

The West and the World: Mr. Melnyk

The Hidden Agenda of Hiroshima

Another day that lives in infamy

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December 20, 2007

When the atomic bomb hit the Japanese city of Hiroshima, the world stopped to ponder the new era that had begun: “My God, what have we done?” The Truman administration was quick to justify its actions. The Japanese army remained a threat to the international community, and American lives had been spared from a costly invasion. Some however, called this a “crime against humanity”. Although the justification of the attack on Hiroshima is grey, there is no doubt that the American administration had their own hidden agenda. The Soviet Union was an imminent threat to American hegemony and the war was nearing an end – meaning that a new struggle for power would emerge as soon as the Allied powers no longer had a common enemy. Utilizing the world’s first atomic bomb appeared to be a quick solution to many of these predicaments. The United States’ dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima had a hidden agenda of self-interest as shown by the necessity of legitimizing the Manhattan Project, the establishment of the nation as a hegemon, and the intimidation of the Soviet Union.

On December 7, 1941, The Japanese bombed America’s Pearl Harbour, which resulted in the entering of the United States into the Second World War. In a race to compete with the Germans, President Roosevelt set up the Manhattan Project, whose task was to build an atomic bomb before any other nation could. By the time Little Boy – the name of the atomic bomb – was perfected, the war in Europe had already ended, leaving the Japanese as the only enemy left standing against the Allied powers. On a summer day in 1945, Little Boy was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, ending the world war nine days later. Even decades after the event, historians still question whether this was an act necessary to preserve the lives of Americans or a crime against humanity. Nonetheless, there is evidence proving that there were much deeper motives behind America’s actions on that fateful summer’s day.

The legitimization of the Manhattan Project was the initial ulterior motive of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. In 1941, the American government set up the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, whose confidential task was to create an atom bomb before any other nation. By 1944, virtually every physicist and scientist of importance was involved with this project. The government poured vast resources into the Manhattan Project, including forty thousand people and over two billion dollars¹. The government, however, knew that this project would lose its legitimacy if its efforts would not help end the war: “[they] lived in constant fear of facing congressional investigating committees if the Manhattan Project did not succeed in time to help end the war”². The administration first claimed that the Manhattan Project was in response to the nuclear arms race that had begun in Germany. However, with the collapse of Germany in 1945 and the waning threat of Japan, the Truman government was beginning to run out of reasons for continuing the project. Truman even admitted later that Japan was nearing surrender three days before the Hiroshima attack. Nonetheless, “[he] was worried that he would be accused of wasting money on the Manhattan Project... if the bomb was not used”³. To ensure the legitimacy of this costly project, the American administration decided to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, claiming that it would prevent the unnecessary loss of American soldiers, which would have otherwise occurred if the United States had invaded Japan. Maintaining the legitimacy of the Manhattan Project was merely one of the self-interested incentives of dropping a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, but ending the Second World War on American terms remained an imperative purpose on their hidden agenda.

The Truman administration conducted a nuclear attack on Hiroshima for purely self-interested reasons, as it would establish the nation as a hegemon. When the Enola Gay dropped the

¹ Clive A. Lawton, *Hiroshima: The Story of the First Atom Bomb*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2004) 11.

² Tamara L. Roleff, *Turning Points: The Atom Bomb*. (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press Inc., 2000) 75.

³ Rob, Edwards, *Hiroshima bomb may have carried hidden agenda*. (*New Scientist*: 2005) 1.

atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the Americans unveiled their hegemony in many ways: first, they revealed that their nation was the first to perfect the atom bomb. Secondly, they exposed a weapon that would allow them the upper hand in international disputes. Lastly, they ended one of the greatest wars of the world on American terms. German physicists had discovered the chemical anomaly of nuclear energy in 1938, but it wasn't until the United States joined the war in 1940 that the race to build the first atomic bomb began. American scientists were told that the Germans were a year ahead of them in terms of development: "It is possible that the Germans will have, by the end of this year, enough material accumulated to make a large number of [atomic bombs]..."⁴. Thus, it was with pride that the first nuclear warhead to be seen by the world was created and launched by the United States. The nuclear attack on Hiroshima also achieved its second purpose of establishing American hegemony. No other nation in the world had created, nor had come close to developing, an atomic bomb.

However, unknown to the United States, Germany focused most of its research on nuclear theory rather than on how to make a bomb. Japan had considered making an atom bomb but never proceeded beyond initial research⁵.

The United States was granted the advantage of intimidation and leverage in diplomatic negotiations because of their new and frightening discovery. This military weapon brought the Americans into hegemony and the world at the mercy of one nation. Hegemony may have only been one of the hidden agendas of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima, but the most prominent incentive was the intimidation of the Soviet Union.

The Truman administration was secretly motivated to drop the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima because of their desire to intimidate the Soviet Union. According to Gar Alperovitz, "...Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped... Japan's military position

⁴ Richard, Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988) 512.

⁵ Clive A, Lawton, *Hiroshima: The Story of the First Atom Bomb*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2004) 11.

was so poor that its leaders would likely have surrendered before invasion...”⁶. Alperovitz is among the many who believed that the United States did not bomb the Japanese because they were a threat, but because they wanted to establish more leverage in terms of diplomacy in the post-WWII era: “The real reason Truman deployed the atom bomb... was to impress the Soviet Union with America’s military strength, which would give the United States the upper hand in postwar diplomatic relations”⁷. Dropping the atomic bomb would establish that the Americans had a weapon of mass destruction that no other nation possessed, which would have frightened the Soviet Union into compromise with American policies. The Soviet Union represented communism, which threatened and clashed with democracy in the West. The Soviets were also rivaling the United States for hegemony; thus the Americans were keen on upholding democracy and confirming themselves as the greater nation. Henceforth, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was entirely self-interested as exhibited by America’s desire to intimidate the Soviet Union.

The nuclear attack on Hiroshima by the United States had a hidden agenda of self-interest as shown by the necessity of legitimizing the Manhattan Project, the establishment of the nation as a hegemon, and the intimidation of the Soviet Union. Historians still argue today whether or not the bombing of Hiroshima was a crime against humanity or a necessary act to preserve American life. Nonetheless, there is no denying that America’s hidden agenda of political ambition would lead to the murder of seventy-thousand people in a mere instant – embedding in humanity’s mind the day the world entered a new era. Like Pearl Harbour, Hiroshima would be a date that would live in infamy.

⁶ Gar, Alperovitz, Hiroshima: Historians Reassess. (Foreign Policy , 99, 1995)

⁷ Ibid.

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