

65 years since the bombing of Hiroshima

Tom Eley
7 August 2010

At 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945, the US Air Force exploded an atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima, instantly killing 80,000 civilians. Most of the city was leveled by the bomb's shock wave or incinerated in the subsequent firestorm. Three days later, before it was understood what had happened in Hiroshima, the US exploded a second atomic bomb above Nagasaki, immediately killing 40,000.

Within weeks the toll had likely climbed to 250,000 killed through burns and radiation poisoning. Those who survived the blasts described scenes of nearly unspeakable horror—civilians, mainly women and children, burnt so badly there could be no treatment; “walking dead” staggering through the streets in their last hours, their skin hanging like rags from their bodies; atomic shadows seared into the pavement where humans had stood. Tens of thousands more continued to die and suffer in the years and decades after the attacks.

The US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand among the most savage acts of violence against a civilian population ever committed. Sixty-five years later, they remain shrouded in lies and obfuscation emanating from the modern-day defenders of American militarism.

Typical is a column written by journalist Warren Kozak, published Friday in the *Wall Street Journal*. Kozak recently wrote a biography that attempts to rehabilitate the bloodthirsty Air Force general Curtis LeMay, who, before the bombing of Hiroshima, organized the firebombing of Tokyo, killing an estimated 87,000 people.

Kozak repeats the standard lies used to justify the atrocity, including the claim that the decision to use the atomic bomb saved lives. “It should be noted that when President Harry Truman was considering whether to invade Japan instead of dropping the bombs, his advisers estimated that an invasion would result in one

million American casualties and at least two million Japanese deaths,” he writes. “In the strange calculus of war, the bombs actually saved Japanese lives.”

Truman's decision had nothing to do with saving lives, Japanese or American. At the time of the bombing, Japan was, in a military sense, already defeated. Its navy, air force, and industrial capacity largely destroyed, the Japanese had sought out conditions for peace in the weeks before the attacks.

The use of the atom bomb was, above all else, a cold-blooded strategic decision made with Washington's eyes already transfixed on the postwar order. At the Tehran Conference of 1943, the Soviet Union had agreed to declare war on Japan within three months after the ending of hostilities in Europe. After the defeat of Germany, the Soviet Red Army—which had borne the brunt of Allied fighting in Europe—began to be shifted across the Eurasian landmass in preparation for an invasion of Manchuria on August 8, 1945—two days after Hiroshima, and the day before Nagasaki.

Washington was aware that if the war were not concluded rapidly, the Soviet Union would be in a position to assert itself in the resumed Chinese civil war between the pro-US nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek and the peasant armies of Mao Zedong, on the Korean peninsula, and potentially in Japan itself, where a revolt of the country's working class and peasants against the empire—as had taken place in Italy against Mussolini—was far more likely than the fight to the death of the Emperor posited by Kozak and others.

But even more crucially, Truman and the US military were anxious to use the atomic bomb, this new weapon of extraordinary destructive power, as an object lesson to the Soviet Union and the entire world of the lengths Washington would go to defend its interests.

Historian Thomas McCormick has eloquently summarized the decision: “In two blinding glares—a horrible end to a war waged horribly by all parties—the

United States finally found the combination that would unlock the door to American hegemony. A prearranged demonstration of the atomic bomb on a noninhabited target, as some scientists had recommended, would not do. That could demonstrate the power of the bomb, but it could not demonstrate the American will to use the awful power. One reason, therefore, for American unwillingness to pursue Japanese peace feelers in mid-summer 1945 was that the United States did not want the war to end before it had had a chance to use the atomic bomb.” (*America’s Half-Century*, 44-45.)

This year we observe the anniversary of the slaughter in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a new period of war and militarist aggression. The Obama administration has intensified its war in Afghanistan, loosening up rules of engagement allowing the military to “take out” civilian targets. In recent weeks, Washington has staged a series of provocations designed to ramp up pressure on what it views to be its main strategic rival, nuclear-armed China.

And now the US is shifting toward a war footing with Iran, claiming that its nuclear program is designed to create nuclear weapons, the same charge it falsely leveled against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Washington’s hypocrisy is staggering. In cases where it views the nation as an ally—Israel, India, and now Vietnam—it turns a blind eye to nuclear weapons programs or supports uranium enrichment.

Moreover, the Hiroshima anniversary recalls that only the US has ever used nuclear weapons in war. If American imperialism was willing to unleash this destructive power to assert its hegemony at a time of its peak economic strength, it will not shirk its use to defend this hegemony under conditions of economic decline.

There have been repeated reports, beginning in 2006, that the US and Israel are contemplating the use of so-called “tactical” nuclear weapons in a preemptive strike against military targets in Iran. Late in 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates—then still in the employ of the Bush administration—formally advocated the use of preemptive nuclear strikes in a speech to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP). (See “US defense secretary expands pre-emptive war doctrine to include nuclear strikes”.)

Though the US has the largest nuclear stockpile and

plays the most destabilizing role in world affairs, the danger of nuclear war is not limited to its designs. Russia, Britain, France, and China maintain thousands of nuclear missiles. Israel has in the past obliquely threatened to use nuclear weapons against its neighbors, while in any new South Asian war, India and Pakistan—and possibly China—would be tempted to use their nuclear missiles.

As in the lead-up to WWI and WWII, the world has become a tinderbox of sharp tensions among the Great Powers. In the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, the Balkans, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, any number of scenarios could touch off a new global conflagration that would repeat the horrors of the 20th century, including the use of nuclear weapons, but on a far more deadly scale.

The descent into depression and militarism, so reminiscent of the 1930s, can only be stopped by the international working class fighting for a socialist program. The capitalists’ genocidal “war of each against all,” as Lenin put it, must be replaced by a planned, socialist economy, organized to meet social needs rather than the profit drives of the rival cliques of billionaires.



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