

## AGAINST ALL REASON

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Original Article

MEDIA LENS: Correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media

RAPID RESPONSE MEDIA ALERT: THE BBC ON HIROSHIMA

By David Edwards

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 was one of history's bloodiest single acts claiming 100,000 Japanese lives. Exposing men, women and children to one million degrees of heat and a supersonic blast wave, the attack had unimaginably horrific results. In his classic essay, 'Machiavellian Realism and US Foreign Policy: Means and Ends', Howard Zinn presents eyewitness testimony indicating the reality of what happened that day. Here a seventeen-year-old girl describes what she saw:

"I walked past Hiroshima Station... and saw people with their bowels and brains coming out... I saw an old lady carrying a suckling in her arms... I saw many children... with dead mothers... I just cannot put into words the horror I felt."

A fifth-grade girl:

"Everybody in the shelter was crying out loud. These voices... they aren't cries, they are moans that penetrate to the marrow of your bones and make your hair stand on end... I do not know how many times I called begging that they would cut off my burned arms and legs." (Quoted, *The Zinn Reader*, Seven Stories Press, 1997, p.354)

In last night's one-hour documentary on the bombing, *Days That Shook The World*, the BBC spent 35 seconds examining the justification for the attack his involved presenting, unchallenged, the unfounded claim that the attack was required to avoid one million US combat casualties in the event of an invasion of the Japanese mainland. This was then followed by a supportive quote from the US Army Chief of Staff in 1945.

In fact the one million figure is based on US Secretary of State James Byrnes' claims at the time, but no serious attempt had ever been made to estimate the

likely costs of invasion. In his essay, Howard Zinn writes that "the closest to such an attempt was a military estimate that an invasion of the southernmost island of Japan would cause 30,000 American dead and wounded". (Ibid, p.351)

Thus, in reviewing the nuclear bombing of a defenceless city claiming 100,000 civilian lives, the BBC justified the attack in 35 seconds, based on an unfounded claim supported by one US army source with no counter-arguments being heard. Media Lens wrote last night to Stephen Walker, the writer and director of the programme:

Dear Stephen Walker

I watched tonight's *Days That Shook The World* on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. You briefly mentioned predictions of 1 million US combat deaths in the event of an invasion of the Japanese mainland. You also quoted the US Army Chief of Staff's justification for the bombing: "It seemed quite necessary, if we could, to shock them [the Japanese] into action. We had to end the war. We had to save American lives."

I wonder if you are aware that the US Strategic Bombing Survey interviewed 700 Japanese military and political officials after the war, and came to this conclusion:

"Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated."

On August 2, the Japanese foreign office sent a message to the Japanese ambassador in Moscow:

"There are only a few days left in which to make arrangements to end the war... As for the definite terms... it is our intention to make the Potsdam Three-Power Declaration [which called for unconditional surrender] the basis for the study regarding these terms."

Barton Bernstein, a Stanford historian, comments:

"The message, like earlier ones, was probably intercepted by American intelligence and decoded. It had no effect on American policy... They were unwilling to take risks in order to save Japanese lives."

After the war, American scholar Robert Butow went through the papers of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the records of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East, and the interrogation files of the US Army. He also interviewed many of the Japanese principals and came to this conclusion:

"Had the allies given the Prince (Prince Konoye, special emissary to Moscow, who was working on a Russian intercession for peace) a week of grace in which to obtain his Government's support for the acceptance of proposals, the war might have ended toward the latter part of July or the very beginning of the month of August, without the atomic bomb and without Soviet participation in the conflict."

The scientist Leo Szilard met with President Truman's main policy adviser, secretary of state Byrnes, in May 1945 and reported later: "Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of Japan in order to win the war... Mr Byrnes' view was that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable."

American historian Howard Zinn comments:

"The *end* of dropping the bomb seems, from the evidence, to have been not winning the war, which was already assured, not saving lives, for it was highly probable no American invasion would be necessary, but the aggrandisement of American national power at the moment and in the postwar period... For the idea that any means - mass murder, the misuse of science, the corruption of professionalism - are acceptable to achieve the end of national power, the ultimate example of our time is Hiroshima."

Why did you make no mention of these important counter-arguments to the claim that the bombing of Hiroshima was necessary to end the Second World War and to save American lives?

Yours sincerely

David Edwards

## **SUGGESTED ACTION**

The goal of Media Lens is to promote rationality, compassion and respect for others. In writing letters to journalists, we strongly urge readers to maintain a polite, non-aggressive and non-abusive tone.

Sample Email:

Why, in your hour-long documentary on the bombing of Hiroshima, did you spend just 35 seconds examining the justification for the killing of 100,000 civilians? And why did you present no counter-arguments to unfounded claims based on US government figures backed up by one quote from the US Army Chief of Staff?

Write to the programme's writer and director Stephen Walker:

Email: [info@bbc.co.uk](mailto:info@bbc.co.uk)

Please also send all emails to us at Media Lens: Email: [editor@medialens.org](mailto:editor@medialens.org)

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