

The Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked the end of WWII but was not the reason the Japanese surrendered

75 years ago two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima (Uranium core) and Nagasaki (Plutonium core). No one really knows how many died but conservative estimates say upwards of 200,000. Anyone who has watched the recent TV series on the Russian nuclear reactor disaster at Chernobyl will have no illusions about the horrific nature of the eventual deaths of those who survived the initial nuclear explosion.

The accepted wisdom has always been that dropping the bombs was justified because it brought an abrupt end to the war and so saved countless allied lives. Historical facts relate a somewhat different story.

Following the surrender of Germany, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and moved 1.5 million troops to the East to launch an attack through Manchuria.

The Japanese War Council, at a meeting with the Emperor six weeks before Hiroshima, agreed that they had to negotiate with the Americans or suffer invasion and occupation by the Soviets, with the certain 'elimination' of the Japanese ruling class and execution of their God Emperor. This was unthinkable for the Japanese nation. President Truman was shown an intercepted cable from 18 July 1945 which indicated that the Japanese Emperor wanted to negotiate peace.

After the war US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, acknowledged that "history might find that the United States, by its delay in stating its position (on surrender terms) had prolonged the war"

The Americans did not want Japan occupied by the Soviets either and, crucially for Japan, were prepared to accept continuation of the Emperor as Head of State as a condition of surrender.

When the atomic bombs were dropped on 6 and 9 August on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, the Japanese War Cabinet minutes barely mentioned them. They were engrossed in discussions about the Soviet invasion when the bomb fell on Nagasaki. Apparently, when a messenger ran in and said "Sir, we've lost Nagasaki, it's been destroyed by a new 'special' bomb' ...", the chairman simply responded "Thank you".*

One has to understand that a city-destroying weapon was not particularly shocking or new to a country that had already suffered fire bombings of more than 60 cities, including a massive attack in March 1945 on Tokyo that matched Hiroshima or Nagasaki by burning to death 100,000 men, women, and children in one night. The Japanese Cabinet were unaware of the radiation effects which would eventually more than double the number killed by the initial blast.

The decision to surrender was made because the Soviets had completed their invasion and occupation of the South Sakhalin and Kurile Islands (which remain in Russian hands), and were poised to invade mainland Japan.

This version of events is supported by a number of recorded statements, which also shed further light on the motive:

* Paul Ham: *Hiroshima Nagasaki*. Harper Collins Australia (2010)

- Churchill wrote: “It would be a mistake to suppose that the fate of Japan was settled by the atomic bomb. Her defeat was certain before the first bomb fell”.
- US Admiral William D. Leahy, Chief of Staff to President Truman, said: “The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender”.
- US Admiral ‘Bull’Halsey in 1946 said: “The first atomic bomb was an unnecessary experiment.... It was a mistake to ever drop it.... [The scientists] had this toy, and they wanted to try it out, so they dropped it...”
- Professor J K Galbraith, the official US investigator in Japan in 1945, said: “The bombs fell after the decision had been taken by the Japanese government to surrender.”

Generals Eisenhower and Arnold, and Admirals Nimitz and King also considered the atomic bombings either militarily unnecessary, morally reprehensible, or both.

So why did the US drop the two bombs when surrender was on the table?

General MacArthur, however, had no compunction in his determination to test the bombs on cities with civilian populations using the presence of some military facilities as justification. In the subsequent Korean War the policy he advocated was so aggressive – including dropping over 30 nuclear bombs - that he was relieved of his command.

Several contemporary scientific accounts refer to the bombings as ‘experiments’ using a Uranium 235 bomb on Hiroshima, and a Plutonium 239 one on Nagasaki despite this type having been successfully tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico on 16 July 1945.

Perhaps most importantly the US Government wanted to demonstrate that they were technically ahead of the Soviets. US Secretary of War Henry Stimson later admitted that the bombs were used “to gain political advantage over the Soviet Union in the post-war situation”.

In summary, the US Strategic Bombing Survey Report (July 1946) concluded “...that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”

It was then convenient for the West to allow the myth to linger through the Cold War when we were led to believe the Soviets might attack the West with nuclear weapons. But in his book *Armageddon and Paranoia* Sir Roderic Braithwaite (UK Ambassador to the USSR from 1998-1992) unequivocally states “There is no evidence that the Russians ever hoped to incorporate Western Europe by military means”. So is this yet another myth?

On this 75th anniversary of the ‘experimental’ attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki it is perhaps an appropriate time to question whether spending £200Bn on Trident over the next 30 years, is a good use of tax payers money, bearing in mind that we have a massive national debt because of the pandemic, and have had no nuclear threats for at least the last 25 years... in proof of which our Trident missiles have not been targeted and have been at 2 to 3 days’ notice to fire since 1994.