



DISCUSSION PAPER

Japan's War Economy and the US Strategy of Bombardment and Naval Blockade

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Abstract

The use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki remains one of the most controversial issues in American history. While some historians have tried to justify the use of atomic bombs by claiming that it saved millions of American lives and put an early end to the war, others argue that it was used for political rather than military reasons: the US aimed to intimidate the Soviet Union with its new, devastating weapon. A third group of historians who have evaluated the issue of the use of atomic bombs from moral and humanistic perspectives emphasize that the US did not give any detailed consideration to possible alternatives to atomic bombs.

As the 74th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki approaches, this paper aims to focus on what was potentially one of the alternatives to atomic bombs: naval blockade and conventional bombing of Japanese cities. Towards the end of the war, the Japanese economy was in shreds: people were starving, and there was a lack of oil, rice, medicine and other crucial materials. The question is would Japan have surrendered unconditionally even if the US had not used the atomic bombs? If it did surrender, would it have been before November or would this strategy merely have prolonged the war? This paper looks for answers for those questions by examining the Japan's economy during the war and the rapidly deteriorating conditions in the country prior to the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Nagasaki city after the atomic bomb dropped on August 9, 1945. (EPA/Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum-Anadolu Agency)

Introduction

The use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been one of the most controversial issues in American history. Historians have different ideas as to whether the strikes were necessary and if there were alternatives to the use of atomic bombs. Right after the end of the war, the view of orthodox historians involved in the decision process was that the atomic bomb was not different from any other conventional weapon: it saved the lives of millions of American soldiers who otherwise would have been involved in an invasion of Japan, it put an early end to the war, and a decision not to use the bomb would have been indefensible to the American people (Pyle, 2015, p. 20). The revisionist view of historians, however, claims that the atomic bomb was used for political rather than military reasons, as the US wanted to intimidate the Soviet Union with its new devastating weapon. The third school of historians think the Japanese emperor bears responsibility for the attacks because he did not surrender when given the opportunity. The fourth group asserts that the unconditional surrender policy resulted in unconditional resistance, which led to the use of the atomic bombs. Among all of the interpretations, except for the view of orthodox historians, many evaluate the use of atomic bombs from the viewpoint of morality. They claim that the alternatives, including the clarification of the Potsdam Declaration, waiting for Soviet entry to the war, demonstration of bombs in a remote area, use of naval blockade and conventional bombing were not given enough detailed consideration. This report aims to focus on the strategy of a naval blockade and conventional bombing of Japanese cities.

By the end of the war, the Japanese economy was in tatters, people were starving and there was a lack of oil, rice, medicine and other crucial items. Considering all of the economic, political, sociological and psychological conditions present, this report asserts that besieging Japan with bombardment and a blockade could have pushed Japan to surrender without the use of A-bombs. Although there is no guarantee for the time required for a surrender, post-war documents show that Japan had only enough food supplies to last for a few days and that people had already begun to die of starvation. If the war had continued, there would have been an internal upheaval and high likelihood that the emperor would have been forced to end the war. In this regard, this report aims to focus on the strategy of a naval blockade and conventional bombing of Japanese cities.

The question remains that if the US had not used atomic bombs, would Japan have surrendered before November 1945 (the planned start date for an invasion) or would this strategy have prolonged the war. There is no certain and clear answer to this question, but there is one certainty: the strategy of bombardment and naval blockade was not thoroughly evaluated by American leaders once the A-bomb became available. This report looks for answers to those questions by examining Japan's war economy and worsening situations in the country. In the first part of the report, war preparations, economic mobilisation and fundamental materials of the war economy will be discussed. The second part touches upon the strategy of bombardment and blockade between June and August and the worsening domestic situation. The final part examines the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Soviet entry into the war, psychological and sociological despair among Japanese civilians, and the outcome if the use of atomic weapons had been avoided.



A plutonium type nuclear bomb dropped on Nagasaki caused the death of tens of thousands of people. (EPA/Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum - Anadolu Agency)

Japan's Economy in the Pre-War Period

Before discussing the escalation and entrance of Japan into the war, it is beneficial to explain Japan's economic background before and during wartime. From the early 1920s to the end of the Pacific War, the Japanese economy can be divided into three parts: economic depression from the 1920s to 1931, economic recovery and heavy industrialisation from 1932 to 1937, and total war deployment and collapse from 1938 until 1945 (Yamamura, 1997, p. 116).

During the First World War, Japanese companies controlled a substantial portion of East Asian markets because the US and European countries had to withdraw from the area in order to focus on winning the war. Japan enjoyed the economic advantages of the war as a non-combatant country. Japanese exports increased from 600 million yen in 1914 to 2,200 million yen in 1919, while the value of Japan's industrial production increased five-fold, reaching 6.5 billion yen during the same time period (Morikawa, 1992, p. 123). The boom in the Japanese economy, however, came to a halt when the war ended. Various economic problems began to emerge in the beginning of the 1920s, and the great Kantō earthquake in 1923, the Shōwa financial crisis of 1927 and the world economic depression in 1929 added to the economic problems of Japan (Pauer, 1999, p. 1). While the capitalist system of Western countries began to crack and lose its charm, the planned economy of the Soviet Union appeared attractive to intellectuals around the world. Likewise, during the 1930s, Japan began to think that a planned economy was better than a liberal free-market economy because of 1) the influence of Marxism; 2) the economic success of the Soviet Union; 3) the Shōwa Depression; 4) the common belief that deflation was exacerbated by excess competition; and 5) a loss of faith in politicians and political parties (Kenichi, 2006, p. 128). Thus, the idea of the "national defense state" (*kokubō kokka*) was developed by military planners in the 1930s (Pauer, 1999, p. 3) and Japan began to shift from economic liberalism to a planned economy under government control.

While the idea of a planned economy was gaining support among the Japanese public, the country's political parties held two opposing positions on this issue. The two main policies of the Seiyukai Party,

which was established in 1900, were based on fiscal activism through public investment and industrial infrastructure, and acceptance of military expansion. The Minsei Party, however, supported a free economy with minimum government interference, return to pre-war gold parity, and peaceful cooperation with other countries, especially the United States (Ōno, 2006, p. 130). When people became disappointed with the economic policies of the Minsei Party, the Seiyukai was able to take office on December 13, 1931. Finance Minister Korekiyo Takahashi of the Seiyukai carried out economic policies which put the Japanese economy on the road to recovery (Ōno, 2006, p. 131). In 1934, Takahashi wanted to tighten the budget due to fiscal pressure, but the army and navy continued to demand more military spending. When Takahashi resisted, he was assassinated by a military group on February 26, 1936 (Yamamura, 1997, p. 141-42). The newly formed cabinet under Prime Minister Kōki Hirota was dominated by the military; therefore, instead of fighting against the military, Finance Minister Baba Eiichi chose to cooperate with it by approving large-scale armament expansion plans for the army and the navy (Yamamura, 1997, p. 42). The Japanese economy was veering away from a rational approach.

Japan gradually became dominated by military officers of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy. Any semblance of civilian control further deteriorated when the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out on July 7, 1937. Initially, Japanese and Chinese troops engaged in a relatively small skirmish at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing, but Japan decided to send more troops to China, which transformed the fighting into a full-scale war that continued until August of 1945 (Ōno, 2006, p. 135).

According to some historians, Japan crossed the threshold of "no return from total war" when it invaded Manchuria in 1931 as it violated the so-called "Open Door Policy" which the major Western powers had established for China (Ōno, 2006, p. 135). However, the real economic transformation toward war occurred with the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 because military expenditures during the first three months of the war reached a record high of 2.5

billion yen, which was almost equal to the 1937 national budget (Yamamura, 1997, p. 146). For this reason, new laws and measures were necessary to control and mobilise people, natural resources, and the economy. For example, in 1937, the Planning Board was founded directly under the Prime Minister to execute policies for wartime resource mobilisation and the best bureaucrats from various ministries were chosen for this purpose. In 1938, Japan's first major economic plans – the Resource Mobilisation Plan and the National Mobilisation Law – were issued. In 1940, in the wake of German victories in Europe, Japan felt the need to establish a strong, one-party political system. Therefore, the government dissolved the existing political parties and founded Taisei Yokusankai (The Society for Humbly Supporting Great Politics) to mobilise people. In 1943, the Military Needs Company Act was issued to place designated companies under state control, thereby allowing the government to oversee and influence top management and production plans of those companies (Ōno, 2006, p. 136). Apart from these comprehensive laws, some special laws covering the synthetic oil, iron machine tools, aircraft-manufacturing, shipbuilding, aluminium and light metals, organic chemicals and heavy machinery industries were issued from the early 1930s to the end of the war (Yamamura, 1997, p. 116). With these laws, the government aimed to control the manufacturing and distribution activities of these companies to be able to boost production as a preparation for a total war.

During the process of heavy machinery development, the government executed a strict control on key industries such as steel, gold mining, coal mining, oil, ammonium sulphate, soda, coal liquefaction, electric power, automobile transport and air transport (Yamamura, 1997, p. 140). Thus, the Japanese economy was rapidly transformed into a wartime-controlled economy. The main purpose of the government was to maximise military products such as ships and warplanes with limited resources and raw materials. Therefore, light industries such as the textile industry were strongly suppressed or completely eliminated to channel resources and the labour force toward heavy industries. Therefore, many Japanese had to live without new clothing or footwear (Ōno, 2006, p. 137).

With each passing day, however, it became more difficult to obtain raw materials and energy resources because they were located in the "Yen Bloc" which included Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria and some other occupied Chinese territories. Therefore, the available

resources were not enough to maximise Japan's military output, and trading with other countries was no longer an option (Ōno, 2006, p. 138). Therefore, the Japanese army began to invade other territories in Southeast Asia, beginning with French Indochina. This aggressive military act from Japan caused the US to impose an oil embargo on Japan and freeze its assets. The US knew that Japan could not survive long without importing oil, and reducing its economic power would keep it out of the imminent war. Japan had petroleum reserves that were only enough to fight a war for two years. Japan attempted to persuade the US to lift its embargo through diplomatic means. But when this failed, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. Instead of losing its status and dignity by accepting the terms offered by the US, Japan chose to engage in war, even though it knew how much stronger the US was in comparison to Japan. "War with the United States was not chosen. The decision for war was rather forced by the desire to avoid the more terrible alternative of losing status or abandoning the national objectives" (Wohlstetter, 1962, p. 353). Japan did not know how to fight against the United States, but it had been encouraged by the victories of Nazi Germany in Europe. It believed in the superiority of the totalitarianism of Japan, Germany and the USSR over American individualism (Ōno, 2006, p. 138).

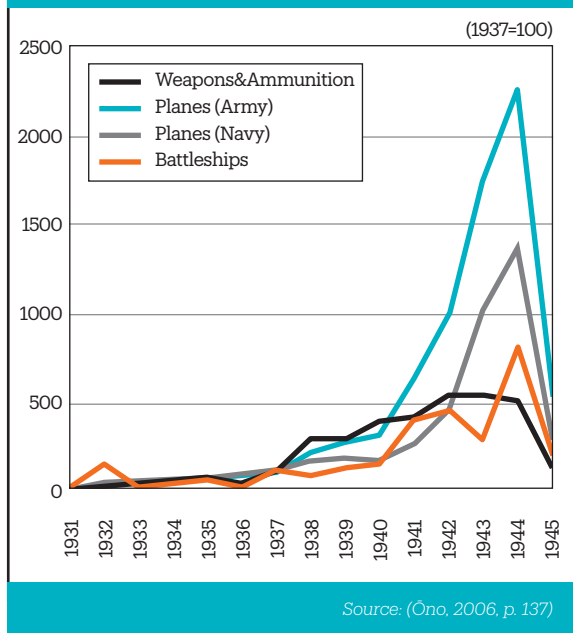
When the Pacific War began in 1941, Japan was behind in its wartime mobilisation because Japanese leaders were late to grasp the necessity of all-out economic mobilisation (Yamamura, 1997, p. 153). However, when the US began to attack Japan, the Japanese government realised that they urgently needed to mass-produce aircraft and ships. Therefore, the government established many small and medium-scale furnaces in Korea, Manchukuo and China to increase steel production, but they did not fulfil their expectations (Ōno, 2006, p. 155).

By October 1943, while the war situation was getting worse in Japan, the government thought that increasing the production of aircraft, steel, ships, aluminium and coal would determine the fate of the war (Takafusa, 1999, p. 19). There was a shortage of raw materials, so the government collected city streetcar rails, the handrails from bridges and the bells in Buddhist temples to deal with the shortages in metal (Yamamura, 1997, p. 155).

In 1943, the shipbuilding industry was achieving good results because all of the iron ore at hand was used to build ships only, and those ships were used to import

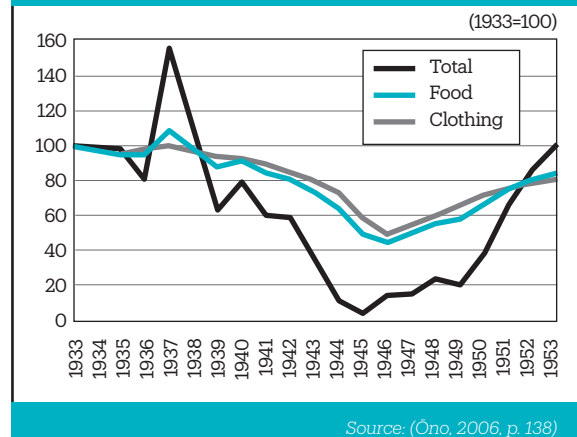
more iron ore (Yamamura, 1997, p. 155). Again in 1943, a Ministry of Munitions was established to increase munitions production: key companies were designated as munitions companies; managers were given titles as government officials; employees were not allowed to quit their jobs without permission; and companies were supposed to increase their production in accordance with instructions from the government.

Table 1: Production of Military Goods



As seen in Table 1, there was a steep increase in the production of weapons and ammunitions, planes and battleships beginning in 1941, and the point where production reached its peak was through the end of 1944. After this year, a drastic increase was observed because Japan could not reach raw materials, factories were damaged and transporting goods within the country became more difficult due to bombing from the US air forces. In other words, Japan did not have enough power left to resist the US through the end of 1944. Additionally, the government focused so much on the production of munitions that it neglected the production of consumer goods such as food and clothing, which caused catastrophic results in later years. For example, textile factories were shut down and their machinery was used as scrap iron for the production of munitions, so there was a sharp decrease in the production of consumer goods throughout the end of the war years (Table 2).

Table 2: Production of non-Military Goods



The shortage in the labour force was another severe problem as 2.4 million out of nearly 80 million Japanese were conscripted into military service by the end of 1941. This number reached 7.2 million by August 1945 (Yamamura, 1997, p. 155). To deal with the shortage of labour, young men working in consumer goods were conscripted and mobilised to work in factories and mines. After 1944, even students from middle school and up were forced to suspend their studies and work in munitions (Yamamura, 1997, p. 155). In 1944, a first-year high school student at Takasaki Commercial School, Nagai Kenji (16), was forced to work in Nakajima Aircraft's Koizumi plant and stay in the plant hostel. He described his situation as follows:

When there was a larger helping [of food] it would be a "lucky day," when we were out of luck it would be a "bad day." The rice of course was not the white rice that we eat today. At first, the rice was mixed with dried sweet potato, soybeans, dried noodles, or sorghum, but over time, the difference between the amounts gradually decreased, and eventually it was reversed, so that the main portion consisted of sweet potato, soybeans, dried noodles, sorghum, or maize, with only a tiny amount of rice mixed in. On top of that, the quantity was unimaginably small. Once breakfast was over, we started thinking about lunch, and once we had finished lunch, we were immediately ready for dinner... [the plumper members of the group] were especially tragic. When the meal was over, they would look unhappy and suggest that it would be better if lunch and dinner were served at the same time (Takafusa, 1994, p. 121).

The Role of the Zaibatsu in Imperial Japan's War Machine

There is another perspective to the close relationship between the government, military and private industry because family-owned big conglomerates, known as *zaibatsu*, played a significant role in Japanese aggression. The structures of Japanese *zaibatsu* conglomerates and the power of *zaibatsu* families changed with the arrival of total war mobilisation. While the Japanese Imperial Army was running wild in the Pacific Ocean and Asia, the *zaibatsu* companies were operating as if they were an arm of the military. They were providing the necessary ships, aircraft, equipment and finance to maintain the war. The war-oriented economy and military directives were the major powers behind the war.

The *zaibatsu* companies focused on heavy industries, foreign trade and banking. "From 1914 to 1929, the three *zaibatsu* of Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Sumitomo possessed twenty-eight percent of the total assets of the top one hundred companies in Japan. In 1945, these three complexes possessed 22.9 percent of the total assets of all Japanese stock companies." (Thorson, 1999, p. 269). As a result of the solid business results during World War I, those companies managed to increase their capital and entered into new industries by incorporating numerous subsidiaries.

The *zaibatsu* companies partnered with the Japanese military when it invaded Manchuria in 1931, and this incident was a turning point in the close relationship between *zaibatsu* and the Japanese military government. When Manchuria was invaded in September 1931, the Japanese army introduced the concept of a planned economy; thus, the region became an experimental area for Japan (Grabowiecki, 2006, p. 16). When the government observed the success in Manchuria that was achieved by this planned economy, it decided to apply the same model in all of Japan by increasing expenses toward the growth of certain industries, including automobile, ship, machine, and aircraft manufacturing and refineries (Grabowiecki, 2006, p. 16). To carry out the planned priorities, the government increased its control on industrial production in terms of investment level and structure, profit allocation and foreign trade (Grabowiecki, 2006, p. 17). Then, Japan invaded Inner

China in 1937, attacked Pearl Harbour in December 1941, and invaded the Philippines, French Indochina, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Burma, and Indonesia in 1942 (Hadley and Kuwayama, 2003, p. 53).

Starting with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese government believed the country needed to expand its production to be able to strengthen the national defense; thus, the *zaibatsu* expansion and the issue of national defense became intertwined, which increased the power of the *zaibatsu* in government affairs. Thanks to their hand-in-glove relationships with the government and army during the war mobilisation, the *zaibatsu* companies witnessed rapid growth and became heavily involved in the development of strategic industries such as heavy industry, the chemical industry, financing and banking. The *zaibatsu* companies increased their power so rapidly between the mid-war period and World War II that only 14 *zaibatsu* controlled almost half of all strategic industries in Japan by 1947 (Mitsubishi Keizai Kenkyūjo, 1955, p. 11).

The close relationship among the government, the military and the *zaibatsu*, as well as the strict control over the economy and planned food distribution, looked very profitable in the first years of World War II because Japan was able to fight despite its limited resources. To achieve this, "Japan had to allocate materials and funds to munitions production and reduce the production of consumer goods and commercial activities, conscript labour into the military industry, and to lower the standard of living to a subsistence level" (Takafusa, 1999, p. 20). However, the entire system began to fail and cause terrifying results such as food shortages and the rise of a black market through the end of the war years.

Japan lost four of its key aircraft carriers during the Battle of Midway in 1942, until which time it thought it was winning the war. After this battle, Japan was forced into a defensive position for the rest of the war (Takafusa, 1994, p. 114). It lost many more ships and aircraft than it had anticipated due to US bombings and marine attacks. Japan lost 2,070,000 tons and 4,110,000 tons of merchant fleet in 1943 and 1944,

Table 3: Depletion of Merchant Marine (in thousand tons)

Years	New Ships Built	Losses During the Year	Fleet at Year-End
December 1941	44	52	6,376
1942	662	1,096	5,942
1943	1,067	2,066	4,944
1944	1,735	4,115	2,564
August 1945	465	1,502	1,527

Source: Takafusa, 1994, p. 113

respectively (Takafusa, 1994, p. 114). The number of newly produced ships was far below the number of ships lost in the war (Table 3).

Therefore, Japan had only 1,500,000 tons of merchant fleet by the end of war, which was less than one-fourth of the pre-war fleet. Japanese economist Nakamura Takafusa says this was the biggest economic miscalculation of the Pacific War (Takafusa, 1994, p. 114). When ships were sunk or became unusable, transportation received a severe blow, which was like the beginning of the end for Japan.

In June 1944, the US forces landed in Saipan in the Marianas and it became possible for the US to bomb Japanese cities with B29 airplanes. Due to the loss of the Marianas, the closing of southern shipping routes and the loss of tons of ships and aircraft, the Japanese government understood that defeat was near, which can be seen from a report prepared by officials of the Munitions Ministry and sent to the Supreme War Council in August 1944 (Takafusa, 1994, p. 114).

Since the outbreak of the Great East Asian war, the material strength of our nation has declined with each successive year owing to depletion of reserves and supply sources. Damage to shipping, chiefly from enemy submarines, has been far greater than anticipated just prior to the war and has far outstripped the volume of vessels built. Not only has the number of ships in our possession rapidly dwindled, but the successive conscription of vessels for A- and B- (army and navy) use has cut sharply into C- (merchant) use shipping capacity. Thus, although we have met growing military

demand at the sacrifice of the civilian sector and under the present situation are able in general to secure supplies of major foodstuffs, the situation is one in which other industries have been forced to reduce or shut down operations across the board, and even in munitions production, which constitutes our highest priority, there has undeniably been a declining trend since the peak at the beginning of fiscal 1944. The momentum is such that it will be increasingly difficult to maintain the national standard of living at present levels. In other words, at the end of fiscal 1944, in the fourth year of the war, we recognize that our national resilience has been lost (Takafusa, 1994, p. 115).

As can be seen, both the government and military officials were well aware that they had already lost the war. By the beginning of 1945, most of the oil refineries were out of oil and the aluminium plants were out of bauxite. The steel mills lacked ore and coke and the munitions factories had low levels of steel and aluminium (Cohen, 1949, p. 107). In other words, before the US started its raid campaign from March to August 1945, Japan's war-making powers had already begun to collapse.

In 1945, the US Army Air Forces started to heavily bomb Japanese cities, but the strategic points such as railways, ports and munitions manufacturers could not be demolished completely. On January 7, 1945, General Curtis LeMay became the leader of the XXI Bomber Command and made four significant changes in the bombing strategy of the air forces: 1) the bombers would fly at low altitudes; 2) they would fly and bomb their targets individually instead of flying in formation;

3) they would carry no armament; and 4) they would fly at night to be able to escape from radar (Sigal, 1988, p. 172). Thus, fire bombings became much more destructive. The US began to pummel tens of Japanese cities between June and August (Frank, 1999, p. 150). During those air raids, thousands of people were killed, hundreds of factories were demolished and tens of strategic transportation points were harmed. Railroad transportation of food to major cities became difficult. American scholar Jerome Cohen also claims, "Japan's economy was destroyed twice over, once by cutting off of imports and secondly by air attack" (Cohen, 1949, p. 107).

Food shortages became so severe by 1945 that the Foreign Ministry urged that "the last shipping space should be set aside to the greatest possible extent for the importation of salt, cereals and soy bean, abandoning the former principle of having as the main import items iron ore, coal, pig iron and other non-ferrous metals" (Cohen, 1949, p. 107). Japan had prioritised the production of munitions, ships and aircraft to extreme levels, ignoring the daily needs of its own people; thus, people who had already been dealing with hunger since the beginning of the war began to suffer from starvation because the availability of everyday commodities became further reduced with each passing day (Table 4).

When the war began in 1941, an average Japanese consumed nearly 2,000 calories daily, which was 6.4 percent above subsistence level. However, this figure dropped to 1,680 calories daily by 1945 (Frank, 1999, p. 351). There was a shortfall of 40 percent in the harvest of 1945 because of adverse weather, manpower shortages, insufficient tools and a decrease in the production of fertiliser (Dower, 1999, p. 93). Malnutrition caused an increase in tuberculosis, beriberi and digestive, skin and vitamin-related diseases. For example, 30 percent of the workers at the Mitsubishi glass factory in Tsurumi were suffering from beriberi in 1945 and food shortages were hindering the war effort because people were taking time off to look for food in the countryside (Dower, 1999, p. 91). On November 1, 1945 "The People's Association for a Policy against Starvation" announced that on average six individuals per day were dying from starvation among the homeless living in Tokyo's Ueno Station (Dower, 1999, p. 93). As a solution to malnutrition, the government encouraged Japanese citizens to supplement their food intake with acorns, grain husks, peanut shells and sawdust; they suggested that people eat used tea leaves and the seeds, blossoms and leaves of roses for minerals. For protein, they advised the eating of silkworm cocoons, worms, grasshoppers, mice, rats, moles, snails, snakes and a powder made by drying the blood of cows, horses or pigs (Dower, 1999, p. 91).

Table 4: Availability of Everyday Commodities

	1941	July 1945		1937	July 1945
Rice	11.74 million kg	9.42 million kg	Cotton textile goods	100	2%
Meat	100	20%	Woolen textile goods	100	1%
Fish	100	30%	Workman's light boots	100	10%
Condiments	100	50% or less	Soap	100	4%
			Paper	100	8%

Source: (Takafusa, 1994, p. 120)

It was a common practice to send children out to catch frogs to eat and after the war ended a young school girl confessed that she felt relieved when she heard the emperor's surrender broadcast; she thought that she would no longer need to catch frogs (Dower, 1999, p. 93). People were selling their watches, jewellery and kimonos to trade for food, which caused the coining of one of the most famous phrases of the time: "bamboo-shoot existence". This was a reference to city people taking off their clothing and jewellery, as the edible bamboo shoot can be peeled off in layers (Dower, 1999, p. 95). The free rice market was abolished in 1941 and the Food Control Law was issued on July 1, 1942: according to this law, only the government was entitled to buy rice from farmers and distribute it to shopkeepers' cooperatives (Scherer, 1999, p. 110-11). This practice opened a path for the black market because instead of selling their crops to the government at low prices, farmers preferred to make more profit by selling to private customers. The distribution given by the government was insufficient, so people had to buy more food from the black market, even though it was illegal. Thus, the crime rate in the country rapidly increased. For example, 46 percent of all economic crimes in Osaka involved food in 1944 (Dower, 1999, p. 90). People who could not feed themselves or their families, or who were caught stealing food, often committed suicide. The domestic situation was getting worse with each passing day and the officials were taking notice. One of the statistical reports on economic incidents in 1944 stated the following:

In a situation of general discontent resulting from a feeling of insecurity among workers and their families, all kinds of strange things are occurring. Especially numerous are rumors: however, theft and other crimes as well as the distribution of inflammatory pamphlets are (also) on the rise. So we have to admit that the rice shortage is causing more and more complicated ideological problems in society (Scherer, 1999, p. 109).

The black market changed everybody's daily life and influenced people's morality; the only thing that anyone could think about was food. People were stressed and had to be cautious about their food, which drastically reduced their trust in the government and its ability to protect its citizens.

By the time of the planned invasion of November 1, 1945, Japan had only enough rice in government reserves to last four days (133,000 tons) (Frank, 1999,

p. 354). Moreover, the government depended upon the thought that if it could distribute food to food-deficient areas using its railway system, it might avoid disaster until 1946. If the US had decided to continue bombing Japan's railway system and strategic targets like bridges connecting cities and main islands, the Japanese government would have lost its last and only hope of preventing a food crisis.

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The Introduction of Atomic Bombs to the Stage of History

The US planned to implement its new strategic bombing plan on August 11, 1945, but when the atomic bombs became available President Harry Truman did not avoid the use of bombs. Either for military or diplomatic reasons, the US dropped its first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6 and the second on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. Having learned that the US had dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Russian leader Joseph Stalin rushed the Red Army to enter the war against Japan on August 9. Even after the twin shocks of the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war, the deadlock in the Supreme Council in the Direction of the War (the Big Six) could not be broken until the emperor intervened and asked them to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration.

Even though the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry to the war were the major reasons why the emperor accepted to surrender, they were not the only reasons. The growing public unrest among citizens, the threat of Communism and the fear of destruction of the kokutai (national polity) from within also had a huge influence on the emperor's decision. According to a police report named "Internal Security" in 1944, the Communist movement in Japan was progressing and the worsening domestic situation was laying down the necessary groundwork:

In the course of the present year, with the deteriorating military and domestic situation, the Communist movement has progressed and gone from a preparatory stage to a stage of active resistance. That is, the communists are trying to organize their scattered groups into an illegal, radical vanguard organization. In the meantime, they have formulated a plan to encourage popular discontent by drawing attention to those problems which, under the present strained domestic situation, are directly affecting the living conditions of the people. They are attempting to prompt outbursts of this discontent in every sector of society (Yellen, 2013, p. 208).

Another police report written in 1945 proves that the number of anti-government movements were increasing:

Recent rumors, scribblings and [other] manifestations are numerically increasing . . . They say that the Japanese war leaders, or the leading circles, are responsible for the decisive battle against Japan proper, for intensified air raids, shortage of foodstuff, acute inflation, etc., all of which have made people's lives hard. This indignation against the ruling class was shown in criticisms of military strategy and misrepresentation of the attitude of military circles. Others speak ill of government measures and government communiques. They explicitly assume a hostile attitude toward government circles. Some dare to speak of class antagonism (Yellen, 2013, p. 209).

Various groups were formed to put an early end to the war before an uprising could take place in civil society. The Yoshida Anti-War Group (Yohansen) was one of them. It was a group formed in 1942 by Yoshida Shigeru, a former ambassador to Rome and London (Takamae, 2003, p. 220). Members of the group included politicians and upper-class Japanese who wanted a negotiated end to the war. Among the members were former premier Prince Konoe Fumimaro, Admiral Suzuki Kantarō, Count Makino Nobunaki, a Mitsui zaibatsu financier named Ikeda Seihin, parliamentarian and ex-minister of education Hatoyama Ichirō and a former bureaucrat and emperor system ideologue, Ueda Shunkichi (Takamae, 2003, p. 220). The main purpose of the group was to preserve the monarchy by bringing the war to an end. They believed that the greatest danger to the kokutai would come from three sources: 1) the military clique that had seized power and which was said to have Communist tendencies; 2) the Communist movement outside of Japan's borders; and 3) a revolutionary movement within the country (Takamae, 2003, p. 220). The group believed that the US would offer Japan a general peace, keep the Communists away and preserve the kokutai (Takamae, 2003, p. 220-21). The Yoshida group initially tried to achieve their goals through backstage politics, but when they did not succeed, they decided to issue a direct appeal to the emperor on February 14, 1945 (Yellen, 2013, p. 211). This appeal included the reports that Konoe had gathered from police officials and emphasised that a leftist revolution was imminent in Japan.



Genbaku Dome (The Hiroshima Peace Memorial) was the only structure left standing in the area where the first atomic bomb exploded on 6 August 1945. (Hiroshima/Onur Kanan)

Regrettably, defeat is already inevitable . . . according to the principles of maintaining the kokutai, we should not be as concerned with defeat itself as with a communist revolution that would accompany defeat...I feel that at the present time, both conditions internal and external to Japan are rapidly progressing toward a communist revolution.[...] There is already a significant danger that the Soviet Union will interfere in Japan's domestic affairs . . . and I feel that if one looks at the domestic situation, one can see that day by day all the conditions necessary to achieve a communist revolution are being prepared. Namely, there is impoverishment, an increase in the voice of labor, a rise in hostility toward America and England being expressed alongside a friendly attitude toward the Soviet Union. There are also reformist movements of a ring in the military elite, a movement of 'new bureaucrats' that have jumped on the military bandwagon, and leftist elements that secretly attempt to pull the strings from behind the scenes (Yellen, 2013, p. 211).

Politicians were therefore well aware that the worsening domestic situation in the country could cause a bigger problem to the kokutai than surrendering to the

United States. They therefore decided not to remain in the background and informed the emperor. The emperor also knew what was happening among his subjects. When he was called to break the deadlock within the Big Six on August 9, 1945, Privy Council Hiranuma Kiichirō informed the emperor that a food crisis was imminent and that dangerous thoughts were spreading among the citizens (Yellen, 2013, p. 217). In one of the debates, he passed on the following comments to Prime Minister Suzuki Kantarō:

It is essential to maintain domestic order, so what measures do you plan to take in the future? What is your plan regarding the food situation? Things are getting extremely bad. The domestic situation is little by little becoming a source of great concern. We should think about the possibility that continuation of the war will create greater domestic disorder than would termination of the war (Yellen, 2013, p. 217).

Hiranuma concluded his appeal to the emperor with those words: "In accordance with the legacy of Your Imperial Forefathers, Your Imperial Majesty is also responsible for preventing unrest in the nation. I should like to ask Your Majesty to make his decision

with this point in mind" (Butow, 1954, p. 174). When Suzuki requested that the emperor break the deadlock, Hirohito said that he had thought about the situation prevailing at home and abroad and he had decided that it was time to surrender (Yellen, 2013, p. 217). It would be wrong to deny the shocking influence of the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry to the war and claim that the domestic situation was the only reason why the emperor decided to surrender, but we know that every top government official including the emperor knew that there was increasing social unrest in the country. Any upheaval within the country might be much more dangerous for the kokutai than surrendering to the US.

One of the most striking pieces of evidence proving that the domestic situation had a great influence on the emperor's decision to surrender is the statement of Navy Minister Mitsumasa Yonai on August 12, 1945:

I think the term is perhaps inappropriate, but the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war are, in a sense, gifts from the gods. This way we don't have to say that we have quit the war because of domestic circumstances. The reason I have long advocated control of the crisis of the country is neither fear of an enemy attack nor because of the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war. The main reason is my anxiety over the domestic situation. So, it is rather fortunate that we can now control matters without revealing the domestic situation (Yellen, 2013, p. 220).

Yonai was not the only politician thinking this way. While Konoe evaluated the Soviet entry into the war as a "gift from heaven for controlling the army" (Yellen, 2013, p. 220), Suzuki stated that the atomic bomb was the "most convenient pretext for ending the war" (Yellen, 2013, p. 220),

Conclusion

If the US had followed the strategy of bombardment and naval blockade instead of dropping the atomic bombs in August, what would have happened? Considering all of the evidence, we might say that Japan would have fallen into a food crisis since any strategic attack on Japan's railroad system would have eliminated the government's last hope of preventing starvation. Japan's highway system was primitive and incapable of transporting goods across the country, so Japan relied heavily upon its railway system. According to the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Japan's railway system was one of the most vulnerable in the world (Frank, 1999, p. 352-53). The same survey stated that if the strategic air forces had focused on forcing Japan to surrender instead of facilitating an invasion, an effective railroad attack might have brought about a very quick surrender (Frank, 1999, p. 353). Had the Japanese railway system been destroyed, a food crisis would have started in late 1945, which might have been the last straw to break the camel's back. People had already begun to blame their leaders for the food shortage and other problems in the country, and a social uprising was imminent. In fact, nearly 150,000 people held a protest at the Imperial Palace on May 19, 1945 (Frank, 1999, p. 351). Noted Japanese historian Daikichi Irokawa writes, "If the people who died of sickness and general physical deterioration are classified among those who died of starvation, the

[actual] death toll comes to several hundred thousand". He continues, "Immediately after the defeat, some estimated that 10 million people were likely to starve to death" (Frank, 1999, p. 351).

Although the US received the information of food shortages occurring in Japan through the Magic intercepts between March and June, those messages were interpreted in two different ways (Frank, 1999, p. 353) like all other Magic intercepts. Those intercepts reported that the imports from Asia should be increased to alleviate the food shortage in the country. Some thought that this might refer to an overall food shortage. However, others considered that there might be a maldistribution rather than a lack of food, and that the Japanese government might be holding food in stock in the event of a future invasion (Frank, 1999, p. 353). In either case, President Truman and other leaders did not think that the bombardment and naval blockade strategy were an alternative to the atomic bombs.

One of the counter arguments here might be about the deadlock in the Big Six. If the US had not dropped the atomic bombs, would the war party in the Big Six have accepted surrender? The answer is that they probably would not. Even after the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war, they were not willing to

accept surrender, and they were pressing for one final decisive battle. It was Emperor Hirohito who broke the deadlock in the council. If there had been an internal uprising against the emperor and the government due to the worsening domestic situation, this would have posed a severe threat to the kokutai. After the war ended, General Douglas MacArthur suggested that conventional bombings could have ended the war without the use of atomic bombs (Frank, 1999, p. 353). Similarly, Admiral William Daniel Leahy told that Japan could have been pushed to surrender before November 1, 1945 without the use of atomic bombs (Frank, 1999, p. 65). The report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey stated the following:

Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated (Frank, 1999, p. 355).

The second counter argument can be that the number of Japanese people who would have died due to starvation and air attacks might have been even higher than the number of deaths from the atomic bombs. First, according to the new strategic bombing plan, the US was going to drop warning leaflets prior to attacks to give time for civilians to escape, which would have decreased the civilian death toll. Second, the air forces were going to bomb selected transportation targets and strategic points rather than entire cities. Richard Frank claims that long-term starvation would have caused more losses than the atomic bombs (Frank, 1999, p. 350). It might be true that Japan may have continued to resist rather than surrender, but evidence shows that an upheaval was close, and for this very reason, Japan would have had to surrender before it was too late, which would have made the use of atomic bombs unnecessary.

The strategy of conventional bombing and naval blockade was never thought of as a separate strategy from invasion by most American leaders. Admiral Ernest L. King was among the few who defended this strategy to force a surrender without invading Japan, while others like General George C. Marshall thought this strategy was dangerous and wasteful (Bernstein, 1996, p. 42). Furthermore, Truman never received



The Peace Message Lantern Floating Ceremony is held in front of the Genbaku Dome to console the souls of the atomic bomb victims every year on the anniversary of Hiroshima atomic bombing on August 06, 1945. (David MAREUIL - Anadolu Agency)

a separate assessment of the bombing and naval blockade strategy, which could have been conducted without the Kyushu invasion. (Bernstein, 1996, p. 45).

We cannot and will not be sure if those who claim that Japan would have surrendered before November 1, 1945 without the use of atomic bombs are correct. However, we know from historical documents that almost none of the American leaders explicitly discussed or evaluated the strategy of bombing and naval blockade before Hiroshima, and they never informed Truman about the possibility of Japanese surrender before November 1 in the event of heavy conventional bombing and naval blockade without the Kyushu invasion (Bernstein, 1996, p. 45). For Truman, there were only two options: either the US was going to use its available atomic bombs to put an end to the war, saving American soldiers' lives at the cost of killing thousands of Japanese civilians, or it was going to invade Japan, which would cost thousands of American lives. Today, we know that the third option of strategic bombing and naval blockade, which would have made the use of atomic bombs and invasion unnecessary, will remain in history as a missed opportunity.

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