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To introduce this symposium on World War II in the Pacific, I reflect on the differences between this, the 60th anniversary, and the memorable 50th anniversary in 1995.

First, we are well aware of the passing of many members of generations who, as adults, experienced the protracted wars of the 1930s and 1940s. 60th anniversary commemorative practices are marked by this awareness. At the site of the German surrender in Holland, for example, the march of veterans and former resistance fighters in May will "be the final one there" "because of the aging of the participants." (NYT 3/27/05, p. 6). In Japan, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Peace Museums have stepped up efforts to gather narratives and artifacts of the atomic bombings in anticipation of the sixtieth anniversary. One critic noted, "it is almost certain that events to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary will be the last chance for surviving hibakusha to appeal to the world to oppose . . . genocide by weapons of mass destruction" (Yuki Tanaka, The Hibakusha Voice and the Future of the Anti-Nuclear Movement). In local newspapers, we see prominent calls for readers to send their memories of VE Day and also of VJ Day.

Yet it is not only the passing of the generations that distinguishes the 60th anniversary from the 50th. It is easy to forget how different the world is today from a decade ago. Cultural, commemorative, and political processes reflect the differences in the moments. In 1995, relatively soon after the end of the Cold War, many thought that the post-Cold War world would be a more stable place geopolitically and culturally because of the ascendance of the global capitalist system, and the waning of the alternative model. The reign of a single superpower with no apparent military challengers suggested that the era of global conflict fueled by Cold War rivalries was a thing of the past. The controversy over the Smithsonian's Enola Gay exhibit during the 1990s revealed the depths of divisions in American society over issues of nationalism, war and historical memory. Although the debate was rancorous, I would argue that it was ultimately productive, because it forced the public, historians, and politicians to confront anew questions of the decision to drop the bomb, the human costs of firebombing and nuclear bombing., and in turn, the legacy of the Cold War.
Now, in 2005, and after 9/11, we witness increasing instability in the post-Cold War world, replete with a War on Terror and local Hot Wars—the Bush Administration's War in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some US veteran groups and politicians take the sixtieth anniversary as an opportunity to identify the Bush administration's war in Iraq with a valorized and triumphal World War II at a time when the American people are deeply divided over contemporary wars. In Europe on the occasion of the 60th anniversary, President Bush attempted to revive early Cold War narratives of Yalta, in effect characterizing the bipolar Cold War arrangement as a sign of American acquiescence to Soviet imperialism.

In 2005, unresolved legacies of the Cold War require attention to parts of the world that barely appeared on American radar screens in 1995, such as Korea and Afghanistan. On the Korean peninsula, public debate makes clear that the liberation of 1945 is not the most significant memory, lacking, as it did in Korea, resounding triumph or crushing defeat. Recent controversies over the German Hitler movie and Korean and Chinese reactions to the Japanese prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine and his stated intention to visit again, perhaps on the 60th anniversary of Japan's defeat, are indicative of the continuing burden of the past for the former Axis powers. Yet, perhaps more significantly, ten years later Japan and Germany find themselves in altered relationships with their former possessions and enemies, as well as with their prominent postwar ally, the US. Germany a decade later is firmly ensconced in the European Union. Japan, by contrast, is torn between the pursuit of a new political, military and cultural identity in a dynamic East Asia and maintaining the primacy of its ties to the U.S., as demonstrated in the fierce debate over the Koizumi regimes decision to send Self-Defense Forces to Iraq and the debate over constitutional revision.

Geopolitical relationships are in flux, and thus the moment of remembrance, of anniversary, is no longer the same. These articles explore cultural, political, and diplomatic dimensions of the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII.
Panel participants at the symposium held in Chicago at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in April 2005, included Sheila Jager, Oberlin College, Charles Armstrong, Columbia University, Laura Hein, Northwestern University, Susan Napier, University of Texas Austin, and Franziska Seraphim, Boston University.

Ann Sherif, East Asian Studies Program, Oberlin College, is a Japan Focus associate. This article, prepared for Japan Focus, expands on a presentation on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, March, 31- April 2, 2005. Posted at Japan Focus on May 31, 2005. See other articles in the symposium by Laura Hein, Charles Armstrong, and Susan Napier.