

Hiroshima: First Shot of World War III

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The barbarity of the nation-state since its emergence 8,000 years ago has only been limited in its intensity by a lack of the technological means needed to perpetrate horrors upon humanity. By the advent of World War II, science and industry, joined together in wedlock by Capital, achieved the breakthrough in destructive methodology and allowed a carnage of a staggering 30,000,000 dead.

Although it had been half-jokingly said that World War II was the only conflict in which the U.S. fought any nation worse than itself, the real nature of the war should never be disguised. It was pure and simply a war of contending empires—opposing factions of capital—with each side and its allies either trying to preserve or extend the area and people controlled by its sphere of domination. When the rubble and destruction were finally swept away, new contenders already were poised for the next conflagration, anxious to act out the capitalist cycle of prosperity, depression, war and reconstruction.

Escalating deaths on the battlefield (from 4,435 in the American Revolution to millions world-wide from 1939 through 1945) were matched by the wholesale slaughter of civilian populations such as the Nazi exterminations of Jews, the firebombings of Dresden and Hamburg, and the atomic holocaust unleashed on two Japanese cities 32 years ago this month.

The Most Appalling Act

Although it may be foolish to attempt to distinguish between acts of such enormity, the militarily unnecessary use of nuclear weapons on a defeated, unarmed civilian population may take the award for the most appalling. All the other acts, no matter how monstrous, were related to the conflict at hand—the psychotic racial dreams of the Nazis or Churchill's carefully targeted German working class districts for the destruction of the Nazi productive mechanism.

The atomic attack on Japan had nothing to do with that conflict, but with the future one with the Soviet Union. The people of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and those of Nagasaki three days later were the first sacrifices of World War III—300,000 of them.

The prevailing myth, one still peddled by many official historians, is that the Japanese were so fanatically devoted to their emperor that they would never surrender no matter how disastrous their military situation might become and that only a full-scale land invasion costing a million American casualties would end World War II. I believed that; didn't you?

In reality, Japan attacked the American empire in the East in its quest to wrest China and the Pacific rim countries from control of the Western powers. However, by late 1944, Japan's ruling politicians began to realize that their plans had fatally failed and began to discuss plans for surrender. In June of 1945, the Japanese Supreme War

Council had authorized Foreign Minister Togo to approach the Soviet Union about their desire to end the war by September.

A state of war had never been declared between the two countries, although Stalin had promised his Western allies that he would begin action against the Japanese three months after the defeat of the Nazis in Europe. This timetable would have brought the Russians into the Pacific war in early or mid-August. The impact of this was not lost on either the Japanese or the Americans, both of whom realized, as stated in intelligence reports from both countries, that Russia's entry would be the signal for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese with the Soviets playing a major role.

Many Options Open to Policy Makers

President Truman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other policy makers knew they had several options for ending the war on terms favorable to the U.S. They ranged from an air and naval blockade favored by those branches of the Service with conventional bombardment, a non-military demonstration of the A-bomb, a warning that the U.S. possessed the bomb and would use it if a surrender was not forthcoming, a series of political and diplomatic moves, or the use of the bomb on a major population center.

Interestingly, almost the entire inner core of the U.S. war machine opposed use of the bomb, including Secretary of State Stettinius and Secretary of War Stimson, as did the military. Right-wing General Curtis LeMay later said, as quoted in "The Use of the Atom Bomb" by Gar Alperovitz, "even without the atomic bomb and the Russian entry into the war, Japan would have surrendered in two weeks...The atomic bomb had nothing to do with the end of the war." General Dwight Eisenhower thought that the bomb was "no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives."

The decision to use the bomb has to be seen clearly as a political act, certainly not a military one, whose intent was to force Japan to surrender directly to the U.S. before the Russian entry into the war and to strengthen the hand of the Allies in dealing with the Soviets regarding the Eastern European territory they occupied. It was a clear and sharp warning to the Soviets that in the period to come the Western Allies were ready to go to any lengths necessary to protect their sector of world capitalism. This act of hostility was understood as such by Stalin and was part of what shaped Russian foreign policy in the Cold War years to follow.

The final decision to use the bomb was made by a small group of advisors around Truman, all of whom were fully aware of the political impact it would have on Russia. The world entered the Nuclear Age at a dreadful price in human suffering, with high rates of cancer and birth defects existing even today in Japan—testimony to the lethal capacity of the bomb.

It becomes difficult to find words that can express sufficient horror, dismay, and revulsion toward men who would coldly order such an act as part of a grand game plan, but it's not like they are creatures from another age relegated to the history books.

The same politicians now inhabit the war rooms of an ever-growing number of nations, all of which have or will soon have the capability of beginning a war that could eliminate life on the planet. Just as the first developers of the A-bomb over 30 years ago never gave consideration to not using their new weapon, one knows the impossibility of not using those possessed today.

e.e. cummings put it thusly, "I don't want to startle you, but they mean to kill us all." The issue of nuclear weaponry and atomic power has transcended the normal considerations of what is revolutionary and what is reformist into a concern for the survival of the species.

Detailed information on the decision to use the atomic bomb and the origins of the Cold War may be found in *Cold War Essays* by Gar Alperovitz, Doubleday/Anchor, 1970.

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