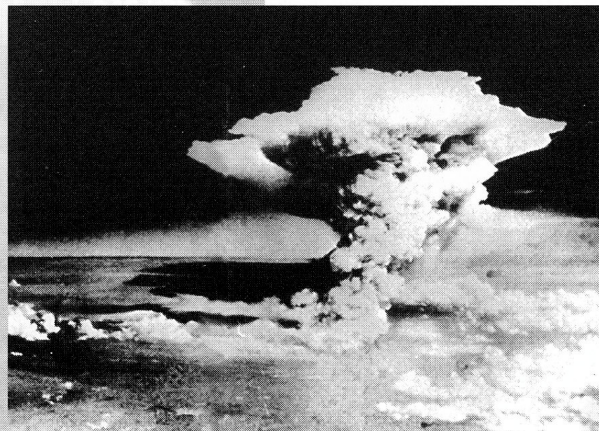


TRUMAN'S MISSED OPPORTUNITY

by Clifford Uyeda



The Smithsonian Institution could not permit a complete examination of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima/Nagasaki and greatly scaled down its exhibit on January 30, 1995. The Japanese Diet still stands on the sanitized version of Japan's aggression and atrocities in World War II. Both feel that they must "honor the war dead" who sacrificed their lives for a national cause.

While the war was in progress, all nations at war focused their attention on the enemies' atrocities and sanitized their own troops behaviors. Only decades later the citizens learn of atrocities committed by their own country. The latest is the shock being felt in Israel by the revelation of hundreds of Egyptian prisoners of war killed in the 1947 Middle East War.

The declassified documents have shown that the dropping of the A-bomb on Japan was opposed by leading military and civilian men under President Truman. Even the invasion of Japan itself was considered unnecessary to win the war. This makes the argument of the estimated loss of

American life irrelevant. Not a single American soldier's life needed to be sacrificed.

General Dwight Eisenhower, in Europe (Potsdam conference, 7/16-8/2/45 was in Germany), argued strongly against the use of A-bomb as "completely unnecessary." Admiral William Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, urged Truman to accept a conditional surrender and proclaim victory. He said that letting Japan keep its emperor was consistent with the Atlantic Charter's promise that Great Britain and US should "respect the right of all people to choose the form of government under which will live." He argued that the invasion of Japan

Although most Americans did not know the true situation, by July 1945 many of Truman's military leaders knew that not a single more American needed to be sacrificed to secure victory over Japan.

(Kyushu on 1 November 1945, and the Tokyo plain on 1 March 1946) was unnecessary to win the war, that America's least expensive course of action was to continue to intensify air and sea blockade, that a completely blocked Japan would fall on its own. Whatever the militarists uttered, Japan was starving and in no position to face the well-equipped Allied forces. The Allies also knew that Japan was desperately seeking way to surrender.

Although General Douglas MacArthur was the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Pacific, he was not consulted about whether to use the A-bomb. After the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, "General MacArthur was livid," his aide reported. Even before the bomb was dropped, MacArthur had called a press conference in which he stated that the war "might end sooner than one thinks," that Japan was "already beaten." MacArthur also considered the A-bomb "completely unnecessary" from the military point of view.

Many within the US government had agreed with Joseph Grew (Ambassador to Japan, 1932-1941; Acting Secretary of State, 1944-1945) when he advised Truman in May 1945 to issue a proclamation-urging Japan to surrender, assuring Japan that the US would permit the emperor to remain as head of state. He, and others, felt that the emperor would be useful to the Allies in getting the widely scattered Japanese soldiers to lay down their arms and surrender peacefully, and that the emperor would be equally useful in the occupation of Japan. Even Truman "thought this a sound idea" (*Truman Memoirs*, p. 416). Secretary of War Stimson was also in agreement.

When James Byrnes became Secretary of State on 3 July 1945, Truman began taking his advice over that of his other advisers. Joseph Grew

even complained to his friend that the President no longer spoke to him. Byrnes insisted till the very last that Kyoto should be the target of the first A-bomb. He strongly opposed the idea of letting Japan keep the emperor. The Gallop poll in July 1945 showed: one-third wanted the emperor executed, 20 percent wanted the emperor jailed or exiled, only seven percent wanted the emperor kept. *Life Magazine*, however, had urged the US to allow the emperor to remain.

When the Potsdam Declaration was announced on 26 July 1945, Truman had accepted Byrnes' advice and called for an "unconditional surrender" without qualification. Japan, as expected, rejected the offer without an assurance of retaining the emperor. US dropped the A-bomb, and then accepted a conditional surrender (to let Japan keep the emperor). Henry Stimson

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(Secretary of War) believed that the US delay in stating the position on the condition of surrender had prolonged the war. The day before the Potsdam declaration, Truman had already approved the order to release the A-bomb on Hiroshima.

Byrnes' primary reason for the use of A-bomb was to force Japan to surrender quickly and prevent the Soviet domination of China. But, as stated by Stimson, if the US had spelled out the suggestion for surrender as advocated by Joseph Grew and agreed to by so many high military and civilian officials, the war could have ended in the

summer of 1945, long before Russia entered the war on 8 August 1945.

It seems very important to recall Admiral Leahy's statement that all major nations had poison gas but it was never used in World War II, that A-bomb is a poison that kills by its deadly radioactive reaction.

In the summer of 1945, within the Manhattan Project itself and also among American and civilian leaders there were individuals who were able to see humanity as the ultimate view of what we do even in war. President Truman did have a choice, that it was not necessary to drop the A-bomb nor to invade Japan in order to assure victory in war, or go on with the powerful flow of events which ended with the dropping of A-bombs on densely populated cities.

The *U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey* report (1946) concluded that "Certainly prior to 31 December 1945 and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 Japan would have surrendered even if the bomb had not been dropped, even if Russia did not enter the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated." (p. 13)

President Truman's statement of having "saved half a million American lives" has become part of the American culture and memory. This is a perfect time to have Americans question this "justification" by learning what really happened at the highest echelon of the US government in the spring and early summer of 1945.

Seldom does history present a person with a perfect scenario for true greatness. Truman missed his opportunity to become one of the great humanitarian men in history. Although

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