

# Introduction

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Over sixty years after the end of the Pacific War, we have still not come to terms with its consequences. In the United States, as the storm of controversy over the *Enola Gay* exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in 1995 vividly reminded us, the debate on the U.S. decision to drop the atomic bomb still touches a raw nerve in Americans. At the sixtieth anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings, the debate was more muted than that at the fiftieth, but it is hardly settled. As David M. Kennedy pointed out in an article in a special anniversary issue of *Time* magazine, the dropping of the bombs still raises a nagging moral issue of where the United States crossed the moral threshold.<sup>1</sup> The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings clearly divide American and Japanese public opinion. While many Americans believe that they led directly to Japan's decision to surrender, a majority of Japanese feel a sense of victimization. Despite the sixty-year defense alliance in the postwar period between the United States and Japan, memories of Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima-Nagasaki have bubbled up to remind us that the United States and Japan have not really come to terms with the legacy of the Pacific War.

If memories of the Pacific War serve as a subterranean psychological barrier between the Americans and the Japanese, they have directly pitted Japan against the Soviet Union and now Russia for the past sixty years. The "Northern Territories" dispute, which directly resulted from the Soviet occupation of the Kuril Islands at the end of the Pacific War, still prevents the two countries from concluding a peace treaty.

And in Japan's Asian neighbors, memories of war are still a contentious issue. Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō's repeated visits to the Yasukuni

Shrine, where Class-A war criminals are buried, and Japanese government-approved history textbooks that minimize Japan's past transgressions of colonialism and aggression, have provoked a storm of protests in China and South Korea. These recent events provide a vivid reminder that the memory of the Pacific War still remains a divisive contemporary issue among Asian nations.<sup>2</sup>

President George W. Bush's trip to Europe for the sixtieth anniversary of the VE Day in Moscow in May 2005 touched off a contentious debate between Americans and Russians about the meaning of the Yalta Agreement. Although this debate was concerned with the consequences of the Yalta conference on European borders, the Yalta Conference also dealt with Far Eastern matters. But, strangely, these issues were not raised at the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Pacific War. In fact, while representatives of sixty-six nations, including Germany, gathered in Moscow to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of VE Day, there was no comparable gathering for the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Pacific War. It is inconceivable that the countries that fought the Pacific War could gather in Beijing, Seoul, Moscow, or Washington with Japan's representatives present. The Pacific War is still hotly contested terrain in Asia.

It is therefore worthwhile to revisit the issues of how the Pacific War ended and help to place the contemporary debate in a new light. Needless to say, how the Pacific War ended is merely one issue in the long list of questions concerning Japan's war in Asia and in the Pacific, but it is an important one, which touches on crucial aspects of the contemporary debate about the subject.

The American debate on the end of the Pacific War has almost exclusively focused on the U.S. decision to drop the bomb. Broadly speaking, there are three different schools of thought, the orthodox, the revisionist, and the neo-orthodox, which have passionately debated President Harry S. Truman's motives for dropping the bombs. Since Barton Bernstein discusses this issue more fully in Chapter 1, while using a somewhat different set of categories, it suffices here to characterize these three schools in a crudely schematic matter. The orthodox historians contend that Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was necessary and justified, because doing so directly and immediately prompted Japan's decision to surrender, thus saving millions of American and Japanese lives. The revisionists challenge this view, arguing that dropping the atomic bombs was unnecessary and unjustified, since Japan had already been thoroughly defeated, and the United States used the bombs, not to defeat Japan, but to intimidate the Soviet Union. The neo-orthodox historians argue that although the bomb was primarily used to defeat Japan and provided a powerful cause for Japan's decision to surrender, the Soviet factor played a secondary role.<sup>3</sup>

The debate is somewhat parochial, however, and focuses almost exclusively

on the American side of the story. The American discussion is concerned with the reasons for the Truman administration's decision to drop the bomb, but it has not fully explored the effects of the bombs on Japan's decision makers. Historians who participate in this debate have assiduously mined the American archives, but it cannot be said that they have searched Japanese materials with the same diligence to assess the impact of the atomic bombs on Japan's decision. Until early 2005, the best authoritative monograph in any language on the subject was Robert Butow's *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, which was published more than a half century ago.<sup>4</sup> One of the two most important goals of the present volume is to shift the focus from the American side of the story to the Japanese side, examining how the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry into the war influenced Japan's decision to surrender.

Since Butow's book, until early 2005, there had been only three other serious works on Japan's decision to surrender, an article by Sadao Asada in the *Pacific Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (1998) and two books, Leon Sigal's *Fighting to a Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945* (1988) and Richard Frank's *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999).<sup>5</sup> Sigal's book is largely based on the translated interrogations and statements that Butow used. Asada is the first historian to have utilized a wide array of newly available Japanese sources to examine the impact of the atomic bombs on Japan's decision to surrender. Frank is the first American historian since Butow to have attempted to use important Japanese sources, especially some monographs in the multi-volume series on the Pacific War edited by Japan's Defense Institute. His incorporation of Japanese sources, in addition to his mastery of American archives, especially Magic and Ultra intercepts, has resulted in his thoughtful interpretation, especially on the significance of Japan's last-ditch defense strategy called Ketsu Gō. Asada's article and Frank's book are landmark achievements, which argued for the defense of the orthodox interpretation on the basis of new Japanese sources. Two of the authors of this volume, Sumio Hatano and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, critically evaluate their interpretations.

Since the chapters in this volume by Frank, Hatano, and myself deal with the detailed political process by which the Japanese government came to accept surrender, it is necessary here to describe the Japanese decision-making mechanism briefly for the uninitiated. The emperor sat at the pinnacle of power, but he served mainly as a figurehead and was not involved in actual decision making, leaving all decisions to the cabinet, although a recent biography of Hirohito by Herbert Bix argues that the emperor was more actively involved in various decisions.<sup>6</sup> As Bernstein argues in Chapter 1, the issue of imperial power and the role of the Shōwa emperor is a subject of debate.

In the final days of the war, decision making became concentrated in the

Supreme War Council, or Supreme Council for the Direction of the War (Saikō sensō shidō kōseiin kaigi), consisting of the six key political and military leaders: the prime minister (Suzuki Kantarō), the foreign minister (Tōgō Shigenori), the army minister (Anami Korechika), the navy minister (Yonai Mitsumasa), the army chief of staff (Umezu Yoshijirō), and the navy chief of staff (Toyoda Soemu). Decisions by the Supreme War Council required unanimity and the approval of the cabinet. Thus the military virtually enjoyed veto power. An army minister's resignation, for instance, was sufficient to cause the cabinet to collapse. Also important was the complete control that the military enjoyed over matters related to military command, which was formally the exclusive prerogative of the emperor alone, beyond the reach of the cabinet.

The peculiarity of Japan's decision to surrender consisted of a departure from the traditional decision-making process. Both the Supreme War Council and the cabinet found themselves in a stalemate, a condition that under normal circumstances would have meant the collapse of the cabinet. But in the unprecedented crisis caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet entry into the war, two imperial conferences were held, at which, breaking with tradition, the emperor twice made the final decision to terminate the war.

A few words are necessary to explain the concept of the Japanese national polity centered on the imperial system, called the *kokutai*, preservation of which became the highest priority of Japan's policymakers at that time. This nebulous concept was never precisely defined until, facing the crisis brought on by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and the Soviet entry into the war, Japanese policymakers were confronted with the issue of formulating concrete surrender terms. Tōgō and the foreign ministry consciously attempted to define the terms as the preservation of Japan's unbroken lineage of the imperial house, but during the intense debate on August 9 to 10, this concept expanded to include "the emperor's status in the constitution" and eventually "the emperor's prerogatives as the sovereign ruler." This definition and its relation to the unconditional surrender demanded by the Potsdam Proclamation were the most important issues that delayed Japan's surrender.<sup>7</sup>

The second major goal of this volume is to bring the Soviet Union to center stage in the drama of ending the war. If historians have failed fully to examine the effect of the atomic bomb on Japan's decision to surrender, the question of how the Soviet Union influenced Japan's decision has received even less attention. As long as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union exercised its dictatorial power, Soviet archives were inaccessible to foreign scholars, and what Soviet historians wrote about the Pacific War fell into the category of propaganda rather than genuine scholarship. The result of this sorry state led

non-Soviet historians to treat the Soviet role in the ending of the Pacific War as virtually a sideshow. But since the last days of the Soviet period, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, new documents have been published, and access to Soviet archives has become possible to a limited extent. Making use of these materials and the hitherto inaccessible foreign ministry archives and naval archives, Boris Slavinsky published a series of monographs that challenged the traditional orthodox interpretation by stressing how Stalin's geostrategic interests drove Soviet policy.<sup>8</sup>

The availability of new sources, both in Japan and Russia, allows historians to reexamine the ending of the Pacific War in an international context, not merely from the narrow American perspective. It was out of acute awareness of this need that the Center for Cold War Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara convened a workshop to reexamine the ending of the Pacific War by inviting a small group of specialists in March 2001. This two-day workshop was remarkable, not merely for the intensity of the discussion of the issues that were examined in view of new evidence, but also for the civility of discourse among specialists with often sharply different points of view, a rare form of discourse in light of past discussions dealing with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

With the agreement of the participants, we decided to produce a collective volume. Hatano and Asada Sadao, though unable to participate in the workshop, readily agreed to contribute to the volume (although the latter eventually did not do so). Unfortunately, Boris Slavinsky, an important participant in the conference, will not be able to see its final outcome in print, because he passed away in April 2003. I myself have contributed Chapter 6 on the Soviet role in ending the war in his stead.

In Chapter 1, Barton J. Bernstein places the debate on the role of the atomic bomb in ending the Pacific War in historiographical context and broadens the historiographical angles to look at the treatment of how and why Japan surrendered. His introductory chapter in examining the publications in the atomic bomb debate since the death of the Shōwa emperor can be viewed in some ways as a sequel to his seminal article "The Struggle over History: Defining the Hiroshima Narrative," published in 1995.

The three chapters that follow Chapter 1 deal with the central question: whether the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the Soviet entry into the war against Japan had a more decisive impact on Japan's decision to surrender. In Chapter 2, on the basis of his meticulous analysis of Japan's Ketsu Gō strategy, the military's plan for a last-ditch defense of the homeland, Richard Frank argues that the Americans had no alternative but to use the atomic bomb. Frank also contends that the atomic bomb, not Soviet entry into

the war, had the decisive impact on the emperor's decision to terminate the war, and that to the extent that the emperor was the only legitimate authority able to impose that decision on the military, this was the most crucial factor in ending the war.

Chapter 3 by Sumio Hatano, on the other hand, takes the view that while the atomic bomb had a decisive impact on the civilian decision makers, the Soviet entry into the war was more decisive in the army's decision to accept surrender. An important feature of his article is the careful reconstruction of the process, on the basis of new sources, by which the Japanese policymakers reached the decision to accept surrender.

In Chapter 4, I challenge the view represented by Asada and Frank and argue that although neither the atomic bombings nor the Soviet entry into the war alone provided the knock-out punch, the Soviet entry was a more decisive factor in Japan's decision to surrender.

Originally, Sadao Asada had agreed to contribute a chapter in the form of a revised version of his *Pacific Historical Review* article, but he decided to withdraw it at the last moment. Since the intention was to represent a wide spectrum of views, I regret Asada's decision to withdraw. Interested readers may, however, consult his original article in the November 1988 issue of the *Pacific Historical Review*.

Holloway's Chapter 5 and my Chapter 6 both examine the Soviet factor in ending the Pacific War, a hitherto understudied subject in the literature. Holloway presents Moscow's motivations in participating in the war in a longer and broader perspective than I do, going back to the historical Russo-Japanese rivalry and to the end of Soviet operations in the Kurils immediately after the war. I focus more narrowly on interactions between the Soviet Union and other powers during the period from the conclusion of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in 1941 to the Soviet entry into the war, arguing that geostrategic gains in line with Soviet strategy were Stalin's main objective.

Finally, Bernstein's Chapter 7 sums up and places the chapters of this volume in a broader historiographical context. The volume also includes a brief bibliographical note on Russian and Japanese sources and a selective bibliography of published sources in English, Russian, and Japanese used in the present volume (and also in Asada's article), which, we hope, represents the most recent bibliographical work on the end of the Pacific War.

This volume, by design, does not attempt to present a unified view. Among the contributors, Frank, Hatano, and I disagree (as does Asada) on which factor—the atomic bombings or the Soviet entry into the war against Japan—played a more decisive role in Japan's decision to surrender. These disagreements stem from different emphases on certain sources and different interpre-

tations. Holloway and I disagree on a number of important points, including the date of the Soviet attack on the Japanese forces in Manchuria set prior to the Potsdam Conference, the role of the Potsdam Proclamation, and Stalin's assessment of the atomic bomb in determining Japan's decision to surrender. We interpret the same sources in different ways and arrive at different conclusions where crucial sources do not exist.

Although we have not reached any consensus on many issues, we hope that this volume will serve as the starting point of new scholarly debate on the ending of the Pacific War, and that the new issues raised here will be further addressed as new evidence becomes available. Finally, we hope that the collegiality, respect, and spirit of cooperation among the contributors in producing this volume, which sometimes involved sharing research materials and critical reading of chapters, will set an example of scholarly discourse on this often contentious issue.

#### **Note on Spelling, Transliteration, Names**

For Japanese words, we have adhered to the Hepburn transliteration system, with slight modifications. For instance, we write *shinbun* instead of *shimbun*, and Matumoto Shun'ichi rather than Matsumoto Shunichi. We also use macrons to indicate elongated vowels (except in the case of Tokyo and where the original sources quoted do not use macrons). Japanese surnames precede given names with respect to Japanese sources: hence, for example, we write Suzuki Kantarō, not Kantarō Suzuki. But if a Japanese author's publication is in English, we have reversed the order, and placed the surname last. For instance, Tōgō Shigenori's memoirs in Japanese are cited as Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no ichimen*, but the English translation is cited as Shigenori Togo, *The Cause of Japan*.

For Russian words, except for well-known names such as Yalta, we have used the Library of Congress transliteration system: hence, for example, Vasilevskii, not Vasilevsky. Soft signs are omitted in the text, but shown in the notes.