Beginning at dawn on April 1, 1945, the silhouettes of the enemy’s ships could be seen stretching for miles along the Okinawa coastline. Standing on Mount Shuri, the highest point on the island, Colonel Yahara Hiromichī watched as more than a thousand landing craft plowed toward the Hagashi beaches. Though dazzled by the sight, he was hardly taken by surprise. For three hours the Americans had pounded the landing zone with nearly forty-five thousand shells 5 inches or bigger, twenty-two thousand mortar shells, and thirty-three thousand rockets. It was the largest concentrated naval bombardment ever to cover a landing. By 0830 the soldiers and Marines were reaching their designated beaches and the defenders were offering only occasional opposing fire. The Japanese had no intention of contesting the beach landings. Instead, following plans Colonel Yahara had drawn up, the Japanese Thirty-Second Army was dug in on the southern third of Okinawa, where it prepared to use the craggy terrain and tight maneuver area to wage a campaign of attrition against the invaders.

Yahara was pleased that he had deceived the enemy into expending so much ordinance on the undefended beaches. That moment of satisfaction vanished, however, when he realized that the landing craft were going to reach the beaches without any opposition from the Japanese Air Force. Where were the planes that had been promised? They had attacked the invasion fleet for several days before the landing. Why did they fail to strike the vulnerable landing craft as they lumbered toward the shore? The Japanese soldiers who had emerged from their fortifications to watch the landing asked each other the same question. Once ashore, the Americans moved
inland toward Yomitan and Kadena Airfields, located on the western side of Okinawa. For the first time during the war, the enemy was on Japanese territory.\(^1\)

Although the Air Force was absent at the crucial moment, the Navy was determined to do its part in the defense of Okinawa. While Yahara observed the uncontested landings, the battleship \textit{Yamato} was preparing to leave the relative safety of Japan’s inland sea and steam south. The pride of the Imperial Japanese Navy when it was completed in 1941, this marvel of naval architecture bore a name that proclaimed its special place. By the late nineteenth century, the Japanese referred to themselves as the “Yamato people,” a name derived from an ethnic group in central Japan. The Yamato people were assumed to be racially pure Japanese, separate from and superior to the lesser groups that inhabited the fringes of the empire, including Okinawans, Koreans, and the Ainu of the northern islands. It would be difficult to imagine a more symbolically potent name for a ship. Almost as soon as it was ready for action, however, the \textit{Yamato} was surpassed in usefulness by the new queen of sea warfare, the aircraft carrier. Despite its sophisticated armament and damage-control systems, without air cover the \textit{Yamato} was as vulnerable as the Royal Navy’s \textit{Prince of Wales} and \textit{Repulse}—also vessels of great national pride—had been when they were sunk by Japanese aircraft at the start of the war.

\textit{Yamato}’s captain knew that he was taking his crew on a mission with virtually no chance of success. In fact, the ship left port with only enough fuel for a one-way run to Okinawa. This suicide run was the result of a brief exchange between Admiral Oikawa Koshiro and Emperor Hirohito. During this encounter, Oikawa, the chief of staff of the Imperial Japanese Navy and the emperor’s advisor, explained the plans for using suicide boats and planes to attack the invasion force assembled off Okinawa. Puzzled, the emperor had asked, “But where is the navy? Are there no more ships? No surface forces?” It was a question and a command. With no more than the verbal equivalent of a raised eyebrow, \textit{Yamato} was doomed. Stung by the emperor’s rebuke and unwilling to subject the Navy to ridicule for protecting its most famous warship, Oikawa ordered \textit{Yamato} to sea.\(^2\)

On April 5, as the \textit{Yamato} and its nine escort ships readied for their journey, Prime Minister Koiso Kuniaki formally announced his resignation. Koiso’s term had been marked by one failure after another. In late 1944, he declared that the battle for Leyte in the southern Philippines would be the decisive engagement of the war, comparing it to the legendary battle
of Tennozan (1582) in which the great lord Hideyoshi Toyotomi overcame heavy odds to emerge victorious and eventually unify the country. The Japanese Army poured irreplaceable resources into the campaign but had failed to turn back the Americans. In late December, the Army, without informing Koiso, stopped reinforcing Leyte and accepted its loss. That embarrassment was followed by the loss of Iwo Jima in February 1945 and the failure of Koiso’s diplomatic effort to end the war in China on favorable terms. Now the Americans had successfully landed on Japanese territory. That was the last straw.

On April 6, a day after Koiso’s resignation, the jushin, the six former prime ministers, met to select a suitable replacement. They settled on retired Admiral Suzuki Kantaro, a seventy-eight-year-old hero of Japan’s first war with China and the Russo-Japanese War. Suzuki had other qualities that made him seem ideally matched to this perilous moment in Japanese history. He had remained above the ideological struggles that had riven military politics in the 1930s. In fact, he had seemed so dangerously apolitical that he was targeted for assassination by Army zealots; he still had shrapnel lodged in his body from the botched attempt on his life. Suzuki had also served as grand chamberlain to the emperor, and the two men remained on good terms.
The change in leadership in Tokyo convinced some diplomats in the United States that Japan was signaling its intent to end the war. They were mistaken. The *jushin* had not chosen Suzuki to redirect Japanese policy or seek an immediate exit from the war. Like the military, and Hirohito, Suzuki believed that Japan would need to achieve a major victory on the battlefield before negotiating an end to the war. The main figures in Suzuki’s new cabinet shared his view, with the exception of Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori. Togo believed that Japan needed to end the war promptly. He agreed to serve in the cabinet on the provision that Suzuki would commission a thorough assessment of Japan’s capacity to wage war. Suzuki agreed, but more time would be lost before the report was ready for the prime minister’s review.

With the Americans ashore on Okinawa and a new prime minister at the helm, Japan had reached a turning point and refused to turn. Instead, the country continued its path toward disaster, with the military urging the nation to endure further sacrifice until they were rescued by the hoped-for victory. On April 5, the day Koiso submitted his resignation, the Soviet foreign minister informed the Japanese ambassador that the Soviet Union would not renew its Neutrality Pact with Japan when the agreement came up for reconsideration in April 1946. The treaty would remain in force for another year, but the announcement sounded an ominous note for the Japanese. Two days later, on April 7, the same day Suzuki took up his new duties, the *Yamato* met its end in the East China Sea south of Kyushu, Japan’s southernmost main island. American torpedo planes swarmed over the *Yamato* and slammed ten torpedoes and five bombs into the disabled ship. Only 23 officers and 233 sailors out of a crew of 3,332 survived. Many of those on board defied orders to abandon ship. Those who obeyed had to throw themselves to the mercy of the sea; *Yamato* carried no lifeboats or rafts.

On April 8, the day after *Yamato* went under, the Imperial General Headquarters issued orders for its revised plan for the defense of the homeland. Code-named *Ketsu-Go*, meaning “decisive operation,” the plan divided the home islands into seven operational districts in which the decisive battles might be fought. For example, *Ketsu-Go No. 1* covered the defense of Hokkaido, the northernmost home island. *Ketsu-Go No. 3* was for the Kanto Plain, the area that included Tokyo. The *Ketsu-Go* operations integrated efforts by the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and were entirely defensive. They required the complete mobilization of the Japanese population and
relied on the deployment of suicide weapons. The commander of the First General Army explained that “this was not just a simple defense, but the final, glorious struggle to preserve the nation, one in which the lives of men were of no consideration—men and officers would attack relentlessly over the bodies of their fallen comrades until the invaders were destroyed.”

One week after Koiso announced his resignation, Japan’s main adversary also changed leaders. On the afternoon of April 12, Vice President Harry S. Truman was settling down for a bourbon and casual conversation in the chambers of House Speaker Sam Rayburn when he was abruptly summoned to the White House. As he entered the residence on the second floor, Eleanor Roosevelt met him and, placing an arm on Truman’s shoulder, said, “Harry, the president is dead.” The First Lady’s calm pronouncement did not come as a complete surprise to Truman. In late February, Truman had been shocked by Roosevelt’s gaunt appearance after the president returned from the Yalta summit conference. Like others who were concerned by the

clear signs of FDR’s declining health, he allowed himself to hope that a few weeks at the spa in Warm Springs, Georgia, would restore the president’s vitality. From that point on, however, the possibility that he might suddenly be called to the presidency was never far from Truman’s mind.5

During the next several days, Truman was sworn in, attended the Washington memorial service for the fallen president and his burial in Hyde Park, met with his predecessor’s cabinet, had several briefings on the global military situation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and moved his family into Blair House, which would be their temporary residence until Eleanor Roosevelt moved out of the White House. In private, Truman admitted to being overwhelmed by the immensity of the responsibilities he had assumed. Publicly, however, the new president conducted himself with a calm dignity that reassured an anxious citizenry. On April 16, he went to Capitol Hill to address a joint session of Congress. Truman’s main purpose was to confirm that he intended to continue Roosevelt’s policies on the home front and on the global stage. Specifically, the United States would go forward in hosting the charter meeting of the United Nations, which was scheduled for April 25 in San Francisco. Truman also pledged to bring the wars against Germany and Japan to successful conclusions, rejecting any thought of compromise or, as he put it, a “partial victory.” He declared, “Our demand has been, and it remains—Unconditional Surrender! We will not traffic with the breakers of the peace on the terms of the peace.”6

Press reports of Truman’s brief speech noted that the congressional audience responded with enthusiastic applause. In pledging to seek the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan, Truman had committed himself to the policy that FDR had announced two years earlier. Truman now not only endorsed the policy, he concisely defined it. The Allies would not negotiate surrender terms. The Germans and Japanese would have to lay down their arms and entrust their fates to the mercy of the Allies.

The policy seemed simple enough to explain; its implications, however, were not. FDR had first announced the policy of unconditional surrender when he and Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave a joint press conference on January 24, 1943, the last day of their meeting at Casablanca. At that stage of the war, the Americans had established themselves in North Africa and, in conjunction with British forces, were well on their way to eliminating the German presence on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Partway into the press conference Roosevelt introduced the idea of unconditional surrender with remarks that seemed almost off the cuff. Noting that he and
Churchill had determined that peace would never return without the “total elimination of German and Japanese war power,” he added that some of the “Britishers” among those gathered at a press conference might not be familiar with the story behind a famous American general:

His name was Ulysses Simpson Grant, but in my, and the Prime Minister’s, early days he was called “Unconditional Surrender” Grant. The elimination of German, Japanese, and Italian war power means the unconditional surrender by Germany, Italy, and Japan. That means a reasonable assurance of future world peace. It does not mean the destruction of the population of Germany, Italy, or Japan, but it does mean the destruction of the philosophies in those countries which are based on conquest and the subjugation of other people.7

In subsequent press conferences and reminiscences, both leaders did much to obscure the origins of the policy. At various times, including his original announcement at Casablanca, FDR breezily claimed that the phrase had just popped into his head before his press conference with Churchill. On another occasion, he recounted a dialogue between Grant and Confederate General Robert E. Lee about surrender.

None of it was true. Roosevelt had given the matter considerable thought before the Casablanca Conference. In May 1942, FDR informally approved the recommendation made by the postwar advisory committee he had established. FDR, like the members of the committee, believed that one cause of World War II was that World War I had ended in circumstances that allowed the Germans to think that they had not actually been defeated on the battlefield. Unconditional surrender, which would lay the country open to military occupation, would eliminate any chance that Germans would misinterpret the results of the war this time. The policy also meshed with Roosevelt’s oft-repeated belief that the only way to ensure that the Axis powers would not disrupt the peace again would be to root out the sources of fascist ideologies; that meant going beyond punishing individual leaders and transforming societies.

Not surprisingly, domestic politics also figured in Roosevelt’s approval of the policy. Roosevelt, who had been President Woodrow Wilson’s assistant secretary of the Navy, remembered that Republicans had pilloried Wilson for rejecting their demands for Germany’s unconditional surrender in favor of an armistice based on the Fourteen Points. Pursuit of unconditional surrender would, he hoped, inoculate FDR against charges that he was repeating his predecessor’s mistakes.8
Roosevelt did not publicly announce his commitment to the policy until Casablanca, almost eight months later. By that time, military-diplomatic circumstances and political considerations turned the president’s impulse to punish the aggressors into a concrete policy. On January 7, 1943, before leaving for Casablanca, FDR informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he was going to speak to Churchill about the advisability of informing Joseph Stalin that the Allies would not stop until they reached Berlin and “that their only terms would be unconditional surrender.”\(^9\) Roosevelt saw it as way of shoring up the alliance with the Soviet Union. In early 1942, the president had carelessly promised the Russians that the U.S. would open a second front in Europe by the end of the year. When that proved impossible, Roosevelt pushed hard for an invasion of North Africa so that Americans would be fighting Germans somewhere before the year was out. That offensive did little to satisfy Stalin. Therefore, FDR sought to assure the Soviet leader that the Western allies would see the war through to the end and not make a separate peace with Germany.

Unconditional surrender would also ease concerns on the home front about Roosevelt’s willingness to negotiate with the dictators who had started the war. Those concerns were aroused when the Americans negotiated with the collaborationist Vichy French government in North Africa in order to minimize the French military’s opposition to the U.S. invasion. The compromise, which was agreed to after brief but sharp fighting, left Admiral Jean Darlan, the commander-in-chief of Vichy French forces, in control of French North Africa. Many of FDR’s backers saw this arrangement as a betrayal of the basic goals of the war. What was next, some in Congress asked, a deal with German Reichsmarschall Herman Goering or Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke?\(^10\) Roosevelt had been stung by these criticisms. His announcement of unconditional surrender was meant to assure voters that the Darlan deal was a one-off arrangement. There would be no compromises with the leaders of the Axis powers.

Like FDR, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had more than one reason for embracing the policy. They worried, with good reason, about the American public’s willingness to endure the sacrifices demanded by a war fought on multiple fronts. Unconditional surrender, they hoped, would serve as a rallying cry, a statement of objectives that the public could understand and support. Moreover, the Joint Chiefs, like FDR, also believed that a lasting peace required the complete destruction of German and Japanese military power.\(^11\)
FDR discussed the subject with Churchill on the second day of the summit at Casablanca on January 18. When he sent the proposal on to the cabinet, Churchill explained that the policy was being applied only to Germany and Japan because there was some hope that by omitting Italy, the Allies would encourage the downfall of the government in Rome and its replacement with one eager to surrender. Churchill’s cabinet approved the announcement of unconditional surrender but rejected the argument about Italy. Churchill subsequently added Italy to the press communiqué that he and FDR drafted but, for reasons that remain unclear, never released. Instead, Roosevelt announced the policy in the press conference quoted earlier. Toward the end of the conference, Churchill asked the press to convey to the world the unity that characterized Allied policymaking and to assure their audiences that the United Nations would prosecute the war “until we have procured the unconditional surrender of the criminal forces who plunged the world into storm and ruin.”

Churchill later claimed that he had not discussed the policy of unconditional surrender with Roosevelt and that he had been surprised when the president announced it at the press conference. That clearly was not the case. Churchill also subsequently explained, more plausibly, that once Italy was included in the statement, he lost enthusiasm for it. There is, however, no record of his having objected to the policy at the time. For his part, Roosevelt muddied the waters by his references to Grant and Lee. Roosevelt’s adoption of the term and the policy had nothing to do with “Unconditional Surrender” Grant. His subsequent references were fabrications but nevertheless succeeded in their main purpose—clearly communicating to the American people that, like Grant, the Allies were resolutely determined to compel the enemy’s total defeat, without compromise, and despite the costs.

Influential columnist Walter Lippmann agreed that Roosevelt’s statement committed the Allies to pursue total victory. Lippmann also recognized the significance of the doctrine for relations with the Soviet Union. He viewed Roosevelt’s statement as a renunciation of the “super-duper realists” who wanted to make the Darlan deal a model for diplomacy with Germany and its satellites because they feared the growing power of the Soviet Union in Europe. Lippmann said jeeringly that the “amateur Machiavellis in their sheltered bureaus who fondly imagine they are both military strategists and guardians against Communism have had their little fling at statesmanship.”
Roosevelt’s pronouncement had made it abundantly clear that there would be no “tricky deals” with the Germans or the Japanese.\textsuperscript{14}

Roosevelt held to that approach publicly and privately over the next two years. In November 1943, the president, Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek affirmed their support for the unconditional surrender of Japan after their meeting in Cairo. The Cairo Declaration, as the statement was called, promised to strip Japan of the territories it had gained through imperialist expansion, specifically Formosa (Taiwan), Korea, the Pacific islands acquired during World War I, and Manchuria, as well as “all other territories taken by violence and greed.” Toward those ends, the three leaders pledged themselves to “persevere in the serious and prolonged operations necessary to procure the unconditional surrender of Japan.”\textsuperscript{15}

At various times, Churchill and some presidential advisors urged FDR to consider softening the demand. During one meeting with Roosevelt at the Yalta summit conference in February 1945, Churchill raised the possibility of shortening the war with Japan by delivering a four-power ultimatum demanding Japan’s surrender coupled with an offer to mitigate the severity of unconditional surrender should the Japanese accept. Churchill left it to the Americans to decide what such mitigation might entail, but it appears that he had in mind some reassurance on the status of the emperor.\textsuperscript{16} The prime minister emphasized the thousands of lives that would be saved if Japan capitulated, but he had additional reasons for seeking an early end to the war. Chief among these was his concern that Britain would be left alone facing Russia in Europe were the United States to redirect its resources to the Pacific following Germany’s defeat. Roosevelt responded to Churchill’s suggestion by saying that it might be worthwhile to broach the subject with Stalin, but he doubted the ultimatum would have much effect on the Japanese until they began to feel the full weight of American air power in their country.

The president was determined to make Germany and Japan suffer the consequences of their aggression. He made his last public statement on the subject in his March 1, 1945, report to Congress following Yalta. After repeating his assurance that unconditional surrender did not mean the enslavement of the German people, Roosevelt explained what it did mean. Germany would be occupied by the Allies, Nazi laws repealed, and Nazis put on trial and punished severely. The occupation would also eliminate militaristic influences in German society, dismantle the German military, and abolish the General Staff. Germany would pay reparations in kind to
the countries it invaded, but, he added, “We don’t want the German people to starve or to become a burden on the rest of the world.”

Later in the speech, Roosevelt spoke about plans for Japan. “The defeat of Germany will not mean the end of the war against Japan. On the contrary, we must be prepared for a long and costly struggle in the Pacific.” Nevertheless, he added, “the unconditional surrender of Japan is as essential as the defeat of Germany. I say that advisedly, with the thought in mind that that is especially true if our plans for world peace are to succeed. For Japanese militarism must be wiped out as thoroughly as German militarism.” That was the last presidential statement on the topic until April 16, when Truman spoke to Congress.

Truman soon realized that Roosevelt had not indulged in hyperbole when he spoke of the need to remind himself, and the American people, that there were two wars being fought. FDR and the Joint Chiefs had long worried that the American public would balk at the sacrifices required to defeat both Germany and Japan. They were also concerned that the end of war in Europe would create a massive letdown in public support for the war against Japan. Those worries intensified as the defeat of Germany seemed only a matter of weeks away. After more than three years of war, many on the home front were growing more vocal in resisting government controls and questioning the fairness of the sacrifices they were being asked to make in support of the war effort. Labor unions broke their fragile truce with business more frequently; Congress vehemently rejected the administration’s efforts to regiment the workforce through a national service law, known as the work-or-fight bill; and business leaders and consumer organizations called more insistently for the lifting of restraints on domestic production.

A number of developments fed the growing expectation of a dramatic shift toward production for the home front, referred to as “economic re-conversion.” On April 2, James Byrnes, the director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion (OWMR), announced that he was stepping down from the post he had held since May 1943. The resignation of Roosevelt’s “assistant president for the home front”—as he was called—came shortly after his office issued a quarterly report that contained an obligatory warning that after Germany’s surrender, the stepped-up campaign against Japan would continue to place great demands on the economy. Nevertheless, most observers, including Byrnes’s former colleagues in the Senate, saw the report as signaling greater emphasis on re-conversion. Byrnes’s resignation,
which they viewed as indicating a new direction for OWMR, with greater emphasis on the “R,” reinforced those perceptions.18

The civilian and uniformed inhabitants of the recently completed Pentagon resisted these calls and defended military prerogatives against encroachment from Congress, business, and labor. Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson epitomized the view shared by most military officials that there could be no let-up in military production until both wars were over. A corporate lawyer in civilian life, Patterson—dubbed “Washington’s Number One Warlord” by Time magazine—proved more than a match for the advocates of reconversion. Disciplined and austere, he followed in the tradition of government service established by his patron, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and proved to be an even more dogged bureaucratic warrior. “Bob Patterson has a one-track mind,” complained Solid Fuels Director Harold Ickes, “and that one track is just a short spur.”19

When Truman moved into the Oval Office, he found himself squarely in the middle of the battle between the Pentagon and the civilian advocates of reconversion. That conflict intensified on May 8 when the shooting war in Europe ended abruptly and Hitler’s successors surrendered unconditionally to Allied forces in a schoolhouse in Reims, Germany. As the Allies maneuvered their forces into the occupation zones agreed upon at Yalta, the American commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower simultaneously initiated the first stages of a massive redeployment that, according to plans, would move three million GIs from Europe to the Pacific in time to finish the war against Japan. The redeployment—described by General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, as the “biggest administrative task in history”—began with a shuffling of troops into different categories based on their Adjusted Rating Scores, a number determined by several variables, including length of service, combat experience, and military valor. Men with scores over 85 points would move into divisions designated for shipment home and discharge from the service. Those with scores near 85 would move into divisions assigned to occupation duty in Europe. The remainder, excluding engineers and construction troops, would be assigned to divisions designated for service against Japan, following a thirty-day furlough in the United States. Engineers and construction units would head straight for the Pacific with no furlough.

Redeployment was necessary to carry out the planned invasion of Japan, which Marshall, for one, believed was the only way to compel Japan’s unconditional surrender. Demobilization, the discharge of high-point men,
was enacted to reward those GIs whose prior service exempted them from the final campaign against Japan. The program was also conceived of as a dividend payable to the home front once Germany was defeated. Marshall hoped that the orderly release of GIs would demonstrate that the Army was not insensitive to the public’s desire to bring the boys home. To devise a system deemed fair by those involved, the Army took the unusual step of using modern survey techniques, polling GIs for their views on the subject. In effect, as one historian has noted, the Army took the extraordinary step of treating its soldiers like a political constituency.

GIs overwhelmingly gave their approval to the process when it was unveiled. They continued to support the criteria used for awarding the Adjusted Rating Score when it was announced in May. They were less pleased, however, with what they perceived as the sluggish pace of discharges and seemingly haphazard availability of ships to carry them home. These complaints were nothing compared with the uproar at home. To Marshall’s dismay, and the surprise of the officers administering demobilization and redeployment, the announcement of the critical score for discharge touched off a public clamor to bring the boys home as speedily as possible. Feeling the heat from constituents, congressmen turned to the Army for answers. The Army urged patience and, at the risk of reversing its priorities, put more resources into demobilization than it originally planned. That, in turn, created a backlog in redeployment, which was already snarled by shipping shortages, miscommunication between transportation officers in Europe and the U.S., and the extraordinarily complicated process of sorting troops into their new units.

Following Germany’s surrender, the seemingly distinct programs of reconversion, redeployment, and demobilization all became intertwined in the public debate. In many economic sectors, reconversion depended on the release of skilled workers from military service. That led to calls for modifications in the discharge system that the Army had painstak- ingly devised. Advocates of reconversion also questioned the large number of troops envisioned for the one-front war against Japan, as well as the enormous quantities of supplies they needed to carry out their mission. Legislators, business leaders, organized labor, and public commentators all complained that the military, the Army in particular, was devouring the materials and manpower needed to begin the process of reconversion to a peacetime economy. Lingering resentment toward the military over the “work-or-fight” bill and the Army’s use of inexperienced eighteen-year-olds
in battle, among other issues, gave the debates over manpower and materials a sharper edge than they might otherwise have had. When the national service bill went down to defeat, Alan Drury, the Senate correspondent for United Press, gleefully wrote in his journal, “The handwriting is on the wall for the roll-top regulars of the Pentagon and Navy Building and as much as they hate it, their little fling at ruling America is entering its final stages with the war.”

Despite the torrent of criticism, Undersecretary Patterson held firm in his commitment to the existing discharge system and the Army’s manpower and materials requirements for the final campaign against Japan. General Marshall tried to defend the Army’s position in closed sessions with legislators, but the Chief of Staff was finding the experience increasingly disagreeable, especially when he was able to read about his supposedly classified deliberations in the next day’s papers. For the time being, the armed services could count on Truman’s support in the debate over reconversion. In his role as chair of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, Truman had acted as a vigilant custodian of the taxpayer’s money. As president, he was willing to defer to the military while he attended to other pressing business.

As senator and during his brief tenure as vice president, Truman acquired valuable experience dealing with the domestic side of national politics. He had little experience in foreign affairs, however, and virtually no insight into Roosevelt’s policies beyond what he could glean from FDR’s public statements. When he became president, Truman pledged himself to carrying out Roosevelt’s policies. During his first weeks in office, he struggled to learn what exactly those policies were. As his first speech to Congress showed, Truman believed that unconditional surrender and leadership in the United Nations Organization headed the list. Beyond that, things got murky. Roosevelt’s reliance on special representatives operating outside of the State Department bureaucracy and his penchant for acting as his own secretary of state left Truman with little institutional support. He would have to rely on Roosevelt’s emissaries for assistance. There was no guarantee, however, that they would agree with each other. Nor was it clear that even they had more than a fragmentary understanding of their former boss’s policies.

From the moment he took office, relations with the Soviet Union topped Truman’s list of concerns. The Soviet-American alliance began in 1941 as a marriage of convenience, and three years of being allies had done little to
change the contractual nature of the relationship. As early as summer 1941, Roosevelt had recognized that the United States would have to rely on Soviet assistance to defeat Germany in a reasonable amount of time. War plans drafted in the U.S. estimated that the Americans would need to mobilize more than two hundred divisions of approximately fifteen thousand men if Germany defeated Russia. The Soviets held and the Americans eventually mobilized only ninety-one divisions. Before the Western allies landed in France on June 6, 1944, the Red Army was responsible for 90 percent of German casualties. After June 6, German casualties on the eastern front exceeded by two hundred thousand the total number of German troops deployed against General Eisenhower’s forces. The political settlement in the areas occupied by the Soviets would reflect the harsh reality contained in those stark numbers.

Roosevelt had understood that Stalin would not leave Soviet security to the untried methods of the new United Nations. He appears, however, to have hoped that Stalin would refrain from imposing on Eastern Europe a Soviet-styled police state. Rather than rely on Stalin’s nonexistent generosity, Roosevelt employed a carrot-and-stick approach, dangling the prospect of postwar reconstruction aid with one hand and withholding information on the Anglo-American atomic bomb project with the other, to make Stalin more cooperative. Finally, FDR had hoped that if the Americans and British made it plain that they would not challenge Soviet suzerainty in Eastern Europe, Stalin would oblige them by providing a fig leaf of democratic respectability on the governments in that area. Beyond that, there was not much that could be done. Confrontation was out of the question, especially while Germany and Japan remained unbeaten.

Unfortunately, Roosevelt’s public depiction of American relations with the Soviet Union differed significantly from his private management of those relations. Fearing a return of isolationism after the war, FDR resorted to idealistic rhetoric to hide the spheres of influence agreements concluded at Yalta. For example, at Yalta the Allies agreed to an ambiguously worded Declaration on Liberated Europe that committed them to fostering democratic governments in the areas freed from Nazi tyranny. The declaration contained no enforcement mechanism, however, and its use of terms like “democracy,” which meant different things to the Americans and Soviets, made it unenforceable in any case. The Yalta agreement on Poland in which Stalin pledged to create a representative provisional government was not much better.
The Yalta arrangements presented Truman with the difficult task of reconciling Roosevelt's lofty depiction of them with their realpolitik underpinnings. The Big Three's agreements on Asia posed even more of a challenge because they remained secret to preserve the fiction of Soviet neutrality in the Pacific War. In the Agreement Regarding Japan, Roosevelt welcomed Stalin's pledge to enter the Pacific War within three months of Germany's surrender and his pledge to recognize only the Chinese Nationalist (Guomindang) government of Chiang Kai-shek. As compensation, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed that the Soviets would acquire a share in the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian Railways, the southern half of Sakhalin island, the Kurile Islands, and leases to the port of Dairen and naval base at Port Arthur on the Liaotung Peninsula. By conceding to Stalin what he could take by force, Roosevelt hoped to avoid a scramble for influence in Asia after the war. The Soviet leader might try to seize more territory in northeast Asia after Japan's defeat, but in doing so he would lose international approval for the substantial gains he had made at Yalta. Roosevelt gambled that Stalin would not take that risk; with American forces scattered throughout the Pacific and with the first stage of the invasion of Japan half a year off, he saw few alternatives.

Roosevelt lived long enough after Yalta to see that as the Red Army moved into Eastern and Central Europe, Stalin cared little about pleasing the Allies. The Soviets did not impose their will uniformly in the areas they liberated from the Germans, but in crucial areas, notably Poland, they displayed a disregard for the letter of the Yalta agreements that proved difficult to ignore. Shortly before his death, FDR cabled Churchill with the assurance that military circumstances would soon permit the Americans and British to be tougher on the Soviet Union than "has heretofore appeared advantageous to the war effort."  

It was now up to Truman to decide how to turn an impulse to be tough with the Russians into a workable policy. He quickly learned that there was no shortage of advisors willing to encourage him to be firmer with Stalin. There were fewer, however, who could say how that firmness would yield positive results. Among those advocating a tougher approach to the Russians was the American ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman. Immediately after FDR's death, Harriman had rushed to Washington to warn Truman that he faced a "barbarian invasion of Europe" unless the United States forcefully opposed Stalin's flouting of the Yalta agreements in Eastern Europe. Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal welcomed Harriman's summons to action. Forrestal, an amateur boxer in his youth, sported a twice-broken
nose that was emblematic of the combative demeanor he had carried into adulthood. Agreeing with Harriman, Forrestal advised Truman that if the Russians remained unyielding on Eastern Europe, “we had better have a showdown with them now, rather than later.” Also pushing for stiffening of American policy were Admiral William D. Leahy, Roosevelt’s and now Truman’s representative on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Major General John Deane, the head of the American military mission to Moscow.\textsuperscript{26}

The new president took his first step in that direction during the second of two White House meetings with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov on April 22–23. The Soviet official stopped in Washington on his way to San Francisco for the United Nations conference to pay his respects and take the measure of the new president. During their second meeting, Truman lambasted Soviet conduct in Eastern Europe and in undiplomatic language told Molotov that he would not tolerate what he viewed as blatant disregard for the agreements made at Yalta. That sharp exchange gave advocates of a firmer policy toward the Soviet Union a momentary thrill, but Truman quickly realized that the United States could not risk a break with the Soviets. Truman needed Russian cooperation to launch the United Nations and, as Secretary of War Stimson and Chief of Staff Marshall reminded him, they were counting on the Red Army to defeat the Japanese Army in Manchuria. Truman, like FDR before him, found himself in the uncomfortable position of needing Stalin to provide the appearance of cooperation in Eastern Europe.

Truman began to recognize that the Yalta agreements were susceptible to varying interpretations. In one instance, he referred to them as “purported to have been made at Yalta.”\textsuperscript{27} Later he complained that every time he read the agreements, he “found new meanings in them.”\textsuperscript{28} In mid-May, Truman dispatched Roosevelt’s confidant and personal envoy Harry Hopkins to Moscow to meet directly with Stalin. Truman wanted to show Stalin that American policy had not changed after Roosevelt’s death. For his part, Stalin was willing to give Truman the meager concessions he desired. Hopkins returned with the Soviet leader’s promise to reorganize the Polish government and a compromise on voting rights in the United Nations that allowed the stalemated conference in San Francisco to move forward. Having papered over his differences with Stalin, Truman agreed to meet the Soviet leader and Churchill in July in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam.

While Truman was preparing to dispatch Hopkins to Moscow, others in his administration sought to determine what, if anything, could be
done to prevent Soviet domination in northeast Asia once the Red Army rolled into Manchuria. Early in April, the head of the Navy’s Strategic Plans Division, Vice Admiral Charles Cooke, recommended that the United States reconsider how its strategy for the defeat of Japan would affect the postwar balance of power in East Asia. “Savvy,” as Cooke was called, worried about the vacuum that would be created by the wholesale destruction of Japanese power. He advised Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King that the best way to end the war would be with a “strengthened CHINA and a JAPAN thrown back to her homeland, incapable of aggression, on the one hand, but, at the same time not completely eliminated as a party to the stabilization in EASTERN ASIA and the WESTERN PACIFIC.”

Navy Secretary Forrestal took a similar view during a meeting of the Committee of Three (the secretaries of state, the Navy, and war) on May 1. “What is our policy on Russian influence in the Far East?” he asked. “Do we desire a counterweight to that influence? And should it be China, or should it be Japan?” Ten days later, Cooke and Deputy Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Richard Edwards met with Ambassador Harriman and Forrestal to discuss the potential problems of Russia’s entry into the war against Japan.

Forrestal feared that Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe offered a preview of what the Americans could expect in Asia. Harriman suggested that the situation might even be worse than Forrestal imagined, warning that “there could be no illusion as to a ‘free China’ once the Russians got in, that the two or three hundred millions in that country would march when the Kremlin ordered.” Admirals Cooke and Richards thought that China could be spared that fate if the United States reevaluated the assumptions on which its strategy was based. According to Cooke, the U.S. no longer depended on the Soviet Union’s early entry into the war against Japan. It followed that ending the war before the Russians came in would facilitate the achievement of Cooke’s previously stated objective of creating a strong China while leaving Japan reduced in power but still able to contribute to the “stabilization” of the region. The challenge, of course, was finding a way to end the war before the Russians came in. “The best thing for us,” Richards added, “would be if the Japanese would agree to a basis of unconditional surrender which still left them in their own minds some face and honor.” Richards did not explain how a surrender that preserved the Japanese military’s sense of honor could still be an “unconditional” surrender. It is telling that no one at the meeting pushed him to do so.
Others in the administration were thinking along similar lines. In fact, the prospect of Soviet entry into the war so troubled Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew that he was losing sleep over it. One morning in mid-May he rose early and jotted down his concerns in a memorandum on Soviet expansionism. Regarding East Asia, he wrote, “Once Russia is in the war against Japan, then Mongolia, and Korea will gradually slip into Russia’s orbit, to be followed in due course by China and eventually Japan.” A career diplomat, Grew had spent most of his professional life implementing policy and transmitting information to policymakers. With the secretary of state away at the UN conference in San Francisco, he suddenly found himself in the position of being able to initiate policy. On May 12, four days after Germany’s unconditional surrender, Grew sent the secretaries of war and the Navy a memo asking their views on the political consequences of the Soviet Union’s entry into the war against Japan. Grew worried that the Yalta Far Eastern agreements practically invited Soviet mischief in the region. Was there something the Americans could do about that? Did they still require Russian assistance against the Japanese? If so, were they in a better position now than they had been in February to modify the Far Eastern agreements and bring them more into line with American postwar objectives?

The son of a wealthy Boston manufacturer, Grew had entered the foreign service in 1904 and risen steadily up the career ladder to hold several ambassadorial posts including ambassador to Japan in 1932. When FDR became president in 1933, he kept his Groton and Harvard classmate in Tokyo. Grew served there until the war broke out and returned to the United States in an exchange of diplomats in 1942. Despite their shared experiences as products of two of America’s most elite schools, and as beneficiaries of family wealth accumulated over several generations, FDR and Grew did not see eye to eye on Japan. Their views on the Soviet Union diverged even more.

In the years before Pearl Harbor, Grew had placed his faith in the good intentions of what he termed the Japanese “moderates,” the civilian leaders who had guided Japan through a decade of cooperative diplomacy with the U.S. in the 1920s. As the Japanese government came under the sway of radical militarians, Grew continued to hope that with the aid of the young emperor Hirohito they would eventually regain control and return Japan to a more peaceful role in international affairs. Grew’s analysis of Japanese politics suffered from his reliance on Japan’s cosmopolitan elite for insights into government activity. The group he and others termed “moderates” were staunchly conservative, even reactionary, in domestic politics. Like the
militarists, they also sought Japanese dominance of East Asia, although they hoped it could be accomplished less violently and without antagonizing the United States.

After Japan invaded China in 1937, the men who Grew trusted to steer Japan on a saner course lost any ability to influence policy. Nevertheless, in late 1941, not long before Pearl Harbor, Grew continued to believe that a leaders’ meeting between Roosevelt and the Japanese prime minister would avert a final break in relations. Roosevelt disagreed. Grew’s perspective was bilateral and constricted by his residence in Tokyo. Roosevelt’s was global, considering the interests of allies and potential allies. Grew’s desire to avoid conflict was admirable, but Roosevelt had to consider how an eleventh-hour compromise would look to the Chinese or, even more importantly, the Russians, who were reeling from the invasion Hitler launched against them in June 1941. American intelligence showing Japanese preparations for further military advances reinforced Roosevelt’s perception of Japanese duplicity and strengthened his inclination to stand with the nations opposing the Axis powers. There would be no leaders’ meeting.  

Nearly four years later, Grew believed that he would once more be able to prevent a catastrophe by restraining Soviet advances in Asia. The War Department promptly threw cold water on those aspirations. On May 21, Secretary of War Henry Stimson submitted to Grew an analysis prepared by the Army’s Strategy and Policy Group (S&P) and approved by General Marshall. The Army’s paper concluded that the United States still needed the Red Army to tie down Japanese forces in Manchuria. Moreover, according to the S&P, the Yalta agreements gave to the Russians nothing they could not take by force. Given those circumstances, the Army concluded that there was little point in pressing for a “reconsideration” of the existing agreements, although Grew was welcome to try. After consulting with Admiral King, Forrestal sent Grew a memorandum supporting the Army’s view. Grew’s plan to limit Soviet expansion fell victim to military necessity.

But what if the war ended before the Russians entered? The Yalta agreements called for Soviet entry into the Pacific War three months after Germany’s surrender. Grew wondered whether it would be possible to induce Japan’s surrender before then. Its situation was militarily hopeless. Its transportation and productive capacity were collapsing under the weight of massively destructive B-29 attacks that pummeled Japanese cities with impunity. American submarines had annihilated Japan’s merchant fleet and isolated the home islands from the empire’s resource areas. Surely
there were leaders in Tokyo who understood the hopelessness of their position. Grew believed there were. He saw the appointment of Suzuki as prime minister as an indication that the tide was turning in Tokyo in favor of the moderates.

He believed, however, that the peace faction in Japan would not succeed unless the United States abandoned its policy of unconditional surrender. The American refusal to discuss the terms created an insuperable obstacle for the moderates. They could not argue for peace if it meant leaving the fate of the emperor and the imperial institution to the mercy of the victors. Grew felt sure that would be unacceptable to all Japanese, not just the militarists. Therefore, the Japanese would need some guarantee that they could preserve the throne and shield Hirohito from punishment before they could consider ending the war. Grew’s ten years in Japan had convinced him that the emperor was a peace-loving monarch who regretted the war but had no influence over its direction. The emperor’s power was largely symbolic, according to Grew. Paradoxically, the moderates needed imperial approval
to succeed. That would not be forthcoming without the desired guarantees from the Americans on the inviolability of the imperial institution.

Grew believed that compromise with Japan offered so many benefits it would amount to diplomatic malpractice to not pursue a negotiated settlement. The most obvious would be the tens of thousands of American lives saved by avoiding an invasion of Japan’s home islands. However, Grew could not have separated that outcome from its corollary; an early end to the war would void the Yalta agreements and withdraw American approval for Russian encroachment in northeast Asia. Despite the rebuff from the Army, Grew pushed ahead with his efforts to induce Japan’s surrender on conditions less severe than unconditional.

On May 27, American newspapers reported that the latest B-29 raids on Tokyo had sent flames roaring into the imperial compound. Grew was convinced that there was no time to lose. The situation demanded action. Surely, the threat of immolation would concentrate Hirohito’s mind on survival and make him more willing to stop the war, providing he survived. On May 28, Grew met with Truman to discuss his thoughts on ending the war. Grew hoped that the president would use his forthcoming address to Congress on the military situation to offer the Japanese a version of unconditional surrender that they would find acceptable. The only way to accomplish that, Grew believed, would be to assure the Japanese that the United States would not destroy the imperial institution. That seemed a minor concession, Grew believed, since the Japanese would eventually restore the monarchy once the Americans left. Preservation of the imperial institution also made sense because the most that one could hope for in Japan was a constitutional monarchy, given that experience showed that democracy there “would never work.”

Grew pressed his case by lecturing the president on Japanese history. Drawing on his decade of experience in Japan, the former ambassador asserted that the American critics of Japan’s monarchy misunderstood its past. For much of its history, Japan’s emperors were confined to Kyoto and kept poor and powerless while the Shoguns, predecessors of the modern militarists, ruled the country and made war on its neighbors. The Meiji restoration in 1868 changed all that. The Meiji emperor, Grew explained, was “a strong man who overcame the militaristic Shoguns and who started Japan on a moderate peaceful course.” Unfortunately, Emperor Meiji’s successors, Hirohito and his father, were not as strong and the militarists stormed back into power. Hirohito and his advisors wanted peace, but they
were overwhelmed by the militarists. “The foregoing facts,” Grew added, “indicate clearly that Japan does not need an Emperor to be militaristic nor are the Japanese militaristic because they have an Emperor.” The military clique that seized control of the government rendered Hirohito and his peace-minded advisors powerless. That did not exonerate Hirohito from responsibility for signing the war declaration, Grew admitted, but once the militarists were deposed, the throne could be used as a cornerstone by the long-suppressed moderates to build a new government.  

Grew’s recitation of Japanese history contained glaring inaccuracies and was open to question as to its logic. For example, it is unclear as to what he was referring when he asserted that experience had shown the Japanese unsuited for democracy. More troubling was his depiction of the Meiji era, in which Japan fought China and Russia, colonized Taiwan, and exerted dominion over Korea, as one of moderation and peace. Japan may have been at peace with the U.S. but not with Asia. Grew’s view of Japanese history as oscillating between moderation and militarism glossed over how the militarists came to power and what role they played. His analysis did not address whether they were anomalous or a constant presence in Japanese life, a dormant virus that was activated when the body politic came under stress. Perhaps he thought it was not that important. The postwar era would belong to the moderates and their constitutional monarchy.

Regarding the emperor, the undersecretary’s conclusions were distorted. The Meiji emperor did not subdue the Shogun; the oligarchs who engineered the restoration did. They built on that success by embarking on a nation-building program that emphasized Japanese uniqueness. Grew was correct that in 1937 the militarists had seized the throne for their own uses. But the modern imperial institution had not been the benign force in Japanese life that he claimed it was. The Meiji Constitution (1889), which borrowed heavily from the Prussian Constitution, was a gift from the emperor to the Japanese people and sovereignty resided in the emperor. It was an authoritarian system meant to ensure the supremacy of the state. In the new nation, the emperor was the source of all governmental authority. He was also supreme military commander. In practical terms, the oligarchs ruled in the emperor’s name and used his authority to build the militarily powerful state that joined the ranks of the great powers in the early twentieth century.

Propagandists worked tirelessly to inculcate a spirit of selfless loyalty to the emperor, who presided as head of the national family. That made him
indispensable as the embodiment of *kokutai*, which is usually translated as “national structure” or “national polity.” The authority vested in the monarchy made it a bulwark against reform from below. Subjects had many obligations but few rights under the constitution. Dissent was equated to disloyalty. In 1937, ultranationalists took the imperial idea to its extreme conclusion and declared the emperor divine. That was the system that survived into the war.\(^{37}\)

Truman did not question Grew’s analysis. If he had any doubts, he kept them to himself. Instead, the president said he was interested in what Grew had said because his thoughts “had been following the same line.” Truman was almost certainly humoring Grew at this point. In any case, despite his supposed sympathy for Grew’s views, Truman asked Grew to solicit the opinions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the secretaries of the War and Navy Departments on the subject. Shortly after he left the White House, Grew arranged to meet with Stimson, Forrestal, Marshall, and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King in Stimson’s Pentagon office at 11:00 a.m. the next day.\(^{38}\) It is not surprising that Truman directed Grew to consult with the military on his proposal. After all, Grew was asking the president to drastically alter policy on Japan. As it turned out, the leaders of the armed services had been reviewing the policy of unconditional surrender, especially in connection to the status of the emperor, for several months.

By January 1945, staff officers in the U.S. Army and Navy were dealing with two related contingencies. The first was that Japan might seek to end the war soon after Germany was defeated, which was expected by early summer.\(^{39}\) The second was that the Japanese would fight on and make an invasion necessary. The second contingency was meeting resistance from the Navy, which argued that blockade and bombardment would bring Japan to its knees. General Marshall and his staff believed that a strategy of siege would lengthen the war, sap American morale, and result in an undesirable negotiated settlement. He instructed his planners to think about the how the U.S. would respond to the first contingency while they also made certain that plans went forward for an invasion.

By early April, staff officers from the Army, Navy, and Army Air Force were working together under the auspices of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to estimate under what circumstances the Japanese would recognize they were defeated and surrender. The planners could only guess as to the timing. Further speculation produced a range of possibilities regarding the condition
of the government in Japan that would eventually agree to surrender and its ability to command its armed forces to lay down their arms. The staff officers were more certain about when the Japanese would know they were defeated. In fact, it was clear that some members of the Japanese government already realized the inevitability of defeat. Others would reach that conclusion during the coming months, when the American bombardment reached its crescendo. The holdouts would finally accept reality when the Russians entered the war.

The planners cautioned, however, that a realization of defeat would not automatically lead to surrender. The problem was the policy of unconditionality. According to the Joint Intelligence Staff, “The literal meaning of unconditional surrender is a term which is unknown to the Japanese.” This obstacle might be overcome if the Americans could explain to the Japanese government that it did not mean “annihilation or national suicide.” In the meantime, the authors of the report added, by midsummer the Japanese government would seek ways to “surrender without the stigma of admitting it is ‘unconditional surrender.’”

The Joint Intelligence Staff’s analysis of a military problem—the possibility of an early Japanese surrender and the conditions under which that might occur—had led it into a political minefield. The staff officers asserted that the policy of unconditional surrender was an obstacle to peace. To obtain their war aims, the Allies would need to clarify the policy’s meaning, preferably in a form that removed its alleged stigma. Roosevelt, on the other hand, had no desire to remove whatever stigma attached to the policy. He had already said publicly on several occasions that it did not mean the enslavement of the Germans or Japanese. Beyond that, he was not prepared to go. Evidence of the atrocious treatment of American prisoners only strengthened the president’s commitment. Speaking to reporters in July 1944, Roosevelt said, “Practically all Germans deny the fact that they surrendered during the last war, but this time they are going to know it. And so are the Japs.”

The Joint Intelligence Staff’s assertion that unconditional surrender did not translate into Japanese was also suspect. The meaning of the term was not lost in translation. The Japanese objected to the policy because they knew precisely what it meant: that the Allies would control their nation and reform its social and political structure. The whole point of it was to end the war in such a way that the Allies would be free to make the changes they found necessary. The extent of those changes would be determined by the
Unconditional circumstances of surrender. Japanese troops, supported by the government in Tokyo, had been on a rampage through Asia for almost fifteen years. They had plundered the areas they conquered and mercilessly subjected millions of people to violence and starvation. How could anyone be certain what steps were needed to bring the perpetrators to justice and ensure that the institutions that made that devastation possible were eliminated? Roosevelt refused to commit the Allies to any policies that would limit their options until the Japanese laid down their arms.

Members of the Joint Intelligence Staff were not alone in struggling with the issue of an early surrender. By early May, Army and Navy planners couldn’t agree on how conditions on the battle fronts—both in Germany and the Pacific—affected the possibility. The Army officers believed that the German collapse was likely to compel the Japanese to seek a way out of the war. The Japanese were isolated and anxious about what the Russians would do. They also would do almost anything to keep the emperor and his family out of the hands of a foreign invader. The Army report’s authors optimistically added that the recent installation of the “moderate” Suzuki as prime minister meant “that the formerly strong extremist group is no longer dominate in Japan.” These circumstances made a Japanese peace offer likely. It was equally likely that the offer would contain conditions that the Allies would find unacceptable such as no occupation of the home islands. Nevertheless, growing war weariness on the American home front might make such an offer difficult to refuse. The alternative would be to launch an invasion. To avoid having to face that dilemma, the staff officers recommended that the United States issue a demand for Japan’s immediate unconditional surrender. The attached draft of the demand warned the Japanese that they faced the same fate as Germany and that the emperor and imperial family would either be killed during the invasion or taken captive by the Allies.43

The Army’s paper was noteworthy for suggesting that the Allies would need to assure the Japanese that the imperial family and by extension the monarchy would remain intact after a surrender. Over the next three months the debate over modification of unconditional surrender would turn on the question of what was to be done with the emperor and the monarchy. Already there was disagreement on that score. When transmitting the draft demand up the chain of command, the Army’s assistant chief of staff explained that regarding the emperor, “there are major differences of opinion.”
That was not the only source of disagreement. Navy representatives on the joint staff objected to linking the demand for unconditional surrender to Germany’s defeat. The battle for Okinawa was a little over a month old and after a promising start had become a brutal campaign of attrition. The Navy, under whose direction the campaign was waged, was suffering heavy casualties from kamikaze attacks on ships supporting the land forces. The Army predicted that the Japanese would be demoralized by Germany’s surrender. The Navy worried that the Japanese would feel emboldened by the heavy toll they exacted from the Americans on Okinawa. A demand for Japan’s surrender had to be made from a position of strength, otherwise the Japanese high command would view it as evidence of weakening American morale. Rather than send the Army’s paper to the Joint Chiefs where it would face certain rejection by the Navy, it was shunted off to a subcommittee in the faint hope that some compromise could be found.

The staff officers struggling to make projections about Japan’s future actions had veered into speculating about what steps the United States could take to encourage a timely Japanese surrender. On occasion they wriggled out of the constraints imposed by the unconditional surrender policy, only to find their efforts stymied by internal disagreement over the fate of the emperor and the timing of a warning. Undaunted, they continued to seek compromise on a statement demanding Japan’s surrender. The least controversial of the proposals they had recommended involved a clarification of the assurance to Japanese subjects that the policy did not mean their destruction or enslavement. As noted, FDR had already made several statements in that vein. Truman reiterated them on May 8 in his public announcement of Germany’s surrender. In that speech, the president threatened the Japanese with the same level of destruction the Allies had brought to bear on Germany if they did not surrender unconditionally. He then explained that this meant the end of the war as well as of the influence of Japan’s militaristic leaders. It also meant “provision for the return of soldiers and sailors to their farms, families, jobs.” “Unconditional surrender” he continued, echoing his predecessor, “does not mean the extermination or enslavement of the Japanese people.”

Truman’s assurance made little impact on the Japanese government’s commitment to carry on with the war. Nor, as it turned out, did Germany’s surrender—despite the efforts of Foreign Minister Togo to seize the moment for a reappraisal of Japan’s situation. Between May 11 and May 14, Togo arranged for a series of meetings of the Supreme Council for the
Direction of the War that restricted attendance to the Big Six, the foreign minister, Army and Navy chiefs of staff, Army and navy ministers, and the minister of foreign affairs. Togo’s intention was to exclude the subcabinet officials and midlevel officers who normally produced the policies approved by their superiors. Most of these lesser officials were fire-breathing bitter-enders who would rather see Japan’s hundred million souls die in defense of the sacred homeland than endure the humiliation of surrender. Togo hoped that the absence of these apocalyptically inclined officials would encourage the Big Six to speak more freely and discuss alternatives to ending the war that did not include the obliteration of the nation.

After much discussion, the meetings yielded a three-point plan of action, all of which centered on the Soviet Union. The product of compromise, as opposed to firm agreement, the plan sought to obtain the Soviet Union’s pledge to stay out of the Pacific War. The Japanese would also seek to persuade the Soviets to adopt a friendly attitude toward Japan. To gain Russia’s friendship, Tokyo would be willing to swap economic and territorial concessions, including the fruits of Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905, in exchange for oil and other war materials. If the Japanese failed to secure the objectives of the first two points, they would, as a last resort, seek Russia’s good offices in mediating an end to the conflict on terms favorable to Japan.46

Following the meetings, the Big Six decided that an emissary would be dispatched to meet with the Soviet ambassador. Togo regarded the assignment as doomed from the start. He tried but failed to convince his colleagues that the Russians had already made their own bargain with the Americans and British at Japan’s expense. Togo’s handpicked envoy eventually arranged to meet with the Soviet ambassador in Hakone, outside Tokyo. The discussions on improving Japan–Soviet relations began on June 3, nearly three weeks after the Big Six meetings ended. The Soviet ambassador, Jacob Malik, dragged out these preliminary conversations by explaining that he needed instructions from Moscow.47 As Malik waited, the situation worsened for Japan.

While the Japanese pursued a rapprochement with the Russians, the Americans continued to evaluate the desirability of issuing a warning to the Japanese that time was running out. Toward that end, the Joint Intelligence Staff continued to labor on a paper that could be approved by the Joint Chiefs and forwarded to the State Department. It would then be up to the State Department to decide how to handle their proposals, but the staff
officers hoped that their demand for unconditional surrender would be presented to the Japanese government through diplomatic channels. Those hopes were frustrated by continued disagreement among the staff officers, leading to the deletion of some of the main justifications for issuing a demand for Japan’s surrender. As the paper neared completion, the reference to the supposedly moderate cast of the Suzuki cabinet was stricken. So, too, was any mention of the emperor. What was left was a demand for unconditional surrender that did not go beyond the president’s May 8 statement. Even those changes were not enough to overcome the chief obstacle to its release. On May 20, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy advised General Marshall that the secretary of war opposed issuing the demand for unconditional surrender until after the battle for Okinawa was won.48

This was the third time in recent weeks that Stimson had swatted away proposed changes in established policy. Earlier, he had advised Truman against confronting the Soviets over Poland and quashed Grew’s attempt to revisit the Yalta agreements on Asia. Various officials, most notably Grew and Ambassador Harriman, had taken advantage of the change of leadership in the White House to recommend to the new president policies that struck Stimson as recklessly provocative. Stimson did not believe that Poland was important enough to risk a breach with the Russians, especially when the Red Army was needed to drive the Japanese out of Manchuria. Circumstances demanded attention to timing and a careful balancing of means and ends. Harriman and Churchill wanted Truman to arrange an early meeting with Stalin, but Stimson counseled delay. “We shall probably hold more cards in our hands later than now,” he explained. The cards Stimson referred to were the Russians’ need for American assistance in rebuilding their industries and Anglo-American development of an atomic weapon. Stimson confidently predicted that America’s commanding economic position and its impending possession of this weapon would amount to “a royal straight flush,” an unbeatable hand, provided that the United States bided its time.49

Though it wasn’t directed at him, Truman would have had little difficulty understanding that Stimson’s poker metaphor was a disguised reference to the atomic bomb. Stimson had informed Truman about its existence after the first cabinet meeting on the night of April 12. On April 25, Stimson gave the new president a full briefing. Also present was Major General Leslie Groves, the commander of the Manhattan Engineering District, the code name for the atomic bomb project. Groves had prepared
a memorandum on the weapon’s development and current status. Stimson also presented a memorandum. “Within four months,” it began, “we shall have in all probability completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city.” The remainder of Stimson’s memo explained Great Britain’s role in the development of the bomb and discussed in broad terms the problems that would arise once the secret of the atomic bomb was revealed to the world. It also described the history of the project and explained that the bomb would be ready by August 1 and that a second would be ready by the end of the year. The project scientists were working on a second type of bomb, an implosion device, but, Groves explained, they had run into problems. If they were able to solve those problems, an implosion device would be ready by the end of August and subsequent bombs would be ready every ten days after that. The bomb would be dropped by a specially organized unit of the Twentieth Air Force, which was about to move overseas for more training.

Armed with this new knowledge, Truman could hope that the bomb would compel Japan’s surrender without an invasion, but he could not count on it. A lot could happen in four months to upset the timetable Groves had presented. Success was tantalizingly close but still out of reach. Stimson made sure that the new president understood that.

In advising the president, the seventy-seven-year-old Stimson drew on the wisdom he had acquired during a long, distinguished career of public service. A graduate of Yale and of Harvard Law School, Stimson had entered the business world as a clerk in the prestigious Wall Street firm of Root and Clarke. Within two years, he became a partner in the firm and a protégé of Elihu Root, a prominent Republican statesman. Over the next five decades, Stimson, like Root, moved easily between the worlds of corporate law and government service. He entered the public realm in 1906 with an appointment as U.S. attorney general in the Southern District of New York, a position once held by his mentor. Stimson subsequently lost a bid to become governor of New York but continued his climb. He became secretary of war under William Howard Taft, and then served as an artillery officer in France during the Great War. After the war, Stimson acquired valuable experience in Asia as governor-general of the Philippines and subsequently became secretary of state for Herbert Hoover just before Japan commenced a decade of violent expansion in Asia that would lead to Pearl Harbor. In 1940, as war engulfed Europe, FDR appointed the internationalist-minded
Stimson secretary of war to build bipartisan support for a more activist foreign policy.

During his service as colonial proconsul and the nation’s top diplomat, Stimson (like Grew) developed an appreciation for Japan’s moderate leaders during the relatively quiescent 1920s. That appreciation was tested when the cooperative diplomacy of the 1920s was disrupted by Japan’s nationalistic drive for self-sufficiency in Asia. When the Japanese Army broke free of Tokyo’s constraints and seized Manchuria in northeast China in 1931, Stimson sought to haul Japan before the court of public opinion, but his efforts were undercut by President Hoover. With the United States mired in depression, Hoover saw no reason to antagonize Japan over control of an area of relative unimportance to the U.S., especially since he thought Japanese colonialism might impose order on the chaos that seemed to perpetually envelop China. Stimson remained confident in the moral superiority of his cause, but some, including Hoover, criticized him for sticking pins in a tiger. What seemed like Stimson’s last chance at public service degenerated into an education in the frustrations of conducting diplomacy unsupported by the threat of force.52

In 1931, Stimson had hoped to strengthen the moderates in Tokyo by opposing Japanese aggression in Manchuria. In 1945, he was once again hoping to tip the balance in favor of the suppressed peace faction believed to be aligned with the emperor. The situation demanded caution. A wrong step could play into the hands of the militarists. This was not the time for diplomatic initiatives. Eight weeks after they had come ashore on Okinawa, the Americans had yet to pierce the Imperial Japanese Army’s main defensive line. A banner headline in the Washington Post drove the point home. “Okinawa Struggle in Bloody Deadlock: Nine Costly Charges by Yanks Win One Height,” it read. The article went on to describe the valiant charges made by Marines over seven days to take the 150-foot-high Sugar Loaf Hill. The Marines, their ranks thinned by casualties, seized the rise on the seventh day, but Japanese snipers remained dug into caves and tunnels on the hill where they continued to make control of the capital city of Naha untenable for the Americans.53 The Japanese were destined to lose, of course, but Colonel Yahara’s strategy of attrition was paying off.

Stimson’s unwillingness to engage in diplomacy from a position of apparent weakness momentarily put the brakes on staff officers’ efforts to issue a warning to Japan, regardless of its specific contents. A week later, he rebuffed Grew’s statement with its concessions on the emperor for the same
reason. The May 29 meeting of the secretaries of state, war, and Navy, along with the service chiefs lasted about an hour. It began with Grew explaining his discussion with the president the previous day. He then presented a draft of the text he hoped to add to Truman’s forthcoming address to Congress. Grew explained in his memo on the meeting that he hoped the president would “indicate to the Japanese that we have no intention of determining Japan’s future political structure, which should be left to themselves.” By Japan’s “political structure,” Grew of course meant the monarchy. According to Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, Grew proposed having the president say that American objectives did not include the destruction of Japan’s “political concepts, of their religion, and particularly of the Emperor as a symbol of their religion.” Stimson supported modification of unconditional surrender but continued to believe that this was not the time. For his part, Elmer Davis, the director of the Office of War Information, strongly opposed any attempt to modify unconditional surrender. Forrestal asked Grew if it would suffice to assure the Japanese that unconditional surrender did not mean their annihilation. According to Forrestal, Eugene Dooman, a Japan specialist and Grew’s former counselor of embassy in Tokyo, replied, “If the Japanese became imbued with the idea that the United States was set on the destruction of their philosophy of government and of their religion we would face a truly national suicidal defense.”

Neither Grew nor Dooman thought it necessary to mention that they had encountered strong opposition to the proposed modification of unconditional surrender within the State Department. Leading the opposition to Grew’s “clarification” of the policy were Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs Dean Acheson and Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Archibald MacLeish. Acheson, described by left-wing journalist I. F. Stone as a “progressive and intelligent specimen of the corporate lawyer,” thought the whole system needed to be pulled out by the roots, starting with the imperial institution. In private, Acheson referred to Grew as the “prince of appeasers.” MacLeish moved to the State Department because of his impeccable credentials as a spokesman for liberal internationalists. In December 1944, he had left his position as librarian of Congress at FDR’s urging to become assistant secretary of state for public affairs. (When he accepted the appointment, FDR congratulated him on moving from one mausoleum to another.)

Acheson and MacLeish questioned the desirability of exempting the emperor from punishment and permitting the Japanese to preserve an
institution that was so easily exploited by the militarists.\textsuperscript{57} That was a view held by Owen Lattimore, a China scholar and advisor in the Pacific section of the Office of War Information. Lattimore published his thoughts on reconstructing Japan in February 1945 in a slim volume titled \textit{Solution in Asia}. Lattimore argued that democratization was possible in Japan, but first the Allies had to “puncture the myth of the divinity of the Mikado.” The best way to do that, he advised, was to exile Hirohito and all males eligible for the throne to China under United Nations supervision.\textsuperscript{58}

Grew and Dooman regarded such criticisms as fueled by blind prejudice and general ignorance of Japanese history and culture. Dooman—who had been born in Japan, spoke Japanese fluently, and had attended the elite Peers School before finishing his education in the United States—could claim even more intimate knowledge of Japan than Grew. Neither man lacked for self-confidence in claiming expertise on Japan. They knew that critics were already calling them appeasers because of their views of the emperor. Nevertheless, in the weeks ahead they would continue to advocate preserving the monarchy.

The meeting in Stimson’s office ended with the secretaries agreeing to postpone issuing a statement. The capture of Okinawa, which would not be completed until June 22, no longer seemed likely to shock the Japanese into surrendering. Whatever advantage might have been gained by pairing a surrender demand with the invasion of Japanese territory had vanished. Some other demonstration of power would be needed for that purpose. Stimson, Grew, Forrestal, and the service chiefs knew that meant the atomic bomb, but were not free to speak openly in front of their junior colleagues. Grew was disappointed with the outcome of the meeting but his memorandum of conversation put the best face on the proceedings. He omitted Davis’s objections and emphasized that the meeting reached consensus on the advisability of issuing the proposed warning at some point. For the time being, however, the warning, with its “clarification” of unconditional surrender, would have to wait.

On June 1, Truman issued a lengthy Memorial Day message to Congress celebrating American achievements in the war and laying out the work that remained to defeat Japan. The message contained no references to the emperor and no clarification of what surrender meant beyond the now-standard assurance “We have no desire or intention to destroy or enslave the Japanese people.” Even more discouraging for Grew was Truman’s warning that the Japanese were counting on American war weariness to “force us to
The president assured Congress that would not happen. Grew could be excused if he thought Truman was speaking to him. Nevertheless, he was not ready to give up, especially when he knew what was in store for Japan.

In the months leading up to the Memorial Day message, the possibility of coaxing Japan's surrender without an invasion had been widely studied and discussed in the government. The bureaucratic axiom that where you stand depends on where you sit helps explain the timing and tenor of these discussions. Administration officials who had to deal with Soviet recalcitrance in Eastern Europe were among the first to see the advantage of modifying unconditional surrender in terms of how it would affect postwar relations with the Soviet Union. Mid-level military planners were less overtly political in their inquiries. They were primarily concerned with ending the war with a minimum loss of American lives. The impending entry of the Soviet Union into the Pacific War did not cast such a dark shadow over their deliberations.

Nevertheless, it was a short leap from thinking about how modification of unconditional surrender would save American lives to considering the geopolitical benefits of an early surrender. It is not surprising that Admirals Cooke and Richards took that leap. The Navy’s support for unconditional surrender had always been lukewarm at best. It cooled considerably once the Imperial Japanese Navy was destroyed, given that it made blockade seem a reasonable policy to pursue. Admiral King supported unconditional surrender when it served to rally the home front, but Navy plans always assumed that the destruction of Japan’s navy would be the final major operation in the war. Victory at sea, according to King, would be followed by strangulation of Japan’s economy. Navy planners expected that at some point in the siege, Japan’s warlords would surrender. It would be an unspectacular finish to the war but also a low-risk one.

Cooke and Richards thought that Japan was already on the verge of collapse and that the only obstacle preventing Japan’s militarists from accepting the inevitability of defeat was the policy of unconditional surrender. The U.S. could remove that obstacle and induce Japan to surrender by modifying it. The war would not end with the total defeat of Japan’s forces that FDR sought, but that would not matter because the destruction of Japan’s navy already made it impossible for the resource-poor island nation to pose any danger to the United States. From the Navy’s perspective, the benefits to be gained from a modest change in policy were irresistible. An
early surrender would save thousands of American lives, preempt a Soviet invasion of northeast Asia, and confirm the role of sea power as the decisive factor in the victory.

General Marshall and members of his staff did not share the Navy’s confidence in a strategy of siege. They believed that anything that delayed the outcome of the war favored the Japanese. A siege was a strategy for protracted war. To conduct an effective siege, the Navy would need to seize bases near Japan. Army staff officers worried that those peripheral operations would squander American resources without producing a swift victory. That would leave the U.S. in the undesirable position of having to maintain a blockade for an extended period. The longer the war lasted, the greater the risk of losing the American public’s support for the campaign against Japan. If Japan did not yield, the U.S. would be faced with having to mobilize again for an invasion or negotiate with Japan’s militarists. The first option was politically unfeasible, the second politically and militarily unthinkable.

The views of Army staff officers differed in other ways from those of their Navy partners. The Army’s representatives on the Joint Staff committees doubted that Japan could be induced to surrender before the Soviet Union entered the war. They also doubted that Japan could be coaxed into surrendering through a modification of unconditional surrender. But they were not opposed to trying, so long as the results produced the complete victory that they thought essential to preventing a resurgence of Japanese power. There was still time to refine the wording of a statement to Japan that would serve as both a warning and an offer of more acceptable terms. The invasion of Kyushu was not slated to begin until November.

Everyone agreed that the success of any overture depended on the ability of the U.S. to maintain unrelenting pressure on Japan. Toward that end, the Navy preyed on shipping in Japan’s narrow seas, carrier-based aircraft struck at enemy airfields in the home islands, and B-29s continued their relentless bombardment of Japanese cities. Several hundred miles to the south, the campaign on Okinawa entered its third month.