



The Actual Reason Why America Dropped 2 Atomic Bombs on Japan - Part 2 with Prof. Kuznick

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acTVism Munch (acTV): Thank you for your time today. In part 1 you addressed the myths that are still regularly disseminated in mainstream media that attempt to justify the use of atomic bombs in Japan by the U.S. during World War 2.

In this part we would like to examine the role of President Truman and on what basis he executed the order to drop atomic bombs. In addition, we would like to find out what the real reasons were that motivated the U.S. to use these bombs. Please could you provide your assessment on these two points?

Peter Kuznick (PK): OK. Harry Truman enters office in a terrible situation. He's going to have to make the most momentous decisions in history about relations with the Soviet Union, relations with the British at the end of the war in Europe, and the end of the war in the Pacific, and what to do with the atomic bombs. He's in way over his head from the very beginning. He'd been Vice-President for 82 days, during which time he met with Roosevelt twice. They never talked about anything of substance. He finally gets the briefings on the bomb. He writes in his diary and records in his memoirs that Byrnes told me it was a weapon great enough to destroy the whole world. He knew that. On April 25th, he gets a fuller briefing from Stimson and General Groves, the Head of the Manhattan Project, and again, he writes, they told me this and they had the reports, in four months we're going to have a weapon, one bomb of which can destroy an entire city. He says, they said that, even if we have it, maybe we shouldn't use it, because it could end up blowing up the world. And I felt the same way when I heard their briefing and I read the report.

On April 25th at Potsdam, he got a full briefing on how powerful the bomb test in Alamogordo was. And he writes in his diary, "we discovered the most terrible weapon in history. This may be the fire destruction prophecy in the Euphrates Valley era after Noah and his fabulous ark."

So on some level, he knows what he's dealing with, not a bigger weapon, but he's beginning a process that could end all life on the planet. The scientists knew that that's what they were dealing with. Robert Oppenheimer briefed the interim committee designed to make decisions about the bomb on May 31, and he told the top military and political leaders that, within three years, the United States would likely have weapons between 700 and 7000 times as powerful as the Hiroshima bomb. We knew that, we entered this wide open. Leo Szilard says, these

weapons are of a terrifying magnitude. They can be made any size. There's no limit to how destructive they can be.

This is what Truman was understanding and dealing with. He goes to Potsdam in mid-July and pressed the scientists to speed up the bomb test because, as Stimson says, "we wanted to have our strongest card in our hand when we were dealing with the Soviets". So Truman gets the report on the bomb test being successful. He meets with Stalin, has lunch with Stalin on July 17th. At that meeting, Stalin assures him that the Russians are coming in on schedule. Truman writes in his journal, "Stalin will be in the Jap war by August 15th. Fini Japs when that occurs." It is clear "Fini Japs. The war is over." He writes home to his wife, Bess, the next day, "the Russians are coming in. We'll end the war year sooner now. Think of the kids who won't be killed." These are Truman's words. There's no ambiguity.

On the boat back from Potsdam to the U.S. on August 3rd, Walter Brown, who is Jimmy Byrnes' personal assistant, writes on the way back on the Augusta, the President, Admiral Leahy and Byrnes agree, "Japs are looking for peace". They all knew this. They were explicit about this. I could cite a hundred different things. The telegrams are saying. The intelligence was saying this, over and over again. And yet the U.S. decided to use the bombs.

Why did the U.S. decide to use the bombs? That's the interesting historical question. And the answer, in large part, is that as soon as Truman took office, the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union was developing. Roosevelt's last cable to Churchill said, "these issues between us and the Soviets pop up every day and they all work out. We shouldn't make more of them than they're worth." But Truman did not have that understanding. He was a little man who had knee-jerk reactions and very little understanding. And his response was just the opposite. His response was that the Soviets are breaking their agreements. And he was egged on by Forrestal, by Byrnes, by Harriman, and on April 23, his tenth day in office, he meets with Foreign Minister Molotov, and he berates Molotov's and accuses the Soviets of having broken the Yalta agreements. And Molotov says, I've never been talked to that way in my life. Truman says, "well, carry out your agreements, you won't have to be talked to that way." Truman went out and bragged, "I gave it to him, 1-2 to the jaw."

So right from the very beginning, U.S. relations with the Soviets are going to be on a rocky and dangerous path, and very different than what would have happened had Roosevelt lived longer or Wallace became Vice President for a second time, then President when Roosevelt died. We would have had a whole different history. This is the context in which Truman is making decisions. There was no need to drop the bomb on the Japanese to end the war. There was a need, Truman felt, to send a message to the Soviet Union of what would happen to them and worse, if they interfered with American plans in Europe or in Asia. And you have to remember that the Soviets knew better than anybody how desperate the Japanese were to surrender, because they were the ones who the Japanese were appealing to to help them surrender. So to the Soviet leaders, this just showed the extent of American ruthlessness, that

the Americans were willing to cavalierly sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives in order to send this kind of message to the Soviet Union.

Now, how do we know? What kind of evidence do we have to support that view? We look at the comments made by Leslie Groves, for example – Leslie Groves, who controlled the bombs, was the Head of the Manhattan Project. Leslie Groves said, there was never, from that two weeks, from the time I took charge of this project any illusion on my part that Russia was our enemy and the project was conducted on that basis. Russia, not Japan. Groves shocked Joseph Rotblat, a Polish physicist, later Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was on the British delegation, over dinner in March of 1944, when he told Rotblat over dinner – he says, You realise, of course, that the main purpose of this project is to subdue the Russians. This was March of '44. This was Groves' view all along, not just Groves, (also) Jimmy Byrnes.

Leo Szilard, the brilliant Hungarian physicist, who was so concerned about the Nazis getting the bomb and then about the Americans not using the bomb. He and Nobel Prize winner, Harold Urey at Walter Barkey from University Chicago, went to the White House to talk to Truman. Truman sent them down to South Carolina to see Byrnes. They met with Byrnes on May 28 and they tried to explain to him, of course, there's no need to drop the bomb, and if we do, the scientists are warning that this is going to lead to an uncontrollable arms race. And Byrnes' response was classic. He said, well, you're a Hungarian, aren't you? How do you think we're going to roll the Soviets out of Hungary and the rest of Eastern Europe without using the bomb? It was very clear, Szilard thought he was dealing with a madman. Understanding that we're beginning a process that could end life on the planet. And what Byrnes is concerned about is Soviet troops in Eastern Europe. So we have this from a lot of the evidence from different sources.

And the thing about it, the final clincher on all of this, is that the United States had eight five-star admirals and generals in 1945, seven of whom were on the record saying the atomic bombs were either militarily unnecessary, morally reprehensible, or both. And we're talking about the top American military leaders. Admiral Leahy chaired the meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was Truman's personal Chief of Staff. Leahy wrote after the war, he says “the Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender. The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. Being the first to use it, we adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.” He said later, “I could see no military reason from a national defence point of view for an invasion of an already thoroughly defeated Japan.” He told Jonathan Daniels, who interviewed him in 1949 and was writing a biography of Truman, “Truman told me it was agreed they would use it only to hit military objectives. Of course, then they went ahead and killed as many women and children as they could, which was just what they wanted all the time.” That's Admiral Leahy. Eisenhower – later, President Eisenhower, General Eisenhower, Head of American forces in Europe was briefed on this by Stimson at Potsdam, and Eisenhower later wrote. He said, “They told me they were going to drop it on the Japanese.

Well, I listened and I didn't volunteer anything because, after all, my war was over in Europe and it wasn't up to me, but I was getting more and more depressed just thinking about it. Then he asked me for my opinion. So I told him I was against it on two counts. First, the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated to see our country be the first to use such a weapon." That was Eisenhower. MacArthur, General Douglas MacArthur, who desperately wanted to use atomic bombs in the Korean War, was appalled that we were using atomic bombs. He said, "All I could think of was the next war, which was going to be 10,000 times more destructive." He says that former President Hoover wrote a memo to Truman in mid-May urging Truman to change his surrender terms. MacArthur wrote to Hoover and he said, "It was a wise and statesmanlike document, and had it been put into effect, would have obviated the slaughter at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In addition to much of the destruction on the island of Honshu by our bomber attacks. That the Japanese would have accepted it and gladly, I have no doubt." MacArthur is basically saying, we could have gotten the Japanese surrender in May and saved American lives, Japanese lives, Chinese lives, had we changed the surrender terms.

We had the same thing from Hap Arnold, the Head of the Air Force General Bonner Fellers, Admiral King Commander of the US Navy, Chester Nimitz, Admiral Bull Halsey. The list goes on and on and on. As Brigadier General Carter Clark, who's in charge of preparing the magic summaries, said, we brought them down to an abject surrender through accelerated sinking of their merchant marine and hunger alone. And when we didn't need to do it and we knew we didn't need to do it, and they knew we knew we didn't need to do it, we used them as an experiment for two atomic bombs.

Well, how did the Soviets respond? Their heads exploded. As Marshall Zhukov said, everybody in the Soviet capital knew that these bombs were unnecessary and that the war was over. And the American use of it sent a message throughout the Kremlin that this is what the New World was about. And this is what the United States believed in and represented and was going to act upon. We also know, for example, that Bonds did not convince the Japanese to surrender, what convinced the Japanese surrender was the Soviet invasion. That happens at midnight on August 8th. The United States had already firebombed more than 100 Japanese cities. Destruction reached 99.5 % in the city of Toyama. The Japanese accepted we could wipe out their cities. We had already firebombed them, wiped out much of Tokyo. They accepted we could wipe out their cities. The atomic bombs did not change that equation at all. The Soviet invasion is what they dreaded and what did change the equation. The Soviet invasion made a two front war. The Soviet Red Army blitzed right through the mighty quantum army in Manchuria, Korea, Hokkaido, Karafuto. And Prime Minister Suzuki was asked on August 13th, the day before they formally surrendered, why they couldn't delay surrender. And he says, I can't do that if we miss today, the Soviet Union will take not only Manchuria, Korea, Karafuto, but also Hokkaido. This would destroy the foundation of Japan. We must end the war. We can deal with the US. We have those statements by General Koabe, the Deputy Chief of Staff, by Admiral Toyota, by the other top military leaders. So we know

that that's what motivated this surrender.

So we've got Obama and Rice and these others saying that the war ended in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That's not only a lie, it's a dangerous lie, because it justifies the U.S. atomic bombs. We could have ended the war earlier, saved lives and not have introduced the world to nuclear weapons in the way that we knew was the most dangerous. We maybe could have set an example if we refused to use them. We could have said that we were not using them because they're so immoral that nobody should ever use that. We have them. We can get rid of them now. It would have had a very different outcome had we approached it in that way. We could have had a different world, the world that I think Roosevelt would have overseen, the world that Wallace fought for later as Secretary of Commerce and then afterwards outside of the cabinet.

acTV: Thank you very much for participating in this two-part interview series. But before we leave you, could you talk about why this information is still important today, 75 years later? In particular, why should our older viewers educate younger people about this topic?

PK: That's a good question. Right now, the younger generation should know that there are two existential threats that threaten to wipe out all life on the planet. The one that they're aware of and sensitive to is global warming. And I see with my students and others, they're very concerned about climate change. That's great. But nuclear issues have fallen off their radar. And this has been the case, really, since the 1980s. And with the end of the Cold War, people believe that this was no longer the threat that it had been. Well, the reality is that it's a greater threat than ever right now.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists began its Doomsday Clock back in 1947. The closest before 2018 that it ever moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock was two minutes before midnight. In January of 2018, they moved it back to two minutes before midnight for the first time since the 1950s, after the US and Soviets tested their hydrogen bombs. The closest we've ever come really is the Cuban Missile Crisis. The lesson that Kennedy and Khrushchev drew from the Cuban missile crisis is that, once one of these crises develops, there is no way to control it. They both knew they had lost control and that the only reason we survived the Cuban missile crisis and didn't blow up more than half the world, maybe all of it, was because of pure blind luck. They did everything they could and they knew they could not control this crisis. Khrushchev afterwards writes to Kennedy saying, "let's get rid of every conflict between us that could cause a new crisis, because it's too dangerous." But Kennedy is assassinated, Khrushchev is toppled, and then the world goes back into the insanity of the nuclear arms race, 70,000 nuclear weapons by the mid 1980s, one and a half million Hiroshima bombs-equivalent.

And then with the end of the Cold War, that seems to be less of a concern. That's wrong, it's more of a concern. In fact, now U.S. relations with Russia, U.S. relations with China, relations between India and Pakistan, the threat of a conflict between China and Taiwan, Korea again, India and China again in the Himalayas. I mean, there's one crisis after another now. So in February 2019, the political scientists moved the hands of Doomsday Clock to 100 seconds before midnight – the closest it's ever been. In January 2018, as Secretary of Defence, Mattis says, now the main threat to American security is no longer international terrorism, it's Russia and China. In February 2018, Trump put out his new Nuclear Posture Review, elevating the status of nuclear weapons and introducing two new nuclear weapons. In March 2018, Vladimir Putin State of the Nation address announced that Russia has developed five new nuclear weapons, all of which can get around U.S. missile defence. In February 2019, the bulletin moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 100 seconds before midnight.

What's going on? Trump pulled the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal, the JCPOA, which was working brilliantly to stop Iran from getting a bomb. Trump destroys that. In 2019, he pulls the US out of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the INF treaty, then he pulls the United States this year out of the Open Skies Treaty. He says he doesn't like the New Start treaty. If that goes, there is no more arms control scaffolding left, once the New Start treaty goes, Trump says, I welcome an arms race. Well, if we get an arms race, we're going to be back to the 1980s. And Trump says he wants to start, hinting they want to start nuclear testing. I mean, one thing after another.

This is dangerous and insane. The immediate threat to life on our planet is nuclear war. And there's a lot of people in the US, Russia and elsewhere who would use nuclear weapons. For example, India and Pakistan almost went to war. Last year, they bombed each other. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. But we know there are hotheads in both of those countries. And so if there is a war over Kashmir. India invades Pakistan. The Indian army is twice the size and more than twice as powerful. They overrun the Pakistani army. Pakistan's strategy is to respond with nuclear weapons. OK. You say one bomb and then maybe the Indians retaliate with one bomb. So, unfortunately, many of your relatives will be gone. But the reality is that it's a limited nuclear war.

But it never ends, all the nuclear war scenarios, the war game scenarios that we've done over the years all spiral out of control. They never end with these limited exchanges. A limited nuclear war between India and Pakistan, the scientists tell us, in which one hundred Hiroshima sized nuclear weapons will create partial nuclear winter. The cities would burn, smoke and soot would go up into the stratosphere. Within two weeks, it would circle the globe, blocking the sun's rays. Temperatures on much of the earth's surface would plummet below freezing. Agriculture would be badly wounded, maybe destroyed in much of the world, and that limited nuclear war could cause up to two billion deaths. One hundred Hiroshima sized bombs. There are almost 14,000 bombs in the world, between seven and 80 times as

powerful as the Hiroshima bomb.

What if a portion of those, even a fraction, are used? And this is the nightmare scenario, the dystopian future we face. And the longer these weapons are there, the more likely, of course, that they're going to be used. And it doesn't have to be by design, it can be by accident. We've come very close to using it accidentally on several occasions. Very, very close, in which a drunk Boris Yeltsin gets the signal in the middle of the night that there's an incoming ICBM attack. And he's got we don't know how many pints of vodka in him and he decides not to respond militarily. We've had several of those kinds of situations. There's no guarantee. I don't like the fact that Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump each have veto power over the continuing existence of life on our planet. Especially Donald Trump, who has not got the emotional maturity of a six year old at best, and intellectual capacities of a gifted four year old. I mean, this is what we're dealing with.

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