

# Howard Zinn - A People's History of the United States

~~in Holland, Coventry in England, and elsewhere. Roosevelt had described these as "inhuman barbarism that has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity."~~

~~These German bombings were very small compared with the British and American bombings of German cities!~~ In January 1943 the Allies met at Casablanca and agreed on large-scale air attacks to achieve "the destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system and the undermining of the morale of the German people to the point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened." And so, the saturation bombing of German cities began with thousand-plane raids on Cologne, Essen, Frankfurt, Hamburg. The English flew at night with no pretense of aiming at "military" targets; the Americans flew in the daytime and pretended precision, but bombing from high altitudes made that impossible. The climax of this terror bombing was the bombing of Dresden in early 1945, in which the tremendous heat generated by the bombs created a vacuum into which fire leaped swiftly in a great firestorm through the city. More than 100,000 died in Dresden. (Winston Churchill, in his wartime memoirs, confined himself to this account of the incident: "We made a heavy raid in the latter month on Dresden, then a centre of communication of Germany's Eastern Front") The bombing of Japanese cities continued the strategy of saturation bombing to destroy civilian morale; one nighttime fire-bombing of Tokyo took 80,000 lives. And then, on August 6, 1945, came the lone American plane in the sky over Hiroshima, dropping the first atomic bomb, leaving perhaps 100,000 Japanese dead, and tens of thousands more slowly dying from radiation poisoning. Twelve U.S. navy fliers in the Hiroshima city jail were killed in the bombing, a fact that the U.S. government has never officially acknowledged, according to historian Martin Sherwin (*A World Destroyed*). Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, with perhaps 50,000 killed. The justification for these atrocities was that this would end the war quickly, making unnecessary an invasion of Japan. Such an invasion would cost a huge number of lives, the government said a million, according to Secretary of State Byrnes; half a million, Truman claimed was the figure given him by General George Marshall. (When the papers of the Manhattan Project—the project to build the atom bomb—were released years later, they showed that Marshall urged a warning to the Japanese about the bomb, so people could be removed and only military targets hit.) These estimates of invasion losses were not realistic, and seem to have been pulled out of the 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. 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 July 26.

Such then, was the situation when we wiped out Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Need we have done it? No one can, of course, be positive, but the answer is almost certainly negative.

The United States 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.

But could American leaders have known this in August 1945? The answer is, clearly, yes. The Japanese code had been broken, and Japan's messages were being intercepted. It was known the Japanese had instructed their ambassador in Moscow to work on peace negotiations with the Allies. Japanese leaders had begun talking of surrender a year before this, and the Emperor himself had begun to suggest, in June 1945, that alternatives to fighting to the end be considered. On July 13, Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo wired his ambassador in Moscow: "Unconditional surrender is the only obstacle to peace... ." Martin Sherwin, after an exhaustive study of the relevant historical documents, concludes: "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." If only the Americans had not insisted on unconditional surrender- that is, if they were willing to accept one condition to the surrender, that the Emperor, a holy figure to the Japanese, remain in place-the Japanese would have agreed to stop the war.

Why did the United States not take that small step to save both American and Japanese lives? Was it because too much money and effort had been invested in the atomic bomb not to drop it? General Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, described Truman as a man on a toboggan, the momentum too great to stop it. Or was it, as British scientist P. M. S. Blackett suggested (Fear, War, and the Bomb), that the United States was anxious to drop the bomb before the Russians entered the war against Japan?

The Russians had secretly agreed (they were officially not at war with Japan) they would come into the war ninety days after the end of the European war. That turned out to be May 8, and so, on August 8, the Russians were due to declare war on Japan, But by then the big bomb had been dropped, and the next day a second one would be dropped on Nagasaki; the Japanese would surrender to the United States, not the Russians, and the United States would be the occupier of postwar 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 (Atomic Diplomacy), who notes a diary entry for July 28, 1945, by 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."

Blackett

