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Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Nuclear weapons and nuclear energy have come under new scrutiny after the recent earthquakes that have virtually destroyed Japan and severely damaged several of the country's nuclear power stations. The situation in Japan is currently so grave that Japan's Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, has been quoted as saying, "The current situation of the earthquake, tsunami and the nuclear plants is in a way the most severe crisis in the past 65 years since World War II." (BBC) I believe the Japanese Prime Minister is right—and I also believe that atomic weaponry should have been banned after its use.

Our text states that the reason we bombed Japan in the first place was to avoid occupying Japan. "In short, a decision not to use atomic weapons was never a serious alternative in the summer of 1945." (Goldfield 753) I blame the decision partially on ignorance, but I blame it mostly on hatred. I think what our text says about the internment of Japanese-Americans proves this:

. . . Roosevelt authorized the secretary of war to define restricted areas and remove civilian residents who were threats to national security. The primary targets were 112,000 Japanese Americans in California and parts of Washington, Oregon and Arizona. Japanese immigrants and their children . . . had experienced 40 years of hostility because of racial prejudice, fear of the growing power of Japan, and jealousy of their business success. The outbreak of war triggered anti-Japanese hysteria and gave officials an excuse to take action against enemy aliens (immigrants who retained Japanese citizenship) and . . . their children. (Goldfield 745)



I researched what the effects of the atomic bomb were on a person, and I was appalled with what I found. I did not know that the atomic bomb affected people all the way down to their bone marrow. (Hanada) The heat of the atomic bomb, from just a kilometer away, was capable of melting tile. It damaged or destroyed things as far as 3000-4000 meters away. (Hanada) It could even shrink peoples' heads! (Hanada)

Even historians are split on the necessity of dropping the atomic bomb. As an article from the Seattle Times, written in 1995, points out, "Historians are still divided over whether it was necessary to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II." (Dietrich) Mr. Dietrich compiled a list of pros and cons in his article, which I think shed a lot of light.

Among the reasons in favor of the bombing of Japan, he states such things as:

- 1.) The fact that the Japanese were willing to fight to the death (he referred to it as "near-fanatical") and that the Atomic Bomb was the only thing that would make Japan stop.
- 2.) Atomic bombs were, essentially, too powerful to waste.
- 3.) An invasion of Japan would have been more catastrophic (in terms of casualties) than dropping the bomb (and I agree with that, by the way).
- 4.) Hiroshima and Nagasaki "would have been firebombed anyway" (Dietrich).
- 5.) Using the bomb would be a way of convincing the world of its power. It was America's way of having a large guard dog on its front lawn, if you will. It also prevented the USSR from demanding joint occupation of Japan. (Dietrich)

But the argument against the bombing is also quite telling. Some key points Mr. Dietrich raised against it were:

- 1.) "Japan was ready to call it quits anyway." (Dietrich)



- 2.) Truman's refusal to modify his peace deal with Japan prolonged Japan's resistance. Japan wanted to keep their emperor, but Truman would not allow it under the agreement.
- 3.) All America likely needed to do was to drop the bomb off of the coast of Japan. Seeing a giant mushroom cloud in the air would have been enough to make Japan surrender. It also would have reduced casualties significantly—but the bomb was too valuable and powerful to simply demonstrate, as I stated before.
- 4.) Relating to that point, Dietrich adds, "Even if Hiroshima was necessary, the U.S. did not give enough time for word to filter out of its devastation before bombing Nagasaki."
- 5.) Demonstrating the bomb for the American people to see would justify the \$2 billion used developing it.
- 6.) Hiroshima and Nagasaki were largely civilian. In Hiroshima, "Civilians outnumbered troops . . . five or six to one." (Dietrich)
- 7.) Firebombing on a larger scale than the U.S. had already done probably would have gotten the same amount of damage. (Dietrich) (It probably would not have had as much of a psychological impact, though.)

It made me wonder just what was going through the minds of the people who made the decisions at the time. How does one come to a decision like that? What is involved in the decision-making process? It is no secret that a lot goes into such a process; politics, diplomacy, and the good of the country for a start. On this matter, I found an archive of files on the subject of the atomic bombings very enlightening on the matter. It comes from an organization called the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. One of the files, entitled, "Letter on Ending the War in Japan in a Humane Manner" is a letter written by President Harry Truman himself to Senator Richard Russel. It is a brief letter, but it grants some insight into Pres. Truman's thinking:



I know that Japan is a terribly cruel and uncivilized nation in warfare but I can't bring myself to believe that, because they are beasts, we should ourselves act in the same manner.

For myself, I certainly regret the necessity of wiping out whole populations because of the 'pigheadedness' of the leaders of a nation and, for your information, I am not going to do it until it is absolutely necessary...

My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a humane feeling for the women and children in Japan. (Nuclear Age Peace Foundation)

This was, according to the website, in response to Senator Russel's wish that Japan be hit with an even larger-scale attack than was already planned. It was written August 9th, 1945—three days after Hiroshima was bombed, and five days before the Japanese surrendered.

To close, I want to give excerpts from one more file from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's archive. It is another letter, written by a Glen T. Seaborg, dated June 13th, 1945. These are some snippets I found to be interesting:

As you know, it is difficult to express unqualified opinions on such political and social questions as these on the basis of information available to us, and therefore I have the feeling that my views could change if there is important information, especially (sic) in respect to the present war, which is not at our disposal . . .

The question of the post war control of nucleonics is a most difficult one. The . . . disposition of the weapon in the present war amounts essentially to subordinating its use now toward the broader goal of insuring control over it in the longer post war (sic) future. One method of post war control lies in the complete outlawing of nucleonics research throughout the world; I believe that this method, which amounts to advocating the suppression of science, is too unnatural for it to succeed. We would favor, rather, if it could possibly be made consistent with our national security and with world security, (sic)



free research in nucleonics throughout the world with complete ex-change (sic) of all the basic information and some degree of control through an international organization. Probably the best method of control lies in the control of the raw materials, although this is admittedly difficult. Completely free research in nucleonics, unfortunately, makes it possible for any country to accumulate a stockpile of fissionable material. It is the opinion of some that probably the only method of maintaining control under such conditions would involve world-wide pooling to form a stockpile of fissionable material to be used by the international organization for policing purposes; I do not feel qualified to express an opinion on this complicated possibility. As suggested by Szilard, perhaps control could be effected, at least in the case of some of the fissionable material, by denaturization, i.e. by mixing it with suitable isotopes to spoil its use for explosive purposes without interfering too much with its use for research purposes such as power pile developments.

With respect to the organization of post war research in nucleonics in our country, I believe that the establishment, with government aid, of about four large research laboratories at four of the major universities is a good idea. [They] should form a sort of a foundation for the country's re-search (sic) program and should include men who are able and willing to advise outlying laboratories . . . The outlying laboratories might consist of Government laboratories working on the more practical aspects of the field, and also regular university and industrial laboratories supported by Government contracts or grants-in-aid. This government-aided research would be concerned with the application of nucleonics to military and defense purposes and with such other applications as are recognized as governmental purposes. There should be no reason to restrict the development of nucleonics along other lines and industry should be free to work on its ap-plication (sic) to such fields as power piles, the manufacture of



radioactive iso-topes (sic) and other fields which they may wish to develop. (Nuclear Age Peace Foundation)

I only wonder if this man would feel the same way if he were still alive today.

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