

# Insulting Veterans & Historical Fact with Hiroshima Mythology

By John LaForge

With President Obama's 2016 visit to Hiroshima, most news and opinion writers repeated the official cover-story that "the atomic bomb...ultimately spared more Japanese civilians from a final invasion," as Kaimay Yuen Terry wrote for the *Minneapolis StarTribune*, or that, "Without it, more Japanese would have died in a US assault on the islands, as would have tens of thousands of Americans," as Mike Hashimoto wrote for the *Dallas Morning News*.

Contrary to former governor Sarah Palin's May 27, 2016 claim that Obama's visit to Hiroshima "insult[ed] veterans," the claim that US atomic bombings ended the war is the real insult to vets. This official story obscures and ignores the fact that US combat veterans and bomber crews defeated Japan before August 6, 1945, by sacrificing so mightily in massive bombing raids and in bloody battles for Midway, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and elsewhere. Dozens of high-level military officers, veterans of the Pacific war, have testified to the fact.

"The dropping of the bombs stopped the war, saved millions of lives," President Harry Truman gushed in his 1960 book *Truman Speaks*. Instructively, his-

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—General Curtis LeMay

torians have found no record of any study, projection, memo, cable, or command where this estimate was suggested to Truman. It is a fictional pretext. In his book *The Invasion of Japan*, historian John Ray Skates says, "[P]rophecies of extremely high casualties only came to be widely accepted after the war to rationalize the use of the atomic bombs." And historian Martin J. Sherwin "cited a 'considerable body' of new evidence that suggested the bomb may have cost, rather than saved, American lives. That is, if the US had not been so determined to complete, test, and finally use the bomb, it might have arranged the Japanese surrender weeks earlier, preventing much bloodshed on Okinawa."

During his visit, President Obama perpetuated the mythology and the ahistorical nostalgia that guarantees the US public will never acknowledge, much less apologize for, the needless experimental massacre of 200,000 civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Hashimoto wrote, "No apology [is] needed for sparing lives on both sides...."

The *New York Times* chimed in as well, reporting: "Many historians believe the bombings on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, which together took the lives of more than 200,000 people, saved lives on balance, since an invasion of the islands would have led to far greater bloodshed."

## New Historical Consensus

While "many historians" may still believe this, the majority of them do not. As outlined by J. Samuel Walker, chief historian for the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, in the winter 1990 issue of the scholarly 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."

Historian Gar Alperovitz wrote in his 1965 book *Atomic Diplomacy*, "[P]resently available evidence shows the atomic bomb was not needed to end the war or to save lives—and that this was understood



**The atomic bomb that incinerated Hiroshima, Japan Aug. 6, 1945 (pictured) was gob-smacking. It did with one device what had taken 464 heavy B-29 bombers to accomplish in the April 26, 1945 firebombing Tokyo. The 15-kiloton Hiroshima bomb does not compare to today's nuclear weapons. The smallest warheads in the US nuclear arsenal are 22 and 13 times more powerful: the 340-kiloton B-61 gravity bombs; and the 200-kiloton W80-1s on Advance Cruise Missiles. Photo by Associated Press.**

by American leaders at the time." Declassification of more documentation over the next 30 years made his comprehensive and matchless 1995 history, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* even stronger on this point.

## Admirals and Generals Reject Official Pretext

Most of the ranking officers who directed the war in the Pacific never agreed that the bombs were conclusive in ending it. General Curtis LeMay, Commander of the 21st Bomber Command, said flatly at a Sept. 20, 1945 press conference: "The war would have been over in two weeks without the Russians entering and without the atomic bomb." Pressed by a reporter who asked, "Had they not surrendered because of the atomic bomb?" General LeMay, who directed the destruction of 67 Japanese cities using mass incendiary attacks, answered, "The atomic bomb had nothing to do with the end of the war at all."

Alperovitz recounts in *The Decision* that General George Kenny, who commanded US Army Air Force units in the Southwest Pacific, was asked in

**"[T]he use of this barbarous weapon ... was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated." —Admiral William Leahy**

1969 whether it was wise to have used atom bombs. Gen. Kenny said, "No! I think we had the Japs licked anyhow. I think they would have quit probably within a week or so of when they did quit."

Fifteen years after Hiroshima, on Dec. 19, 1960 according to Alperovitz, Admiral Lewis Strauss, special assistant to WWII Navy Secretary James Forrestal, wrote to the naval historian Robert Albion that "from the Navy's point of view, there are statements by Admiral King, Admiral Halsey, Admiral Radford, Admiral Nimitz, and others who expressed themselves to the effect that neither the atomic bomb nor the proposed invasion of the Japanese mainland were necessary to produce the surrender."

And President Dwight Eisenhower wrote in his 1963 memoir *Mandate for Change* that when Secretary of War Henry Stimson told him atomic bombs were going to be used, he responded, "...I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary..."

Admiral William Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff, adamantly agreed. As reported in *Hiroshima in America: 50 Years of Denial* by Robert Lifton and Greg Mitchell, Leahy said, "It is my opinion that 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

because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons..." Lifton and Mitchell also note that Henry "Hap" Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, said in his memoirs, "It always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse."

Early questions about the necessity of the atomic bombings were answered with facts that were sometimes kept secret. "[A]n extensive official study by the US Strategic Bombing Survey published its conclusion that Japan would likely have surrendered in 1945 without atomic bombing, without a Soviet declaration of war, and without an American invasion," according to Alperovitz in *The Decision*. Alperovitz, who spent 30 years studying the issue, also revealed that another study

issued in 1946 by the Intelligence Group of the War Department's Military Intelligence Division—first discovered in 1989—"concluded the atomic bomb had not been needed to end the war."

—A version of this article first ran at *PeaceVoice and CounterPunch*.

## Nuclear Madness Still Raving

While Civil Society and a global movement marches steadily toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, planning and rehearsal for mass destruction using nuclear weapons are still routine in the US military and NATO. In June 2019, the US Joint Chief of Staff published online—then quickly deleted—its nuclear attack manual known as "Nuclear Operations, Joint Publication 3-72."

Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists noticed and managed to preserve a copy ([https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3\\_72.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_72.pdf)), before the Joint Chiefs took it down. The manual refers to radioactive mass destruction using abstract, obtuse euphemism, like, "The employment of nuclear weapons could have a significant influence on ground operations." No reader of the gung-ho report would guess that the subject matter involves searing fireballs, vaporized flesh, blast and shock-wave devastation, demolished hospitals, mass firestorm, or permanent radioactive contaminating of water, soil, and the food chain.

The manual simply says nuclear attacks "create conditions," but without ever describing them. "Using nuclear weapons could create conditions for decisive results and the restoration of strategic stability," and, as if Reagan never said, "Nuclear war cannot be won," the report pretends it can. "[T]he use of a nuclear weapon will...create conditions that affect how commanders will prevail in conflict."

US nuclear war practice takes place annually in Europe. "Steadfast Noon" is NATO's code name for the mass destruction rehearsal. Hans Kristensen reported for the Federation of American Scientists that, "This is the exercise that practices NATO's nuclear strike mission with the B61...nuclear bombs the US deploys in Europe." Jan Merička, in *ESJ News* Oct. 19, 2017, wrote that the practice is designed is "to simulate nuclear strikes...and was conducted from the Kleine Brogel Air Base in Belgium and Büchel Air Base in Germany, where US B61 thermonuclear bombs with the force of up to 340 kilotons of TNT are stored."

To illustrate the Pentagon's day-to-day readiness for nuclear war, it just opened its new \$1.3 billion Strategic Command headquarters in Omaha, used for supervising and targeting the nuclear arsenal. The building is named after General Curtis LeMay, who, the *Omaha World Herald* reported, designed and managed the nighttime incendiary bombing raids on 60 Japanese towns that "incinerated entire cities" and killed between 241,000 and 900,000 civilians. —*JL*