

**Tsuyoshi Hasegawa.** *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan.*  
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"The writing of 'recent history' is difficult at best; at worst it degenerates into a form of disguised fiction with little or no claims upon the historical. The years ahead may reveal new sources of untapped information or may seal into near oblivion a part, at least, of what is presented here. This is both the limitation and its justification. Had it not been for those who wrote of events close to themselves, who recorded the history of their own times, our present record of the past would be far less rich, far less intimate, than is generally admitted."[1]

Robert J.C. Butow's observations in his 1954 groundbreaking study *Japan's Decision to Surrender* about the continued reconstruction of history are appropriate to consider in the context of Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's new work. Hasegawa, a former Butow student, notes that Butow's classic work "made an indelible impression on me. This book is in a way an overdue thank you to the mentor who inspired me so many years ago" (p. 363).

*Racing the Enemy* is a new look at an old question and, as Hasegawa intends, it should

cause many historians to reconsider their views on why the Japanese surrendered when they did and how they did to end the Pacific War. Hasegawa's title illustrates his argument that each party to the conflict was under time constraints because of real or perceived deadlines to take action. *Racing the Enemy* is a complicated book with nuanced arguments. I will comment only on what seem to be the study's two most important concepts: the decisive impact of the Soviet entry into the Pacific War and the American decision to use the atomic weapons.

True to Butow's words, Hasegawa reveals new sources of untapped information by using Soviet, Japanese, and American sources to examine the triangular relations at the end of the war. He is correct in claiming that his work is the most internationalized study of the end of the Pacific War. While many historians have focused on the issue of whether or not the Truman administration dropped the bomb primarily to intimidate the Soviet Union (and primarily from a Washington perspective), Hasegawa moves into broader consideration of the role of the Soviet involve-

ment in the final weeks of the war. In the acknowledgements, Hasegawa recognizes the contributions of his colleagues Sumio Hatano and Boris Nikolaevich Slavinsky (Slavinsky, a senior researcher at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow, died in 2002 before the project was complete and the book is dedicated to him). It is not that Hasegawa has uncovered any genuine "smoking gun" to prove his case but he appears to have recovered a more genuine context from which the events flowed and the decisions were made. The Soviet documents add depth and breadth to the understanding of the final months of the war and provide the evidence for Hasegawa's argument that Stalin was a much more active player in the decision-making process regarding the invasion of the Japanese-occupied territory than previously assumed. Stalin "was engaged in skillful Machiavellian diplomacy to manipulate Japanese desires for negotiated peace to his own ends," Hasegawa argues, and "ruthlessly pursued diplomacy and military operations to secure the territories to which he felt entitled" (p. 11).

More importantly, Hasegawa argues that the Soviet Union's entry into the war had a much greater impact on Japan's surrender than many historians have previously assumed. No longer, Hasegawa argues, should historians believe that it was primarily the shock of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that brought the end of the war. Instead, the Soviet attack played an essential role in bringing the Japanese leadership to that decision.

As Hasegawa explains, the central issue almost obsessively occupying Japanese diplomacy in the final months of the war was the effort to keep the Soviet Union neutral in accordance with the 1941 Neutrality Pact and to bring about a negotiated peace through its approaches to the Allies via Moscow. Unrealistic though it may have been, high-level Japanese officials clung desperately to this diplomatic gambit. Hasegawa draws a strong

portrayal of Naotake Sato, the Japanese ambassador to Moscow, who for a time seemed to be the only high-level Japanese official who realized talk with the Soviets was likely a futile path. "Soviet entry into the war shocked the Japanese even more than the atomic bombs because it meant the end of any hope of achieving a settlement short of unconditional surrender," Hasegawa writes (p. 3).

Another area where Hasegawa's argument is intriguing is in regard to the concept of *kokutai*, which is the mythical notion that the Japanese emperor, as a living God united with the creator of the imperial system, is the eternal essence of his subjects and imperial land. Hasegawa traces the evolution of this thought to its rather late culmination in a Japanese Ministry of Education publication called *The Essence of Kokutai* in 1937, which had appeared after a controversial debate over the matter. Central to this notion was the emperor's monopolistic power over the military command. All of this emphasized the centrality of the emperor to Japanese national identity. Part of the peace party's work in the final days of the war was to redefine *kokutai* much more narrowly to include just the preservation of the imperial house. This movement to change the emperor's status from a semi-mythical figure to a real historical actor gained solid ground with Hirohito's decision to involve himself in the decision-making process, a process that separated the idea of the national community from the emperor's own person. An understanding of *kokutai* helps to explain the difficulty the Japanese had confronting the reality of their impending defeat. Hasegawa suggests that along with the traditionally accepted argument that Hirohito directed the surrender in order to spare Japan more destruction, he also was making a desperate attempt to save himself and the imperial house.

This threat to the imperial house, Hasegawa reveals, was made more severe in the emperor's eyes because of the Soviet invasion. With Japan's whole diplomatic framework geared in the final

weeks and months toward maintaining Soviet neutrality so that Japan could arrange a negotiated peace, the Soviet declaration of war had a devastating impact. The Soviet attack emboldened the peace party in Tokyo, whose members had been diligently, but with inadequate force, working toward a negotiated peace. Still, despite the shock, Japanese army officers insisted on the need to fight on. Elsewhere reality began dawning.

The Hiroshima bombing did inspire greater urgency on the part of officials and the emperor to seek the negotiated peace, Hasegawa shows, but did not produce a rush to embrace the Potsdam terms of unconditional surrender. The author maintains that "[a]s long as they still felt they might preserve the *kokutai* or negotiate with the Allies with Moscow's help, they would press on" (p. 185).

In an interview on the morning of August 9 (before the emperor had heard or digested news of the bombing), Hirohito had a meeting with Koichi Kido, keeper of the privy seal. During the meeting the emperor said, "The Soviet Union declared war against us, and entered into a state of war as of today. Because of this it is necessary to study and decide on the termination of the war" (p. 198). Similarly Ambassador Sato received the Soviet declaration of war from Vladimir Molotov and, while en route back to the embassy, glumly told an aide, "The inevitable has now arrived" (p. 191). With Japan's diplomatic strategy in ruins as Soviet troops attacked, word came of yet another atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Again, Hasegawa contends, the bombing seems to have had little impact on the negotiations between the peace and war parties.

There is an explanation, this reader believes, for the apparent lack of impact the atomic bombings may have had on Japanese leaders, especially the military. We should keep in mind that American forces had been bombing Japanese cities with impunity for months. On both the American and Japanese sides, the fact that American bombers

were incinerating Japanese cities before Hiroshima lessened the impact of destroying that city. Just as the mounting destruction of Japanese cities reduced American reluctance to destroy civilian targets, it also reduced the shock value to the Japanese. Surely, there were significant differences with the Hiroshima bombing but the line had long been crossed on the destruction of cities. The tens of thousands of civilians killed in the conventional bombings were no less dead because the instruments of their deaths were high-explosive bombs and incendiaries rather than atomic weapons. While there is some mention of the scale of the conventional bombings, Hasegawa could have sharpened his argument by incorporating this destruction and its inevitable affect on both the Japanese and the American decision-making processes.

This brings us to a further important contribution of Hasegawa's study, because his argument adds to the debate over the effectiveness (and justness) of the atomic bombings. *If* the Hiroshima bombing did not induce surrender, and *if* the Soviet action was so central, and *if* the decision to surrender was reached before the Nagasaki bombing, as Hasegawa argues, then the case for the usefulness of the bombs is seriously undermined.

Hasegawa is critical of the American decision-making process but he goes beyond previous criticisms of Truman's decision, such as Martin Sherwin's faulting Truman for making a single decision to drop both bombs rather than two separate decisions.[2] Hasegawa cites a cryptic response by Truman to Secretary of War Stimson, "Suggestion approved. Release when ready but not sooner than Aug. 2" (p. 175). Hasegawa argues that this document has been misidentified. For example, in *Truman* (1992) historian David McCullough contends that this is the presidential order to drop the bomb. Instead, Hasegawa argues, this document is really a response to Stimson's inquiry whether a statement about the bomb should be

prepared and released when necessary. Hasegawa goes on to argue that despite Truman's later claims "that he issued the order to drop the bomb on his voyage back to the United States somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic, the president never issued such an order. The fact is that the atomic bomb was dropped without Truman's explicit order" (p. 176). Instead, the only explicit order to drop the bomb was almost entirely within military channels. According to Hasegawa, General Lesley Groves drafted the order, George Marshall and Henry Stimson approved it, and General Thomas Handy delivered it to General Carl Spaatz, commander of the Army Strategic Air Forces. Truman "was not involved in this decision but merely let the military proceed without his interference" (p. 152).

This is an intriguing point even though some historians will believe it irrelevant since there was an apparently clear understanding that Truman wished the bombs to be used once they were ready. After all, as George Elsey, a naval intelligence officer recalled, "Truman made no decision because there was not a decision to be made. He could no more have stopped it than a train moving down a track" (p. 159). Nevertheless, civilian control of the military is an important American principle and separates the United States from the banana republics, and Hasegawa's observations deserve consideration.

Acknowledging that Truman's objectives were twofold (to impose unconditional surrender and to save American lives), Hasegawa argues that the Soviet entry played an important part in speeding up the use of the weapons. "Truman was in a hurry. He was aware that the race was on between the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war" (p. 183). Part of this rush resulted in what Hasegawa calls the "concocted" story that Japan had promptly "rejected" the Potsdam Proclamation. Instead, Hasegawa cites Magic decrypts and Swiss sources that the Japanese government believed the Potsdam documents could be used as a

basis for surrender. Hasegawa admits that the Japanese appear to have publicly ignored the proclamation but maintains that that is quite different from rejecting the surrender conditions. Of course, Truman probably never saw the Magic decrypts but had he been interested in a way to avoid using the atomic weapons, Hasegawa argues, he would have had each bit of intelligence scrutinized and there would have been a high-level discussion of Japan's reaction to the Potsdam Proclamation. Hasegawa's conclusion is that "even in the face of what was known, and should have been known to Truman, Byrnes, and Stimson, one cannot escape the conclusion that the United States rushed to drop the bomb without any attempt to explore the readiness of some Japanese policymakers to seek peace through the ultimatum" (p. 173).

Of course, it is possible to poke some holes in Hasegawa's argument. The wartime context and the fact that by early August 1945 destroying Japanese cities had become routine made it unlikely that a policy of patience would have been valued by American policymakers. In addition, Hasegawa has a tendency to see carefully calibrated calculation in much of the American decision making. But as we are seeing in the current Bush administration's war in Iraq, incompetence and miscalculation are too often essential factors in war and diplomacy.

Hasegawa has written a compelling study of the end of the Pacific War that should give historians food for thought and fodder for debate. His argument about the importance of the Soviet declaration of war is this study's strongest and most convincing contribution and his nuanced arguments about internal Japanese struggles and the American decision to drop the bomb add new and important perspectives to our understanding of the end of the Pacific conflict.

Notes

[1]. Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), p. vii.

[2]. Martin Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance* (New York: Random House, 1975).

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