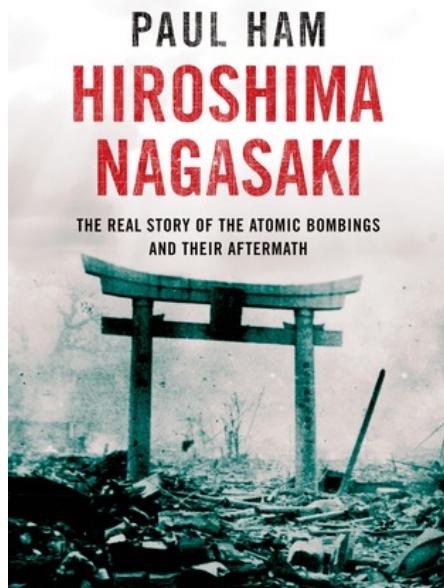


"[A] vivid, comprehensive, and quietly furious account."  
—Ben Macintyre, *The Times* (UK)



## Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath

*Paul Ham*

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# Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath

Paul Ham

**Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath** Paul Ham  
The first narrative history of the nuclear attack told from both the Japanese and American viewpoints.

Japan 1945. In one of the defining moments of the twentieth century, more than 100,000 people were killed instantly by two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by US Air Force B29s. Hundreds of thousands more succumbed to their horrific injuries, or slowly perished of radiation-related sickness.

*Hiroshima Nagasaki* tells the story of the tragedy through the eyes of the survivors, from the twelve-year-olds forced to work in war factories to the wives and children who faced it alone. Through their harrowing personal testimonies, we are reminded that these were ordinary people, given no warning and no chance to escape the horror.

American leaders claimed that the bombings were 'our least abhorrent choice' and fell strictly on 'military targets'. Even today, most people believe they ended the Pacific War and saved millions of American and Japanese lives. *Hiroshima Nagasaki* challenges this deep-set perception, revealing that the atomic bombings were the final crippling blow to the Japanese in a strategic air war waged primarily against civilians.

## Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath Details

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## **From Reader Review Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and Their Aftermath for online ebook**

### **Jim says**

Excellent account of the development of the atomic bomb leading to the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the aftermath. Ham focuses on the horror of the bombings and how it affected some of the individuals. Over 100,000 people were killed and people have kept dying since then.

Was it worth it? Ham argues that, no, it wasn't. The atomic bombings did not bring about an end to the Pacific War. The blockade of Japan by the overpowering naval might of the USA and American total control of the air by July 1945 were bringing about an end to the war without any invasion by troops necessary. What finally pressed the Emperor Hirohito to make his announcement of surrender was the Soviet declaration of war followed by the reception of "the Byrnes Note" which stated that the Japanese could keep their Emperor ( although most Americans wanted him put on trial as a war criminal). So Japan was able to surrender conditionally--not unconditionally...Ham makes a good case that the thousands of deaths in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were unnecessary...

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### **Daniel Kukwa says**

There's nothing like the feeling of finishing an engrossing, thorough, well-written piece of historical scholarship that leaves you contemplating commonly-held myths that have been neatly shredded into pieces. A very worthy, gripping examination of a time & place everyone thinks they know about...but really don't.

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### **Ray says**

There was so much research done for this book. It was more informative than any text book in school. A very heavy read and a very dark time in our history. I learned so much and am sadden by the results of just war in particular. Why? War doesn't decide whose right it decides whose left.

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### **Adam says**

Determining the thesis of Paul Ham's *Hiroshima Nagasaki* can be accomplished with ease by simply looking at the table of contents--specifically, chapter six, which is entitled "Japan Defeated." This would seem to imply an end to Ham's investigation of the titular events; after all, the surrender of Japan is what history tells us was the ultimate goal--and accomplishment--of the atomic bombings of Japan. And yet, beginning as it does on page 166, chapter six does not even mark the halfway point: when the chapter ends, there are still 300 pages remaining, almost all of them devastating in their critique of not only the American government but the Japanese one, as well. The story of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Ham believes, is not at all what we think it is.

For the longest time, we have told ourselves--in anecdotes, on television programs, in textbooks--that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was justified, that Hirohito's empire was so thoroughly invested in

complete victory that it was willing to fight until the last man, woman, and child had shed their blood. Defeat, we have been repeatedly told, was not part of the Japanese vocabulary, and to force their hands, we had to demonstrate the utter destructive abilities of our own military--a clear and unequivocal sign that Japan would not survive if it continued to resist surrender. Part of the reason this story has survived as long as it has is because of our national hubris--a belief that, because of our victory and the speed with which we developed such destructive weapons, we were the deciding factor--and part of the reason is because we, as victors, were in the position to write the history ourselves. (As the saying goes, history isn't written by the losers.) But the overriding reason is that, for decades after the actual bombings, most of the pertinent information related to the decision and its aftermath was classified or unpublished by the U.S. government, including communications between members of the Japanese government that was intercepted and decoded by the MAGIC program.

Even today, those intercepted communications--which should be readily available on websites and in government publications--can only be accessed in bits and pieces across the internet, if at all. (The diplomatic cables between members of the Japanese government, which Ham uses to great effect throughout much of his book, are available in full only on 15 reels of microfilm that exist in a handful of college libraries across the country.) The reasons for this odd hesitancy to publicize more about our own history has never been explained, though theories might abound. What matters, however, is that the lack of awareness over what these documents reveal distorts our own understanding of history--our knowledge of what was done in our names and with our tacit permission, if not our unchallenged approval--and keeps us from making sure the tragedies of the past don't become tragedies of the future.

For example, the belief that Japan's government was unified behind its last-man-standing mentality is easily disproven by the MAGIC intercepts, in which many of the top men in Hirohito's government pushed vociferously for their country's surrender to the Allies, only to be refuted by more ardent and nationalistic colleagues. Perhaps the most vocal of these figures is Naotake Sato, a diplomat whose awareness of the situation transformed him into one of the few honest men in all of Japan's government, and he spoke his mind with careless abandon--a decision that could easily have cost him both his position and his life. The bombings of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki play a minimal role in the back-and-forth between those voices advocating for continued hostilities against the Allied forces and those demanding a quick but honorable surrender; in fact, when notified of the bombing of Nagasaki during an hours-long meeting meant to plan out the terms of their surrender, the top Japanese officials are recorded as demonstrating little reaction or concern, a fact that our own country has steadfastly refused to acknowledge.\*

The main reason the Japanese government was unmoved by the dropping of not one but two atomic bombs on their own people is that their empire was already suffering immensely at the hands of the Allies. Their country was prevented from importing any food or necessary supplies by an Allied navy blockade, and their closest neighbors--China, the Soviet Union--were also against them, removing any chance for humanitarian aid. Towards the end of the war, they hoped the latter of these nations, under the leadership of Josef Stalin, would at least serve as the arbitrator in negotiations with the Allied Powers; when the Soviet Union instead declared war on them, it marked the disappearance of the last possible hope of the Japanese government and its people. Millions were starving and homeless due to Allied air-raids and fire-bombings, and hundreds of thousands were dead; had the Allies simply kept the blockade intact and continued pushing towards the Japanese mainland, it's safe to assume--and General Eisenhower himself agreed after the war--that Japan would have been forced to declare surrender before the year's end anyway.

Likewise, the American government's decision to drop both bombs is called into question by Ham's research. Much like Japan, the American government experienced its own tumultuous split over how, when, and where to use the atomic bombs. Truman seemed determined to utilize the weapon as soon as possible,

refusing to proffer a warning to the Japanese government about what would happen to their cities. (There were some in the government who said a warning would persuade the Japanese to surrender before the bomb was even used, an idea that is difficult to prove.) And, much like Japan, there were those who attempted to secure a peaceful resolution, or at least a resolution that did not involve the use of cataclysmic weapons. Included among these voices was Joseph Grew, the former ambassador to Japan who understood, after a decade of firsthand experience, that demanding Japan give up its emperor as part of an "unconditional surrender" would force the country to continue hostilities, even when all hope seemed lost. Grew, who had been interned by the Japanese after Pearl Harbor, was soundly ignored.

In the end, Ham argues that it wasn't the atomic bombs that forced Japan to finally surrender, nor was it the naval blockade--which, he argues, had a much greater effect on the Japanese government's decision than the actual bombs--but the Soviet Union's refusal to act as an intermediate and its subsequent declaration of war against Japan. Only then, according to the correspondences of those in power, did the government of Japan finally give in to what the rest of the world had seen as inevitable for some time. What followed was an ocean surrender and, as Ham writes, an occupation by the Allies that was shameful, with the American government steadfastly denying the true legacy of the atomic bombs: radiation poisoning, illness, and death, all spread across generations. Journalists who gained access to Hiroshima and Nagasaki wrote about and photographed the aftermath; much of this evidence was soon confiscated or censored by the American military. Not until John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, published in 1946, did the American public come to understand the true extent of the devastation.

And yet history continued to tell us that, had it not been for these two bombs, the war would have become even bloodier, lasted even longer, cost even more American lives. The atomic bombs, we are told, actually helped save lives and end the war. This postulation isn't entirely false--an invasion of the Japanese mainland would have certainly resulted in the deaths of Allied soldiers, as the mainland forces were surprisingly strong--but to offer those options as the only two we could have taken demonstrates a remarkable unwillingness to reexamine ourselves and our own war-time decisions, especially today. Yes, we didn't know then what we know now, so past generations should not be denounced with retrospective guilt--they were simply embracing what they were told by the very same government that had led them through the largest war in world history, and against some of the most vile dictators we would ever experience, including an empire that attacked us on our own soil. But to look back with so many previously classified and unpublished documents now available--albeit limitedly--for our consumption, and retain the same theory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is ignorant, if not downright dangerous. It allows us to see cataclysmic weapons as a viable--and paradoxically lifesaving--solution, one that values the civilian lives of one nation over the civilian lives of another, without understanding all of the implications and nuances inherent in such a momentous decision.

Yes, the people of Japan held onto their emperor, even as their emperor ignored them, and they had been brainwashed--or threatened--into believing their crusade against the Allied Powers was a noble one. But to use this as an excuse to dismiss hundreds of thousands of lives as justifiably expendable, simply because they were civilians under the other side's government, sets a dangerous precedent where foreign policy and war is concerned. By waving aside these numbers and statistics, and by ignoring the photographs of sick and deformed Japanese civilians--men, women, and children who were guilty of nothing more than being born in a country that warred against our own--we are casting ourselves as something less than the scions of liberty and freedom we so vocally aspire to be.

People will debate the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for decades to come, and there will never be a consensus over the efficacy--or even necessity--of Fat Man and Little Boy. Even Ham, for all the positive aspects of his book, leaves much to be desired in terms of writing a comprehensive and accurate history. But

there can never be one, at least not yet: we exist beyond a time and place where one could be written, and our minds are too frequently clouded by ideology, propaganda, and patriotism to see what needs to be seen. Instead, we need to take the bombing of Japan for what it can still teach us, and that requires having all the information available to us, without restrictions or concessions. Unfortunately, as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki grow ever more distant, and those who continue to push a simplistic, winner-take-all history fade into that very same timeline, we will see its legacy spread tendrils and grow. The truly sad part is that, without more books like this one, regardless of its successes or failures, we won't even realize that it is happening until the cycle repeats itself and we're back where we started, having learned nothing.

\*There are those who point to Hirohito's 1945 radio broadcast, in which he stated that "the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives," as proof of the opposite. But what a government tells itself and what a government tells its people are often completely different.

This review was originally published at [There Will Be Books Galore](#).

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### **Edward Sullivan says**

This is the best book on the subject I've read yet, a superbly researched and absorbing narrative. I particularly like how Ham alternates between the American and Japanese perspectives. He effectively shatters the popularly held belief that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified because they ended World War II in the Pacific without a costly invasion of Japan's home islands. Ham further convincingly argues that the bombings played no role at all in the surrender of Japan, that it was rather Japan's feared entry of the Soviet Union into the war made real that was the deciding factor. A skillful, comprehensive, provocative, and challenging work of history.

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### **Laurie Bryce says**

This is a fascinating book with a powerful premise. Americans are brought up believing we dropped bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki only because we felt forced to, and that Japan would never have surrendered otherwise. After absorbing this controversial book, I still think that's partially true, but not the whole truth.

Paul Ham meticulously presents a different view that makes the chaotic end of the war and the race for the bomb feel much more nuanced than that standard history. Some of the things I learned were surprising and upsetting. According to Ham, we were eager to test the bombs, and actually in a bit of a hurry to do so before the war ended. There were military targets we could have chosen, but we deliberately targeted city centers full of civilians. Mistakenly, we thought that would send a stronger message to Japan, but Japan's military and political leaders were so far removed from reality at that point, and so generally unconcerned with civilian casualties, that Hiroshima and Nagasaki barely registered in their discussions near the end of the war. We also failed to understand that Japan wasn't a democracy and no amount of harming civilians could cause them to rise up and demand an end to the war -- they were truly helpless targets. And no one in Japan knew what an atomic bomb was or how it was different than the firestorms that had been raging through its other cities. Japan's leaders never got the message of shock and awe of the bombs were supposed to deliver.

More surprises (for me anyway): Russia invading Japan was really the catalyst that pushed Japan to surrender. That happened after Hiroshima but before Nagasaki, making a good argument that the second bomb was really extraneous. The people of Hiroshima may have suffered for little reason, but the people of Nagasaki suffered for no reason.

I thought it was interesting how removed Truman was from the creation and delivery of the bombs. He was gung-ho about doing it, but very hands off. He didn't even know about Nagasaki until afterwards. Imagine in this day and age, dropping a bomb on civilians in another country and the President not being directly involved?

The randomness of the cities chosen was chilling to read about -- Kyoto was spared from the list of targets because someone in the military group who was choosing the cities had been there and had fond memories of it. The weather dictated where the bombs were dropped; Nagasaki was literally a last-minute choice when the actual target city nearby was too obscured by clouds.

After the war, we sent American doctors to study the horrendous effects of radiation on the survivors. They examined countless suffering patients, but they were not permitted to help them in any way, or even share their knowledge with the Japanese doctors, who were mystified and utterly helpless in the face of this strange new illness. The suffering of the Japanese people was extended long after the war by this heartless US policy.

Ham's work has been castigated as revisionist, by those saying he's applying liberal modern thinking to a very different time and place. I can see threads of that in the book, and obviously he's presenting a very uncomfortable look at US behavior at the end of the war so people will react to that.

I think both viewpoints can be true, however -- Ham is convincing in his argument that the bombs weren't the major reason that Japan finally surrendered, and therefore we have to accept that it's possible we did not need to do what we did. But while Japan's leaders could live with civilian defeat, their death-before-loss-of-honor culture would never permit them to accept military defeat. Faced with the invasion by Russia and out of options, Japan used the bombings as a convenient "excuse" (in their view) to surrender. That means the bombings served a purpose in ending the war, even if it wasn't quite the way we intended.

What a powerful book about a terrible time in world history.

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**Mairéad (is roaming the Undying Lands) says**

**[February 19th, 2016] AT LAST THE REVIEW**

4 stars.

This weighty tome caught my eye due to the research I was doing for *CrownedEmpyreon*. Although I knew from what I read in textbooks and documentaries, and other forms of mediums that the atomic bombings, which helped end WWII has been a predominant blemish of both the scientific and moral grounds of human life. And something that no person should have to play a part or have a role involved with such destruction. It is difficult though, considering I didn't live through that and seeing it from all sides, it was definitely no one wished for. Still it came down to such consequential actions that would impact millions of lives, then

and now.

I already braced myself for the entirety of these horrific events when TSLI covered from preWWI all the way to the end of the Cold War. I knew I would have to deal with the historical tragic events that led and occurred and the aftermath of these actions. It's clear though, from Paul Ham's narrative and perspective, that a lot of things happened to lead events to this path. War is a horrific thing, as are the actions people are forced to take in the matter of life and death, to protect and defend, and whether to kill or be killed.

And I'm glad that this book was written with both sides in mind. It truly shows exactly how no war is won without losses. No life would be the same after these events. And how much one choice can alter millions upon millions of lives, and then future billions. Yes, both sides showed terrible actions in war, but that what we should remember...

War alters our human morals into a fight for survival, the most animalistic and primal nature that has been within us since the dawn of time.

Paul Ham covers a majority of events and time frame, and doesn't leave his readers without information and a clear idea what's going on. The 2 years and a half worth of research he did is evident in the details he presents us. And it would take another 1 and a half worth to write and edit this weighty tome. It is ambitious to say the least.

My only regret is that because of the massiveness of this book, it was a harrowing effort on my part to struggle through the trenches of line after line of words. At times I had to take a break and do other things otherwise it would lose or overwhelm me. Considering the nature of the topic and the fact I had picked this up for research, it carried a burden of information and a narrative that we need to know and acknowledge about what happened.

Did the atomic bombs truly help win the war? Or did something else play in the decision of the desperate victory?

We are provided some inkling to this, however we won't truly know exactly what the final deciding factor was--the nuclear wrath, the threat of the Soviets, or both.

And the descriptions of those that suffered, their stories and details will haunt me, especially when their pleas were ignored. Especially when they were not told of the horrific aftermath of being exposed as we do now. The souls that suffered needlessly and without a voice. It saddens me deeply, more so when I relive their words again in writing the scenes I need to portray. I only hope I do the justice they so rightly deserved, despite the horrific details I'll have to trudge through and dread.

Definitely a heavy read for me, more so as research.

I can only fervently wish and hope that such tragic actions will not have to be made again.

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**Liam says**

Thanks to my girlfriend's parents for giving me this one for Christmas, most appreciated.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the close of World War 2 are two of the most controversial events in warfare. As a student of World War 2 - albeit I've always been much more interested in the European theater than the Pacific theater - I've read quite a lot about the subject, but it has always been tinged with a distinctly rationalist tone. 'Sure, it was a tragedy, but it stopped World War 2 so it was in service of good'.

This book is the first proper historical work I've read which has flown in the face of that narrative - if anything, the book is deeply biased *against* the use of the bombs, a point of view that I've always held myself so this review is likely to be flawed from the outset. But nevertheless, here we go.

*The old samurai, in frock coats and winged collars, sitting at attention at the conference table in the government's well-stocked Tokyo shelter, continued to observe - in extremis - the ancient forms of deference and decorum of the warrior class; they lived in the shadow of an antique past, in the darkened codes of 'honour' and 'sacrifice', in whose interests they were willing to destroy their nation and race.*

-p256

The book begins with an overview of the state of the world at the outset of 1945 - Roosevelt's death and Truman's ascendance, the defeat of Germany, the Japanese Empire's defeats and retreats throughout the pacific, and the research into the atomic bomb. As someone who hasn't been too interested in the Pacific theater until this point, this was valuable. I knew the broad strokes, but the first few chapters of Hiroshima Nagasaki do a fantastic job of laying the foundations for the deeper study to follow.

A chapter is dedicated to the US firebombing campaign which destroyed dozens of Japanese cities - including Tokyo and Osaka - and it is in this chapter that, if it weren't already, Ham's bias becomes self-evident. He labels this campaign of terror and wholesale civilian slaughter as the barbarism that it was, and doesn't shy away from the lack of Japanese response.

Fully the last two thirds of the book are dedicated to the preparation, use, and aftermath of the atomic bombs Little Boy and Fat Man. This is the real meat of it. There are three major themes running throughout this section off the text - the brutality of the US campaign, the Japanese leadership's indifference to the slaughter of its people, and the argument of whether the bombings were 'justified'.

Ham is quite obviously a detractor of the United States' campaigns against the Japanese homeland - this is made obvious by the chapter dedicated to the firebombing campaigns across Honshu and Kyushu. I was vaguely aware that the US had firebombed Japan (especially from the film *Grave of the Fireflies*), but I didn't realise the extent of the campaign - pursuing a flawed philosophy that the death of hundreds of thousands of noncombatants would cripple Japanese morale to such a point that they would have no choice but to surrender (a concept that anyone who knew the slightest amount of Japanese zealotry at the time would have found laughable), Major Curtis LeMay intentionally targeted civilian population centres and displaced millions from their homes.

This campaign continued for several months until the Japanese surrender in August - concurrent with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ham doesn't pull any punches with these events - the injuries, destruction and sickness are described in full detail, from a child losing his eyes from the change in pressure (screaming '*Soldier-san, help me!*' while nobody listened), to a girl who tried to pick up her brother and carry him to safety, and found his skin sloughing off his arms in bloody, wet sheets.

This was the great success that was heralded back at home in America.

*Lewis [co-pilot of the Enola Gay] scribbled 'Just how many did we kill? My God, what have we done?' 'My God, look at that sonofabitch go!' he is said to have also shouted, according to other crew members.*

-p298

*65,000 of Hiroshima's 90,000 buildings were 'rendered unusable' and the rest partially damaged. Glass windows were blown out at a distance of up to 8 kilometres. But 'nothing was vaporised', the report noted optimistically.*

*p414*

While the bombing of Hiroshima is portrayed as a tragic waste of human life, the bombing of Nagasaki is worse - in fact the Japanese, having received word of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria the day before, were drafting surrender terms to send to America when a messenger burst into the cabinet and notified them that another 'special bomb' had been dropped on Nagasaki - the Japanese cabinet ministers paused for a moment, then went back to their drafting.

For most, the news that 30,000 of your people had just been wiped out would be an event worth dropping everything for - but not so for the Imperial Japanese. Throughout the book, the Japanese leadership's total and utter lack of care for their people is drilled home again and again - it wasn't that they didn't care whether they died or not, it is that they were *expected* to die for the Motherland. The Japanese plans to rebuff a US land invasion was predicated on the 'one-hundred million' residents of Japan (in actual fact Japan only had a population of 70m at the time) rising up and repelling the western invader.

After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they were in the process of developing a 'field cap' to protect their people from the glare and heat of future atomic bombings - this goes to show how just how low a priority they placed on the bombings. They were prepared to weather more of them until the 'inevitable' land invasion. And the United States was prepared to drop more of them - had Japan not capitulated on August 15th, the US had a half dozen more bombs in the pipeline, with plans to drop them every 10 days or so.

Ham makes his opinion on whether the bombings were justified well known by the closing chapter (tellingly titled 'Why'). The main reasons for justifying the use of the bombs is that they ended the war, and that if they hadn't used the bombs then the US would have risked a bloody land invasion of the Japanese mainland, killing many more Japanese and Americans in the process.

Ham carefully deconstructs these justifications. As stated above, and at numerous points throughout the text, the Japanese officials placed little importance on the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the same could not be said of those on the ground in those two cities, who experienced likely the closest representation of hell on earth yet - dozens of Japanese cities had already been wiped out wholesale by the American firebombing campaign, what were two more? The real impetus for Japan's surrender was the Soviet Union's surprising and crushing invasion of Japanese-held Manchuria and Korea between the bombings. Nothing matched the fear Japan held for a Russia, and their surrender to America on the 15th was merely picking the lesser of the two evils to capitulate to.

That the bombings removed the need for a US land invasion is also a fallacy - the US leadership had in fact abandoned the possibility of a land invasion of Japan in the early stages of 1945 as too costly, far before the atomic bomb was first tested. Later attempts to use this as the justification for the bombings by Truman and other American officials neatly avoids this point.

Of course, a less virtuous explanation often given is that the bombings are proportionate 'revenge' for the attack at Pearl Harbour, and the Japanese atrocities throughout the war. I won't dignify this with any more words.

In the end, the thing that finally brought Japan to the table was Emperor Hirohito giving his own judgement - in the past when the Emperor had suggested peace or surrender, the militant armed forces had killed those advisors closest to him - obviously they had corrupted his Majesty for him to suggest such things. But as the dust settled on Nagasaki, the Voice of the Sacred Crane stating once and for all that victory was no longer possible was the real decider - and tellingly, during his surrender address, Hirohito only pointed to the Soviet invasion as the reason for this.

As stated, I've always been on the view that the atomic bombings are wholly unjustifiable. Nothing - no atrocities, contingencies, possibilities or plans - justifies the instant murder of tens of thousands of civilians, and the slow and painful deaths of tens of thousands more. Having been to Hiroshima, having stood on the Aioi Bridge and under the hypocenter, I cannot feel anything other than disgust that this was something that human beings did to their own.

*At a time of war, people will applaud any story their government feeds them. Americans continue to swear blind that the bombs alone ended the war; that they were America's 'least abhorrent' choice. These are plainly false propositions, salves to uneasy consciences over what was actually done on 6 and 9 August 1945 when, under a summer sky, without warning, hundreds of thousands of civilian men, women and children felt the sun fall on their heads.*

-p510

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### **Peter McLoughlin says**

This very detailed history of the closing days of WWII and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It untangles the complex decision making on the part of the Japanese, the Americans and the Russians that lead to the use of nuclear weapons for the first and (hopefully) only time in history. The author blames nationalism and intransigence by both the Japanese and Americans in negotiating a surrender of Japan without resorting to use of the bomb. Japan in early 1945 was beat. It was the terms of surrender which were a sticking point between the Japanese and the Americans. The idea that if a nuclear weapon wasn't used a ground invasion would be necessary is a postwar fantasy. Japan is not off the hook though. The hardliners in the government refused to bow to the inevitable and dragged their feet long after their cause was lost. The Americans for there part had already gotten their hands dirty with area bombing of Europe and Japan and did not see that this new weapon was something very different from conventional bombing. The author argues that it was Russian entry into the Pacific war and not the bomb that caused the Japanese to capitulate. The bomb was the punctuation mark that spurred the surrender. This would be farce if it wasn't for what the bomb did to these two cities. The descriptions of what witnesses went through makes this event dead serious and sobering. The descriptions of burnt bodies and collapsed buildings as well as the radiation sickness don't make for pleasant reading especially knowing we live in a world where thousands of more powerful bombs sit on ICBMs all over the world. The author shows that the bombing was unnecessary but inevitable due to animosity and inertia. Very good assessment of what really happened on that fateful August.

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## **Pam Baddeley says**

A fascinating account of the buildup and background to the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan and the aftermath. A lot of research obviously went into this book, and although I have read accounts before, those were mainly to do with the horrendous experiences of the survivors. This book makes it very clear exactly what drove the handful of men who controlled the entire Japanese war machine, and their lack of concern with one exception - a man who was always overruled - for the ordinary people. They were just cannon fodder or expected to live off starvation rations - a lot of children died of malnutrition - while labouring to demolish buildings and create firebreaks in the cities which by then were experiencing devastating incendiary bombing raids by the US airforce. Even children as young as 12 were conscripted while the mindless propaganda continued to insist that Japan was winning the war. As long as these civilians 'died with honour', that was all that mattered to those who ruled over them.

Behind the scenes, the heads of the military were resistant to the increasing conviction of the civilian members of the government that a peace had to be brokered - but the stumbling block was the US insistence on unconditional surrender. The Emperor had to be preserved and this had not been guaranteed. The book documents the peace 'feelers' these top officials put out, through various channels, the chief one being via the ambassador to the Soviet Union who was expected to convince the Russian government to be the mediator of an end to the war despite the - unusual for the time - blunt and determined attempts by that ambassador to explain to his superiors that the Russians had no interest in doing that and were in fact building up to break their agreement with Japan. The strange system of government in Japan at the time - where the Emperor was literally a living god but was also rarely expected to voice his own opinion and where, if he said that Japan should surrender, it would be seen as influence from corrupt officials who would then be fair game for assassination - meant that despite crippling losses and a mounting death toll from the conventional bombing, there was no will among the military or their leaders to cease fighting.

Contrary to the impression which has been given by the US government since the end of WWII, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are shown in the book to be of no consequence to the Japanese rulers. The chief reason for their finally agreeing to surrender was that the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan and was invading Japanese conquered territory in China. It was useful as an excuse - the Emperor for one used this in his broadcast to the general population that it was to save them from a cruel new weapon, but in his broadcast to the remnant of the Japanese fighting forces, he didn't mention it - in that, the reason given was that the Soviet Union had declared war and there was no point fighting such an overwhelmingly superior force. The author shows that the Japanese would most likely have surrendered without the dropping of atomic weapons, certainly without Nagasaki being bombed, and could have been induced to give up due to the blockade which had starved the country of all raw materials and fuel and food supplies. The decision had already been made in the US government not to invade, even before the atomic bomb had been tested, so there certainly was no saving of huge numbers of American lives as the public have always been told despite the few dissenting voices.

After the war, the US officials clamped down on news of radiation sickness and confiscated the documentation of Japanese doctors who tried to research it, as well as refusing to hand over any medical supplies to those desperately struggling medical professionals. At the same time, with inducements of food - or sweets to children - they induced Japanese who had felt the effects of the bomb or its aftermath to submit to tests, and did not provide any treatment. The whole attitude was one of extreme callousness. I had read about this before, but here it forms part of the continuous narrative of self serving and self deceiving attitudes among certain men in power in the occupation forces. Some did speak out, but reports were hushed up and so on.

In general, this is an illuminating book which raises moral questions such as how is it possible for countries which prided themselves on being Christian and democratic to inflict such horrendous suffering on a civilian population - commencing with the carpet bombing with incendiaries and high explosives and culminating in nuclear holocaust. As Ham shows, the Allies had condemned the barbaric treatment of prisoners and those conquered by Germany and Japan, and yet in effect had sunk to the same level. The only thing that holds this book back from a 5 star rating for me is that it is very focused on the US role in the Pacific and does not even acknowledge that the Royal Navy had a role in the Pacific war, which is an attitude shown in Hollywood portrayals for some years. A small acknowledgement of the British contribution in WWII would have provided a little balance.

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### **Chin Joo says**

Judging by the two extremes ratings that this book received in Amazon, one can tell that this is a rather controversial book. The author did not think that the atomic bombs made Japan surrender which in turn avoided the loss of lives of many Americans who would otherwise have to invade the main islands of Japan. But his position was not just that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were unnecessary, he went further to obliquely imply that the reason for dropping the atomic bombs were for the pure purpose of killing civilians.

The author argued that the atomic bombs were unnecessary by showing that:

#### Fire bombing was not an effective strategy to make an enemy surrender

In support of this argument the author spent a chapter on the fire bombing of cities in Germany. Meant originally to bring Germany to its knees, the effectiveness was questionable and eventually Germany capitulated not because of the destruction of any or all of the cities but because of the land forces of the allies that reached Berlin.

#### The Japanese cabinet was not swayed by the atomic bombs

The author argued strenuously that the Japanese cabinet, especially the three (of six) representing the military, the War Minister Korechika Anami, the admiral in the Imperial Japanese Navy Soemu Toyoda and general in the Imperial Army Yoshijiro Umezu. They did not change their minds after the two bombs were dropped. It was actually the entry of Soviet Union into the war that convinced the Japanese cabinet that all was lost and surrender was inevitable.

#### The Japanese were going to surrender anyway

Citing the futile and delusional efforts at getting Russia to play the role of the intermediary for an end to the war, the author showed that the Japanese were already seriously contemplating an end to the war (in contrast to unconditional surrender). It would be a matter of time, given Japan's lack of ability to deploy air or naval power, that they would collapse.

These would have made for a persuasive case but Ham went further and opined that despite all these, the US bombed Japan anyway and it was not really because the decision makers wanted to save American lives, but because "total war had debased everyone involved..." (pg 158) and made it easy to contemplate the destruction of properties and lives on a grand scale, not helped by many who were spoiling to demonstrate the new power of the US.

The author then went further to imply that putting the blame on the Japanese for not surrendering despite the

warnings was wrong because the Allies kept insisting on ‘unconditional surrender’, a term which at first confused the Japanese and later became the only stumbling block to their agreement to surrender because they were afraid that the Americans would try the Emperor as a war-criminal. In the end unconditional or not, was this not what the Japanese got? Knowing this the Americans should have just relented earlier, let them surrender and the bombs and the resulting carnage would have been spared. And if the Americans had really wanted to drop the bombs, the morally right thing to do was to give warning by demonstrating the power of the bombs given that it was so much more destructive than anything anyone knew then. Finally, even if one argues that Hiroshima was necessary and effective, there was no need for Nagasaki.

And since the bombs were used despite all reasons against them, the author brought us through the aftermath of the bombs, showing how many civilian targets were destroyed and how many of them were killed, maimed or suffered the radioactivity for years while the military targets were somehow missed (pg 410). To add insult to the injury, the victims were denied medical help and were in some cases treated as exhibits for research into the effects of radiation. Finally in the years following the end of the war, the main players could only manage incoherent narratives as to the reasons and effects of the bombs, further attesting to the difficulty in justifying their use.

The author was indeed persuasive. However as I read the book, I could not help wondering if the problem was one of hindsight. Take for example the case of area bombing. Its limits in persuading the enemy to surrender are recognised now because it was used then. Given that prior to the Second World War there was no precedence for one to learn from, it was reasonable that looking at how much fear it could instil in the enemies, this could be an effective way to get the enemy to surrender. Similarly while it is increasingly recognised that the Soviet Union’s invasion of Manchuria greatly accelerated Japan’s capitulation, how could one know then what we know now?

The author also did not give complete consideration to the whole context of the situation. For example it was not that the Japanese military had retreated from island to island and finally were confined to their main islands. They were still in Manchuria and also countries in South East Asia. To blockade them to starvation would mean a prolonged occupation of these places by the Japanese. If I were living under the Japanese then, I would wish for the bomb.

One important question was whether Nagasaki was necessary. There was a sense in the book that people realised the devastation the first bomb brought to Hiroshima and were no longer elated about Nagasaki, seeding some doubts in the readers’ minds about the correctness of its use. How should one decide whether or not to drop the second bomb given that the first one did not seem to get the Japanese to surrender? Was it really ineffective or did it just didn’t move them enough, in which case perhaps another bomb was in order?

Questions aside, there were a few chapters in the book that I like very much. The first one being the chapter on the science and scientists behind the atomic bomb which brought back good (and not so good) memories of my school years. The second one was the chapter discussing the Japanese’ deliberations over how to end the war, it was a very nuanced discussion about the Japanese psyche (which I cross-examined with Kazutoshi Hand?’s Show Shi). There was this element of (pardon me) “smoking their own dope” where they would know the undesirable outcome if the Russians were to invade Manchuria. And since it was undesirable, it should not happen, and if it should not happen, then it would not happen. Therefore it was conceivable to get the Russians to mediate an end to the war.

The author also gave a very vivid description of the condition of the victims in the two cities immediately after the bombs were dropped. These represented the two times so far that atomic weapons were used on cities. Alas as tragic as they were, it failed to arouse in me the feeling of sympathy and I even felt that the

descriptions were slightly over done, especially when he gave some statistics on civilian versus military casualties. I could not help wondering if he was steering readers to the conclusion that the bomb was selective; dropped on a city with both civilian and military targets, the civilian targets would be obliterated while the military ones intact. The indifference I felt towards the victims was at first curious to me given that I bear no hatred towards the Japanese today. This has made me re-examine my attitude towards Japan today. While I am not going to discuss it here, I have to give the author credit for doing this for me.

A reviewer in Amazon said that this book is only for people who can think for themselves. I would not say that, I would encourage people to read this book but to temper it with other books to put things in a better context.

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### **Sean Kennedy says**

I was disappointed with this book. Although meticulously researched and offering a good (although not unique) revisionist take on early nuclear history, this is really the story of the nuclear bomb, and not really about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Out of over five hundred pages, only two slight chapters focus on the bombings themselves and the citizens who found themselves at the epicentre of the worst terrorist attacks enacted upon innocent civilians.

If the book had been called *The Creation and Detonation of Fat Man and Little Boy* I may not have been set up for disappointment, but it was called *Hiroshima Nagasaki* and to have so little of the book focused on the city and the inhabitants feels like it is doing them a grave injustice.

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### **Ranger says**

After visiting Japan and Hiroshima in particular I just had to read up more about it all. Nuclear power and weapons have scared and awed me since I was a small child and visiting Hiroshima chilled me to the very core. The book caters for a leftist swing at American politics and decision making as well as creating a mind boggling impression of the Japanese psyche during the final days of the Pacific War. This is a great book for gaining a perspective on WHY, and towards the end of the book you will gain an understanding as to why, rather than whether it was morally corrupt or anti-human.

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### **Michael Flanagan says**

A great read from start to finish. Paul Ham has delivered yet again the book is well researched and tells the story from every aspect of the dropping of the A-Bombs on Japan. From the political intrigue to the scientific quest to unlock the power of the sun and those who were the victims of its power this book is a well balanced look into a defining moment in history.

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### **Jennifer (JC-S) says**

‘We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world.’ (Harry S. Truman 25 July 1945)

In an interview, Paul Ham said that it took him four years to write this book: 2.5 years of research and 1.5 years to write and edit. He said that he chose this topic because 'I have always felt that there is something wrong with American narratives that attempt to justify the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians in a nuclear holocaust.' After researching and analysing the core archives, Paul Ham said he 'felt a strong impulse to write an accurate account of the bomb, and to dissect the truth from the lies and popular myths.'

The lead up to August 1945, and the aftermath, is covered from a number of different angles: historical and political as well as military and scientific. Aspects of the book are based on extensive interviews with eighty survivors and depict the human communities of the two cities before and after they were destroyed. So much of the damage was civilian: schools, hospitals, and the homes of so many – primarily women, children and the aged.

'It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.'

Paul Ham writes that the orthodox view of why the atomic bombs were dropped is President Harry S Truman's justification (enunciated two years after the decision was made) that the bombs saved the necessity of invading Japan and the loss of one million American servicemen. Ham scrutinises this *ex post facto* justification: pointing out that the atomic bombs were not the only option and, in any case, Japan was rapidly running out of the raw materials required in order to continue.

General Curtis LeMay, like the RAF's Air Vice Marshall 'Bomber' Harris (who ordered the area bombing of Hamburg and Dresden) believed that Japan's military leaders could be shamed into surrender if their cities and civilian population were blanket bombed. The dropping of Little Boy and Fat Man was an extension of that strategy and while these bombs killed thousands of civilians, it apparently had little impact on the Japanese war machine or those directing it. Or did it? Surely it's not total coincidence that Japan surrendered just days after Nagasaki was bombed.

In Ham's view, what really led to the Japanese surrender was Stalin's sudden entry into the war in the Pacific. The Japanese generals could see one million Soviet troops pouring into Manchuria, ready to invade Japan and to avenge the Russian defeat of 1904-05.

'The Japanese people had kept their Emperor and lost an empire.'

Having read the book, having had some of my views and assumptions challenged, I'm still forming my own conclusions – especially on the role of science and the responsibility of scientists. Revisiting the choices made in 1945 is important: can we apply learning from the past to an unknown future?

'Total war had debased everyone involved.' As it does, and will continue to do.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

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