

Politics as Strategy: The United States and the End of the Pacific War, 1944-45

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By December 1943, after two years of high intensity attrition and the mobilization of industry to the production of munitions, the United States had overwhelming superiority over Japanese forces. This situation was not so clear at the time. American commanders expected Japanese forces to resist as they had done before, and so did authorities in Tokyo: no one understood how far matters were about to change. American commanders took time to understand their opportunities—during 1944-45, their forces regularly achieved greater successes than were expected. Meanwhile, American strength was great, but it could not be translated into victory through simple means. Its advantages were constrained by the power of Japanese forces (strong enough to disrupt allied strategy and operations during 1944 and to challenge them in 1945), by the sheer size of the Asia-Pacific theater, and particularly by problems of politics. These problems included relations with Britain, the USSR and the Guomintang regime in China, allies pursuing aims that challenged the postwar order which American authorities hoped to establish in the Pacific Ocean and across the world. The greatest of these problems, however, were rivalries between the United States Army and Navy, which increasingly viewed operations and strategy in the Pacific Theatre from the perspective of how these matters would affect their postwar positions, especially against each other, in Washington. All of these matters turned on a question which combined strategy and politics: how could the United States occupy Japan and so change its socio-political system that this country no longer would threaten the world order which Washington hoped to establish? The combination of these operational, strategic and political processes, and the impact of intelligence, worked in favor of Douglas MacArthur, with great consequences for the nature of American victory and Japanese defeat in 1945, and afterward. Throughout these events, strategy, power and politics were combined in complex, and often paradoxical, ways.

By 1944, the balance of military power between Japan and the United States had turned definitively, in both quantity and quality. Even by devoting just 33% of its economic output to the Pacific theatre, the United States still deployed almost 300% more industrial resources to that campaign than Japan could do. Not only did the United States dramatically out-produce Japan in aircraft, but the quality of these machines surged far beyond Japanese levels. Fighter aircraft such as the Hellcat were designed specifically to exploit the weaknesses in standard equipment, like the

Zero, which Japan was unable to replace in its squadrons; no Japanese weapon could block the blows directed from B-29 bombers. Even worse, unlike the United States Army and Navy, Japan failed to train enough good new pilots to match their wastage; thus, unskilled men flew obsolete machines against first rate opponents. By 1944, Japan no longer could compete with the United States in any form of conventional airpower. When its commanders recognized these facts, during the American invasion of the Philippines, they turned toward unorthodox moves, such as shimpu (or kamikaze) forces, or the use of aircraft carriers as bait, to lure the United States Navy (USN) into error. These moves were useful—shimpu forces frightened Americans and took a heavy and cost effective toll on the USN—but insufficient to challenge the enemy’s command of the air. Given the centrality of airpower to operations on land and at sea, these failings had great consequences for combat in every dimension.

Meanwhile, the USN received a new fleet, the one which it had begun before December 1941, and with this force came crushing superiority in all categories of warships. The USN more than matched the quality of Japanese surface and submarine vessels ship to ship, and owned the air. Despite its smaller size, in 1944 the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) possessed effective warships and commanders and a credible fleet in being. The issue of whether the IJN was “neutralized” shaped strategic planning in Washington, determining whether one drove into its defenses, or its guts. After the USN’s triumph during the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot” of June 1944, strategic planners concluded that American forces could jump straight to Iwo Jima, ten months before this actually happened, or Formosa. They abandoned these ideas because they believed that the IJN would bleed American forces holding a position so far from secure bases. ¹ The IJN’s power was real but it also was a wasting asset. The IJN constantly confronted this dilemma-- either to tolerate yet another American step toward Tokyo, or to resist it, at a high risk of disaster. Until October 1944, the IJN managed to contain American (and British) actions and came close to achieving a kind of victory at the battle for Leyte Gulf. The commander of the Combined Fleet, Admiral Ozawa, grasped the psychology of his opponents, Admirals Spruance and Halsey, and exploited it in the two main sea battles of 1944. In the process, he out-admiraled Halsey, and gained a marginal edge on Spruance. At the Marianas, Ozawa took the first strike by carrier aircraft. At Leyte Gulf, he slipped a major fleet through superior forces so to reach vulnerable troop transports and amphibious assault ships. His forces lost both of these battles in a decisive, almost embarrassing, fashion, however, because they no longer could go toe to toe with the USN,

¹ J.P.S. 404/7, 11.7.44, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1, 1942-1945, The Pacific Theater, Reel 9, (University Press of America), J.I.C. 143/4, 20.7.44, J.W.P.C. 91/3, 12.8.44, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1, 1942-1945, The Pacific Theater, Reel 10, (University Press of America).

especially in the air. Between January to October 1944, the IJN was annihilated in a one-sided way while the USN drove two thousand miles toward Tokyo. In 1945, the USN did the same again, and easily enabled an invasion of Japan. By this stage, any conventional activities by the IJN became a form of suicide.

These failures in the air and the sea wrecked Japanese strategy. By late 1943, Japan had hoped to force a compromise peace and to retain most of its recent territorial gains. It aimed to tire its enemies through delaying actions in front of northern New Guinea and the Marianas Islands, and then by the defence of these bastions, which covered the inner zone which stretched from Singapore to the Philippines, Formosa and Japan. This strategy attempted to replicate the experiences of the Solomon Islands campaign of 1942-43 on a broader scale. The Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) was expected to hold strong points which the enemy must take one after another in order to advance, at too heavy a cost to continue for long, while Japanese air and seapower neutralized their American equivalents, and thus the United States' ability to manoeuvre wide or to thrust deep. Instead, Japanese naval and air resources were broken, while its enemies penetrated the inner zone, bypassing most Japanese strongholds. Japan lost the ability to defend its empire overseas or to gain any sustenance from it, while its home islands were exposed to blockade, and invasion.

As a result, the defence of Japan came to rest on the IJA, the only combat arm of the Axis powers whose absolute quality had not declined since 1941. In 1944, on the mainland of Asia, the IJA still could disrupt allied strategy. The Ichi-Go offensive in south and central China humiliated the Guomintang and forced the Allies to reshape their strategy, which had assumed that the drive across the Pacific would culminate in the middle kingdom, unleashing Asiatic manpower and American airpower against Japan. The IJA also could disrupt allied operations: the speed of the assault on Imphal-Kohima initially shocked British commanders and Indian forces, which were saved only by the availability of allied airpower and transport aircraft, while the defence of Luzon trapped large American forces in a strategically unnecessary campaign. Granted, the lack of modern equipment exposed the IJA to annihilation in mobile operations, as occurred in Manchuria and the last months of the Burma campaign, while many of its units were wasted on Pacific islands, which its enemies could bypass. None the less, until August 1945 the IJA furthered Japanese strategy by maintaining control over China and South East Asia, and by ferociously defending those locales which Americans chose to attack. By hampering the United States' ability to acquire advanced airbases, the IJA was Japan's best anti-aircraft defence, reducing the weight of American bomber attacks and increasing the losses among machines damaged or running out of

fuel . The IJA could not prevent the allies from invading islands abroad or at home, but it could inflict such losses as to make their enemy think carefully.

During 1944-45, IJA tactics and the quality of its forces varied widely. Its commanders could be reckless on the offense, most notably General Mutaguchi during the Burma campaign, while from August 1942 its standard tactics of counterattack with little fire preparation easily degenerated into human wave assaults against barbed wire and machine guns. Yet on the defence, the IJA always created effective hard points, and from late 1943 its operations adjusted well to allied superiority in firepower. The commanders whom the Americans faced during 1945 on Luzon, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, (Generals Yamashita, Kuribayashi and Ushijima) were able men who matched their foes, and made good use of bad circumstances. Leaving aside the single, if central, issue of firepower, IJA units matched their enemies in quality until the end of the war, especially because of one unique characteristic, their breathtaking self sacrifice. As the commander of Anglo-Indian forces in Burma, General Slim, said, "The Japanese are a well trained enemy and in my experience they always fight to the last. All armies talk about fighting to the last man and the last cartridge but the Japanese are the only people who put it in practice".² Allied forces usually had to attack the IJA on ground of its own choosing, in well prepared defences. In these circumstances, during 1944, inferior numbers of Japanese soldiers stalled second rate formations, whether Indian troops at Razabil in the Arakan or the 27th American Army Division on Saipan. Japanese resistance at Okinawa and Iwo Jima shocked the best American formations, and commanders.

Allied armies could defeat the IJA in serious defensive positions only by maintaining effective force to space ratios and firepower and, where possible, by exploiting their own capabilities for movement and Japanese tendencies to launch unceasing frontal attacks. This was easier in some cases than others. During August 1945, IJA forces stretched across a 1500 mile front in Manchuria were easy meat for superior Soviet forces using the tactics and kit which had smashed better equipped German forces in Europe.³ Other Allied forces had to recalibrate their entire mode of warfare in order to defeat the IJA. Conventional American and British tactics were designed to smash formations by blasting wide areas with firepower, advancing over the wreck, and forcing soldiers to run or surrender. This approach broke elite German formations, but not average IJA units. An enemy holding a series of small and hard positions until every man was dead would survive any unfocused bombardment and then wreck every advance. American and

² *The Times*, 20 June, 1945.

³ David Glantz, *Soviet Operational and Tactical Combat in Manchuria, 1945: 'August Storm'*, (Frank Cass, London, 2003).

Commonwealth forces could defeat such a foe only by learning to kill every Japanese they fought. As the 26th Indian Division noted, “The objective in every attack must be the extermination of the Jap in a given area rather than its territorial occupation”.⁴ It is sometimes thought that American and Commonwealth forces adopted the tactics of extermination eagerly and from hatred; not so. They had no wish to take this action at all, because it was inconvenient—it required a fundamental change in their organization, in a direction officers did not wish to go. The tactics of extermination, which made surrender or survival almost impossible for Japanese soldiers, were adopted from necessity, rather than racism—American and Commonwealth soldiers hated the Japanese no more than they did the most Nazified elements of the Wehrmacht, or than their fathers had done German troops during the First World War. Certainly, the difficulties involved in fighting Japanese to the death produced complex attitudes toward them, resting on fear and hatred. Halsey constantly and publically told his men to “kill, kill, kill” the Japanese. MacArthur’s intelligence chief, Charles Willoughby, thus described Japanese forces in 1944: “An incredible obscene monstrous semi-religious cult (the hypodermic effect no white man can equal) armed to the teeth. At this moment, a 40 000 000 dollar battle ship, is at the mercy of a suicide-crashing hop-head, that hurtles downward to perdition”.⁵ Slim described the IJA as “a fanatical enemy unsurpassed in his insect-like qualities of persistence and vicious ruthlessness, as “man-sized soldier ants”. Still, he praised their military ability, noting, “None was a tougher or more formidable adversary than the Japanese”.⁶ Anglo-American military attitudes were functional, and dominated by one aim: how to defeat Japan, at the least possible cost to one’s own men. This was equally true of the decision to try to end the war through the use of atomic bombs, in 1945.

No part of the American and Commonwealth approach to operations was more difficult to recalibrate than its central one—firepower. In order to be effective in Burma, New Guinea and the Philippines, the sophistication, centralisation and weight of fire had to decline, precisely when these characteristics were rising in Europe. They were inappropriate to locales where Japanese forces were dispersed, the terrain was broken, and the deployment of massive firepower might splinter logistical systems. Officers had to learn that what they really needed were light, easily deployable and logistically less demanding weapons like mortars and flamethrowers, or that one accurate gun offered better results than barrage by ten, because concealment and hardness was central to Japanese positions. So too, when assaulting Pacific islands, battleships provided the

⁴ Sequence of Lessons, Arakan, GOC 26th Indian Division, 12.6.43, WO 172/2008, The National Archives, United Kingdom.

⁵ Kay (Willoughby) to Cherie amie (Claire Booth Luce), 26.11.44, Claire Booth Luce Papers, Library of Congress, Box 758,

⁶ *The Times*, 20 June 1945.

fundamental fire support for infantry, but in order to be effective, their crews had to use completely different procedures and ammunition than those applied to surface combat. Within amphibious assault formations, firepower had to be delegated down to specialist sections within squads, where rifleman were attached to protect men using flamethrowers or explosives against bunkers. The edge of allied firepower was not universally applied. During the Burma campaign of 1944, British infantry battalions actually fought with less firepower and suffered more casualties than Indian units, because one third of them served with the Chindits, units drawn primarily from white soldiers, lacking support weapons, and thrown into ferocious operations against Japanese forces. As a result, the operations of Chindits and Sino-American forces in Burma actually cost more lives to mount than the IJA lost to stall them. Elsewhere, however, firepower provided the razors which bled the IJA dry. Tanks, for example, had unusual power because Japanese anti-tank capabilities were poor. The movement of just one tank to a key position wrecked Japanese defenses at Kohima. On Okinawa, Ushijima warned his men, "The enemy's power lies in its tanks. It has become obvious that our general battle against the American forces is a battle against their...tanks".⁷

The legacy of these operations shaped American decisions about the end of the war. In every battle of 1944-45, almost all Japanese military participants died, but the relative scale of allied casualties varied widely. The difference was staggering, when the IJA attacked allied forces. In the Imphal-Kohima campaign, sixteen Japanese soldiers died for every Anglo-Indian fatality, 65,000 men to 4,000. At Aitepe, along the Driniumor River in New Guinea, the exchange rate was twenty to one, 10,000 Japanese for 500 American dead. The ratio was even higher when the IJA fought mechanized forces in mobile operations. During April-May 1945, along the Sittang River in Burma, 15,000 Japanese died, compared to 97 Indian soldiers; in Manchuria, one million Japanese were killed or captured for 5000 Soviets. When American forces attacked Japanese ones on Pacific islands, however, the casualty differential was less favourable, because they were attacking strongholds head on. Excluding sailors, on Luzon and Okinawa, 11,000 and 7,000 American soldiers died for 180,000 and 110,000 Japanese: on Iwo Jima, the ratio was 7,000 to 22,000. Even worse, some of these assaults were unnecessary in strategic terms, selected not to gain essential supply and air bases, but primarily for political reasons: Luzon to bolster the prestige of MacArthur, Iwo Jima as an outcome of inter-service rivalries.⁸ In all of these cases, usually two to three allied soldiers were invalided out of service, many maimed permanently, for every

⁷ Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War, Its Theory and Practice in the Pacific, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1951, pp. p 575.

⁸ Robert S. Burrell, "Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology: A Strategic Study of Operation Detachment", The Journal of Military History, 68 (10.2004) pp 1143-86.

one who died. Around 50% of American combat personnel on Luzon and Okinawa were serious casualties. On Iwo Jima, aggregate American casualties actually exceeded Japanese ones.

The scale and the ratio of these casualties mattered because, from late 1944, Japanese strategists were pursuing a new strategy, one of human attrition and the grinding of American will, at however one sided and heavy a cost to their own people. They aimed to make Washington accept a compromise peace that maintained the position of the Emperor, the core of Japan's political system, and perhaps even some overseas possessions. This strategy required that the United States invade Japan, suffer staggering losses and be stalled, while Japan demonstrated it could fight on. As Admiral Onishi, originator of the *shimpu* programme and Vice Chief of Naval Staff, said, "we would never be defeated if we were prepared to sacrifice 20,000,000 lives in a 'special attack' effort".⁹ However terrible and irresponsible, this strategy had strength. Without the atomic bomb, it might have made Washington offer better terms than it did. Even with the bomb, these capabilities did budge American attitudes. By 1945, the IJA's only power was the ability to inflict casualties on its enemy. That capability affected American decisions to use the atomic bomb as a means to sidestep the IJA's strategy and defeat Japan cheaply, but also to abandon demands for unconditional surrender, instead adopting a limited compromise peace, which maintained the Imperial House and substantial parts of the existing state, and ruled through them. This situation gave the Japanese elite and people greater control over their destinies than German ones received. Japanese power and combat actually did achieve some political objectives. Its defeat achieved a victory of a kind.

During 1944-45, Japanese power in air, sea and land could not prevent its foes from driving fast and economically toward Tokyo, but they did constrain allied strategy, and shape its politics. Japan could not beat American forces, but it could defeat their plans. Japan was too weak to win, but strong enough to shape the nature of its defeat. Indeed, Japan became almost the kingmaker among its competing opponents. By late 1943, the allies formulated a complex mixture of strategies against Japan. Their political divisions prevented them from pursuing just one strategy, so producing both ruthless rivalry, at the price of waste and confusion, and cooperative competition, which improved the use of their resources. Under this approach, the USN would launch the main thrust across the central Pacific from the Marshall Islands via Formosa to China, so enabling Guomintang armies to tie down the IJA, and to hold airbases from which American bombers, conducting precision attacks, would knock out resources key to the Japanese economy. Limited British operations in Burma and the Indian Ocean would support this strategy. The British

⁹ Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little Known Near-Disasters, and Modern Memory", *Diplomatic History*, 19/2, 1995, pp. pp. 258,

and Chinese governments were happy to receive resources to support these aims, but also hoped to use them to pursue objectives of their own. Meanwhile, MacArthur received enough resources to thrust north along New Guinea toward the Philippines, though his proposal to make that line the main (indeed, the only) axis of allied advance was rejected. Japan was not expected to fall before 1946-48, and probably not until after the IJA in Asia had been annihilated. In order to aid that process and to speed that date, the allies hoped for eventual Soviet intervention against Japan. ¹⁰

Collectively, small allied forces were thrusting in from exterior lines, along a semi-circle with a perimeter 20,000 miles long, from Hokkaido to Hollandia to the Himalayas to Hunan, toward an enemy with a weak navy and air force, but a powerful army. Compared to the European theatre at its greatest extent, the Asia-Pacific front was far larger, and force to space ratios far smaller. These geostrategic circumstances had political ramifications. The Pacific Ocean had too many commands for the space and forces available. By 1944, Australian forces largely were shut from the war, while the commands in the South and North Pacific were cancelled. The outcome of operations during 1944-45 might have the same effect on either command controlling the two remaining Pacific thrusts, with great repercussions in Washington, since one was led by a General, MacArthur, and the other by an Admiral, Chester Nimitz. Meanwhile, the Pacific was linked to three Asian theatres, in South East Asia, China and Manchuria /Siberia, where the United States and its allies had different political objectives. Japan stood at the centre of these converging operations. Japanese power, and decisions regarding the use of it, would affect the success or failure of all of these operations, and thus the politics of future allied strategy. That effect proved to be profound. On paper, the allies were pursuing an inter-service, international and Asia-Pacific strategy. The nature of Japanese resistance broke that approach down into several distinct strategies and divided events in Asia from those in the Pacific. It upturned Allied expectations in Asia, and incited inter-service confusion in the Pacific.

American strategists found politics a difficult and emotional issue. Every group of them believed that they were pursuing strategic objectives, while their partners at home and abroad were following political ones. In fact, American attitudes were no less political (or more strategic) than those of their allies, who also understood the relationship between those matters, and their own needs, better than Washington did. Thus, American strategists condemned Chiang Kai Shek for failing to make the war against Japan, especially in Burma, his first priority, and for focusing on the internal rivalry with the communists. He was right to adopt that approach and they were wrong, even more about China's ability to affect the war. American decision makers were

¹⁰ Grace P. Hayes,, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan* (Annapolis, Md., 1982)

paranoid regarding Britain, especially its participation in the Pacific war. In fact, like everyone everywhere, British decision makers intended to use their forces (and whatever strength they could borrow from their allies) to further their own strategic and political interests, but they also understood the limits to their resources and their freedom of action in the Pacific theatre. In a rare collective dissent, the British Chiefs of Staff blocked Winston Churchill's efforts to adopt a narrow national policy using imperial resources to achieve British ends in South East Asia, because they appreciated the limits to those resources and did not wish to disrupt the general pattern of Anglo-American military cooperation.¹¹ Again, from December 1941, the Americans pressed the Soviets to intervene against Japan, because they knew it was potentially their greatest ally; but by the time the USSR joined the Pacific war, experience with Russian behavior in occupied Europe caused Washington to question Soviet political aims. Still, they valued the aid of the Red Army against the IJA more than they feared its effect on the postwar politics of Asia.

No matter their concerns about politics, American attitudes toward their allies turned more on their efficacy in fighting the war, than on fears about their actions afterward. That was not true of inter-service issues. The American Army and Navy had argued bitterly about how to fight Japan since war began. That bitterness rose once victory came in sight, and the outcome of operations became linked to postwar power in Washington. Far more than the war in Europe, the Pacific campaign was an issue of—perhaps the central issue in— inter service politics. Both services, especially the USN, were driven by memories of penury during the interwar years, fears that it would recur after Japan was defeated, and by the determination never to suffer a surprise attack again. The desire to prove that the USN rather than the army had defeated Japan, drove the strategy of the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral King, just as the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) aimed to show that strategic bombing was the true cause of victory. The lines of advance across the Pacific advocated by King and MacArthur were as much intended to beat the other as the Japanese. When James Forrestal, the Secretary for the Navy, witnessed the first raising of the flag on Iwo Jima in April 1945, he said: “That will ensure that there is a Marine Corps for the next 500 years”. The senior general in the Pacific, MacArthur, had an acute sense of politics. In 1942, he told his British liaison officer that President “Roosevelt has his spies right down to the kitchen sink”.¹² In 1944, MacArthur warned his superiors and subordinates that the USN intended to create a Marine Four Star general to command all soldiers in the Pacific during the war, while its ultimate “object is to control all overseas positions after the war, using the Marines, and

¹¹ Draft and revised minute from Chief of Staffs to Winston Churchill, 10-12 May 1944, Lord Alanbrooke Papers, 6/3/11, Basil Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.

¹² Christopher Thome, “MacArthur, Australia and the British, 1942-1943: The secret journal of MacArthur's British liaison officer (part 1)”, *The Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 29/1, 4.75, p. 67.

using the Army as a sort of home guard".¹³ Fortunately, adults also were involved in this discussion, like Nimitz and the Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall. Yet they merely could constrain the consequences of the political divisions between American commanders, especially MacArthur and most admirals, not eliminate it.

The actions of the IJA shaped the politics of allied strategy in Asia. The Ichi Go offensive demonstrated Guomintang weakness and the impossibility of basing American bombers in China. These facts, combined with poor relations between Chiang and the American commander in China, General Stilwell, caused Washington to abandon that country as a leading factor in the war, and also shaped its policy toward the Guomintang after the war. Thus, the IJA shattered the capstone of allied strategy, and forced its redefinition. Other Japanese actions shaped that process. In 1944, Britain had neither the means nor the aims to achieve victory in South East Asia. Only Mutaguchi 's decision to attack in Burma let Anglo-Indian forces acquire that outcome. The IJA attacked Commonwealth forces precisely where they were strong and wished to fight, because the Japanese believed their enemy must be weak wherever it stood; and they did so through an extraordinarily deep and logistically fragile lunge which must produce either immediate victory, or disaster.¹⁴ That victory could not recoup entirely the political damage which Britain suffered in 1941-42, but its position certainly rose. The effect of the Ichi Go offensive, combined with the American belief that victory required the annihilation of the IJA in Asia, raised Washington's emphasis on the need for Soviet intervention against Japan. When that event occurred, the IJA's utter vulnerability to the Red Army had strategic and political consequences.

Above all, Japanese successes and failures turned the politics of American strategy, and in an odd way. The IJA, by knocking out Chinese armies, and the IJN, by vanishing, weakened the position of the USN and strengthened that of MacArthur. Until late 1944, the USN was the key to American success against Japan, but then its position declined, because it had done its work so well at sea, and had no solution to the problem on land, how to defeat a defiant Japan. These circumstances reinforced the need for a general rather than an admiral to command American forces, and unleashed MacArthur to fit that bill, by letting him act as a free rider to the USN's command of the seas.

This contingency was shaped by intelligence, which reinforced not merely the power of the United States against Japan, but of one American commander against another. During 1942-43,

¹³ Jay Luvaas, (ed) *Dear Miss Em, General Eichelberger's War in the Pacific, 1942-1945*. Greenwood, Westport, CT, 1972, p 260.

¹⁴ John Ferris, "The Anglo-Japanese War In Asia, 1941-45", in Ian Gow, John Chapman and Hiram, Yoshi (ed), *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000, Volume III, The Military Dimension*, (Palgrave Press, 2002), pp. 186-201.

intelligence had supported American air and naval forces well, and more than it did the army, because American codebreakers had greater success against the traffic of the IJN than of the IJA, while decisive actions were easier to find at sea than on land. In 1944-45, codebreaking and reconnaissance continued to give the USN as much intelligence as it had done before, but it needed this advantage less, because its power was so overwhelming. Even Ultra could not read Ozawa's mind, the only information which would have let Spruance or Halsey perform better in the great battles of 1944. MacArthur, conversely, gained more intelligence than before, because cryptanalytical success increased against the IJA, and he could use all forms of it better, since his maritime capabilities rose. He also needed and gained more from intelligence than did the admirals. MacArthur's military record in the Pacific before April 1944 and after November 1944 was mixed in quality. He evinced aggression, willpower, a gambler's instinct and a flair for amphibious operations. Against that stood his penchants for misreading enemy intentions, for issuing unrealistic orders to his men and for attacking directly where the enemy was strongest; his operations on land tended to become bogged down in battles of attrition, a style of operations in which he was not gifted. He was at his worst when times were tough, and at his best when they were good. In mid 1944 MacArthur conducted an impressive campaign which turned his command from the periphery to the centre of allied strategy in the Pacific. He did so because he had greater power than his foes and favourable opportunities to fight a war of manoeuvre, but without Ultra, MacArthur would not have used these resources with maximum effect, or very well at all.¹⁵

In early 1944, before the intervention of Ultra, he pursued stereotyped operations: to strike directly at Hansa Bay, the enemy's main line of resistance on New Guinea. A direct attack on this outer crust of Japanese defences might well have failed, marginalizing the South-West Pacific Area (SWPA). Once Ultra uncovered Japanese deployments on New Guinea, however, in particular, its strength at Hansa Bay and the weakness of its main supply base at Hollandia, MacArthur threw his plans out the window. To precise knowledge and superior force he added aggressive command and the calculated pursuit of great gains at the risk of moderate losses. In April 1944 a seaborne assault seized Hollandia, shattering Japanese defences in the south-west Pacific. Over the next two months a fast amphibious campaign seized north-western New Guinea before Japanese defences could be solidified. Between April to July 1944, MacArthur leapt five times further than in the previous 24 months, annihilated or isolated five IJA divisions for small

¹⁵ Edward Drea, *MacArthur's Ultra, Codebreaking and the War Against Japan, 1942-1945*, (University Press of Kansas, 1992).; Ferris, J.R., and Michael Handel, "Clausewitz, Intelligence, Uncertainty and the Art of Command in Modern War", *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 10, no. 1, January 1995, pp. 1-58.

American losses, and broke Japan's external defensive perimeter. He also seized bases for the assault on the Philippines, the projected date for which advanced by five months. Then, the attack on the weak garrison of Leyte during October 1944 caught Japan by surprise. On this anvil, the American hammer smashed three divisions and, courtesy of the USN, what remained of Japan's regular naval and air forces. This victory gave MacArthur the opportunity to bypass the inner perimeter of Japanese defences, the Philippines, and to attack directly the heart of the Japanese Empire--its line of maritime communications from Singapore to Tokyo.

These operations, and MacArthur's strategy of bypassing strongpoints and striking weakly held but strategically vital areas to serve as forward bases, rested on intelligence, especially Ultra. Yet Ultra increasingly lost that function once American forces entered the Philippines. Tough fighting could no longer be avoided, since strong garrisons held each position in the innermost perimeter of Japanese defences. MacArthur, moreover, refused to bypass most of the Philippines but insisted on assaulting its main islands, because he viewed their conquest as an aim rather than a means. He threw American forces directly against Japanese strength, instead of around it. In turn, these battles required the support of precisely that sort of intelligence which Ultra could least provide. MacArthur's campaign of March-October 1944 had rested on the basis of the material which Ultra was best able to acquire and SWPA to use, on the enemy's strategic intentions, perceptions, dispositions and redeployments. Such intelligence could differentiate strong points from centres of weakness. If SWPA could determine where the enemy was weak, it did not need precise intelligence about the composition of garrisons which were known to be strong, so long as it bypassed them. This was fortunate, since in mid-1944 its assessments of such intelligence were poor, including gross miscalculations (often 100% wrong) of the strength of several garrisons which American forces did have to attack.

Once the strategy of by-passing was abandoned, these problems with intelligence rose in importance. With the annihilation of the IJN and Japan's ability to move soldiers and supplies by sea, cryptanalytical access to traffic about maritime matters became irrelevant. Yet that traffic previously had been the main source of the material which SWPA used well. While the IJA's operational codes yielded more material than before, it revealed little about the strength of IJA formations. Continually, SWPA misunderstood these issues, while MacArthur ignored Ultra whenever it did not say what he wished to hear. When American forces entered the Philippines, Ultra became less and less useful. Due to a combination of fragmentary intelligence and wishful thinking, Willoughby underestimated the number of Japanese defenders on Luzon by 50%, or 130,000 soldiers. SWPA's planning for the invasion of Luzon rested on this assumption. MacArthur wished to fight a rapid and risky campaign which would have played straight into the

hands of a strong, effectively deployed and well-led enemy. Fortunately, working from the same data, his army commander, General Krueger, assessed Japanese strength accurately and better than SWPA did. Krueger ran the battle, and through a broad and cautious advance which took Japanese power properly into account. This minimised American casualties, but also the speed of the campaign.

For Operation Olympic, the projected invasion of Kyushu, Ultra was the only source of strategic intelligence available to American planners, and in some ways strikingly effective. It located 13 of the 14 divisions on Kyushu and uncovered their strategy, but did not define their strength. Thus, Willoughby underestimated the number of Japanese soldiers on Kyushu by 40%. MacArthur rejected this calculation as defeatist and held that Japanese forces were even smaller. Right after the war, he said that “The main blow (ie on the Tokyo plain) would have been a deadly thing because the Japanese are fine in defending what would have amounted to a frontal assault. Krueger’s landing on Kyushu was a cinch and he would not have suffered over 15,000 casualties”.¹⁶ This guess is unlikely. Though any assessment of the matter is arbitrary, if one extrapolates to a campaign in Kyushu the level of American casualties compared to the IJA’s strength experienced at Luzon, Olympic probably would have cost some 45,000 American soldiers dead-- 65,000 or 300,000 judged by the same ratios at Okinawa or Iwo Jima. The 1900 shimpu aircraft thrown into Okinawa destroyed 36 USN ships and killed 5000 of its personnel: on this basis, the 7000 kamikaze machines available for use at Kyushu might have sunk 133 ships and killed 18,500 sailors. Almost all of the 900,000 Japanese defenders and most of the five million civilians in southern Kyushu also would have died. Even more, after he examined Japanese defences, General Eichelberger, the intended commander of the assault on Tokyo wrote, “I am not at all certain that it would have been successful because my training on Sugami Beach after the war has indicated that there were sand bars which would have made the use of our landing craft extremely difficult. The Japanese defenses were almost impregnable, and the defenders would have been well disciplined and fanatical”. So too, in 1946 Spruance reflected that Kyushu was “full of Japs & securing the island would have taken a long time” while Japanese aircraft “could have done tremendous Kamikaze damage to our T(ask) F(orce)s”.¹⁷ Fortunately, the plan which rested on MacArthur’s optimism was not put to the test, partly because of the influence of Ultra.

¹⁶ Luvaas, *Dear Miss Em*, p.300, By “casualties”, MacArthur meant more than combat deaths, and probably counted wounded in the figure of 15,000, suggesting that he expected to lose only 4000 soldiers killed in action.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 310; “Talk with Admiral Spruance, 29 June 1946”, by Morison, Samuel Elliot Morison Papers, Box 8, Library of Congress.

Throughout 1944-45, Ultra shaped the politics of American strategy at the theatre level. During 1942-43 SWPA was a command of secondary importance. The operations of 1944 made the territory under its control a plausible base for the assault on the Japanese home islands: and MacArthur immediately brought the Philippines to the forefront of American strategy. King, meanwhile, pursued a drive on Formosa, partly so to box MacArthur into a backwater. While Nimitz and Halsey, potential rivals for dominance over American strategy in the Pacific, accepted MacArthur's case, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were less accommodating. Here Ultra became the trump suit for MacArthur. During the debate over the future of American strategy between June-August 1944, assessments of Japanese capabilities and intentions rested primarily on the basis of Ultra. MacArthur's operations of the period, his drafting and redrafting of plans for the invasion of the Philippines, and the speed of his attacks, were shaped by Ultra not only in operational terms but in political ones--by the need to overcome the arguments, often derived from interpretations of Ultra, put forward by opponents to his strategy. He achieved his aims.

Conversely, Ultra helped to save Americans and Japanese alike from paying the price on Kyushu for MacArthur's ambition to command the largest amphibious assault in history, incidentally removing that honour from the USN. The combination of MacArthur's clumsiness as a land commander and his poor interpretation of intelligence might have been disastrous in Japan; but his reputation and millions of lives were saved by the bell of the atomic bomb, which also enabled the triumph of his career, the task no one could have handled better than he, as American Viceroy in Japan. Ultra was fundamental to the American decision to try to defeat Japan by using the atomic bomb. The best source of strategic intelligence available to American decision makers in the summer of 1945 was not "Magic" but Ultra. Magic demonstrated --indirectly-- the intentions of the liberal Japanese faction, which routinely had lost power struggles in Tokyo since 1934. It revealed that even they pursued terms which Washington would not accept; indeed, it convinced many American leaders that Japanese peace moves were not serious, and perhaps intended simply to weaken their will.¹⁸ Magic indicated that success in diplomacy required more military pressure. Ultra, meanwhile, revealed the capabilities of the IJA and the intentions of the faction which dominated Japanese policy. Though it did not reveal the full strength of Japanese forces on Kyushu, which remained underestimated by 40%, it showed that the IJA intended to make Kyushu a second Okinawa and fight to the death, taking thousands of Americans with them, not to mention millions of Japanese. Ultra convinced all military advisors in Washington that MacArthur was overoptimistic, and any amphibious assault would be costly. An assessment of the

¹⁸ Gerhard Krebs, "Operation Super-Sunrise? Japanese-United States Peace Feelers in Switzerland, 1945", *The Journal of Military History*, 69, (10.05), pp 1081-1120.

intelligence record as a whole illuminates the attitudes of American statesmen towards the atomic bomb. Intelligence drove the United States to find an effective alternative to an amphibious assault.

Before 1942, American planning for war with Japan always ended when the fleet entered Tokyo Bay: it had no clear idea how to make a recalcitrant Japan surrender, save for siege by blockade and bombing. By the summer of 1945, that problem was at hand. Several solutions were on the table. One, simply to continue the siege, could not promise quick victory and, incidentally, had a huge human cost. The USAAF was preparing to annihilate Japan's transportation system, which might have killed millions of civilians through famine. President Truman's military advisors regarded this approach as inadequate, instead favouring an amphibious invasion of Japan. Although they did not define the cost of such a campaign, generally they used Luzon and Okinawa as the model for American casualties, and thought dead, wounded and missing would fall in the mid to high tens of thousands. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Leahy, suggested that 33% of the 250,000 American attackers would be casualties, 300% more than the number at Okinawa. None of his colleagues challenged that estimate, which might have risen had they known the IJA's real strength on Kyushu. Truman accepted their recommendation with the pointed comment that, until that very moment, he "had hoped that there was a possibility of preventing an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other".¹⁹ Some staff officers were even more pessimistic. In August 1944, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee noted "In our Saipan operation it cost approximately one American killed and several wounded to exterminate seven Japanese soldiers. On this basis it might cost us a half a million American lives and many times that number in wounded to exterminate the Japanese ground forces that conceivably could be employed against us in the home islands".²⁰ Whether Operation Olympic really would have been launched is uncertain. It always was open to cancellation. Senior USN figures increasingly opposed the idea, and reverted toward a strategy of siege. So concerned was Marshall by the likely level of casualties that he considered dropping atomic bombs at the invasion site, and then sending the assault forces through, where, ironically, the unknown element of fallout probably would have caused more Americans to die than the original Japanese defences would have done. None the less, American decision makers operated on the assumption that invasion would happen within a few months, while neither negotiations nor siege could end the war before that moment. Under these circumstances, naturally they looked for any other means to a faster and cheaper victory.

¹⁹ Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, Volume One, The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan, (University Publications of America, 1995), pp. 49-56.

²⁰ J.C.S. 942/2, 30.8.44, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1, 1942-1945, The Pacific Theater, Reel 9, (University Press of America)

The obvious candidates were Soviet intervention and the atomic bomb. Scholars routinely treat these two matters as competitors, almost as mutually exclusive ones, and try to determine which of them really won the war, implying that the other was irrelevant. That approach is wrong, both from the contemporary perspective, and hindsight. Before the surrender, American statesmen were strategic bigamists: they married two brides at once, because they did not know how well either would perform and thought they might need them both so to shock Japan into surrender. No matter how one parses the relative effect of the atomic bomb and the Red Army, American strategy succeeded. In August 1945, the Red Army worked for Washington. Moreover, since the effect of the two atomic bombs, siege, and Soviet intervention overlapped so closely, one cannot determine which of them was decisive, and indeed none of them was so on their own. The point was their combination. Remove any one of them from the equation, and it would not add up.

Scholars rarely question the morality of the siege or Soviet intervention, but they routinely do challenge that of the atomic bomb. In fact, the use of the atomic bomb was neither immoral, nor the product of racism. This weapon would have been dropped on Germany had it been available in time. It was used for purposes of military instrumentality, rather than hatred or a desire to impress the USSR—it would have been applied had Americans liked Japanese, had the latter been Caucasians, or had the USSR not existed. Atomic weapons were seen as being simply big bombs, at a moment when thousands of smaller ones constantly were falling on Japan; and as a powerful solution to a difficult problem. The atomic bomb, moreover, was the means to end the war which involved the least loss of life among Americans and Japanese. Of course, the war might have been won through other means, but blockade and conventional bombing would have taken far longer and killed far more Japanese, as would invasion, which also would have slain far more Americans. In the event, conventional bombing killed more Japanese than did atomic weapons, while Soviet intervention caused almost as many. Finally, without the atomic bomb, Onishi's strategy might have worked, by forcing Americans to invade Japan, kill millions of its civilians for too many of their own soldiers, so losing their will and perhaps offering better terms than they did—in effect, killing far more Japanese in order to leave the survivors a worse government. The strategic effect of the atomic bomb came from politics, and went there. It gave Japanese decision makers a means to break military dominance over policy, by providing proof that a fight to the death would produce only the death of Japan.²¹ Thus, it led Tokyo to enable Americans to help Japanese build a better Japan.

²¹ The classic study of the ending of the Pacific war, with particular reference to decision making in Tokyo and Washington, and the use of the atomic bomb, is Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1954). The best recent studies in the English language, though using Japanese language sources, are Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995), Sadeo

Asada, "The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender: A Reconsideration", [Pacific Historical Review](#), 67/4, 11.98, pp 477-512, Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little Known Near-Disasters, and Modern Memory", [Diplomatic History](#), 19/2, 1995, pp. 227-72, Richard B. Frank, [Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire](#), (Random House, New York, 1999) and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, [Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan](#), (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2005). These scholars differ over how far the atomic bomb or Soviet intervention shaped Japan's decision to surrender. Most of them agree that military instrumentality was the key factor behind American intention , but two of these scholars offer views rejected by the rest. Hasegawa argues that hatred of Japanese drove the use of the atomic bomb. Alperovitz claims that military calculations had no effect on American decisions, which were impelled instead by Washington's hopes that the use of the atomic bomb would provide diplomatic leverage on the USSR. A useful summary of the state of the debate is H-Diplo Roundtable, [Racing the Enemy](#), 2006.