “unconditional surrender . . . drove both belligerents to last-ditch military strategies,” with the U.S. planning for an invasion and Japan contemplating “an apocalyptic defense of the homeland” (1994, 252). Realizing the extent of the damage these “last-ditch military strategies” would incur, the U.S. opted for dropping the atomic bomb, hoping to avoid a costly invasion.

In *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*, Dennis D. Wainstock adopts a harsher tone than John Ray Skates, writing that the Allied insistence on unconditional surrender with Germany and Japan “was a policy of revenge,” which negatively impacted American self-interest in the long run. Wainstock argues that had the U.S. pursued a negotiated peace with Japan, allowing for retention of the Emperor, for example, Japan would have surrendered in the spring or early summer of 1945, if not sooner. As with some historians, Wainstock believes that the peace faction within the Japanese government would have been strengthened by American willingness to settle for a conditional surrender and eventually would have outmaneuvered “the more militaristic factions and negotiate[d] a surrender while their industries were still strong” (1996, 131). An earlier surrender obviously would have avoided the heavy loss of life that occurred that summer, including the lives lost in Hiroshima and

Nagasaki. Wainstock adds that by insisting on unconditional surrender with Germany and Japan, which ensured that the fighting continued unnecessarily, much of these two countries' industrial capacities were destroyed. Since the economies of the countries surrounding Germany and those near Japan were very much dependent on them, a power vacuum emerged after the two countries surrendered. Wainstock argues that the Soviet Union deftly filled in this power vacuum, enabling it to have effective control of Eastern Europe and a sphere of influence in China and East Asia.

Then Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew similarly believed that a revision of the unconditional surrender demand by the Allied forces to allow for retaining the Emperor would have strengthened the hand of the peace faction in the Japanese government. Grew understood that the peace faction "had to overcome . . . the complete dominance of the Japanese Army over the Government." The Emperor, according to this viewpoint, "needed all the support he could get" (Grew 1976, 31) from the peace and moderate factions and a conditional surrender would have provided such factions sufficient ammunition to convince the more radical elements of the Japanese government to lay down their arms. Grew concluded that "[i]f surrender could have been brought about in May, 1945, or even in June or July, before the entrance of Soviet Russia into the war and the use of the atomic bomb, the world would have been the gainer" (1976, 32).

One of the best recent works into the reasoning for dropping the atomic bomb is Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan*. More than simply focusing on one specific country's decision-making process, Hasegawa provides a broader picture of the situations faced and decisions made by the U.S., Soviet Union, and Japan during the last few months of the war. He points out that the three countries shared a very strange relationship. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were allies fighting Axis powers that included Germany and Japan. Japan, however, had a neutrality pact with the Soviet Union. This neutrality pact, born of necessity, not affinity, allowed the Soviet Union to focus on fighting Germany, Japan's ally, while it permitted Japan to concentrate on waging war against the Americans, an ally of the Soviet Union. When Japan began to lose successive battles against the U.S., ensuring Soviet neutrality became Japan's highest priority because Japan would not have been able to fight one more formidable foe if Stalin had gone to war against her. Hasegawa notes that the Japanese government around mid-May 1945 attempted to adopt a policy of (1) preventing Soviet entry into the war, (2) attaining its "favorable neutrality," and (3) requesting "its mediation to terminate the war in terms favorable to Japan" (2005, 73). However, the hawkish party of the government led by Army Minister Anami objected to conducting negotiations to end the war because "Japan is not losing the war." Therefore, to avoid a possible deadlock, the government adopted only the first two policies. This, unfortunately,

resulted in the Japanese government terminating all private contacts aimed at possibly obtaining a negotiated peace. Thus such “peace feeler” contacts through the Vatican, Swedish diplomats, and Allen Dulles, the intelligence chief in Bern, Switzerland, ended (Hasegawa 2005, 74).

Hasegawa asserts that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were in a “race” to determine who would have paramount influence in a post-war Asia. The Yalta Conference promised Stalin a piece of the pie, provided the Soviet Union joined the war against Japan soon after German surrender. Stalin and Truman’s relationship, however, began to sour as a result of the former’s heavy-handed actions in Eastern Europe and Poland, and Truman’s insistence that free elections be held in those countries. Stalin, however, was unsure whether the U.S. would abide by its promises if Truman determined that Soviet help in forcing Japan’s surrender was no longer needed. Stalin therefore took the American decision to pointedly exclude the Soviet Union in issuing the Potsdam Declaration as proof that the U.S.-Soviet interests were diverging fast. For Stalin, it was imperative that all measures were taken so that the Soviet Union got into the action against Japan before she surrendered. The transfer of Soviet troops from the European theatre to the Far East was therefore accomplished at “breakneck speed” (Hasegawa 2005, 85). At the same time, the Soviet foreign minister Molotov and officials such as Malik continued to entertain Japanese notions of mediating between the U.S. and Japan thereby lulling the Japanese into believing that the

Soviet Union held the key to a negotiated peace, all the while insisting that the U.S. follow through on its pledge of extracting unconditional surrender terms from Japan. Soviet knowledge of the atomic bomb research, its successful testing, and its use likely meant that the U.S. could possibly win the Pacific War without Soviet help, further emphasizing the importance of getting into the action as soon as possible. Stalin did so by moving up his planned attack a couple of weeks sooner than promised. Hasegawa argues that Japan allowed herself to be fooled into believing that the Soviet Union would help Japan obtain favorable treatment, specifically a conditional surrender, during future negotiations to end the war. Instead, Stalin tore the neutrality pact it had with Japan by declaring war against her on August 8, 1945—two short days after the Hiroshima bombing. Caught completely by surprise and utterly “shocked” at the prospect of fighting on another front, the Japanese government, according to Hasegawa, succumbs to Potsdam’s unconditional surrender terms.

From the American perspective, Hasegawa asserts that Secretary Byrnes was concerned about Japanese overtures to the Soviet Union, believing that the latter may obtain very favorable concessions from Japan by assisting in a negotiated peace at the expense of American interests in the area. Therefore, although the conventional wisdom that Soviet participation in the war would hasten Japan’s surrender was held to be true, high-level officials such as Byrnes were wary of Soviet intentions. For them and also Truman, obtaining Japanese

surrender without Soviet help would have avoided muddying post-war realities as there would have been no reason for the Soviet Union to expect promises made to it at Yalta, since those spoils of war were conditioned on Soviet entry in the Pacific theater. As support for this position, Hasegawa quotes Truman stating: “I was not willing to let Russia reap the fruits of a long and bitter and gallant effort in which she had had no part” (2005, 164). As further support, Hasegawa cites Secretary Byrnes’s memoirs in which he writes:

I must frankly admit that in view of what we knew of Soviet actions in eastern Germany and the violations of the Yalta agreements in Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria, I would have been satisfied had the Russians determined not to enter the war. Notwithstanding Japan’s persistent refusal to surrender unconditionally, I believed the atomic bomb would be successful and would force the Japanese to accept surrender on our terms. (2005, 164)

The U.S. insistence on unconditional surrender, the impending (but unwelcomed) Soviet participation in the war, and availability of the atomic bomb all figured prominently in the race to force Japanese capitulation (Hasegawa 2005, 135-36). Truman and Byrnes figured that the Japanese would reject the Potsdam Declaration, the atomic bomb would then be dropped forcing Japan’s surrender, all before the Soviet Union was able to enter the war; thus relieving the U.S. from having to follow through with promises made to Stalin at Yalta, which included giving the Sakhalin and the Kuriles to the Soviet Union, and thereby preventing Stalin from exercising any dominion in the Far East.

Some historians believe that the U.S. could have exacted Japan’s surrender

by means other than dropping the atomic bomb. For example, they have noted that continued bombing and a blockade of the Japanese islands, although more time-consuming, would have done the job. They typically cite the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey published in 1946, which states:

. . . it seems clear that, even without the atomic bombing attacks, air supremacy over Japan could have exerted sufficient pressure to bring about unconditional surrender and obviate the need for invasion. Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts, and supported by 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 bomb had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated. (Kort 2007, 338)

It is certainly a very tall order to claim that air supremacy over Japan alone could have done the deed without dropping the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the Pacific War. Others, with the distinct benefit of hindsight, take a catch-all approach in arguing that the Hiroshima bombing could have been avoided. For instance, J. Samuel Walker in *Prompt and Utter Destruction* asserts that a combination of continued aerial bombings of Japan, a naval blockade, the Soviet invasion, and the softening of the U.S. insistence on unconditional surrender may have goaded the Japanese to surrender without the U.S. having to invade or use the atomic bomb (2004, 89-90).

Nonetheless, such claims along with others discussed in this chapter cannot be summarily discounted for these are among the more prominent arguments that continue to be raised in support of the position that the atomic

bombing of Japan was unnecessary or that the motives originally given by the administration were indeed suspect. The next chapter attempts to seek a more balanced view in light of what President Truman had to consider at the time. It does so considering that some of the claims above were made after a review of top secret documents from Soviet and Japanese archives, which contained information that were obviously unavailable to the Truman administration at the time important decisions were made and acted upon.

## CHAPTER 4: A REASONABLE DECISION

First, in any war the overriding aim is to secure victory in the least amount of time. Churchill believed that much, writing to FDR: “When we are vexed with other matters, we must remember the supreme value of . . . shortening the whole struggle” (Hastings 2007, 445). Doing so stems the number of casualties on all sides. As Admiral Leahy described it to members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: “It is [President Truman’s] intention to make his decisions on the campaign with the purpose of economizing to the maximum extent possible in the loss of American lives” (Bernstein and Matusow 1966, 5). President Truman was not alone in this sentiment. For instance, Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia wrote to Truman the day after the Hiroshima bombing warning against allowing Japan to be the “beneficiary of a soft peace” (Ferrell 1996, 67) and urged the President to stop dropping leaflets by plane over Japanese cities warning them of impending attacks as the American airmen were putting themselves unnecessarily at risk of being shot down.

The Allies defined victory against Japan as requiring her unconditional surrender. Since Japan dismissed that idea even after suffering enormous casualties in troops and civilians and her war-making capabilities being diminished as a result of battle losses in Midway, Leyte Gulf, Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, President Truman had to consider invading Japan to bring about an

unconditional surrender. As early as April 1945, a Department of Defense study concluded that an “invasion of the Japanese represented the most suitable strategy to accomplish unconditional surrender” (Bernstein and Matusow 1966, 5). General Marshall concurred because he “felt that air power alone was not sufficient to put the Japanese out of the war,” (Bernstein and Matusow 1966, 8) considering that air power by itself was unable to force German surrender. Top officials believed that, in view of the casualty numbers in Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, an invasion of Japan portended Armageddon. As mentioned before, casualty figures involved in wresting those islands from Japanese hands were staggering: in Saipan, 50,000 combatant soldiers and civilians died; Iwo Jima witnessed a total of 28,000 soldiers killed and 24,000 wounded; and far worse, the bloodshed in Okinawa claimed a total of about 237,000 lives (military and civilian). Although the Americans had a three-to-one combat force advantage in Okinawa and still lost 18,000 soldiers, the best estimate at the time, June 1945, was that the advantage in soldier ratio would be nearly reversed in favor of the Japanese in Kyushu—a more than two-to-one numerical edge. The latter ratio did not even include the arming and training of civilians living in Kyushu, who most analysts believed would have fought with zeal in defending their home soil. In fact, by June 12, 1945, 32 million Japanese civilians had been conscripted to military services (Winters 2009, 94).

American military commanders such as Admiral Leahy approximated

200,000 American troops dead and injured in an invasion (Winters 2009, 101); a minimum of a quarter million American casualties according to General Marshall (McCullough 1992, 437). It was Admiral Leahy's comment that casualties in an invasion of Kyushu and Tokyo would be on par with Okinawa, which elicited President Truman's "horror at the possibility that an invasion would amount to another Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other" (Ferrell 1996, 5). Former President Hoover's memorandum prophesizing between one-half to a million American troop deaths as a result of Olympic and Coronet must have weighed heavily in Truman's calculation. As well, then Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard recalled telling Truman on June 21, 1945 that an invasion may result in a million people dead (Maddox 2007, 70). Prime Minister Churchill, writing in 1953, believed that an invasion would have "require[d] the loss of a million American lives and half that number of British—or more if we could get them there" (Churchill 1953, 638). As well, Truman, on his way home from the Potsdam Conference, was provided intelligence reports that the Japanese military had reinforced Kyushu in anticipation of the invasion. But even with a costly victory in Kyushu, there was no guarantee that Japan would capitulate. The prospect of facing Japan's troops totaling 6.3 million, many of whom were in the process of being recalled to Japan from overseas outposts, in a fight to the end on their own terrain was indeed sobering. Added to Admiral Leahy's or General Marshall's approximation of a multiple of two or more in Japanese losses,

military and civilian, the invasion of the Japanese home islands would have been catastrophic.

Karl T. Compton, a member of Interim Committee, in a December 1946 essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, wrote that in an interrogation of a Japanese military officer a week after Japanese capitulation, the officer stated that: “‘We would have kept on fighting until all Japanese were killed, but we would not have been defeated,’ by which he meant that they would not have been disgraced by surrender” (Compton 1946). General Marshall predicted as much, later explaining as follows:

The Japanese had demonstrated in each case they would not surrender and they fight to the death. . . . It was to be expected that resistance in Japan, with their home ties, could be even more severe. . . . So it seemed quite necessary, if we could, to shock them into action. . . . We had to end the war; we had to save American lives. (McCullough 1993, 395)

As Byrnes later wrote, faced with enormous casualties on both sides, “it was certainly essential to end the war as soon as possible and avoid the invasion” (1958, 286). Churchill shared the same sentiments in thinking that the war may end “in one or two violent shocks,” which would give Japan “an excuse which would save their honour and release them from their obligation of being killed to the last fighting man” (1953, 638-39). Not to mention a quicker end to the war meant freedom for millions more who were under Japanese subjugation in East and Southeast Asia, including those who were prisoners of war.

A War Department press release on the day of the Hiroshima bombing

stated that “[i]t is abundantly clear that possession of this weapon by the United States . . . should prove a tremendous aid in the shortening of the war against Japan” (Ferrell 1996, 53). The White House press release that same day reaffirmed the thinking that “[i]t was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam” (Ferrell 1996, 53). Since Japan rejected the ultimatum, the press release further threatened:

. . . a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already made aware. (Ferrell 1996, 50)

These press releases presented the Truman administration’s hope that Japan would surrender after the Hiroshima bombing and spare everyone involved more suffering, further confirming the administration’s thinking all along that the dropping of the atomic bomb was first and foremost intended to end the war and save lives. As Secretary Byrnes remembered, immediately after hearing the news of the Hiroshima bombing while on the return trip from Potsdam, “Mr. Truman told the sailors of the [atomic bombing], and turning to me said, ‘It’s time for us to get home’” (1958, 304).

In one sense, it was simply a matter of weighing casualty numbers: hundreds of thousands dead and injured in an Allied invasion and the resulting Japanese defense of her homeland compared with the destruction of Hiroshima, and choosing the option that would result in the lesser evil. Historian David

McCullough summed up President Truman's thinking on the Hiroshima bombing by noting that when Truman was the presiding judge of Jackson County, Missouri, he had "allowed a crooked contractor to steal \$10,000 in order to forestall the stealing of ten times the amount" (1992, 440). McCullough writes that Judge Truman in essence "permitted evil in order to prevent a larger evil and saw no other choice."

Life and death decisions involving the lives of thousands of soldiers and civilians in war can be compared, on a much smaller scale, to actions taken by medical personnel during emergency medical situations. In triage cases, medical professionals provide life-saving care to those more likely to survive, while withholding efforts from those unlikely to benefit from such care. It is a simple calculation of saving as many lives as possible. As President Truman would later remark: "It occurred to me that a quarter of a million of the flower of our young manhood were worth a couple of Japanese cities, and I think they were and are" (McCullough 1992, 439). Churchill felt the same way: "To avert a vast, indefinite butchery, to bring the war to an end, to give peace to the world, . . . at the cost of a few explosions, seemed, after all our toils and perils, a miracle of deliverance" (1953, 639). Such an antiseptic calculation was purely rational and plainly sensible. From this perspective, it was reasonable to drop the atomic bomb because it avoided further bloodshed.

Second, the U.S. had run out of plausible options, short of an invasion.

Having lost in Midway and Leyte Gulf, the latter the biggest naval battle in history, the Japanese navy was in tatters; its air force, in Okinawa, reduced to suicide missions. By this time Japan no longer controlled her skies, suffering hundreds of thousands of deaths as a result of American B-29 fire bombing runs that devastated 66 Japanese cities (Winters 2009, 74). Nevertheless, Prime Minister Suzuki rejected the Potsdam Declaration and urged the military to fight on, hoping that American losses in Okinawa and the prospect of even more casualties in a land invasion of Japan would convince the Americans to consider a ceasefire and negotiated peace (Hastings 2008, 471). The atomic bomb remained the only credible option of inducing a quick Japanese surrender. Prior to dropping the atomic bomb, the U.S. had raised the ante each step of the way to force Japan's capitulation: from inching closer to the Japanese homeland to fire bombing Japanese cities. This is why societies have graduated penalties for aberrant behavior: serious crimes result in harsher punishment, such as lengthier prison time. Such a system of penalties deters criminal behavior. In Japan's case, choosing to continue the war after being given a chance to surrender required harsher punishment necessary to convince her to change course. Potsdam warned of "utter destruction." Japan dismissed it. It did not make sense to continue on the same well-trodden path of fire bombing that had already burned down scores of Japanese cities and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, with no apparent effect on the Japanese government's determination to fight. And since, as noted

above, the invasion of Japan was the last resort for the Truman administration, reason therefore dictated that the next step in the graduated system of penalties be pursued. That next step was the atomic bomb.

Third, assuming the Soviet plan to enter the Pacific War by August 15, 1945 played a role in the dropping of the atomic bomb, it merely confirmed for Truman the necessity of ending the war quickly. Soviet intransigence and unilateral abrogation of promises made at Yalta regarding free elections in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe were ominous signs that Truman and Churchill could not ignore. In a diary entry on July 25, 1945 during the Potsdam Conference, President Truman did not hide his true feelings about Stalin even to the point of equating him with Hitler: "It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made useful" (Ferrell 1996, 31). Churchill also perceived that trouble would follow if Stalin entered the Pacific War and began to make demands for doing his part in the Japanese surrender. In fact, Stimson, in a memorandum, counseled Truman that the U.S. would have to allow the Soviet Union "at least a token" role in the occupation of Japan if the Soviet army showed "credible participation" in the defeat of Japan (Maddox 93). Essentially, Truman fervently hoped that the atomic bomb would end the war immediately, at least before any meaningful Soviet participation; thus averting the need to satisfy Soviet demands for recompense. The Americans' fear

of Soviet meddling in the occupation of Japan was almost realized when, soon after receiving Japan's peace offer, Soviet foreign minister Molotov demanded a "Soviet veto power over who would be appointed Supreme Commander, and later in the discussion raised the possibility of joint Soviet-American Supreme Command" (Maddox 1995, 140). Only after Ambassador Harriman firmly rejected Molotov's demands, reasoning that the Americans had suffered through four brutal years of war against Japan while the Soviets had only very recently (two days) become involved, did the Soviet back down.

As it turned out in Eastern Europe, Truman and Churchill proved powerless to prevent Soviet domination of that part of the world because Soviet troops were firmly ensconced there after Germany surrendered. In Japan this situation was preventable. Otherwise, Soviet entry in the Pacific War foreshadowed Soviet occupation of parts of Japan and likely even other Asian countries then under Japanese domination. For President Truman, a divided Japan, one part under an indefinite totalitarian occupation similar to what was happening in the Soviet occupied Germany, was unfathomable. To have allowed it meant the betrayal of the memory and sacrifice of all who had perished fighting for freedom. To have acted to prevent an outcome similar to what happened in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe in Japan by ending the war quickly, thus, forestalling Soviet occupation of parts of Japan was not only grounded in reason but also prescient and utterly commendable.

Fourth, all of the advice that reached President Truman approved the use of the atomic bomb. Secretary of State Byrnes, Secretary of War Stimson, Admiral Leahy, and General Marshall, by July-August 1945, understood the gravity of the situation and supported the use of the atomic bomb. Certainly no one in President Truman's inner circle advised him otherwise. Both General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz, the top commanders in the Pacific, favored dropping the atomic bomb. No "high-ranking officer expressed moral objections about the bomb to Truman" (Maddox 1995, 124).

Stimson as early as March 1945 had concluded that "failure to use any means necessary to end the war before an invasion 'deserved punishment'" (Maddox 1995, 119). Stimson chaired the Interim Committee that advised Truman regarding options available for use of the atomic bomb (McCullough 1993, 390). It studied possible non-military uses of the bomb including a demonstration explosion, but in the end advised against it. The Interim Committee recommended that the bomb be dropped on a location in Japan that was a military installation "surrounded by or adjacent to houses" as soon as possible and that no "prior warning [of the nature of the weapon] be given." (Bernstein and Matusow 1966, 10). Efforts were therefore made to provide Truman with third party advice regarding such an important matter. In addition, Truman asked for, and was shown, the results of a poll conducted to determine the views of scientists working on the Manhattan Project, which showed that a

majority “favored the military use of the bomb” (Winters 2009, 201).

Accordingly, President Truman agreed with the Interim Committee’s advice. As well, Truman concurred with Stimson’s view that Kyoto, the historical and cultural capital of Japan, be removed from the target list of cities to be bombed, which indicated considerable deliberation regarding all matters atomic.

Literally, “no one close to Truman was telling him not to use the new weapon” (McCullough 1993, 440). Prime Minister Churchill remembered that “there never was a moment’s discussion as to whether the atomic bomb should be used or not” (1953, 639). Churchill went on to state that:

The historic fact remains and must be judged in the after-time, that the decision whether to use the atomic bomb . . . was never an issue. There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; nor did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise. (1953, 639)

As with Truman, Churchill simply saw its use as resulting in “a speedy end to the Second World War” (1953, 638). As required under the Quebec Agreement, the British, on July 4, 1945, gave formal approval to dropping the atomic bomb on Japan (Maddox 1995, 78). Moreover, an opinion poll conducted in late August 1945 found 85 percent of the American people approved of the decision to use the atomic bomb (Rotter 2008, 235). Similarly, those suffering under the brutal Japanese occupation, such as the local population and prisoners of war alike, would have undoubtedly praised the decision. As historian Max Hastings describes it: “Nowhere was relief at the dropping of the bomb more intense and

heartfelt than in prison camps throughout the Japanese empire” (2008, 479).

Certainly those soldiers from the European front who faced deployment to the Pacific War were elated upon hearing the news about Hiroshima. Paul Fussell, an infantry platoon leader, recalled crying, relieved that “[w]e were going to live. We were going to grow up to adulthood after all” (1981, 29).

There is one common theme underlying all revisionist arguments, which is that the decision to use the atomic bomb was unnecessary. They believe that Japan was essentially defeated after losing a series of battles to the U.S. All the U.S. had to do, according to revisionists, was, in one version or another, revise the Allied demand for Japan’s unconditional surrender and guarantee the survival of the emperor. Had the U.S. done so, Japan would have surrendered by the spring or early summer of 1945, before the atomic bomb became operational. This viewpoint obviously dismisses entirely the tenacity and the willingness of the Japanese soldier to fight and often times die for the cause. No American soldier, after having witnessed the courage of their Japanese counterpart, would have underestimated the latter’s resolve and no one in the Truman administration doubted this. It is reasonable to believe (and indeed very likely) that had the U.S. revised its demand for unconditional surrender, the Japanese government, especially its military, would have interpreted that concession as an unmistakable sign that the U.S. did not have the backbone to carry the fight to the Japanese home islands. Unlike when Germany surrendered, the Allies had yet to set foot

on Japanese home soil. It is improbable that Japan would view such a major concession and surrender. The Japanese reaction to a revision of the demand for her unconditional surrender more likely would have been a hardening of her resolve to continue to fight, believing that the U.S. would be open to more concessions, including no Allied occupation of Japan and no international trial of Japanese government and military leaders for war crimes.

### **Hirohito's War**

It is interesting to note that the revisionists frequently cite the belief that had the U.S. guaranteed Emperor Hirohito's survival, the Japanese government would have surrendered prior to the atomic bombing. This thinking unwittingly places all of the responsibility for ending the Pacific War on the Americans. It was Japan, however, that attacked Pearl Harbor and waged war on her neighbors. Emperor Hirohito blessed Japanese military aggression during the war and, in fact, was present at meetings where crucial military decisions were made, including the Pearl Harbor attack. The Historian Herbert Bix argues that Hirohito "was energetically engaged in wartime policymaking" and "made vital interventions in policy decisions at the top level," including appointing and promoting generals and admirals (Rotter 2008, 181). Except for events after the Hiroshima bombing, there is no evidence that shows the Emperor disagreed with Japanese military thinking during the war. The Emperor either agreed, or acquiesced, to aggressive militarist thinking. For instance, as late as June 9, 1945,

Emperor Hirohito was calling on the Japanese people to “smash the inordinate ambitions of the enemy nations” (Hastings 2008, 444). Hirohito was no fool of the military.

It therefore makes sense that much of the blame for the war itself and, as importantly, responsibility for ending the war should rest on the shoulders of Emperor Hirohito. After leading his nation to near ruin, why was Emperor Hirohito so intent on saving his own skin that he would not surrender until the Allies guaranteed his place in Japanese society? Was Hirohito so full of himself that he believed Japanese society would cease to exist if he vanished from the scene? Emperor Hirohito could have abdicated his throne and installed a pacifist replacement by the spring or early summer 1945; thus saving the institution and averting the Hiroshima bombing. Instead, he was more interested in continuing the war and obtaining better surrender terms. Hirohito therefore placed himself above the interests of his people by remaining emperor, even as a powerless figurehead of the Japanese government as it turned out in the immediate postwar Japan, rather than doing what was right as the supreme leader of the Japanese people and taking responsibility for Japanese aggression during the war and abdicating his position. Undoubtedly, Hirohito, along with the civilian government and the military, carry “overwhelming responsibility for what happened at Hiroshima” (Hastings 2008, 476). Professor Tsuyoshi Hasegawa goes even further in blaming Japanese leaders for refusing to surrender, stating

that they “did not care about civilians; in fact, they were more than willing to sacrifice them to preserve what they cherished most: the *kokutai*,”—the royal prerogatives (2009, 116-17).

As well, Emperor Hirohito only considered surrendering when there was no other plausible option but to surrender. And the atomic bombings were front and center in Hirohito’s mind when he relented:

. . . the enemy had begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to so damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. . . . How are we to save Our subjects? By accepting the joint [Potsdam] proclamation of the powers. (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 253)

An indication of Hirohito’s intent to save his own skin at the expense of the Japanese people was his naked attempt to influence his future stature after the war by insisting “Japan would accept the Potsdam Declaration on the condition that it did not ‘compromise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler’” (Wainstock 1996, 130). Thankfully, the Allies saw the clever ruse and responded that the Emperor’s decisions would be subject to the ultimate authority of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Power.

### **A Reply to Revisionist Viewpoints**

Books have been written countering revisionist historians’ points of view. Revisionists in turn have responded and written articles and books defending their particular thesis. It seems that new interpretations of statements made by decision-makers long ago are used to bolster one particular side or the other. For

seminal events, the writing of history indeed is a never-ending back-and-forth between authors representing a particular side of a story in the often times futile attempt to have the last word. This section does not merely recount what has been written to counter the revisionist viewpoints cited in the previous chapter. It takes a step further by assuming that their side of the story is true and then argues that, even if burdened with such handicap, Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb may still be viewed as within the bounds of reason.

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's assertion that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were in a "race" to determine who would have paramount influence in a post-war Asia appears very plausible. In this scenario, the implication is that the Hiroshima bombing was hurried expecting it would directly result in a Japanese surrender, prior to Soviet entry. Assuming this is true, President Truman's intention in doing so must be analyzed and judged accordingly. Soviet actions in Eastern Europe would have figured prominently in President Truman's decision-making. Truman's intent would have been to obtain Japanese surrender without Soviet help, resolving to exclude Stalin from post-war meddling in Japan. As historian Max Hastings put it succinctly: "European experience suggested that whatever Stalin's armies conquered, they kept" (2008, 446). Faced with this, President Truman was well within reason to drop the atomic bomb to end the war quickly as this would have saved many lives and ended further suffering, but also with the aim of stopping "Soviet expansionism" in Japan and Asia (Hastings 2008, 463).

It is a far more difficult task to assume Gar Alperovitz's thesis that President Truman ordered the atomic bombing of Hiroshima to "impress" the Russians and make them more "manageable" in Europe as factual and judge that the decision to sacrifice Japanese lives in Hiroshima was reasonable. Alperovitz sees President Truman as downright calculating and impolitic. It can be argued, however, that during that time no one in the Truman administration or the scientific community was completely certain the atomic bomb would work in actual battle conditions or that the bomb would be as destructive as it turned out to be. Admiral Leahy thought that the atomic bomb would be a "dud" (Wainstock 1996, 42). Dr. Oppenheimer bet that the Hiroshima bomb would only produce 300 tons of explosive power in real war conditions, although it produced 20,000 tons of TNT in the Alamogordo testing site (Byrnes 1958, 286), and "predicted a death toll of perhaps 20,000" (McCullough 1992, 456). Therefore, it can be assumed that President Truman could have regarded the atomic bomb as a considerable improvement in military weaponry, but not a weapon capable of destroying a major city. As Max Hastings notes: "In [Truman and Stimson's] minds, as in that of Winston Churchill, the new weapon represented simply a massive multiple of the destructive capability of LeMay's B-29s" (2007, 456). If this is the case, then we can judge President Truman's intent to impress the Russians and make them more manageable in Europe accordingly. It is fairly common for nations to project power in order to influence current or future

events. Using a new weapon in war, holding military exercises or a military parade during important national holidays, as the Soviet Union later became famous for, are among the many ways to project muscle. Seen in this light, the Hiroshima bombing can be judged as defensible and within the bounds of reason.

Based on the foregoing arguments, President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was indeed reasonable.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCRIMINATION AND PROPORTIONALITY

Having concluded in the first part of this thesis that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was a reasonable decision, the second part of this thesis discusses the discrimination and proportionality criteria found in *jus in bello* (how war is fought) of Just War Theory and concludes, after an analysis of the facts, including contrary viewpoints, that the Hiroshima bombing was ultimately just.

### **Jus in Bello**

As mentioned before, Just War Theory is based on the belief that a nation's action in war is "legitimate when it serves morally legitimate purposes" (Amstutz 2005, 110). The question to be answered in this analysis is whether the actions and purposes undertaken by President Truman to end the Pacific War are morally justifiable. To assist in this endeavor, Just War Theory provides two main parts: "*jus ad bellum*, the justice of going to war, and the *jus in bello*, justice in wartime" (Amstutz 2005, 110). Each part has a set of criteria that must be met for an action to be deemed morally permissible.

Because the Hiroshima bombing falls within the ambit of American political and military conduct during war (*jus in bello*), it is not necessary to discuss the criteria justifying America's entry in the Pacific War against Japan (*jus ad bellum*). American participation, after all, was an act of self-defense. Therefore, the second part of this thesis focuses on the discrimination and

proportionality criteria, the two necessary parts of *jus in bello*.

### **Discrimination Criterion**

In *Just War*, General Lord Guthrie and Sir Michael Quinlan state that the discrimination criterion:

. . . means that in our conduct of the war we must not deliberately attack the innocent. In this formulation ‘innocent’ means . . . ‘not involved in harming us, or helping to harm us’ . . . By ‘deliberate attack’ is meant attack in which the harm to the innocent is the direct aim of the attack, or essential to achieving its purpose. (2007, 14)

Two important concepts follow from describing the discrimination criterion:

innocents and deliberate attack. Guthrie and Quinlan provide that in war legitimate targets include government and military leaders, soldiers, civilians employed by the military, and also workers involved in the manufacture of armaments (2007, 36). Excluded from these legitimate targets are prisoners of war and innocent civilians, among others. According to National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “[p]lainly, . . . school children, hospital patients, the elderly, the ill, the average industrial worker producing goods not directly related to military purposes, and many others. . . . may never be directly attacked” (1983, 34). They are generally referred to as non-combatants.

With regard to the prohibition against deliberately attacking non-combatants, Professor Amstutz qualifies that the discrimination criterion allows for non-combatant casualties so long as “they are an unintentional by-product of the intentional targeting of military forces.” It is a fact that in war innocent

civilians are injured or killed, deliberately or not. Guthrie and Quinlan distinguish between foreseeing the death of innocent civilians and intending the same. The former may still meet the moral test, while the latter likely fails the test. Innocent civilian casualties “must truly be an unwelcome side-effect” (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007, 38). As another author puts it: “it is precisely when and because military personnel seek to destroy military or war-related targets that they can truly claim not to intend the collateral deaths of ordinary citizens” (Regan 1996, 94).

Further, the discrimination criterion requires warring sides to ensure that injury or death to non-combatants is minimized as much as possible (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007, 39). Michael Walzer describes this requirement as innocent civilians “have a right that ‘due care’ be taken” (1977, 156). For instance:

A soldier must take careful aim *at* his military target and *away from* nonmilitary targets. He can only shoot if he has a reasonably clear shot; he can only attack if a direct attack is possible. He can risk incidental deaths, but he cannot kill civilians simply because he finds them between himself and his enemies. (Walzer 1977, 176) (emphasis in the original)

In requiring that a soldier take into account any collateral damage in his actions and that a decision be made whether a particular action justifies the perceived collateral damage, *jus in bello* thereby adds the proportionality criterion to the equation.

### **Proportionality Criterion**

Guthrie and Quinlan state that the proportionality criterion:

. . . means that we must not take action in which the incidental harm

done is an unreasonably heavy price to incur for the likely military benefit. The harm needs to be weighed particularly in relation to the lives and well-being of innocent people, but it is not confined to them. The lives of our own military personnel need to be brought into account, and sometimes even those of our adversary. The principle of not using more force than is necessary always applies. (2007, 14)

This criterion therefore requires the soldier to assess whether his actions are worth the price of possibly incurring innocent casualties. For example, a soldier who fires his weapon intending to kill a low-ranked enemy soldier whom he sees patrolling a crowded market may likely violate this criterion because placing the lives of innocent civilians at risk would not be worth the military benefit of killing that lowly enemy soldier. Most would judge this scenario differently, however, if an important political figure or military leader were in that soldier's crosshairs. In a bombing situation, such an act "will be morally permissible only if the importance of the military targets equals or outweighs the resulting deaths of ordinary civilians" (Regan 1996, 96). The proportionality criterion requires, in many cases, split-second judgement calls regarding life and death situations and best-guess scenarios. No matter, "[t]here remains no escape . . . from the duty to make honest judgements about proportionality on the best information available, even where uncertainties have to be factored into the judgement" (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007, 41). For Michael Walzer, where paramount decisions have to be made, a political or military leader must be able to reason that he or she "studied the case as closely" as possible, "took the best advice" available, including

analyzing alternatives, and then if that leader's "perception of evil and imminent danger [are] not hysterical or self-serving," then the "wager" must be made (1977, 260).

As well, weapons capable of massive firepower may be used against combatants "to make the battle or war shorter and therefore more 'proportionate'" (Carmola 2005, 96). This is yet another difficult calculation that political and military leaders must make. Such a calculation requires attempting to guess how the enemy will react to an escalation of tactics and weapons and, hence, is fraught with danger. The hope is that the use of immense firepower against the enemy would convince them that there is no other choice but capitulation. This results in an abbreviated conflict and, compared to casualty figures in a prolonged hostility, reduced numbers of dead and injured on all sides. Miscalculations abound in history, however. For example, President Lyndon Johnson's attempt to bomb Vietnam "back into the Stone age," (Whittemore 1992, 59) as General Curtis LeMay urged, hoping to pressure the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table and shorten the war proved disastrous because it is generally thought to have had the opposite effect of stiffening the enemy's resolve. As a result, many now regard the massive aerial bombings of Vietnam as plainly disproportionate.

Judging whether the Hiroshima bombing is both discriminate and proportionate according to *jus in bello* necessarily requires that writers and historians study President Truman's intentions at that critical time in the war.

Many, soon after the bombing and decades later, have judged that decision to be unjustified, falling short of the discrimination and proportionality criteria. The following chapter discusses these views.

## CHAPTER 6: A PROFOUND TRANSGRESSION

On August 10, 1945 the Japanese government wrote to the Swiss legation officially protesting the atomic attacks. It was the only official protest made by any government. It cited violations of Articles 22 and 23 of the Hague Convention Respecting the Law and Customs of War on Land, which banned such weapons as poisonous gas. The Japanese letter of protest regarded the atomic attacks as “surpass[ing] the indiscriminate cruelty of any other existing weapons,” sufficient to be condemned as a crime against humanity (Hasegawa 2009, 130).

A mere two weeks after the Hiroshima bombing, when reports trickled in that about one hundred thousand residents, combatants and non-combatants, may have perished in the bombing, the editors of *Commonweal*, a lay Catholic magazine, saw American victory over Japan as having been “defiled” (1945, 238). The article blasted the purported justification for the Hiroshima bombing, which was to “secure peace” and “save lives” as tantamount to “say[ing] that anything goes” in war. The editors noted that the Allies, in the beginning of WWII, sharply criticized German atrocities in the indiscriminate bombing of Rotterdam and Coventry, proclaiming that the “right of civilians” may not be disregarded. FDR himself condemned the practice, stating that “[t]he ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population . . . has resulted in the maiming

and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women and children . . . and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity” (Hasegawa 2009, 118). The editors of *Commonweal* regarded the Hiroshima bombing as an atrocity on par with German and Japanese inhumanity, and predicted that all involved “will remember with horror the days of their shame.”

Dwight MacDonald, writing on August 20, 1945, also denounced the claimed rationales for the Hiroshima bombing, which were: to end the war, to save lives, and because the Japanese refused to surrender, as “flimsy” (1945, 265). MacDonald noted that “*any* atrocious action, absolutely *any* one, could be excused on such grounds.” He posited a dilemma raised by Dostoevsky’s *Grand Inquisitor*, which is whether it is morally justified to sacrifice an innocent child’s life in exchange for mankind’s “eternal and complete happiness.” In this, MacDonald raised the issue of whether the “ends justify the means.” Essentially, for MacDonald, committing an evil act so that a beneficial result may come cannot be morally justified. Hence, assuming that the Hiroshima bombing did end the war and saved lives, a good end result, it was an immoral act nonetheless because it sacrificed the lives of innocent people.

Father James Martin Gillis, in an essay titled *Nothing But Nihilism*, also pointed out that indiscriminate bombing of cities in order to crush civilian morale is morally impermissible because it violates the principle of not targeting innocent people directly. Gillis, agreeing with Dwight MacDonald, asserted that if

saturation bombing is an evil act, then all that flows from it is tainted and illegitimate. Similarly, for Gillis, “[i]t is not permissible to do evil that good may come” (1945, 280).

Edgar R. Smothers, a Jesuit, wrote in *An Opinion on Hiroshima*, that atomic weapons may only be used if it is “necessary to a just defense, to the exclusion of means which of their nature exceed the limit of a just defense” (1947, 307). Presumably, for Smothers, employing an atomic bomb in retaliation for a similar attack would be permissible. But since the Americans were not under such duress, the Hiroshima bombing, to Smothers, was clearly disproportionate and indiscriminate.

For Mahatma Gandhi, writing in July 1946, “[t]he atom bomb has brought an empty victory to the Allied armies” (1981, 394). He insisted that “[v]iolence cannot be destroyed by counter-violence” and that *Ahimsa* or nonviolence is the only answer to evil. At a later time, Gandhi stated “I regard the employment of the atom bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children as the most diabolical use of science” (1982, 371).

Former President Herbert Hoover, in a September 1945 interview with newspaper editors, stated that “[d]espite any sophistries its major use is not to kill fighting men, but to kill women, children, and civilian men of whole cities as a pressure on governments” (1949, 14), undoubtedly failing the discrimination criteria in *jus in bello*. Many ordinary Americans felt disgust. Some wrote letters

to President Truman protesting the attack on noncombatants; others to the editors of the *New York Times* decrying the Hiroshima bombing as “‘simply mass murder, sheer terrorism’” (Takaki 1995, 143), an evil done to innocent civilians.

Radhabinod Pal, the sole judge in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East who voted to acquit Japanese politicians and military leaders of war crimes, regarded the atomic bombings “as the worst atrocities of the war, comparable with Nazi crimes” (Onishi 2007).

### **The Exception to the Rule**

Michael Walzer, the author of *Just and Unjust War*, however, sees an exception to the general rule that noncombatants may not be directly attacked in war. Walzer posits that in a “supreme emergency,” the laws of war may be overridden and an attack on innocent civilians may be permitted. Supreme emergency, for Walzer, means a situation posing a definite and imminent threat to a nation’s existence. The response to counter that threat must be of the type that the nation’s leaders regard as a means of last resort. Setting aside the rule of discrimination and proportionality in Just War Theory cannot be taken lightly and the exception may only be during a period of supreme emergency.

Walzer cites the first two years of WWII in Europe in which Britain faced imminent danger of being defeated by Germany as an example of a supreme emergency. In response to this dire situation, the British bombed German cities indiscriminately, killing about 300,000, most of them non-combatants, and

seriously injuring another 780,000 (Walzer 1977, 255). Walzer provides the following scenario: The Nazis had no compunction regarding destroying civilian cities as part of their campaign to destroy morale and total domination. Nazism personified evil. Assume that Nazi victory is imminent and that the only possible salvation from certain defeat is to bomb German cities indiscriminately. In this supreme emergency, Walzer asks: “Given the view of Nazism . . . , the issue takes this form: should I wager this determinate crime (the killing of innocent people) against that immeasurable evil (a Nazi triumph)?” (1977, 259-60). Gamble, Walzer demands. For “[t]here is no option; the risk otherwise is too great.” There exist extreme situations “where one might well be required to override the rights of innocent people and shatter the war convention.” As it turned out, evidence suggests that the indiscriminate bombing of German cities early in the war did “direct damage to factories and rail lines” and severely disrupted “the economy in general” causing “German war production . . . to sag noticeably in 1944” (Bess 2006, 100). Further, “[t]he indiscriminate devastation of cities forced the enemy to divert tremendous resources into air defenses, assisting the homeless and wounded, and repairing the damage” (Bess 2006, 106). The gamble paid off.

Walzer, however, does not view the dilemma that confronted the U.S. in the summer of 1945 as a situation comparable to what the British faced when it decided to bomb German cities indiscriminately as discussed above. For Walzer,

the crucial difference between the terror bombing of German cities in the beginning of WWII and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima is that the U.S. at that time did not face the imminent threat of invasion and being subject to the absolute domination of the enemy. Indeed, according to Walzer, the opposite was true: the U.S. threatened Japan with “prompt and utter destruction” and only when the Japanese appeared to ignore the ultimatum and continue fighting, did the U.S. drop the atomic bomb. As well, Walzer sees the Japanese conquest, unlike Nazism, as more the “ordinary sort of military expansion, and all that was morally required was that they be defeated, not that they be conquered or totally overthrown” (1977, 268). In this case, the U.S. controlled the situation in the summer of 1945 and could have negotiated a settlement that was less than the unconditional surrender of Japan; thus avoiding the atomic tragedy. Because the U.S. did not face imminent defeat and subjugation by Japan, there was no supreme emergency that would have permitted the suspension of the war convention and, therefore, the atomic attack on Hiroshima was a profound transgression.

## CHAPTER 7: A JUST DECISION

To place the Hiroshima bombing in perspective, after nearly six years of total war between the Allies and the Axis powers resulting in more than 50 million people dead, the Allied nations hoped that WWII was nearing its end by summer 1945 (Harper 1985, 202). It was President Truman's use of a new weapon of enormously destructive power that arguments about its necessity and justness continue today. No nation comes out of any war unsullied. The American experience near the end of the Pacific War would be no different.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the last century's great Christian theologian, noted that "[t]he political life of man must constantly steer between . . . anarchy [or war] and . . . tyranny" (1969, 14). It is indeed a sad, but true, statement. In relations between states, nations go to war to resist tyranny. Achieving peace, presumably the mid-point in Niebuhr's pendulum, requires force and coercion. It is not for the faint of heart. Unlike a preacher who advocates "turning the other cheek" during Sunday mass or sees the world as it should be, political and military leaders in war must deal with the world as it is. As FDR noted, war is a "dirty business" (Harper 1985, 202). Faced with defeating Japanese militarism and a resurgent Soviet communism bent on domination, the avenues left for Truman to find a way to end the Pacific War were distressing. The choices available for Truman in August 1945 were no different in gravity and ghastliness than the

options that an outgunned American soldier faced during the Battle for Corregidor: either fight to the death, or surrender and suffer as a Japanese prisoner of war. For Truman, the choices were either to invade Japan or drop the atomic bomb. Neither guaranteed a swift end to the war and both had significant drawbacks. As Secretary of War Stimson later stated, in dropping the atomic bomb, we picked the “least abhorrent choice” (Winters 2009, 212). As with the Allied fire bombing of Dresden a few months before German surrender, the Hiroshima bombing at the end of the Pacific War would be no less controversial. Niebuhr summed it well: “We take, and must continue to take, morally hazardous actions to preserve our civilization.” (1952, 5)

### **Proportionality Criterion**

As discussed previously, the principle underlying the proportionality criterion is that a nation at war may not use “more force than is necessary” to achieve a military purpose. The Potsdam Declaration made clear that Truman’s sole purpose was the immediate and unconditional surrender of Japan. With Japan opting to fight on, however, Truman essentially had more convincing to do. The atomic bomb was next in a long series of offensive capabilities, from conventional bombs to the fire bombing of 66 Japanese cities, which had effected no signal of breaking Japan’s will to fight. As mentioned before, the fire bombing of Tokyo during one night in March 1945 killed more than 100,000 people. Overall, the last five months of fire bombings cost 310,000 Japanese lives. In

terms of casualties alone, the Hiroshima bombing represented less than a third of the numbers killed by fire bombings.

President Truman's intent in using the atomic bomb was to "shock" the Japanese political and military leaders into surrendering. He calculated that success would mean ending the war sooner and therefore the costs incurred in terms of dead and injured would be more "proportionate" compared to continued fighting. British Admiral Mountbatten, the head of South East Asia Command fighting in Burma and Singapore, felt that an invasion of Japan would have meant millions of civilians and soldiers killed on all sides because the Japanese "would blow themselves up rather than surrender" (Harper 1985, 207). Truman succeeded in forcing the Japanese to surrender, with Emperor Hirohito citing the new atomic weapon as the reason for accepting the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. Only after acknowledging the effects of the atomic bombings did Hirohito realize that surrendering was the only viable option; otherwise, he believed "the whole nation would be reduced to ashes" (Winters 2009, 218). The atomic bombing was a "miracle of deliverance," according to Churchill (Harper 1985, 12); "God's gift" to the Japanese people, according to Japan's Navy Minister Mitsumasa Yonai (Hastings 2008, 509). The atomic bombings presented a way to "save face;" in other words, to surrender with their honor intact since there was no other meaningful choice. Comparing the costs incurred by the Hiroshima bombing to what that action likely had avoided, it is plainly

sound to judge that the Hiroshima bombing met the proportionality criterion.

### **Discrimination Criterion**

Critics of the Hiroshima bombing argue that it failed to meet the “discrimination” criterion of Just War Theory. As discussed above, this criterion prohibits direct attacks against innocent civilians or non-combatant targets. Just War Theory, however, qualifies this prohibition on direct attacks against noncombatants noting that civilian casualties may be morally permissible so long as the attack was targeted toward military forces and that civilian casualties are an unintended consequence of that action. Dwight MacDonald, James Martin Gillis, and Edgar R. Smothers center their critique on the immorality of justifying the decision to use the atomic bomb by an accounting of the number of lives supposedly saved. They argue that the end result, no matter how worthy, cannot be justified if immoral means are used.

There are two ways of interpreting the “ends cannot justify the means” argument: that the atomic bomb is inherently evil, or the way the atomic bomb was used, *i.e.*, that it directly targeted non-combatants, is immoral. With regard to the initial interpretation, however, there is nothing inherently evil about the atomic bomb. Similar to a handgun, the atomic bomb, as a weapon can be used for evil (*i.e.*, aggression) or good purposes (*i.e.*, for deterrence and defensive objectives). For instance, a murderer may use a handgun to kill, while a police officer rightly carries the same weapon for protection of life and property. The

alternative interpretation, on the other hand, is much more complicated and necessarily requires an analysis of the discrimination criterion. Therefore, to refute the “ends cannot justify the means” critique, one would need to assess whether the Hiroshima bombing essentially was a direct attack on non-combatants.

The American conventional historical wisdom is that President Truman dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima because that city was a prime military target. As mentioned before, Hiroshima was an important ammunition depot for the Japanese army; it also housed the headquarters of Japan’s Fifth Division and important military targets such as a military airport, shipyards, railroad yards, and aircraft factories were located within the city. Among a total population of 290,000, there were 43,000 soldiers stationed in Hiroshima. The ratio between civilians and soldiers in Hiroshima was the highest among cities in Japan. Surely among those dead and injured in the atomic bombing included civilian workers in factories providing goods for the military and who are considered legitimate targets in war. In his diary, Truman wrote that “soldiers and weapons were the target, not women and children” (Ferrell 1996, 31). Assuming that Hiroshima was indeed a valid military target, it can be argued that non-combatants who perished were an “unintentional by-product of the intentional targeting of military forces” (Amstutz 2005, 111nb). Therefore, the Hiroshima bombing would meet the “discrimination” criterion under Just War Theory. Secretary Stimson’s

advice, and Truman's approval, to remove Kyoto, a "target of considerable military importance," (McCullough 1992, 436) from the bombing list for humanitarian and cultural reasons attest to the fact that genuine attempts to discriminate between target cities were made.

Furthermore, it can also be argued that many of the civilians who were counted among the victims of the Hiroshima bombing and who, normally, would have been excluded from being legitimate targets in war, lost the proverbial "umbrella" providing them immunity from direct attack following the enactment of the Voluntary Soldier Duty Law on June 12, 1945. As mentioned before, that law drafted into military service "all males between . . . fifteen and sixty, and able-bodied women between . . . seventeen and forty" (Winters 2009, 94). The "Voluntary" Soldier Duty Law essentially placed civilians into the category of combatants who may be directly attacked. This did not escape the notice of a U.S. Air Force intelligence officer who noted that, with this law, "[t]he entire population of Japan is a proper target" (Hasegawa 2009, 119). The facts are: Truman intended to destroy all military personnel in Hiroshima, some 43,000 soldiers; scores of thousands more civilians in Hiroshima became legitimate targets in war because of the "Voluntary Soldier Duty Law;" about 100,000 died immediately and within days of the bombing. Examining these facts, it is legitimate to assert that Truman would have every reason to assume that a great majority of the intended target were indeed combatants, with a relatively small

ratio of non-combatants (children and the elderly) who may be killed. Non-combatant casualties under this scenario are permissible as they would be regarded as an “unwelcome side effect” and their numbers would have been limited. Therefore, considering that Hiroshima was a valid military target and the number of non-combatant casualties would be much lower, under this analysis, the Hiroshima bombing would clearly meet both the discrimination and proportionality criteria.

However, accepting the American conventional historical thinking that Hiroshima was a valid military target and that civilian casualties were classifiable as collateral damage would be the path of least resistance for the critics’ argument that Truman intended to destroy Hiroshima entirely and cause as much civilian deaths as possible, sufficient to shock the Japanese to surrender, calls for further examination.

### **An Exception to the Rule**

This section assumes that directly attacking innocent civilians was part of Truman’s strategy in the Hiroshima bombing, and argues that, even with such an assumption, the Hiroshima bombing may still be viewed as just.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Michael Walzer provides an exception, if a supreme emergency exists, to the general rule that non-combatants may not be directly attacked. A supreme emergency means a scenario posing a definite and imminent threat to a nation’s existence. By providing this exception,

Walzer recognizes that the rule forbidding direct attacks on non-combatants is not absolute. He therefore disagrees on this important point with the authors cited in the previous chapter, such as Dwight MacDonald and James Martin Gillis, who claim that the end result, no matter how good, can never be morally justified if immoral means are used. For instance, Father Gillis observes with disdain that “Professors of ethics . . . say there is no such thing as Absolute, that is to say, no God; . . . that there is no such thing as Natural Law; that laws are temporary and arbitrary . . . .” Gillis concludes that this is “ethical anarchy,” and if it “prevails, our Christian civilization will dissolve in a gas like the bodies of the 100,000 . . . victims of the first atomic bombing” (1945, 279). Gillis and Edgar Smothers essentially claim that the Natural Law of an individual’s Right to Life is absolute in that the targeting of non-combatants “is . . . to be rejected, whatever may be the alternative.” As well, Gandhi’s non-violence stance reflects an absolutist perspective that is more in harmony with MacDonald and Gillis’s viewpoint than Walzer’s.

The absolutist position above, however, fails to consider the Natural Law Principle of the state’s Right to Independence. By allowing the supreme emergency exception to the prohibition against directly attacking non-combatants, Walzer recognizes the Natural Law Principle of the state’s Right to Independence. Under this principle, a state under attack or under subjugation by another has the right to fight for its survival, or as Professor Francis X. Winters applies it more

fittingly to this matter: “the sovereignty of individual nations renders invalid the Japanese claims of a right to empire” (2009, 234). This is why the U.S. and other nations continue to maintain nuclear arsenals. If the U.S., for example, comes under mortal attack and its survival is at stake, its use of nuclear weapons launched against cities of the enemy state, which will obviously incinerate hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, would be judged proper under such extreme circumstances. Although the U.S. was not under mortal attack by Japan in August 1945 and its survival not directly threatened, an argument can be made that the U.S. in a surrogate sense was asserting the other countries’ Right to Independence in casting off the yoke of Japan’s imperialism. St. Augustine considered this a duty: “the law of love prohibits Christians from killing or wounding others in their own defense, but the law of love itself obliges Christians to come to the aid of others and so justifies the use of force that inflicts harm on malefactors” (Regan 1996, 17). The U.S. had in the past and continues to bear the heavy responsibility of underwriting security and peace worldwide. For example, Japan since after WWII has benefited from the U.S. nuclear security umbrella; so did Europe during the Cold War. More recently, the U.S. and coalition forces went to war against Iraq to defend Kuwait’s Right to Independence. The point is these two Natural Law Principles, the individual’s Right to Life and the state’s Right to Independence, are neither absolute, but are to be weighed against each other depending on circumstances, much like an individual’s right to free speech

and association under the First Amendment must be balanced against the state's right to impose order and security.

As noted in the previous chapter, Walzer criticizes the Hiroshima bombing in part because he sees the Japanese conquest, unlike Nazism, as more the "ordinary sort of military expansion, and all that was morally required was that they be defeated, not that they be conquered or totally overthrown" (1977, 268). Walzer, however, fails to consider the Japanese fighting spirit that was evident in all the battles they fought, including the death wish that kamikaze pilots exhibited during the Pacific War. There is no question that, with their suicidal tendencies, the Japanese would have been more difficult to defeat than the Germans. Professor Winters quotes Associated Press reporter Russell Brines stating that many U.S. soldiers returning from the Pacific War warned that "this is a war of extermination" (Winters 2009, 193). Joseph Grew, the former U.S. ambassador to Tokyo also warned FDR in 1940: "I have lived [in Japan] for ten years. I know the Japanese intimately. The Japanese will not crack. . . . Only by utter physical destruction or utter exhaustion of their men and materials can they be defeated. That is the difference between the Germans and the Japanese" (Winters 2009, 194). It was thus unimaginable that the Japanese would surrender absent an Allied invasion; in fact, the Japanese expected and prepared for it. They had to be thoroughly defeated on its home soil. The enormous cost involved in an invasion forced Truman to find an alternative. Considering all options and their

corresponding sacrifices, Truman dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Gandhi's admonition that non-violence is the only answer to countering evil dismisses the reality that in certain cases, such as when Nazism threatened all of Europe, people must fight to defend themselves. President Obama noted so in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize: "A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies." Non-violence may be "as old as the mountains," but it does not necessarily mean that it should be the rule in all circumstances.

Having established that the moral impermissibility of directly attacking non-combatants and the individual's Right to Life are not absolutes but are to be considered in the light of the state's Right to Independence, and taking into account the options available to Truman, the arguments presented in this thesis tilt toward an understanding that President Truman's use of the atomic bomb was just.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

President Obama, in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize last December 2009, stated that he, as head of state, faces the “world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people.” The president’s speech recognizes the divide that separates the reality of what we confront in this world, war and scarcity, and the ideal, a peaceful and prosperous world, which we strive for. When we face aggression and a just cause exists, war serves as an “instrument . . . in preserving peace.” It is an acknowledgement that leaders must sometimes take actions that can be viewed as counter to what they are trying to achieve: do violence to gain peace. The precepts of Just War Theory serve as a guard against excesses, allowing us to hang on to a sense of morality and our humanity in the heat of battle or even during the rare, extreme circumstance when we are faced with a “supreme emergency” and therefore must take “morally hazardous actions” to defend ourselves and others. The reality, however, is, as President Obama described, “no matter how justified, war promises human tragedy.” We can only hope that those individuals tasked with important decisions involving war and peace have the wisdom to differentiate between what should be done and what must be done, and when the situation requires it, the

courage to do the latter.

It was the desire to understand the human tragedy of Hiroshima that triggered work on this thesis. However, even after judging this tragedy as justified, ambivalence prevails. It is much easier to remain in the comfort of believing that in human relations there are certain lines that are not to be crossed, ideas and principles not to be sacrificed. The uncertainty that follows when we conclude that this may not always be the case is unsettling. Maybe that is the human condition, striving to achieve certainty in our lives but always falling short. Circumstances intrude just as we are ready to plant our feet firmly. The crafting of this thesis proved to be such an exercise—it began with a clear statement, confident that it will be the final word on this matter; it ends, however, with the author having a much deeper appreciation of the difficulties involved in discussing issues of morality in the most extreme of circumstances imaginable. Alas, the only thing absolute is that uncertainty reigns.

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