

## **Enough!**

Speech presented at the USAF Museum

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Good evening ladies and gentleman. It is a great honor to be invited to speak to you this evening. You've just heard from Michael Vickio about the role of the Manhattan Project in the creation of the atomic bombs. If you will permit me, I'd like to tell you a little bit tonight about why those bombs were used.

It seems on each and every anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan, the same tired, old arguments reappear about the use of those bombs. Back in 1995, Hitoshi Motoshima, the outspoken former mayor of Nagasaki stated his opinion that the use of the atomic bombs on Japan was an atrocity on par with the Nazi death camps.<sup>1</sup> The sole purpose of the Manhattan Project was to produce atomic weapons before the Axis powers were able to manufacture and use them against the Allies. For anyone to equate our use of the atomic bombs with Germany and Japan's genocidal governmental policies and programs devised specifically to eradicate entire races of people from the face of the earth borders on delusion and fantasy.

It has been said many times throughout history, that one of the objects of war, quite bluntly, is to break things and kill people. To destroy your enemy's morale, the means of production, and the will to fight. In short, to inflict such massive pain and suffering on your enemy that they eventually say... **Enough!**

Some continue to assert it was morally wrong for America to have used atomic bombs to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Did this mean it was somehow morally "better" to destroy cities by using hundreds of B-29's instead of just one? Is it therefore morally "correct" to kill people by using bare hands, rifles, or bayonets? In fact, is there really a nice, polite, gentlemanly, way to kill? Of course not! And what about the machine-gun? After all, when it was invented, the machine-gun was seen as the ultimate weapon of mass destruction and considered so horrible that people tried to outlaw its very usage.

The use of these bombs has been criticized over the decades by people who complain that we should have limited the targets to non-civilian areas. During World War II, the large Japanese factories that produced the war materiel were surrounded by the so-called phantom industry - the smaller factories, shops, and homes that have traditionally done subcontracting piece work for the larger factories. The civilian workers all lived in close proximity to these industries. The Japanese could have separated the industrial and civilian areas, but chose not to. Everyone in Japan was part of the "War Machine" and thus

considered to be the enemy. The Japanese were 100% behind their emperor and military when the war was going their way.

Following the formation by the Japanese government of the Peoples Volunteer Corps, all civilian noncombatants were told to make products for the war effort. These included women, children, elderly, and the infirm who worked both in factories and in their homes to make everything from mines and grenades to booby traps and bomb detonators.

After the Tokyo firebomb raid in early March 1945, the Japanese government authorized the closing of schools and ordered the students to military service. As a 12-year-old junior high school student, Hiroshima bombing survivor Miyoko Matsubara, was taken out of school to work in a munitions factory along with all of her fellow students. According to her, “We were to sacrifice everything, including our lives, for the war effort. Everyone was involved in the war effort. We were a legitimate target.”<sup>ii</sup>

General Curtis LeMay made the observation that it was the Japanese dispersal of industry. After the war, he told about seeing the ruins of a multitude of tiny houses, with a drill press sticking up through the wreckage of every home. He commented that the entire population got into the act and worked to make those airplanes or munitions of war.<sup>iii</sup>

Since millions of civilians were preparing for suicide attacks against the invaders, General LeMay also described the terrible dilemma Allied troops would have faced during the invasion. He said we wouldn't have known which civilians were, or were not, part of the fighting force. You wouldn't have been able to tell who was in the army, who was a civilian, and who was just a kid. What this meant is that we would have had to kill practically every man, women, and child we saw. It would have been an awful slaughter.<sup>iv</sup>

The use of the atomic bombs was considered by President Truman and the Joint Chiefs as a means of heading off this upcoming invasion of Japan with its anticipated massive casualties. Allied leaders were aware that secret orders had been issued by Japanese Field Marshal Terauchi to execute all remaining POW's if such an invasion took place.<sup>v</sup> At the time, Japan was holding some 400,000 Allied POW's and this would have meant over 100,000 US deaths before any soldiers died during an invasion. Over one-third of all people taken prisoner by the Japanese during World War II died<sup>vi</sup> and fully one-half of the 60 million who died in World War II were civilian non-combatants. Over 200 US soldiers died each and every day during the entire course of World War II. It's been said that more people died at the end of a Japanese bayonet than died as a result of the atomic bombs. I don't know how many of you are aware of this, but of the 5,000 B-29 crewmembers downed over Japan, after the war was over less than 200 emerged alive from the prison camps.

So, just what is right and moral in war? If it was “moral” for Germany and Japan to pursue atomic weapon development programs with the presumed assumption these weapons would be used against the Allies, why was it “immoral” for the United States to also develop and use them? Does anyone here tonight think the Japanese and Germans would have hesitated to use them against us if they had developed them first? Captured

Japanese military personnel and scientists, who had been working on their atomic bomb program, were asked after the war if they would have used their bomb against the Allies. They replied, somewhat puzzled, “Why wouldn’t we have?”<sup>vii</sup>

Some continually attempt to blur the clear distinction between defeat and a willingness to surrender. Germany was a perfect example of this difference. The Nazis had been defeated long before they finally agreed to surrender and hundreds of thousands of people perished during that period. The very same concept should be applied to Japan. Though they had certainly been defeated militarily, Japan was not, as some historians have vainly attempted to prove, on the verge of surrender.

The Japanese militarists who had started this war, and comprised the sole, effective government at that time, steadfastly and senselessly refused to surrender for any reason. This occurred despite the fact it was certainly obvious to everyone, including Allied leaders and eventually Emperor Hirohito and members of the Japanese government peace faction, that they had been defeated for some time. The problem was that the diehard militarists, Minister of War General Anami, Army Chief of Staff General Umezu, and Navy Chief of Staff Admiral Toyoda were the ones who were in firm control of the government, not the peace faction, and according to their 2,000-year-old “Death before Surrender” code of Bushido, surrender was never an option they would even think of considering.

Patriotic slogans such as “100 million die together with Honor!” and “We will fight until we have to eat stones,” summed up the extent to which the Japanese were willing to go. The militarists would accept nothing less than total victory and some of them were ready to sacrifice the entire population of Japan, if necessary, to win the war. According to historical records, this even included a last-ditch plan put forth by Admiral Onishi four days after Nagasaki was bombed. He boldly stated, “If we are prepared to sacrifice 20,000,000 Japanese lives, victory will be ours.”<sup>viii</sup>

General LeMay’s incendiary raids caused more death and destruction than anything else used in the war, including the atomic bombs. Photos show the destruction in these cities to be virtually indistinguishable from that inflicted later on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, and this is important, they were willing to continue fighting the war. Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki promised his nation victory, “Even if, when it is won, no Japanese still is alive to enjoy it.”<sup>ix</sup> In light of such delusional madness, something drastic, something shocking had to be tried. The atomic bombs provided that shock.

If Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kokura, Niigata, and Kyoto not been removed from General LeMay’s targeting lists, these cities would have been completely destroyed anyway by conventional bombing.

The brutal fighting on Okinawa and Iwo Jima had achieved the desired purpose of inflicting massive casualties on the Americans. It had grimly proved to the Allies the Japanese were willing to fight to the last man and suffer horrendous casualties, even when there was absolutely no hope of victory.

Based on the bitter experiences of Okinawa and Iwo Jima, the Japanese warlords were convinced the US would not have the stomach for a protracted war on the Japanese mainland. Although they certainly knew they could not defeat the US, they were sure that the US could not defeat Japan. The costly and bloody land battle would become bogged down in a stalemate. The militarists believed firmly the Allies would then be forced to drop their demand for an unconditional surrender and thus be maneuvered into suing for a negotiated peace.<sup>x</sup>

During a postwar interview, Marquis Kido, the Emperor's closest advisor and Keeper of the Privy Seal, talked about this final battle, this "Tennozan":

"The younger officers in the army, the extremists, thought that we should fight to the bitter end until every man had been killed. But the War Minister, General Anami, didn't agree. He thought that if we fought on until the Americans invaded the mainland, and then hit their forces hard on the beaches once, we could then negotiate peace on terms more favorable to Japan."<sup>xi</sup>

In July 1945, the Allies met at Potsdam. President Truman held meetings with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin regarding the end of the war with Germany and Japan. As Truman's plane flew over Berlin before the meetings started, he looked down and witnessed the devastation that had befallen this formerly beautiful city. The Russian army suffered some 500,000 casualties in that final battle to take Berlin. These were the very same circumstances Truman faced with an invasion of Japan. He later had an opportunity to see this monumental destruction close-up as he was driven on a tour through the streets. A tour that started at almost the exact minute the Trinity test was taking place halfway around the world.

Truman was so shaken by these sights that he compared this destruction to what had occurred to other important cities throughout history. One can certainly draw parallels between Germany and Japan in Truman's written accounts of what he saw. His keen grasp of world history comes across vividly in his July 16 diary entry:

"Then we went on to Berlin and saw absolute ruin. Hitler's folly. He overreached himself by trying to take in too much territory. He had no morals and his people backed him up. Never did I see a more sorrowful sight, nor witness retribution to the nth degree."<sup>xiii</sup>

These depressing sights surely played a role in his final decision to use the atomic bombs before any bloody invasion would have to take place. On July 24, Secretary of War Henry Stimson brought Truman the message that the bombs would be ready for delivery after the beginning of August. While expressing differing opinions about the effectiveness of the atomic bomb, Truman wrote later that Stimson, Secretary of State James Byrnes, General Arnold, General Marshall, and Admiral Leahy all eventually approved of its use. No written evidence has yet been uncovered that any of these advisors told Truman, before the bombs were used, that they were against their deployment.

The Allies formulated the terms of the Potsdam Declaration and it was received in Tokyo on July 27. After a daylong meeting, this ultimatum was rejected by the Japanese government in statements carried both in the newspapers and by Radio Tokyo the following day. Prime Minister Suzuki denounced the ultimatum during his press conference:

“I believe the Joint Proclamation by the three countries is nothing but a rehash of the Cairo Declaration. As for the government, it does not find any important value in it, and there is no other recourse but to ignore it entirely and resolutely fight for the successful conclusion of this war.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Toshikazu Kase, a Japanese Foreign Office diplomat who later participated in the surrender ceremonies onboard the *Missouri*, said the following;

"This was a piece of foolhardiness. When I heard of this I strongly remonstrated with the cabinet chief secretary, but it was too late. The press, eager for a sensation, printed the prime minister's statement with a banner headline, and Tokyo radio flashed it – to America! The punishment came swiftly. An atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6 by the Allies who were led by Suzuki's outrageous statement into the belief that our government had refused to accept the Potsdam proclamation."<sup>xiv</sup>

Kase added that if Prime Minister Suzuki had been more steadfast or his advisors less stupid they might have been spared the atomic attack.<sup>xv</sup> It was yet another in a long string of fatal miscalculations on the part of the Japanese militarists – miscalculations that started with their attack on Pearl Harbor.

They could have finally ended the war at this point. However, the Japanese militarists stubbornly chose not to and it was they, not the Allies, who bore the ultimate responsibility for bringing this “rain of ruin” down upon their own people.

Truman's primary purpose in using the bombs was to shorten the war thus saving the lives of as many Allied soldiers as possible. For many months he had been exposed to arguments, for and against the use of the bombs. It was a complicated decision not made lightly and definitely not flip or cavalier as some have charged.

If Truman had not used the bomb, and it came to light later that he had at his disposal a weapon so powerful that it might have ended the war without an invasion and the resultant hundreds of thousands of Allied deaths, it is entirely within reason to assume he would have been impeached.

Truman said decades later that his oath of office mandated him to use all means at his disposal to protect and defend the United States. He stated that, “The Constitution of the United States is dedicated to the common defense. I had sworn to uphold and protect the Constitution of the United States and I had no alternative but to enforce it.”<sup>xvi</sup>

Many critics have charged over the decades that we didn't need to drop the second bomb on Japan. The main reason given by our government for dropping this second bomb only three days after Hiroshima was the "one-two punch." If we had dropped just one bomb, the Japanese leaders might have reasoned the US had only one bomb and continued the war. By dropping a second one immediately after the first, the Japanese military would be unsure how many atomic bombs we had and would be more likely to surrender. This plan was intended to cause as much instability, confusion, surprise, and shock as possible in the Japanese government. It greatly increased their sense of vulnerability.

Indeed, after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, records show the militarists in the War cabinet did think we only had one bomb. After the second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, they said it didn't matter and they would continue fighting and preparing for the invasion. However, it was another matter altogether for Emperor Hirohito.

The massive losses in the Pacific, coupled with the rapid chain reaction of events culminating in the dropping of the Hiroshima atomic bomb on August 6, the interrogation of a quick-thinking B-29 pilot who told his captors that Tokyo itself was the next target, the second atomic bomb on August 9 along with the simultaneous Russian invasion of Manchuria all combined to cause a critical mass, as it were, in the mind of the Emperor. He met with his closest advisors the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup> and then again with the entire War Cabinet that evening. After many hours, it was time for Hirohito to find some backbone, to stand up to the War Cabinet and finally say...**Enough!** He announced he was going to "endure the unendurable" and accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. Even then, it took almost a week, including a last minute coup attempt before the broadcast of the Emperor's decree over the radio occurred on August 15, 1945.

Japanese diplomat Kase expressed his understanding about the use of the bombs. "It is certain that we would have surrendered in due time even without the terrific chastisement of the bomb or the terrible shock of the Russian attack. However, it cannot also be denied that both the bombs and the Russians facilitated our surrender. Without them the Army might still have tried to prolong resistance."<sup>xvii</sup>

Marquis Kido, Hirohito's closest advisor acknowledged, "In a way it could be said that the atomic bombings and Russia's sudden attack on Japan helped to bring about the end of the war. If those events had not happened, Japan at that stage probably could not have stopped fighting!"<sup>xviii</sup>

Hirohito himself had this to say in a postwar interview, "I feel it is very regrettable that nuclear bombs were dropped, and I feel sorry for the citizens of Hiroshima. But it couldn't be helped because it happened in wartime."

Truman's basic moral code had always been to do what was right and honorable. He wrote later, "The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used."<sup>xix</sup> This was a clear, unequivocal, straightforward

claim of responsibility that certainly echoed the sentiment of the famous sign on the front of his desk – The Buck Stops Here!

You know, it never ceases to amaze me that, when our country needs them the most, we always manage to find the right people for the right job. People like Harry Truman, Robert Oppenheimer, Leslie Groves, Curtis LeMay, and Paul Tibbets.

We all know Truman made the right decision to drop those bombs. It was the only moral thing to for him to do. Ladies and gentleman, we have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. We have nothing to apologize for. Quite the contrary, the entire free world owes a debt of gratitude to the thousands and thousands of men and women who made the Manhattan Project possible. Indeed, we all owe a debt of gratitude to the millions of Allied veterans who's great sacrifices led to the defeat of one of the most evil enemies our world has ever faced!

And to all of the Vietnam vets here tonight, may I add a long overdue, thank you for your tremendous service to our great country and welcome home. I am very proud of you!

So in closing, I'd like to say to all of you tonight on the eve of the 59<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Japanese surrender, that this seemingly endless debate about the use of the bombs has dragged on far too long!

It's time to end it once...and...for...all.

The moment in history has finally arrived for each and every one of us to say ...

**Enough!**

Thank you very much.

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<sup>i</sup> Washington Post, 3/15/95.

<sup>ii</sup> Speech given at the Peace Action Center in Milwaukee, WI, on 8/31/94.

<sup>iii</sup> *Mission With LeMay*, LeMay, Curtis and Kantor, MacKinlay, 1965, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, p. 384.

<sup>iv</sup> *B-29 Superfortress*, Lloyd, Alwyn T., 1987, Tab Books, Inc., Blue Ridge Summit, PA, p. 156.

<sup>v</sup> *Tennozan*, Feifer, George, 1992, Ticknor & Fields, NY. p. 573; *Prisoners of the Japanese*, Gavan Daws, 1994, Wm. Morrow and Company, NY, pp. 324-325.

<sup>vi</sup> *Prisoners of the Japanese*, Van Waterford, 1994, McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, NC, pp. 141-146.

<sup>vii</sup> *Code-Name Downfall*, Allen, Thomas and Polmar, Norman, 1995, Simon and Shuster, NY, p. 272.

<sup>viii</sup> *The Fall of Japan*, Keith Wheeler, 1983, Time-Life Books, Inc., Alexandria, VA, p. 160.

<sup>ix</sup> *Kamikaze*, John Hersey, July 30, 1945, *Life Magazine*, p. 75.

<sup>x</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 12.

<sup>xi</sup> *The Bomb*, 1975, World at War Film Series, #24, Thames Productions.

<sup>xii</sup> Harry S. Truman Library.

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- xiii *Weapons For Victory*, Maddox, Robert J., 1995, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, MO, p. 110.
- xiv *Journey To The Missouri*, Kase, Toshikazu, 1950, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, p. 211.
- xv *Ibid.*
- xvi *The Truman Tapes-In His Own Words*, 1977, Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- xvii *Journey To The Missouri*, p. 217.
- xviii *The Bomb, World at War*.
- xix *Memoirs, Vol. One, Year of Decisions*, Harry S. Truman, 1955, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, p. 419.