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Truman & His A-Bombs

By Fan Yew Teng

TRUMAN LIED ABOUT A-BOMBS ON HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

Previously classified documents show that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had not really been necessary to make Japan surrender, and that then US President Harry Truman had lied in order to justify the dropping of the bombs.

For almost 50 years, the United States authorities have helped to cover up the facts surrounding the decision of US President Harry Truman to use atomic weapons against two Japanese cities -- Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- on 6 August 1945 and 9 August 1945 respectively.

Truman's justification for these atrocities which killed about a quarter of a million people, mostly civilians, was that this would end the war quickly, making unnecessary an invasion of Japan. According to US Secretary of State Byrnes, a million lives would be saved. Truman claimed that half a million was the figure given him by General George Marshall.

When the papers of the Manhattan Project were released years later, they showed Marshall urged a warning to the Japanese about the bomb, so people could be removed and only military targets hit. Marshall's advice was obviously rejected by Truman.

As Professor Howard Zinn of Boston University says in his book, "A People's History of the United States," the 'estimates of invasion losses were not realistic, and seem to have been pulled out of their air to justify bombings which, as their effects became known, horrified more and more people.'

Japan, by August 1945, was in desperate shape and ready to surrender, "The New York Times" military analyst Hanson Baldwin wrote, shortly after the war: 'The enemy, in a military sense, was in a hopeless strategic position by the time the Potsdam demand for unconditional surrender was made on 26 July. Such then, was the situation when we wiped out Hiroshima and Nagasaki.'

The US Strategic Bombing Survey, set up by the War Department in 1944 to study the results of aerial attacks in the war, interviewed hundreds of Japanese civilian and military leaders after Japan surrendered, and reported just after the war: 'Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion 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.'

Did Truman know about this in August 1945? Yes, of course. The Japanese code had been broken, and Japan's messages were being intercepted. He knew that the Japanese government had instructed its ambassador in Moscow to work on peace negotiations with the Allies. Japanese leaders had begun talking of surrender a year before this, and the Japanese Emperor himself had begun to suggest, in June 1945, that alternatives to fighting to the end be considered.

Martin Sherwin, after an exhaustive study of the relevant historical documents, concludes: 'After having broken the Japanese code before the war, American Intelligence was able to -- and did -- relay this message to the President, but it had no effect whatever on efforts to bring the war to a conclusion.'

In a recent review of the relevant literature, J Samuel Walker, chief historian of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, wrote in the respected academic journal "Diplomatic History": 'The consensus among scholars is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan and to end the war within a relatively short time. It is clear that alternatives to the bomb existed and that Truman and his advisers knew it...It is certain that the hoary claim that the bomb prevented one-half million American combat deaths is unsupportable.'

An avalanche of archival documents released or discovered over the past decade -- including Truman's 'lost' diary and a series of revealing letters to his wife, Bess -- as Gar Alperovitz and Kai Bird point out in the 10 May 1993 issue of "The Nation" of New York, 'leaves no doubt that Truman knew the war would end "a year sooner now" and without an invasion'.

One of the main reasons was Truman's awareness that the shock of an early Soviet declaration of war was expected to jolt Japan into surrender long before an invasion (tentatively set for planning purposes in November 1945) could begin.

After receiving Stalin's confirmation that the Soviets would enter the Pacific war by 15 August, Truman wrote in his diary: 'Fini Japs when that comes about.'

At least one of the factors in the minds of those making the decision to use the atomic bomb on Hiroshima involved geo- political and diplomatic concerns about the Soviet Union. As British scientist P M S Blackett said in his book, "Fear, War, and the Bomb," the United States was anxious to drop the bomb before the Russians entered the war against Japan.

In other words, Blackett says, the dropping of the bomb was 'the first major operation of the cold diplomatic war with Russia'. Blackett is supported by American historian Gar Alperovitz, who notes in his book, "Atomic Diplomacy," a diary entry for 28 July 1945, by US Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, describing Secretary of State James F Byrnes as 'most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians got in'.

Or, consider a diary entry by Walter Brown, an assistant to Secretary of State Byrnes which clearly suggests Truman and Byrnes saw the bomb as a way to reduce Soviet political influence in Asia. Brown noted that Byrnes, whom Truman had designated his main adviser on the issue, was 'hoping for time, believing that after (the) atomic bomb Japan will surrender and Russia will not get in so much on the kill, thereby being in a position to press for claims in China'.

In other words, to ensure that the Americans had an advantage in the US-Soviet scramble to grab China, a quarter of a million Japanese, mostly women and children, had to die.

Truman had said, 'The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians.'

This was simply untrue. Truman was lying. Those 100,000 killed immediately in Hiroshima were almost all civilians. The US Strategic Bombing Survey said in its official report: 'Hiroshima and Nagasaki were chosen as targets because of their concentration of activities and population.'

And, last but not least, why was the second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki? Was it because this was a plutonium bomb whereas the Hiroshima bomb was a uranium bomb? Were the dead and irradiated of Nagasaki, as Professor Howard Zinn asks, 'victims of a scientific experiment'? -- Third World Network Features

About the writer: Fan Yew Teng is a writer and former MP in Malaysia.

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