

Hiroshima, First Shot of World War III

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Introduction by R. Relievo

As E.B. Maple points out in the following article (which first appeared in FE #285, August 1977), the atomic bombings of civilians by the American Army Air Corps at the end of World War II was not the knockout punch that convinced an intransigent Japan to suddenly change its strategy and surrender.

The record now indicates that the United States knew since early Spring, 1945 (from intercepted diplomatic cables), of Japan's overtures to surrender if allowed to keep the Emperor. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff were planning invasion of the home islands only on a contingency basis; Secretary of State James Byrnes, however, was terrified that "failure to use the bomb, after 2 billion of the taxpayers' money had been spent on it, would outrage the electorate and destroy the Administration." Byrnes "refused to consider, until after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese peace feelers that were first put out in April 1945." (*NY Times*, 12-18-94.)

Let's get this straight: after a single July test in New Mexico, the U.S. exploded its two remaining atom bombs over Japanese cities on the islands of Honshu and Kyushu to intimidate that other conquering empire, the Soviet Union, and to vindicate the huge expense of building the weapon.

However, more subtle reasons than cost or classic imperial posturing recognizable to any Bronze Age city-state existed as an impetus for the bomb's use. In a society that sanctifies technology, there is an almost religious impetus to utilize new techniques: therefore, as soon as the massive industrial process assembled by scientists, bureaucrats, generals and businessmen had extracted and prepared enough material to make prototypes, the armed forces exploded them almost immediately. (This continued after the war; within a year, two more bombs were detonated.) So enthusiastic was desire to try out the new apparatus that even fears of some atomic scientists that the first explosion at Alamogordo could conceivably ignite the atmosphere in a chain reaction were not enough to stop the scheduled test.

The scale of this scientific-industrial venture was unprecedented. When undertaken in 1942, the Hanford plutonium facility in the state of Washington was history's biggest construction project. In Oak Ridge, Tennessee, as one bomb bureaucrat put it, "We accomplished the development of an industry for separating uranium-235 the size of Detroit in two years. It is almost unbelievable, but it happened." Only a powerful government-business team in the blast furnace of modern war could have forged this doomsday machine. The project to build an atomic bomb alone is sufficient reason to despise the state, for could anything be more obviously harmful to humanity's existence than a mad arms race which produced tens of thousands of weapons poised to obliterate entire populations? Or a worldwide nuclear industry—consisting of complicated technics capable at any moment of catastrophic malfunction—releasing a continuous flow of lethal waste that can be neither safely stored nor disposed of? Such achievements of "civilization" bring into serious question the viability of our species.

The story of why the U.S. is the only country yet to deliberately use these horrific weapons is topical again. In the Empire's capital city, its preeminent national museum will begin this May to display part of the B-29 bomber Enola Gay, the technical device used to administer America's nascent nuclear policy that summer of 1945. Because of pressure from veterans' groups and members of Congress, museum officials agreed to delete a section from the exhibit on the postwar nuclear arms race, and to revise upward (to match Official History) predicted casualty figures for American forces had there been an invasion of the Japanese islands.

Another Big Lie

The current evidence flatly contradicts postwar claims by President Truman and his political allies that the bomb was the only alternative to an invasion of Japan. Using the weapon arguably cost American lives, since delaying the victory until August only to accept the original Japanese peace initiative of April condemned thousands more U.S. troops to death during the bloody Okinawa campaign.

The American empire must cloak all it does in a cape of righteousness, thus a cover story was constructed: the holocausts ignited in undefended Japanese cities were rational acts of self-defense. The Nazi state in Europe, while perpetrating unimaginable crimes against other defenseless civilians, similarly claimed in its propaganda that it was defending itself from the people being systematically massacred. In both cases, perceived geopolitical interests were reason enough for mass murder of innocents. Despite the physical distance between victims and their executioners, America and Nazi Germany found common moral ground at Nagasaki and Treblinka.

Current ideology cannot admit the military redundancy of the bombings and uncontrollable characteristics of runaway technology, so a Big Lie is maintained: namely that nuking two large population centers was done to save American lives—and not just a few, but hundreds of thousands (in some cases wildly inflated to a million). This is carnival patter for suckers coming from a government that would deliberately irradiate entire divisions of its legions during atomic tests in the 1940s and 50s, and toxify GIs in Vietnam and the Gulf War, afterwards always attempting through extensive legal maneuvers to forestall responsibility as long as possible, sometimes for decades. When the altar of National Interest requires human sacrifice, the state's only concern with lives is how to manage the public relations involved after extinguishing them.

Western Progress?

A more complex reason for “deciding” to drop atomic bombs is that there was no decision at all. The impersonal institutional manifestation of “Western Progress”—that which can be done shall be done—destined the weapon for use from its very conception. The arch-conservative Winston Churchill illuminated this spirit in relation to use of the bomb: “There was never a moment's discussion on whether the atomic bomb should be used or not...There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; nor did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise.”

In his biography of WW II War Secretary Henry Stimson, historian Elting Morison wrote that the interim committee on atomic policy appointed by the Secretary went through “a symbolic act” of bestowing “ordered form, some corporate structure,” upon “attitudes already developed.” Top Manhattan Project physicist Robert Oppenheimer presided over an advisory panel of scientists that also supported the foregone conclusion two weeks after Stimson's committee had submitted their report to President Truman.

Why should these executives and technicians have had any reservations? Firestorms killing human beings by the hundreds of thousands had resulted from U.S. and British air raids. Daily news of what we now call conventional bombing had inured nearly everyone to the mechanized slaughter of civilians. The transition to a single superbomb that could do the work of several squadrons must have seemed an improvement to many, another triumph of American technological mastery.

The United States won the war; one of the rewards was it got to write the history books. To mask this crime against humanity, the *Million Casualties Myth* has been a necessary genuflection towards state ideology. Required

to claim two and two equal five (the biological insanity of inventing and mass-producing nuclear arms and energy), the ruling elites maintain the original cover story to this day.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the Nuclear Age approaches, we reprint Maple's (Peter Werbe's) article as part of our effort to counter the swirl of lies sure to appear between now and next summer.

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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.

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