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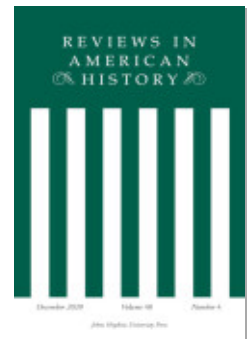
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Kirsten L. Ziomek

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## THE VIEW OF THE JAPANESE ENEMY 75 YEARS AFTER THE END OF WORLD WAR II

Kirsten L. Ziomek

**Waldo Heinrichs** and **Marc Gallicchio**, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific 1944–1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 711 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95.

After the defeat of Germany in May 1945, the United States wanted to end the war with Japan as quickly as possible. But Waldo Heinrichs and Marc Gallicchio contend that this was impossible as the United States was not in the position to launch a successful invasion of mainland Japan. One of the questions that *Implacable Foes* sets out to answer is how the conflict arrived at the point that the United States needed to be saved by both the atomic bombs and Hirohito's intervention in favoring surrender, because the prospects of a successful U.S. invasion of Japan did not look good. The book's premise is novel in that it challenges a common narrative that the dominant United States, with all its industrial might, men, and matériel was the certain victor in 1945. The authors depict a United States government and military that still considered themselves the underdog versus the Japanese who had not won a battle since the loss of Midway in 1942. Despite the Japanese fighting a two-front war in China for eight years and for four years in the Pacific theater, with a dwindling amount of supplies, trained pilots, and resources necessary to wage war, the United States still did not like its chances in launching an invasion of the Japanese mainland. Japan had 69 cities that had already been firebombed prior to the atomic bombings, and their military had to resort to *kamikaze* tactics in 1944 as their primary strategy from the air out of their sheer desperation caused by their lack of skilled pilots and planes. That the Japanese posed such a formidable threat raises questions: was the United States really incapable of launching a successful invasion of Japan or was it that the government and public simply did not have an appetite for further fighting with boots on the ground? The authors argue that both are true.

This substantial book is primarily focused on the American order of battle, the personalities of several "great men" like General Douglas MacArthur and George Marshall, and detailing the internal wrangling that U.S. government officials and military leaders went through when confronted with the prospect

of continuing the Pacific war well past the end of fighting on the European front. References to Japanese soldiers, which are relatively rare, often rely on depictions of them as fanatics who fought to the death: “[The Americans] were engaged in a war of annihilation against an enemy resigned to his own death and determined to fight on for the sole purpose of killing as many Americans as possible” (p. 8).

Although the authors try to provide balance by pointing out that American soldiers—like the Japanese—also committed brutalities during the war, (pp. 77–80) brief mentions do not obviate the overwhelming sense that pervades the book that the Japanese were an enemy of a sort that American soldiers had never encountered before. Refuting John Dower in *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (1987), which argues that the Pacific War was a race war that fueled hatred on both sides, the authors contend that Japanese soldiers were unique and unlike their American counterparts. “That war with the Japanese was a battle for survival, a struggle without sanctuary, came as a shock to the American soldier. Surrender meant barbaric death, to survive meant killing” (p. 79). While it is true that official Japanese military doctrine discouraged soldiers from surrendering, whether this resulted in American soldiers being less willing to fight for their lives than the Japanese is debatable. More groundwork and substantial evidence would help advance their argument against Dower’s.

Regardless, the book was never intended to be about the foes of America, but instead the focus was meant to be (and is) on how the American government and military officials saw their options to end the war in light of the last year of the conflict. While there might never have been any intention to focus on the Japanese as the enemy, the authors’ assumptions about them and their mindset lays the foundation for their arguments justifying how and why Americans acted as they did.

The authors’ depiction of the Japanese as a formidable threat justifies their argument that only unconventional means (i.e. the atomic bomb) could ultimately end the war. Noting that the Battle of Okinawa netted the largest number of Japanese prisoners to surrender (over 3,700), the authors question whether the relatively high numbers illustrated a depleted morale or, “was it more significant that over 100,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors, like the young men who piloted planes on one-way missions, chose to die rather than surrender” (p. 412)? This question posits a false dichotomy that the Japanese never faced. Neither the Japanese government nor military commanders presented such a choice to their soldiers to decide on their own: to surrender and live or to choose death (Dower, 1986, pp. 11–12). To understand the low numbers of those who surrendered, we need to look specifically to the conditions of each battlefield. How did opportunities to surrender present themselves to the Japanese military? In the cases where Japanese soldiers did surrender, what

were the circumstances? Did the U.S. Marines who were killed on Peleliu or Okinawa choose to die? If the situation were reversed and Americans faced the prospect of their territory being invaded, would American soldiers choose “to live and surrender?” These are worthwhile questions to consider if we are interested in moving beyond caricatures of the Japanese as enemy and toward a more multifaceted view.

It is striking that this view of the Japanese “enemy” written in 2017 has not changed much from accounts written in 1945 in *Life* and *Time* magazines or in Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946). In contrast, historians like John Dower and Aaron Moore have conducted research that stresses some of the commonalities in American and Japanese cultures of war. In Dower’s *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9–11/Iraq* (2010) rather than reifying cultures as fundamentally distinct and essentialized, he draws parallels between different wars that had commonalities in the execution of war and in “failures of imagination” or “strategic imbecilities” in war planning. Dower’s work is polarizing. Some critics have pushed back on Dower’s questioning of American triumphal narratives surrounding WWII, especially with regard to the use of the atomic bombs. One can see his work as throwing a gauntlet down to other historians. Will the writing of narratives of war continue to be siloed as national history projects or is there something to be gained by moving beyond nationalist frameworks? Moore’s *Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire* (2013) analyzes diary entries of Chinese, American, and Japanese soldiers during WWII. Chapters 4 and 5 specifically will be of interest to those interested in the Pacific war from both American and Japanese perspectives. Among Moore’s findings are similarities behind how atrocities and brutalities conducted by both Americans and Japanese were rationalized. This sort of transnational history writing breaks down cultural assumptions about the essentialized nature of the enemy.

Heinrichs and Gallicchio have produced a hefty volume on the last desperate and frenzied year of fighting in the Pacific. A work of more than 700 pages, *Implacable Foes* in some ways reads like two different books: Chapters 1–9, are synopses of the major action in the Pacific theater from 1944–45, with distinct chapters covering different battles. Coverage includes the last months (from June to July 1944) of a several-years-long campaign in Papua New Guinea, the battles of Saipan and Guam from June–August 1944, the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the retaking of the Philippines, and the Battle of Okinawa. In this first half of the book, the actions and motivations of the polarizing figure of General Douglas MacArthur are reinterpreted and analyzed.

The second half of the book, Chapters 10–13, focuses on the shift from ending the war on the European front and the US pivoting back to the Pacific theater with plans to invade Japan in order to force its surrender. It details the economic concerns government officials and politicians had regarding rationing

and the infrastructure upgrades needed to support wartime industrialization. The authors detail Operation Downfall (the plan to invade Japan) and Operation Olympic (the first phase of the plan to invade Kyushu) amid the myriad complications that launching such enormous endeavors entailed. They also detail the backroom discussions those in the U.S. government had about the terms of Japan's unconditional surrender, ultimately leading to a discussion of the political backdrop against which the use of the atomic bombs occurred. In lieu of MacArthur, in the latter half of the book, George Marshall dominates as the "great man" who is the subject of much of the authors' interest.

In this section, the authors' contention that neither the American public nor the government wanted to invade Japan in order to force it to surrender is not surprising considering the extensive loss of life the Americans had already experienced fighting in Europe and in the Pacific over the preceding four years. The authors argue that by July and August of 1945, increasing discomfort with Operation Olympic caused some military leaders to seek an alternative means to end the war. The American public had no appetite for a redeployment of troops from Europe or other sites in the Pacific to Japan in order to stage the final invasion of Japan and that the government acceded to their wishes.

The idea that the American public's support for a prolonged war was a crucial component factoring into the use of the atomic bomb has not received much consideration. The argument distinguishes the authors' work from other scholarship on the U.S. government's motivations in dropping the bomb. They contend that, "Looming over all was the realization shared by the military leaders in both nations that the greatest obstacle to an American victory would be the willingness of U.S. citizens and their representatives to support the extraordinary measures needed to subdue Japan" (p. 8). Are the implacable foes then not the Japanese but rather the American public? The authors' strength in these chapters lies in giving the reader an insight into the many economic, social, and political challenges the task of demobilization from the European front and redeployment into the Pacific necessitated in order to launch Operation Downfall. The challenges that the Truman administration faced with presenting the terms of unconditional surrender to the Japanese or in modifying demands to retain the emperor is laid out, as well as a summary of the events leading to the dropping of the bombs. Much of this latter material has been evaluated by numerous historians, and it would have been helpful to the reader if the authors did a better job indicating where their work diverged from other historians' interpretations in order to highlight their unique contributions to this historiography.

While the European front looms in *Implacable Foes* as an important backdrop to the strategic U.S. calculations over the continuation of the Pacific war, the background of the Asian theater is virtually absent from the book

except for a few mentions that oversimplify Japanese intentions. The authors write that, by the 1930s, the Japanese army “prepared for a war to establish Japanese predominance in East Asia” (p. 77). This description, seemingly benign, prioritizes expediency over details of the events in the 1930s that would make the Japanese become less caricatures and more fleshed-out protagonists blundering their way into a world war without a concrete plan or intention.

The linkages between the Asia and Pacific theaters have always been emphasized in English classics, including Akira Iriye’s *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, (1987) and *Pearl Harbor and the Coming of the Pacific War: A Brief History with Documents and Essays* (1999), only in the last couple of decades has this trend become more popular among a broader American audience. Richard Frank’s *Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia Pacific War July 1937–1942* (2020), the first of a three-part trilogy, is a sign that expectations are normalizing toward documenting the Pacific war within the context of the Asian theater and not just the European one.

Another omission in the book regards the loss of civilian life, only very briefly mentioned in the chapters on Okinawa and the retaking of the Philippines. This omission is felt most keenly in the Okinawa chapter. The Battle of Okinawa included more than the 12,500 deaths of American soldiers, as well as the devastation of an island whose vast civilian population of 530,000 mostly could not evacuate. About 80,000 wealthy people were able to flee, leaving 450,000 on the island during the largest amphibious invasion of the Pacific war. About a third of the remaining population, roughly 122,228 Okinawans, are estimated to have lost their lives, including roughly 28,228 Okinawan men who conscripted into the Japanese imperial army (total deaths are estimated around 200,000). This means about 1.5 times more Okinawans than Japanese soldiers died during the Battle of Okinawa.

Thousands of Okinawan civilians were caught in the crossfire; many were bombed and shot. Countless died fleeing from shelling in the north as they evacuated to the south. Many died at the hands of the Japanese imperial soldiers who forced civilians to commit group suicide and shot civilians to commandeer their hiding spots in caves and steal their food. Documents from the United States’s Tenth Army throughout April and June of 1945 open with the same phrase: “there were no front lines.” That is to say there was no demarcation between soldiers and civilians. Instead, civilian bodies intertwined with those of soldiers, and the fates and relationships between the two groups became even more entangled as Okinawan civilians of all ages were mobilized as either student nurse corps (for the girls) or into the Blood and Iron corps (for the boys), or as laborers. To recount the battle without the civilian component writes out one of its most devastating aspects. We should be moving towards writing military history that does not discount civilian losses as an ancillary side note, especially when civilians participated in the main action to the

extent that Okinawans did. Could witnessing the large-scale transformation of children into makeshift nurses and soldiers and their subsequent slaughter potentially explain the actions of Japanese soldiers who fought to the death?

*Implacable Foes* deserves to be read and debated. It offers an opportunity for historians and readers to think about what histories of the Pacific war should try to achieve. When the field is overcrowded with books documenting the Pacific war, the standards should be high in terms of assessing what sends ripples in the field in terms of changing our understanding of the events of 1944–45. *Implacable Foes's* greatest contribution can be found in its latter half. The archival research is particularly strong in the last three chapters. The authors' research and analysis into the political drama behind the potential implementation of Operations Downfall and Olympic adds another dimension to our understanding of why the Truman administration opted to use the atomic bomb. As the authors write regarding their contribution, not enough historians have paid attention to, "the growing opposition to the Army's strategy that the advocates of reconversion were mounting. Nor have historians fully appreciated the degree to which the Army's leadership became the object of criticism and invective following V-E Day" (p. 591).

The growing public criticism of the Army and potential negative consequences of launching such a reconversion eventually caused some military leaders to want to abandon Olympic and seek an alternative way to bring about a quick surrender (p. 560). Olympic featured so many potential headaches that alternatives included launching an invasion into the Kanto plain or the northern tip of Honshu (p. 574). This is where the authors pivot to the necessity of the bomb: "The Army found itself preparing to fight the most demanding campaigns of the Pacific war with divisions replenished by green troops. Arrayed against the Army were a bitterly determined enemy, a restive public, and increasingly political leaders. Under these circumstances the atomic bomb had been indispensable and that it alone had brought the kind of victory they sought" (p. 595). Although the authors are squarely in the traditional school with regard to their views toward the necessity of the bomb, their lack of engagement with the arguments of revisionists or other historians whose work is in dialogue with theirs is a missed opportunity to advance the historiographical debate. This is not a critique leveled just at these authors; rather, it seems to be a general trend with a few notable exceptions to write within traditional or revisionist frameworks and to use evidence that suits that particular perspective while avoiding rebutting conflicting evidence to the contrary, as if the debate is already decided. While this depiction of the Japanese as enemy leaves much to be desired, there is much to be learned from this substantial work and it is certain to provoke much-deserved interest and debate.

Kirsten L. Ziomek is an Associate Professor of History specializing in Japanese empire and imperialism. Her first book is *Lost Histories: Recovering the Lives of Japan's Colonial Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019). Her next book is on the Asia-Pacific War, focusing on the extreme violence enacted by diverse ethnoracial peoples who were coopted into fighting for the Japanese imperial military throughout the Pacific region, including the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Saipan, Attu, Okinawa and the mainland of Japan. It will also examine the everyday people who found themselves on the frontlines of war when their islands became war zones.