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**The Pacific War:
An Evaluation of Alternative Strategic Courses of Action**

Preface

There is a continuing debate over the use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The discussion focuses on the bombs' necessity and the interconnectivity of any possible alternative courses of action. However, those arguments often overlook the consideration for a decisive victory through means other than sequential strategy. However, Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie's cumulative theory provides a more nuanced relevancy to the debate, which embraces the cumulative effects to achieve victory. In the application of this theory, the threat of the atomic bomb, as discussed in this paper, could have been sufficient, in conjunction with diplomatic, information, military, and economic efforts.

Introduction

When evaluating the alternative strategic courses of action open to the United States for terminating the Pacific War, the better alternative than the use of atomic bomb was to employ the cumulative efforts in use with the atomic bomb serving as deterrence. To understand why this was the best course of action, this paper will analyze three alternative courses of action, including the blockade and aerial bombardment of Japanese cities, an invasion of Japan, and a cumulative strategy as explained by Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie. As independent strategies, the use of blockade extended the duration of the war, while the aerial bombardment drove up the casualties. Further, the invasion threatened a significant loss of Allied forces. However, the cumulative efforts of the blockade, aerial bombardment, the Soviet Union's entry into the war, and the threat of the atomic bomb as a deterrent, leveraged the successes of the past with diplomatic solutions.

Naval Blockade and Aerial Bombardment

The combination of the blockade and aerial bombardment was a powerful tool that achieved both short- and long-term objectives. Furthermore, the combination of naval blockade and aerial bombardment were key steps in the Allied plans to weaken the Japan's industrial might (Kort, 105). The two forces leveraged the short- and long-term strategies to wear down the economic center of the country, thus creating economic disruption throughout the home islands.

Naval Blockade

The blockade demonstrated signs that it was succeeding in significantly weakening the economy of the Japanese. The U.S. began a blockade using submarines immediately and continued to the end of the war (Marston, p. 223-224). While taking several years to see the progress, the effects of the blockade destroyed a large percentage of tonnage. Japan began the war against the U.S. with 6.3 million tons of merchant vessels, captured or built 4 more million, but by early 1945 Japan had 2.5 million tons, and by the end of the war, it was down to 1.4 million (Marston p. 223-224). The depletion of resources was felt throughout the home islands. The blockade was effective in leveraging the geographic structure of the islands with economic destruction. Japan's economy was dependent on the movement of food and goods throughout the home islands, creating significant consequences for the population (Marston, p. 224). By disrupting the total tonnage, it created economic stress amongst the home islands. This was further amplified by the inability to gain access to new resources, particularly fuel, as Japan relied heavily on the East Indies for obtaining fuel (Marston, p. 173). While the blockade demonstrated the long-term economic disruption, it did not overcome the immediacy needed by the Allies for war termination. Tonnage wars are not able to predict the result of these independent naval blockade actions (Wylie, p. 118). By slowly eroding the economic forces, the

Allies were winning the economic battle. However, greater action was needed to force unconditional surrender, particularly as the Allies were pressured for rapid resolution.

Aerial Bombardment

The use of the B-29s for aerial bombardments in Japanese cities brought widespread devastation across the home islands. The first raid in Tokyo in March 1945 killed 100,000 and burned 15.8 sq. miles (Marston, p. 225). However, such a brutal and relentless attack in March did not cause the Japanese to surrender. When considering the already stretched resources, the increased pressure to provide for the casualties mounted without Japan wavering on its resolve. By end of war, B-29s bombed 66 cities, destroying 20% of Japan's housing and leaving 15 million homeless (Marston, p. 225). The B-29 aerial bombardment campaign created massive destruction to the home islands. The aerial bombardment demonstrated that high losses were not sufficient to lead to Japanese surrender. In effect, the aerial bombardment should have led the Allies to consider that the high losses of the atomic bomb would also have similar effects.

Invasion

The proposed invasion of Japan, while not enacted, would have cost lives without a quick termination of the war. By early 1945, the Imperial General Headquarters had already changed its defensive posture to create an environment that cost so much in time and blood that it would move the Allies to pursue an armistice before it invaded the home islands (Marston, p. 206). While this dissuasion did not occur, the cost to the Allies in Okinawa was great. The Allies had adapted its techniques for amphibious landings, focusing on prioritized need over quantity (Marston, p. 204-205). However, the Japanese also adapted and focused on its efforts in Okinawa on the assembly of 100,000 Japanese troops that leveraged extensive defenses with kamikaze attacks on the Allied forces (Marston, p. 175). The lessons learned from Okinawa persisted in

American thinking as it was seen as foreshadowing a land invasion. Further, by August 1945, Japan built up its troops in Kyushu to about 900,000, planning to combat any American invasion (Kort, p. 87). By this aggregation of forces, it could be concluded that the lives lost would be more than Okinawa and take longer. Further exacerbating the Allies' decision to invade Japan, was the Japanese adoption of the strategy of Ketsu Go. One of the main components relied on the suicide tactics of both troops and civilians in the land, sea, and air (Marston, p. 229). This change in policy also heightened the danger to an Allied invasion. The invasion course of action focused on maximizing the forces in the Area of Operations, while forcing the Japanese to capitulate. However, Allied command struggled with the losses that the invasion was likely to incur. The invasion of Japan's home islands was perhaps the largest motivator for using the atomic bomb instead, to spare hundreds of thousands of lives, both military and civilians.

Cumulative Strategy

Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie postulated that two ways of analyzing strategy are sequential, where the actions are based on those that preceded it; and cumulative, where the actions are not sequentially interdependent (Wylie, 117). The cumulative strategy of actions against Japan by Allied forces was a strategic course of action available, but not fully considered. Allied forces already used the naval blockade and aerial bombardment, with the later addition of the Soviet Union entering the war. As a final component to the cumulative strategy, the threat of the atomic bomb could have been leveraged to negotiate a diplomatic surrender.

FDR began the national campaign of unconditional surrender, which at that time was perceived as the only pathway towards peace (Marston, p. 226). There was a build-up of pressure to push towards immediate unconditional surrender. This pressure contributed to the lack of assessment of the actions of individual Allied efforts. A later analysis stated it was possible that a

“synergistic combination” of strategies could have ended the war, prior to the planned invasion date (Marston, p. 106). The cumulative diplomatic, information, military, and economic efforts could have been leveraged against one another to bring about war termination.

The naval blockade demonstrated the commitment to the long-term strategic effects of economic disruption. However, the Allies failed to capitalize on those effects. The Allies did not seem to recognize the significant impact on the destroyed tonnage (Wylie, p. 118). Secondly, the aerial bombardments brought forth widespread devastation across cities in Japan, further interfering with the industrial might of the state. While Japan anticipated that the Soviet Union would enter the war, they did not anticipate the timing. Intelligence gathered indicated that Soviet Union entry into the war would convince Japan of impending defeat (Kort, p. 91). However, this intelligence was not leveraged in conjunction with the other efforts. Further, the Soviet Union’s entry into the war removed the hope that there could be a surrender mediated by the USSR (Kort, p. 107). The Soviet Union’s entry eliminated the ability for the Allies to employ diplomatic efforts, but also forced the hand of Japan in recognizing that mediation was no longer a viable option.

The Emperor of Japan identified three core reasons for surrender: loss of faith in the Army, Japan’s civility would dissolve with the blockade and bombardments, and the atomic bomb (Marston, p. 238). A strategy of cumulative efforts was never fully considered, but an analysis of the Emperor’s rationale align with the ability to join these efforts with a warning or demonstration of the atomic bomb, allowing the deterrence to help the Japanese capitulate. However, providing a warning or demonstration of the atomic bomb would not have yielded the capitulation, as it lost the shock value and thus was not widely considered (Kort, p. 96). While there would have been a risk that the warning or demonstration would not have been enough, it

would have allowed the time for both the Japanese and Allies to make proper assessments. In doing so, the Allies should have considered the possibility of employing the cumulative strategy.

Counterargument

Some might say that the use of the atomic bomb was a way to create a decisive victory through unconditional surrender of the Japanese. There was a rising apprehension that the cost of American and Japanese lives would be too great during an invasion. The previous battle in Okinawa foretold the atrocities that could be anticipated through an invasion on the home islands (Marston, p. 175). Further, there was consideration for the tolls of prolonging the war. The American government predicated some of its decision-making based on the estimated losses of 250,000 people each month the war continued, even without major ground combat (Kort, p. 106). The continued monthly losses were also compounded by the threat of Allied prisoners of war being executed under a potential liberation (Kort, p. 106). This had the effect of pushing for a solution that could end the war as quickly as possible without sacrificing hundreds of thousands of American lives. When evaluating the options available, the Allies focused on meeting its objectives quickly rather than focusing on the alternatives available. There seems to be an overwhelming notion that the justification was made to end the war based on the thought that invasion was the only other alternative. This highlighted the lack of assessment conducted in the summer of 1945. However, there is also strong evidence to demonstrate that the atomic bombs provided the decisive actions necessary to force the Japanese to surrender (Kort, p. 108).

Prior to the usage of the atomic bomb, little consideration was provided on the aspect of using the bomb as a deterrent. Further, even after the bomb's first usage, Admiral Toyoda argued that the U.S. would not use an atomic weapon, highlighting that the bomb as a deterrent was insufficient, as there was Japanese denial over the usage (Marston, p. 236). As such, the use of

the atomic bomb provided the decisive action that brought about the immediate termination of the war, thus achieving the Allies' objectives.

Rebuttal

The usage of the atomic bomb never offered an off-ramp for the Japanese and focused exclusively on unconditional surrender. Alternatively, the use of diplomatic interventions in advance of the atomic bomb could have created a pathway towards meeting the objective without sacrificing lives, when coupled with the existing actions. Clausewitz states that, "Destruction of the enemy's force is only a means to an end, a secondary matter. If a mere demonstration is enough to cause the enemy to abandon his position, the objective has been achieved..." (Clausewitz, p. 96). Some American officials believed that Japan may have been looking for a way to surrender (Kort, p. 95). This notion reinforces that a demonstration of the power of the atomic bomb may have been enough in conjunction with the other actions to end the war.

While the use of the atomic bomb brought massive destruction, it did not result in immediate unconditional surrender. The combined losses from the two atomic bombs amounted to 100,000-200,000 lives (Marston, p. 234). When comparing this to the losses of the aerial bombardment, it was significantly less. While adequate analysis was conducted over the use of individual efforts as separate courses of action, the Allies did not sufficiently consider the cumulative efforts of its actions. As stand-alone strategies, the use of naval blockade and aerial bombardments were insufficient to end the war; however, when considering the cumulative effects of the efforts, it is apparent that greater assessment was needed to evaluate the damage of those efforts. The addition of the Soviet Union, while anticipated, was not considered when planning the initial atomic attack. The Emperor attempted to press for Soviet mediation twice, but to no avail (Marston, p. 229). There were several instances in which individual actions, when

assessed, demonstrated that there was a turning point, in turn providing consideration for the effects of an atomic demonstration or warning. The use of the atomic bomb as a deterrent, could have been sufficient to terminate the war. The previous assessment of these individual strategies undermines the power they could have had together. There should have been a recognition of the power of cumulative assessment and strategy (Wylie, p. 121). The Allied powers had an opportunity to bring together the various strategies employed throughout the war and focus on leveraging them to bring about the end of the war. While this represented a missed opportunity, it nonetheless represented the best strategic course of action for the Allies.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the strategic courses of action, each option presented itself with massive casualties and risk. However, the better course of action was to employ diplomatic pressure with the deterrence of the atomic bomb, leveraging the cumulative effects of the actions already taken by the summer of 1945. The blockade, while employed for years, demonstrated its long-term effects on the economy and movement of goods. The aerial bombardments killed hundreds of thousands, compounding the effects of a diminishing economy. The threat of invasion would have cost hundreds of thousands of lives, but never came to fruition. While the use of the atomic bomb ultimately brought about the termination of the war, it did not bring the immediate unconditional surrender that was initially sought. The strength of this weapon coupled with a failing economy and the destruction caused by the aerial bombardments and Soviet entry into the war could have been used to leverage the surrender of Japan. The use of a cumulative strategy of war represented a departure in strategy as Allies had a history of employing sequential strategies. However, the inclusion of this cumulative effort provided a way for the Allies to achieve its objective without having to use the atomic weapons. While there was not an

understanding at the time of how the use of these weapons would alter the course of history, there was an insufficient assessment of the damage conducted by this time. If a sufficient assessment had been completed, then there would have been the possibility that the atomic bombs could have been refocused as a deterrent and steered the Pacific into peace.

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