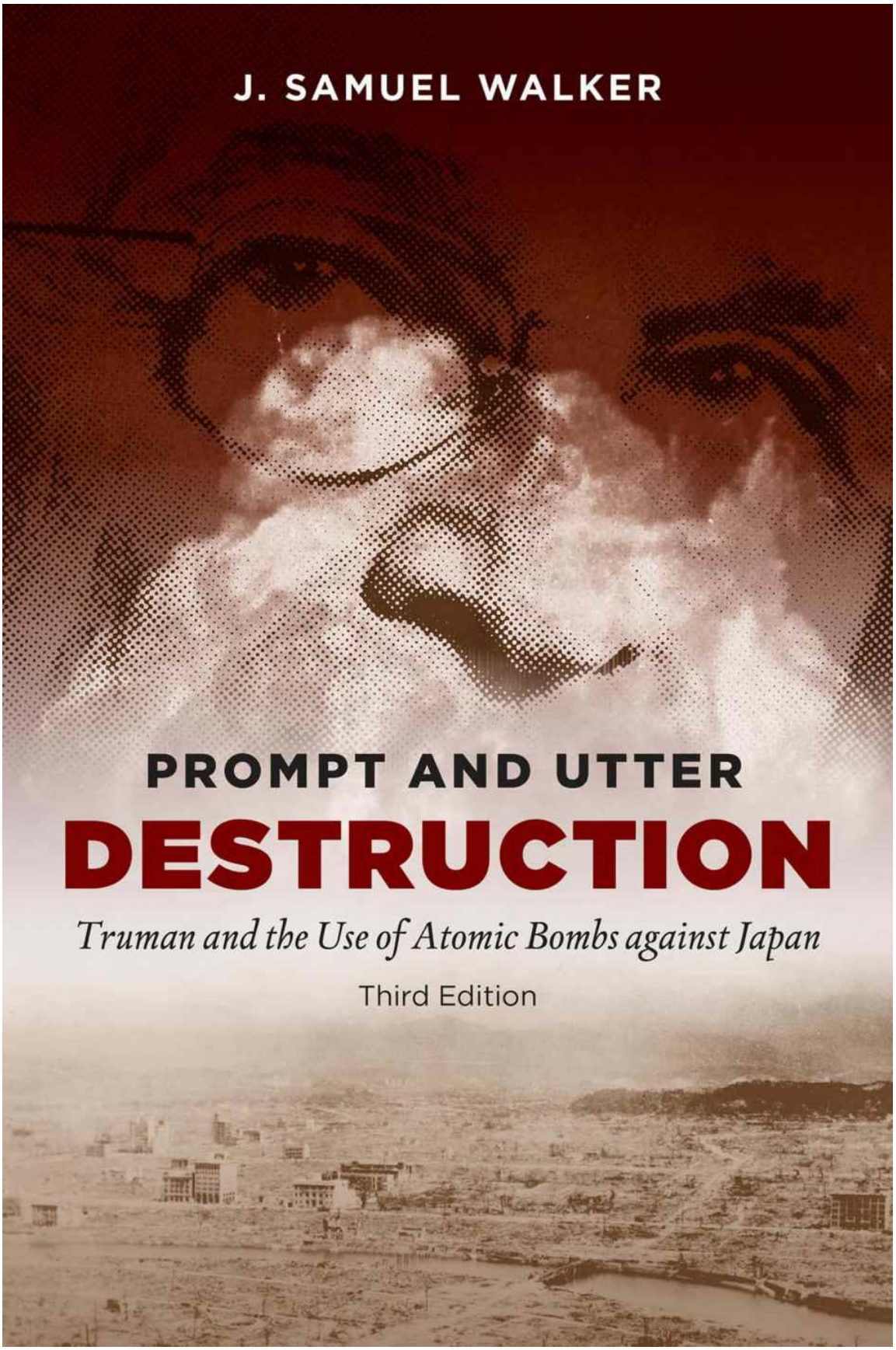
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PROMPT AND UTTER
DESTRUCTION
Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan
Third Edition

Chapter 6: Hiroshima and Nagasaki

At 2:45 A.M. on August 6, 1945, a B-29 under the command of Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, a 29-year-old veteran pilot, began to roll down a runway on Tinian Island to take off on its historic mission to Hiroshima. The plane, which Tibbets had named *Enola Gay* after his mother, carried a crew of 12 men and an atomic bomb fueled with uranium 235. As it flew over Iwo Jima, it was joined by two other B-29s; their crews would seek scientific information on and take photographs of the blast. Tibbets informed his crew after takeoff that the cargo they would deliver was an atomic bomb, but otherwise the flight was uneventful. The weather was clear and the *Enola Gay* did not encounter resistance from anti-aircraft fire or enemy fighters. The fleet of just three planes caused little alarm when it appeared over Hiroshima; no warning sirens sounded and citizens saw no reason to seek shelter.

At about 8:15 A.M. (Hiroshima time) the *Enola Gay*'s bombardier released the bomb. It was festooned with messages that would never be read, some obscene, some wrathful; one offered "Greetings to the Emperor from the men of the *Indianapolis*." Forty-three seconds after leaving the plane, the bomb exploded, proving that the uranium 235, gun-type design worked as Manhattan Project scientists had promised. Even at 30,000 feet and 11 miles from ground zero, the Enola Gay was hit by two strong shock waves that bounced it around in the air and made a noise, as one crew member recalled, "like a piece of sheet metal snapping." When the plane circled back to take a look at the effects of the atomic bomb, even the battle-hardened veterans aboard were stunned. Copilot Robert Lewis declared: "We were struck dumb at the sight. It far exceeded all our expectations. Even though we expected something terrific, the actual sight caused all of us to feel that we were Buck Rogers 25th Century Warriors." Tail gunner Robert Caron described the mushroom cloud from the explosion as "a spectacular sight, a bubbling mass of purple-gray smoke."[1]

On the ground the bomb produced a ghastly scene of ruin, desolation, and human suffering. After the bomb exploded in the air about 1,900 feet above Hiroshima, witnesses reported seeing a searing flash of light, feeling a sweeping rush of air, and hearing a deafening roar, which was intensified by

the sound of collapsing buildings. The city lay on flat ground on the edge of Hiroshima Bay, and the level surface on which it was situated allowed the destructive energy of the atomic bomb to flow evenly outward from the point of detonation. As a result, an area of about 4.4 square miles surrounding ground zero was almost completely devastated. Only a few structures that had been built to withstand earthquakes were strong enough to weather the atomic blast.

FIGURE 7 Hiroshima after the atomic attack. (National Archives 306-PS-B-49–5295)

The bomb created what one survivor called “the hell I had always read about.” Within a radius of a half mile or so, the force of the blast killed virtually everybody instantaneously. Farther away from ground zero, the effects were somewhat less lethal but still altogether terrible. The bomb gave off a flash of intense heat that not only caused many deaths and severe injuries but also helped to form a huge and all-consuming firestorm. The survivors of the blast and heat were often horribly debilitated. Blinded by the flash, burned and blistered by the heat, cut beyond recognition by flying

glass, those who could move stumbled through the darkness caused by dust, smoke, and debris. It was common to see people whose skin was hanging off their bodies, a result of the thermal flash and the heat, which together caused severe blistering and tearing of the skin. Charred corpses were everywhere, and no services were available to help the living put out fires, salve their wounds, and ease their agony. The survivors were often so weakened that they died from their injuries or from the later effects of radiation, which began to show up within a few days of the attack.[2]

President Truman received two sketchy reports about the success of the atomic bomb aboard the cruiser USS *Augusta* as he sailed home from Potsdam. Elated by the news, he remarked to a group of sailors, "This is the greatest thing in history." A few minutes later he told the cheering crew of the ship about the power of the bomb. Truman's expectation that the bomb would bring the war to a prompt finish made him jubilant and, for the moment at least, superseded the ambivalence he had privately expressed at Potsdam about the development of nuclear weapons.[3]

Within a short time the White House released a statement from the president about the atomic bomb. It revealed that the bomb "had more power than 20,000 tons of T.N.T." and commented that the Japanese had "been repaid many fold" for their attack on Pearl Harbor. The president threatened that if Japan failed to surrender quickly, it would suffer more atomic attacks: "We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city…. If [their leaders] do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth." The statement sought to take advantage of the shock of the first bomb by suggesting that the United States had a stockpile of atomic weapons that soon would be used against Japan. In fact, it had only one more atomic bomb that would be available within a short time.[4] To reinforce the shock value of the bomb, American forces in the Pacific hastily prepared 6 million leaflets to drop on Japanese cities. The leaflets informed their readers that Hiroshima had been destroyed by an atomic bomb and appealed to them to press their leaders for peace. They also urged Japanese citizens to evacuate cities in order to avoid exposure to further atomic attacks.[5]

While the leaflets were being prepared, an assembly team was rushing to ready the second bomb for delivery to Japan. The date for the attack was originally August 11, but discouraging weather forecasts pushed the schedule

ahead by two days. On August 9, a B-29 named *Bock's Car* after its usual commander but piloted on this occasion by Major Charles W. Sweeney took off from Tinian. It carried a plutonium bomb of the same design as that tested at Alamogordo. Its primary target was the Japanese city of Kokura. The flight of *Bock's Car* was much more harrowing than that of the *Enola Gay* three days earlier. After enduring stormy weather and enemy flak, the plane was unable to drop its bomb on Kokura because of a heavy haze. With fuel running low, it headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki. Nagasaki was covered by clouds, but as the plane approached, the cloud cover opened slightly to give the bombardier a brief view of the city. Unable to find the planned target point, he used a stadium as a landmark to guide his aim.

Nagasaki was a densely populated industrial city in western Kyushu. At one time it had been a bustling port, but it had declined in importance as a commercial center. The city's economy depended heavily on the Mitsubishi Corporation, which operated shipyards, electrical equipment works, steel mills, and an arms plant that together employed 90 percent of Nagasaki's workforce. Although the city had not entirely escaped bombing by American air forces in previous months, it was relatively intact.

Because of the hills that rise above Nagasaki, the effects of the bomb were less widespread than in Hiroshima, but they were more intense in areas close to ground zero. The bomb destroyed a hospital and medical school that lay within 3,000 feet of the explosion and seriously damaged the Mitsubishi electrical equipment, steel, and arms factories. Within a radius of a half-mile or so, humans and animals died instantly, as in Hiroshima. The survivors also suffered the effects of injuries, radiation exposure, shock, helplessness, and fear that the residents of Hiroshima had experienced three days earlier. Nagasaki was fortunate to be spared from a raging firestorm, but the consequences of the atomic attack were still, by any standard, dreadful. Ironically, it was not until the day after the second bomb was used that leaflets prepared after Hiroshima that warned Japanese citizens about further atomic attacks were dropped on Nagasaki.[6]

It is impossible to measure accurately how many people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were killed by the atomic bombs. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, which conducted a thorough study of the effects of the bombs shortly after the war, estimated the number of deaths in Hiroshima at between 70,000 and 80,000 in a population of about 350,000 and in Nagasaki at about 35,000 in a population of about 270,000. More recent analyses have

raised the mortality figures to about 166,000 in Hiroshima and between 60,000 and 80,000 in Nagasaki by the beginning of December 1945. The enormity of the death and destruction caused by the single bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was one major difference in their effects from those of the aerial attacks on Japanese cities with conventional weapons.

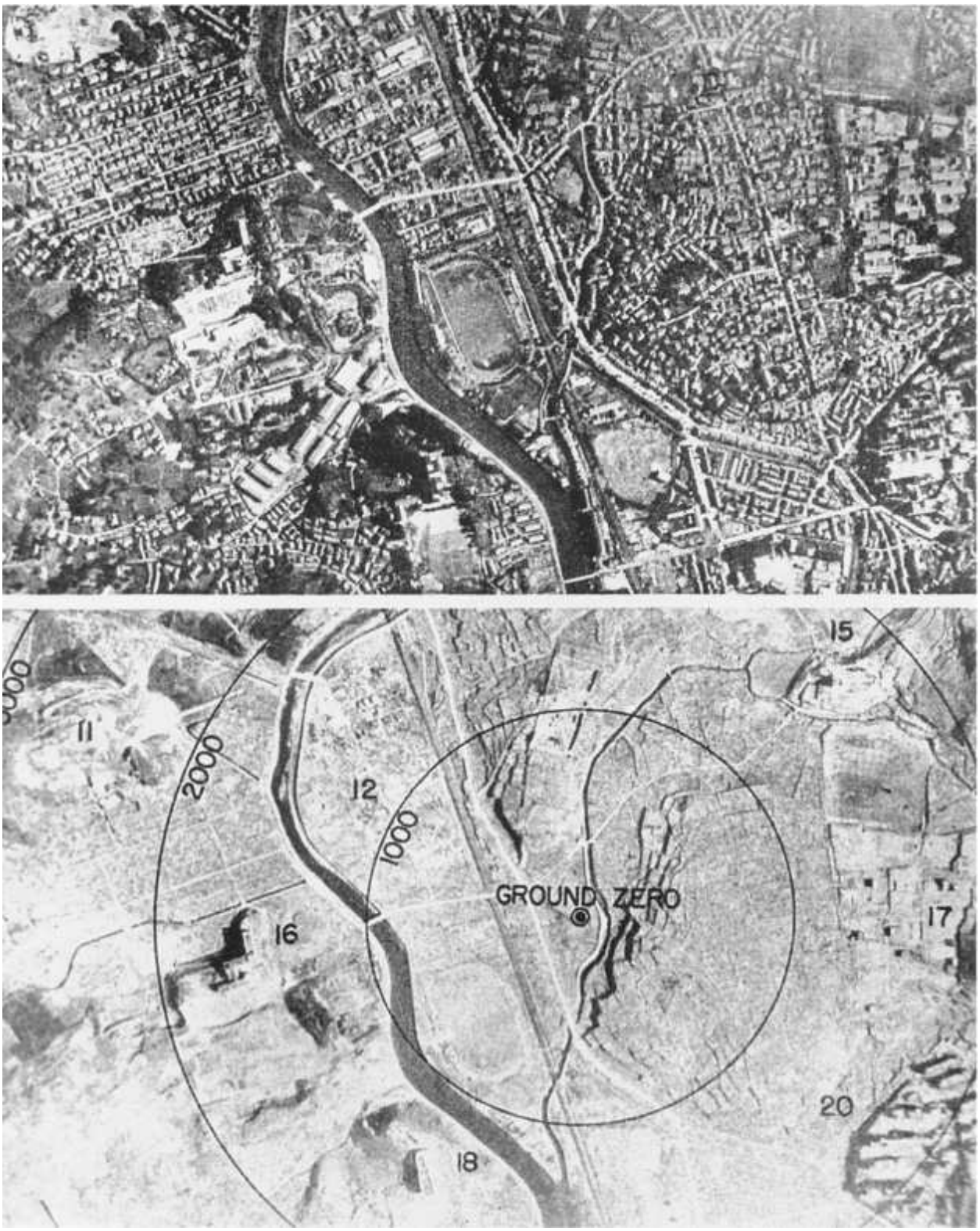

FIGURE 8 Nagasaki before and after being hit with the atomic bomb. (National Archives 77-MHD-12.3)

The other important distinction in the use of atomic bombs was the death and illness that residents of the two cities suffered from ionizing radiation. The report of the Strategic Bombing Survey suggested that 15–20 percent of the fatalities in the first few weeks after the bombs fell were the result of acute exposure to radiation. It also found "reason to believe" that even if the effects of blast and heat had not been present, "the number of deaths among people within a radius of one-half mile from ground zero would have been almost as great as the actual figures and the deaths among those within 1 mile would have been only slightly less." The lethal levels of "initial radiation" came from the process of nuclear fission that fueled the bombs. The explosions released large inventories of radioactive "fission products" to the environment. The dose of radiation an individual received and the damage it caused depended on distance from the hypocenter (directly below the atmospheric explosions) and other variables such as shielding from buildings or topographical features and the position of the body relative to the path the radiation traveled. Although the death toll from nearly instantaneous exposure to initial radiation from the bombs cannot be calculated with precision, it clearly was a large number.

Levels of "residual radiation" from atmospheric fallout and deposits in the soil and building materials were less harmful than exposure to initial radiation by orders of magnitude. Nevertheless, they were a source of concern because of their potential long-term health effects on survivors of the atomic attacks. Both of the bombs were air bursts that went off several hundred feet above the ground (about 1,900 feet at Hiroshima and about 1,600 feet at Nagasaki). This greatly reduced the radioactive fallout they produced, though limited quantities of radioactive particles were dispersed in the atmosphere and slowly descended to earth. Survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki feared that "black rain" that fell on their cities was an indication of high levels of fallout. In fact, the black rain was caused by soot from the fires that raged on the ground and was not related to radiation releases from the bombs.

The exposures from residual radiation were generally far lower than from initial radiation, but they have been blamed for causing a massive number of deaths from cancer over the years. Historian Paul Ham, for example, claimed in 2014 that "hundreds of thousands" of survivors of the atomic explosions have "succumbed to cancers linked to radiation poisoning." Careful studies conducted by American and Japanese scientists on the health effects of

radiation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki since 1948 tell a quite different story. The Radiation Effects Research Foundation, by tracing the health histories of a cohort of about 94,000 atomic bomb survivors, has calculated the number of "excess deaths" above the normal incidence of cancer mortality in the two cities. Its most recent report estimated the number of excess deaths from slow-developing solid tumors between 1958 and 1998 to have been 848. It estimated the number of excess deaths from leukemia, which shows up more quickly, between 1950 and 2000 to have been 94. The foundation concluded that the number of radiation-induced cancer deaths over a period of several decades was about 940. It assumed that the cohort on which it based its findings represented about one-half of the atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so it doubled its estimates to yield a total of about 1,900 excess deaths from cancer. This is a serious number that should not be taken lightly, but it is far short of epidemic proportions.[7]

In August 1945, the effects of radiation were much less of a concern than the impact of the atomic bomb on the Pacific war and international politics. The power of the bombs used against Japan and the story behind their development were featured in prominent headlines and in column after column of newsprint in the United States. Press treatment of the news generally reflected the tone of gratitude, pride, and confidence that the war would soon end that Truman and other American officials presented. But in some press accounts there was also a trace of uneasiness about the long-term consequences of the atomic bomb. As popular radio commentator H. V. Kaltenborn put it in a broadcast on the evening of August 6: "For all we know we have created a Frankenstein! We must assume that with the passage of only a little time, an improved form of the new weapon we use today can be turned against us."[8]

In Moscow, Joseph Stalin was concerned that the bomb would be turned against him, at least politically. After receiving the news about Hiroshima, he became intensely concerned that the bomb would deprive him of his objectives in Asia. He immediately ordered Soviet troops to attack Manchuria. Stalin did not wait for an agreement with China but hastened to join the Pacific war out of fear that the Japanese would surrender. On August 8, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov informed Ambassador Satō that his country would consider itself at war with Japan the following day. Hours later, 1.5 million Soviet troops launched the invasion. They quickly routed the inferior Japanese forces, who surrendered in droves.

Stalin also established a new committee to make the atomic project a top priority and speed progress in constructing a Soviet bomb. Stalin viewed Truman's use of the bomb as a political act intended to deny him the gains he had been promised in Asia. He also regarded the bomb as a serious threat to the long-term international position of the Soviet Union by distorting the balance of power. "Hiroshima has shaken the whole world," he reportedly remarked. "The balance has been destroyed."[9]

In Tokyo, Japanese leaders were slower to recognize, or to acknowledge, the new force with which they had to deal. They did not receive details about the destruction of Hiroshima for several hours because of the loss of communications in the devastated city. The awful truth came in a report early in the morning of August 7: "The whole city of Hiroshima was destroyed instantly by a single bomb."[10] Within a short time, Japanese officials also learned of Truman's statement threatening a "rain of ruin" and announcing that Hiroshima had been attacked by an atomic bomb. They responded by sending a team of experts to Hiroshima to investigate the damage. The die-hard military faction insisted that Truman's announcement was mere propaganda and that the weapon used against Hiroshima was not an atomic bomb.

The emperor was deeply disturbed upon learning on the morning of August 7 that the United States had razed Hiroshima with an atomic weapon. Later in the day he pressed Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Kido, his closest adviser, for further information about the bomb. The next morning he told Foreign Minister Tōgō: "Now that such a new weapon has appeared, it has become less and less possible to continue the war…. So my wish is to make such arrangements as to end the war as soon as possible." The use of the bomb shocked Hirohito and finally overcame his ambivalence about the need to end the war expeditiously. But even the distressing news of the atomic attack was not enough to convince him to surrender immediately on the basis of the Potsdam Proclamation. Hirohito and other Japanese leaders continued to deliberate over the terms that they would find acceptable for quitting the war.

At the request of the emperor, Prime Minister Suzuki called a meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War for August 9. Before the meeting took place, the Japanese government received word that the disaster of Hiroshima was compounded by the Soviet Union's declaration of war. The Soviets had been massing troops and supplies on the Manchurian border for months; Stalin commented at Yalta that he "believed Japan realized Russia

was coming into the war because they could see Russian troops on [the] border." Nevertheless, the Soviet invasion came as a stunning blow to many Japanese military and political leaders. Some of them still harbored the illusion that the Soviet Union would remain neutral or even mediate a peace settlement on more favorable terms than the Potsdam Proclamation offered. The Japanese army acted on the premise that the Soviets would not launch an attack on Manchuria before early 1946. Those ill-founded hopes were shattered by the Soviet offensive. The closure of the Soviet option suddenly made the Potsdam Proclamation much more appealing as the best means to end the war and retain the emperor.[11]

The dual jolts of the atomic bomb and the Soviet attack pushed the Japanese government toward surrender, but it reached a decision only after painful deliberations and acute internal controversy. When the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War met on the morning of August 9, Suzuki opened the discussion by arguing that Japan had no choice but to accept the Potsdam Proclamation with the sole condition that the imperial institution be preserved. War Minister Anami, Army Chief of Staff Umezu, and Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda sharply disagreed. They contended that Japan should insist not only that the emperor be retained but also that other conditions be admitted. They wanted the United States and its allies to greatly restrict or forgo entirely the occupation of Japan, permit the Japanese to conduct their own war trials, and allow the Japanese to disarm themselves. Foreign Minister Tōgō responded, quite accurately, that the only concession that had a chance of acceptance by the Allies was the retention of the emperor. He was certain that the other conditions would be flatly rejected. The members of the Supreme Council angrily debated those points without reaching a consensus. They were hopelessly deadlocked, with Suzuki, Tōgō, and Navy Minister Yonai lined up against Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda.

As the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War battled over the issue of surrender, it received the shocking news that Nagasaki had been hit with an atomic bomb. This demolished the argument of the diehards, who had dismissed the reality that the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima was an atomic explosive and the possibility that the United States had more weapons of equal power. The attack on Nagasaki showed not only that the United States had succeeded in developing an atomic bomb but also that it had built more than one. It also fed the fears of the peace faction that many more atomic bombs would be used against Japan. Its members maintained that the only

way to preserve Japan's national polity was to surrender with the assurance that the emperor would not be removed. Kido worried about a popular uprising against the government if the war continued much longer.[12]

Despite the impact of the news about Nagasaki, the stalemate within the Supreme Council continued. Three members favored acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation if the emperor were allowed to remain, while the other three demanded further conditions and called for all-out resistance if the Allies refused. The debate then moved from the Supreme Council to the larger cabinet (of which Umezu and Toyoda were not members). It voted overwhelmingly against the militants' position by a margin of 13 to 3, but it required unanimity to act.

At that point, several former high-ranking Japanese government officials prevailed on Kido to persuade the emperor to intervene in support of Tōgō's argument. This was not an easy task. Hirohito apparently concurred with those who insisted on four conditions, and Kido was reluctant to challenge this position. But eventually he persuaded the emperor that the best way to preserve the national polity was to offer to accept the Potsdam Proclamation with one condition. Kido later explained that he "felt the situation was utterly hopeless," and he told Hirohito that "there was no alternative left" but to "have the government at once accept the Potsdam Declaration and bring the war to a close." The emperor's primary concern was saving himself and the imperial dynasty; shaken by the atomic attacks, the Soviet invasion, and the growing indications of popular discontent with his rule, he concluded that the Potsdam Proclamation was more palatable than the looming threat of Soviet expansion. Therefore, he agreed to address the cabinet and the Supreme Council, which was a major departure from standard procedures. Under normal conditions the emperor did not take an active role in deliberations but waited for his advisers to agree on a position. The "imperial conference" began close to midnight on August 9. After the opposing sides stated their views, Hirohito told his ministers that the time had come to "bear the unbearable." He announced his support for accepting the Potsdam Proclamation with the single condition of preservation of the imperial institution.[13]

Hirohito's comments were an expression of his will and not an order or binding decision, but they broke the deadlock. The Supreme Council and the cabinet agreed to his wish to offer to surrender. Even the diehards went along, partly out of respect for the emperor and partly because the atomic

bomb, ironically, enabled them to save face. They could claim that the war was lost and surrender made necessary because of the enemy's scientific prowess in developing nuclear weapons rather than because of their own mistakes or miscalculations.[14]

On August 10, the Japanese government transmitted a message through the Swiss embassy to the United States (though it arrived first in Washington through a MAGIC intercept). It offered to accept the terms of the Potsdam Proclamation "with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler."[15] The Japanese overture, welcome as it was, generated a spirited debate among Truman's advisers. Stimson, Forrestal, and Leahy, consistent with their earlier support for modifying unconditional surrender, urged that the United States agree to the proposal.

The Japanese offer largely set aside two of the disadvantages of softening unconditional surrender that had previously troubled American policymakers. If the United States had first approached Japan with more moderate terms, it might have encouraged and enhanced the credibility of the Japanese die-hard faction. But the fact that the initiative came from Japan indicated that the militants were willing to surrender on the basis of agreement to the single condition. An American proposal to mitigate surrender demands would also have run the risk of undermining morale and support for the war effort at home. But the Japanese provided what appeared to most high-level U.S. officials to be a sensible and painless way to end the war, especially since the retention of the emperor would greatly ease the potential difficulties of enforcing the surrender terms.

The lone holdout on accepting the Japanese proposal among Truman's key advisers was Byrnes. In part, he was troubled by objections raised by Japan experts in the State Department. They pointed out that the wording of the Japanese overture could leave the emperor on the throne with his powers undiminished. They convinced Byrnes that approving the conditional surrender offer was incompatible with the fundamental American war aim of eliminating Japan's ability to make war. Byrnes was probably even more concerned about the other potential drawback of backing off from unconditional surrender—it was politically risky. There was considerable evidence of strong popular support for insisting on unconditional surrender and removing Hirohito from his throne after the Japanese peace proposal became public knowledge. A Gallup poll on August 10, for example, showed

that by a margin of almost two to one those surveyed wanted the United States to reject Japan's initiative. Byrnes remarked that agreeing to the Japanese terms could lead to the "crucifixion of [the] President."[16]

Byrnes's priorities were clear; he was more worried about the political consequences of softening unconditional surrender than about prolonging the war and allowing the Soviets to make greater gains in Asia. Truman shared Byrnes's political concerns, and as a result, he continued to equivocate on the question of the status of the emperor. Rather than choosing between the two positions, he asked Byrnes to draft a reply that, in keeping with a proposal from Forrestal, would suggest that the United States was willing to accept Japan's offer without seeming to retreat from the Potsdam Proclamation.

Byrnes, with the assistance of his staff and input from Truman, Leahy, and Stimson, responded to his delicate assignment with a statement that carefully avoided an explicit guarantee about the status of the emperor. It suggested, however, that Hirohito would not be unseated immediately by specifying that his authority would be placed under that of the supreme commander of the Allied forces who would occupy Japan. It also provided that the "ultimate form of the government of Japan shall, in accordance with the Potsdam Proclamation, be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people."[17] After receiving approval from Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, Byrnes dispatched the statement to the Japanese government. The State Department also broadcast the message to Japan, where it was first picked up in the early morning hours of August 12.

By the time the Japanese peace offer had reached Washington on August 10, Truman had received his first full report on and photographs of the leveling of Hiroshima. Stimson met with him on August 8, the day after the president arrived home from Potsdam. Among the documents that Truman presumably read was a graphic firsthand account of the damage based on the observations of reconnaissance planes. It provided its "most conservative estimate" that "at least 100,000" people had lost their lives in Hiroshima.[18] The reports and photographs greatly impressed Truman; they seemed to make him focus for the first time on the immensity of the costs the bomb assessed in destruction and in human lives. He announced at a cabinet meeting on August 10 that he had issued an order that no more atomic bombs be dropped without his express authorization. Secretary of Commerce Wallace recorded in his diary: "He said the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible. He didn't like the idea of killing, as he said, 'all those kids.'"[19]

Nevertheless, heavy conventional bombing continued, to the consternation of residents of Japanese cities that were attacked and American crews that flew the missions at the risk of being shot down.

The guarded and purposely vague American reply to the Japanese peace overture caused a new crisis in Tokyo. It produced acute disappointment among Japanese leaders who wanted peace and had hoped for a more favorable response from the United States. Tōgō took Byrnes's statement to mean that the imperial institution would be preserved, but most of his colleagues were less certain. Suzuki, who had worked hard for the original Japanese proposal to accept the Potsdam Proclamation, was so disgruntled that he changed his position and argued that unless the Allies clarified their intentions, Japan would be forced to fight on. Tōgō, with considerable effort, managed to convince Suzuki to rejoin the ranks of the peace advocates.

The key to an agreement on peace was Anami, and he found Byrnes's statement unacceptable. He not only argued that the American reply failed to guarantee the national polity by allowing the retention of the emperor, but he also revived two of the additional conditions for which he had fought earlier. Anami contended that surrender was tolerable only if the Allies desisted from occupying Japan and permitted the Japanese to disarm themselves. In the face of the growing crisis, Kido again appealed to the emperor, and again Hirohito responded. On the morning of August 14, he met with the cabinet and Supreme Council for the Direction of the War. After listening to the conflicting arguments, Hirohito reiterated his support for terminating the war. "I have surveyed the conditions prevailing in Japan and in the world at large, and it is my belief that a continuation of the war promises nothing but additional destruction," he declared. "I have studied the terms of the Allied reply and … I consider the reply to be acceptable."[20] The cabinet quickly and unanimously acceded to the emperor's wishes.

The struggle was not yet over. A group of fanatical junior officers planned an uprising intended to establish a military government in Japan. Their leaders tried to enlist Anami, but despite his strong aversion to accepting the Potsdam Proclamation, he remained devoted to the emperor and committed to maintaining the existing system of government. He undermined the forces behind the coup d'état by asking a group of rebellious officers to carry out the emperor's request and "to do your utmost to preserve the national polity."[21] After refusing to join the plot, he returned to his home, knelt before his uniform and medals, and committed suicide by plunging a dagger into his

abdomen and neck. The attempted overthrow of the government failed, but it would have presented a much more formidable threat had it received Anami's support.

Meanwhile, the emperor made a recording of a message to the Japanese people, most of whom had never heard his voice. At noon on August 15, his radio broadcast announced that Japan would agree to the provisions of the Potsdam Proclamation. The emperor explained to his stunned listeners that "the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage." Without apologizing for Japan's aggression or mentioning the word "surrender," he went on to state that "the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives." If the war continued, he said, "it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization."[22]

The combined shocks of the atomic attack on Hiroshima and the Soviet offensive in Manchuria were decisive in ending the Pacific war. In the words of Navy Minister Yonai, who favored surrender on the single condition that the imperial institution be retained, the atomic bomb and the Soviet invasion were "gifts from the gods" that brought the war to a prompt conclusion. After Hiroshima, the emperor for the first time came out unequivocally for surrender, and after Soviet entry into the war, he decided, after considerable hesitation, that he supported acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation if the imperial dynasty were not abolished. The bombing of Hiroshima and the Soviet attack also had the salutary effect of greatly increasing the concern of Hirohito and his top advisers that growing popular dissatisfaction with the government represented a genuine threat to the imperial system.

Although the dual shocks of the atomic bomb and the Soviet invasion combined to force a Japanese surrender, it is unlikely that either one alone would have ended the war as quickly. The use of the bomb was a stunning and demoralizing blow for the Japanese government and population, but it did not cause the emperor or his chief advisers to decide immediately to accept the Potsdam Proclamation. Some scholars have argued that the Soviet strike in Manchuria would have been enough to cause a surrender, and it appears that American military leaders, who thought Soviet entry would be helpful but not decisive, underestimated the potential impact of the Soviet attack on the Japanese leadership. But if the bomb had not been dropped, the

end of the war would not have occurred as soon. For one thing, the use of the bomb motivated Stalin to begin the assault on Manchuria several days earlier than planned. More importantly, it is far from clear that the Japanese would have surrendered at once in response to the invasion of Manchuria alone. Suzuki commented after first learning of the offensive, “If we meet the Soviet advance as we are now, we will not be able to hold on for two months.” This was an ambiguous statement that nevertheless suggested that Japan would fight on as long as it was able. In short, it required both the atomic bomb and Soviet entry to convince Japanese authorities in Tokyo to accept the Potsdam Proclamation and to force a prompt surrender.[23]

The Soviet attack had another important and often overlooked benefit. It was apparently vital in winning acceptance of the Japanese decision to surrender among military leaders of intact Japanese forces in China and other parts of Asia and the Pacific. This could not be taken for granted. High-level officials in both Washington and Tokyo worried that mutinous generals of Japanese armies abroad would refuse to heed the emperor’s wishes. There were millions of able-bodied soldiers stationed in territories the Japanese had conquered early in the war who had been bypassed in the American island campaigns. They had the capacity to continue to battle fiercely and fanatically, and there were disturbing indications that some military leaders might order them to keep fighting. The commander of the Japanese army in China, for example, declared: “Such a disgrace as the surrender of several million troops without fighting is not paralleled in the world’s military history, and it is absolutely impossible to submit to unconditional surrender.” The invasion of Manchuria quickly neutralized this threat because of the power of the Soviet war machine, and a potentially severe crisis was averted. “Ending the war in the organized capitulation of Japan and her armed forces,” historian Richard B. Frank has written, “was a near miraculous deliverance.”[24]

The effect of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki is more difficult to assess than the impact of the Hiroshima attack and the Soviet invasion. The second atomic strike discredited the arguments of the die-hard military faction that the United States had only one atomic bomb. At the same time, both bombs made it easier for those who had called for a final battle in the homeland to go along with the emperor’s desire for peace, because the new technology diverted blame for the nation’s defeat from its military leaders. Nevertheless, the impact of the Nagasaki bomb on Japanese decision-makers

was slight in comparison with Hiroshima and the Soviet offensive.

It is possible, perhaps likely, that the war would have ended as soon even if the atomic bomb had not been used against Nagasaki. But the order to drop the second bomb “as soon as made ready” had gone out on July 25, and American leaders had no reason to change it. If the Japanese government had been ready to surrender at the time of the bombing of Hiroshima, as some critics of Truman later charged, it had ample time to notify the United States before the attack on Nagasaki. But Japanese leaders did not act quickly, resolutely, or prudently to end the war even in the face of disaster. They forfeited the opportunity to halt the “rain of ruin” from both atomic and conventional bombs by failing to immediately seek peace.

Even without the use of the atomic bombs, the war would probably have ended before an American invasion of Kyushu became necessary. Conditions in Japan were steadily deteriorating before the atomic attacks and would have continued to worsen as the war dragged on. The distribution of food in Japan was heavily dependent on railroad transportation by the summer of 1945, and as the war drew to an end the United States was planning a major bombing campaign to destroy the rail system. Had the war continued, the Japanese population faced the grim prospect of mass starvation. Diminishing food supplies, the destruction of cities from B-29 raids, and decreasing public morale had already fostered enough discontent to worry the emperor and his advisers. The peace advocates concluded that surrendering with assurances about the status of the emperor was the best way, perhaps the only way, to preserve the national polity. Even without the atomic attacks, it seems likely that the emperor at some point would have acted in the same way that he did in the aftermath of Hiroshima to end the war. Once the emperor decided in favor of surrender, the die-hard militants would probably have gone along, however grudgingly, just as they did when Hirohito supported the peace faction after Hiroshima.

It appears probable that the emperor would have moved to end the war before an American invasion. The fact that the invasion was a dreadful prospect for American leaders and soldiers should not obscure the fact that the costs in lives and destruction would have been even greater for the Japanese. In light of the hardships that Japan was suffering, growing popular criticism of the government, and the intervention of the emperor once he clearly opted for peace, it seems reasonable to conclude that a combination of the B-29 raids with conventional bombs, the blockade, the Soviet invasion,

and perhaps a moderation of the unconditional surrender policy would have ended the war without an invasion and without the use of atomic bombs. Although the militants were impervious to the suffering of civilians and welcomed the prospect of an invasion, Kido and presumably Hirohito were much more concerned about a loss of popular support that could threaten the national polity.[25]

After the war was over, a number of high-ranking American leaders, in memoirs or other statements, suggested that even without the use of atomic bombs, an invasion would not have been necessary to secure victory. Among those who made this point were Admiral Leahy, General LeMay, General Arnold, Admiral King, General Eaker, and General Eisenhower.[26] Herbert Feis, a former State Department official and a Pulitzer Prize–winning historian, reported in a book published in 1966 that Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, Undersecretary of the Navy Bard, and General Spaatz shared the same opinion.[27] Of course, this conclusion was an after-the-fact appraisal on the part of former policymakers and military authorities. With the exception of LeMay, there is no evidence that the postwar statements of American leaders reflected their judgment during the summer of 1945 or that any of them, with the possible exception of Bard, informed Truman that they thought the war could end without the bomb or an invasion. Important information about Japan's weakness and growing popular discontent among the Japanese did not surface until after the war and was not available to Truman before Hiroshima.

Some of the officials who asserted after the fact that the war could have ended on a satisfactory basis without the bomb or an invasion were influenced by bureaucratic interests, personal experiences, or even political ambitions. Navy leaders were concerned that the importance of their mission would not receive due recognition in the postwar world and that their status, prestige, and budgets would suffer accordingly. Air force leaders wanted the establishment of a separate branch of the armed forces that was independent of the Army. In both cases, they did not want the effects of the atomic bombs to overshadow their contributions to the victory over Japan. Leahy belonged to the old-fashioned school of military ethics that deplored attacks on civilian populations. He found the atomic bomb barbaric, which affected the conclusion in his memoirs that the use of atomic bombs "was of no material assistance in our war against Japan."[28] Eisenhower, when he published his wartime memoirs in 1948, might have wanted to present an image of a

military leader who was tough but sensitive to the horrors of war.[29]

Despite personal backgrounds or experiences that might have colored their views, the independent testimonies of so many top officials about the likelihood of the war ending without an invasion or the bomb should not be lightly dismissed. They almost certainly would have refrained from promoting an argument that could offend the president they had served or invite criticism unless their assessment had some solid factual or analytical foundations. Most of them had retired from active service by the time they published their memoirs, so they were removed from interservice rivalries and bureaucratic posturing. Their judgments were not conclusive, but they provided substantial confirmatory evidence that victory over Japan could have been achieved without either the bomb or an invasion.

Although information and testimonies that appeared after the war suggested that neither the bomb nor the invasion was essential to force a Japanese surrender, documentary sources do not demonstrate that high U.S. officials were convinced in the summer of 1945 that victory would be accomplished without a landing on Kyushu. They could not be certain that the war would end before November 1, and they proceeded on the assumption that the invasion would be necessary. American leaders and military planners regarded an invasion as a genuine possibility for which preparations had to be made. But they did not view it as inevitable; it was a contingency if all else failed to end the war. Deputy Chief of Staff Thomas Handy told Stimson on June 4 that it would take Soviet entry into the war and a landing "or imminent threat of a landing" to bring about the surrender.[30] General Marshall used a similar conditional reference at the June 18 meeting at which Truman authorized the Kyushu invasion. He commented that Soviet participation in the war would help force a surrender "if we land in Japan."[31] A member of Marshall's staff, General George A. Lincoln, wrote to a colleague on July 10, 1945: "The B-29s are doing such a swell job that some people think the Japs will quit without an invasion."[32] One of MacArthur's lieutenants, General Robert Eichelberger, told his wife on July 24 that "a great many people, probably 50%, feel that Japan is about to fold up."[33]

Truman's diary notations support the same conclusion. His remark after meeting with Stalin on July 17, "Fini Japs when that [Soviet entry into the war] comes about," does not prove that he thought the Soviet invasion of Manchuria was enough in itself to force an early surrender. It does, however, suggest that he did not believe an invasion was inevitable. This also applies

to Truman's notation the following day: "Believe Japs will fold up before Russia comes in. I am sure they will when Manhattan appears over their homeland." The precise meaning of those comments in perhaps debatable, but they clearly suggest the president thought that even if the bomb was not used, the war might end without an invasion.

A further indication of the same outcome was the reconsideration in early August 1945 of the plans for the American landing on Kyushu. Intelligence information showed that Japanese forces in southern Kyushu were much larger than anticipated, and this caused military planners to weigh the possibility of shifting the site of the invasion or perhaps even canceling it. The end of the war made this problem moot, but it is further evidence that Truman did not face a clearly defined choice between the atomic bomb and an invasion of Japan.[34]

Given the fact that Truman and his top-level advisers did not regard an invasion as inevitable and given their knowledge, incomplete as it was, of the severity of the crisis in Japan, the question arises of why they did not elect to wait to use the bomb. The invasion was not scheduled until November 1, 1945, so why not postpone the atomic attacks and hope that Japan collapsed under the weight of the critical internal and external problems it faced? Why rush to drop the atomic bombs when they might prove to be unnecessary? Five fundamental considerations, all of which grew out of circumstances that existed in the summer of 1945, moved Truman to use the bombs immediately, without a great deal of thought and without consulting with his advisers about the advantages and potential disadvantages of the new weapons: (1) the commitment to ending the war successfully at the earliest possible moment; (2) the need to justify the effort and expense of building the atomic bombs; (3) the hope of achieving diplomatic gains in the growing rivalry with the Soviet Union; (4) the lack of incentives not to use atomic weapons; and (5) hatred of the Japanese and a desire for vengeance.

Ending the war at the earliest possible moment. Truman was looking for a way to end the war as quickly and painlessly as possible for the United States; he was not looking for a way to avoid using the bomb. The primary objective of the United States had always been to win the war decisively at the lowest cost in American casualties, and the bomb was the best means to accomplish those goals. Even if the bomb was not necessary to end the war without an invasion, it was necessary to end the war as soon as possible.

Although American forces were not involved in any major campaigns at the time of the Japanese surrender, they were still suffering casualties. If the total of 3,233 Army combat and noncombat deaths in the month of July 1945 is taken as a norm—a risky assumption, but they are the only relevant figures available—the continuation of the war for, say, another three months until the invasion was scheduled to begin would have resulted in approximately 9,700 American deaths in the Army alone. If only combat deaths are considered, the 775 sustained in July would extrapolate into about 2,300 had the war lasted three months more. The overall number of American casualties would have increased further from Japanese attacks on U.S. ships; the battle of Okinawa and the sinking of the *Indianapolis* demonstrated how high the costs to the Navy could be.

If Truman had been confronted with a choice, on the one hand, of using the atomic bomb or, on the other hand, permitting the deaths of 9,700 soldiers and a significant number of sailors, there is no reason to believe that he would have refrained from authorizing the bomb. He would almost certainly have made the same choice if the number of projected American casualties had been much smaller. Whatever casualty estimates he might have received or projected, he was strongly committed to reducing them to a minimum. This goal was consistent with American war aims and with his own experience. The atomic bomb offered the way most likely to achieve an American victory on American terms with the lowest cost in American lives.

The inflated numbers of American lives supposedly saved by the bomb, numbers cited by Truman and others after the war, should not obscure the fact that the president would have elected to use the bomb even if the numbers of U.S. casualties prevented had been relatively small.[35] In two statements he made on August 9, the president suggested that the bomb would spare thousands, but not hundreds of thousands, of American lives. In a radio address to the nation he declared that he had used the bomb "to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans." In a congratulatory message to the men and women of the Manhattan Project, he expressed hope that "this new weapon will result in the saving of thousands of American lives."[36] By citing the number of Americans who would be spared in a range of thousands, Truman's statements were more in line with the military's estimates in the summer of 1945 than with later claims that the bomb saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Even though American policymakers did not regard an invasion as inevitable, they did regard it as possible. They could not be sure that the Japanese would surrender without an invasion. With information that became available later, it is possible to determine with greater certainty that victory would have come without a landing on Kyushu. This is, however, an after-the-fact conclusion that cannot be proven, and it is essential to keep in mind that Truman and his advisers had to make their decisions based on what they knew at the time.

Justifying the costs of the Manhattan Project. As a corollary, and only as a corollary, to the main objective of shortening the war and saving American lives, Truman wanted to justify the expense and effort required to build the atomic bombs. After learning of Hiroshima, Byrnes commented that he had been "worried about the huge expendtirue [*sic*] and feared repercussions because he had doubt of its working." Throughout the war Groves and his superiors in the War Department also fretted about the possibility that after spending huge amounts of money and procuring vital war supplies on a priority basis, the bomb would be a dud. They could easily imagine being grilled mercilessly by hostile members of Congress. The success of the Manhattan Project in building the bombs and ending the war was a source of satisfaction and relief.[37]

Truman's concerns were broader. If he had not used the bomb once it became available, he could never have explained his reasoning in a way that satisfied the American people, particularly those who lost loved ones in the last few days or weeks of the war. As Stimson wrote in 1947: "My chief purpose was to end the war in victory with the least possible cost in the lives of the men in the armies which I had helped to raise…. I believe that no man, in our position and subject to our responsibilities, holding in his hands a weapon of such possibilities for accomplishing this purpose and saving those lives, could have failed to use it and afterwards looked his countrymen in the face."[38] If Truman had backed off from using a weapon that had cost the United States dearly to build, with the result that more American troops died, public confidence in his capacity to govern would have been, at best, severely undermined.

Impressing the Soviets. As an added incentive, using the bomb might provide diplomatic benefits by making the Soviet Union more amenable to

American wishes. There is no question that Byrnes strongly believed the bomb would improve his negotiating position with the Soviets over the growing list of contested issues. Byrnes enjoyed easy access to and great influence with Truman on diplomatic issues; the president acquiesced in Byrnes's efforts to delay Soviet entry into the Pacific war and, from all indications, shared his hope that the bomb would provide diplomatic benefits by making the Soviets more tractable. But Truman did not drop the bomb primarily to intimidate or impress the Soviets. If its use resulted in diplomatic advantages, that would be, as Barton J. Bernstein has argued, a "bonus."[39]

Truman's foremost consideration in using the bomb immediately was not to frustrate Soviet ambitions in Asia or to show off the bomb before the Japanese capitulated; it was to end the war at the earliest possible time. Despite their impatience with Soviet demands at Potsdam, he and Byrnes still hoped that they could get along with Stalin in the postwar era. Growing differences with the Soviet Union were a factor in the thinking of American officials about the bomb but were not the main reason they rushed to drop it on Japan.

Lack of incentives not to use the bomb. Truman used the bomb because he had no compelling reason to avoid using it. American leaders had always assumed that the bomb would be dropped when it became available, and there were no military, diplomatic, political, or moral considerations that undermined or reversed that assumption. Indeed, military, diplomatic, and political considerations weighed heavily in favor of the use of the bomb. Militarily, it could speed the end of the war. Diplomatically, it could make the Soviets more likely to accept American positions. Politically, ending the war quickly would be enormously popular, while delaying the achievement of victory by not using the bomb could be disastrous.

Moral scruples about using the bomb were not a major deterrent to its use. American policymakers took the same view that General LeMay advanced later in his memoirs: "From a practical standpoint of the soldiers out in the field it doesn't make any difference how you slay an enemy. Everybody worries about their own losses."[40] Bombing of civilians was such an established practice by the summer of 1945 that American leaders accepted it as a legitimate means of conducting war. It seemed defensible if it shortened the war and saved American lives, and that was the principal purpose of dropping the atomic bomb. Some high-ranking American officials found

attacks on civilian targets distasteful, and Truman, after he saw the photographs of and read the reports about the destruction of Hiroshima, was so disturbed that he issued an order that no more atomic bombs be used without his express authorization. But moral reservations about terror bombing remained muted; on balance they were less influential than the desire to end the war as soon as possible. In the minds of American policymakers, this objective took precedence over moral considerations about the indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations.

Dealing with "a beast." Hatred of the Japanese, a desire for revenge for Pearl Harbor, and racist attitudes were a part of the mix of motives that led to the atomic attacks. When Samuel McCrea Cavert, general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches, raised objections to the atomic bombings, Truman responded on August 11, 1945: "Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war…. When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true."[41] Truman did not authorize the bombs solely or primarily for those reasons, and there is no reason to think that he would have refrained from using atomic weapons against Germany if they had been available before the European war ended. But the prevalent loathing of Japan, among policymakers and the American people alike, helped override any hesitation or ambivalence that Truman and his advisers might have felt about the use of atomic bombs.

All of those considerations played a role in the thinking of American leaders, and taken together they made the use of the bomb an easy and obvious decision. It was not an action they relished, but neither was it one they agonized over. The use of the bomb was not inevitable; if Truman had been seeking a way to avoid dropping it, he could have done so. But in the context of the circumstances in the summer of 1945 and in light of the disadvantages of the alternatives, it is difficult to imagine Truman or any other American president electing not to use the bomb.

The fundamental question that has triggered debate about Truman's decision since shortly after the end of World War II is, Was the bomb necessary? In view of the evidence now available, the answer is yes … and no. Yes, the bomb was necessary, in combination with the Soviet attack on

Manchuria, to end the war at the earliest possible moment. And yes, the bomb was necessary to save the lives of American troops, perhaps numbering in the several thousands. But no, the bomb was probably not necessary to end the war within a fairly short time without an invasion of Japan. And no, the bomb was not necessary to save the lives of *hundreds* of thousands of American troops.