Atomic Race: From Hiroshima to the Cold War

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Abstract

The decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan is widely disputed among scholars. Advocates called for an end to the War with minimum U.S. casualties. Opposition to the use of the atomic bomb argue Japan was on the brink of surrender and that a catastrophic event was no longer necessary. Use of the atomic bomb did however create a race for atomic and nuclear energy culminating in what is known today as the “Cold War Era”.

This paper will argue the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was no longer justified to end an already defeated Japan.
Atomic Race: From Hiroshima to the Cold War

Power is the primary mechanism used to deter war, justify war, and end war. The ability of a country to flex its might and wage war is never superficial. The use of war to further other alternate agendas creates speculation and arguments as to whether the end justifies the means. Critics over the use of the atomic bomb argue Japan was on the brink of surrender; therefore, the use of the atomic bomb was no longer justified. Supporters argue continued war in Japan would likely lead to higher U.S. casualties eroding American will and continued support. The means by which the atomic bomb would bring about an end to the War carries far more lasting impacts to World stability—the nuclear race begins.

Background

On December 6, 1941 Congress approved funding for the construction of an atomic bomb. The program became known as the Manhattan Project. The weapon of mass destruction was to later be used on Japan, while the targets were still unknown. Documents pertaining to the Manhattan Project are few although the intent was known. America was growing weary of the War and continued support would likely diminish with increased bloodshed. An end to the War in Japan was necessitated with the end of the War in Europe with Nazi Germany in May 1945. The Manhattan Project was funded under Roosevelt and later authorized for use by President Truman who saw a need to bring upon a quick end to war with Japan.

Political Climate

As Nazi Germany surrendered in Europe a few years prior to the end of war in Japan, American people were demanding an end to war. The political climate of this era would cause the Truman administration to decisively bring about an end to the war and bring American Soldiers home. The atomic bomb was built and tested without little regard as to the intended
targets. Records would later reveal that decisions on which cities to bomb would change. The dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki for example was as a result of inclement weather and the inability to engage primary targets elsewhere. Therefore, it can be argues that the use of such devastating weapons was random at best. Even during the building and testing of the bomb many argued in what capacity the bomb could be used. It wasn’t until later that Truman would create the need out of necessity to bring about a decisive win.

*President Truman*

Brought an end to World War II but brought about a beginning to the Cold War Era and confronting communism. In the advent of war with Japan speculation shifts to the intent of using a controversial albeit justifiable method to bring about a close to one war (WWII) and the birth of a new (Cold War). Few records exist from the Truman administration that would reveal the logic behind the use of the atomic bomb. The assassination of Roosevelt paved the way for Truman to handle the ongoing war in Japan. Under advice from his cabinet, Truman was plagued with many of the same decisions facing Japan in its invasion into Pearl Harbor—the consequences for the actions and use of the atomic bomb.

Like Truman, the unprovoked invasion into Pearl Harbor by Japan would lead to likely retaliation from the West. It was later assimilated that America would be like waking a “sleeping giant”. The attack during this period mounted U.S. support for the administration to respond to the crisis. Support by the American people was without waiver. At the conclusion of war in Japan the same support would grow weary as thousands of Americans died throughout the East from the Philippines to Japan. Whether or not the use of the atomic bomb was justified, only history would show the ultimate destruction it caused as a result.
Russia

Throughout World War II, Russia suffered the highest casualty loss; however, the U.S. suffered the highest economic loss. The Stalin years under Soviet Union would directly confront the U.S and begin the race for arms. Communism during this and any period was viewed as a direct threat to U.S interests at home and abroad. The Cold War standoff would later result creating decades of unease throughout the world. On August 8, 1945, the Soviet Union announced war Japan. On August 9, 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. On August 10, 1945, the second bomb was dropped over Nagasaki, a secondary target as a result of inclement weather. In total, nearly 160,000 died in both bombings. The fact that Soviet Union declared war on Japan and the timeline of events of the use of the atomic bomb only add to the alternate agenda and consequences for their use during this period.

Japan and the Imperial House

Few would dispute that the use of the atomic bomb in Japan did bring about an immediate end to war in Japan. Japanese Soldiers immediately began laying down their weapons. Before this time, Japanese officials were little swayed at the possibility that the U.S. harnessed the energy of the atom and created enough radiation to create such a device. Traditional fire bombings were still being used at the time and one would argue whether the atomic bomb was even conceivable. A proclamation to end the war in the Imperial Palace was unachievable prior to the second bombing even though the Soviet Union announced war on Japan. Once news of the second bombing came decisive vote was called upon without dissention. In his book, Kennedy quotes Emperor Hirohito as saying, “I swallow my own tears and give my sanction to the proposal to accept the Allied proclamation,” in an effort to preserve the Imperial House (1999, p.851).
Had the U.S not dropped the atomic bomb, some argued thousands more young Americans would likely die. In the advent of dwindling American support for Japan, decisive means to bring about an end to the war was viewed by supporters as necessary to save lives. The lives saved during this period were likely realized with the decisive attack. However, the Japanese would continue to lose lives decades later due to radiation and unexploded ordinance throughout the region. Further, with the Soviet Union entering the war only days before the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the likelihood of an immediate acceptance to an Allied Proclamation to end the war was elevated. Stalin would have committed thousands of troops to the effort and the Japanese surrender would have been imminent. The commitment of troops by the Soviet Union was then thwarted by the use of the atomic bomb. Countries would now enter a new period of instability and isolationism—the Cold War Era.

**Ramifications**

Sputnik, the race to the moon, competitive global environments, and Russia were key factors during this era. Russia was the first to enter space; however, the U.S. was the first to land on the moon. After the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Russia became the second power to create atomic weapons of mass destruction. An argument can be made whether the U.S. was aware of advancements in Russia and whether the use on Hiroshima had alternative agendas aimed at Russia. The Stalin years and the Cold War era would later reveal rapid advancements in technology and the civil global unrest as a result. The Cuban missile crisis, for example, would test the stability of the two great powers of that time—Russia and the United States. These ramifications may have been avoided if the United States did not show it’s willingness to use an instrument of mass destruction to silence an already ending war in Japan.

*Political Decision*
The atomic bomb was built without regard to a specific use. Further, the race for nuclear technology, during this period, is not widely recognized by the general public. However, after the deployment of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima and which demonstrated the capabilities for U.S. mass destruction, Russia became the second country to quickly develop similar technologies. One would argue whether intelligence showed the Soviet Union’s impending designs and later development as the U.S. intentions to thwart Soviet advances. According to Mastny, the Soviet Union had been developing its nuclear technology for four-years. It wasn’t until after Nagasaki, the Soviet Union stepped efforts (1996). The likely threat during this period was further escalated when the Soviet Union was the first to achieve a manned flight into space. Under Kennedy, the U.S. entered the space race by being the first to land on the moon. Both the nuclear race and subsequent space race paved the way for the Cold War Era.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of WWII and subsequent fall of Japan, the United States should not have dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war in Japan was drawing down and the use of such a devastating device only aided in the advent of the Cold War Era. The Truman administration was forced to end a war due to American pessimism and decreased support. According to Weinberg, “for the vast majority of people the bomb dropped on Hiroshima became the symbol and the standard of measurement for a new era of potentially total destruction” (1994, p 915). Supporters of the use of the atomic bomb conclude that the use of the bomb mitigated the needless deaths of thousands of soldiers while advocates support the conclusion that Japan was on the brink of surrender. The use of the atomic bomb created the nuclear age and race for arms. The ultimate aim of the atomic bomb sought about the cold war era and decades of unrest in the world.
References

