

# 80 Years of Lies: The US Finally Admits It Knew It Didn't Need to Bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki

By Alan Macleod

## Eighty Years Of Lies

The United States remains the only nation to have dropped an atomic bomb in anger. While the dates of August 6 and August 9, 1945, are seared into the popular conscience of all Japanese people, those days hold far less salience in American society.

When discussed at all in the U.S., this dark chapter in human history is usually presented as a necessary evil, or even a day of liberation—an event that saved hundreds of thousands of lives, prevented the need for an invasion of Japan, and ended the Second World War early. This, however, could not be further from the truth.

American generals and war planners agreed that Japan was on the point of collapse, and had, for weeks, been attempting to negotiate a surrender. The decision, then, to incinerate hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians was one taken to project American power across the world, and to stymie the rise of the Soviet Union.

“It always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse,” General Henry Arnold, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1945, wrote in his 1949 memoirs. Arnold was far from alone in this assessment. Indeed, Fleet Admiral William Leahy, the Navy’s highest-ranking officer during World War II, bitterly condemned the United States for its decision and compared his own country to the most savage regimes in world history.

As he wrote in 1950:

*“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. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.”*

By 1945, Japan had been militarily and economically exhausted. Losing key allies Italy in 1943 and Germany by May 1945, and facing the immediate prospect of an all-out Soviet invasion of Japan, the country’s leaders were frantically pursuing peace negotiations. Their only real condition appeared to be that they wished to keep as a figurehead the emperor—a position that, by some accounts, dates back more than 2,600 years.

“I am convinced,” former President Herbert Hoover wrote to his successor, Harry S. Truman, “if you, as President, will make a shortwave broadcast to the people of Japan—tell them they can have their emperor if they surrender, that it will not mean unconditional surrender except for the militarists—you’ll get a peace in Japan—you’ll have both wars over.”

Many of Truman’s closest advisors told him the same thing. “I am absolutely convinced that had we said they could keep the emperor, together with the threat of an atomic bomb, they would have accepted, and we would never have had to drop the bomb,” said John McCloy, Truman’s Assistant Secretary of War.

Nevertheless, Truman initially took an absolutist position, refusing to hear any Japanese negotiating caveats. This stance, according to General Douglas MacArthur, Commander of Allied Forces in the Pacific, actually lengthened the war. “The war might have ended weeks earlier,” he said, “If the United States had agreed, as it later did anyway, to the retention of the institution of the emperor.” Truman, however, dropped two bombs, then reversed his position on the emperor, in order to stop Japanese society from falling apart.

**At that point in the war, however, the United States was emerging as the sole global superpower and enjoyed an unprecedented position of influence. The dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan underscored this; it was a power play, intended to strike fear into the hearts of world leaders, especially in the Soviet Union and China.**

### **First Japan, Then The World**

Hiroshima and Nagasaki drastically curbed the U.S.S.R.’s ambitions in Japan. Joseph Stalin’s forces had invaded and permanently annexed Sakhalin Island in 1945 and planned to occupy Hokkaido, Japan’s second-largest island. The move likely prevented the island nation from coming under the Soviet sphere of influence. To this day, Japan remains deeply tied to the U.S., economically, politically, and militarily. There are around 60,000 U.S. troops in Japan, spread across 120 military bases.

Many in Truman’s administration wished to use the atom bomb against the Soviet Union as well. President Truman, however, worried that the destruction of Moscow would lead the Red Army to invade and destroy Western Europe as a response. As such, he decided to wait until the U.S. had enough warheads to completely destroy the U.S.S.R. and its military in one fell swoop. War planners estimated this figure to be around 400. To that end, Truman ordered the immediate ramping up of production. Such a strike, we now know, would have caused a nuclear winter that would have permanently ended all organized life on Earth. **The decision to destroy Russia was met with stiff opposition among the American scientific community. It is now widely believed that Manhattan Project scientists, including Robert J. Oppenheimer himself, passed nuclear secrets to Moscow in an effort to speed up their nuclear project and develop a deterrent to halt this doomsday scenario. This part of history, however, was left out of the 2023 biopic movie.**