

Why Dropping The Atomic Bombs On Japan Was The Right Decision

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In early August 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan. Shortly thereafter, Japan surrendered to finally end World War II. More than 65 years later, they remain the only nuclear weapons ever used in war. The decision to use these terrible new weapons has gained a great deal of criticism over the subsequent decades. But new evidence has become available over the last two decades, primarily due to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989. Conventional aerial bombardment, naval blockade, invasion, and the Soviet Union's entry into the war were not viable alternatives for ending the war, especially without far worse results than the atomic bombs wrought. The sum of evidence now makes it clear that the atomic bombs were instrumental in Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945.

The United States had been brought into World War II by Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. It took years of material buildup, training, and difficult sea, air, and land campaigns across the Pacific Ocean for the United States to be within striking distance of the Japanese home islands in the summer of 1945. The Japanese navy had been essentially destroyed by battles at Midway, Philippine Sea, and Leyte Gulf combined with frequent attacks by American submarines. Japan's air forces were likewise devastated by the large losses of both planes and veteran pilots; by 1945, they were hopelessly outnumbered and outclasses by American aircraft and pilots. With the surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945, all focus was now on defeating Japan as soon as possible.

The seizure of several of the Mariana Islands in the summer of 1944 opened the Japanese home islands to aerial bombardment from new B-29 bombers. The largest and

longest-ranged bombers in the world at the time, B-29s flying out of the Marianas initially attempted precision bombing of Japanese targets starting in November 1944. These bombing missions were frustrated by mechanical difficulties, bad weather, and the discovery of the Jet Stream.¹ These difficulties combined with the scattered nature of Japanese industry, a lack of intelligence information, and the flammable nature of Japanese houses (most of them made of wood and paper) lead to a new strategy. On the night of March 9-10, 1945, a massive raid of B-29 attacked Tokyo with incendiary bombs. The intensity of the bombing combined with high winds created a firestorm resulting in nearly 16 square miles of Tokyo burned down, approximately 100,000 people dead, and over 1 million survivors left homeless.² More firebombing raids followed destroying 3 square miles of Nagoya, 8 square miles of Osaka, and 14 square miles of Kobe before the the supply of incendiaries was temporarily exhausted.³ More firebombing followed in April, burning out over 20 square miles of Tokyo and Kawasaki. In May and June, Nagoya, Yokohama, Osaka, Kobe, and Tokyo were firebombed. By mid-June, over 105 square miles of urban area had been destroyed, including more than half of Tokyo.⁴ Bombing and firebombing continued right up until the end of the war.

When bombers were not trying to destroy Japanese industry or raze Japanese cities, they were mining Japanese waters to cripple shipping of raw materials and food. Over 13,000 mines were deployed by bombers between March and August 1945. Submarines were also taking a devastating toll on shipping, sinking nearly half of Japan's existing merchant shipping in

¹ Frank 53-62.

² Frank 16-18.

³ Frank 68-69.

⁴ Frank 73-77.

1944.⁵ In June 1945, submarines were finally about to maneuver through Japanese minefields to attack shipping in the Sea of Japan. In July, aircraft began attacking transportation and shipping in Japanese-controlled Korea.⁶ Carrier-based aircraft spent most of the summer of 1945 striking a variety of targets in Japan while battleships bombarded coastal targets.

Despite all this, Japan did not surrender. Thus after consultation with the two main Pacific commanders – Admiral Chester Nimitz and General Douglas MacArthur – the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a formal directive on May 25, 1945 for an invasion of Japan.⁷ Codenamed Downfall, this plan was divided into two operations: Olympic and Coronet. Scheduled for November 1945, Olympic was the invasion of the southernmost Japanese home island of Kyushu. An invasion of this area could be supported by land-based aircraft operating from recently captured Okinawa. Once occupied, southern Kyushu would allow land-based aircraft to attack almost anywhere in the Japanese home islands and support further amphibious assaults. Coronet would follow in March 1946 with an invasion of the main Japanese home island of Honshu. The objective was to occupy the Japanese capital of Tokyo, thereby hopefully prompting surrender without having to invade or occupy the rest of Japan.⁸ Plans for Olympic assumed 6 Japanese divisions in Kyushu, possibly reinforced up to 10 divisions after the invasion and supported by 2500 aircraft and “a fanatically hostile population.” These would be attacked by 14 to 17 American divisions supported by aircraft from Okinawa and carrier-based aircraft from the Navy’s 22 aircraft carriers.⁹

⁵ Frank 78-82.

⁶ Frank 155.

⁷ Frank 36.

⁸ Frank 117.

⁹ Frank 117-118.

The fanatically hostile population was an accurate assessment. The Japanese army had issued a “Field Manual for the Decisive Battle in the Homeland” in preparation for an invasion. They were prepared to use a variety of suicide attacks on an unprecedented scale. The manual was a “commitment to creation not merely an army of suicidalists, but an entire nation.”¹⁰ But that was the least of the problems with Operation Olympic.

By the summer of 1945, American radio intelligence was intercepting and decoding of Japanese radio messages at a rate of more than a million per month.¹¹ The geography of Kyushu and its distance from Okinawa allowed the Japanese to correctly conclude an invasion was likely and where it would occur; they redeployed their forces accordingly. By August 7th, American military intelligence had discovered more than 13 Japanese divisions on Kyushu, 9 of them close to the intended invasion beaches. On August 20th, 625,000 Japanese soldiers were estimated to be on Kyushu. Actually, it was closer to 900,000, triple the expectations from May and June.¹² Attacking on a 1:1 ratio is considered dangerous in good conditions; for an amphibious assault, it is suicidal. Likewise, radio intelligence and aerial reconnaissance had revealed far more aircraft available to the Japanese than previously believed. An intelligence estimate on August 13th showed more than 10,000 aircraft available in the Japanese home islands.¹³ These were expected to be used in unprecedented quantities to strike the invasion fleet, mostly as kamikazes. By August 1945, plans for Olympic were no longer feasible.

The Japanese could not open surrender negotiations with the Allies if they wanted; there was nothing to negotiate. Unconditional surrender had been the demand of Japan (and

¹⁰ Hastings 439.

¹¹ Frank 198.

¹² Frank 202-203.

¹³ Frank 210.

Germany) since the Casablanca conference in 1942. The goal was to ensure the Axis countries were truly pacified by “military occupation and postwar reform...so that the philosophies of fascism and militarism could be uprooted and their societies democratized.”¹⁴ The possibility of defining or modifying the demand for unconditional surrender was hotly debated within the United States government in 1945.¹⁵ President Harry Truman’s V-E Day speech attempted to do just that. He said that unconditional surrender applied specifically to Japan’s armed forces and included “the return of soldiers and sailors to the families, their farms, and their jobs”. Unconditional surrender “does not mean the extermination or enslavement of the Japanese people.”¹⁶ These clarifications were repeated in the Potsdam Declaration on July 26, 1945: “Japanese military forces, after being completely disarmed, shall be permitted to return to their homes...We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation...”¹⁷

While these declarations may have alleviated fears of annihilation, they were still unacceptable to Japanese leaders. War Minister General Korechika Anami objected to “conducting negotiations on the assumption that we are defeated.”¹⁸ Prime Minister Kintaro Suzuki had requested and received a report detailing Japan’s terrible condition after taking office in April 1945¹⁹ and the Emperor had inquired about the possibility of ending the war in an Imperial conference on June 22, 1945.²⁰ But Suzuki was dismissive in his famous response to

¹⁴ Frank 27.

¹⁵ Frank 214-221.

¹⁶ “Harry S. Truman: The President’s News Conference on V-E Day”. The American Presidency Project.

¹⁷ “Birth of the Constitution of Japan: Potsdam Declaration”. National Diet Library.

¹⁸ Hastings 453.

¹⁹ Walker 29.

²⁰ Hasegawa 106.

the Potsdam Declaration.²¹ While many members of the Japanese government wanted to end the war, they would only accept much broader conditions such as no requirement for democracy, no occupation of Japan, self-disarmament, and no war crimes trials by the Allies. Some even insisted on retaining Japan's older conquests such as Formosa and Korea.²² These were all clearly unacceptable to the Allies; the belief that Japan could negotiate a conditional surrender was "fantasy land."²³ Japan's leaders were also very concerned for the preservation of the Emperor. A common argument is that Japan was willing to surrender with the sole condition of retaining the monarchy, but only a few in the Japanese government were willing to settle for this single condition. On July 22, 1945, Naotake Sato, Ambassador to the Soviet Union, advised Foreign Minister Shiginori Togo that the best Japan could hope for was "unconditional surrender, modified only by the extent that the Imperial institution could be retained."²⁴ Togo rejected this suggestion despite being one of those most in favor of ending the war.

The United States had been developing an atomic bomb since 1941. Dubbed the Manhattan Project, the primary concern had been to develop an atomic bomb before Nazi Germany did. In December 1944, scientists working on the project correctly estimated the first uranium bomb would be available around August 1, 1945 with the first plutonium bomb available in July.²⁵ With victory over Germany seemingly assured, it now was expected to be used against Japan. A targeting committee of soldiers and scientists met in April and May 1945

²¹ Frank 234 & 239.

²² Hasegawa 71.

²³ Hasegawa 109.

²⁴ Frank 239.

²⁵ Frank 253.

to determine where the bombs should be dropped. The committee decided targets should be “places the bombing of which would most adversely affect the will of the Japanese people to continue the war” but also “military in nature”. For maximum impact and so the effects could be accurately assessed, “targets should not have been previously damaged in air raids”.²⁶ Using the bomb on an unpopulated area to demonstrate its power was considered but ruled out for a variety of reasons: “there was still no guarantee the weapon would work and a failure would have a diametrically opposite effect from what was sought; the Japanese might intercept the bomber; Japanese militarists might refuse to be impressed; or the Japanese might move Allied prisoners of war into the designated target zone.”²⁷ Most importantly, there were “no bombs to waste.”²⁸ While there were some concerns for “postwar nuclear dangers” and whether use of the atomic bomb would create a backlash of public opinion against the United States,²⁹ “there was very little deliberation over what to do with the bomb once it was ready for deployment.”³⁰ Truman’s biggest concern was ending the war as soon as possible and the atomic bomb seemed to be the best way to accomplish this so its use “did not require lengthy consideration.”³¹

Due to design concerns about the plutonium bomb, a test bomb codenamed “Trinity” was detonated on July 16th near Alamogordo, New Mexico.³² The test was a huge success. President Truman approved use of the bombs on July 24th. The first bomb would be dropped as soon after August 3rd as weather was favorable and “additional bombs will be delivered...as

²⁶ Frank 254.

²⁷ Frank 258.

²⁸ Harper 102.

²⁹ Frank 258-260.

³⁰ Walker 51.

³¹ Walker 60.

³² Frank 260-261.

soon as made ready.”³³ The final target list was Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, and Nagasaki.

Missing from the list was the targeting committee’s top choice of Kyoto; it had been removed by Secretary of War Henry Stimson who insisted the cultural significance of Japan’s old capital be spared, despite the tempting target of its 1 million residents.³⁴

With a civilian population of 280,000-290,000, Hiroshima was one of the largest cities thus far unbombed. It was also the headquarters of the Second General Army with approximately 43,000 soldiers in the city, making it a viable military target.³⁵ Weather cleared enough on August 6th for the bomber “Enola Gay” to drop “Little Boy”, the first uranium-based atomic bomb, on Hiroshima. Casualty estimates vary widely, but a modern estimate by the Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF) is 90,000-160,000 deaths within 4 months of the bombing.³⁶ This total includes about 20,000 military personnel.³⁷

The second bomb was scheduled to be dropped August 11th, but this was moved up to August 9th due to a forecast of extended bad weather. Kokura was the intended target, with a large military arsenal and a pre-war population of 168,000. Technical difficulties and visibility issues prompted the bomber, “Bock’s Car”, to instead attack the backup target. Nagasaki had a prewar population of 253,000 and contained the largest and most productive shipyard in Japan.³⁸ “Fat Man”, a plutonium-based atom bomb like the one tested the “Trinity” test,

³³ Frank 262.

³⁴ Frank 262.

³⁵ Frank 263.

³⁶ "Frequently Asked Questions." *The Radiation Effects Research Foundation Website*.

³⁷ Frank 287.

³⁸ Frank 284.

missed its aiming point and caused fewer casualties than the Hiroshima bombing: 60,000-80,000.³⁹

Hours before a mushroom cloud appeared over Nagasaki, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan. Joseph Stalin had repeatedly promised the Allies to attack Japan three months after Germany's surrender. Having determined China's army was of no particular use, the United States had been eager for the Soviet Union to attack⁴⁰ so as to tie down Japan's army of 1 million men in China and Manchuria.⁴¹ While the United States often doubted that promised attack would come, the Soviets had little to lose and much to gain from joining the war. Russia had lost embarrassingly to Japan in a 1905 war and wanted revenge. Stalin was eager to physically seize all territory promised to him at the Yalta conference.⁴²

The reaction of the Japanese government to the Hiroshima bomb was slow. Despite Truman's promise of a "rain of ruin" and a message to the Imperial Army General Staff that "the whole city of Hiroshima was destroyed instantly by a single bomb"⁴³ the Japanese Army did not dispatch an investigation team until August 8th. The military attempted to downplay the attack. Admiral Teijiro Toyoda argued there could only be a few bombs and "world opinion would intervene" against use of such weapons.⁴⁴ By the time the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki the Japanese government still had not formally met since before Hiroshima. But

³⁹ "Frequently Asked Questions." *The Radiation Effects Research Foundation Website*.

⁴⁰ Hastings 221.

⁴¹ Hastings 9.

⁴² Hasegawa 253.

⁴³ Frank 269.

⁴⁴ Frank 270-271.

while the government was slow to take action, the Emperor was unsettled by the new weapon.⁴⁵

The Japanese Supreme Council for the Direction of the War finally met on the morning of August 9th. Prime Minister Suzuki declared the Hiroshima bomb and Soviet attack made it impossible to continue the war.⁴⁶ The damage at Nagasaki was quickly recognized as far less than Hiroshima, but the shock of a second atomic bomb only 3 days after the first seemed to foretell many more bombs were in store for the future.⁴⁷ The six-man Council was able to agree on seeking peace, but still not under what conditions. Half the council asked only for the preservation of the monarchy, but the other half also still insisted on self-disarmament, no Allied occupation, and Japanese control over their own war crimes trials.⁴⁸

The full Japanese cabinet met that afternoon, but could not come to a unanimous agreement as required. The deadlocked meeting adjourned and Prime Minister Suzuki and Foreign Minister Togo went to see the Emperor. Suzuki proposed an Imperial conference that night and the Emperor agreed. During the meeting, the Emperor declared “continuing the war can only mean destruction for the nation and prolongation of bloodshed and cruelty in the world. I cannot bear to see my innocent people suffer any longer.” He sanctioned Togo’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration with the sole condition that the monarchy be retained.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Frank 272.

⁴⁶ Frank 290.

⁴⁷ Frank 290.

⁴⁸ Frank 291.

⁴⁹ Frank 293-296.

Although the Emperor's opinion carried not official political power, it was still greatly respected. "His Majesty's decision should be made the decision of this conference as well" announced Prime Minister Suzuki. A pre-dawn cabinet meeting approved the decision and a response was sent out via neutral countries.⁵⁰ After some deliberation and unwilling to appear they were backing off from unconditional surrender, the American government responded with a statement that gave vague assurances but no official promises. "The ultimate form of government of Japan shall...be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people."⁵¹

A full cabinet meeting on August 13th could not reach a unanimous decision on whether to accept the American response. On August 14th, American bombers dropped leaflets across Japan with the surrender offer and the American response. Seeing the content of the leaflets, some government officials feared civilian or military unrest in response. A meeting between Prime Minister Suzuki and the Emperor led to another Imperial conference that morning. In addition to the usual government officials, Field Marshal Sunroku Hata also attended the meeting. "Respected and forceful....he carried the unmatched credentials of command of what was expected to be the decisive battlefield on Kyushu and direct experience with the atomic bomb."⁵² Expected to urge that Japan fight on, instead he endorsed ending the war. The Emperor again called for an end to the war and requested the army and navy cooperate with that decision.⁵³ There was some dissent afterwards and a coup attempt by some junior officers. But Generals Anami and Umezumi, the two Army representatives in the cabinet, chose to accept

⁵⁰ Frank 296.

⁵¹ Frank 300-302.

⁵² Frank 314.

⁵³ Frank 313-314.

the Imperial edict and persuaded the Army's senior officers to sign a document confirming the Army would obey the Emperor's wishes.⁵⁴ At noon on August 15th, the Emperor spoke via an unprecedented radio broadcast to the nation declaring Japan's surrender.⁵⁵

How decisive were the atomic bombs in Japan's surrender? President of the Privy Council Baron Hiranuma spoke at the Imperial Conference on August 9th and listed the many "blatant manifestations of Japan's impotence and vulnerabilities" including the aerial bombing and Soviet attack, but "above all" the atomic bomb.⁵⁶ At the time of that meeting and the Emperor's call for an end to the war, the extent of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria was not yet known.⁵⁷ The Emperor had supported the war until after Okinawa, but was only persuaded to order surrender because of the atomic bombs. After Hiroshima, he told Foreign Minister Togo "now that such a new weapon has appeared, it becomes less and less possible to continue the war..."⁵⁸ While the Emperor made references to the general poor condition of the nation and a desire to protect the Imperial line, he only once made reference to the Soviet attack. He most often cited the atomic bombs as the reason to end the war: in the Imperial conferences on August 10th and 14th and in his radio broadcast on August 15th. Prime Minister Suzuki explained in December 1945 that the Supreme War Council did not believe bombing alone could beat Japan and the United States would be forced to invade. After the atomic bomb was dropped, the Supreme War Council realized the Americans "need not land when it had such a weapon."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Frank 315-317.

⁵⁵ Frank 320.

⁵⁶ Frank 293.

⁵⁷ Frank 289.

⁵⁸ Walker 81.

⁵⁹ Frank 345-347.

One of the biggest criticisms of the atomic bombs is how inhumane it was. But in terms of sheer death toll and destruction it was on par with other American and British bombing efforts against Germany and Japan.⁶⁰ The death toll at Hiroshima was comparable to the March 1945 firebombing of Tokyo and the death toll at Nagasaki actually less. At the time, the atomic bomb was seen by most as little more than a superbomb and the extent of the dangers from radiation were not understood.⁶¹ Robert Oppenheimer, top scientist working on the Manhattan Project, estimated the bomb would only kill about 20,000 people.⁶² General George Marshall admitted after the war that there had been talk of using as many as 9 atomic bombs on Japanese troop concentrations on Kyushu ahead of the American invasion.⁶³ Doing so would have exposed American troops to dangerous amounts of radiation. After the Trinity test, General Leslie Groves claimed the radioactivity from the explosion was not high enough to “have required the evacuation of the population.”⁶⁴ Even in June 1946, a Manhattan Project press release claimed “no harmful amounts of persistent radioactivity were present after the explosions.”⁶⁵

There is no clear answer how many casualties were expected from an invasion of Japan or how casualty estimates affected the decision to drop the atomic bombs. Estimates by the staffs of General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz for the first 30 days of Operation Olympic estimated 49,000 to 55,000 casualties.⁶⁶ Joint Staff Planners estimated 193,500 casualties for Olympic and Coronet combined, but this estimate was removed from a final draft given to

⁶⁰ Hastings 281.

⁶¹ Hastings 456.

⁶² Frank 256.

⁶³ Harper 90.

⁶⁴ Frank 261.

⁶⁵ Hastings 477.

⁶⁶ Frank 137-138.

General George Marshall for a meeting with President Truman.⁶⁷ It is unclear how these estimates were made. Based on previous amphibious campaigns in the Pacific and the number of troops allocated to the initial Operation Olympic plan 456,000 to 514,000 casualties were likely for the first 90 days of the invasion of Kyushu. Including the first 90 days of Coronet raises this total to 1.2 million casualties.⁶⁸ Since American casualties for the entire rest of World War II were about 1 million, such losses would have been an unacceptable number to the American public.⁶⁹ None of these estimates were revised to account for the massive reinforcement of Kyushu that reduced the ratio of American to Japanese troops from 3:1 to close to 1:1.

Most of these estimates only accounted for the invasion force on land and not for losses by the Navy. After Okinawa, the Japanese held their remaining aircraft and planned to unleash kamikaze strikes against the invasion fleet off Kyushu on an unprecedented scale. Approximately 1900 kamikaze sorties during the Okinawa campaign sank 27 ships and damaged 164 (with 1 sunk and 63 damaged by non-kamikaze attacks)⁷⁰ caused at least 3300 deaths. Kyushu would have seen in excess of 5300 kamikaze sorties and possibly as many as 11,000 if the Japanese truly committed every aircraft they had left.⁷¹ If those attacks caused death and destruction at the same rate off Kyushu as they did off Okinawa then 9,200 to 19,000 sailors would die and 75 to 156 ships would be sunk with 455 to 949 damaged. Since the kamikazes would not have to fly as far to reach targets off Kyushu as they had at Okinawa and since they would be attacking in far greater numbers, these estimates could be low.

⁶⁷ Frank 139.

⁶⁸ Frank 136-137.

⁶⁹ Frank 343.

⁷⁰ Hastings 393.

⁷¹ Frank 182-187.

Muddling the issue is the tendency of Truman and others who bore responsibility for the bombs to quote after the war casualty estimates they were not given during the war. Max Hastings notes “leading figures changed their minds, some more than once. Several wrote disingenuously afterwards, to justify their own actions.”⁷² Truman gave initial approval for Operation Olympic in a meeting on June 18, 1945.⁷³ At that meeting, various casualty estimates were discussed mostly in the range of Luzon to Okinawa (31,000 to 41,000).⁷⁴ Though Truman met with Marshall again during the Potsdam Conference when the final approval for the atomic bomb was given, there is no evidence what, if any, casualty estimates Truman received during that meeting. Nor is there any evidence he ever saw the higher projections he would later claim of a half million to a million casualties for an invasion of Japan before he authorized use of the atomic bombs.⁷⁵ Regardless of what casualty estimates he was given, invasion or atomic bombs was never seen as either/or choice.⁷⁶ The atomic bombs were used just like “every other available destructive tool to advance the conflict’s ending.”⁷⁷

Besides the deaths directly caused by the invasion fighting, there were other lives at risk in Japan: prisoners of war (POWs). 27% of Allied POWs – over 35,700 - died in Japanese captivity, not including those killed upon capture.⁷⁸ “Nearly to a man, Allied POWs believed the Japanese would kill them if the Homeland was invaded.”⁷⁹ They had good reason to feel this way as there were many examples of Japanese executing prisoners before an invasion, real or

⁷² Hastings 444.

⁷³ Frank 144.

⁷⁴ Frank 139-144.

⁷⁵ Frank 342.

⁷⁶ Walker 5.

⁷⁷ Hastings 449.

⁷⁸ Hastings 346.

⁷⁹ Frank 361.

only suspected: the Gilbert Islands, Ballale, Wake Island, and Palawan. Some written documentation from the Japanese military includes plans for leaving no trace of POWs in case of “urgent situations.”⁸⁰ Even when wholesale slaughter of POWs did not occur, cannibalism by the Japanese sometimes occurred and not always due to lack of food supplies.⁸¹ American aircraft crew that came down in Japan were frequently gruesomely killed by both civilians and military when captured⁸², and as long as the war continued planes were going to be lost over Japanese territory.

Several other military operations were aborted by the Japanese surrender. The Soviets were prepared to follow up their seizures of southern Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands with an invasion of the northern Japanese home island of Hokkaido. The island was lightly defended by just over 2 divisions who were not expecting a Soviet attack on the western side of the island. However, the island is mountainous and the Soviets lacked American and British experience with amphibious assaults. They would likely have succeeded in seizing the island, but with high casualties on both sides.⁸³ Hokkaido would then have been subject to Soviet occupation which, based on how they treated Germany and Manchuria, would have involved mass rape, the removal of everything of value back to the Soviet Union, and the death of an estimated 400,000 civilians.⁸⁴

Another invasion cancelled by the Japanese surrender was Operation Zipper. Scheduled for September 9th, British forces planned to land on the west coast of Malay and move south to

⁸⁰ Frank 361.

⁸¹ Hastings 427.

⁸² Frank 361.

⁸³ Frank 323.

⁸⁴ Frank 356.

recapture Singapore before the end of 1945. The Japanese were expecting an invasion, although farther north than the British planned. Some troops were landed anyway at the designated beaches and, based on the problems they experienced, the invasion could have been one of the “bloodiest of the war” if it had been opposed by Japanese troops.⁸⁵ Even if the invasion itself had seen little opposition, the 77,000 Japanese troops in Singapore were preparing strong defenses to make British efforts to retake it long and bloody.⁸⁶

In addition to this invasions, the American bombing campaign was about to shift direction when the war ended. A new strategic bombing directive was issued on August 11th and it made the Japanese railroad system the primary target. The vulnerability of Japan’s railroads was not well known by the United States during the war, but afterwards the US Strategic Bombing Survey concluded it was “one of the most vulnerable of any size to be found anywhere.”⁸⁷ Even with the US occupation to provide foodstuffs, Japan faced a food crisis in early 1946. Had the war continued and Japan’s flimsy yet vital rail system was wrecked, the country would likely have faced mass starvation.⁸⁸

Even non-combatants outside Japan were at serious risk every day the war continued. Depending on the source used, between 100,000 and 250,000 non-Japanese non-combatants died on average each month between Japan’s invasion of China in July 1937 and Japan’s surrender in August 1945.⁸⁹ This means if the war had lasted only a month or two longer, it is

⁸⁵ Harper 11.

⁸⁶ Harper 77.

⁸⁷ Frank 352.

⁸⁸ Frank 350-354.

⁸⁹ Frank 163.

quite likely that as many civilians would have died as did die from both atomic bombings combined.

While the atomic bombs may not have been the only way to force Japan's unconditional surrender, they were clearly had a huge impact on the opinion of the Emperor and other members of the Japanese government. Once convinced that the war had to end, the Emperor was able to break a deadlock in the government and his status persuaded the Japanese military to accept peace. An invasion would have been a bloodbath, even if successful. Bombardment and blockade would have cost more lives and caused more destruction than the atomic bombs and were not certain to end the war. The Soviet Union's operations might end the war, but likewise at a terrible cost. Every day that World War II continued was a deadly tragedy and the atomic bombs brought that tragedy to an end.

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