

History, Ethics, and the Bomb

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Of all the fateful decisions of World War II, none continues to arouse greater interest than the decision to drop the atomic bomb. For the explosion at Hiroshima did more than speed the conclusion of a war; it laid a shadow across the future of mankind and raised fundamental questions of the nature of warfare, politics, morality, and international relations. Twenty years after Hiroshima, in a world poised in uneasy balance between two super powers and faced with the growing spread of nuclear weapons, scholars and writers continue to be fascinated by the steps that led to that fateful decision and the opening of a veritable “Pandora’s box.”

In the flow of accounts since the end of World War II, certain questions continue to be raised. How did the fateful decision emerge? Was the decision to make the bomb justified? Was the decision to drop the bomb justified? What were the alternatives, and were they properly considered? Was the decision an act of vengeance, of calculated immorality? What was the role of the President, his civilian advisers, the scientists, the military leaders and planners in the decision? What was the relationship among political objectives, strategic plans, and moral considerations in the concluding phases of the war against Japan out of which flowed the decision?

While all the facts are still not known, enough evidence has been accumulated to date to suggest that the story is complicated and multifaceted. There is a scientific side: the brilliant research that led to the development of the bomb, the work of Szilard, Fermi, Oppenheimer, and a host of extraordinary scientists, and the wrestling of scientists with their consciences once the test proved successful. There is a military aspect—from General Groves and the Manhattan District down to the actual delivery of the bomb by the 509th Composite Group over the target, and the relationship of strategic planning to the bomb. There is also a diplomatic-political side—the political objectives of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman, the unconditional surrender goal, the conclusions of the civilian Interim Committee, the dealing with Churchill and Stalin at Potsdam, and the Japanese, Soviet, and American diplomatic maneuverings in the concluding phases of the war. Most accounts that have appeared to date have chosen to deal with one or another of these aspects.

How did the decision emerge? From the accounts published to date, it is clear that the decisions to make and to drop the bomb grew up outside the normal channels of strategy and diplomacy. The decision to make the bomb emerged in the first instance from prewar decisions of FDR (the preliminary decision of October 1939 largely upon the advice of foreign-born scientists, and the crucial decision of 6 December 1941, a day before Pearl Harbor, to enter the race before the German scientists won through). For a long time during the war, the problem was essentially scientific and technological. Only a handful of officials—civilian and military—knew of the project, and diplomatic and strategic planning for most of the war went on as though such a bomb might never come to fruition. Indeed, when Truman became President in April 1945, he

had not heard of it. And one ingenious strategic planner in the War Department who had innocently suggested looking into the military application of atomic energy found himself the center of an investigation.

Only gradually, as the forecast of scientific and technological success became certain, did the prospective weapon become a potential strategic and diplomatic problem. But by then, the framework of decision had changed. Germany was well on its way to defeat. And a weapon that began as a deterrent against one foe was eventually used to end the conflict with another, Japan. From the late spring of 1945 the question of its use became enmeshed with the unconditional surrender formula and with questions of conventional strategy that had grown up in compartments entirely separate from the development of the bomb. It also became enmeshed with questions of relations with our allies, particularly the U.S.S.R. To tell or not to tell the Soviet Union was the question. Should the United States back off from its invitation to the Soviet Union to join in the war against Japan and retreat from the “concessions” made at Yalta in February 1945? Then too there were questions of morality and postwar controls to be considered.

All these threads began to come together in the late spring of 1945, with the succession of Truman to the Presidency, the surrender of Germany, and the formation of the Interim Committee. That committee, a high-level civilian committee established by President Truman at the suggestion of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, considered the questions of whether and how to use the bomb against Japan. For the first time the compartmented factors began to be drawn together, and the bomb began to enter the mainstream of high-level policy and planning. After considerable soul-searching, the committee reached the decision to use the bomb, use it against a military target, and without prior warning. It decided to override the objections of some of the scientists, particularly those at the Chicago Metallurgical Laboratory who had second thoughts about its use and were fearful of postwar international repercussions. Nor could the Scientific Panel come up with a feasible alternative to dropping the bomb (e.g., a demonstration) that might lead the Japanese to yield.

It is important to recognize the political and military assumptions that were guiding the American President and his military and civilian advisers at the time. On the political level President Truman continued the objective of unconditional surrender that he had inherited from FDR. Like Roosevelt, he pursued the objective of military victory with the fewest possible American casualties in the shortest possible time. To the military, particularly to Army strategists, the political objective reduced to military terms meant planning for the invasion of Japan. Despite misgivings by Air Force and Navy leaders, the Army strategists saw no alternative to planning a large-scale invasion of the home islands. On the basis of casualty figures, in the light of Japanese resistance encountered in previous island campaigns, the cost of such an invasion could be expected to be high—as high as one million lives. Though Japan appeared beaten, she refused to admit defeat. In the opinion of Stimson, a shock weapon would be required to induce surrender and reduce American casualties. Sensitive as he was to prospective relations with Russia in the postwar period, in the final analysis military necessity in the immediate war took precedence.

The final steps in the decision were taken at the time of the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. A day after Truman’s arrival came word of the successful test at Alamogordo. Quickly calling his

key advisers together, he once more received confirmation of the decision to use the bomb. By then another alternative to the military possibilities (invasion or bombing and blockade) and the scientific-technological (use of the atomic bomb) suggested itself: the political approach. By the time of Potsdam Truman and his advisers knew of Japanese feelers to Russia to intercede and mediate a peace with the West. Indeed much of the literature dealing with the bomb and the surrender of Japan has concentrated on raising a cluster of questions about the timing and content of the Potsdam Declaration, the virtue of an outright promise to preserve the imperial institution, and an attempt to capitalize more actively on the known Japanese peace feelers to Russia. It is patently clear that Truman followed the advice of Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, who in turn listened to former Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and that the advice of Stimson and Joseph C. Grew of the State Department to announce the sparing of the imperial institution was overruled. Domestic considerations, as well as fear that repercussions in Japan would stiffen its resistance, evidently persuaded Hull that the time was not ripe to make such an overture.

For a brief moment the curtain of secrecy was pulled aside and Truman let Stalin know that the U.S. had acquired an unusual weapon in its arsenal. Much has been made of Stalin's indifference, pretended or real, though there is reason to believe, in the light of the postwar spy revelations, that he already knew the secret. Although by then the Americans had cooled on the need to have the Russians in the war against Japan, a marked change in attitude since Yalta, it would have been difficult to keep them out, particularly after having urged them for so long to enter. While Stalin told the Americans of the Japanese peace feelers, there is no indication that he told them how urgently the Japanese were seeking to get out of the war or that he was leaving them dangling. In the light of subsequent events, it would appear that he was not in a hurry to close the door on the Japanese bid until he was ready to enter the war, that he was playing for an overt invitation from the Allies to enter the war, and that knowledge of the bomb probably speeded his entry into the war against Japan. In the final analysis, the Americans, aware though they were that an internal struggle was going on in Japan and that the Japanese cables insisted on the preservation of the imperial institution, did not actively pursue the political approach at Potsdam and in the closing weeks of the war. Americans chose to emphasize the references in the cables to "fight-to-the-death rather than accept unconditional surrender." And when the Japanese chose to "ignore" the Potsdam Declaration, which was silent on the position of the Emperor, American military plans and preparations to drop the bomb, already put into motion, were allowed to go ahead.

Much of the postwar criticism of the American decision revolves around the steps taken or not taken at Potsdam vis-à-vis the Russians and the Japanese. The sequence of events is well known. On 6 August Hiroshima was bombed; on 9 August Russia entered the war against Japan, and Nagasaki was bombed; on 10 August the Japanese sued for peace. The evidence suggests that the Russians probably speeded their entry into the Japanese war, but there is no clear evidence that the Americans decided to use the bomb to try to forestall Russian entry.

While the basic lines of the story are now familiar through the works of Hewlett and Anderson, Feis, Butow, Groves, Stimson and Bundy, and a host of others, new accounts focusing on one or another aspect of this fascinating story can be expected as we get more perspective on the decision. Two accounts have recently appeared: one by Giovannitti and Freed, titled *The Decision to Drop the Bomb*, * is subtitled "A Political History"; the other, *The Irreversible*

Decision, 1939-1950,** by Batchelder, stresses the ethical side of the story. Both stress the need to understand the decision in its historical context. Both follow the main lines of the story as it has emerged from the basic work of the scholars who have plowed the ground before them. Both are eminently readable, provocative, and interesting books. Giovannitti and Freed, who turned out a television documentary based on their research, have produced essentially a synthesis of the main outlines for the general reader. On balance, they agree that the decision was justified. Batchelder takes a tack somewhat different from most of the previous writers in that his interest is in pursuing ethical considerations at key points along the way to the decision; in raising questions about morality, the bomb, and warfare for the postwar period; and in the need for a new ethic.

It is clear that for this multifaceted decision the particular account the author gives will depend in large measure on what time frame he chooses and what he selects to emphasize within it. Giovannitti and Freed have chosen to concentrate on the period from Truman's accession to the Japanese surrender. Their account is primarily of American leaders wrestling with the problem of whether and how to use the atomic bomb against Japan in the hectic 117 days from 12 April 1945 to the fateful act of 6 August 1945. While their account goes over ground familiar to specialists, some lively vignettes and useful insights emerge. The authors draw interesting portraits of leaders in the stress of decision-making: the President, scientists, statesmen, and military leaders. There is Leo Szilard, the brilliant refugee scientist and one of the original instigators of the atomic project vis-à-vis Germany, in the summer of 1945 whipping up petitions against using the bomb on Japan. As the scientists wrestled with their consciences, Stimson, the old Secretary of War, equally sensitive of conscience and the future judgment of history, weighed the military, scientific, and diplomatic claims and in the end reached the decision that the bomb must be dropped. He agreed with Grew, student of Japan and Acting Secretary of State, in arguing for keeping the institution of the Emperor and thereby softening the unconditional surrender formula. There is Byrnes, newly appointed Secretary of State, experienced in domestic politics, who comes on the scene toward the end and at a decisive point overrules Stimson and Grew. There is Major General Leslie R. Groves, single-minded and dedicated to his mission, conscientiously bent on producing the bomb and using it.

The account goes into considerable detail as to the soul-searching among the scientists and notes that, though many reversed themselves on the issue, there were splits among them even at the Chicago Metallurgical Laboratory in the forefront of the scientific dissent. There is also the portrait of President Truman falling heir to the problem, polling his advisers, and in the end unhesitatingly ruling for the bomb.

Giovannitti and Freed examine the familiar charges and possible alternatives, and they believe that on balance the bomb had to be used. They reach the conclusion that the use of the bomb was justified to save lives and to get the war over with quickly. They stress as a secondary reason that Europe was sinking into an economic morass and that there was danger the Soviet Union might take over Europe as well as the Far East. On this latter point, however, the evidence of motivation of American leaders, it must be noted, is not fully and decisively clear. In summing up the alternatives, the authors do not feel that a prior demonstration of the bomb would have helped. They do offer one qualification: that a prior warning should have been given. In that event, they feel, the Americans might have been spared the postwar feeling of guilt.

On the question of what really induced the Japanese to surrender, the account is not quite consistent. In general it supports the theory of multiple causation—the accumulated effects of the fire-bomb raids and of blockade and economic strangulation, carrier air attacks, the Russian entry, the dropping of the atomic bomb, and the threat of invasion. At other points it leans toward the atomic bomb as more important than the Russian intervention in inducing Japanese surrender. Here, on a point on which scholars are still not in agreement, some of the interviews with Japanese leaders cited in the appendix do not bear out the author's conclusion.

While one may be disposed to quarrel here and there with a specific point or nuance in interpretation, on the whole the authors have offered a sympathetic and balanced account of the story they have set out to tell. They have presented a lively synthesis, if not a really original account. But on reading the Giovannitti-Freed account, one comes away with a sense of Greek tragedy in the reaching of the decision. Sensitive, conscientious officials found themselves toward the end of a bitter global struggle caught in the toils of war to the point where, as the authors indicate, they could hardly decide other than to use the new weapon. Heightening the sense of ineluctable progression toward the final outcome are the indicators at key points in the account that the primary actors in the drama suffered from a failure of communication, an inability, or even an unwillingness at times, to understand each other. There are the scientist and the political leader who simply did not talk the same language: "If Szilard, the volatile Hungarian, with his quick aggressive mind, his accent, his sometimes brusque manner, made an 'unfavorable impression' on Byrnes, the impression was reciprocated." (p. 64) Even more important were the positions set forth by leaders of the opposing nations—President Truman and Premier Suzuki—on the question of unconditional surrender. "Had he [Truman] wanted to soften his position, he could not have taken the chance of saying so directly, in the face of Congress and public opinion, any more than Suzuki in Japan could soften his position, in the face of the military. Suzuki had to say he would 'fight to the very end.' Truman had to demand 'unconditional surrender.'" (p. 72)

There remains further the gnawing question, Did the United States in July 1945 miss an opportunity to end the war earlier "by failing to evaluate correctly the Japanese efforts to mediate peace through the Soviet Union"? (p. 217) In other words, did the United States, firmly conditioned toward unconditional surrender, fail to read the signals correctly, as some authorities have maintained, and thereby pursue its by then needlessly relentless Course toward the destruction of Japan? These examples can be multiplied in the failure of the Japanese and Russians and the Russians and Americans to communicate their intentions in the concluding phase of the war. Whether bridging the gaps would have led to a different outcome is, of course, still a moot point. Indeed, the authors of *The Decision to Drop the Bomb* conclude that the United States could "probably not" have exploited the Japanese peace feelers.

Few will quarrel with the authors' stress that the momentum for the decision had been building since the project was launched. Many of the steps along the way were merely "passive" decisions to let the plans and preparations continue. "In the end the decision was made because a decision *not* to use it [the bomb] could not be justified." (p. 316) More controversial is the authors' contention that Truman came to Potsdam with the main intention of bringing the Red Army into the war against Japan but that in the following 21 days he and his advisers apparently changed their minds. They advance the argument that the use of the bomb as a political weapon against

the Russians threatening in Europe and making claims on the Far East was an additional rather than a primary reason. While signs of Russian intransigence were mounting even before the death of FDR and American dealings with the Soviet Union had begun to stiffen in the spring and summer of 1945, the authors' thesis of a secondary and added purpose, insofar as it applied to the Russians and the bomb, remains a hypothesis, however plausible, still to be proved.

In the opinion of the authors, two errors of judgment were made. One was the failure to estimate accurately the destructive power of a single atomic bomb; the second was the failure to grasp the extent of the collapse of communications within Japan which kept the Japanese leaders from learning the situation at Hiroshima for almost 48 hours. But even here the authors hedge—and properly: The second bomb was “probably” not necessary. “But the error—if it was an error—was one of military and political miscalculation, not of calculated immorality.” (p. 318) And they doubt that the Japanese would have surrendered earlier than they did even if they had been forewarned of the destructive force of an atomic bomb to be used on their cities. In the final analysis, they conclude, the decision, far from being an act of vengeance, was one made by men of good faith who primarily sought a quick way of ending a barbaric war with least loss of life. And in the Potsdam Declaration, despite the “unconditional surrender” slogan, they held out to the Japanese the promise of human rights and freedom and retention of their industries.

While Giovannitti and Freed focus on the political, diplomatic, and military strands behind the decision during the last four months of the war, Batchelder concentrates on the interplay of events and moral principles relating to the decision in the period 1939 to 1950. His main concern is to examine the influence of ethical considerations in the making of the crucial decision and to analyze the ethical debate that resulted from it. In narrating the historical context of the decision, Batchelder retraces in the first part of his account much the same ground. Subjecting a longer bite of the recent past to his ethical probes, he too emerges with valuable and provocative insights.

The unique contribution of Batchelder's *The Irreversible Decision, 1939-1950* is the story of the transformation of ethical standards held by American scientists, political and military leaders, and even churchmen under the impact of World War II. It shows how the scientists overcame their moral and professional scruples to enter the race for an instrument of mass destruction out of fear lest Hitler's Germany win the race for the bomb and submerge Western civilization. Their justification was that of the “lesser evil.” Later, when the war with Europe was over, many of them, ridden with guilt and fear over the Frankenstein monster they had released, argued against using the bomb on Japan. American political and military leaders entered the war opposed on moral and military grounds to indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and committed to a doctrine of daylight precision bombing of purely military objectives. Under the demands of “military necessity,” they ended by adopting and justifying obliteration bombing against cities and came to regard the bomb as just another military weapon to that end. Despite his later scruples about applying the bomb against Japan, Szilard, a scientist of sensitive social conscience, would have been willing to use it against Germany. Stimson, who had spent thirty years arguing for morality in war, wrestled with his conscience and overcame whatever scruples and uneasiness he had about the judgment of history and postwar relations with the Soviet Union. In the end the practical utility of saving American lives and shortening the war swayed him and President Truman to advocate use of the bomb against Japan. Again it was the choice of

the “lesser evil,” the impact of tangible, short-range considerations rather than the long-term, intangible consequences. “Churchmen,” Batchelder asserts, “proved only slightly more resistant than political leaders to this erosion of moral principles during wartime.” (p. 213) Some Christian moralists justified obliteration bombing; others retained the principle of noncombatant immunity but remained silent.

On the basis of his study Batchelder concludes that historical context is important to the understanding and application of ethical principles. What conscientious men favored in one historical situation was the exact opposite of what they advocated in another. Behind the specific choices along the way leading to the final decision lay the hardening American attitude toward the nature, aims, and conduct of the war. The priority of military over political considerations, the concept of total war, the goal of military victory, the concentration on unconditional surrender—all paved the way for the bombing of Hiroshima. The overemphasis on the military aspects of the war led to a shift in attitude toward the atom bomb as the war progressed, from the scientists’ original view of it as insurance against its use by Hitler to its being regarded as “just another weapon” to insure military victory. Gradually, under the impact of war grown total, the traditional ethical restraints of the doctrine of “just” war (limited means to a limited end) were twisted out of shape, forgotten, or pushed aside.

According to Batchelder, Americans emerged from World War II prepared in theory, armament, and attitude “for only two extreme possibilities: total atomic war or abolition of all war.” (p. 268) Although polls soon after the war showed that the American public felt that the use of the bomb was morally justifiable, leading churchmen regarded its use as morally indefensible. Again the traditional Christian doctrine of the just war was thrown out of joint by the preoccupation with total war concepts of the World War II variety; the tradition was under strain, and Christian moralists, disturbed over the use of the bomb, were in a dilemma. Church moralists, as well as secular strategists, however, overlooked the “middle ground of limited military action.”

As the 1950’s wore on and no major confrontation occurred between the two major super powers possessing atomic arsenals, and as the conflicts that did break out were limited or brushfire engagements (Korea, Indochina, Suez, etc.), the need for a doctrine of limited war became apparent. Along with the challenge to the inevitability of total war, an urgent need has arisen for a new ethic of limited warfare in the nuclear age, to link morality, politics, and war—to put restraints on the ends and means of war “in support of enlightened and creative national goals.” Batchelder believes that the doctrine of just war, far from being outmoded, may gain fresh relevance in the nuclear age.

In hindsight, Batchelder offers perceptive, if not always certain, judgments about the decision. Thus he points to the role played by “ignorance and miscalculation” as well as scientific genius and vision in the decision to make the bomb—an ironical reference to the overestimation of German progress in wartime atomic research. He denies that the atomic bomb resulted in a last-minute change to keep the Russians out of the Pacific war. On the basis of evidence to date, the reviewer believes this author is here on sounder ground than Giovannitti and Freed. Batchelder concludes that American leaders overestimated Japan’s ability to resist at the end and underestimated the number of casualties to be expected from atomic bombing. Like Giovannitti and Freed, he feels the bomb was the decisive factor in the surrender of Japan, since it threw the

war party off balance and allowed the peace party to win out. The use of the bomb, he concludes, saved lives; conventional means, with or without invasion, would have exacted many more casualties than the lives lost at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He admits that the bomb probably shortened the war by months. But he also feels that a demonstration against a purely military target, followed by a warning, might have catapulted Japan out of the war without other use of the bomb. At any rate, in his opinion, the bombing of Nagasaki was unnecessary, and he regrets that a stern warning and adequate time between the dropping of the two bombs were not given to Japan.

Batchelder too points to a political failure: that had the peace feelers in the Japanese cables been taken seriously and followed up skillfully by diplomatic and political approaches, the decision to use the bomb might have been averted. He goes so far as to suggest that a “political” rather than a “military way of thinking” might have precluded or tempered the use of the bomb and ended the war by diplomatic means. On this score the account is open to the charge of too facile generalization. The author overlooks the political objectives of FDR in the war, general though they were, and fails to link unconditional surrender with FDR’s hopes for a brave new world and a new international organization to keep the peace. Such judgments in hindsight lead the author into the realm of Monday-morning quarterbacking, and his account becomes less certain and hedged with “probably” and “might have.” There is no assurance that a “political” rather than a “military way of thinking” (itself a questionable distinction), or a military demonstration followed by a warning and a diplomatic approach, would have necessarily led to any different decision about the bomb.

Interesting and stimulating as these two books are, a number of basic questions about the decision remain to be answered. At what point, for example, did the implicit decision to use a nuclear bomb against Germany evolve to the idea of its use against Japan? Or, put another way, when did the notion of the bomb as a deterrent give way to its projected use as just another military weapon? It appears that FDR was prepared in his own mind to use it—and this was long before the obliteration bombing had its effects on Japan, and long before the peace feelers from Japan began, and long before the Russians entered the war. The agreement he worked out with Churchill at Hyde Park in September 1944 appears to foreshadow the bomb’s use against Japan. Neither book has grappled satisfactorily with FDR’s motivations and political objectives, difficult enough in the light of available evidence but part and parcel of the story of the decision.

In retrospect, it would appear that the decision to make the bomb was in effect the decision to use the bomb. In this respect, an account focusing on the last four months of the war, after FDR’s death, necessarily tells only part of the story: it obscures the full impact of the original decision and its relationship to FDR’s approach to problems of war and peace. It obscures too the momentum generated by the decision itself from the beginning, and from this standpoint the last four months may be viewed as anticlimax, rather than climax. This may help explain why so many of the decisions in the concluding phase of the war were essentially “passive” and matters of detail, of *how*, *when*, and *where*. Indeed, members of the Interim Committee later testified that the question of whether to use the bomb appeared to be a foregone conclusion when they met.

Similarly, an account that stresses the hardening of American moral attitudes under the impact of war also tends to obscure FDR’s motivations and objectives—in large part based on his reading

of the past, of the history of World War I and the period between the two world wars. Thus the doctrine of unconditional surrender, which he announced in January 1943, does not really emerge as a mark of a changed ethical framework during the war so much as it was FDR's rallying response at a critical time in Allied fortunes and a reflection of his interpretation of Wilson's experience with the Fourteen Points, the rebirth of German military power, and the growth of Nazism after World War I. He was determined that Germany should not again be offered escape clauses and that this time she would have to admit that her armies were defeated in the field. The same approach he extended to the other aggressor, Japan.

It is not enough to stress unconditional surrender as the progenitor of an invasion strategy, the abettor of Russian entry into the war against Japan, and the catalyst of brute force, the bomb. Unconditional surrender was consistent with FDR's stand, taken even before the United States entered the war, that it was folly to negotiate with dictators. It was also consistent with his desire to wipe the slate clean and set up a new international order and international organization in which community of interest would replace the old balance-of-power notions. Thus, both accounts, sensitive though they are to the claims of history, are incomplete history and tend to oversimplify the historical and political framework of the decision.

It is also true that FDR rarely recorded motives for his decisions, and so the historian is hard put to interpret and reinterpret on the basis of the scraps he does have. Indeed, the complete story of FDR's part in the decision may never be known. Unfortunately, in this respect, neither of these accounts, which are based largely upon published sources and selected interviews, really advances our knowledge of this part of the story.

Similarly, assuming there had been a viable ethic of limited war, would the decision to use the bomb have been different? Would the political alternative then have been pursued more actively and the "military way of thinking" subordinated? Here too the answers may always remain in doubt. Suffice it to say here that in good measure the difficulties of terminating the war on some kind of rational basis do not appear to have been essentially those of ethics so much as of communication—the unwillingness of the Japanese and Americans to deal directly with each other and the apparent inability of each to read the other's mind correctly at the end. Furthermore, even if any of the alternatives proposed in these and other accounts had been followed (for example, demonstration, warning, or a more active follow-up of the Japanese peace feelers), there is no assurance that the other side would necessarily have yielded. Ethics, Batchelder suggests, may be relative, a reflection of the times. They would also appear to be comparative: It takes two to discuss as well as to tango. Whether the Japanese ethic and politico-military matrix could have been affected by less catastrophic means is a question still to be answered. In any event, both these accounts, like those before them, fail to solve the question of feasible and practical alternatives convincingly or completely.

There is much in the story of the decision to drop the bomb and the surrender of Japan for students of warfare, statecraft, and ethics to ponder. On the basis of the experience with Japan, defeat and surrender may be regarded as two separate acts requiring different techniques. The precise causes of the Japanese surrender remain a controversial subject; on the basis of evidence to date, it is safest to assume that multiple factors were involved. While the growing literature on World War II has tended to play down somewhat the effect of the bomb in inducing the

surrender of Japan, the bomb is still regarded as an important factor; to many it was the all-important catalyst.

The surrender of Japan suggests that force and diplomacy as the twin arms of foreign policy have as important a role in the termination of a conflict as they have traditionally played in steps leading to the outbreak. The Japanese surrender also raises the question of the need for flexibility in ends, objectives, and even methods in approaching the termination of war. As positions and attitudes harden on both sides during the course of struggle, freedom of action becomes limited and strategy frozen: toward the end the problem of communication becomes especially difficult. In that event, a determined third party, with lines of communication open to both the contenders, is in a favored position and may pick up the chips at little cost to itself. The lack of American receptiveness to the Japanese surrender overtures and the long deferment of the decision over the retention of the Emperor, it may be argued, permitted the Russians to benefit.

Yet, after all the known evidence is carefully weighed, the gnawing question remains: Would the policy-makers in the hard-pressed circumstances of mid-1945 have been justified in a decision not to use the bomb? Twenty years after the event, with all the advantages of hindsight, the reader may well ask himself: Faced with the decision in the summer of 1945, what would my answer have been?

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* Len Giovannitti and Fred Freed, *The Decision to Drop the Bomb* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965, \$6.00), 348 pp.

**Robert C. Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision, 1939-1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1965, \$2.45), 306 pp.

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