

FACTS ON W.W. II AND JAPAN RELEVANT TO HEARINGS ON
SMITHSONIAN EXHIBIT

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TRUTHS ABOUT HIROSHIMA

1) THE IMPERATIVE OF ACCURACY

Hiroshima was such a pivotal event in human history that it will still spur discussion centuries from now. I would like to contribute to a proper interpretation of the bombing because:

a) the men who ordered and carried out the bombing have a right to be judged fairly, and not be wrongly considered guilty of errors and crimes for ages to come. In any free society, a person has the inalienable right to be declared guilty or innocent according to the evidence, and those who wield the gavel have an obligation to ensure objectivity and fair-mindedness. But surely these nostrums have added significance in this case, as an unfounded condemnation could lead to the blackening of a name for ages hence.

b) humanity must understand the accurate moral and political lessons of the bombing, such as the inherent dangers of despotic rule, the suicidal ramifications of mindless conformity, and the need for good to resist evil. If propaganda or falsehoods reign, future generations will lack the clear lenses for seeing the diplomatic and moral challenges they face.

c) Japan wants a warped interpretation of the bombing to prevail to buttress its immoral conviction that it was the victim of American racism and aggression in the war. Opposing Japan on W.W. II is important to me simply because:

- i) any professional analyst must seek the truth;
- ii) the prevailing Japanese view of Hiroshima and W.W. II is driven by a self-pity and an Orwellian propensity to manufacture "truth", among other dysfunctional values (please note enclosed

short articles on this theme). These characteristics will not encourage Japan to be a responsible actor on trade, security or human rights issues. Whenever Japan displays these tendencies, whether on Hiroshima or car imports, the U.S. must signal to Japan that it will be exposed and rebuffed, firmly yet fairly, in the name of veracity, stability or equity.

2) THE CORRECT VIEW OF HISTORY

i) Why Japan Would Not Surrender

a) Social Structure Promotes Public Fictions and Conformity

Revisionist historians assert that in mid-1945, Japan was "already defeated and on the verge of surrender", or words to such effect. This is not true.

The revisionists cardinal error is assuming that the Japanese think and feel like Americans do, and so were about to exit the war because of their depleted military might and widespread suffering. That is, they made a rationalistic cost/gain/risk calculation, undergirded by norms that exalt life over death, compromise with foes and diplomatic pragmatism.

The simple truth is that the Japanese have always behaved like Japanese. Japanese society even in peacetime is intrinsically conformist in the name of harmony, the supreme virtue. People face intense social pressures to maintain societal taboos, think, speak and behave like others (some Japanese high schools, in the 1990's, still force girls with natural red or brown hair to carry cards certifying that they did not use dye to look different). They are socialized from birth to perceive and to espouse the public fiction and to keep secret - very secret - their sense of the reality behind that fiction.

The public facade is known as "tatemae", while the sincere conviction is called "honne".

During the war, these social values assumed pathological dimensions. While many in 1945 knew or suspected that Japan lacked the weapons and men to win, they suppressed their sentiments. Instead, they acted on the public, nation-wide fiction that Japan, with its samurai spirit and divine protectors, would defeat the mongrel-raced Americans.

Japanese are not Americans - their radically dissimilar social structure and mass attitudes have a 1,500 year history. It is intellectually debased to speculate or predict what the Japanese would have done in 1945 by imputing to them a value system derived from Judeo-Christian ethics, the legacy of the Western European enlightenment, and the individualistic spirit of post-agrarian America.

b) Paranoid Fear of the Americans

Yet another factor compelling the Japanese to resist to the bitter end was the propaganda that had made the entire nation paranoid about their post-defeat fate. The authorities had drummed into the people's heads that when American troops land, they will forcibly prostrate women and children in a line and crush them under tanks. Obviously, this hideous scenario would induce people to pray to the war gods for superhuman prowess - unless unfathomable force, rendered more painful because of its surprise value, made capitulation seem like the lesser of two evils.

c) The Japanese Hero is Self-Abnegating

For centuries, Japanese literature, drama and philosophy have propagated the ideal of the self-abnegating hero. The archetypical American hero follows his conscience, is true to himself, and is willing to confront a disapproving majority.

However, the Japanese hero is someone torn between duty to the self and to the group, be it the family, business firm, military unit or nation. He agonizes over the choices, generally in a private world, before ultimately submerging his inclinations, even those rooted in primordial human instinct for survival and comfort, for the collective. Japanese is full of proverbs that warn that American-style heroes will be castigated; "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down" is the best known, and is told to kindergarten students.

To be sure, the Japanese model of the hero, held explicitly or implicitly in the minds of millions, bred a "never surrender" outlook. The kamikaze pilots were the very apotheosis of this ideal: many wrote regretfully about their imminent death, their natural desire to return to their sweethearts, and the hopelessness of the kamikaze strategy. Some even had to climb into the cockpit drunk to force themselves to overcome their love of life and revulsion at a futile self-annihilation for the group. But almost none of them abandoned their post, or turned back; virtually every one elected to make the fiery crash that snuffed out his young life the very symbol of his love for Japan.

It required unbearable pain in the form of the atomic bombs for this ideal to be supplanted with the elemental urge for survival and comfort.

d) Survival is Shameful...

A corollary to the hero model is the notion that Japanese people who escape suffering should feel embarrassed or even ashamed. The West also has the phenomenon of survivors guilt, but in Japan, this emotion is infinitely more commonplace and embedded in the minds of average people. Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have written or said that they felt extremely guilty that they had survived the bombings to the point of wanting to hide away.

This psychology also colored views of the home front towards the soldiers still fighting in the Pacific. It was a powerful impediment to the masses choosing life through surrender, given the privation that their rifle-bearing sons and brothers were enduring, and the misery of their fellow citizens being pounded by hordes of deadly B-29 bombers.

e) The Left Wing Joins the Fight

As the militarists seized power in the 1930's, and during W.W. II, the Japanese left not only failed to protest and oppose what it was seeing, it actively supported the new jack-booted regime headed by Tojo. Japanese communists, including Stalinists and Trotskyites, labor leaders, pacifists and intellectuals underwent the process of "tenko". This means a dramatic recantation of beliefs, involving the soul as well as the mind, and the embracing of a previously opposed ideology. For about twelve years, ending in 1945, the left jettisoned its principles to herald the dawning of the Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Of course, in American politics, one can also cite instances of defections. But the Japanese example is different in degree and implication: hardened leftists, champions of international

socialist revolution and world peace, became among the most impassioned defenders of an imperialistic war that left some 30 million Asians dead.

Admittedly, some leftists never defected; they suffered social persecution, torture and execution. Others broke down under ghoulish torture. But a great many abandoned their life long commitment to proselytizing socialism and pacifism. They asserted in their public utterances, diaries, articles and broadcasts that they realized they had been like errant children, but were now rushing to be embraced again by the warm and tender arms of the national Mother.

Along with the leftists, Christian groups, centralist intellectuals and journalists also advocated the national war aims. A few retreated into hapless silence as a means of non-violent resistance. The Buddhists' conformity was especially appalling, as Japan was then killing co-religionists in countries - China and Korea - that were the very womb and cradle of Japanese civilization. Imagine Americans uncritically supporting the United States in the 1940's as the Marines feverishly massacred the British, forced British women into prostitution, and conducted diabolical medical experiments on British prisoners.

There are several conclusions to be drawn:

- a) the forces of conformity were so powerful in Japan as it fought the war that they overrode almost every deductive, moral principle derived from religion, ideology or intellectual theory.
- b) if even Stalinists were willing to support the emperor system and an imperial war, it is safe to surmise that the average Japanese person, inculcated with nationalistic propaganda from

birth, was even more of a die hard. This observation does not point to the conclusion that the Japanese were on the verge of making a rational decision to surrender in 1945, when there were still 80 million people on the home front, armed with weapons, driven by patriotism mixed with wrenching fear.

ii) Why Truman Could Not Guarantee the Emperor

Several historians, like Professor Barton J. Bernstein of Stanford, have argued that Japan was putting out peace feelers, and that it would have quit the war if the U.S. had agreed with the Japanese request that the emperor system be preserved. This view is wrong.

It would have been impossible for Truman to back away from the pledge made by all allied leaders at the war's outset, and again at Potsdam, for an unconditional surrender of fascism. He could not have left in power a man, namely Hirohito, denounced as an Asian Hitler any more than Churchill could have agreed to a Nazi capitulation on the proviso that Hitler would remain the undisputed leader of Germany.

True, after the war, Hirohito was left on the throne. But, by then, passions had cooled: America had won the war; the fascist dragon was dead for good in Japan and elsewhere; the emperor was needed as a figurehead to implement the Occupation; and the public's attention shifted rapidly to demobilization and prosperity at home. Finally, Americans were prepared to manifest the magnanimity and generosity towards defeated opponents which is a hallmark of the American character.

iii) Casualties from Invasion

Invasion deaths would have been astronomical. At the very least, 400,000 men would have died, because Tokyo had ordered the wardens of p.o.w. camps to slaughter all prisoners upon an invasion. Even if not a single invading allied soldier had been killed, the prompt death toll among the Western armies would still have been four times higher than the 100,000 or so who died instantly at Hiroshima.

There is also ample evidence that the Japanese were planning a defense to the death of their homeland. Kenzaburo Oe, the Nobel prize winning writer, for example, has written that after Emperor Hirohito made his surrender broadcast, Japanese people began to wrap up swords and hunting rifles, which they furtively buried in forests. He has recalled how high school students practiced charging at straw dummies with pointed bamboo poles. And he recollects that when teachers asked him as a boy what he would do if Emperor Hirohito commanded him to die, he shouted, "I would cut open my belly."

The very survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have asserted in books like Hiroshima and The Bells of Nagasaki that they were swinging sharpened bamboo spears in the days before the atomic attacks, and that they never thought they would hear their divine leader calling upon the benighted "fatherland" to surrender. These same survivors have been lionized as heroes by the so called peace movement, but in fact, they were ardent supporters of fascism; they were willing to commit suicide in resisting the expected American invasion, taking with them to the next world as many Marines as they could skewer eight inches above the testicles. The atomic bombings, however tragic and gruesome, saved countless numbers of American - and Japanese - lives.