

WHY HIROSHIMA/NAGASAKI?*

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It has always been something of a mystery to me why the United States government decided to go ahead with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki August 1945. If it were not already clear to everybody that Japan was losing the war and could be forced into unconditional surrender by means of conventional weapons alone, given the Soviet pledge to invade on 8 August, then a trial explosion on an unpopulated island of a nuclear bomb would have been sufficient. If it is really the case that they wanted to test two of them because they were of different kinds (the usual explanation given for the second bomb, over Nagasaki) then two demonstrations, even on the same unpopulated island, would have been sufficient. This would also have been more than sufficient to persuade the Russians in general, and Stalin in particular, that the United States came out of the war not only victorious, but even predominant, in possession of a weapon so far unheard of, close to the "ultimate weapon". In July that weapon had been tested and it is believed that Stalin (in Potsdam) was impressed, but did not react particularly strongly. He did react strongly, however, when the bomb was dropped over Hiroshima since it so clearly was not needed. As a consequence of that he went full steam ahead, ordering his own nuclear physics establishment to develop the Soviet bomb. As is well-known it was detonated years later, in 1949. And since then we have the United States/Soviet Union nuclear arms race go ahead unabated, joined by Great Britain in 1952, France in 1960, China in 1964, and then the famous Indian "nuclear device" in 1974.

However, this was hardly the effect the US decision-making establishment had in mind. Hence, the question remains, why did they do it? And my answer is very simple and is certainly not the only answer to that question, but one among many: Hiroshima was the revenge for Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was the most traumatic event in US history up to that point, dwarfing the Wars of Independence and the Civil War, both of them being in a sense natural outcomes of the birth of a new nation, born with some basic contradiction built into it. Pearl Harbor, to the contrary, was the "Day of Infamy", as it is still referred to.

The hypothesis, then, is that the US could not permit Japan to capitulate before Pearl Harbor had been fully avenged. It may be objected that this had happened already, that the B-29 raids on Tokyo had wrought a terrible damage, more than equal to what happened at Pearl Harbor, whatever way one tries to measure it. But this is besides the point. It is not a question of matching quantity with quantity. Pearl Harbor had a certain quality to it; it was that quality that had to be matched.

So, what was this particular "quality"? The first atomic bomb with U-235 used in military action in world history was dropped on Hiroshima 6 August 1945 at 08.15 a.m. It was early morning, the bomb came out of the clear sky. Hiroshima had been off limits for conventional bombing presumably due to a Hiroshima lobby in Washington that had managed to get the city off the list of possible targets. In other words, the city had been saved - that was its tragedy. The same actually also was the case for Kyoto - but that city remained off limits, possibly because of the cultural treasures within its confines. Hiroshima/Nagasaki were more at the periphery; to hit them did not hit the imperial Japanese system as would have been the case had Tokyo, Kyoto or Nara been used as nuclear targets.

Every morning for two weeks prior to 6 August a single plane had appeared over Hiroshima. Possibly the mission of this plane was to get the population used to the appearance, in the morning, of an aircraft so as to dumb their senses, and make them more vulnerable. At any rate, when the 6 August plane arrived it was taken as one more of those single planes, possibly reconnaissance missions. It was not. It was the prelude to the nuclear age. Three days later, 9 August, came the follow-up, the Pt-239 bomb on Nagasaki; the death toll was about 150 000. The death toll to Hiroshima is estimated at 200 000.

Compare this to Pearl Harbor 7 December, 1945. Already at dawn that Sunday morning the Japanese task force of 33 ships had arrived at the position approximately 200 miles to the north of Oahu (the major island in the Hawaiian archipelago). But Japanese ships had been way out in the Pacific waters before, on maneuvers. As a matter of fact, they might even have been successful in blunting the attentiveness of the US military, although the debate is still

on about to what extent they really were surprised. But any advanced knowledge would be for the higher levels only; for people in general the Japanese attack suddenly came out of the sky. It started at 07.40, the Japanese coming in over Oahu from the west. And then it went on, wave after wave of high level bombers, torpedo bombers and what not, for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hour. The damage was considerable, as is well-known; Pearl Harbor was to the hardware of the US Navy what Hiroshima was to the software of the Japanese people. There is, of course, no comparison between the human losses involved: civilian vs. military; people vs. iron and steel; hundreds of thousands vs. a very modest loss in spite of the military stupidity in offering such a target of ships and aircraft.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was carried out with conventional weapons, hence one single blow was insufficient. Waves of attack were needed, over an interval of less than one and a half hour, distributing relatively symmetrically around the Hour selected for the Hiroshima attack (for Nagasaki 11.02 a.m.). One single 13 kiloton bomb was sufficient, for Nagasaki 22 kiloton. For Pearl Harbor today one single bomb would also have been sufficient, possibly with the load of around one megaton (to close up the whole bay 10 megatons might be needed, the load estimated necessary to close important straits around the world).

The parallels are too many to be just by chance. It is the transcendental suddenness, the unpredictability of the event, not to mention the awesome feeling that a new chapter in military history has been opened, that stand out. Retribution had to be in kind. If the Japanese opened a chapter in military history, the United States had to open not only a chapter, but an entire library. A line had to be drawn to seal the episode introduced by the "Day of Infamy", and that line had to be nothing but the dividing line between two eras. The population of Hiroshima, and afterwards that of Nagasaki, were to be sacrificed in order for the US to retribute in kind, and in order for the US government to signal the opening of a new age, presided over by the United States, alone. In the Hiroshima museum the bomb has no pre-history; it is presented like anti-Genesis. A strong message, but obviously not a correct one.

If Hiroshima is the revenge for Pearl Harbor then two important questions immediately arise. History has no beginning, and no end. It is convenient from a Western perspective in general, and a US perspective in particular, to see the US as the innocent victim that was hit by an evil Japanese government; unaware, vulnerable. When evil is wrought then the cause is located outside the West, or, if inside the West, in devious, evil forces. It is then for the West to set the matters right again, if necessary with a paralyzing strike against the forces of evil. Justice has to be done. The West, as such, is pure.

But, it might also possibly be the case that history did not start on 7 December 1941. Maybe the Japanese had some reasons for doing what they did? Maybe they felt they were any bit as much entitled to a share in world capitalist imperialism as did the United States, and more particularly so in East Asia and the Pacific? One can reject both of them if one rejects capitalist imperialism, but one can only accept one or reject the other on the basis of a very narrow civilization-al or nationalist perspective. The admittance of one to the world market should lead to the admittance of the other, or so the Japanese thought. But this thinking was not shared by the Western powers in general and the US in particular; nor is it fully shared today with Japanese superiority as an actor on this market being proven again and again. The West wanted to run the game alone, Japan wanted to participate in that game and if necessary to run it their own way in East Asia, in the *daitōā-kyōeiken*; the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, then as also today. Regardless of how one looks at it it is difficult to escape the conclusion that if any injustice were exercised, any wrong was done, then the burden falls on the United States rather than on Japan in the period between the two world wars.

Hence, instead of putting the cause at the feet of the Japanese it could also be put in front of the door of the United States. That leads to the second question: could it be that the effect would not necessarily show up in Japan but rather in the United States? In other

words, could it be that if Hiroshima/Nagasaki is the revenge for Pearl Harbor then something else might one day become the revenge for Hiroshima/Nagasaki? Could it be that deep down in the collective unconscious of the Japanese nation there is a tremendous bitterness as having been selected as the first victim of nuclear genocide? Could it be that they one day might feel that it was not quite by chance that this took place against the "yellow race" and not against the German enemy belonging to the "white race"? And what does that tell us about United States security in the longer run, not today when the United States looks very strong militarily, but the day after tomorrow when ecological degradation, social disruption, political ineptitude and economic crisis are accompanied by military decline? Could it be that they will one day reap what they have sewn?

I do not know. Nobody knows. All we know is that such chains of revenge, international vendettas lead to nothing but death; kilo-deaths; mega-deaths. Nobody can or should ever pay for the lives lost, for the tremendous human suffering of Hiroshima/Nagasaki; not only on the population those two disastrous mornings but on generations that come, on their off-spring. All I am saying is that the 6/9 August genocidal acts is the kind of raw material out of which more disasters are made. So cruel. And so utterly unnecessary.

And, imagine it had not happened; the bomb had been developed, but not used. We would have lived in a completely different world. Of course, the threat of its use would have been there, but as something abstract, like some horrid toxin not yet used militarily. In all probability we would have been spared for most of the nuclear arms race although there would have been suspicions. The nuclear age, the age of nuclear weapons would have remained embryonic. But stupidity, short-sightedness, arrogance, self-righteousness and vengeance prevailed. And the populations of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, with their lives, paid for the birth of the monster. Let us hope it will not devour us all.

* For some information, see Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World, Dept. of Public Information, United Nations, New York, 1983 and Pearl Harbor, December 7 1941, Honolulu 1983. I am also indebted to Daniel Ellsberg for comments.