

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

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Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's book *Racing the Enemy* is a significant contribution to our understanding of the end of World War II in the Pacific. For the first time a historian who can read the American, Japanese, and Russian sources has written an account that integrates Soviet as well as American policy into an examination of the timing and terms of the Japanese surrender. Hasegawa has been helped in this not only by his command of the relevant literatures in three languages, but also by the recent appearance of new sources, especially from the Russian archives. His book will provide the benchmark for further work on the end of the war in the Pacific. Henceforth everyone writing on this topic will have to take Hasegawa's book as the point of departure.

After an initial chapter on US-Soviet-Japanese relations before and during World War II, Hasegawa focuses on the period from April to September 1945. He examines the interactions among the three powers, and in these interactions he identifies three subplots: the complex relationship of cooperation and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union; the equally complex relationship between the Soviet Union and Japan; and the struggle between the war party and the peace party in Japan over the terms of surrender. This analysis of the endgame of the war in the Pacific is an example of international history in the classic style, focusing on government leaders, their decisions, their goals, and their understanding of one another's policies.

As he writes in the Introduction (p. 5), Hasegawa's most important conclusion is that "the Soviet entry into the war played a greater role than the atomic bombs in inducing Japan to surrender." He makes this point more emphatically in the Conclusion (p. 298):

it is clear that the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki alone were not decisive in inducing Japan to surrender. Despite their destructive power, the atomic bombs were not sufficient to change the direction of Japanese diplomacy. The Soviet invasion was. Without the Soviet entry into the war, the Japanese would have continued to fight until numerous atomic bombs, a successful invasion of the home islands, or continued aerial bombardments, combined with a naval blockade, rendered them incapable of doing so.

The Soviet role in the war against Japan is sometimes dismissed as unimportant - after all, the Soviet Union entered the war on August 8, less than one week before the Japanese surrender. It is a mistake, however, to confuse the Soviet role in defeating Japan with the part it played in bringing the war to an end. Although Japan was already defeated when the Soviet Union attacked, it was not at all clear when, and on what terms, it would surrender. Hasegawa is right to underline the importance of assessing the role of the Soviet factor in the Japanese decision to surrender.

In the Spring of 1945 the Japanese government placed considerable hopes in the Soviet Union, as Hasegawa shows. The peace party looked to Moscow to mediate an agreement with the Allies, so that Japan could retain the Emperor and end the war on terms other than unconditional surrender. For the war party it was important that the Soviet Union stay out of the war so that Japan could wage a final battle with the American forces before securing what it considered an honorable peace. Moscow was thus a key factor in the calculations and hopes of both these groups, which had different conceptions of the way in which the war should be brought to an end and the terms on which Japan should conclude peace. Because these groups had divided purposes, the Japanese were unable to formulate a clear set of proposals to put to Moscow, which not without reason regarded the Japanese overtures as signs of desperation. When the Soviet Union entered the war on August 8, it destroyed the plans and hopes of both groups in the Japanese government: it punctured the peace party's strategy of enlisting Moscow as a mediator, and it put an end to the war party's hopes of keeping the Soviet Union neutral. By depriving Japan of a viable strategy—by checkmating it, in other words—the Soviet Union precipitated the Japanese surrender.

Hasegawa adds another factor: the fear on the part of at least the Prime Minister, Baron Suzuki, that the Red Army would not only take Manchuria, Korea, and southern Sakhalin, but would land troops on Hokkaido too. The headlong Soviet advance into China made the decision to surrender a matter of urgency. “Even without the atomic bombs,” Hasegawa writes, “the war most likely would have ended shortly after Soviet entry into the war—before November 1” (p. 296). In this interpretation it was the prospect of Soviet domination, rather than the fear of more death and destruction inflicted by American bombing, that persuaded Japan to surrender (see p. 237).

Hasegawa is not always so emphatic that Soviet entry was more important than the atomic bomb. He writes on p. 295: “without the twin shocks of the atomic bombs and Soviet entry into the war, the Japanese would never have accepted surrender in August.” In discussing a counterfactual scenario in which Stalin signs the Potsdam Proclamation and the Proclamation promises that Japan can have a constitutional monarchy, he concludes: “a shock was needed. It is difficult to say if the Hiroshima bomb alone was sufficient, or whether the combination of the Hiroshima bomb and Soviet entry into the war was needed to convince the emperor to accept surrender” (p. 293). In other words, even if the Japanese had been informed that the Emperor could remain and that the Soviet Union would enter the war, the shock of the atomic bomb might still have been needed to persuade the Emperor to surrender. This assigns a greater shock value to the atomic bomb than his other statements allow. He seems at times to take a position not very different from that of Robert Butow who, in his classic *Japan's Decision to Surrender*,

treated both Soviet entry and the atomic bomb as decisive factors, without making a categorical judgment about the relative weight to be assigned to each.

In this context it may be of interest to report the assessments of Japanese generals captured by the Soviet Union in Manchuria and interrogated in the weeks after the end of the war.¹ Among the questions put to the generals was what they thought had caused Japan to surrender. On August 23 Lieutenant General Uemura Mikio gave three reasons for the Japanese surrender. The first was that after the surrender of Germany Japan was on its own, with the result that the fighting spirit of the army and the people fell. The second was the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. “Of course,” he said, “Japan would not have surrendered because of the use of atomic bombs alone, but this had an effect on the fighting spirit of the people.” The third reason was that Japan could not fight against the Red Army and against the armies of the whole world. That, he said, was “the main reason that determined so quickly the surrender of Japan.” General Uemura told his Soviet interrogators that he had said to a colleague the year before that if Japan did not improve its relations with the Soviet Union it would not be able to continue the war. General Uemura told his Soviet captors that he would not judge whether it had been right to surrender, adding: “Everything the Emperor does is right.”²

General Kita Seiti, interrogated on September 16, gave two reasons for Japan's surrender. The first was the use of the atomic bomb, which caused many casualties among the population: “the Emperor, evidently, considered that it would be hard for Japan to fight on.” The second reason was Soviet entry into the war; the Emperor had decided that Japan could not conduct a war against all the great powers.³ Germany's surrender, according to General Kita, was a great blow for Japan too. Lieutenant General Hata Hikosaburo, chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, told his Soviet captors in September that he did not know in detail the reasons for Japan's surrender: “the reasons for surrender are given in the Imperial Rescript, with which I fully agree.”⁴

Major General Matsumura Tomokatsu, deputy chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, told his interrogators in September that the Japanese knew they did not have enough forces to resist the Soviet Union in Manchuria, because they needed to concentrate large forces on the territory of the metropole in order to repel an Anglo-American invasion; they did, however, have enough forces to hold Korea for at least two or three years. After victory over Britain and the United States, in which they believed, General Matsumura continued, they assumed that it would be possible to use the Korean bridgehead to attack the Red Army and regain the whole of Manchuria. “I and all the generals and officers known to me thought that we would not be defeated in that war against the allied nations and that the war would just last several more years. Surrender is acknowledgment of defeat. I think we would not have been defeated if the emperor had not given the order to lay down arms and surrender.”⁵

¹ These are taken from V.A. Zolotarev, ed., *Sovetsko-iaponskaia voina 1945 goda: istoriia voenno-politicheskogo protivoborstva dvukh derzhav v 30-40e gody*, published in the series *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia otechestvennaia* as volume 7(2), Moscow: Terra, 2000, pp. 299-337.

² For Uemura's comments see *ibid.* p. 302.

³ *Ibid.* p. 311.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 321.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 315.

In October Lieutenant General Simidzu Noritsune told his interrogators that Soviet entry into the war had come at a time when Japan was facing more and more difficulties in its war against America, Britain, and China and had put Japan in an even worse position. One of the main reasons for surrender, he said, was the use of the atomic bomb. He had heard that 350,000 people had died in Hiroshima and 150,000 in Nagasaki. “These facts indicate that America was aiming for the total destruction of the Japanese people. These barbarous methods of conducting war, these devilish deeds by America will remain for a long time in the memory of the Japanese people.”⁶

These assessments—and the reports from which they are taken—merit detailed commentary. I will not attempt that here, but several brief points can be made. First, one has to bear in mind of course the circumstances in which the generals were interrogated: they were talking to Soviet officers on whom their fate depended; they were in Manchuria and presumably not privy to what had actually transpired when the emperor decided to surrender. Second, they gave weight to the bomb as well as to Soviet entry in explaining the Japanese surrender. (And it is perhaps interesting in itself that the Soviet interrogators asked that question.) Third, Soviet entry is related in their comments to the overall strategic position that Japan found itself in after the German surrender; the Soviet attack is seen as putting Japan in an extremely difficult position, at war with all the other great powers. Fourth, the way the generals speak about the Emperor’s decision to surrender indicates how painful it was for them; Matsamura is open in his disagreement, while Uemura barely hides his own doubts.

Whichever version of Hasegawa's interpretation one takes, the Soviet factor is of crucial importance, and Hasegawa provides a fuller treatment of it than is available in any other English-language work. He was able to draw on newly declassified sources from the Russian archives, and also on the recent work of Russian historians, notably the late Boris Slavinskii, who published several books in the 1990s about Soviet-Japanese relations and provided Hasegawa with important materials. (It should be noted that the Russian sources, though very much better than we had twenty years ago, are still far from satisfactory. There is very restricted access to some key archives, and the documents that have been published, while very valuable, make one wish for access to the files from which they come.) Soviet policy is of interest for several reasons, apart from its role in bringing about the Japanese surrender. Hasegawa explores, for example, how the atomic bomb influenced Stalin’s policy on entry into the war, but there are other questions he devotes less attention to, such as the relationship between the end of the war in the Pacific and the origins of the Cold War.

Hasegawa’s analysis seems to me to be wrong on one aspect of Soviet policy.⁷ He argues that during the Potsdam Conference Stalin realized that the United States now had the bomb, that it would use it against Japan, and that the use of the bomb would lead Japan to surrender. (This latter point contrasts with Hasegawa’s view of the bomb's actual impact). Late in the conference, according to Hasegawa, Stalin advanced the date of entry into the war from August 20-25, which is what the General Staff was planning for. Stalin now had to make a desperate dash to get into

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 322-323.

⁷ I discuss this issue in detail in “Jockeying for Position in the Postwar World: Soviet Entry into the War with Japan in August 1945,” in Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, ed. *Reinterpreting the End of the Pacific War: Atomic Bombs and Soviet Entry into the War*, Stanford University Press, forthcoming.

the war as quickly as possible, in order to secure the strategic gains that had been promised to him at Yalta.

This is not implausible, but it contradicts the evidence. According to Marshal A.M. Vasilevskii, Commander-in Chief of Soviet Forces in the Far East, and to General S.M. Shtemenko, Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff, both of whom were deeply involved in planning the war against Japan, the planned date of entry was advanced, at some point in late June or the first half of July, from August 20-25 to August 11. On July 16, the day he arrived in Potsdam, Stalin telephoned Vasilevskii in the Far East to ask him to be ready to attack on August 1, but Vasilevskii replied that Soviet forces would not be ready by then and asked that August 11 date remain in effect. According to Shtemenko, Stalin gave no new orders for the war during the Potsdam Conference and evidently did not understand the significance of the atomic bomb.

On August 3 Vasilevskii recommended to Stalin that the offensive against Japanese forces in Manchuria begin on August 9-10. Stalin accepted this advice and sent an order that the attack be launched on August 10 at 18.00 hours (Moscow time) or 24.00 hours (Trans-Baikal time). On August 7, however, Stalin sent Vasilevskii a new order advancing the attack by 48 hours. Soviet forces were now to begin their offensive on August 8, not August 10, at 18.00 hours (Moscow time) or 24.00 hours (Trans-Baikal time). Stalin's order to Vasilevskii on August 7 contained no explanation of the change of date, but it seems obvious that it was the bombing of Hiroshima the day before that impelled him to speed up Soviet entry into the war.

It is clear that Stalin was eager in July and August to enter the war before Japan surrendered and to secure the concessions promised to him under the Yalta Agreement. There were two things to cause him anxiety. The first was the increasingly active Japanese approaches to Moscow, which suggested growing desperation on the part of the Japanese government to find a way out of the war. The second was Stalin's chronic suspicion that the Western allies would conclude a compromise peace with Japan, thereby thwarting Soviet aims in the Far East and allowing Japan to remain a powerful military-political force in Asia. These factors are sufficient to explain Stalin's anxiety. There is no evidence that Stalin's policy was driven by the fear that the United States would use the atomic bomb to end the war at a stroke; indeed, Shtemenko's testimony suggests otherwise.

It is of course puzzling that Stalin did not appreciate the importance of the bomb before it was used. The Soviet Union had received detailed information about the atomic project, and it is very likely that Stalin was informed just before Potsdam that the Trinity test was about to take place or had already taken place. It is not clear when he learned that the test had been successful, though he might have deduced it from Truman's remark to him on July 24 that the United States had "a weapon of unusual destructive force." There is no evidence that Stalin expected the bomb to be used against Japan. None of the memoirs or reminiscences by those present in the Soviet delegation – V.M. Molotov, Marshal G.K. Zhukov, and A. A. Gromyko—recalls any apprehension on that score. Stalin might well have assumed that the period between the first test and actual use in war would be much longer than three weeks. Even if Stalin did anticipate early use of the bomb against Japan—for which there is no evidence—there is no indication that he believed before Hiroshima that the bomb would greatly hasten Japan's surrender.

This disagreement does not affect Hasegawa's argument about the impact of Soviet entry on the Japanese decision to surrender, but it does have implications for our understanding of US-Soviet relations at the end of the war. Hiroshima came as a great shock to Stalin, and on August 20—two weeks to day after Hiroshima—he signed a decree putting the Soviet atomic project on a crash footing. In September he adopted a new policy of “tenacity and steadfastness” in order to demonstrate to the United States and Britain that the Soviet Union would not give in to intimidation. This policy was apparently designed to counter American diplomatic pressure backed by the atomic bomb.

Hasegawa's achievement in this book is not that he has settled every issue, but that he has shown how fruitful international history can be in taking a broad approach to the end of the war in the Pacific. For all that Hasegawa has done, there are many issues that deserve further investigation. For example, what was the relationship between Stalin's policies in Europe and his policies in Asia? How can US-China-Soviet relations be integrated into the US-Japan-Soviet story that Hasegawa tells? How did the US-Soviet rivalry play out in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese surrender? There is another, more general, issue that Hasegawa's book raises but does not address: 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? The United States and the Soviet Union were allies in the war against Japan, and each side kept broadly to the Yalta Agreement, in spite of the suspicions that each harbored about the other. This was not the Cold War, but what role did the endgame in the Pacific play in ushering in the Cold War? Hasegawa's book not only contributes to our understanding of the end of the war in the Pacific; it also provides a basis from which to explore more thoroughly and in greater detail the origins of the Cold War.

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