

Chapter 8 - The United States and the Atomic Bombings of Japan

The unnecessary atomic bombings

An atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, and three days later another was dropped on Nagasaki.

In his memoirs, *Freedom Betrayed*¹, Roosevelt's predecessor as president, Herbert Hoover, strongly denounced the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

"Prior to the Potsdam Conference in July, 1945, the Japanese were repeatedly signaling for peace. A review of these Japanese peace efforts sheds light on the actual situation at this fateful conference... In March, 1945, a month after Yalta, the Swedish Minister to Japan was requested by Japanese Foreign Minister Shigemitsu to enlist his government to mediate peace for Japan. Nothing came from it and its only importance was the indication of Japan's determination to make peace... Thus before the ultimatum issued at the Potsdam Conference on July 26th, there had been six months of peace feelers by the Japanese, and nearly two weeks before [the atomic bombings], the positive proposal of Japan to Russia of which Truman, Byrnes and Stimson had full information from intercepted telegrams."²

At that time, James Byrnes was the Secretary of State and Henry Stimson was the Secretary of War.

"The seventeenth wandering of American statesmanship was Truman's immoral order to drop the atomic bomb on the Japanese. Not only had Japan been repeatedly suing for peace but it was the act of unparalleled brutality in all American history. It will forever weigh heavily on the American conscience."³

The men who dropped the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki were specially trained B-29 bomber crewmen of the United States Army Air Forces who took off from the airfield on the island of Tinian.

What if Japan had had an atomic bomb?

I once met with John McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War under Henry Stimson, and asked him a question about the atomic bombings. McCloy was present at the White House conference at which President Truman made the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

¹ *Freedom Betrayed – Herbert Hoover's Secret History of the Second World War and its Aftermath* edited with an Introduction by George H. Nash, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2011.

² *Ibid.*, p.560 - 561

³ *Ibid.*, p.882.

The American woman who I most admired has sadly passed away, but she had lived in New York. Mrs. Iphigene Sulzberger was the head of the Sulzberger family, which owns The New York Times Company. She was a petite but sprightly woman, brimming with curiosity. She was always delightfully animated.

When she learned that I was coming to the United States, she hosted a luncheon, called an "editorial luncheon", for me at the executive dining room of The New York Times Building which faces Times Square. The "editorial luncheon" brought together the newspaper's top editors for a question and answer session with guests. She also invited me and one of her friends to dinner at her home in the New York town of Stanford.

Once when I had travelled to New York, she had invited my wife and me to a banquet at her mansion on the upper reaches of the Hudson River, which flows to the shores of Manhattan.

At the dinner, the great *New York Times* reporter James Reston and Mrs. Iphigene's old friend John McCloy, who had been Assistant Secretary of War during the final year of World War II, were also invitees.

I was aware that McCloy was a participant in the conference where the decision to drop the atomic bombs had been made.

I brought up the issue of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and I asked him, "If Japan was in possession of even a single atomic bomb at that time, and had the capacity to drop it anywhere in America, would the United States still have subjected Japan to a nuclear attack?"

Reston was surprised by my question and immediately interjected, "Why would you ask something so obvious? You should know the answer without having to ask."

I responded, "It's something I wanted to confirm, because this is the first time I have met one of the men who participated in the decision to drop the atomic bombs."

Then McCloy said, "Naturally, you too know the answer. If Japan also had had an atomic bomb, then making a nuclear attack on Japan would have been unthinkable."

The cenotaph in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park bears the inscription, "Let all the souls here rest in peace, for we shall not repeat this mistake." However, the real pledge we should make is to not repeat the mistake of inviting upon ourselves another terrible nuclear attack by not having nuclear weapons of our own.

The final reunion of the unit that dropped the A-bomb

In August 1990, in the town of Wendover, which straddles the border between Utah and Nevada, the veterans of the United States Army Air Forces' 509th Composite Group, which had dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, held their final reunion.

The town of Wendover is half in Utah and half in Nevada, and it is surrounded on all four sides by a vast desert. During the closing years of World War II, it was just a small village, more than two hundred kilometers distance from the next nearest town.

That is the reason why Wendover was made the site of a top secret air base in 1944. Here, the unit which carried out the atomic bombings was formed and trained under the utmost secrecy.

The old flight crews of the 509th Composite Group brought their family members to the reunion, and soon Wendover's hotel was filled with over 500 people from across the United States.

I also was invited to the reunion to deliver a commemorative speech.

On the day before my speech, some veterans of the 509th Composite Group guided me around the old air field, which was located not far from the hotel where the reunion was taking place.

The hanger which once held the *Enola Gay*, the bomber piloted by Colonel Paul Tibbets that dropped the atomic bomb, remained intact just the way it had looked at the time.

However, it was now a quiet airport for civilian use only. There were a couple of small Cessna aircraft parked there.

I saw no signs posted anywhere to explain that once, forty-five years earlier, this had been the site of the secret air base where the unit which dropped the atomic bombs was stationed. Any person who dropped by without knowing that already probably thought of the site as nothing more than a lonely, largely abandoned airport.

The veterans brought their wives and children to the airport and the old hanger. Some of them were holding cans of beer in their hands. There were forty or fifty people there in total, and I shook hands and spoke with seven or eight of them. Some of them were salesman of Japanese-made cars or cameras.

I gave my speech the next day in the hotel's auditorium. I was scheduled to speak for forty minutes.

Retired Brigadier General Tibbets had been introduced prior to my speech. He was wearing a suit and was sitting in the front row.

In my speech, I described how Japan had been making peace offers since June of 1945 and was requesting that Sweden and the Soviet Union mediate. Because Washington was fully aware that Japan was trying to negotiate its surrender, I argued, Japan would have surrendered even without the atomic bombings and thus there was never any need to drop the bombs.

The explanation I gave of the peace maneuvers of the Japanese government and military was virtually identical to what Herbert Hoover had written about the atomic bombings in his memoirs as I quoted at the top of this chapter.

And yet, Hoover's memoirs were only released in 2011, twelve years after my speech. The memoirs, which were published by the Hoover Institution, are a huge tome, 957 pages in length.

As I was writing the rough draft of my speech, I considered mentioning what General of the Army Dwight Eisenhower, who would become the 34th President of the United States, had said to Secretary of War Stimson upon being informed that an atomic bomb would be dropped on Hiroshima. He recalled that, "my belief [was] that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary... our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory". I decided that because the horrific nature of the atomic bombing was evident, there was no need to quote an American to make the point.

At the time he said that, Eisenhower was Supreme Allied Commander in the European theater.

I concluded the speech by saying that, while the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were atrocious acts contrary to both international law and basic humanity, they took place in the madness of war, and for that reason, Japanese people have already forgiven it and bear no resentment against the United States.

I was only a little over five minutes into my speech when, one by one, around 100 or 150 people rose from their seats with their family members and walked out in protest. They gathered in the hallway and began to sing patriotic songs.

Did the atomic bombing save Japanese lives?

By the time I had finished speaking, the room was filled with empty seats. Only forty or so people remained.

Brigadier General Tibbets was among those who stayed behind. After I had left the stage and Tibbets had exited into the hallway, I was moved to see a group of more than thirty people line up to shake my hand. They thanked me personally and told me things like, "That was a good speech" and "I truly understand the Japanese viewpoint." As I spoke to

them, the chorus of patriotic songs being sung in the hallway continued to filter into the room.

Throughout their lives, the former members of the 509th Composite Group had taken great pride in what they had done during the war, convinced that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had forced the Japanese to surrender and thus prevented an invasion of mainland Japan which would have cost millions of American and Japanese lives.

The precise reason why they invited me as a speaker was because they had believed that I would tell them how Japan had been saved thanks to the atomic bombings.

One of the veterans who stayed in his seat right up to the end of my speech told me, "If General Tibbets had walked out, everyone else would have followed him, and you would have been the only one left in the room."

Paul Tibbets was a small, quiet man who did not look to be in good health.

The day before, one of the veterans had confessed to me that, "After the war, Brigadier General Tibbets was not lucky as a soldier. He had bombed Hiroshima, but the Army didn't think of it as a major accomplishment and so was not able to promote him to the rank of major general. I feel truly sorry for him."

I returned back to my room. I had been invited as a guest to the reunion dinner which was taking place that evening in the hotel. However, I was told before the dinner that, "Some of the vets got drunk and were threatening to beat you to death. We apologize, but we would like you to stay in your room tonight and take room service."

The next morning, local papers reported on the gist of my speech. All the veterans joined the unveiling ceremony for a monument that had been built in Wendover's main thoroughfare, but I did not attend.

I had some free time, so I went to see the salt flats, which are located about ten kilometers outside the town.

The salt flats are an area where hard salt covers the whole area of the earth. Because the ground is perfectly level, the salt flats are famous as the place where automobile land speed world records are set.

As far as the eye could see, it was a vast expanse of pure white salt, which sparkled under the blazing desert sun. On that day too, there were dozens of racing cars of all colors parked in the pit.

Among them were three Nissan sports cars from Japan, which were being worked on by a group of ten or so young Japanese men and women. They told me that they had come together from Tokyo. Just a little while ago, they said, one of their cars had reached 277 miles per hour (446 kilometers per hour).

I chatted with several of them. When I commented that, "Forty-five years ago, that airport just over there was the place where the unit which dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was trained." They were surprised and told me, "Did that really happen?"

I thought to myself, "World War II has really become ancient history to them."

Two of the former members of the 509th Composite Group saw me off at the airport that evening. Just before that, several Japanese newspaper correspondents who had come to cover the reunion interviewed me. One of them praised me for "saying what we Japanese people needed to say".

The different treatment of Germans and Japanese

It was strong racial contempt of the Japanese people which motivated the United States to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even though Japan had expressed its desire for peace.

Hatred of the Japanese people ran high at the time, derived from the earlier prejudices of white people against Asians and Africans.

In December 1944, eight months before the atomic bombings, an opinion poll conducted in the United States found that 13% of Americans answered affirmatively to the pre-prepared question, "Should all Japanese people be killed?" I was astonished that such a question had even been asked.

An opinion poll was also conducted concerning Germany, but it did not include the question, "Should all German people be killed?"

Most of the propaganda posters which were ubiquitous in wartime America depicted Japanese soldiers not simply as ugly humans, but as apes.

They showed gibbons, orangutans, or gorillas wearing the uniforms of the Japanese Army. Japanese soldiers also appeared on the posters as insects or reptiles.

Though American soldiers collected the ears and skulls of Japanese soldiers as souvenirs and turned their bones into letter openers, no incidents of this nature ever took place against German soldiers in the European theater.

In the Pacific theater, most American units never took any prisoners. There are countless eyewitness accounts of American, British, and Australian forces shooting Japanese soldiers who were trying to surrender.

Many Allied officers and men hoped to have the Japanese people wiped out.

Admiral William Halsey, who led a carrier group throughout the war, was a white supremacist who openly advocated, "the almost total elimination of the Japanese as a race." Halsey is also known for leading the Doolittle Raid, a surprise attack on mainland Japanese targets, including Tokyo, carried out by B-25 bombers early in the war in April of 1942.

MIT professor John Dower's book, introduced in Chapter 5, meticulously documents the fact that many units took pride in their policy to take no Japanese prisoners. According to Dower, an article published in an army newspaper about the 41st Infantry Division, which had been transferred to the Pacific Theater, unabashedly declared that "The 41st Didn't Take Prisoners."

Chapter One of America's official history of the Pacific Theater mentions that over ninety per cent of the Japanese soldiers engaged in America's island hopping campaign were reported as killed in action. This figure may have included Japanese soldiers massacred by the Americans, though there is no way to definitively confirm this.

US Army records state that most of the Japanese soldiers who became POWs were injured. Nonetheless, the US Army killed most of the wounded Japanese soldiers who had been captured.

In wartime Japan too, the government stoked hatred of the enemy, who were called the "Anglo-American beasts," but despite this, there were absolutely no cases of Japanese soldiers indiscriminately massacring British or American soldiers who were surrendering.

It would seem the Japanese had good reason to call American soldiers "beasts". Throughout their history, the Japanese people have always made racial equality their guiding principle.

The world was in the grip of a shocking racism directed at colored peoples, until after the end of the war when the world was reconstructed on the basis of racial equality.

The Potsdam Declaration and the myth of unconditional surrender

On July 26, 1945, President Truman, Prime Minister Churchill, and General Secretary Stalin held talks in the city of Potsdam, located in the suburbs of Berlin, where they unveiled the Potsdam Declaration. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had not been invited, but his name was added to the declaration.

At that point in time, the Soviet Union was still bound by the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact signed in April 1941, so it did not sign the declaration. The Soviet Union only joined

in on the Potsdam Declaration on August 8, at the same time that it declared war on Japan, in violation of the pact.

Under President Roosevelt, the United States demanded that Japan and Germany surrender unconditionally. In November 1943, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang met in Cairo, Egypt, where they announced the Cairo Declaration. According to the Cairo Declaration, "The Three Great Allies are fighting this war to restrain and punish the aggression of Japan," and "will continue to persevere in the serious and prolonged operations necessary to procure the unconditional surrender of Japan."

In May 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

By contrast, the Potsdam Declaration indicated that Japan could surrender with conditions. In reality, the Potsdam Declaration only demanded "the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces," and not the unconditional surrender of the Japanese nation or the Emperor.

President Roosevelt died suddenly on April 12, and Vice President Truman succeeded him as the thirty-third President of the United States.

Why did America's strategy towards Japan change so dramatically in such a short period of time?

On July 24, President Truman handed down a top secret order to implement the invasion of Kyushu, codenamed Operation Olympic, in November. The order was received by General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, and General Henry Arnold, the respective commanders of the US Army, Navy, and Air Forces in the Pacific Theater.

Twenty-two days earlier on July 2, War Secretary Stimson submitted his "Proposed Program for Japan" to the President. Stimson's program predicted that the invasion of mainland Japan would require five million soldiers, of whom more than one million might become casualties, and therefore recommended that the United States seek only unconditional surrender of the Japanese military, instead of their previous demand for unconditional surrender of the Japanese government.

The Japanese Army that America feared

In 2006, all the top secret planning documents on the invasion of mainland Japan, which were approved in Washington in the waning months of the war, were declassified.

America's plan for the conquest of mainland Japan, codenamed Operation Downfall, was comprised of two parts, firstly an attack on the southern island of Kyushu, and then landings on the Kanto Plain, the heart of Japan.

Each page of the document, divided into one part on the amphibious invasion of Kyushu and one part on the amphibious invasion of Kanto on Japan's largest island of Honshu, is stamped as "TOP SECRET".

According to the plan, the invasion of Kyushu, codenamed Operation Olympic, would have taken place on November 1. Early that morning, fourteen divisions of US Army soldiers and US Marines were to storm the beaches at Miyazaki, Kagoshima, and Ariake Bay. They were to be boarded on 3,000 ships including sixty-six aircraft carriers of the Fifth Fleet to cover their landing. On November 4, there would be another landing in the vicinity of Kaimondake on the southern tip of Kyushu.

Prior to this, on October 27, the United States had planned to occupy the small islands around Kyushu and there set up a radar base, a seaplane base, and other infrastructure.

As a means of boosting the morale of America's fighting men, all the landing targets on the shore around Miyazaki were named after America's most beloved passenger cars such as Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, Chrysler, and Ford.

Several British Far East Fleet ships were also scheduled to participate in the attack, and so, as a gesture to them, one landing site was named Austin for the automobiles produced by Britain's Austin Motor Company.

The declassified documents foresaw that 250,000 Americans soldiers would be killed during the invasion of Kyushu alone.

The invasion of the Kanto Plain, codenamed Operation Coronet, would require double the troop strength of Operation Olympic. Twenty-eight divisions were scheduled to land in Sagami Bay on March 1, 1946.

The United States had planned to commit a force of more than 4,000 ships, from the Fifth Fleet on down, to its attack on the Kanto Plain.

Because dogged resistance from Japanese soldiers and civilians was foreseen, the United States had expected to suffer a massive number of casualties.

Major General Charles Willoughby, who was Chief of Intelligence to General MacArthur, is on record as believing that the Japanese would continue resisting until the end of the year 1946 and that at least one million American soldiers would be killed or wounded in combat.

What Washington feared the most was that the invasion of mainland Japan would be too costly in terms of soldiers' lives for public opinion at home to bear.

One of the top secret documents states that, "We have been capturing the islands of the Pacific up to Iwo Jima through our leapfrogging strategy, but in every case we have put

ashore a number of troops over 2.5 times greater than the number of Japanese defenders. However, if we must assault the Japanese mainland, Japanese forces will be two times more numerous than our own army, and if we include civilians, the ratio becomes even greater. There is no race which fights as fanatically as the Japanese, whose soldiers act like they are possessed by the devil."

It was believed that even if America committed all the strength it could muster, it would still take until 1947 to force Japan to surrender.

According to the documents, the US Army would also be forced to suffer casualties from relentless air, land, and sea-based suicide attacks by Japanese soldiers and civilians.

At the time of the occupation of Japan, an American investigation found that on the day Japan had surrendered the Japanese Army and Navy put together still had 12,725 bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance planes hidden in reserve inside their fortified bunkers.

The kamikaze did not die in vain

Some believe that, if the United States had continued to insist that Japan surrender unconditionally, then the Japanese people would not have ceased resisting even after the atomic bombings.

In order to compel Japan to make peace, the United States government had decided to offer Japan a "conditional surrender", in which the Emperor system would be preserved, based on the suggestions of Joseph Grew, former ambassador to Japan who was then Under Secretary of State.

Thus, the Potsdam Declaration demanded unconditional surrender only of the Japanese armed forces while providing a list of surrender conditions to the Japanese government. The Potsdam Declaration clearly stated "Following are our terms," and then requested Japan's conditional surrender.

Between August 9 and 14, Emperor Hirohito resolved to impose an unprecedented "sacred decision," and by doing so ended a war which had lasted three years and eight months.

If the United States had continued to demand unconditional surrender, it is not likely that this "sacred decision" would ever have been laid down. In that case, Japan would have fought to the last and probably even the Emperor system would not have survived.

Without the Emperor, Japan too would have ceased to exist.

Nowadays, it's common to hear Japanese people say that the kamikaze pilots, "died for a lost cause," but in reality the kamikaze were Japan's saviours. Still, it was not only the kamikaze who did their duty to the nation.

I firmly believe that we must also show our profound gratitude to all the soldiers who, just like the kamikaze, perished in battle throughout the northern and southern islands of the Pacific Ocean.

In spite of everything, Japan's soldiers fought magnificently. It was the most powerful army the world had ever seen.

Japan's love of military songs

The Japanese people adore military songs. There is no other country in the world where military songs are so widely heard in day-to-day life. In every other country, military songs are known only to those people with experience in their nation's armed forces.

In Japan, young people sing military songs as well. Even the left-wing newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* has run full-page advertisements for CD-ROM collections of military songs.

What is the reason for Japan's unique love of military songs? This is not a phenomenon seen anywhere in the Americas, Europe, or Asia.

Moreover, all of Japan's military songs have gloomy lyrics and sorrowful melodies.

The lyrics of *Danchone Melody* go, "Shells fly through the air, The mast will break... If I should die I will gather the demons, from the shores of the River Styx, and wrestle with them." The lyrics of *Father, You Were Strong* go, "You slept among enemy corpses, drank muddy water, and ate grass... You were immersed for three days, in a creek up to your neck, though you had not eaten anything for three days." The song *Bivouac Ballad* includes the lines, "My father appeared in a dream, and said to me 'Come back home after you have died!'"

One must admit that these lyrics are rather grim. If any other country had its soldiers sing these songs, morale would plummet and soldiers would be scrambling in order to be the first to flee the battlefield.

Japan's Army Ministry and Navy Ministry commissioned outside composers and songwriters to create most of their military songs, and then authorized them for use. In spite of everything, Japanese soldiers fought valiantly while singing these very songs.

This proves just how desperately and stoically all the people of Japan were fighting in response to the unjust persecution they were suffering at the hands of the Western powers.

Neither before nor during the war did the Japanese authorities need to force the people and fighting men to sing these songs.

Right up to the present day, the Japanese people have never been able to forget the spirit that led them to fight again and again to defend their country since the birth of modern

Japan following the 1868 Meiji Restoration. This history is a tragic tale just like those in Japan's military songs.

Japan is the world's only country where collections of military songs are widely sold. In foreign countries, a newspaper with a high circulation would never run an ad for a collection of military songs.

The United States banned military songs and patriotic songs during the postwar occupation of Japan, and since then Japanese TV and radio stations have entirely refrained from airing them. Even so, these songs continue to be the favorites of the Japanese people as a whole, including even the youth.

We take pride, from the very bottom of our hearts, that we have fought bravely against all obstacles since the time of the Meiji Restoration.

On September 2, the surrender ceremony took place in Tokyo Bay aboard the battleship *USS Missouri*. The Instrument of Surrender was the equivalent of an international treaty signed between the victorious and the vanquished nations.