

**Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005)**

Roundtable Editor: **Thomas Maddux**, CSU Northridge

Roundtable Participants:

**Michael D. Gordin, Gar Alperovitz, Richard Frank, Barton Bernstein, David Holloway**

---

**Introduction by Thomas Maddux, CSU Northridge**

In 1965 the issue of the U.S. decision to use atomic bombs against Japan moved to the front burner of political-diplomatic discussion with the publication of Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*. Although not the first author to challenge the necessity, wisdom, and morality of President Harry S. Truman's decisions, Alperovitz provided the most serious questioning in a tightly written and argued thesis with substantial primary sources. In Alperovitz's view, Truman adopted a strategy of a delayed showdown with Joseph Stalin and waited for the development of the atomic bomb before moving on Stalin over his emerging hegemony in Eastern Europe. Truman used the atomic bombs to pressure Stalin, end the war without a U.S. invasion of the Japanese home islands, before the Soviet Union could enter the war. Alperovitz's Truman did this despite evidence that Japan was ready to end the war.

Herbert Feis and other historians questioned Alperovitz's thesis, his reading of Japanese policy and decision-making, and his basic challenge to the acceptance of the use of the a-bombs as necessary to ending WWII in the Pacific with minimum loss of life and the achievement of U.S. objectives. However, if you were teaching in 1969 you encountered students who, believe it or not, were really into reading about U.S. diplomacy or anything that could be linked to the current disaster in Vietnam. When I taught U.S. diplomacy since 1898 for the first time, many students were taking a Political Science course on U.S. foreign policy since 1945. They started the course with Alperovitz and started questioning me about his thesis and the a-bombs when I was just getting to the 1930s. I caught up to the Political Science instructor who spent about eight weeks on 1945-1947, used Herbert Feis and Robert J.C. Butow to challenge Alperovitz's reading of Japanese policy, and dismayed the students who also were not very pleased with other revisionist authors who disagreed with aspects of Alperovitz's interpretation.

Alperovitz's expanded study, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (1995) attracted a different reaction reflecting the twenty years of scholarship since 1965, such as Martin Sherwin's *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race* (1987), and the significant change in scholarly perspectives and changed political context of the 1990s. Yet the issue still could produce significant heat as witnessed in the month long H-Diplo exchanges on Alperovitz's book in September-October, 1995, and continuing on to H-Japan. Interested list members may locate this discussion at: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lm&list=H-Diplo>.

Interested readers may also review the historiography on the issue in J. Samuel Walkers' "Recent Literature on Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground," in *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April 2005), 311-334.

So it is very appropriate that Professor Alperovitz and Barton Bernstein, who has written many challenging and influential articles on the issue (Bernstein's commentary has been delayed but we hope to post it separately), are among the distinguished commentators on Professor Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's study which, all of the commentators agree, takes the issue of the role of the atomic bombs to a new level with the first international perspective on ending of the war in the Pacific. Whereas previous scholars consulted only U.S. records or Japanese and U.S. documents, Hasegawa has included available Soviet records and emphasized the triangular relations among the three powers as the war moved to its final stages in the spring and summer of 1945. At times the study reads like an early Tom Clancy novel with flashing date lines starting with Emperor Hirohito meeting with his advisers in the Imperial Palace; jump to Moscow where Stalin is conferring with Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov about speeding up Soviet Red Army preparations for the attack on Manchuria; or shift to the White House where President Truman is being advised by Secretary of War Henry Stimson to modify unconditional surrender but Secretary of State James Brynes vigorously objects. Only at the end with the scrambling, opportunistic Soviet occupation of the southern Kurils and unsuccessful effort to divide up Hokkaido, the northern-most home island, does the drama lose some of its momentum.

So what are the major issues raised by Hasegawa's book and the commentaries? Hasegawa carefully addresses the historiography on these issues and makes clear where he is in disagreement with recent studies by Richard Frank, Sadao Asada, and Herbert Bix. A first issue which makes this roundtable valuable for student seminars on historiography and decision making in diplomacy is that of intention, what were the intentions of Truman, Stalin, Hirohito, and their advisers. As Michael Gordin and Gar Alperovitz point out this is a major challenge since the documentary evidence is limited with respect to what has emerged from Soviet archives, from Japanese documents that were not deliberately destroyed, and even on the U.S. side where President Truman and Secretary of State James Brynes spent a lot of time together during the critical period in July-August 1945 but left few primary records. How does Hasegawa and other historians evaluate intentions and what weight do they give to a variety of diplomatic, military, political, and personal considerations?

Second, the issue of morality and what role should it play in decisions for war and peace. In his conclusion (pp. 298-303), Hasegawa addresses the myths each nation constructed to explain how the war ended and notes Stalin's "expansionist geopolitical designs ... [which] he pursued with Machiavellian ruthlessness, deviousness, and cunning." (p. 300). Hirohito and his advisers receive the most credit for the destruction produced by the way the war ended with the Emperor depicted as giving priority to saving the imperial house rather than the Japanese people and nation. Truman is challenged by Hasegawa for failure to pursue alternatives to using the atomic bombs, although the author does not emphasize the use of the second bomb on Nagasaki as significantly unnecessary as some revisionists stress.

A third issue is to what extent are Stalin and Truman racing against each other, as Hasegawa suggests in his title, and particularly after the Potsdam conference when the author suggests that

earlier cooperation gives way to competition with the U.S. increasingly trying to end the war to minimize Soviet gains with respect to its Yalta concessions in Manchuria, southern Sakhalin, and the Northern Kurils. How concerned is Stalin about the Pacific war coming to an end before he can secure his Yalta concessions, and how much does this shape his support for unconditional surrender, his effort to delay and keep Tokyo hoping for an agreement that would keep the Soviet Union out of the Pacific war? Does Washington really give a high priority to reducing Soviet gains to the extent of rejecting negotiations with Tokyo on terms of surrender and using the atomic bombs as soon as they were ready?

A fourth issue is the nature of Japanese decision-making and the relative impact of the atomic bombs and Soviet entry into the war on Japan's final decision to surrender. Hasegawa provides the most thorough assessment of Japanese decision-making with significant attention devoted to the major Japanese participants, the peace party, and the Japanese military. The author includes a number of useful maps, such as Map 3 on Central Tokyo around the Imperial Palace that helps the reader follow the hour-by-hour consultations during the last week of the war. The kokutai, which Hasegawa defines as the "symbolic expression of both the political and the spiritual essence of the emperor system," (p. 4) is closely followed through the book since the author considers it central to the final decisions of Tokyo. Hasegawa clearly demonstrates the enduring resistance of Japanese civilian and military officials to face the reality of defeat and surrender to the U.S. and its allies with a revealing discussion of military coup plans and abortive efforts even after the Emperor called for an end to the war. Furthermore, Hasegawa comes down decisively on the side of authors who have suggested that the Soviet entrance into the war rather than the atomic bombs had the most decisive influence, although he recognizes the importance of the shock effect of both on Hirohito and his advisers.

A fifth issue related to the third involves the nature of calculations shaping the decisions of President Truman and his principal civilian advisers. Hasegawa depicts Truman as motivated by a desire for revenge, a political distaste to revise unconditional surrender terms, and an expectation that a successful development of the atomic bombs will significantly enhance his negotiating stance vis-à-vis Stalin. Hasegawa displays considerable disagreement among civilian and military advisers about revising unconditional surrender terms and about the future Soviet role in the Far East. They seemed to agree only on the belief that ending the war without an invasion of the home islands would be most desirable but difficult to accomplish without the Soviet Union and/or a new powerful weapon like the atomic bombs to shock Japan into surrender.

Finally, the question raised by David Holloway, "how are we to think about the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union in the endgame of the war in the Pacific?" As every instructor of U.S. diplomacy knows, students want to get to the origins of the Cold War and are quick to pull the hindsight trigger on the ending of WWII. So it is a most important question coming out of Hasegawa's study to consider "what role the endgame in the Pacific play in ushering in the Cold War? "

*Author and Discussion Participants:*

**Tsuyoshi Hasegawa** is Professor of History and Co-Director of the Center for Cold War Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Professor Hasegawa earned his Ph.D. at the University of Washington in 1969 where he worked with Donald Treadgold, a leading specialist in Russian and Soviet history and completed a reading seminar with Robert Butow, author of the classic *Japan's Decision to Surrender*. Hasegawa has several major publications on Russia, Japan, and international relations, most notably *The February Revolution of Petrograd, 1917* (1981), *Everyday Life of Petrograd during the Russian Revolution* (1989), co-editor with Jonathan Haslam and Andrew Kutchins, *Russia and Japan: An Unresolved Dilemma between Distant Neighbors* (1993), and *The Northern Territories Dispute and Russo-Japanese Relations. Vol. 1: Between War and Peace, 1967-1985. Vol. 2: Neither War Nor Peace, 1985-1998* (1998). *Racing the Enemy* will be revised and translated into Japanese and will be published as *Anto: Sutarin, Toruman to nihonno kohuku* (Tokyo: Chuokoron shinsha). He is currently editing *Reinterpreting the End of the Pacific War: Atomic Bombs and the Soviet Entry into the War* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

**Gar Alperovitz**, the Lionel R. Bauman Professor of Political Economy at the University of Maryland, College Park, is both a historian and political economist. He earned a Ph.D. at Cambridge University, UK, 1964. His most widely-known works in connection with the close of World War II include *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (1965) and *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (1995). Alperovitz has also published *Cold War Essays* (1970) and several works dealing with American economic policy, most recently *American Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty, and Our Democracy* (2004). Alperovitz has numerous articles in academic and popular journals. He has also been a Legislative Director in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, and has been a policy level Special Assistant in the Department of States. Alperovitz has been a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge University, a Fellow of the Institute of Politics at Harvard, and a Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution.

**Barton Bernstein** is Professor of History at Stanford University. Professor Bernstein earned his B.A. at Queens College and Ph.D. at Harvard University. In 1968-69 Bernstein launched his early leadership of New Left revisionist historiography with *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays on American History* (1969) and quickly followed-up with a series of collected essays and documents on the Truman administration, specifically *The Truman Administration; A Documentary History* (1968), *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration* (1970) with Allen Matusow, and *Twentieth-Century America: Recent Interpretations* (1969). By the mid-1970s Bernstein shifted increasing to studies related to the decision to use the atomic bombs with a number of influential articles in *Diplomatic History*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Pacific Historical Review*, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, and *The Journal of American History*. Bernstein is currently teaching at course at Stanford on the atomic bombs.

**Michael Gordin** is an Assistant Professor at Princeton University. He earned his A.B. and Ph.D. at Harvard University. He specializes in the history of the modern physical sciences and the history of Imperial Russia. He has published articles on a variety of topics, such as the introduction of science into Russia in the early eighteenth century, the history of biological warfare in the late Soviet period, the relations between Russian literature and science, and a series of studies on the life and chemistry of Dmitrii I. Mendeleev, formulator of the periodic

system of chemical elements. His cultural history of Mendeleev in the context of Imperial St. Petersburg, *A Well-Ordered Thing: Dimitrii Mendeleev and the Shadow of the Periodic Table* was published by Basic Books in April 2004. Princeton University Press will publish his *The Third Shot: Ending the First Nuclear War* in September 2006 which focuses on ending the Pacific War. He is currently working on a study of the rise of nationalism among Russian and German chemists in the late nineteenth century.

**Richard B. Frank**, a graduate of the University of Missouri, is an independent scholar specializing in World War II in the Pacific. Random House published his first book in 1990. It won the General Wallace Greene Award from the U.S. Marine Corps. His second book, *Downfall: the End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, was published by Random House in 1999. It won the Harry S. Truman Award from the Truman Presidential Library. Both works were main selections of the History Book Club. He contributed essays on the end of the Pacific War to Robert Crowley's *What If? 2* and to Daniel Marston's *Pacific War Companion: Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima*. In the past year Mr. Frank was a consultant on "Victory in the Pacific," a program on the *American Experience* series on PBS, and BBC's "Hiroshima." He is currently working on a biography of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur for Palgrave.

**David Holloway** is Professor of Political Science and Raymond A. Spruance Professor in International History at Stanford University. He is a Senior Fellow in the Institute for International Studies. He served as co-director of the Center for International Security and Cooperation from 1991 to 1997, and director of the Freeman-Spogli Institute for International Studies from 1998 to 2003. He earned his B.A., MA, and Ph.D. at Cambridge University, UK. His research focuses on the international history of nuclear weapons, on science and technology in the Soviet Union, and on the relationship between international history and international relations theory. Professor Holloway wrote *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (1983) and co-authored *The Reagan Strategic Defense Initiative: Technical, Political and Arms Control Assessment* (1984). His book, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (1994) received the Vucinich and Shulman prizes from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. He also edited with Norman Naimark, *Reexamining the Soviet Experience: Essays in Honor of Alexander Dallin* (1996).

---

**Copyright (c) 2006 by H-Diplo, all rights reserved.** H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

---