

The Soviet Factor in Ending the Pacific War

From the Neutrality Pact to Soviet Entry into the War in August 1945

TSUYOSHI HASEGAWA

The Soviet factor in ending the Pacific War has been a neglected subject. Although it has been touched on in the voluminous books and articles on the atomic bomb in American historiography, the discussion has almost exclusively centered on how the Truman administration factored the Soviet Union into its decision to drop the bomb. Left unexplored are the questions of how the USSR was involved in Japan's surrender, what significance the Japanese government attached to the Soviet Union in its foreign and military policy, and how Stalin took the American atomic bomb into consideration in his decision to enter the war against Japan.

This chapter aims to bring the Soviet factor to center stage in the drama of the Pacific War's ending by examining the crucial period from the neutrality pact in April 1941 to the Soviet entry into the war against Japan on August 9, 1945. The process of ending the Pacific War must be examined through the complicated interplays of various actors—Soviet, American, Japanese, and Chinese—and this chapter, although focusing on the Soviet side of the story, attempts to view Stalin's policy in the context of his dealings with Japan, China, and the United States. It argues that although he concluded the neutrality pact with Japan in 1941 to avoid a two-front war in Europe and Asia, he intended to wage war against Japan all along when an opportune moment provided itself. Following the Moscow Foreign Ministers' Conference and the Teheran Conference in 1943, Stalin carefully and methodically took measures to build his case with the Western Allies, and he finally succeeded in obtaining major concessions from President Franklin D. Roosevelt about the territorial and other rewards that would accrue to the USSR for entering the war against

Japan. His objectives were avowedly geopolitical, not ideological, focusing on territorial gains, and control of railways and strategic ports in Manchuria to protect Soviet security against future aggression from Japan. After successfully concluding the Yalta Agreement, Stalin's objective was to join the war against Japan in order to obtain the geopolitical gains promised at Yalta. In other words, for Stalin, the war had to last long enough for the Soviet Union to join it. Nevertheless, he faced four dilemmas in achieving his goal. Although the Soviet government renounced the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in April, it assured the Japanese that the pact was still in force. This assurance was given so that under the cloak of neutrality, the USSR could secretly transport troops and equipment to the Far East in preparation for war. The first dilemma was how long this deception would work before the Japanese discovered Stalin's true intentions and perhaps launched a preemptive attack on the still unprepared Soviet Army. Second, the tactical need to maintain the façade of neutrality created the strategic problem of how to justify the Soviet attack on Japan in violation of the neutrality pact. Third, Stalin feared that in view of the increasing conflict with the United States over Poland and in view of the increasingly anti-Soviet attitude displayed by the new president, Harry S. Truman, who succeeded Roosevelt in April, the United States might renege on the Yalta Agreement and seek to achieve Japan's capitulation unilaterally before the USSR joined the war. Finally, Stalin had to gain China's acceptance of the Yalta terms that violated China's sovereign rights, a precondition set in the Yalta Agreement for Soviet entry into the war.

This chapter argues that in order to solve the first dilemma, Stalin skillfully and successfully manipulated the policy of the Japanese government, for which Soviet neutrality and later the possibility of Soviet mediation to end the war became the top priority. In fact, by April 1945, the Soviet Union occupied the most prominent place in Japan's foreign and military policy. The chapter also argues that to Stalin, the Potsdam Conference provided a crucial arena in which to resolve three other dilemmas. First, he attempted to obtain Truman's commitment to the Yalta Agreement by assuring him that the Soviet Union was prepared to join the war against Japan. Second, after he failed to achieve China's approval of the Yalta terms in the negotiations preceding the Potsdam Conference, he attempted to mobilize the support of the United States to put pressure on the recalcitrant Chinese. Third, and most important, he expected Truman and Churchill to consult him fully on the joint ultimatum to be issued to Japan, which would override the neutrality pact and provide a convenient justification for waging war on Japan. On all three scores, Stalin failed.

The reason for his failure was the atomic bomb. Before Potsdam, Truman

faced his own dilemmas. The first dilemma was how to deal with the Soviet Union. On the one hand, he needed Soviet entry into the war in order to shorten the fighting and reduce the cost in American lives. But, on the other hand, he feared the consequences of Soviet expansion in the Far East, and if possible, he wished to avoid it. The second dilemma was his commitment to the unconditional surrender demand to Japan. In order to shorten the war, especially before the USSR joined it, his advisers recommended, it might be wise to modify the unconditional surrender demand by promising the Japanese that they could retain the monarchical system. But because of the pressure of domestic American public opinion, which was strongly against the Japanese emperor, and, more important, because of his own strong conviction that America's national mission in the Pacific War lay in avenging the humiliation of Pearl Harbor, Truman was not willing to accept this recommendation. The atomic bomb solved these dilemmas. Truman chose not to tell Stalin the whole truth about the atomic bomb and decided to exclude Stalin completely from the deliberations leading to the Potsdam Proclamation, which sought to impose unconditional surrender on Japan. Stalin was totally outmaneuvered by Truman. He belatedly attempted to request an invitation to participate in the Potsdam Proclamation from Truman, but Truman flatly rejected this request.

The result of the Potsdam Conference was a race between the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war. The issue was whether the atomic bomb would compel Japan to surrender before the USSR entered the war or whether Stalin would manage to enter the war before the Japanese surrendered. This chapter argues that after the Potsdam Conference, Stalin attempted to change the date of the Soviet attack on Japan twice, first, right after the Potsdam Conference, and second, after the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The news of the Hiroshima bomb was a great shock to Stalin, who was almost convinced that he had lost the race. But the Japanese attempt to seek Moscow's mediation for peace revived Stalin's hopes. He advanced the date of attack by forty-eight hours, achieving his goal of joining the war just in the nick of time.

Two important issues are outside the scope of this chapter. First, it does not deal with the question of whether Soviet entry into the war or the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki played a more crucial role in Japan's decision to surrender, since this is covered by Chapter 4 in this volume. Second, space does not permit discussion of Soviet military operations in the Kurils, although these operations are important in validating the major argument that this chapter advances: that Stalin's major objective in the war against Japan was to secure the geopolitical gains promised at Yalta.¹

From the Neutrality Pact to the Yalta Agreement

It was strategic calculations by both the Soviet Union and Japan that led to the conclusion of a neutrality pact in April 1941. Moscow needed peace in the Far East in order to avoid a two-front war if Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Japan also needed peace in the north if it wished to move south to exploit the vacuum in Southeast Asia created by World War II. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Japanese government debated whether it should join Germany and attack the Soviet Union or move south at the risk of war with the United States. In July, the government decided to advance south and not to intervene in the Soviet Union "for the time being," but to make secret preparations for war in case the German-Soviet war provided a favorable opportunity.² Japan decided to wait for the ripe persimmon to fall to the ground, as one General Staff officer put it.³ But to prepare for war against the Soviet Union just in case, the Japanese army implemented a large-scale mobilization of troops along the Manchurian border under the guise of "special maneuvers" of the Kwantung Army, doubling its size from 400,000 to 700,000.⁴

In view of the Japanese reinforcements along the Manchurian border, Stalin was forced to maintain a sufficient number of troops in the Far East, while giving the Far Eastern Military District the strict order to refrain from actions that might provoke military action by Japan.⁵ Only when he received reliable information in October that Japan was unlikely to attack the Soviet Union did he send troops from the Far East to the defense of Moscow.⁶ On December 7, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and the Pacific War began. Stalin must have breathed a sigh of relief, since Japan's war against the United States made it unlikely that Japan would attack the Soviet Union.

Immediately after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States requested Soviet participation in the war against Japan, but Foreign Commissar Viacheslav Molotov rejected this request for two reasons. First, with the Soviet Union devoting all its energies to the war against Germany, it could not afford to divert any effort and resources to a war against Japan. Second, the Soviet Union was bound by the neutrality pact with Japan.⁷ This did not mean that Stalin did not harbor any intention to wage war against Japan at this time. In fact, when British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden came to Moscow only ten days after Molotov's rejection, Stalin told Eden that sooner or later the Soviet Union would join the war against Japan. But the best way to enter the war against Japan would be to induce Japan to violate the neutrality pact.⁸ Although Stalin made no concrete plans at this time, it is important to note that from the very beginning of the Pacific War, Stalin's intention was to join the

war against Japan. Furthermore, it bears remembering that Stalin was already concerned with the potential problem of reconciling the neutrality pact with the war against Japan.

Throughout 1942, Tokyo carefully monitored developments in the German-Soviet war to see if an opportune moment might arise for Japan to attack the Soviet Union. But the persimmon never fully ripened. Japan's policy remained to "maintain tranquility" in the north, and Tokyo rejected the German request to join the war against the Soviet Union.⁹ Already in the second half of 1942, the tide of military fortunes had begun to turn against Japan, which lost the battle of Midway in June 1942, and the battle of Guadalcanal in February 1943. From this time on, Japan could no longer afford to wait for a propitious moment to attack the Soviet Union. The positions of the Soviet Union and Japan had reversed. Japan now needed Soviet neutrality more than the USSR needed Japan's. Now it was Stalin's turn to look for the ripe persimmon to fall to the ground.¹⁰

While Tokyo was interested in enhancing its relations with the Soviet Union in 1943, the Moscow's approach to Japan became noticeably cooler, and Soviet relations with the United States and Britain improved by a few notches.¹¹ At the Foreign Ministers' Conference at Moscow in October 1943 and at the Big Three Conference at Teheran in November, Stalin promised to enter the war in the Pacific after the Germans had been defeated in Europe, in return for the Western Allies' promise to open a second front.¹² He made it clear that he wanted various "desiderata" in return for Soviet entry into the war, but at this time he did not specify what they were. It is possible to speculate, however, that in private conversation with Roosevelt, he revealed roughly what he wished to obtain, though there is no record of this. In January 1944, Roosevelt explained at the Pacific War Council that he had agreed to grant to Stalin what he was to give later at Yalta.¹³ It is important to note that the objectives Stalin revealed to Roosevelt were purely geostrategic gains, not ideological ones, something that Roosevelt found it easy to accept.

Stalin's promise to enter the war against Japan was closely connected with his bargaining to extract concessions from the Americans and the British on the opening of the second front. But it was not merely a negotiating ploy. He had already secretly begun preparing for the war against Japan. As soon as the victory of the battle of Stalingrad became certain in August 1943, the State Committee of Defense ordered the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) to construct a railway line between Komsomolsk-na-Amure to Sovetskaia Gavan as its top priority project.¹⁴ Stalin thus laid the first foundations for massive transportation of troops and equipment to the Far East. But if he secretly initiated preparations for the war against Japan, he kept his

intentions close to his chest, confiding the secret merely to a few key Politburo members such as Molotov and the NKVD chief, Lavrentii Beria.¹⁵

During 1944, two important reports on Soviet policy toward Japan were written by Ivan Maiskii, former ambassador to Britain, and Iakov Malik, Soviet ambassador to Japan. Maiskii advocated that the USSR's concern in the postwar world should be above all its security, and that for that purpose, the Soviet government should obtain southern Sakhalin and the Kurils. More important was Malik's 73-page report. Malik argued that Japan's defeat was only a matter of time, and that the Soviet Union should act before the United States and Britain dismembered the Japanese empire. According to Malik, the Soviet objectives should be to secure passage to the Pacific by occupying strategic points such as Manchuria, Korea, Tsushima, and the Kurils. He then made twenty-seven specific proposals, which served as the basis for the Yalta Agreement.¹⁶

The reports by Maiskii and Malik indicate two important points that characterized the fundamental nature of Soviet foreign policy toward Japan during the war. First, the tenor of the reports was overwhelmingly geostrategic rather than ideological. In fact, it appears that both Molotov and Stalin rejected a stridently ideological criticism of Malik's report by Deputy Foreign Commissar Solomon Lozovskii, who charged that it was devoid of any analysis of class struggle in Japan. Second, both Maiskii and Malik believed that the USSR's territorial demands should be based on Soviet security requirements that went far beyond historical legitimacy, enunciated as the Allied war objectives in the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo Declaration. It is important to note that Stalin's objectives were not merely the Soviet dictator's wild plan, but were widely shared by the Soviet foreign policy elite. There was nonetheless an important difference between Maiskii and Malik, on the one hand, and Stalin, on the other. Both Maiskii and Malik thought that the Soviet Union would be able to obtain these gains without participating in the war. But Stalin knew that without waging war on Japan, the Soviet Union would never be able to secure these gains. Stalin never thought it possible to obtain these gains through a peace conference, as these foreign policy advisers had advocated.

While his diplomats believed that Moscow could stand to gain by maintaining neutrality, Stalin was thus secretly planning a war against Japan. In the summer of 1944, he recalled Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevskii to the Kremlin from the Belorussian front and told him that he intended to appoint him commander of the Far Eastern Front for the war against Japan. In September, Stalin instructed the General Staff to conduct a detailed study as to the number of troops, weapons and equipment, logistical support, points of concentration, and possible operational plans in the war against the Japanese forces in Manchuria.¹⁷

Approximately at the same time, American military planners had mapped out the plan for invasion of Japan. Overcoming disagreements as to the best methods to achieve Japan's capitulation among the services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a two-stage invasion of Japan, first Kyūshū and then a decisive invasion of the Kantō Plain. In that plan, the JCS envisaged collaboration with the Soviet Union as an essential prerequisite. Before the U.S. forces invaded Kyūshū, it was deemed absolutely essential to pin down the Japanese forces in Manchuria and North China. For this purpose, the USSR would have to enter the war against Japan before the United States launched the Kyūshū invasion. Nevertheless, the Soviet military specialists remained exceedingly reluctant to provide the American military planners with necessary information. As far as Stalin was concerned, collaboration with the United States was essential to secure military supplies through Lend-Lease, but he did not want to give the Japanese any opportunity to learn about the Soviet intention, fearing that this would give them a pretext to launch a preemptive attack on the Soviet Union. Thus, when the Combined Chiefs approved the overall strategy for the defeat of Japan at the Quebec Conference in September 1944, they had no choice but to proceed without counting on Soviet participation in the war.¹⁸ Divergences between the United States and the Soviet Union on their respective strategic needs for collaboration became more and more pronounced as the more concrete operations plans were mapped out on both sides.

After the fall of Saipan in July 1944, the Tōjō Hideki government was finally forced to resign, and the Koiso Kuniaki government was formed. As the military situation worsened day by day, the importance Japan attached to the Soviet Union increased proportionally. In September, the government resolved to seek to maintain Soviet neutrality and, if possible, to elevate Soviet-Japanese relations to a higher level. It also attempted to mediate a peace between the Soviet Union and Germany. Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru decided to send a special envoy to Moscow and Berlin to achieve these goals.¹⁹

It is interesting to point out the degree of concessions that the Japanese government was willing to make to achieve its policy toward the Soviet Union. It was willing to allow Soviet ships to pass through the Tsugaru Strait and to abolish the Soviet-Japanese Basic Agreement of 1925 as well as the Anti-Comintern Pact and the Tripartite Pact. Japan was thus prepared to abandon its alliance with Germany. Furthermore, it was prepared to accept Soviet activities in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, give up the coveted Chinese Eastern Railway, and return southern Sakhalin and the northern Kurils to the Soviet Union. The list of concessions indicates that Japan was willing to make drastic concessions, giving up vital interests in Manchuria and sacrificing territories gained by the St. Petersburg Treaty of 1875 and the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905 after the Russo-Japanese War. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether this list

would have satisfied Stalin's voracious appetite. The list said nothing about the South Manchurian Railway, Dairen (Dalian), and Port Arthur. Neither Korea nor the southern Kurils were included. Perhaps the Japanese government still clung to possession of Korea as vital to its interests. As for the southern Kurils, it never occurred to it that Moscow would be bold enough to claim what the Japanese considered to be intrinsically Japanese territory. The Japanese government proceeded on the assumption that the Soviet demand for territories would be limited to those that they could claim on grounds of historical legitimacy, without realizing that the Soviet foreign policy elite were claiming them on the basis of Soviet security requirements.²⁰

Not surprisingly, Molotov flatly rejected Japan's idea of sending a special envoy. He explained that Soviet-Japanese relations remained firmly based on the neutrality pact. Besides, receiving an envoy might wrongly signal to the USSR's allies that it was committed to a separate peace with Japan at a time when Stalin was conducting a delicate maneuver by which to extract maximum concessions from the United States in return for his promise to enter the war against Japan.²¹ As far as Stalin was concerned, the time to engage in real bargaining with Japan had passed. Negotiations with Japan were useful only to prolong the war. Despite the existence of the neutrality pact, the Soviet Union was definitely "leaning to one side," to use Mao Zedong's famous phrase from a later period.

But the Allied differences had to be adjusted. In September, Stalin raised a question about the Allied decision at Quebec. Obviously disturbed by the Allied military plan, which did not mention Soviet participation in the war, Stalin asked if the United States was still interested in Soviet entry into the war, bluffing that if that was the American intention, it would be fine with the Soviet Union. The U.S. ambassador in Moscow, W. Averell Harriman, hastened to disabuse him of any such misconception. He was eager to please Stalin by confirming the continuing commitment to Soviet entry into the war.²² Stalin was clearly gambling on the American need to secure Soviet entry into the war to extract maximum concessions from the Americans.

In October, Stalin told Harriman that he could not give a definite date for the Soviet attack on Japan but said that "planning should begin at once." He also requested "food, and fuel for aircraft and motor transport, sufficient to constitute a two to three months' reserve," indicating that he envisaged a short operation. But he was still reticent about his price for entering the war, although he made it clear that "consideration would have to be given to certain political aspects."²³

On October 15, Stalin held another meeting devoted to the Far Eastern theater with military representatives from the Soviet Union, the United States,

and Britain. For the first time, General Aleksei Antonov, chief of the Soviet General Staff, gave a detailed explanation of the Soviet operational plan in the Far East, describing where Manchuria would be invaded, how many Japanese divisions there were in Manchuria and North China, and how many divisions Moscow expected to dispatch to the Far East. He revealed that at present the USSR had thirty divisions in the Far East, but that to obtain a margin of superiority against the Japanese forces, thirty additional divisions would have to be added. Stalin said that for the operation against Japan, the USSR would need stockpiles of food, fuel, rails, and railway stock—essential items that only the United States could supply by sea. Harriman was quick to oblige such requests. Finally, Stalin talked about “political consideration” for Soviet entry into the war against Japan, but did not reveal what this political consideration was at this time.²⁴

While he was maneuvering to gain the maximum concessions from the United States, Stalin began a propaganda campaign to prepare the USSR for the impending war against Japan. In his speech on the anniversary of the October Revolution on November 7, he raised the eyebrows of the audience, including the Japanese, by identifying Japan as an aggressor and comparing its attack on Pearl Harbor with the Nazis’ invasion of the Soviet Union. A book on the siege of Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War was published and favorably reviewed in the Soviet press.²⁵

Stalin correctly believed that he could extract concessions from the United States by promising to enter the war against Japan. In a study of the Soviet participation in the war against Japan completed in November 1944, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that “Russian entry at the earliest possible date” was desirable, considering Soviet military action essential, not only to pin down Japanese forces in Manchuria and North China, but also “to interdict lines of communication between Japan and Mainland Asia.”²⁶

Finally, on December 14, Stalin named the price for Soviet entry. Harriman asked a question about the “political considerations” that Stalin had referred to previously for Soviet participation in the war. Stalin brought out a map from the next room and said that southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands should be returned to the Soviet Union. It should be noted here that Stalin was lumping together the Kurils, which Japan had peacefully acquired from Russia in 1875 in exchange for southern Sakhalin, which Japan had obtained after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. He justified the claim to southern Sakhalin and the Kurils in terms of the Soviet right to have access to the Pacific Ocean. Stalin then said that the Soviet Union desired leases on the port facilities of Dairen and Port Arthur, the Chinese Eastern Railway, and the South Manchurian Railway. Finally, he demanded recognition of the status quo in Outer Mongolia. Stalin’s

gigantic ambitions were now fully revealed. His demand for the Kurils clearly contradicted the principle of territorial integrity enunciated by the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo Declaration. His avaricious claims to the railways and ports in Manchuria violated the sovereign rights of China, a major ally of the United States and Britain. But the important fact is that Harriman was not surprised by Stalin's demands, at least at this time. The only concern that the American ambassador expressed was that Dairen should become an international port rather than the port facilities being leased to the Soviet Union. Harriman was more interested in securing the port for U.S. commercial interests than he was concerned with China's sovereign rights. The high-sounding principles in the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo Declaration could be thrown out of the window, as long as the pressing strategic need to secure Soviet entry into the war was assured.²⁷

The Yalta Agreement

In February 1945, the Big Three met at Yalta. Roosevelt and Stalin had an unofficial discussion on the Far Eastern question on February 8, during which Stalin presented the demands outlined in his conversation with Harriman. It took Roosevelt merely fifteen minutes to accept them. The Secret Protocol, or Yalta Agreement, that came out of this brief fifteen-minute talk became the foundation of U.S.-Soviet relations in their war against Japan. It stipulated that in return for Soviet entry into the war against Japan on the side of the Western Allies "in two or three months," the status of Outer Mongolia would be preserved; southern Sakhalin would be returned to the Soviet Union; Dairen would be internationalized, "with the preeminent interests of the Soviet Union in this port being safeguarded"; the lease of Port Arthur would be restored to the Soviet Union; the Chinese Eastern Railway and the South Manchurian Railway would be operated by a joint Soviet-Chinese company, taking into consideration the "preeminent interests of the Soviet Union"; China would retain full sovereignty in Manchuria; and the Kuril Islands would be "handed over" to the Soviet Union. The agreement was made conditional on the approval of Chiang Kai-shek.²⁸

Stalin was pleased. The Soviet ambassador to the United States, Andrei Gromyko, noted that when Stalin succeeded in obtaining Roosevelt's consent, Stalin was elated, walking back and forth in his room repeating: "Good. Very good!"²⁹ He had reason to be elated: he had got what he wanted. He had received the approval of Roosevelt and Churchill for his insistence on the principle based on the security demands of the USSR for settling territorial issues in the postwar world, overruling the principle based on historical legitimacy, enunciated by the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo Declaration. To obtain the

gains promised at Yalta, however, Stalin had to do two things: to join the war against Japan and to obtain Chiang Kai-shek's acceptance of these terms. The latter condition, which Stalin himself had insisted on including, was advantageous to the Soviet Union, he believed, inasmuch as without Chinese consent, the provisions of the Secret Protocol would inevitably be a bone of contention with China. In addition, the fact that the USSR would regain privileges that the Russian empire had once enjoyed under the tsar, and that had subsequently been abandoned under the Soviet Union, would boost the support of the Soviet people for war against Japan. It would be wrong to assume that the Soviet dictator could impose his will on his people all the time and on all issues. Even Stalin had to be concerned with the reaction of the Soviet people to a war in which they might feel they had little stake.

Moscow's Renunciation of the Neutrality Pact

With the Yalta Agreement concluded and the objectives of the war against Japan established, Stalin now had to prepare for the war. The first question he had to deal with was the neutrality pact. Article 3 of the pact stipulated that unless one party notified the other of the intention not to renew it, it was to be extended for the next five years. Therefore, unless the Soviet Union informed the Japanese government of its intention to abrogate the pact before April 26, it would automatically be renewed, and the deadline was fast approaching.

Lozovskii had already recommended in January that the Soviet government should notify the Japanese that it did not intend to renew the pact. He suggested that lest Japan infer that Allied pressure had forced the Soviet government to take this step, the Japanese should be notified of this before China's foreign minister, T. V. Soong, visited Moscow at the beginning of April.³⁰

Stalin faced a dilemma. On the one hand, he had no choice but to renounce the pact before the deadline. Although this renunciation did not free the Soviet Union from its obligation to neutrality until the pact expired in April 1946, at least psychologically and morally, it would diminish the impact of the war against Japan as a violation of the pact and avoid comparison with Hitler's violation of the non-aggression pact between Germany and the USSR. And it would serve as a clear signal to the United States, with whom conflict had emerged over Poland and eastern Europe, of the Soviet commitment to honor the promise made at Yalta to enter the war against Japan.³¹

The renunciation of the neutrality pact, on the other hand, would give the Japanese a clear signal that the Soviet Union intended to join the war against them, and it might therefore trigger a Japanese attack on Soviet forces in the Far East before all the preparations were completed. The Soviet government could explain that even though the pact had been renounced, it would still be

in force until it expired in April 1946. This explanation would lead Japan to believe that it was still possible to keep the Soviet Union neutral, while under the cloak of neutrality, the USSR could secretly transport men and matériel to the Far East to prepare for the war. This solution would conveniently satisfy the immediate tactical need to “lull the Japanese to sleep,” as Stalin put it, but it still left the strategic question of how to justify the violation of the neutrality pact if the USSR launched a surprise attack on Japan sometime in the summer, as the General Staff was planning to do.

On April 5, Molotov summoned Ambassador Satō Naotake to his office and read the Soviet official statement renouncing the neutrality pact. The exchange between Satō and Molotov indicates that the Soviet government was ambiguous about its intention. Molotov initially indicated that with this renunciation, the Soviet government was freed from any obligation under the pact. Reminded by Satō that Article 3 stipulated otherwise, Molotov immediately retracted his statement and affirmed that the pact would be in force until it expired in April 1946. For the time being, Stalin and Molotov decided to opt for the tactical advantage, leaving the solution of the strategic problem of how to justify the war against Japan for a later date and by other means.³²

With regard to the risk that this renunciation might trigger a preemptive attack by Japan on the Soviet forces along the Manchurian border, Stalin had received reasonable and unanimous assurances from Malik and other intelligence sources that Japan was so reliant on Soviet neutrality that it was unlikely to attack the Soviet Union. But just in case, before he renounced the pact, he placed the Far Eastern military district on high military alert, instructing that the defenses of railways and major cities, including Vladivostok and Khabarovsk, be reinforced.³³

Truman's Policy Toward the Soviet Union and the Issue on Unconditional Surrender

By the time Truman assumed the presidency in April 1945, the military and the political situation in Europe and Asia had drastically changed. With victory over Germany now only a matter of time, conflict between the Anglo-American Allies and the Soviet Union over Poland intensified. The military situation in the Pacific changed so favorably for the United States that the Joint Chiefs of Staff became confident that the United States alone could force Japan to surrender without Soviet participation in the war. Stalin became tormented by two possibilities. First, he suspected that the new president, known for his anti-Soviet views, might renege on the Yalta Agreement. Second, he feared that the war in the Pacific might be over before the USSR entered the war.

As the American military planners mapped out concrete plans for the invasion of Japan's homeland, two mutually connected issues were raised and debated among the military and civilian policymakers: how to deal with Soviet entry into the war against Japan and how to define the unconditional surrender demand to Japan.³⁴ Ambassador W. Averell Harriman and Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew, among others, took the position that the United States should take a tougher stand toward the Soviet Union. Following Harriman's advice, Truman delivered a stern lecture to Molotov on April 23 to "carry out the agreements" reached at Yalta. His "cock-like" belligerency and the tone with which he spoke shocked the Soviet leaders.³⁵ Stalin immediately reacted. On April 24, he sent a telegram to Truman rejecting the American-British proposal on the Polish question as a violation of the Yalta Agreement. Stalin's tone was almost as strident as Truman's with Molotov.³⁶ Furthermore, on May 10, Truman signed a presidential directive to cut off shipments of Lend-Lease goods to the Soviet Union, provoking the Soviet diplomat's reaction that this was a deliberate hostile act designed to break with the Soviet Union.³⁷

Truman's belligerent attitude toward the Soviet Union exceeded even Harriman's expectations. Harriman was anxious to use the Lend-Lease issue to extract Soviet concessions on Poland, but not to break decisively with the USSR. Truman, too, had second thoughts about the abrupt deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations. He sought advice from Joseph Davies and Harry Hopkins, two pro-Soviet advisers to Roosevelt. In order to mend fences with Stalin, Truman decided to send Hopkins to Moscow.³⁸

Truman's zigzag course with regard to the Soviet Union reflected the ambivalence of the U.S. policymakers about the role the Soviet Union should play, not merely in Europe but also in Asia. On the one hand, Soviet entry into the war against Japan would hasten the end of the Pacific War. Despite the change in the military fortunes in favor of the United States, the military planners in the War Department favored Soviet entry. But, on the other hand, in view of the troubles over Poland, other policymakers feared the consequences of Soviet military actions in Asia. The U.S. Navy, represented by Admiral Ernest King, commander in chief of the U.S. Fleet, Navy Secretary James Forrestal, and Chief of Staff William Leahy became more skeptical about the utility of Soviet participation in the war. Harriman, Grew, and former President Herbert Hoover were alarmed by the possibility of expansion of Soviet influence in Asia. Truman was torn between these two views, though his sympathy clearly lay with the anti-Soviet camp. He wished to avoid Soviet entry into the war, but he needed it to minimize the sacrifices of American soldiers. This was a conundrum for which Truman could find no easy solution.

The Soviet question was closely connected with the issue of defining the

unconditional surrender demand that the United States was imposing on Japan. Groups emerged in policy circles that favored redefining this demand by allowing the Japanese to retain the monarchical system under the current dynasty. In May and June, this view was championed by Grew, who suggested to Truman that the president issue a statement to “clarify” the unconditional surrender demand by allowing the possibility of retention of a monarchical system. But Truman was deeply committed to unconditional surrender and was not prepared to compromise on this point, not only because American public opinion was decidedly against Hirohito, but also because he was determined to avenge the humiliation of Pearl Harbor. Grew’s attempt failed, and with this failure, his influence waned. The leadership for redefining unconditional surrender shifted from Grew to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.³⁹

Japan Seeks to Maintain Soviet Neutrality

Stalin was relieved to know from Ambassador Malik’s dispatches that despite the Soviet renunciation of the neutrality pact, the Japanese government was even more eager to seek Soviet neutrality.⁴⁰ This did not mean that the Japanese were so gullible as not to notice the transfer of Soviet troops from the European theater to the Far East. The Fifth Section of Japan’s Army General Staff was in charge of intelligence on the Soviet military, and on the basis of unassailable evidence, it came to the conclusion that Soviet entry into the war was inevitable.⁴¹ But this view was overruled by the Twelfth Section, in charge of operations, which was to merge with the Army Ministry’s powerful Bureau of Military Affairs. The head of the Twelfth Section was Colonel Tanemura Suketaka, a staunch supporter of the continuation of the war, for which he considered Soviet neutrality the most essential prerequisite.

Tanemura expressed his view on the Soviet Union in an influential report he distributed to the army authorities. In this report, he underscored the importance of preserving Soviet neutrality for the continuation of the war with the United States and Britain. Now that the USSR had renounced the neutrality pact, he calculated, there was a 90 percent probability of Soviet entry into the war. Nevertheless, Japan would have no choice but to gamble on the remaining 10 percent. Japan would have to pay a high price in order to entice the USSR into remaining neutral, including the complete abandonment of Manchuria, southern Sakhalin, Taiwan, the Ryūkyūs, the northern Kurils, and Korea. This would be tantamount to returning to the status before the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95.⁴² In including the Liaotung Peninsula (Dairen and Port Arthur) and Korea, Tanemura’s concessions were far more extensive than Shigemitsu’s concessions in 1944. But Tanemura still operated on the assumption that the

USSR would be satisfied with possession of the territories and rights on the principle of historical legitimacy, not realizing that Soviet thinking far exceeded that.

Tanemura's argument swayed the High Command, which having put all its eggs in the one basket of the last-ditch Ketsu Gō strategy of fighting off the expected U.S. invasion of Kyūshū, considered it essential to keep the Soviet Union out of the war. On April 22, Deputy Chief of Staff Kawabe Torashirō paid a visit to Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori and requested that Tōgō do his utmost not only to preserve Soviet neutrality but also to improve Japan's relations with the Soviet Union.⁴³

The army's proposal was more than welcome to Tōgō, since he, Navy Minister Yonai, and the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, Marquis Kido Kōichi—key members of the peace party—harbored a secret plan to end the war through the mediation of the Soviet government. Although their policy was not clearly defined and they were uncoordinated, they were unanimous in their view that as long as the Allies insisted on unconditional surrender, which they interpreted to be the destruction of the *kokutai* (national polity) centering on the emperor system, the only chance of ending the war while assuring the preservation of the *kokutai* would be Moscow's mediation.

The army and the peace party thus shared the need to rely on the Soviet Union, but their objectives for approaching Moscow greatly differed. The army wanted to assure Soviet neutrality so as to continue the war, while the peace party wished to use Moscow's mediation to end it. It should be emphasized, however, that mollifying the Soviet Union had now become the topmost priority in Japan's foreign and military policy.

The army high command was aware of the desperate situation in which Japan found itself and reluctantly concluded that defeat was inevitable. But they were confident that their Ketsu Gō strategy would be able to inflict such tremendous damage on the invading American forces that the United States would be forced to terminate the war by accepting terms favorable to Japan. However, the high command had to resolve the conflict between the Fifth Section of the General Staff, which by June was predicting that a Soviet attack might occur in late August or in September 1945, and the Army Ministry's Bureau of Military Affairs, which dismissed that possibility. A compromise was reached in early June, and Imperial General Headquarters presented the war plan to the Supreme War Council (Supreme Council for the Direction of the War), which identified the continuation of the war against the United States and Britain as Japan's top priority. While warning of the possibility of Soviet attack in August and September, it insisted on the need to preserve Soviet neutrality. This decision was eventually approved at the imperial conference.

The intransigence with which the army steered Japan's policy toward the continuation of war alarmed Japan's peace party. As the defeat of the battle of Okinawa became apparent, Emperor Hirohito finally abandoned the hope of waging a last decisive battle before ending the war. The peace party made a decisive move to approach Moscow.⁴⁴

The Hopkins Mission to Moscow

To repair the damage done by Truman's anti-Soviet stance, Harry Hopkins was sent to Moscow, where he remained from May 26 to June 6. The Hopkins-Stalin talks dealt with three important issues directly bearing on the Pacific War. First, Hopkins asked Stalin when the Soviet Union would enter the war. Stalin answered that "the Soviet armies would be in a sufficient state of preparedness and in position by August 8, 1945." This statement has been taken by many historians as Stalin's pledge to attack Japan on August 8; and thus that the actual Soviet attack on August 9 was exactly what Stalin had promised Hopkins in May. This is hardly the case. What Stalin spoke of was the completion of "a state of preparedness" by August 8, not the definite date of attack, which would be determined by a number of intangible factors, such as weather and the completion of negotiations with the Chinese.⁴⁵

The second question was the issue of unconditional surrender and the position of the emperor. When Hopkins asked about unconditional surrender, Stalin responded that the USSR would prefer this, since it would mean the complete military destruction of Japan. As for the emperor system, Stalin categorically stated that he favored the abolition of the emperor system.⁴⁶ Hopkins reported to Truman: "Stalin made it quite clear that the Soviet Union wants to go through with unconditional surrender and all that is implied in it. However, he feels that if we stick to unconditional surrender the Japs will not give up and we will have to destroy them as we did Germany."⁴⁷

Stalin's position on unconditional surrender and the emperor system suggests the fundamental objective that Stalin pursued in waging war against Japan. He was determined to destroy Japan's military potential and weaken Japan's political structure so that Japan would never again pose a security threat to the Soviet Union. Ironically, Stalin and Truman shared the same value in demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan. But in Stalin's case, there was another motivation behind demanding unconditional surrender. He knew that doing so would prolong the war.

The third important question raised by Stalin was the question of "zones of operations for the armies and zones of occupation in Japan." He took it for granted that the Soviet Union would share in the occupation, as it had in

Germany. Hopkins did not reject this suggestion, and proposed that the question of surrender and occupation of Japan be discussed at the forthcoming Big Three meeting between Truman, Churchill, and Stalin.⁴⁸ Then Hopkins made an important proposal to Stalin: he promised the question of a U.S.-Soviet joint ultimatum to Japan would be placed on the agenda of the Big Three meeting.⁴⁹ According to the American version, "Mr. Hopkins said he thought at the next meeting of the three heads of Government all these matters should be discussed." But the Russian version is more specific, stating: "Hopkins said that at the next meeting Marshal Stalin and Truman can discuss possible proposals for Japanese capitulation and also plans for occupation of Japan, and other urgent matters."⁵⁰ This is an enormously important point that historians have previously ignored. Hopkins promised the possibility of a joint ultimatum to Japan at the Potsdam Conference and gave Stalin the impression that the United States had already agreed to let the USSR participate in Japan's occupation. In Stalin's mind, this invitation gave him a perfect solution to the problem that the Soviet government had been struggling with. It had explained to the Japanese government that the neutrality pact was still in force, while Stalin and his close advisers intended to launch a surprise attack on Japan violating it. The invitation to the joint ultimatum by the Allies would give Stalin a perfect justification for the violation of the neutrality pact.

Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson's Draft Proposal for the Ultimatum to Japan

When Truman met T. V. Soong in early June, he informed him for the first time of the contents of the Yalta Agreement and suggested that China should come to an agreement with the Soviet Union, since Stalin had told Hopkins that he would support Nationalist China as the sole legitimate power in a unified China. When Soong asked Truman if he was contemplating issuing an Allied joint declaration specifying the terms of surrender, Truman answered that such a general statement "would be both necessary and desirable, but he thought it should be done when the Soviet Union entered the war." At this stage, Truman was clearly committed to the Yalta Agreement and desired Soviet entry into the war.⁵¹

On June 18, Truman held a military conference at the White House to hear from the military leaders about plans for the invasion of Japan. General of the Army George C. Marshall said that for Japan to capitulate, short of complete military defeat, it would, in addition to bombing and naval blockade, have to be faced with a U.S. landing in the home islands and "entry or threat of entry of Russia into the war." Although Marshall intentionally gave Truman the lower

numbers of estimated American casualties, even these numbers must have had a sobering effect on the president. In the end, Truman approved only Operation Olympic, suspending his judgment on the second, final stage, Operation Coronet.⁵²

But some policymakers were already exploring the possibility of amending the unconditional surrender terms as an alternative to invasion. Forrester submitted this proposal to the president on June 13, and Grew met Truman on June 18, telling him that “the preservation of the Throne and non-molestation of Hirohito” would be “the irreducible Japanese terms.” On both occasions, Truman refused to accept their recommendations and deferred the issue either to a consensus on the part of the state, war, and navy secretaries or to James Byrnes, soon to be secretary of state.⁵³

After the White House meeting that approved Operation Olympic on June 18, Stimson took an active role in amending the unconditional surrender demand. Unlike Grew, who was by then marginalized as an influential policy adviser, Stimson brought with him the formidable influence of military planners. On June 26, the Committee of Three—Henry Stimson, James Forrester, and Joseph Grew—approved the basic outline of Stimson’s rough draft, but it created a subcommittee headed by Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy to work out a more detailed draft. During the two-day subcommittee meetings, it was the War Department’s Operations Division that played a key role in writing the final version of the draft, which was submitted by Stimson to the president on July 2.⁵⁴

Three important points should be noted in Stimson’s draft proposal. First, it called for unconditional surrender, but the formulation of this demand was changed to “unconditional surrender of the armed forces.” Second, it contained a provision that allowed the Japanese to retain “a constitutional monarchy under the current dynasty.” Third, it envisioned the Soviet Union as one of the signatories of a joint ultimatum, and phrases about Soviet contributions to the war effort were inserted in brackets in anticipation that the Soviet Union would participate.⁵⁵

It should be noted that the Operations Division, which did not know of the ongoing atomic bomb project, except for McCloy, contemplated five possible timings for issuing the ultimatum, and concluded that “the best time would be immediately after Russia’s entry into the war.” The Operations Division therefore suggested: “It would be very desirable if by prior agreement, perhaps arising from the next conference, the proclamation could be tied in with Russian entry into the war. If this date could be about 15 August to 1 September and if surrender were accepted, the Allies would be in the best military position to exploit the situation.”⁵⁶ The Operations Division’s timing coincided uncannily

with what Stalin must have been thinking about the timing of a joint ultimatum.

Although the Operations Division had no knowledge of the atomic bomb, McCloy knew about it. What McCloy wrote to Stimson is revealing about their thinking about the role of the atomic bomb in relation to Japan's surrender. McCloy wrote: "You will appreciate that this has no relation to S-1 [Manhattan Project] element but as it discussed other factors which relate to the timing, I think that the S-1 element can be readily introduced in it."⁵⁷ The meaning of McCloy's memo is somewhat ambiguous. It could be taken as an indication that McCloy and Stimson thought of the threat of the atomic bomb as an additional element for inducing Japan to surrender. In that case, the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war would be complementary factors. But it could also mean that the atomic bomb could serve as an independent factor, detached from Soviet entry into the war, and that the warning should be timed with the use of the atomic bomb, not with Soviet entry into the war. This important question needs further study.

The Hirota-Malik Negotiations

Japan's Foreign Ministry gingerly explored the possibility of terminating the war by unofficially contacting Ambassador Malik. As far as Tōgō was concerned, before he officially approached Moscow, he had to know the Kremlin's assessment of its relations with Japan. Thus began a clumsy, bizarre attempt on Japan's part to conduct unofficial negotiations by sending the former prime minister and foreign minister Hirota Kōki to Ambassador Malik in June.

Hirota's mission was never clearly specified. He was to sound out Soviet intentions with regard to Japan's wish not only to keep the Soviet Union out of the war but also to develop closer friendly relations by settling outstanding bilateral issues and making major concessions with regard to rights and territories in East Asia. But because of the fear of alienating the army, he was enjoined from requesting Moscow's mediation to terminate the war.⁵⁸ Hirota pursued the elusive Soviet ambassador in Hakone and the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo with persistence, and yet when they met four times in June, Hirota did not reveal anything concrete. While Malik kept insisting that he would not be able to do anything without Japan's specific proposals, Hirota dwelled on generalities, repeating that Japan would consider any specific requests from the Soviet side.⁵⁹

Details of these fruitless negotiations do not concern us here. What is important is to place the negotiations in the context of Stalin's overall policy toward Japan. Having closely monitoring Malik's detailed reports about the

first two meetings, Molotov sent his instructions to the ambassador on June 15. Molotov enjoined Malik from taking the initiative in seeking meetings with Hirota. "If he again requests a meeting," Molotov ordered, "then you may receive him and listen to him. If he again talks about general matters, you must limit yourself to stating that you will inform Moscow of the talks at the first possibility (but through diplomatic pouch). You should not go beyond that."⁶⁰ Molotov's intention is unmistakable: he wanted to use the Hirota-Malik negotiations to prolong the war. Stalin was directly involved in this. A photocopy of Molotov's message bears his handwritten note "To Stalin, Request approval, V. Molotov" and Stalin's signature indicating his approval.

By sending Hirota to Malik, Japan fell right into the trap of Stalin's machinations to prolong the war. The Hirota-Malik negotiations represented a gross failure of Japan's diplomacy at this critical juncture.

Stalin Decides to Attack Japan and Japan Requests Moscow's Mediation

On June 22, the emperor summoned the so-called Big Six—Prime Minister Suzuki Kantarō, Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori, Army Minister Anami Korechika, Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu Yoshijirō, Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa, and Chief of the Navy General Staff Toyoda Soemu—to the Imperial Palace.⁶¹ At the outset of this meeting, Hirohito asked their views about the possibility of terminating the war. Although Hirohito's opinion was couched in the form of a question, such direct intervention by the emperor was unprecedented. At the end of the meeting, Hirohito urged them to proceed with the negotiations with the Soviet Union. However, Hirota's two subsequent meetings with Malik failed to produce any results.⁶²

On June 26 and 27, Stalin convened a combined conference of the Politburo, the government, and the military, at which the closely guarded secret decision to wage war against Japan was revealed and adopted as government policy. The General Staff's recommendation of a simultaneous all-out thrust from three fronts toward the center of Manchuria also received final approval.⁶³ On June 28, three directives were issued by Stalin, the first to the commander of the Far Eastern Front to complete all the preparations for an attack by August 1 and the second and the third to the commander of troops of the Maritime groups and the commander of the Transbaikal Front respectively to complete the preparations for attack by July 25.⁶⁴

Only after the USSR had made the final decision did the Japanese government belatedly decide to send Prince Konoe as the emperor's special envoy formally to request the Soviet government's mediation to terminate the war. The war party in the Big Six (Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda) gave their tacit ap-

proval for this secret mission without informing their subordinates, but in view of radical staff officers' expected opposition, the cabinet could not come up with specific conditions for the termination of the war. Konoe welcomed this arrangement, since the absence of specific instructions gave him wide leeway. He assembled a handful of trusted advisers and drafted a negotiating position that made the preservation of the *kokutai* the sole condition. It recommended territorial concessions except for Japan's homeland, acceptance of a democratic form of government headed by the emperor, acceptance of an occupation government and occupation force for a limited period, acceptance of punishment of war criminals by the occupation powers, and complete disarmament for a definite period of time. Preserving the *kokutai* was defined as perpetuating the emperor system, but it was conceded that if it came to the worst, Hirohito's abdication should be considered. It is important to note that this was broadly compatible with Stimson's draft proposal for the Potsdam Proclamation, described above.⁶⁵ Stalin had no knowledge of Konoe's draft, of course, but from Malik's dispatches, he must have known that a powerful group around the emperor advocated surrender on condition that some form of the emperor system be preserved. This would doom Stalin's plan and made it all the more imperative for him to insist on unconditional surrender.

On July 12, Tōgō sent an "extremely urgent" and "strictly secret" telegram to Satō in Moscow, instructing the ambassador to see Molotov immediately. Tōgō told Satō to present the message to Molotov, informing him that it was the emperor's desire to terminate the war. The emperor asked the Soviet government to accept Prince Konoe Fumimaro as his special envoy, who would go to Moscow to seek Soviet mediation to terminate the war. Tōgō made it clear, however, that so long as the Allies demanded unconditional surrender, Japan would have "no alternative but to fight on with all its strength for the honor and existence of the Motherland."⁶⁶

Tōgō's telegrams and Satō's replies were intercepted by the American code-breaking operation known as Magic. The Magic decrypts of the Satō-Tōgō exchanges were immediately delivered to the highest American policymakers, including Truman (through Leahy), Byrnes (who had been sworn in as secretary of state on July 3), Stimson, McCloy, and Forrestal. Finding it significant that the Japanese government indicated its willingness to terminate the war in the emperor's name, Stimson, Forrestal, and McCloy attempted to persuade the president to allow the Japanese to retain a constitutional monarchy to speed up Japan's surrender. Truman and Byrnes, who were wedded to unconditional surrender, rejected their recommendation.⁶⁷ Clearly, it was Truman and Byrnes who called the shots on this issue. Stimson, who was not even invited to attend the Potsdam Conference, was excluded from the decision-making process.

Stalin closely watched these events, which were moving with breathtak-

ing speed, and carefully planned his next move. He initially thought that he would not be able to conceal his intention to wage war against Japan from the Japanese beyond the first weeks of July.⁶⁸ He must have been delighted to learn that the Japanese were still requesting Moscow's mediation to terminate the war in the middle of July. Stalin exploited this request to further prolong the war, but he was keenly aware that Japan's surrender was imminent. He was also keeping abreast of intelligence reports from Beria concerning the progress of the American atomic bomb project. The Americans were close to possessing a nuclear weapon. Stalin must have been consumed by the fear that the war might end before the Soviet Union could join the fray. Before the Potsdam Conference began, Stalin called Vasilevskii in Chita from Potsdam, presumably using a military telephone line, and asked the commander of the Far Eastern Front if it would be possible to move up the date of attack by ten days from the August 11 set by the Military High Command, or Stavka. Vasilevskii answered that "the concentration of the troops and the transportation of essential war supplies would not allow" the change. Stalin for the time being accepted Vasilevskii's cautious judgment.⁶⁹

Two obstacles still stood in the way of the Soviet attack plan. The first was the neutrality pact. Stalin had to come up with an excuse that would override this commitment. At the end of May, it should be recalled, Hopkins had suggested the possibility of placing the specific surrender terms on the agenda of the Potsdam Conference. Just as the United States had carefully prepared a draft ultimatum under Stimson's leadership, Stalin also ordered the Foreign Commissariat to work on a draft of its own. In Stalin's mind, this joint ultimatum would have cardinal importance. Not only would it justify the violation of the neutrality pact, but, if the timing of the issuance was well coordinated with the Soviet military plan, it would also serve as a declaration of war against Japan.

The second obstacle was the provision in the Yalta Agreement that made Chiang Kai-shek's consent a precondition for Soviet entry into the war. The provisions of the Yalta Agreement grossly violated the sovereign rights of the Chinese government. Although Chiang Kai-shek was informed about the Yalta Agreement weeks after the conference, he was not formally told of its specific provisions until June 15.⁷⁰ The Chinese Foreign Minister, T. V. Soong, arrived in Moscow on June 30, and the Stalin-Soong negotiations began two days later. Stalin needed an agreement with the Chinese to fulfill the obligations of the Yalta Agreement, and he was eager to close the deal before he left Moscow for Potsdam. But Soong was adamant about China's rights with respect to Outer Mongolia and railways and ports in Manchuria. Finally, the negotiations were broken off, and Stalin and Molotov left for Moscow to meet Truman

and Churchill at Potsdam. The Yalta provision on Chinese consent, which he himself had inserted to advance Soviet interests in China, now came to haunt Stalin.

Thus, the Potsdam Conference loomed large as the crucial moment for Stalin's plan to wage war against Japan. He expected to close the deal by using the bait of Soviet participation in the war to extract concessions from Truman, as he had done successfully with Roosevelt at Yalta.

The Potsdam Conference

The Truman-Stalin Meeting on July 17

Stalin arrived in Berlin on July 16. He immediately asked, through Truman's special assistant Joseph Davies, to meet Truman that evening. Davies was horrified to learn, however, that Truman did not want to see Stalin that evening. According to Davies, Stalin was "tired, worried and irritated over something." We do not know what led Truman to shun such an important meeting, but it is possible to speculate that he was eagerly waiting for the news of the atomic test at Alamogordo.⁷¹ At noon on the following day, Stalin had the first meeting with the American president in Truman's "Little White House" in Babelsberg. According to Charles Bohlen's note, at this meeting, Stalin, "reverted to the Yalta Agreement concerning Soviet entry into the Pacific war and told the President that the Soviets would be ready for such entry *by the middle of August*, but said that prior to acting they would need to complete their negotiations and reach agreement with the Chinese [emphasis added]."⁷² It is important to note that it was Stalin who without Truman's prodding volunteered to enter the war as he had pledged at Yalta, and that it was Stalin who brought up the issue of the Sino-Soviet negotiations. But according to the Soviet record, it was Truman who requested that the USSR join in the war against Japan. The Soviet record states: "Truman said [that] . . . the United States expects assistance from the Soviet Union. Stalin answered that the Soviet Union is prepared to enter into action *by the middle of August* and that it will keep its word. Truman expressed his satisfaction on this matter and asked Stalin to tell him about his negotiations with Soong."⁷³

In contrast to the Bohlen note, according to the Soviet version, Truman requested Soviet entry into the war and Stalin complied with this request. Also, the Soviet record takes the view that it was Truman who asked about the progress of the Sino-Soviet negotiations. The Bohlen note then records that Stalin talked about the state of negotiations with the Chinese. He assured Truman that the Soviet Union would stand firm on its pledge to support Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria under the Nationalist government. Stalin then explained

in detail the current conditions of the Sino-Soviet negotiations. All these portions are omitted from the Soviet record.⁷⁴ According to the Soviet version, Stalin said: “[T]he Chinese do not understand what constitutes Soviet preeminent interests in the railways and ports in Manchuria”; according to Bohlen’s notes: “Chungking did not understand horse trading; they were very slow and tried to wrangle every little thing. They did not seem to be aware of the big picture.” The Soviet version has Truman express the desire that the USSR and the Chinese would soon come to an agreement, but according to the Bohlen notes: “The President and Secretary Byrnes both indicated that the main interest of the United States was in a free port.” Stalin expected Truman to support the Soviet demands, which, as far as he was concerned, were etched in stone in the Yalta Agreement, and to put pressure on the Chinese in return for the firm commitment he had made to enter the war. He was immediately disappointed, because although Byrnes committed himself to the Yalta Agreement, he warned that the United States would not support any provisions that went beyond that.⁷⁵

Differences between the two versions speak volumes about the different expectations each leader had of the other. Stalin felt that Truman should feel grateful for his commitment to enter the war “by the middle of August,” just as FDR had felt grateful for his commitment and rewarded the USSR with rights and concessions at China’s expense. For this commitment, he expected Truman to reward him by putting pressure on the Chinese to come to an agreement with the USSR. But as far as Truman was concerned, Soviet entry into the war against Japan was an obligation under the Yalta Agreement. He did not feel grateful for Stalin’s assurance that the USSR would do so. Moreover, he had doubts about the consequences of Soviet entry into the war in the Far East. He was thus in no mood to help Stalin reach an agreement with the Chinese. Not only did he not help the USSR on this matter, but also he made a point of disagreeing with Stalin’s attempt to establish Soviet preeminence in Dairen.⁷⁶ He wrote in his diary: “[H]e had some more questions to present. I told him to fire away. He did and it is dynamite—but I have some dynamite too which I’m not exploding now.”⁷⁷ Truman’s memoirs explained: “[W]e might know more about two matters of significance for our future effort: the participation of the Soviet Union and the atomic bomb. We knew that the bomb would receive its first test in mid-July. If the test of the bomb was successful, I wanted to afford Japan a clear chance to end the fighting before we made use of this newly gained power.”⁷⁸ Truman did not come to Potsdam to actively seek Soviet entry into the Pacific war, which to him remained an insurance policy. In fact, he had profound misgivings about Soviet involvement. He wanted to avoid it if at all possible, which hinged on the atomic bomb test.

The first Stalin-Truman conversation also contained another important piece of information: the date of the forthcoming Soviet attack on Japan. Stalin at first explained that the Soviet Union was ready to join the war by the second half of August. Toward the end of his conversation, however, according to the Bohlen note, Stalin suddenly reverted to the question of Soviet entry into the war, "Stalin repeated that the Soviets would be ready in mid-August, as was agreed at Yalta, and said they would keep their word."⁷⁹ There was a discrepancy between Stalin's two statements on the date of Soviet entry into the war: "by the middle of August" or "in mid-August." The former might mean that Stalin had in mind August 11 as the day of attack as set by the Stavka, but Truman took it to be August 15. If he was interested in forcing Japan's surrender before the USSR entered the war, he thus had to do it before August 15. This gave him a benchmark against which to construct a timetable.

The Truman-Stalin Meeting on July 18

After the meeting with Truman on July 17, Stalin had a separate meeting with Churchill. As it turned out, Stalin revealed to the prime minister a piece of confidential information about Japan's peace overtures to Moscow. When Churchill asked why he had not conveyed this news directly to Truman, Stalin answered that he had feared that Truman might think "that the Russians were trying to influence him towards peace" or "that Russia was reluctant to go to war."⁸⁰ On July 18, when Truman paid a return visit to Stalin's villa, Stalin revealed the information he had shared on the previous day with Churchill: the Japanese had asked Moscow to mediate in ending the war. He showed Truman Satō's note that explained the emperor's desire to terminate the war but warned that the demand for unconditional surrender would force Japan to fight to the bitter end. Stalin asked Truman if it was worthwhile answering this communication. Truman answered that he had no respect for the good faith of the Japanese. "Stalin pointed out that the Soviet Union was not at war with Japan and that it might be desirable to lull the Japanese to sleep, and possibly a general and unspecific answer might be returned, pointing out that the exact character of the proposed Konoye [*sic*] mission was not clear. Alternatives would be that they might ignore it completely and not answer, or send back a definite refusal." Truman said that the first course of action—asking for clarification—would be satisfactory.⁸¹

Truman had already known from the Magic intercepts about Japan's overtures to Moscow. It is not clear whether Stalin knew that the Americans were eavesdropping on Japan's diplomatic dispatches, but he may have had an inkling of it. Whether he knew of or suspected the existence of the Magic, however, he was in any case trying to impress Truman with his goodwill. In the

end, it was Truman who suggested the course Stalin had all along intended to take: not to reject, not to ignore, but to reply to the Japanese that the purpose of the Konoe mission was unclear, in order “to lull the Japanese to sleep.”

The Atomic Bomb Test in New Mexico

The first news of the successful detonation of the atomic bomb at Alamogordo on July 16, New Mexico time, reached Stimson on the evening of July 17, shortly after the first session of the Potsdam Conference was over. He brought the news to President Truman on the morning of July 18. But the first reports were so sketchy that it was not until General Groves’s full report arrived on July 21 that the atomic bomb factor began to influence the American decisions.

The news of the successful atomic bomb test solved the fundamental dilemmas that had vexed Truman. With the atomic bomb, the president became confident that the United States could unilaterally force Japan to surrender without the Soviet Union. In fact, it became important to exclude the Soviet Union from the joint ultimatum and to drop the bomb before the USSR joined the war. Truman therefore did not even tell Stalin that the United States now possessed the atomic bomb. He only told him during the recess of the Potsdam Conference on July 24 that he now had in his possession “a new weapon of unusual destructive force.”⁸² More important than this half-truth about the atomic bomb in terms of arousing Stalin’s suspicion was Truman’s handling of the Potsdam Proclamation. Truman was now determined to impose unconditional surrender on Japan without any consultation with the Soviet Union. The crucial question regarding the exact process in which the final form of the Potsdam Proclamation was adopted is not clear. We know that the initial proposal to strike out the promise regarding “a constitutional monarchy under the present dynasty,” as Stimson’s original draft had it, came from the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC) in Washington. This proposal met with an angry reaction from the Operations Division, which presented a counter-proposal by amending JSSC’s amendment to read: “The Japanese people will be free to choose whether they shall retain their Emperor as a constitutional monarchy.”⁸³ When the Joint Chiefs of Staff met on July 16 and 17 at Potsdam, they unanimously adopted the JSSC’s proposal. The promise of a constitutional monarchy disappeared from the Potsdam Proclamation.

It is not clear who was behind this amendment. Although no evidence exists, it is possible to speculate that the real actors working behind the scenes for this were Truman and Byrnes. Tōgō’s July 12 dispatch to Satō informing him of the emperor’s wish to terminate the war jolted Stimson and McCloy with excitement. Stimson sent a memo to Truman on July 16, and urged Truman

to retain the original phrase promising a constitutional monarchy in the ultimatum. Truman told Stimson to see Byrnes. When Stimson went to see the secretary of state on the following day, Byrnes rejected Stimson's proposal. According to Stimson, "He [Byrnes] outlined a timetable on the subject [of a] warning which apparently had been agreed to by the President, so I pressed it no further."⁸⁴ Furthermore, Byrnes and Truman struck out the passage from the text that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that indicated that the ultimate form of government would be left to the Japanese, thus making the text even harsher to those in Japan who advocated the preservation of the monarchical system.⁸⁵ Why did Truman and Byrnes write an ultimatum that demanded unconditional surrender without any reference to the emperor's status that they knew full well that the Japanese government would surely reject? It is important to remember that the order to drop the atomic *bombs* (note the plural) was issued by the acting chief of staff, General Handy, with the prior approval of Stimson and Marshall, to General Carl Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Army Strategic Air Forces, on July 25, one day before the Potsdam Proclamation was issued. If one takes into consideration the following five crucial facts—(1) that Truman knew that Japan would reject unconditional surrender; (2) that the order to drop the atomic bombs was issued on July 25; (3) that the Potsdam Proclamation was issued on July 26; (4) that the atomic bombs were ready to be dropped in the first week of August; and (5) that Truman knew that the USSR would enter the war on August 15—two conclusions are inescapable: (1) that the purpose of the Potsdam Proclamation was to justify the dropping of the atomic bombs, and (2) Truman wanted to drop the bombs before the USSR entered the war.⁸⁶

Truman Issues the Potsdam Proclamation

Stalin's suspicion was piqued by Truman's half-truth about the atomic bomb, since he knew full well from his intelligence source what Truman was talking about. But an even greater shock awaited Stalin. Stalin had wished and expected to be asked to affix his signature to the joint ultimatum, which would serve as the Soviet declaration of war against Japan and justify the violation of the neutrality pact. He fully expected to be consulted on the joint ultimatum. In anticipation of the discussion on the joint ultimatum, Stalin had come to Potsdam with a Soviet draft for the ultimatum, which began: "The time has come when the governments of the allied democratic countries—the United States of America, China, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union—have recognized the necessity of declaring their attitude to Japan." It went on: "Eight years ago, Japan attacked China. . . . After that Japan treacherously attacked the United States and Great Britain. . . . Japan used the same method of perfidi-

ous surprise attack as forty years ago when it attacked Russia.” The aggressive plans of the Japanese militarists had been thwarted, however, by the “tenacious resistance of the Chinese people and the courageous struggle of the American and British armed forces.” The draft then stated: “The United States, China, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union consider it their duty to come forward with joint decisive measures that ought to lead to an end to the war.” Finally, it called upon Japan to “lay down its arms, and surrender unconditionally.”⁸⁷

The document was filled with effusive praise of the Western Allies, closely linking Soviet interests with theirs. This draft indicates how badly Stalin wished to be invited to participate in the joint ultimatum. There remains one question, however. If Japan’s last hope was to end the war through Moscow’s mediation, didn’t Stalin fear that the issuance of the joint ultimatum might bring Japan to surrender prematurely before the USSR joined the war, by shattering Japan’s last hope? In order to prevent this, Stalin had two escape hatches. First, Stalin must have hoped that the issuance of the ultimatum might be postponed to coincide with the Soviet attack. This expectation was by no means far-fetched, since, as stated above, even the Americans, or, more precisely, the Operations Division of the War Department, which had composed Stimson’s draft of the Potsdam Proclamation, had originally envisaged that the optimal time to issue the ultimatum was at the moment of Soviet entry into the war. Second, the draft itself contained a provision that would likely prevent Japan’s premature surrender. It called for Japan’s unconditional surrender, and Stalin knew from Tōgō’s telegrams what Truman and Byrnes knew, that is, that if the Allies insisted on unconditional surrender, Japan would fight the war to the bitter end. To make it more difficult for Japan to accept surrender, he would therefore definitely insist on elimination of the emperor and the emperor system, as he had said at his meeting with Hopkins in May.

All this careful planning came to naught, because Truman completely excluded Stalin from the deliberation of the joint ultimatum, although he fully consulted Churchill and the British delegation behind Stalin’s back. Finally, the Potsdam Proclamation, without Stalin’s signature and with the unconditional surrender demand but without promising a constitutional monarchy, was issued on July 26. The text of the proclamation was released to the press even before Byrnes sent it to Molotov. Molotov immediately telephoned Byrnes and requested that the release of the proclamation be postponed. Byrnes told Molotov that it was too late, since the text had been released to the press. Stalin was completely outmaneuvered by Truman.

On July 28, Stalin made the last attempt to invite himself to participate in the joint ultimatum. He showed Truman Japan’s formal request for Moscow’s mediation to terminate the war, which the Soviet government had received on

July 25, remarking that although the Soviet delegation had not been consulted by the Allies about the Potsdam Proclamation, he wished to keep the Allies informed of Japan's further approach to Moscow. After he had his interpreter read the English translation of Japan's request, he dismissed it as nothing new, and declared that he would give the Japanese a more definite negative answer.⁸⁸

On the following day, Stalin did not attend the conference, since he had allegedly caught a cold. At the end of the conference, Molotov told Truman that Stalin had instructed him to tell the president that "the best method would be for the United States, England, and the other allies in the Far Eastern war to address a formal request to the Soviet Government for its entry into the war."⁸⁹ This request could be made on the basis of Japan's rejection of the Potsdam Proclamation, and for the purpose of "shortening the war and saving lives."⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that Molotov's request was entirely deleted from the Soviet record.

This request put Truman and Byrnes in an awkward situation. Under no circumstances were they willing to comply with it, because the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Potsdam ultimatum was their major purpose since the successful atomic bomb test. And yet, since it had been a consistently declared U.S. policy, and Truman had publicly stated, that the United States desired Soviet participation in the war, and since Soviet entry into the war might still serve as an insurance policy to assure Japan's surrender if the atomic bombs failed to do so, they could not flatly reject this request. In order to get out of this dilemma, Truman and Byrnes concocted tortuous legal arguments that the Soviet Union could justify entering the war against Japan on the basis of the Moscow Declaration of October 30, 1943, and Articles 103 and 106 of the still unratified United Nations Charter.⁹¹

According to Truman's memoirs: "I did not like this [Stalin's] proposal for one important reason. I saw in it a cynical diplomatic move to make Russia's entry at this time appear to be the decisive factor to bring about victory." As far as Truman was concerned, Soviet participation in the war was a treaty obligation, but there was "none obliging the United States and the Allies to provide Russia with a reason for breaking with Japan."⁹² Byrnes also 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 Japan to accept surrender on our terms."⁹³ Truman and Byrnes knew that these legal explanations were not sufficient to justify the Soviet violation of the neutrality

pact, but they were not about to help Stalin on this issue by inviting him to join the Potsdam Proclamation.

Japan's Reaction to the Potsdam Proclamation

Stalin was a master strategist, but he did not always get what he wanted. On the Potsdam joint ultimatum, he was completely outmaneuvered by Truman. He was also lucky, because his failure was unexpectedly turned into a serendipitous windfall for him. When the Potsdam Proclamation was relayed to the Japanese by short-wave radio, their immediate attention was drawn to two facts: first, the Potsdam Proclamation demanded unconditional surrender, but kept silent about the fate of the emperor and the monarchical system; and second, Stalin had not signed it.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry took note of the ambiguous formulation of the Potsdam terms, which might leave the possibility of retention of the monarchical system, and argued for the eventual acceptance of the terms. But as long as the promise to retain a monarchical system was not clearly spelled out and until the Soviet government responded to Japan's request to receive the Konoe Mission, it was quite reasonable, given the delicate balance between the peace party and the war party in the government, for the Japanese government to continue the policy of seeking Moscow's mediation to end the war. It is doubtful that Prime Minister Suzuki actually used the term *mokusatsu* (ignore, or, literally, silently kill) at his news conference. The Japanese government was suspending judgment on the Potsdam terms, rather than rejecting them, pending Moscow's reply to the Konoe Mission.⁹⁴

For Truman, it was sufficient to learn that the Japanese government did not accept the ultimatum. It is a myth he himself helped to create that he ordered the use of the atomic bomb only after the Japanese government promptly rejected the ultimatum.⁹⁵ The Japanese government never rejected the Potsdam Proclamation, and Truman never issued an order to use the atomic bombs. He did not have to, since the order had been given before the Potsdam Proclamation was promulgated. It is more accurate to say that the Japanese government's inaction did not give Truman sufficient grounds to intercede to rescind the order to use the atomic bomb.

The Atomic Bomb and Soviet Entry into the War

Stalin Attempts to Change the Date of Attack

The fiasco of the Potsdam Proclamation convinced Stalin that Truman had finally decided to force Japan to surrender unilaterally without any Soviet help. He was alarmed, and he acted quickly while he was still in Berlin. On July

30, he appointed Marshal Vasilevskii as supreme commander of the Soviet troops in the Far East as of August 1, thus removing all secrecy with which he had prepared for the attack on Japan.⁹⁶ On August 2, the Stavka made official the reorganization of the Far Eastern Front into three separate fronts: the First Far Eastern Front, made up of the Maritime group of troops, commanded by Marshal K. A. Meretskov; the Second Far Eastern Front, formerly the Far Eastern Front, commanded by General M. A. Purkaev; and the Transbaikal Front, commanded by Marshal Rodion Malinovskii.⁹⁷

The Potsdam Conference was over on August 2, and the Soviet delegation left Berlin that day and arrived in Moscow on August 5. On August 3, Chief of Staff Colonel-General S. P. Ivanov and "Colonel General Vasiliev" (Vasilevskii's nom de guerre) sent an important report on the situation at the front to Stalin and Antonov, presumably responding to their order:

In the Transbaikal Front, the 39 A Liudnikov Army [Voiska] and the 53A Managarov Army are completing the advancement to the designated district of concentration, so that by the morning of August 5, 1945, with the rest of the troops of the front, they will be ready, in accordance with your instructions, in the areas about fifty to sixty kilometers from the border, to take the command for the initiation of the action.

From the moment of receiving the order to cross the border, and then to the actual beginning of action, for the supply of troops and their final preparations a minimum of three and a maximum of five full days [*sutok*] will be required.

Taking into consideration all the problems of securing and stockpiling the equipment and provisions for the troops, the optimal time for the initiation of action of front[*line*] troops (I have in mind crossing the border) will be August 9–10, 1945.

In addition, the armies of the First and the Second Far Eastern Front should be able to initiate action on the same day and at the same time after the troops of the Transbaikal Front go into action. Military preparedness of all these fronts should be completed by August 5.⁹⁸

This report suggests that the change of the date of attack from the previously agreed August 11 to August 9–10 was more likely written in response to Stalin's earlier request to change the date. Since this report was sent on August 3, Stalin's request must have been sent earlier than that date. It is most likely, although it cannot be determined from the documentary evidence, that the order was issued from Potsdam on July 30, at the same time when Vasilevskii was officially and openly appointed the commander of the Soviet Army in the Far East, after Stalin's last attempt to obtain the Western Allies' invitation to join the Potsdam Proclamation was rejected by Truman. It is likely, absent other documentary evidence, that Stalin proposed to advance the date of attack in response to what he perceived as the American maneuver to achieve Japan's surrender before the Soviet entry into the war. Vasilevskii requested instructions regarding questions of a "political and diplomatic nature," strongly sug-

gesting that the change of date was dictated by political motivation arising from the Potsdam Proclamation.

After receiving Vasilevskii's recommendation to advance the date of attack by one to two days, however, the Stavka seems to have turned down this request, presumably judging that to do so would be too risky. As previously agreed, the precise time of attack was set at midnight Transbaikal time on August 11 (6 P.M. Moscow time on August 10).⁹⁹

The race between Truman and Stalin, and between the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war against Japan, was on in earnest.

The Hiroshima Bomb

Stalin returned to Moscow on the evening of August 5. His appointment log for August 5 shows that immediately after his arrival at the Kremlin, he frantically resumed activities. He met Molotov, Mikoian, Beria, and Malenkov from 19:45 to 23:00. Kaganovich joined the meeting at 20:40, Voznesenskii came at 20:55 and left at 21:40; Vyshinskii came at 21:40 and left at 22:00, and finally Kuznetsov joined the meeting between 21:55 and 22:10.¹⁰⁰ Considering the participation of Molotov (foreign commissar), Vyshinskii (deputy foreign commissar), Beria (NKVD chief), Kuznetsov (navy commissar), and Mikoian (in charge of Lend-Lease), it is almost certain that at least part of this meeting was devoted to the war in the Far East and the possibility of the Americans using the atomic bomb. It is also safe to assume that Stalin was constantly in touch with General Antonov of the General Staff, most likely through direct military telephone lines.

The Kwantung Army noticed an increase in Soviet reconnaissance activities from the end of July all along the borders from Manchouli to Korea. The most daring actions took place on the night of August 5 on the eastern border along the Ussuri. An observation post manned by thirty Japanese soldiers near Hulin was attacked by a group of a hundred Soviet soldiers, who had crossed the river. The fight continued until August 6, but eventually the Soviet forces withdrew.¹⁰¹ Whether it was an intentional diversionary action or an unintended breach of discipline, it reinforced the Kwantung Army's conviction that Soviet military actions would likely be border incursions, not a mass invasion.

Then the shocking news reached Moscow. The Americans dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima at 8:15 A.M. (Hiroshima time: 0.15 Moscow time) on August 6. Truman received the news on the USS *Augusta* on the way back to the United States. He could not hide his excitement, and exclaimed, jumping to his feet: "This is the greatest thing in history." He then released a statement that had been previously arranged by Stimson: "It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam.

Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on earth."¹⁰²

In contrast to Truman, the news of the atomic bomb crushed Stalin. *Pravda* did not report anything about the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 7, and only on August 8 did it report Truman's statement on the atomic bomb in a lower column on page 4 without comment.¹⁰³ Stalin's appointment log shows that he refused to see anyone on August 6, reminiscent of his behavior immediately after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.¹⁰⁴ It is reasonable to assume that Stalin was completely devastated by the news, believing that the game was over and that the Americans had won.

On the afternoon of August 7, T. V. Soong and the Chinese delegation arrived in Moscow. While waiting for the arrival of the Chinese delegation at the airport, Molotov and Harriman exchanged a brief conversation. Harriman asked Molotov how he thought the Japanese would react to the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Molotov said that he had heard nothing yet and rather belligerently commented: "You Americans can keep a secret when you want to." It is difficult to say what Molotov meant by this comment, but it is possible to interpret it as a tacit and sour-grape acknowledgment of defeat. At the arrival of the Chinese delegation, Molotov told Soong that Japan was on the verge of collapse. Considering Molotov's dejected mood, it is likely that the foreign commissar did not know at this time that the Kremlin had received new information about Japan's reaction to the atomic bomb.¹⁰⁵ At least, Molotov did not look at this moment like a foreign commissar prepared to declare war on Japan.

The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima did not have an immediate, decisive impact on Japan's decision to surrender. It did not change Japan's policy of seeking Moscow's mediation, and it did not immediately lead to the government's acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation. On August 7, one day after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Foreign Minister Tōgō sent an urgent telegram to Ambassador Satō in Moscow, instructing him to seek an appointment with Molotov immediately to obtain Moscow's answer on the subject of the Konoe mission.¹⁰⁶ On August 6, having learned that Molotov had returned to Moscow, Satō had contacted Deputy Foreign Commissar Solomon Lozovskii, requesting a meeting with Molotov. Satō received no reply, but on August 7, he again contacted Lozovskii requesting an appointment with Molotov, although he had not yet received Tōgō's August 6 telegram. Satō's request on August 7 had special meaning: it was an unmistakable sign that Tokyo had not surrendered despite the atomic bomb, and it was the first reaction of the Japanese government to the Hiroshima bomb.

Having received this news, Stalin leapt to action. At 4:30 P.M., he ordered Vasilevskii to begin the Manchurian operation at midnight on August 9 (6 P.M., August 8, Moscow time), thus moving up the date of attack by forty-eight hours. Accordingly, Vasilevskii issued four directives between 10:35 and 11:10 Transbaikal time (4:35 to 5:10 Moscow time), each ordering all forces on the Transbaikal Front, the First and Second Far Eastern Fronts, and the Pacific Fleet to begin operations at 6 P.M. Moscow time on August 8 (12 midnight Transbaikal time and 1 A.M. Khabarovsk time on August 9).¹⁰⁷ The die was cast. The Soviet forces were about to cross the Manchurian border at midnight on August 9.

In the meantime, Satō received the news that he had been looking for. He was told to come to see Molotov at 6 P.M. on August 8 at the Foreign Commissariat. Later, the appointment time was changed to 5 P.M., giving the USSR one hour to hand a declaration of war to the Japanese government before the Soviet attack began. At 7:50 P.M. on August 7, Satō dispatched a telegram to Tōgō, informing the foreign minister that Molotov would meet with him at 5 P.M. the following day.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Stalin decided to begin negotiations with the Chinese at 10 P.M., giving the Chinese only a few hours of rest.

Sino-Soviet Negotiations, August 7

The Sino-Soviet negotiations began at 10 P.M. in the Kremlin. Stalin was impatient. He wanted to conclude an agreement that night so that he could observe the provision of the Yalta Agreement for the Soviet entry into the war, but he was not ready to sacrifice any rights and territories promised at Yalta.

As soon as Soong entered the room, he was greeted by Stalin's impetuous question: "What news have you brought?" Soong only referred to Chiang Kai-shek's meeting with Soviet Ambassador Apollon Petrov on July 16. That was not what Stalin wanted to hear, and at the first encounter, Stalin must have realized that he would have to enter the war with the Yalta provision unfulfilled.

Soong was prepared to sacrifice Outer Mongolia, railways in Manchuria, and Port Arthur, but he stood firm on Dairen. During the negotiations Stalin revealed why he was so persistent on Soviet rights and concessions in Manchuria. He explained that the Soviet ports in the Far East were not connected with railways. Therefore the railways, Port Arthur, and Dairen were important to keep under Soviet control as a defense against a future Japanese threat. Japan would surrender, but it would revive in thirty years.¹⁰⁹ Both sides stood firm. The negotiations did not produce an agreement.

Stalin's interest in the Far East was not ideological, but geostrategic in the classical sense. He was not prepared to sacrifice what he regarded as Soviet entitlements for the sake of formally fulfilling the Yalta Agreement. He gambled

on the assumption that once Soviet tanks rolled into Manchuria, the Americans and the Chinese would not condemn the USSR for violating the Yalta provision, for fear that Stalin might change his mind about supporting the Nationalist government as the sole legitimate government in China. Even worse, he might claim Manchuria as a Soviet sphere of influence.

Moscow Declares War on Japan

As soon as Satō came to the Foreign Commissariat at 5 P.M. on August 8, Molotov began to read the Soviet declaration of war on Japan. The declaration asserted that since Japan had rejected the Potsdam Proclamation, “the proposal of the Japanese Government to the Soviet Union concerning mediation in the war in the Far East thereby loses all basis.” This was a tortured logic, since Japan had suspended judgment on the Potsdam Proclamation precisely because its request for mediation by the Soviet government was still pending. The declaration further explained: “The Allies approached the Soviet government with a proposal to join in the war against Japanese aggression and thereby shorten the length of the war, reduce the number of victims, and assist in the prompt reestablishment of general peace.” The Soviet government did not use either the Moscow Declaration or Articles of the United Nations Charter to justify its violation of the neutrality pact, as suggested by Truman and Byrnes, and opted instead to concoct a brazen lie that the Allies had requested it to join the Potsdam Proclamation. It was Stalin’s open and bold challenge to Truman to see if the president dared to protest. The declaration finally served notice: “The Soviet government declares that as of tomorrow, that is, as of August 9, the Soviet Union will consider itself in a state of war with Japan.”¹¹⁰

Satō had harbored no illusion about the Soviet reply to Japan’s request to receive the Kono mission, but the declaration of war was the last thing he had expected. Having read the declaration several times, Satō asked Molotov if he could send a coded telegram to his government before midnight. Molotov raised no objection. Satō was a brilliant diplomat, but he made a fatal mistake here. He took it for granted that the phrase “as of tomorrow that is, as of August 9” in the Soviet declaration of war meant August 9, Moscow time, without realizing that in Far Eastern time, August 9 would arrive in less than one hour. He accordingly asked Molotov for permission to send a telegram to Tokyo to alert the Japanese government that the Soviet government had declared war on Japan. Satō’s telegram never reached Tokyo, or rather it never left Moscow, since within less than one hour after his meeting with Molotov, the USSR was at war with Japan, and therefore, for security reasons, severed all the communications with Japan.¹¹¹

Less than one hour after Satō left Molotov’s office, Soviet tanks, troops, and

airplanes crossed the Manchurian border from all directions. Stalin had managed to join the war against Japan in the nick of time.

Truman's Reactions to Soviet Entry into the War

A few minutes after 3 P.M. in Washington, Truman held a news conference at the White House. The president appeared and read a statement to the reporters: "I have only a simple announcement to make. I can't hold a regular press conference today, but this announcement is so important I thought I would call you in. Russia has declared war on Japan. That's all."¹¹² This terse statement betrays Truman's profound disappointment. Things had not gone according to his timetable. The Japanese did not immediately surrender, and he had let the USSR manage to join the war.

After Truman's short announcement, a statement by the secretary of state was released to the press. Byrnes welcomed the Soviet declaration of war against Japan, which he believed would "shorten the war and save . . . many lives." He further stated that at the Potsdam Conference, the president had conveyed to Stalin that Soviet participation in the war would be justified on the basis of Paragraph 5 of the Moscow Declaration of 1943 and Articles 103 and 106 of the United Nations Charter.¹¹³

Clearly Byrnes's statement was directed at the Soviet claim that the Soviet government had been asked by the Allies to join the Potsdam Proclamation. Byrnes implied that this was not true, hinting at the illegitimacy of the Soviet government associating itself with the Potsdam Proclamation. Nevertheless, Byrnes's statement fell far short of condemning the Soviet declaration of war as a deception. Stalin's gamble had worked.¹¹⁴

Space does not permit description here of the tortuous process by which the Japanese government came to accept the Potsdam terms, thanks to the emperor's unprecedented "sacred decision," first, on August 10, with one condition, preservation of "the prerogatives of His Majesty as the sovereign ruler," and, finally, on August 14, unconditionally, at the second imperial conference.¹¹⁵ The Truman government was divided over the issue of whether it should accept Japan's first reply. Over the objections of Stimson, Leahy, and Forrestal, Truman accepted Byrnes's recommendation that the United States should reject this reply. After this decision, Truman had a meeting with Congressman Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) and told him the reason why he had rejected Japan's reply: to accept Japan's offer "would constitute something less than unconditional surrender," and would permit the emperor to become "the nuclear rallying point for future nationalism."¹¹⁶ It is ironic that Stalin could have uttered the same words. After the Byrnes note was presented to the cabinet in the afternoon on August 10, Truman said that he expected Britain and China to

acquiesce promptly to the document, and that if he did not hear from Moscow, the United States would proceed with the occupation of Japan without the USSR.¹¹⁷ It is not clear why Truman thought that Moscow would reject the Byrnes note. Perhaps, he expected Soviet objections to the provision in the Byrnes note that stipulated that the future form of government should be determined by the will of the Japanese people themselves. To Truman's surprise, however, Moscow promptly accepted the Byrnes note. Stalin was pleased with the U.S. rejection of Japan's reply, since it gave the Soviet troops more time to expand the territory under Soviet occupation. U.S. policymakers were not unaware of this danger, but in counterposing the danger of Soviet expansion in Asia and the need to avenge the humiliation of Pearl Harbor, Truman and Byrnes gave more weight to the unconditional surrender of Japan than to the need to prevent Soviet expansion.

Stalin also gambled on the Chinese response. He expected the Soviet advance deep into Manchuria would induce the Chinese to make concessions for fear that the Soviet influence in Manchuria would lead to the establishment of a communist regime in Manchuria. He gambled and won. The Chinese finally came around to an agreement on August 15, three hours after Japan announced unconditional acceptance of the Potsdam terms.

Conclusions

The Soviet Union played a central role in the drama of the ending the Pacific War. Stalin was determined to enter the war against Japan in order to obtain the geopolitical gains promised at Yalta. He had to balance Japan and the United States for this purpose. While he was transporting troops and equipment to the Far East with frantic speed in preparation for the war against Japan, he deceived the Japanese government into believing that the neutrality pact would remain in force until it expired in April 1946. He fully exploited Japan's clumsy diplomatic faux pas of sending Hirota to Malik to keep the Soviet Union out of the war. He let Hirota pursue Malik, but instructed Malik not to refuse to meet him, in order to "lull the Japanese to sleep," while he was frantically putting the last touches on the preparations for the war against Japan. In fact, the Politburo and the State Defense Committee made the final decision to wage war against Japan on June 26 and 27. It was only after this decision that the Japanese government decided to request Moscow's mediation by sending Prince Konoe as the emperor's special envoy. This move merely served Stalin's purpose. It was exploited to prolong the war and gave Stalin a bargaining chip in his dealings with Truman.

Stalin came to Potsdam to achieve three objectives. First, he wanted to reaf-

firm Truman's commitment to the Yalta Agreement by promising Soviet entry into the war. Second, he wanted to mobilize Truman's support to put pressure on the recalcitrant Chinese to conclude a treaty endorsing the Yalta Agreement. Third, he wanted to join the Allies' joint ultimatum to Japan. Such an ultimatum would justify Soviet entry into the war against Japan in violation of the neutrality pact. It would also serve as a declaration of war on Japan.

The successful detonation of the atomic bomb in New Mexico spoiled Stalin's plans. Truman did not share the secret of the atomic bomb with Stalin and excluded him completely from the deliberations leading to the Potsdam Proclamation, which was issued without Stalin's knowledge and without Stalin's signature. Truman did little to influence the Chinese, who were adamantly resisting Stalin's bullying to accept the Yalta terms. Stalin made a desperate attempt to request an invitation from Truman to join in the Potsdam Proclamation, but Truman coldly refused. This fiasco finally convinced Stalin that the United States was determined to force Japan's surrender unilaterally without Soviet help. If this were allowed to happen, Stalin would be deprived of the fruits promised at Yalta.

The race between the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war was on. Stalin accordingly ordered Vasilevskii to hasten all the preparations to attack by August 5 (Moscow time) and attempted to change the date of the attack to August 10. But the Stavka did not agree with this change at this late stage. Stalin returned to Moscow on August 5 and resumed frantic activities to prepare for the war against Japan.

But the Americans moved first. They dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Stalin was crushed. He was convinced that the game was over.

But the game was not played out yet. The Hiroshima bomb failed to deal a coup de grâce to the Japanese. The Japanese government continued to cling to the hope that it could end the war through Moscow's mediation. Satō's approach to the Foreign Commissariat on August 7 launched Stalin into action. He ordered the date of attack to be advanced by forty-eight hours to midnight on August 9 (6 P.M., August 8, Moscow time). He had Molotov tell Satō to see him in his office at 5 P.M. on August 8 and hastily arranged the meeting with T. V. Soong and the Chinese delegation at 10 P.M. in the Kremlin.

Soong was as adamant as before, and the negotiations with the Chinese did not yield a treaty with China. But Stalin was in a hurry. He decided to plunge into the war without a treaty with China, thereby violating a provision of the Yalta Agreement. He gambled. Once the USSR had entered the war, neither the Americans nor the Chinese would condemn the Soviet government for violating the Yalta Agreement.

At 5 P.M. on August 8, Molotov handed the Soviet declaration of the war

to the unsuspecting Satō on the grounds that the Allies had invited the Soviet government to join in the Potsdam Proclamation. It was a blatant lie, but as Stalin suspected, no one protested. Within one hour after Satō left Molotov's office, Soviet tanks rolled into Manchuria. Stalin had managed to enter the war, fulfilling a goal he had aimed at since 1941. Now he had to conquer physically what he had been promised at Yalta. During the war that lasted from August 9 through September 5, the USSR occupied all the territories that were promised by the Yalta Agreement.

In the end, Stalin succeeded. He achieved what he wanted through Machiavellian diplomacy and ruthless execution of military plans. But we should not portray Stalin as an infallible strategist who anticipated everything with clairvoyance and executed everything flawlessly. He failed miserably in his attempt to join in the Potsdam Proclamation, and he let Truman drop the atomic bomb before the USSR entered the war. He was lucky, because he was greatly assisted by catastrophic mistakes committed by the Japanese government. But in the end, did he really win? He managed to obtain the war trophies he was after, but at the cost of the long-term enmity of the Japanese, which lingers on to this day.