

The Bombs

1 FANTASY IN TOKYO

In the final phase of the Second World War, Allied generals and admirals played a minor role in the decisions which precipitated Japan's surrender. These will remain a focus of controversy until the end of time, first, because of the use of atomic bombs; second, because the mountain of historical evidence, detailing the principal actors' words and deeds, stands so high. Much of it invites inconclusive or even contradictory interpretation. Leading figures changed their minds, some more than once. Several wrote disingenuously afterwards, to justify their own actions. The Japanese aspect of the story is rendered opaque by a familiar chasm between what the nation's leaders said, and what each afterwards claimed or is conjectured privately to have thought.

From the winter of 1944 onwards, a significant party in Tokyo was seeking a route by which to end the war, and to overcome the army's resolve to fight to the last. Even the most dovish, however, wanted terms that were not remotely negotiable, including the preservation of Japanese hegemony in Korea and Manchuria, freedom from Allied military occupation, and the right for Japan to conduct any war crimes trials of its citizens. As late as May 1945, the emperor clung to a belief that a victory was attainable on Okinawa, which would strengthen Japan's negotiating position – in other words, that military resistance was still serviceable. On 9 June, he urged the Japanese people to 'smash the inordinate ambitions of the enemy nations'.

The 'peace party' thought and spoke as if Japan could expect to be treated as an honourable member of the international community. There was no acknowledgement of the fact that, in Western eyes, the behaviour of the Japanese since Pearl Harbor, indeed since 1931, had placed their nation beyond the pale. Japan's leaders wasted months asserting

diplomatic positions founded upon the demands of their own self-esteem, together with supposed political justice. In reality, their only chance of modified terms derived from Allied fears that a host of men would have to die if an invasion of the homeland proved necessary. As blockade and bombardment, together with the prospects of atomic bombs and Russian entry into the Pacific theatre, progressively diminished the perceived American need to risk invasion, Japan held no cards at all.

Nothing more vividly reflected Tokyo's misreading of its own predicament than its attempts to enlist the good offices of the Soviet Union as an intermediary. Russian abstention from belligerency until August 1945 was among the odder aspects of the global conflict. In April 1941 it served the interests of both Russia and Japan to conclude a five-year Neutrality Pact. Japan's ambitions lay south and eastwards. It needed to secure itself from a threat in the rear. Likewise, even before Russia became committed to its death struggle with Germany, Moscow wanted no complications in Asia. When Hitler's Operation Barbarossa was launched in June 1941, Stalin was thankful to be assured by Richard Sorge, his legendary agent in Tokyo, that Japan would not attack Russia, and thus that the Red Army could safely throw everything into the western war.

Yet if peace on the Russo-Manchurian border suited the two neighbours for three years, by 1944 it no longer suited the US. A million Japanese soldiers in China might sooner or later be committed against the Americans. An invasion of Manchuria by the Red Army offered the most obvious means of deflecting such a redeployment. Stalin's masses could reprise what they were so spectacularly doing in Europe – saving the lives of Western Allied soldiers by expending those of Russians. As late as 6 August 1945, MacArthur told an off-the-record press briefing in Manila of his eagerness for the Soviets to invade Manchuria: 'Every Russian killed is one less American who has to be.'

Churchill and Roosevelt were thrilled by Stalin's September 1944 promise to launch sixty Soviet divisions against Japan within three months of Germany's collapse. 'When we are vexed with other matters,' the prime minister wrote to FDR, 'we must remember the supreme value of this [commitment] in shortening the whole struggle.' MacArthur was firmly of the view that 'We must not invade Japan proper unless the Russian army is previously committed to action in Manchuria.' Marshall concurred. American field commanders wanted all the help they could get to diminish the numbers of enemy they might have to confront in

the Japanese home islands. From Luzon, Maj.-Gen. Joseph Swing of 11th Airborne Division wrote home in May, dismissing reported British fears about the perils of admitting the Soviets to the Asian war: 'Everybody wants the Roosh as soon as he will come and the more the merrier. As to what Uncle Joe Stalin will get in the East . . . he'll demand and probably get anything he wants.'

Washington recognised that the Russians would not fight unless they received tangible rewards for doing so. To destroy the Nazis, the Soviet Union had already contributed twenty-five times the human sacrifice made by all the Western Allies together. After months of equivocation, at Yalta Stalin presented his invoice for an eastern commitment. Moscow wanted from Japan the Kurile Islands and southern Sakhalin; from China, the lease of Port Arthur, access to Dalian as a free port, control of the south Manchurian railway, and recognition of Russian suzerainty over Outer Mongolia. On the fifth day of the conference, 8 February 1945, Roosevelt agreed to accept Moscow's terms. The US president acted with colonialist insouciance, making important Chinese territorial concessions without consulting the Chinese government. But these arrangements were nominally subject to Chiang Kai-Shek's endorsement, and in return Moscow pledged to recognise the Nationalists as China's sole legitimate rulers. Both the Soviet and American delegations went home from Yalta well pleased with their bargain, indifferent to the fact that it would violate the Russo-Japanese Neutrality Pact.

Yet in offering incentives, Roosevelt ignored the fact that Stalin never did – or forbore from doing – anything unless it fitted his own agenda. In 1945, far from the Russians requiring encouragement to invade Manchuria, it would have been almost impossible to dissuade them from doing so. As soon as Germany was beaten, Stalin was bent upon employing his armies to collect Asian booty. Ironies were thus densely woven into the events of the five months following Yalta. On 22 February, Japanese ambassador in Moscow Naotake Sato, a former foreign minister, called on Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin's foreign minister, on his return from the Crimean conference. Sato was assured that bilateral Russo-Japanese relations, the future of the two countries' Neutrality Pact, had nothing to do with the Americans and the British. This bland deceit was gratefully received in Tokyo. Japan sought Russian goodwill to salvage its tottering empire at exactly the moment Stalin secretly committed himself to loot it.

As the Russians planned and armed for an August descent on

Manchuria, however, American enthusiasm for their participation began to falter. Even if US military leaders were eager to see the Red Army committed, politicians and diplomats were much more equivocal. European experience suggested that whatever Stalin's armies conquered, they kept. It seemed rash to indulge further Russian expansionism in Asia. By April 1945, some important Americans would have been happy to break the bargain made with Stalin in February, if they could justify doing so. The Russians, conscious of this, thenceforward possessed the strongest possible interest in ensuring that the Japanese kept fighting. If Tokyo made peace with Washington before Stalin had shifted his armies eastwards and was ready to declare war, the Americans might renege on the rewards promised at Yalta.

Japanese politicians, with extraordinary naïveté, acted in the belief that wooing neutral Russia would serve them better than addressing belligerent America. In reality, there was more willingness among some Western politicians than in Moscow to consider concessions in return for an early end of bloodshed. Winston Churchill was the first and most important Allied leader to propose qualifying the doctrine of unconditional surrender in respect of Japan. Before the combined chiefs of staff in Cairo on 9 February 1945, he argued that 'some mitigation would be worthwhile, if it led to the saving of a year or a year and a half of a war in which so much blood and treasure would be poured out'. Roosevelt dismissed the prime minister out of hand. British influence on this issue, as indeed upon everything to do with the Pacific war, ranged between marginal and non-existent. The decisions about how to address the Japanese, whether by force or parley, rested unequivocally in Washington.

A strong party in the State Department, headed by former Tokyo ambassador Joseph Grew, now undersecretary of state, favoured a public commitment to allow Japan to retain its national polity, the *kokutai*, of which the most notable feature was the status of the emperor. Grew and his associates believed that the *kokutai* mattered vastly more to the Japanese than it should to anyone else: if assurances on this point would avert a bloodbath in the home islands, they should be given. Secretary of war Henry Stimson and navy secretary James Forrestal agreed, as did some media opinion-formers. The British Embassy in Washington reported to London on 13 May: 'There are notes . . . not merely in the ex-isolationist press but eg the *Washington Post*, of the possibility of some modification of unconditional surrender in [Japan's] case and

optimistic speculation of likelihood of her early surrender when she perceives the hopelessness of her case, and woven into popular desire for Russian participation in the Pacific War there runs a thin but just perceptible thread, the thought that an American settlement of that area would best be made if USSR were kept out of it.'

Yet the White House and its most influential advisers believed that American public opinion would recoil from concessions to the perpetrators of Pearl Harbor, among whom the emperor was symbolically foremost; and that generosity was anyway unnecessary. Japan's predicament was worsening rapidly. The principal uncertainty focused upon whether it would be necessary to invade the home islands. Among US chiefs of staff, Admiral Ernest King, for the navy, and Gen. 'Hap' Arnold of the USAAF opposed a ground invasion. While their desire to avoid another bloody campaign was no doubt sincere, both men also had partisan agendas, well understood in Washington. King wanted the world to see that Japan had been defeated by the US Navy and its blockade. Arnold sought recognition of strategic bombing's decisive contribution, in pursuit of his crusade to make the Army Air Forces an independent service. King and Arnold could invoke important opinion in support of their case. Early in April, the US Joint Intelligence Committee predicted that 'the increasing effects of air-sea blockade, the progressive cumulative devastation wrought by strategic bombing, and the collapse of Germany' would soon oblige the Japanese to acknowledge that they could not continue the war.

Yet as Germany foundered, King and Arnold allowed themselves to be persuaded that planning must continue for Olympic. Marshall, although he had never been enthusiastic, 'went firm'. However unwelcome, the invasion option must be kept open. Given the lead time indispensable to a huge amphibious operation, a commitment was needed forthwith. Experience, especially at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, showed that the enemy exploited every day of grace to strengthen his defences, and thus to raise the cost of delaying invasion. The chiefs of staff were also concerned that the American people's patience with the war was ebbing, and thus that it was essential to hasten a closure in the east. On 25 April the joint chiefs of staff adopted JCS 924/15, endorsing Olympic. Their memorandum, which should be regarded as prudent recognition of a contingency, rather than as an ironclad commitment, was forwarded to the President – the very new President – of the United States.

Harry Truman has come to be regarded as one of America's outstanding national leaders of the twentieth century. In the spring of 1945, however, this decent, simple, impulsive man was all but overwhelmed by the burden of office thrust upon him by Roosevelt's death on 12 April. 'I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen upon me,' he told reporters on the afternoon that he was sworn in. 'Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now.' One journalist said: 'Good luck, Mr President.' Truman said: 'I wish you didn't have to call me that.' By one of Roosevelt's most hubristic omissions, given the desperate state of his own health, he had made no attempt to ensure that his vice-president was briefed to address the vast issues which now fell to his lot. Until 12 April, Truman was not even a recipient of Magic intelligence bulletins. Those who observed him closely during his first months at the White House believed that much he said and did was motivated by insecurity, a desire to appear authoritative and decisive, though within himself he felt equipped to be neither. Such self-awareness deserves the sympathy of posterity.

On 10 May, responding to perceived Russian breaches of faith in Europe, Truman directed that lend-lease supplies to the Soviet Union should be terminated. Grew and Averell Harriman, US ambassador in Moscow, wanted him to go further, and repudiate the Asian provisions of Yalta. Stimson dissuaded the president from these courses, observing that 'the concessions . . . to Russia on Far Eastern matters . . . are . . . within the military power of Russia to obtain regardless of US military action short of war'. But Truman's conduct in the months that followed was dominated by a determination to prove his own fitness for office, above all by making no unnecessary concessions to the bullying of the Soviet Union, and by conducting the last phase of the war against Japan with a conviction worthy of his great predecessor, and of his great nation. He now discovered that science promised an extraordinary tool to further these ends.

On 24 April Truman received from Stimson a letter requesting a meeting to discuss 'a highly secret matter'. Next day, the secretary of war and Maj.-Gen. Leslie Groves, senior officer responsible for the Manhattan Project, revealed to the new president its secrets, about which he had previously received only intimations. 'Within four months,' wrote Stimson, 'we shall in all probability have completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city.' Groves was bent on dropping two, to prove to the Japanese

that the first nuclear explosion represented no unique phenomenon.

The Manhattan Project represented the most stupendous scientific effort in history. In three years, at a cost of \$2 billion, the US – with some perfunctorily acknowledged British aid – had advanced close to fulfilling a programme which much of the scientific world had thought unattainable, certainly within a time frame relevant to this conflict. At Truman's meeting with Stimson and Groves, he was not warned that he must make a great decision, confront a historic dilemma. He was merely informed of the new weapon's impending maturity. There was no hint of looming controversy. Rather, there was an absolute assumption that if the Japanese continued to fight, atomic bombs would be used against them, as had been every other available destructive tool to advance the conflict's ending.

Technological determinism is an outstanding feature of great wars. At a moment when armadas of Allied bombers had been destroying the cities of Germany and Japan for three years, killing civilians in hundreds of thousands, the notion of withholding a vastly more impressive means of fulfilling the same purpose scarcely occurred to those directing the Allied war effort. They were irritated, indeed exasperated, by intimations of personal scruple from scientists concerned with the weapon's construction. As long as Hitler survived, the Manhattan team had striven unstintingly to build a bomb, haunted by fear that the Nazis might get there first. Once Germany was defeated, however, some scientists' motivation faltered. Their doubts and apprehensions grew, about the purposes to which their efforts might be turned.

A group in Chicago formed a 'committee of social and political implications' which became known as the Franck Committee. Its members argued in a report submitted to Washington: 'The military advantages and the saving of American lives achieved by the sudden use of atomic bombs against Japan may be outweighed by the ensuing loss of confidence and by a wave of horror and revulsion sweeping over the rest of the world and perhaps even dividing public opinion at home.' In May 1945, some Manhattan team members made determined efforts to caution America's political leaders. Several wrote letters to the president. Leo Szilard, one of the foremost Chicago scientists, paid a personal visit to the White House. Truman's secretary diverted him to Spartanburg, South Carolina, home of James Byrnes, the president's personal representative on the bomb committee.

Byrnes enjoyed one of the more unusual careers in American history.

Sixty-six in 1945, a self-made man of the humblest origins, he had served as congressman, senator and Supreme Court justice. Critics dismissed him as a mere Democratic Party hack and White House crony, but he wielded extraordinary power as director of the Office of War Mobilization, and was widely described as FDR's 'assistant president'. Embittered by Roosevelt's refusal to offer him the vice-presidency, in the spring of 1945 he had opted to retire into private life when abruptly recalled by Truman, who intended him for secretary of state. At Spartanburg on 22 May, Byrnes was irked to be confronted by the unsolicited Hungarian emotionalism of Szilard: 'His general demeanour and his desire to participate in policy-making made an unfavourable impression on me.' The scientist, in his turn, was dismayed by Byrnes's unreceptiveness: 'When I spoke of my concern that Russia might become an atomic power soon, he said that General Groves . . . told him there was no uranium in Russia.' Groves hated Szilard, and indeed had claimed to suspect him of being a German agent.

As the scientist made his case against precipitate use of the bomb, Byrnes interrupted impatiently that Congress would have plenty to say if \$2 billion proved to have been expended on the Manhattan Project for no practical purpose. 'Byrnes thought the Russians might be more manageable if impressed by military might,' recalled Szilard. Nothing could demonstrate this more effectively than the atomic bomb. The Hungarian was disgusted when Byrnes urged him to consider that the bomb might even get Stalin's legions out of his own country. 'Flabbergasted' by his host's insensitivity, Szilard walked unhappily back to Spartanburg station. It would have been little consolation to him to know that attempts by the great Danish physicist Niels Bohr to convey the same fears to Roosevelt and Churchill had met with a response even less temperate than that of Byrnes. The prime minister suggested that Bohr should be confined, to prevent him from venting his dangerous misgivings.

The scientists' scruples counted for little alongside the consensual perception of America's leadership that here was a weapon which could decisively strengthen their hands in confronting the Soviets as well as defeating the Japanese. The builders of the bomb were fatally hampered in their attempts to promote a debate about its use by the fact that security made it impossible, indeed treasonable, even to discuss its existence outside their own circle. Most focused concern not upon the bomb's use, but upon whether a warning should first be given to Japan, and

whether the peace of the post-war world might best be secured by sharing America's atomic secrets with the Soviets.

If the scientists had better understood the disastrous strategic predicament of the Japanese in 1945, more would have opposed Hiroshima. As it was, however, the men who knew most about the new weapon were quarantined from awareness of the context in which it would be employed. Meanwhile, the politicians responsible for determining the bomb's use had an inadequate sense of its meaning for civilisation. Byrnes told Truman: 'It might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war.' Overwhelmingly the most important representative of the Manhattan Project in Washington was not a scientist, but Gen. Groves. Triumphant about the monumental undertaking of which he was chief administrator, he rejected any notion that his country might fail to exploit its fulfilment.

Groves is one of the least-known significant military figures of the Second World War. It is hard to overstate his importance in sustaining momentum towards the detonation of the bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A major-general whose rank would have entitled him only to a divisional command in the field, he had been promoted by fate to extraordinary authority. An army chaplain's son, as deputy chief of construction for the army he had played a major role in building the Pentagon. In September 1942 he was a forty-six-year-old colonel eagerly awaiting overseas posting – 'I wanted to command troops' – when he was instead ordered to supervise the Manhattan Project. 'If you do the job right, it will win the war,' he was told.

It seems likely that his superiors said this to reconcile the engineer to a thankless domestic posting, rather than because they believed it at the time. Groves's assignment was unique for a soldier, requiring him to oversee thousands of civilian scientists of the highest gifts and often most wayward personalities, led by Dr Robert Oppenheimer. Beyond these guiding brains, Groves was responsible for a workforce that eventually grew to 125,000, embracing engineers, administrators and construction personnel, centred upon the development laboratory at Los Alamos, New Mexico, and operating other facilities all over the US. Most of these people had no notion, of course, about the objective of their labours. The paunchy, bustling general reported only to the secretary of war and the army chief of staff. To Groves's own amazement, as the bomb approached completion he was deputed by Marshall also to assume responsibility for its operational use.

Groves was bereft of tact, sensitivity, cultural awareness, and human sympathy for either the Japanese or the bevy of Nobel laureates whom he commanded. He harassed and goaded the scientists as if they were army engineers building a bridge. Yet his effectiveness demands the respect of history. His deputy, Col. Kenneth Nichols, described him as 'the biggest sonofabitch I've ever met in my life, but also one of the most capable. He had an ego second to none . . . tireless energy, great self-confidence and ruthlessness. I hated his guts and so did everyone else, [but] if I was to have to do my part all over again, I would select Groves as boss.' At the end of April 1945, the general was exultant. The sun shone brilliantly upon his purposes. A bomb should be ready for testing inside three months, its siblings for use rapidly thereafter. Groves's commitment was critical to the eventual decision to destroy Hiroshima. When other men faltered or their attention was distracted, he never flagged. A week after the White House meeting with Stimson and the general, Truman ordered the formation of the so-called Interim Committee, to advise him on the progress and possible use of the bomb. Groves had already established a Target Committee, which selected eighteen Japanese cities as possible objectives, and endorsed the general's view that when the time came, two atomic weapons should be dropped.

When Truman learned of Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May, therefore, he knew of the extraordinary means the United States was soon likely to possess to impose its will on its enemies and drastically to alter the balance of power between itself and the Soviet Union. Stimson told a colleague: 'We really held all the cards . . . a straight royal flush, and we mustn't be a fool about the way we play it . . . Now the thing is not to get into unnecessary quarrels by talking too much . . . Let our actions speak for themselves.' At a press conference on 8 May following the end of the war in Europe, Truman restated America's determination to receive the unconditional surrender of Japan's armed forces. He said nothing explicit, however, about the future of the emperor, and emphasised that America did not intend 'the extermination or enslavement of the Japanese people'.

Next day, Japan defiantly informed the world that the German surrender increased its determination to fight on. The Japanese minister in Berne, alarmed by observing the revulsion towards all things German which followed exposure of their concentration camps, urged Tokyo to avoid giving the world any impression that Japan would follow Nazi policies 'at the bitter end'. Yet there were still plenty of fantasists. As late

as 29 May, Japan's naval attaché in Stockholm expressed his belief that in negotiations the Western Allies would allow Japan to retain Manchuria 'to provide a barrier against Russia'. He thought Britain would be content to settle for restoration of its Asian colonies. He himself favoured fighting on, because he thought Western dismay about Russian excesses left the Anglo-Americans open to compromise. These messages were read in Washington, via Magic.

While Japan was suffering terrible pain from LeMay's B-29 offensive, it was plain that several months must elapse before the US could launch its next big land campaign, which the Japanese correctly assumed would be an invasion of Kyushu. Japan's peacemakers supposed, therefore, that they still had time to talk. Since early spring there had been some diminution of expectations among civilian politicians. Facing imminent defeat on Okinawa, they aspired only to preserving the *kokutai*, together with Manchukuo's 'independence' and Korea's status as a Japanese colony.

If these ambitions were fanciful enough, the fantasies of the military were even more extravagant. As an incentive to the Soviets to maintain their neutrality, the navy proposed exchanging some Japanese cruisers for Russian oil and aircraft. Gen. Korechika Anami was a man of few brains and little imagination, but as war minister he possessed overwhelmingly the most influential voice in the Japanese cabinet. Anami opposed all concessions on the Asian mainland: 'Japan is not losing the war, since we have not lost any homeland territory. I object to conducting negotiations on the assumption that we are defeated.' More realistic voices urged that Japan should concentrate upon a single limited objective: preserving the imperial system and the homeland's territorial integrity.

Among many leading Japanese, there was a sharp distinction between an outcome of the war which they would privately accept, and that which they would acknowledge in the presence of colleagues and subordinates. Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki, for instance, favoured peace. In public, however, he continued to exhort the nation to resist to the end, in the spirit of the kamikazes. The politicians feared for their lives if they were identified as defeatists by the military fanatics, and recent Japanese history suggested that their apprehension was well-founded. Admiral Suzuki himself, seventy-seven and deaf, carried the scars of four bullet wounds received in 1936, during an attempt by army ultra-nationalists to overthrow the then government.

The consequence of the peace party's timidity was a stunning incoherence of view, which persisted through to August 1945. Japanese equivocation was bound to incur the impatience, if not incomprehension, of literal-minded Americans, to whom words meant neither more nor less than they expressed. Japan's critical error was to address the quest for peace at the usual snail's pace of all its high policy-making. Tokyo was oblivious that, 8,000 miles away, Gen. Groves's titanic enterprise was hastening towards its climax at a far more urgent tempo.

Japanese leaders feared, indeed anticipated, a Russian invasion of Manchuria. They were nonetheless shocked when, six weeks after Molotov told ambassador Sato that nothing had happened at Yalta which should alarm his country, Moscow announced the abrogation of the 1941 Neutrality Pact. In Japanese eyes, Soviet behaviour represented perfidy. Yet on 29 May Molotov received Sato amicably, and assured him that the Soviet statement was a mere technicality, that Russia 'has had her fill of war in Europe', and must now address huge domestic problems. Sato, usually bleakly realistic about Soviet pronouncements, was rash enough to swallow this one. US intelligence annotated the Magic decrypt of the ambassador's report to Tokyo: '[The] meeting leaves a mental picture of a spaniel in the presence of a mastiff who also knows where the bone is buried.' If it seems extraordinary that the architects of Pearl Harbor could be surprised by another nation's duplicity, that the Japanese could suppose themselves to possess any negotiating hand of interest to Stalin, their behaviour was of a piece with the huge collective self-delusion which characterised Tokyo's conduct in 1945.

In Moscow on 28 May, in response to a question from Harry Hopkins, Stalin said that the Soviet Union would be ready to invade Manchuria on 8 August, though weather would thereafter influence exact timing. Hopkins reported to Truman that Stalin favoured insistence upon Japan's capitulation, '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'. The same week, Japan's foreign minister, Shigenori Togo, appointed Koki Hirota, a former prime minister, foreign minister and ambassador, as his secret envoy to the Soviets, with instructions to pursue their friendship as well as neutrality.

Hirota's first move was to visit Jacob Malik, the Russian ambassador in Tokyo. He expressed admiration for the Red Army's achievement in Europe, a richly comic compliment from an emissary of Germany's

recent ally. Malik reported to Moscow that Hirota's overtures, though intended to be deniable, reflected a desperate anxiety by the Japanese government to end the war. He judged success implausible, however, since Tokyo persisted in its determination to cling to Manchuria and Korea. Nor were such fantasies confined to politicians. Jiro Horikoshi, the Zero design engineer, often discussed with friends the prospect of soliciting Soviet aid: 'Japan has made special efforts to maintain neutrality with the Russians,' he wrote in his diary in May, 'and we hoped we could rely on her fairness and friendship in mediating with the Allies.'

Meanwhile in Washington on 31 May, at a meeting of the Interim Committee Stimson emphasised the magnitude of its agenda: to manage deployment of a weapon that would bring about 'a revolutionary change in the relations of man to the universe'. James Byrnes flatly rejected a proposal made by Oppenheimer, director of the atomic programme, that its secrets should be shared with the Russians. He also dismissed a suggestion that Soviet representatives should be invited to attend the bomb's testing. Beyond security considerations, America would appear ridiculous in the event of failure. For the same reason he opposed, without dissent from the committee, a formal warning to the Japanese. Oppenheimer himself said that he found it impossible to imagine a demonstration of the bomb – for instance, in the skies off Japan – which would be likely to impress the enemy. Next day, 1 June, the decision was formally recorded: 'Mr Byrnes recommended, and the Committee agreed, that the Secretary of War should be advised that, while recognizing that the final selection of the target was essentially a military decision, the present view of the Committee was that the bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible, that it be used on a war plant surrounded by workers' homes, and that it be used without prior warning.'

When Stimson reported these conclusions to Truman on 6 June, the secretary of war made two disingenuous and indeed contradictory observations. He had firmly rejected Groves's proposal to drop the first bomb on the ancient capital Kyoto, hub of Japan's culture. He was unmoved by the general's pragmatic argument that Kyoto was 'large enough in area for us to gain complete knowledge of the effects of the bomb. Hiroshima was not nearly so satisfactory in this respect.' Tokyo and several other cities had already been discarded as objectives, on the grounds that they were mostly rubble already. Stimson told Truman that, against air force wishes, he had held out for a precision rather than an area target, because he did not want the atomic bombing to

be compared with Hitler's mass murders. He also expressed fears that LeMay 'might have Japan so thoroughly bombed out that the new weapon would not have a fair background to show its strength'. Truman laughed, and said that he understood. Here was a vivid illustration of the inability of two intelligent men to confront the implications of what they were about to do. They had been told the potential explosive power of the atomic bomb, yet no more than the scientists did they know its consequential effects, of which radiation sickness was the most significant. In their minds, as in that of Winston Churchill, the new weapon represented simply a massive multiple of the destructive capability of LeMay's B-29s.

Stimson's role puzzles posterity. He was the most august veteran in the administration, seventy-eight years old. His political career began in 1905, when he was appointed a US Attorney for New York by Theodore Roosevelt. A gentleman at all points, known as 'the colonel' from his military service in World War I, he had served as Secretary of State under Hoover from 1929 to 1933, and presided over the War Department from 1940 to 1945. Stimson disliked many things about total war, above all aerial bombardment of cities. Robert Oppenheimer noted his strictures: 'He didn't say that air strikes shouldn't be carried on, but he thought there was something wrong with a country where no one questioned that.' In the months preceding Hiroshima, though Stimson was increasingly tired and ill, no American political leader devoted more thought and attention to the bomb. Oddly, given his distaste for incendiary attack, he never expressed principled opposition to atomic devastation. Indeed, he welcomed Oppenheimer's weapon as a means of shortening the war. He strove, however, to serve the Japanese with notice to quit before this horror fell upon them.

The secretary of war's fastidious reservations were quite insufficient to deflect the process now in train. From June onwards, only absolute Japanese submission could have saved Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thereafter, no explicit political decision was made to drop the bomb; rather, a dramatic intervention from Truman would have been needed to stop it. To comprehend the president's behaviour, the limitations of the man occupying the office, his July Potsdam diary is helpful. This reveals Truman's ingenuous private responses to the personalities and events amidst which he found himself. His narrative possesses an awesome banality. To say this represents not condescension, for Truman's later achievement is undisputed, but mere recognition of his predicament. He

was a self-consciously small man much influenced by advisers, notably Byrnes, because he was morbidly sensitive to his own inexperience.

The president adopted in the case of 'Little Boy' precisely the same mechanism employed throughout the war by the democracies to implement strategic decisions. He, the politician, approved the concept, then left its execution in the hands of the military – which meant Groves. The dispatch of *Enola Gay* and *Bock's Car*, in common with all bomber operations, required a sequence of orders, aircrew training, logistical preparation, which was now rolling. In recent years, immense scholarly attention has focused upon the decrypted Japanese diplomatic communications, notably with Moscow, which became available to the Americans between June and August 1945. Yet the salient aspect of these is readily summarised: the Japanese government wanted to end the war, but privately as well as publicly rejected unconditional surrender. Japan's most notable pragmatist, ambassador Sato in Moscow, vividly articulated in cables to Tokyo his conviction that nothing the Japanese government was minded to propose would prove acceptable to the Allies.

If Sato held this opinion, why should Americans intercepting his messages have been any more impressed? In 1945, the distant chirrups of Morse between Tokyo and Moscow were nowhere near explicit or humble enough to halt the earth-shaking juggernaut being steered towards Japan by Leslie Groves. After the war, Truman falsely claimed that he gave the order to attack Hiroshima at the beginning of August 1945, perhaps because he feared that it would seem shocking to posterity to acknowledge that there was no such moment of deliberate presidential judgement before Col. Tibbets took off. Having acquiesced in the process months earlier, thereafter the president merely remained informed of progress, and did not halt the *Enola Gay*. Tolstoy argues – in the context of Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia – that great events possess an impetus of their own, independent of the will of national leaders and commanders. Had he lived through 1945, he would have judged the countdown to the dropping of the bombs a vivid demonstration of his thesis.

The Japanese continued to delude themselves that they had time to talk, time to probe and haggle with each other and with the Allies. They believed that their ability to extract a huge blood price from their enemy before succumbing represented a formidable bargaining chip. Instead, of course, this helped to undo them. It seems irrelevant to debate the merits of rival guesstimates for Olympic's US casualties – 63,000,

193,000, a million. What was not in doubt was that invading Japan would involve a large loss of American lives, which nobody wished to accept. Blockade and fire-bombing had already created conditions in which invasion would probably be unnecessary. New means now promised a summary termination of Japan's defiance, and perhaps also pre-emption of the Soviet onslaught.

Why should the United States have endured prevarication from the sponsors of Pearl Harbor and the Bataan death march, or further duplicity and self-aggrandisement from the bloodstained Soviets? The public face of Japan remained implacable. Given the strains to which US–Soviet relations were now subject, knowledge that the Japanese were seeking terms through Moscow rather than offering submission to Washington could only stimulate American impatience and cynicism. The dropping of the bombs did not represent, as Truman and others later claimed, a direct alternative to a costly US invasion of Japan. The people disastrously influenced by the prospect of Olympic were not Americans, but the Japanese, whom it persuaded to continue the war. Much historic attention has focused upon whether the US should have warned Tokyo that it planned to drop atomic bombs. In truth, Japan's military leadership would have been much more readily confounded by a public American intimation that it did not intend to invade the home islands, unrealistic though such a notion is.

2 REALITY AT HIROSHIMA

The Japanese dickered through June, unaware that American attention was now fixed upon two critical events, scheduled for undetermined dates in August: the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, and the dropping of atomic bombs. The hawks in Washington, foremost among whom were James Byrnes and Truman himself, were eager that the second should pre-empt the first; that, if possible, the US should be seen to have terminated the Japanese war without Soviet participation. A paper prepared by the War Department's Operations and Plans Division on 12 July asserted the advantages of an early Japanese surrender 'both because of the enormous reduction in the cost of the war [by achieving victory without an invasion] and because it would give us a better chance to settle the affairs of the Pacific before too many of our allies are committed there and have made substantial contributions to the defeat of Japan'. Yet until the Manhattan Project attained fulfilment, planning continued

for the launch of Olympic on or soon after 1 November. The atomic bomb was anticipated, but it must never be forgotten that its putative power did not become proven fact until the test on 16 July at Alamogordo in New Mexico.

In the weeks before the Potsdam summit conference, Stimson and others devoted intensive effort to drafting a proclamation, which they expected to be signed by all the Big Three Allied leaders, offering Japan a last opportunity to surrender before facing unparalleled devastation. The 'warning party' in Washington attached much importance to including in such a document an assurance about the preservation of the imperial dynasty. Many hands tinkered with the drafting, seeking a precision of language which would deny Japan's militarists any escape clause. Yet some prominent State Department officials, notably including assistant secretary of state Dean Acheson, opposed sparing the emperor. They believed that Hirohito must pay the price for having occupied the throne of a nation which launched a hideous war. By the time the American delegation sailed for Potsdam, rival drafts of the proclamation reposed in several briefcases. The instincts of Truman and Byrnes were much closer to those of Acheson than to those of the would-be compromisers. To eager applause, the president had told Congress on 16 April that 'America will never become a party to any plan for partial victory.' This remained his position thereafter.

Within the Allied nations, in July 1945 many people who knew nothing of the atomic bomb or the imminent Soviet invasion of Manchuria believed that the eastern war was anyway approaching its end. The British Embassy in Washington reported to London on the fifteenth: 'The belief that Japan herself is anxious to capitulate on terms less than unconditional surrender has been further nourished by stories of unrest and dissatisfaction inside Japan; reports over the Tokyo radio that the dean of Japanese journalists had openly criticised his government for "dismissing the loss of strategic islands with superficial optimism".' A week later, the Embassy noted: 'Generally it is believed that the Pacific War is rushing towards an early climax.' Eichelberger of Eighth Army wrote from the Philippines on 24 July: 'A great many people feel . . . that Japan is about to fold up.' He added next day: 'so many believe that the Japs will quit if Russia comes in'. Yet such optimism underestimated the obduracy which still prevailed among Japan's leaders.

In Tokyo, the emperor made his first direct personal intervention at

a meeting of the 'Big Six', the leaders of Japan's government and armed forces, in the Imperial Palace on 22 June, following defeat on Okinawa. While all those present signified their commitment to continue the war – a mantra as indispensable to every Japanese principal as obeisance to the throne – Hirohito authorised an attempt to pursue negotiations through Moscow. In the days that followed, the Japanese were dismayed to find that ambassador Malik was 'too busy' to meet Hirota again. Now, for the first time, an astonished ambassador Sato in Moscow was informed that ministers in Tokyo were pursuing at least a modest portion of the policy which for months he had urged in vain. When Malik did receive Hirota on 29 June, however, the Russian found the Japanese talking in fantasies: he advanced proposals for preserving Manchukuo's 'independence', for abandonment of some Japanese fishing rights in exchange for Russian oil, together with a general willingness to discuss outstanding issues. This was persiflage, as absurd to Malik as it seems to posterity.

However sincere was Hirohito's desire to initiate a negotiation, so dilatory were the Japanese diplomatic efforts which followed that a month was thrown away – a fatal month for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The prevarication which characterised the conduct of Japan's leaders in the summer of 1945 represented an appalling betrayal of hundreds of thousands of its soldiers, sailors and airmen who had died in recent campaigns designed to buy time for their country. Such time was squandered. Col. Paul Tibbets's take-off was now barely five weeks away, Stalin's assault little more. At a meeting of the Soviet Stavka and Politburo in Moscow on 26–27 June, the formal decision had been promulgated to launch Russian armies into Manchuria and seize the offshore islands promised at Yalta. Some generals and party leaders urged also occupying the Japanese home island of Hokkaido. Others, including Molotov and Marshal Zhukov, argued that such action would be militarily hazardous, and would enable the Americans to claim a breach of the Yalta terms. Stalin preserved his silence, leaving the issue open to wait upon events.

When Hirota sought a further meeting with Malik in Tokyo on 14 July, in the absence of encouragement from Moscow the ambassador again refused to see him. The next step in this black farce was the nomination of Prince Konoe, yet another former prime minister, to serve as the emperor's personal envoy to the Soviets. Grotesque equivocations accompanied the appointment. To avoid a confrontation with the war party,

Konoe was given no formal instructions. Ambassador Sato was urged by the foreign minister: 'Please be careful not to give the impression that our plan is to make use of the Russians in ending the war.' The exasperated ambassador cabled back, demanding to know how much influence Japanese promises – for instance – of non-annexation or non-occupation of overseas territories were likely to have, when most of these had been lost anyway. He declared that he could never hope to convince such supreme realists as the Soviets 'with pretty little phrases devoid of all connection with reality'.

But these were all that Tokyo's riven factions could agree to offer. Hirohito's 12 July message to Molotov, conveyed by Sato, declared simply: 'His Majesty The Emperor, mindful of the fact that the present war daily brings greater evil and sacrifice upon the peoples of all the belligerent powers, desires from his heart that it may be quickly terminated. But so long as England and the United States insist upon unconditional surrender the Japanese Empire has no alternative but to fight on with all its strength for the honour and existence of the Motherland . . .' The message concluded with a bald assertion that Prince Konoe would shortly arrive in Moscow to seek to 'restore peace', bearing a letter confirming the lofty sentiments expressed in the emperor's cable.

All these exchanges became known to the Americans through Magic intercepts. On 16 July, Stimson noted in his diary: 'I received . . . important papers [regarding] Japanese maneuverings for peace.' McCloy, his deputy, likewise wrote exultantly: 'News came in of the Japanese efforts to get the Russians to get them out of the war. Hirohito himself was called upon to send a message . . . to Stalin. Things are moving – what a long way we have come since that Sunday morning we heard the news of Pearl Harbor!' Forrestal noted: 'The first real evidence of a Japanese desire to get out of the war came today . . . Togo said . . . that the unconditional surrender terms of the Allies was about the only thing in the way of termination of the war.'

A few miles from the cold, shattered heart of Berlin, in Potsdam's Cecilienhof Palace, Stalin was playing host to the last great Allied summit conference of the war. Each participant perceived the occasion as a critical challenge, none more so than Harry Truman. He was a novice, taking a place at a table crowded with legends, Stalin and Churchill foremost amongst them. The president, having sailed from Newport News, Virginia, on 7 July, was now installed in a three-storey yellow

stucco house at 2 Kaiserstrasse, formerly owned by a German film-maker whose daughters had been raped on the premises barely ten weeks earlier, during its pillage by the Red Army. The building was, of course, densely microphoned by the Soviets, and the NKVD provided domestic staff. It was there that Truman received a memorandum from Stimson, emphasising how urgent had become an American warning to Tokyo.

The principal business to be transacted at Potsdam related to Europe, specifically the future of Germany and Poland. The issues of the Far East war and Soviet participation were also much on the minds of the principals, but a host of great matters competed for the attention of Truman and Byrnes. It would be unjust to perceive their approach to Asian matters as perfunctory. Throughout the conference, however, these had to be addressed in the context of much else. Byrnes, overwhelmingly the most important influence upon the president, took the news of Tokyo's overtures to Moscow much less seriously than did Stimson, McCloy and Forrestal. The secretary of state wrote later that he thought little of this Japanese attempt to 'avoid the emperor's removal and also save some of their conquered territory'.

Some historians have perceived in Byrnes's attitude a petty nationalism unworthy of the issues at stake. It may be true that he was an unsophisticated man, smaller than his great office, as Truman later decided him to be. Yet if Byrnes's judgements in the summer of 1945 were strongly influenced by domestic political considerations, they do not seem unreasonable. The US was Japan's principal enemy. Throughout the war, the Soviet Union had shown itself obsessively fearful that the Western Allies might make a separate peace with Germany. Britain and the US deferred to Soviet paranoia – rejecting, for instance, every approach from German anti-Nazis until the last days when Hitler's armies in Italy surrendered. Now, Tokyo had chosen to approach Moscow. At a time when Soviet savagery and expansionism in Europe were shocking the world, why should not the US spurn such contortions? Those who criticise America's alleged failure to reach out to the enemy in the last weeks of July 1945, to save the Japanese from themselves, seem to neglect a simple point. If Tokyo wanted to end the war, the only credible means of doing so was by an approach to Washington, through some neutral agency less hopelessly compromised than the Soviet Union.

We know *why* this did not happen: because the Japanese expected to gain more favourable terms from the Russians; and because the war party in Tokyo would have vetoed direct negotiation with the US. The

loss of face would have been unendurable. The State Department's Asian experts thoroughly understood the cultural and political forces which caused the Japanese to behave as they did. When, however, America stood on the brink of absolute victory over a nation which had brought untold grief and misery upon Asia, why should not the enemy bear the burden of acknowledging his condition, and indeed his guilt?

Hitler set a standard of evil among those whom the Allies fought in the Second World War. Some historians, not all of them Japanese, argue that Japan's leaders represented a significantly lesser baseness; and certainly not one which deserved the atomic bomb. Few of those Asians who experienced Japanese conquest, however, and knew of the millions of deaths which it encompassed, believed that Japan possessed any superior claim on Allied forbearance to that of Germany. Post-war critics of US conduct in the weeks before Hiroshima seem to demand from America's leaders moral and political generosity so far in advance of that displayed by their Japanese counterparts as to be fantastic, in the sixth year of a global war. Their essential thesis is that America should have spared its enemies from the human consequences of their own rulers' blind folly; that those in Washington should have displayed a concern for the Japanese people much more enlightened than that of the Tokyo government.

Why, however, should the US either have welcomed a Soviet propaganda triumph in Asia, or humoured the self-esteem of a barbarous enemy? Truman's 'firmness' towards Japan certainly reflected a desire to impress his authority upon the Soviets, as well as upon the American people. Yet it is hard to believe that Roosevelt, architect of the doctrine of unconditional surrender, would have behaved much differently, had he survived. In the war against Germany, Stalin took much in return for paying most of the blood cost of victory. He profited from overrunning eastern Europe while the British and Americans dallied west of the Rhine. In the Japanese war, however, the US was unequivocally the victor. It was irksome to see the Soviets on the brink of garnering rich rewards for attending curtain calls after missing all but the last minutes of the play. The principal and overwhelming reason for dropping the bomb was to compel the Japanese to end the war; but it seems entirely reasonable that the US also wished to frustrate Soviet expansionism.

James Byrnes wrote in his memoirs: 'Had the Japanese government surrendered unconditionally, it would not have been necessary to drop the atomic bomb.' Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, author of one of the more significant

recent studies of this period, comments: ‘Perhaps this statement can be read in reverse: “If we insisted on unconditional surrender, we could justify the dropping of the atomic bomb.”’ Hasegawa’s words again prompt the question: why should the US *not* have insisted upon unconditional surrender?

At Truman’s first bilateral meeting with Stalin at the ‘little White House’, 2 Kaiserstrasse, on 17 July, the Soviet leader announced that his armies would be ready to invade Manchuria in mid-August. The president wrote to his wife Bess next day: ‘I was scared I didn’t know whether things were going according to Hoyle or not. Anyway a start has been made and I’ve gotten what I came for – Stalin goes to war August 15 with no strings on it. I’ll say that we’ll end the war a year sooner now, and think of the kids who won’t be killed.’ How can this letter be squared with Churchill’s memorandum to Eden at Potsdam: ‘It is quite clear that the United States does not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan?’ Truman, like many of his advisers, regretted the deal for Soviet intervention in the Far East. Yet at Potsdam he was obliged to make the best of the fact that Yalta could not be undone. The significant phrase in his letter is surely ‘*with no strings on it*’. Moscow had made no new demands that would further compromise Chinese or American interests. Stalin was not insisting upon a Soviet occupation zone in Japan, as he had intimated to Harry Hopkins that he would.

Yet the US president’s words and deeds at Potsdam suggest a lingering confusion of mind about Soviet entry into the Japanese war. The issue is further muddled by false claims Truman made later, notably in his memoirs, about the circumstances surrounding the atomic decisions. All politicians seek to amend their own records. Roosevelt told many untruths, and Churchill’s war memoirs are shamelessly self-serving. Truman’s writings convey a sense that, at the very least, he was not afterwards wholly comfortable about some of the things he did and did not do in July and August 1945. He injured a strong case by supporting it with notable misstatements of historical fact.

The day before the president wrote the letter to his wife, he had received first news of the successful atomic test in New Mexico of an implosion device similar to ‘Fat Man’, which would be used against Nagasaki. The scientists, under enormous pressure to produce an outcome in time for Potsdam, had achieved ‘the greatest physics experiment in history’. ‘Little Boy’, the gun-type bomb that would be dropped

on Hiroshima, needed no test. Truman could henceforward assume, therefore, that the US would soon be able to employ such weapons against Japan. The enemy's early surrender seemed overwhelmingly likely, but what combination of forces would precipitate this outcome was as uncertain as ever. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa writes: 'It is clear that [Truman] saw Stalin not as an ally committed to the common cause of defeating Japan, but as a competitor in the race to see who could force Japan to surrender.' This assertion is important, because it has become one of the pillars upon which modern critics support their case against Hiroshima. The US president deceived his own people and the world, they say, by claiming that he was employing the atomic bomb to force Japan's surrender. In reality, this was the first military act of the Cold War, designed to overawe America's future enemy, the Soviet Union.

Such a proposition attaches to Truman's behaviour an unmerited malignity. The world in July 1945 seemed a deeply dangerous place not only to the president and to Byrnes, but also to cleverer and better-informed people such as Averell Harriman. Hitler had been destroyed, but the evil of Nazi tyranny was now supplanted in eastern Europe by an almost equally repugnant Communist one. Harriman asserted that the West was threatened with 'a barbarian invasion'. The Russian conquest of eastern Europe provided Stalin with opportunities for imperial dominance, formally acknowledged at Yalta by an ailing Roosevelt, which the Russians had abused ever since. In Poland, the most conspicuous example, Soviet forces were systematically murdering every citizen who professed support for his country's right to independence and democracy. There were no means short of war whereby Stalin's new dominions could be wrested from him. Churchill's Fulton speech still lay seven months ahead, but on 12 May 1945 he had already used its most momentous phrase: 'An iron curtain is drawing down on the Russian front.' Moscow's global ambitions were abundantly apparent.

Thoughtful and informed Americans were apprehensive about what new aggrandisement Stalin might attempt in the east. No US invasion of Japan was feasible before November, yet the Soviets would invade Manchuria in August. When Moscow's armies plunged into China, how likely was it that Stalin would respect his promises to forswear Mao Zedong's Communists, and acknowledge the government of Chiang Kai-Shek? There was concern that the Russians might exploit their planned drive into Korea to seize the whole peninsula instead of stopping halfway, at the 38th parallel, as agreed at Yalta. When Stalin's forces staged their

amphibious landings in the Kuriles, which had been promised to them, what if they went on to occupy some Japanese home islands? A strong Japanese Communist movement existed, the source of much unease in Tokyo, which might provide the nucleus for a Soviet puppet government. Lest it should seem that such speculation reflected mere paranoia in Washington, it is a matter of fact that when Stalin's armies attacked in August, the Soviet leader held open the option of seizing Hokkaido, and almost certainly would have done so had Japanese resistance persisted.

Truman found himself president at a moment when it was alleged, not least by Winston Churchill, that American naïveté and weakness had licensed Soviet expansionism, and when fear of Communist takeover pervaded many nations. Atomic bombs should allow America to end the war with Japan before Stalin's armies wreaked havoc in Asia. It seems mistaken of some historians to perceive this view as reflecting a crude competitive nationalism on the part of the US government. Truman's and Byrnes's attitude was certainly ruthless, but it lacked neither realism nor statesmanship. They understood, as some people in the West did not yet understand, the depth of evil which Stalin's Soviet Union represented. They may be accused of treating Japan with a summary abruptness which its residual military power did not make necessary. But it was the misfortune of the Japanese in July 1945 that their own prevarication coincided with other imperatives oppressing America's leadership.

To Truman, Byrnes, Acheson and many others, swift victory over the declared present enemy of the democracies would also send an important signal to their undeclared prospective foe. It seems correct to acknowledge that a race to claim victory over Japan took place between America and the Soviet Union in the summer of 1945. The motives of the US government, however, seem deserving of more respect than critics accord them. It also seems mistaken to convey even an implicit impression that the *principal* objective of the Hiroshima bomb was to impress the Soviet Union. This was certainly a highly desirable secondary purpose of Col. Tibbets's mission. But it remains almost impossible to doubt that the atomic weapons would have been used to hasten Japan's surrender whether or not the Soviets were on the brink of intervention.

If this argument is important in assessing Truman's Hiroshima decision, however, it does not address the question of what manner of warning might first have been given. As far as is known, none of the Americans or British present at Potsdam voiced moral scruples about using the bomb. But the Western Allied leadership exhaustively debated

the merits of first presenting an ultimatum to the Japanese, along the lines proposed by Stimson and McCloy. Winston Churchill, in his last days as prime minister after losing the July 1945 British general election, renewed his urging that the unconditional surrender doctrine should be modified.

Truman was not overawed by the greatest Englishman. 'We had a most pleasant conversation,' he wrote of their first meeting, in a characteristic passage of his Potsdam diary. 'He is a most charming and a very clever person – meaning clever in the English, not the Kentucky sense. He gave me a lot of hoey about how great my country is and how he loved Roosevelt and how he intended to love me, etc., etc.. I gave him as cordial a reception as I could – being naturally (I hope) a polite and agreeable person. I am sure we can get along if he doesn't try to give me too much soft soap. You know, soft soap is made of ash hopper rye and it burns to beat hell when it gets into the eyes.'

Truman rejected Churchill's emollient proposal as swiftly as Roosevelt had done in Cairo. When the prime minister made reference to giving the Japanese 'some show of saving their military honour', the president responded tartly that, since Pearl Harbor, they had little of this commodity left. He remained unimpressed when Churchill persisted 'that at any rate they had something for which they were ready to face certain death in very large numbers'. Churchill told Truman that Stalin had disclosed to him the Japanese peace feelers to Moscow. The Soviet leader, who shortly afterwards repeated the same story to the US president, plainly hoped to exploit this disclosure as earnest that he would conduct no secret bilateral negotiation with Tokyo.

Yet, just as Truman's mention to Stalin at Potsdam that the US 'now possessed a new weapon of unusual destructive force' came as no surprise to the Russian leader, so he also probably knew or guessed that the Americans were reading Japanese cipher traffic. Soviet agents had penetrated Western intelligence as thoroughly as they had done the Manhattan Project. A notable feature of Potsdam was the fashion in which the Big Three revealed to each other supposed secrets which were already known to the recipients. Stalin asked Truman how the Americans would like Russia to respond to Japanese overtures. Keep talking, said the president.

And indeed, even while the Allied warlords conferred in Germany, Japanese exchanges with the Russians continued. As agreed between Truman and Stalin, on 18 July Moscow sought clarification of Tokyo's

position. Two days later, ambassador Sato sent a signal to his government, passionately urging that Japan should offer its surrender, subject only to preservation of the *kokutai*. Foreign minister Togo dismissed this proposal: 'The whole country as one man will pit itself against the enemy in accordance with the Imperial Will so long as the enemy demands unconditional surrender,' he informed Sato – and, of course, through Magic the Americans – on 21 July. Four days later, Togo told Sato to inform Moscow that if Russia remained indifferent to Japanese requests for mediation, 'we will have no choice but to consider another course of action'. This plainly signalled a threat to approach the other Allies. Nothing in these messages was likely to persuade Washington that Tokyo had embraced reality. Magic decrypts of messages from neutral diplomats in Japan to their home capitals showed their assessments matching everything the Americans knew from the Moscow–Tokyo exchanges: the Japanese were determined to fight to the end. Their government explicitly rejected the urgings of such rationalists as Sato, to accept unconditional surrender.

In Potsdam, debate continued about the wording of Stimson's proposed ultimatum or proclamation to Japan. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee disliked the notion of promising, as the secretary of war wished, that the emperor's position would be protected. Its members, good republicans, preferred to say that 'Subject to suitable guarantees against further acts of aggression, the Japanese people will be free to choose their own form of government.' The War Department's Operations Division, Stimson's drafters, remained determined to offer a commitment to sustain the emperor, and substituted: 'The Japanese people will be free to choose whether they shall retain their Emperor as a constitutional monarchy.' The joint chiefs of staff told the president that they favoured the JSSC version, which best fitted the American vision of national rights to self-determination.

On 21 July, Gen. Groves's full report from Alamogordo, brimming with exhilaration, was received in Potsdam: 'For the first time in history there was a nuclear explosion. And what an explosion! . . . The test was successful beyond the most optimistic expectations of anyone . . . We are all fully conscious that our real goal is still before us. The battle test is what counts in the war within Japan.' When Stimson read Groves's dispatch aloud to Truman and Byrnes at the Little White House, the president looked 'immensely pepped up'. The news, he told the secretary of war, gave him 'an entirely new confidence'. McCloy noted in his diary:

'The Big Bomb stiffened Truman and Churchill . . . They went to the next meeting like little boys with a big red apple secreted on their persons.' Stimson was enraged to learn that Groves had reinstated Kyoto as primary target for the first bomb. He hastened to signal Washington, vetoing the general's choice, though the rationale explained to Truman was scarcely enlightened. Sparing Kyoto, Stimson suggested bizarrely, should ensure 'a sympathetic Japan to the United States in case there should be any aggression by Russia in Manchuria'.

The War Department, in its turn, signalled to Potsdam that it should be possible to use the first atomic bomb soon after 1 August, depending on weather, and almost certainly before the tenth. On the morning of 23 July, Truman told Stimson that he accepted the latest draft of his 'warning message' to the Japanese. He proposed to issue this as soon as possible. On the morning of 25 July Gen. Carl Spaatz, commanding the US Army's Strategic Air Force in the Pacific, received a written order for dropping the two bombs on Japan, approved in Potsdam by Stimson and Marshall. It is uncertain whether Truman saw the document, but its issue was anyway a formality. The directive stipulated: 'The 509 Composite Group, Twentieth Air Force, will deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945 on one of the targets: Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata and Nagasaki . . . Additional bombs will be delivered on the above targets as soon as made ready by the project staff.'

There was, in other words, no provision for a political pause between the first bomb and the second, to enable the Japanese to consider their position. This was a morally unattractive aspect of the process. Hiroshima was named primary objective nominally because it was a strategic port, but chiefly because it was untouched by LeMay's fire-raisers, and thus would provide a convincing nuclear test site. In Europe, the RAF's Bomber Command had sometimes sought undamaged cities for the same reason – to measure the effectiveness of new techniques of destruction. There is little doubt that Hiroshima would already have been devastated by the Twentieth Air Force had it not been deleted from American fire-raising lists after its appointment as birthplace, or rather deathplace, of the nuclear age.

The question of whether Soviet operations in Manchuria were still desirable continued to loom large in Truman's mind. Once more he invited the opinions of Stimson and Marshall. The chief of staff responded that a Russian invasion was now superfluous. The mere fact of

Moscow's massive deployment on the Manchurian border had deterred the Japanese from moving their Guandong Army. Since, however, the Soviets could take Manchuria whenever they chose, Marshall could see no merit in a formal American policy change. It seemed better to admit the Russians to the Japanese empire in accordance with conditions agreed with the US, rather than watch them flood into China on their own terms. Stimson agreed. It is significant to notice that, even at this late stage, Marshall was sceptical about whether atomic bombs would precipitate Japan's surrender. Months earlier, America's foremost soldier had declared that the decision about whether and how to use them must be made by the nation's political rather than military leadership. In July, he continued to focus his own attention upon what Soviet and American armies might do, rather than upon the mission of Col. Tibbets.

On 24 July, Truman approved the final text of what became known as the Potsdam Declaration. Some suggestions made by Churchill were incorporated. The prime minister had also agreed, with a readiness close to insouciance, that the Americans should thereafter drop atomic bombs without further consultation with Britain. In this, he recognised political reality; yet also, perhaps, he revealed the limits of his understanding about the manner in which this vast event would change the world. A final British attempt to incorporate a modification of unconditional surrender was rejected, as was a new plea by Stimson for more specific assurances about the preservation of the imperial dynasty.

Between Truman's departure from Washington and the issue of the Declaration, the success of the atomic bomb test caused the document to assume a changed significance. Stalin, as well as some Americans, assumed that all three Allied leaders in Potsdam would sign a common document, which would also become the Soviet Union's declaration of war on Japan. Yet now that a direct causal link was intended between the document, its rejection, and unilateral American detonation of the bomb, the US delegation had no desire to share its Declaration with the Soviet Union.

On 25 July, Truman recorded in his diary: 'This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. I have told the Sec. Of War, Mr Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old capital

[Kyoto] or the new [Tokyo].? It is impossible to interpret this passage as anything but a self-conscious attempt by Truman to create a record which would serve his reputation in the eyes of history. After receiving Groves's report, no intelligent person could doubt that a cataclysm of unprecedented horror was to be unleashed upon a Japanese centre of population.

The Potsdam Declaration, signed by the American, British and – in absentia – Chinese leaders, was issued on the evening of 26 July:

Following are our terms. We will not deviate from them. There are no alternatives. We shall brook no delay.

– There must be eliminated for all time the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest . . .

– Until such a new order is established . . . points in Japanese territory shall be occupied.

– Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as determined.

– The Japanese military forces, after being completely disarmed, shall be permitted to return to their homes with the opportunity to lead peaceful and productive lives.

– We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as nation, but stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals . . . Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established.

– Japan shall be permitted to retain such industries as will sustain her economy . . .

– The occupying forces of the Allies shall be withdrawn from Japan as soon as these objectives have been accomplished and there has been established in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese people a peacefully inclined and responsible government.

– We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces . . . The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.

The Potsdam Declaration was not dispatched to the Japanese government as a diplomatic communication, but merely broadcast to the world through the media. The Soviets were stunned to find themselves excluded from the signatories, and indeed shown a copy only after the Declaration's release. They had come to the conference with their own draft, demanding Japan's unconditional surrender, but using the words 'The United States, China, Great Britain and the Soviet Union consider it their duty to take joint, decisive measures immediately to bring the war to an end.' This was never presented or discussed.

The Americans were within their rights to confine endorsement of the ultimatum to co-belligerents against Japan, and thus exclude the neutral Soviets. But Stalin could thereafter be in no doubt of America's determination to address Japan in its own way, with minimal reference to Moscow. For once, the Russian leader might have been excused paranoia, in fearing that the US hoped to renege on Yalta, and deny him his promised Asian prizes. From Potsdam he had already telephoned Moscow to demand a ten-day acceleration of the Red Army's timetable for invading Manchuria. He lambasted Beria, his spymaster, for ignorance of the successful American bomb test, which he readily inferred from Truman's hints.

On 29 July at Potsdam, Molotov asked that the US should make a formal request for the Soviet Union to enter the Far Eastern war. The Americans refused. Truman later claimed that he did not want to give the Russians scope to claim that their intervention decided the outcome of the conflict. Byrnes, in his memoirs, was much more frank. He asserted that, given recent Soviet behaviour and violations of the Yalta Agreement in Europe, he did not want the Soviets in the Asian war, and believed that the atomic bomb would compel Tokyo's surrender without them. Truman responded to Molotov's request with a personal letter to Stalin on 31 July, suggesting that the four Allies' 1943 Moscow Declaration fully justified the Soviet Union in joining the war without any further preliminaries. Such a view scarcely suggested much regard for diplomatic niceties, but there the matter rested. The Soviets left Potsdam enraged by what they perceived as American duplicity.

The party most deluded by the Declaration was Japan. When the absence of Stalin's signature was noted in Tokyo, it was supposed that he had chosen to exclude the Soviet Union from the ranks of Japan's enemies; and thus that it remained a plausible intermediary. The Japanese were further heartened by the eclipse of Churchill, following the

British election defeat which removed him from the premiership. They supposed this to open prospects of faltering and dissension in the Allied ranks. Some in Tokyo were encouraged by the language of the Potsdam Declaration. Through Moscow, they sought clarification of its vague generalities. At a cabinet meeting on the afternoon of 27 July, foreign minister Togo urged making no immediate public response, partly because it would be almost impossible to achieve an agreed position among ministers. The Declaration's terms were reported in the Japanese press, omitting only the Allied promise that Japanese soldiers would be allowed to return peacefully home. Newspapers were less restrained than politicians in their reactions: 'Laughable Surrender Conditions to Japan', said the heading of an editorial in *Yomiuri Hochi*. Another title, *Asahi Shimbun*, reported: 'The government intends to ignore it.' *Mokusatsu*, silence in the face of unacceptable words or deeds, is among the principal behavioural tools of Japanese society.

Next day, however, several office-holders headed by Anami, the war minister, declared that silence would not suffice. They insisted that Suzuki should denounce the Declaration. The prime minister made a short statement to a press conference, dismissing the American document as 'a rehash of the Cairo Declaration. The government does not think that it has serious value. We can only ignore it. We shall do our utmost to see the war through to the bitter end.'

Some historians have questioned whether Suzuki indeed used these words in this context. Yet if there is doubt about the exact language, it is undisputed that the Japanese government agreed to make no positive response to the Declaration. The US Associated Press reported on 27 July: 'The semi-official Japanese Domei news agency stated today that Allied ultimatum to surrender or meet destruction would be ignored.' The emperor himself seems to have made no attempt to question Suzuki's posture. Hirohito has so often been credited with a role as Japan's principal peacemaker that it is important to emphasise his rejection of the Potsdam terms. If the emperor had intervened decisively at this point, rather than a fortnight later, all that followed might have been averted. As it was, this hesitant, inadequate divinity continued to straddle the fence, wanting peace yet still recoiling from acknowledgement of his nation's defeat, and history took its course.

From Moscow, ambassador Sato continued to bombard Tokyo with imprecations to face reality. 'There is no alternative but immediate unconditional surrender if we are to try to make America and England

moderate and to prevent [Russia's] participation in the war,' he cabled on 30 July. Foreign minister Togo replied on 2 August, urging patience: 'It is difficult to decide on concrete peace terms all at one stroke.' He reported, however, that the emperor was closely following developments in Moscow, while Suzuki and the army's leaders explored the question of whether the Potsdam Declaration offered scope for negotiation. American naval intelligence analysts of the Magic decrypts on the Declaration reported: 'There is a disposition (or determination) of finding in its terms a sufficiently effective emollient for tortured pride which still rebels at the words "unconditional surrender"'.

It is unknown whether Truman read these decrypts or this analysis on his way back from Potsdam. The final conference session took place on 1 August. Stalin left Berlin that day, and the US president early the following morning. Truman had already approved the text of a public statement to be issued in his name when the bomb was dropped. In his eyes, all that now mattered was that the Japanese government refused to respond positively to the Potsdam Declaration. Indeed, the earlier Magic intercepts between Sato and Togo had made Tokyo's rejection certain, since the foreign minister explicitly ruled out unconditional surrender. For weeks past, use of the bomb had been almost inevitable. It now became absolutely so.

Many people of later generations and all nationalities have viewed the dropping of atomic weapons on Japan as events which, in their unique horror, towered over the war as a dark mountain bestrides the plain. In one sense this perception is correct, because the initiation of the nuclear age provided mankind with unprecedented power to destroy itself. Until the bombs had exploded, however, full understanding of their significance was confined to a few score scientists. To grasp the context in which the commitment to bomb Hiroshima was made, it seems necessary to acknowledge the cacophony amidst which all those involved, the political and military leaders of the US, were obliged to do their business. These were men in their fifties and sixties, weary after years of perpetual crisis such as world war imposes, bombarded daily with huge dilemmas.

Europe was in ruins and chaos, the Western Allies striving to contend with Stalin's ruthlessness and greed, Britain's bankruptcy, the starvation of millions. Each day brought to the desks of Truman, Stimson, Marshall and their staffs projections relating to the invasion of the Japanese homeland. The US found itself obliged to arbitrate upon the future of half the world, while being implored to save as much as possible of the

other half from the Soviets, even as war with Japan continued and mankind recoiled in horror from newsreel films of Hitler's death camps. What could be done about Poland, about millions of displaced persons? About escaping Nazi war criminals and civil war in Greece? Could power in China be shared? Might the rise of the Communists in Italy and France be checked? Japan's beleaguered Pacific garrisons continued to resist even though the Allies initiated no major operations against Hirohito's armies overseas after June 1945. The British were preparing to land in Malaya. Almost every day, LeMay's Superfortresses set forth from Guam and Saipan to incinerate more Japanese cities. Carrier aircraft strafed and bombed the home islands. Casualty lists broadcast grief to homes all over the US and Britain. Apprehension overhung the fate of many thousands of Allied prisoners in Japanese hands.

In judging the behaviour of those responsible for ordering the atomic attacks, it seems necessary to acknowledge all this. The bomb was only the foremost of many huge issues with which these mortal men, movingly conscious of their own limitations, strove to grapple. In the course of directing a struggle for national survival, all had been obliged to make decisions which had cost lives, millions of lives, of both Allied servicemen and enemy soldiers and civilians. Most would have said wryly that this was what they were paid for. The direction of war is never a task for the squeamish. The US had already participated in bombing campaigns which killed around three-quarters of a million German and Japanese civilians, and to which public opinion had raised little objection. It is much easier to justify the decision to drop the atomic bombs than the continued fire-raising offensive of the Twentieth Air Force. 'The preoccupation of the historians' debate with the necessity of using the bomb,' Lawrence Freedman and Saki Dockrill have written wisely, 'has meant that it has been judged strategically against the prospective invasion [of Japan], rather than the actual air bombardment under way at the time and with which it was unavoidably linked in the minds of policy-makers.'

Poison gas was the only significant weapon available to the wartime Allies which was not employed against the Axis. Roosevelt opposed this for moral, or rather propagandistic, reasons; the British chiefly on the pragmatic grounds that the Germans might retaliate against their homeland. As discussed above, the Americans began the war with moral scruples about bombing civilians, but by 1945 had abandoned them. It is a delusion of those who know nothing of battle, to suppose that death

inflicted by atomic weapons is uniquely terrible. In truth, conventional shells and bombs dismember human bodies in the most repulsive fashion. The absolutism of atomic destruction merits humanity's horror, and indeed terror, more than the nature of the end which it inflicts upon individuals.

Most of those involved in the atomic decision recognised war, the homicidal clash of belligerents, as the root evil from which mankind should spare itself. After living for years with the bloody consequences of global conflict, they were less sensitive than modern civilians to specific refinements of killing. Many people whose deaths are described in this book would have found nothing uniquely pitiable about the manner in which Hiroshima's and Nagasaki's inhabitants perished, even if they might have been appalled by the scale.

From the inception of the Manhattan Project, it was assumed by all but a few scientists that if the device was successful, it would be used. Some people today, especially Asians, believe that the Allies found it acceptable to kill 100,000 Japanese in this way, as it would not have been acceptable to do the same to Germans, white people. Such speculation is not susceptible to proof. But given Allied perceptions that if Hitler and his immediate following could be removed, Germany would quickly surrender, it is overwhelmingly likely that if an atomic bomb had been available a year earlier, it would have been dropped on Berlin. It would have seemed ridiculous to draw a moral distinction between massed attacks on German centres of population by the RAF and USAAF with conventional weapons, and the use of a single more ambitious device to terminate Europe's agony.

Curtis LeMay regarded the Hiroshima and Nagasaki raids merely as an addition – a redundant and unwelcome addition – to a campaign which his B-29s had already won. LeMay had not the slightest moral qualms about the atomic attacks, but was chagrined that they diminished the credit given to his conventional bomber force for destroying Japan. In late June, he predicted that the Twentieth Air Force would render the enemy incapable of continuing the war after 1 October 1945. 'In order to do this,' said Arnold, 'he had to take care of some 30 to 60 large and small cities.' LeMay had accounted for fifty-eight when events rendered it unnecessary to test his prophecy to fulfilment. In the minds of those conducting the war against Japan, the mission of the *Enola Gay* represented only a huge technological leap forward in the campaign already waged for months by the fire-raisers.

One further military point should be made. From August 1945 onwards Truman and other contemporary apologists for the bomb advanced the simple argument, readily understood by the wartime generation of Americans, that it rendered redundant a bloody invasion of Japan. It is now widely acknowledged that Olympic would almost certainly have been unnecessary. Japan was tottering and would soon have starved, with the aerial destruction of its means of food distribution. Richard Frank, author of an outstanding modern study of the fall of the Japanese empire, goes further. He finds it unthinkable that the United States would have accepted the blood-cost of invading the mainland.

Like any 'counter-factual', it is hard to accept this proposition as an absolute. The prospect of the Kyushu landings was wholly unwelcome to America's military and political leadership. Yet in the summer of 1945 Marshall, for one, was committed to keeping open the invasion option, partly because he questioned whether the bomb's impact would be conclusive. The US chief of staff recognised the supreme wisdom of Churchill's view that 'all things are always on the move simultaneously . . . One has to do the best one can, but he is an unwise man who thinks there is any *certain* way of winning this war . . . The only plan is to persevere.' So much that is today apparent was then opaque. So many forces were in play, the exact impacts of which were unclear.

At the beginning of August 1945, most of MacArthur's officers believed that they *would* have to invade Japan, and even some of those in Washington privy to the atomic secret and to impending Russian intervention thought they *might* have to do so. It was impossible to be sure what an enemy nation which had displayed a resolute commitment to mass suicide might do, when confronted with the last ditch. A 27 July US naval intelligence analysis of Japan's behaviour, written with full access to Magic decrypts, was circulated to all Washington's top policy-makers: 'Her unwillingness to surrender stems primarily from the failure of her otherwise capable and all-powerful Army leaders to perceive that the defenses they are so assiduously fashioning actually are utterly inadequate . . . Until the Japanese leaders realize that an invasion cannot be repelled, there is little likelihood that they will accept any peace terms satisfactory to the Allies.' Invasion was not a direct alternative to the bomb, but on 1 August 1945, who could be sure what might have to be done if the bomb was not dropped?

So much for military context. What of the political decision? The

most obvious question is that of whether Japan might have behaved differently if the Potsdam Declaration had explicitly warned of atomic bombs. The answer, almost certainly, is no. If America's leaders found difficulty in comprehending the unprecedented force they were about to unleash, the Japanese were unlikely to show themselves more imaginative. More than that, the war party in Tokyo, which had crippled Japan's feeble diplomatic gropings, was committed to acceptance of national annihilation rather than surrender. If LeMay's achievement in killing 200,000 Japanese civilians and levelling most of the country's major cities had not convinced the likes of Gen. Anami that surrender was inevitable, there is no reason to suppose that a mere threat of atomic bombardment would have done so.

The principal beneficiary of a warning, even if unheeded, would have been Harry Truman. His decision to insist upon unconditional surrender can be justified for reasons offered above. Japan had done nothing in China and South-East Asia throughout its occupation, or in the prison camps of its empire, to make any plausible moral claim upon terms less rigorous than those imposed upon Germany. Japan would certainly have used atomic weapons if it possessed them. The nation had gambled upon launching a ruthless war of conquest. The gamble had failed, and it was time to pay. It would have well served Truman's historic reputation, however, to have been seen to offer Japan an opportunity to escape nuclear retribution before this was administered. The Potsdam Declaration was a statement of honourable Allied objectives. It was a sham ultimatum, however, because it failed plausibly to describe the nature of the vague sanction which it threatened in the event of non-compliance. The words 'prompt and utter destruction' meant much to American drafters, nothing at all to Japanese readers.

Why was no explicit warning given? Because the dropping of the bomb was designed to deliver a colossal shock, not only to the Japanese people but also to the leaders of the Soviet Union. Marshall said to Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, head of the British Military Mission in Washington: 'It's no good warning them. If you warn them there's no surprise. And the only way to produce shock is surprise.' This was precisely the same justification offered by the Japanese military to the emperor in 1941 for declining to give the US notice of its intention to go to war before attacking Pearl Harbor. Japan bears overwhelming responsibility for what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, because her leaders refused to acknowledge that their game was up. However,

the haste with which the US dropped the bomb as soon as it was technically viable reflected aforementioned technological determinism, together with political fears focused upon the Russians, as much as military imperatives related to Japan. It is possible to support Truman's decision not to stop the dropping of the bomb, while regretting his failure to offer warning of its imminence.

Late on 6 August 1945, a Top Secret signal flashed from the Twentieth Air Force to Washington, where the time difference caused it to be read just before midnight the previous day: 'Subject: Bombs Away Report 509 SBM 13 Flown 6 August 1945 . . . 1 a/c bombed Hiroshima visually thru 1/10 cloud with good results. Time was 052315Z. No flak or E/A opposition.' This was followed almost immediately by a second signal: 'Altitude: 30,200 feet . . . Enemy air opposition: Nil . . . Bombing Results: Excellent.'

'Little Boy', 'an elongated trash can with fins' in the words of one of *Enola Gay's* crew, scrawled with rude messages for Hirohito, exploded 1,900 feet above Hiroshima's Shima Hospital, 550 feet from its Aiming Point. Tibbets, a supremely professional bomber pilot, described this simply as 'the most perfect AP I've seen in this whole damn war'. The 8,900-pound device created temperatures at ground zero which reached 5,400 degrees and generated the explosive power of 12,500 tons of TNT. All but 6,000 of the city's 76,000 buildings were destroyed by fire or blast. The Japanese afterwards claimed that around 20,000 military personnel and 110,000 civilians died immediately. Though no statistics are conclusive, this estimate is almost certainly exaggerated. Another guesstimate, around 70,000, seems more credible.

The detonation of 'Little Boy', the mushroom cloud which changed the world, created injuries never before seen on mortal creatures, and recorded with disbelief by survivors: the cavalry horse standing pink, stripped of its hide; people with clothing patterns imprinted upon their flesh; the line of schoolgirls with ribbons of skin dangling from their faces; doomed survivors, hideously burned, without hope of effective medical relief; the host of charred and shrivelled corpses. Hiroshima and its people had been almost obliterated, and many even of those who clung to life would not long do so. As late as June 1946, an official press release from the Manhattan Project asserted defiantly: 'Official investigation of the results of atom bomb bursts over the Japanese cities . . . revealed that no harmful amounts of persistent radio-activity were

present after the explosions.' Yet even at that date, thousands more stricken citizens of Hiroshima were still to perish.

Truman received the news aboard *Augusta*, four days out from England on his passage home from Potsdam, as he was lunching with members of the cruiser's crew: 'Big bomb dropped on Hiroshima August 5 at 7.15 p.m. Washington time. First reports indicate complete success which was even more conspicuous than earlier test.' The beaming president jumped up and told *Augusta's* skipper: 'Captain, this is the greatest thing in history.' At Truman's behest, the officer carried the signal to Byrnes, eating at another table, who said, 'Fine! Fine!' Truman then addressed crewmen in the mess: 'We have just dropped a new bomb on Japan which has more power than 20,000 tons of TNT. It has been an overwhelming success!' The president's delight was apparently unburdened by pain or doubt. He simply exulted in a national triumph. Here was a vivid demonstration of the limits of his own understanding of what had been done. Sailors crowded around the president, asking the question on the lips of millions of Allied soldiers, sailors and airmen across the world: 'Does this mean we can go home now?'

In the US, first reaction to Hiroshima was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The British Embassy in Washington reported: 'The lurid fantasies of the comic strips seemed suddenly to have come true. Headlines sagged under the weight of the drama and the superlatives they had to carry.' There was much unseemly flippancy, for American skins had been thickened by forty-four months of war. The Washington Press Club produced a sixty-cent 'atomic cocktail'. A newspaper cartoonist depicted Truman presiding over an angelic gathering of his advisers, each sprouting wings as they contemplated a bowl of split atoms on the table. The caption read: 'The Cabinet meets to discuss sending an ambassador to Mars.' At Los Alamos, scientist Otto Frisch recoiled from the exuberance of colleagues who telephoned the La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe to book tables for a celebration.

Among some ordinary people news of the bomb prompted not triumphalism, but the darkest reflections. A letter to the *New York Times* described Hiroshima as 'a stain on our national life. When the exhilaration of this wonderful discovery has passed, we will think with shame of the first use to which it was put.' British housewife Nella Last recorded in her diary how she and her Lancashire neighbour received the news: 'Old Joe called upstairs, brandishing the *Daily Mail*: "By Goy, lass, but it looks as if some of your daft fancies and fears are reet. Look at this."

I've rarely seen Jim so excited – or upset. He said: "Read it – why, this will change all t'world. Ee, I wish I was thutty years younger and could see it aw.'" Mrs Last, however, reacted very differently: 'I felt sick – I wished I was thirty years older, and out of it all . . . This atomic bomb business is so dreadful.'

Senator Edwin Johnson of Colorado declared the bomb to prove that universal military training was stupid. President Roosevelt's widow Eleanor said it showed the importance of goodwill visits such as Soviet trades unionists were then making to the United States. Leaders of the oil and coal industries issued statements reassuring stockholders that for the foreseeable future the new discovery would have little effect on existing fuels. Some left-wingers demanded that atomic patent rights and means of production should remain controlled by Congress, and not be allowed to fall into the hands of large oil or munitions combines. To the embarrassment even of many capitalists, the prospect of an end of hostilities caused the New York Stock Exchange to fall sharply. A correspondent of the London *Sunday Times* wrote: 'It is always unedifying when moneyed interests are revealed as benefiting or believing themselves to benefit more from war than from peace.'

Some senior US soldiers in the Philippines were disgruntled to find themselves facing financial loss of a different kind. One of their number had returned from a liaison mission to the Marianas shortly before, reporting that Twentieth Air Force officers had created a \$10,000 pool, to bet that the war would end before October. Since MacArthur's people knew that Olympic was not scheduled until November, some hastened to accept the Air Force wager. 'From what we knew and the way it looked to us, that was an easy bet to win. We started taking up the \$10,000, but we didn't get very far with it,' Krueger's G3, Clyde Eddleman, wrote ruefully. '. . . The next thing we knew Hiroshima disappeared.'

A British corporal of Fourteenth Army in Burma, George Macdonald Fraser, noted: 'It is now widely held that the dropping of atomic bombs was unnecessary because the Japanese were ready to give in . . . I wish those who hold that view had been present to explain the position to the little bastard who came howling out of a thicket near the Sittang, full of spite and fury, in that first week of August. He was half-starved and near naked, and his only weapon was a bamboo stave, but he was in no mood to surrender.'

Nowhere was relief at the dropping of the bomb more intense and heartfelt than in prison camps throughout the Japanese empire. Yet even

among those for whom Hiroshima promised deliverance, a few displayed more complex emotions. Lt Stephen Abbott's closest friend Paul, a devout Christian, entered their bleak barrack room in Japan and said: 'Stephen – a ghastly thing has happened.' He described the destruction of Hiroshima, as reported on the radio, then knelt in prayer. Eighteen months later, Abbott wrote a letter for publication in *The Times*, citing his own status as a former PoW, and arguing that a demonstration of the bomb would have sufficed: 'The way it has been used has not only provided a significant chapter for future Japanese history books but has also convinced the people of Japan that the white man's claim to the ethical and spiritual leadership of the world is without substance.'

President Truman's statement to the world, approved before he left Potsdam, declared that the fate of Hiroshima represented a just retribution for Pearl Harbor: 'It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of 26 July was issued at Potsdam . . . If they do not now accept our terms, they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth.' This time there could be no doubt in the minds of Japan's leaders about exactly what the president's words portended. More atomic bombs would follow 'Little Boy'. Other cities would share the fate of Hiroshima.

Yet the extraordinary aspect of Japanese behaviour in the wake of the 6 August bombing was that the event seemed to do almost nothing to galvanise Japanese policy-making, to end the prevarication which was already responsible for so much death. The emperor and prime minister learned of the attack only after a lapse of some hours. First reports spoke of 'the complete destruction of Hiroshima and unspeakable damage inflicted by one bomb with unusually high effectiveness'. At least one senior officer immediately guessed that this was an atomic device, as was soon confirmed by intercepted American radio broadcasts. Other army commanders remained sceptical, however, and saw nothing in the news to soften their implacable opposition to surrender. Gen. Anami, the war minister, privately acknowledged that this was a nuclear attack, and dispatched an investigating team to Hiroshima. He proposed, however, that the government should take no action before hearing its report, which would not be available for two days. Hiroshima at first rendered some ministers more committed, rather than less, to resisting unconditional surrender.

Foreign minister Togo dispatched a message to ambassador Sato in

Moscow, seeking urgent clarification of the Soviet attitude. Togo went to the Imperial Palace on the morning of 8 August. Hirohito told him that, in the new circumstances, 'My wish is to make such arrangements as to end the war as soon as possible.' Togo was asked to convey this message to prime minister Suzuki. Even now, however, the emperor was vague about means. He certainly did not urge immediate acceptance of the Potsdam terms. The Japanese government failed to adopt the course which could almost certainly have saved Nagasaki from destruction: a swift communication to the Americans declaring readiness to quit. Once again, we know *why* this did not happen: because the decision-making process was so slow, the war party so resolute. But again, also, the question should be asked: how many days of stubborn enemy silence should the US, never the most patient society on earth, have been expected passively to endure?

In Moscow, on 7 August Russia's media reported nothing about events in Hiroshima. All that day Stalin remained incommunicado. It is assumed that the Soviet leader was stunned by the news, and fearful that Japan would immediately surrender. But ambassador Sato's urgent request to meet Molotov showed that this was not so. Japan was still in the war. It was not, after all, too late for the Soviet Union to achieve its objectives. Sato was granted an appointment with Molotov for the evening of 8 August. Stalin meanwhile conducted meetings with a Chinese delegation led by T.V. Soong, Chiang's prime minister and brother-in-law, which was still stubbornly resisting endorsement of some of the terms agreed by Roosevelt at Yalta. Japan's leaders went to bed in Tokyo on the night of 8 August expecting to hear news from Moscow next morning about Sato's meeting with Molotov. This they did, but in a form drastically divergent from their expectations.

When Sato entered the foreign minister's office, Molotov brushed aside his greetings, invited him to sit, and read aloud the terms of his nation's declaration of war. Since Japan had rejected the Potsdam Declaration, said the Russian, 'the Allies approached the Soviet Union 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 re-establishment of general peace'. Russia accepted the Allied proposals, to save the Japanese people 'from the same destruction as Germany had suffered'. Less than an hour later, Molotov informed the British and American ambassadors that, in fulfilment of its obligations, his country had declared war on Japan. Harriman

expressed the gratitude and pleasure of the US, for he could do nothing else. A few hours later, shortly after Truman in Washington heard news of the Soviet action, *Bock's Car* took off from Tinian for Nagasaki.

The second mission was launched without any further Washington directive, and simply because its weapon was ready. Twentieth Air Force's mandate left the timings of both atomic attacks in the hands of local commanders, to be determined by operational convenience. The generals advanced the second strike by two days in the face of warnings of bad weather after 10 August, and 'a general feeling among those in the theater that the sooner this bomb was dropped the better it would be for the war effort'. Washington's only contribution was passive. The president and his advisers discerned in Japanese silence no cause to order the 509th Bomb Group to halt its operations. At 1102 on 9 August Japanese time, having found Kokura, its primary target, under cloud, Maj. Charles Sweeney dropped 'Fat Man' on Nagasaki, his secondary objective, generating the explosive power of 22,000 tons of TNT, killing at least 30,000 people. Since midnight, Soviet armies had been sweeping into Manchuria.