

**Marc Gallicchio. *Unconditional: The Japanese Surrender in World War II*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020. xvi + 264 pages. Hardcover, \$27.95.**

The debate over what was necessary for Japan's surrender in World War II is the topic of this important contribution. The book covers the disagreements over the meaning of the "unconditional surrender" demand first enunciated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the January 1943 Casablanca conference amongst Allied powers; Harry Truman's succession to the White House and his various warnings to Japan; the detonation of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the end of the Pacific war and the rebuilding of Japan; and the ongoing controversy over whether a less violent end to the conflict could have been avoided.

Author Marc Gallicchio is a Professor of History at Villanova University. He was awarded Fulbright Lectureships in Japan twice. His 2017 book co-written with Waldo Heinrichs, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific, 1944-1945*, won the Bancroft Prize for History.

The present text has six chapters along with an Introduction and Conclusion. Gallicchio begins by observing that the passage of time has clouded the understanding of how the war with Japan concluded and perpetuated the debate over the use of atomic weapons. He holds that it is crucial to comprehend the context of actions on both the American and Japanese side by studying what information was available to decision-makers.

In the first two chapters, Gallicchio examines the impact of leadership transitions in America and Japan which occurred in April 1945. After President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death, Vice President Harry Truman took over. Among the challenges he faced pertaining to the Pacific War included defining the meaning of FDR's "unconditional surrender" demand expressed two years earlier. Truman faced conflicting advice on war termination strategy from advisors, Allies, and even from the military service branches. Meanwhile, Shigenori Togo became Japan's

Foreign Minister in April 1945 and was the only member of the Supreme War Council to pursue early termination of the war.

In Chapters 3 and 4, the urgency of war's situation is vividly depicted. President Truman and his administration worried over Russian intervention in the Pacific conflict following the defeat of Germany. American public opinion was split on the war's prospects. Members of Congress insisted that the Truman White House clearly state the terms necessary for Japan's surrender. Although there is some evidence of an attempt at back-door negotiations between U.S. and Japanese officials, there is likewise discovery of Japanese eavesdropping and of propaganda efforts to continue the conflict. At the end Potsdam Conference in July 1945, President Truman issued a warning to Japan to surrender or face devastating consequences. Unfortunately, his ultimatum was both misunderstood in translation terms and ignored by the still-in-charge military.

Chapter 5 covers the events which led to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9, 1945, respectively. Clearly, part of the rationale for deployment of atomic weapons was the specter of an American invasion of the Japanese home islands, for which more soldiers, sailors, and equipment would be necessary. Further, weather issues would delay a full-scale invasion until Fall 1945 at the earliest, prolonging the war at a time when American citizens were hoping for its end. Finally, it was apparent that President Truman did not trust either Japanese Emperor Hirohito or government officials and held out for the strictest terms of surrender. In actuality, Japan formally surrendered less than a month after the second atomic attack.

While Chapter 6 begins by describing occupation and rebuilding of Japan by American forces, it relays a series of circumstances which have facilitated the debate over whether the

atomic bombing of Japan was necessary to end the Pacific war. For one, a number of reliable sources published articles on both sides of the issue. Second, the manner by which the Korean war and other conflicts since have ended has added to the controversy. Third, the question of the appropriateness of atomic use was renewed in 1995 at an Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.

In the book's Conclusion, Gallicchio takes on World War II revisionists who have cast doubts about America's war strategy in the Pacific. He notes that the closed-ended nature of Japanese society and that nation's militaristic tradition left little alternative to the atomic bombings. He reminds readers of how the United States transformed Japan's government while retaining the Emperor post.

Other than Gallicchio's coauthored book on the topic, there have been a handful of recent studies probing the Japanese surrender in World War II. A 2015 edited book focuses on the impact which conventional and atomic bombings had in hastening the conclusion of the Pacific war. While another 2015 text traces World War II events from midsummer 1945 to the end, Barrett Tilman's 2022 book concentrates on August 1945 alone. Evan Thomas' 2023 publication adds to our understanding of World War II's conclusion in several ways. Thomas mentions Japan's fear of a Soviet invasion of its homelands and President Truman's order to renew conventional bombing of Japan following the two atomic blasts as contributors to Japan's surrender.

*Unconditional Surrender* certainly has some noteworthy points. The author credits Harry Truman for holding firm to FDR's original policy on ending the war with Japan. He relays the views of Navy Admiral William Leahy, who consistently downplayed the potency of atomic weapons. He minimizes the roles of former President Herbert Hoover and General Douglas

MacArthur in influencing President Harry Truman's decisions World War II actions relating to Japan. In exploring the debate over conditions for Japan's surrender in World War II, Gallicchio concludes that disagreements over atomic bomb usage miss the point. Rather, he regards atomic weapons as a tool and their deployment as just a first step in converting an enemy into a friendly nation.

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