

# Why Hiroshima as the Target of US Atomic Bomb in 1945

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**Abstract:-** This article analyzes background aspects on why United States chose Hiroshima as prime target for the atomic bomb attack. Based on many existing researched of World War II, there were many opinions from experts on why the United States dropped both atomic bombs in Japan. United States initially chose five cities as the targets to end the war, from all Japan's major cities, they are: Kyoto, Hiroshima, Kokura, Yokohama and Nigata. Kyoto, known as the most important city for Japanese culture, was erased and focused on Hiroshima as the main target. By knowing what matters were taken into account by the United States about Hiroshima which was selected as the main atomic bomb target, it can be concluded that the United States did not only consider the political and military interests, but the United States also considered the cultural interests.

**Keywords:-** United States, Atomic Bomb, Hiroshima, Japan, World War II.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Hiroshima City, in World War II, became world highlight as the first city in the world ever destroyed by an atomic bomb by the United States of America. Atomic bomb was only used twice in World War II, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki cities. Conflict between Japan and countries in Asia started when China admitted their defeat in Sino-Japan War I (1894-1895). Not long after that, there was war between Japan and Russia in 1904-1905 with victory on Japan side. Once Japan won the war on Russia and controlled Manchuria, Japan had confident to expand their territory and influence.

Western countries criticized Japan's ambition at the time. Japan government predicted America as the Western country that against their expansion plan.

Therefore, on 8 December 1941, Pearl Harbor military base in Uinter States was attacked by Japan. The event turned USA focus on preparing attacks to Japan. The war was going to an end but Japan refused to surrender and ignored Potsdam Declaration issued on 26 July 1945. USA, with full consideration from England and Soviet Union, chose two cities as target of atomic bomb named *Little Boy* and *Fat Man*.

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## II. LIERATURE REVIEW

J. Samuel Walker wrote "*The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update*" in "*Hiroshima in History and Memory*" (Horgan, Michael J.1996:11-37). The article described J. Samuel Walker research on US decision to launch atomic bomb attack to Japan. J. Samuel Walker described debates happened in the world over US decision to attack Hiroshima using an atommic bomb. The article did not describe in detail reasons behind US decision on attacking Hiroshima with an atomic bomb. However, author decided to use the article as a reference for the research.

Karl T. Compton (1946) in "*If The Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used*" stated that atomic bomb introduced dramatic element in World War II. The article only described on what might happen if US did not attack Japan using atomic bomb. The article didnt elaborate reasons on US atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima city.

Taketo Suzuki (2004 : 87-88) in "*Why Was the A-Bomb Dropped in Hiroshima?*" stated that reason behind US atomic bomb attack in Japan was to end the war as soon as possible. Taketo Suzuki only described US decision to use atomic bomb but not decribing reasons why Hiroshima was chosen as target for atomic bomb attack.

Ward Wilson (2007) in "*The Winning Weapon? Rethinking Nuclear Weapons in Light of Hiroshima*" described that nuclear weapon had key role to decide the victory of Pacific War. The research focused on reasones whether the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima at 6 August 1945 had significant impact on the course of war and situation after the bombing. It did not describe reasons behind US atomic bomb attack on Hiroshim

### III. PROBLEM DEFINITION

Question of the research was the reason behind USA decision to drop the atomic bomb in Hiroshima at the end of World War II in 1945. Why United States of America chose Hiroshima as target of Atomic Bomb. The scope of the research was limited on Washington Naval Power Agreement, Pacific War as part of World War II, and US reason launching atomic bomb attack at Hiroshima, a bomb created by Manhattan Project.

### IV. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was based on document study and history research through heuristic, critic or verification, interpretation, and historiography. Data analyses was conducted using qualitative methods and descriptive analyses. Author described the issue, analysed it and made conclusion.

### V. DISCUSSION

#### A. Western Blockade on Japan

Leo Marriott (2005), in his book, stated that there would be Naval arm race within years after World War I, especially on US, Britain and Japan Navy, including countries who won World War I. United States of America, Japan, France and Italy agreed to sign treaty to prevent arm race by designing limits on total tonnages of battle ships of each country.

The meeting was known as *Washington Naval Treaty* held in Washington DC from November 1921 to February 1922 to discuss production limit of battleships of each country. Japan, after signing the treaty, later realized that the treaty was designed to limit Japan power as strategy of Allied countries to blockade Japan navy at sea and Manchuria campaign. Japan then realized that the Washington Naval Treaty had become obstacle for Japan to build their naval power.

#### B. Washington Naval Treaty

The Washington Naval Treaty ended the long naval arm race at the time after World War I, where there were many battle ships remanufactured into naval carrier. The Washington Naval Treaty was revised by London Treaty in 1930 and The 2nd London Treaty in 1936. In the mid of 1930s, Japan and Italy decided to withdraw themselves from the Treaty. Their decision made The Washington Naval Treaty weak and cannot be maintained.

Based on Office of The Historian, there was an article stipulated three main agreements following The Washington Naval Treaty, they were : Five Power Agreement, Four Power Agreement, and Nine Power Agreement. The key subject of these agreements were as follow:

- Five Power Agreement: signed by USA, Britain, Japan, Italy and France. Japan asked for total tonnage control at 10:10:7 while USA asked the total tonnage at 10:10:5. The final comparison was 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 on reason that USA and Britain had Naval Power in the Pacific and Atlantic to secure their colony, (b) Four Power Agreement: signed by USA, Britain, Japan and Italy. They agreed to consult each other if crisis emerged in the East Asia. The agreement replaced Anglo-Japan Agreement signed in 1902, (c) Nine Power Agreement: signed by USA, Britain, Japan, Italy, France, Belgium, Dutch, Portuguese, and China where they agreed to respect the sovereignty of China territory.

Based on data of Siegfried Breyer (1973), The Washington Naval Treaty had impact on the planning and manufacturing of all types of battleships between 1905 and 1945 in six major countries. The researcher stated that, total of Japan's battleship manufacturing, under The Washington Naval Treaty, was controlled under 50.000 tonnage. However, after Japan decided to withdraw from The Washington Naval Treaty, total of Japan's battleship manufacturing was more than 70.000 tonnage. Japan's decision to withdraw from The Washington Naval Treaty was based on reason to save Japan's dignity in world naval supremacy. Japan's government was disappointed when they found out that Japan was considered unequal to USA and Britain. Japan considered The Washington Naval Treaty was not fair, where total tonnage of allowed manufactured battleships for Japan Navy were only 315.000 tonnage, while USA and Britain may manufactured up to 525.000 tonnage each.

USA and Britain had bigger proportion in the Treaty because both countries had their own reasons. USA had to protect two big coastlines, while Britain had colonial responsibilities in the world. Japan refused their reasons and rejected the situation of being treated not as superior country like USA and Britain. On 29 December 1934, Japan officially withdrew from The Washington Naval Treaty. Japan then improved the manufacturing of battleships for their Naval fleet. The first two carrier, Akagi and Kaga, were modernized through modification and made them as the first sophisticated carrier in the world after World War I (C. Peter Chen dalam *Japan's Refusal of Washington Treaty 19 Dec 1934 World War II Database*).

#### C. Manchuria Incident

Based on Encyclopædia of Britannica, Manchuria was ancient territory at Northeast China near border of North Korea and Uni Soviet. Manchuria had been part of China territory for long. On 19 September 1931, Japan launched invasion on Manchuria, one day after Mukden incident<sup>1</sup> which triggered the 2nd Sino-Japan War. Based

<sup>1</sup> Incident at Mukden (known as Shenyang nowadays), Southern part of Manchuria, where train railroad owned by Japan was bombed by Japanese junior officer. Japan accused China for the bombing.

on data of Japan Foreign Ministry Archives (2009), in 1932, Japan proclaimed the new country of Manchukuo by 15 September 1932 through Japan-Manchukuo protocol.

Henri Chambert Loir (2014:1) stated that, Manchuria incident happened because Japan did not want Russia entered Korean territory, which was colony of Japan. Russia wanted Manchuria for their “Warm Water Policy”. Russia started their train railway of Trans-Manchuria from Harbin to Port Arthur through Mukden and penetrated Korean area. Loir also stated that Russia sent 177,000 soldiers to Manchuria during Boxer revolt (1898-1901)<sup>2</sup>. Japan’s government offered an agreement in 1903 to Russia where Japan would not interfere Russia plan on Manchuria if Russia did not interfere Korea. Russia did not respond the agreement offer from Japan and Japan declared war to Russia by launching attacks to Port Arthur on 8 February 1904 (Henri Chambert Loir, 2014 : 2).

Manchuria was a battleground, politically and military, for Japan, Russia and China before World War I and World War II. Manchuria incident involving Japan armed forces happened in 1931 and it was condemned by Western countries and League of Nations. Japan was considered crossing norms and ethics of world peace. Japan finally decided to leave League of Nations when no other country would support Japan’s policy (Harun, Ahmad, 1996 : 11).

Japan’s nationalist-imperialist idea grew stronger after Japan left League of Nations. In 1920s and 1930s Japan had strong political faction named *Kōdōha*(皇道派) and *Tōseiha*(統制派). They had strong roles in determining government decision but each of them had different perspectives. Ian Buruma (2004 : 98) stated that both factions believed that national defence should be strengthened by national political reform. *Kōdōha* proposed confrontative approaches to prepare for revolution, while *Tōseiha* considered future war shall be total war and it required solid partnership between bureaucracy and *Zaibatsu*<sup>3</sup> to maximize Japan’s military ability and strength. Richard J. Samuels (2007) supported Ian Buruma on the interest of both factions. It was clear that *Kōdōha* wanted Japan’s expansion strategy heading north against Uni Soviet while *Tōseiha* wanted Japan’s expansion strategy to go south.

<sup>2</sup> Revolt in China that happened between November 1899 and 7 September 1901. The revolt was triggered by a secret group named *Yihetuan* (Justice and Harmony). Great Mother Queen of China accused the group on murder of foreign emissaries, so she formed alliance with eight countries : Japan, Uni Soviet, Britain, USA, Germany, France, Austria-Hongaria, and Italy. They deployed 19,000 soldiers to quell the revolt. Boxer rebellion ended at September 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Japanese term for industry and conglomerate business in the time of Japan Imperial system. They were key of economic restoration in Japan since Meiji era.

The role of military elites in Japan grew significantly. They had played key roles in Japan’s politics within few years and established regime of *tennosei-fascism*<sup>4</sup> which reformed political condition in Japan and expanded political influence abroad using military power (Harun, Ahmad, 1996 : 12).

#### D. Hiroshima City

Based on book published by Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Sino-Japan war brought development and economic prosperity to Hiroshima. The city had main harbor, Ujina, as an embarkation to China mainland. On September 1894, Imperial administration and *Diet* were temporarily moved to Hiroshima from Tokyo. At the time, Hiroshima was considered as second capital of Japan.

The modernization in Hiroshima was triggered by activities during Sino-Japan war. Hiroshima developed and expanded infrastructures such as clean water lines, gas lines, sewers, and power lines to people in Hiroshima. Modern transportation like Tram was also built in 1912. The presence of Tram flourished shopping and entertainment places for the people. There were also many educational institutes built in Hiroshima, including *Higher Technical College*, *Women’s College*, and private schools. In 1920s, buildings in the city were mixed between old and modern buildings. Bricks and stone building started to change the appearance of the city and Law on buildings in the city applied in Hiroshima at 1923, which turned Hiroshima into modern city.

Military infrastructure factories were built in Hiroshima to support war against China and Russia. Factories to build warships and metal works grew high in Hiroshima. At the time, Hiroshima was the most important city for Japan military base, because Japan built Army Headquarter to face land defense. Hiroshima had become key city in modern military, industry and education in Japan.

Based on book published by Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, people in Hiroshima were forced to work and support military during World War II<sup>5</sup>. It was admitted that people were enthused on Japan’s victory during Sino-Japan war and Japan-Russia war. People supported military faction as they brought glory for the country. However, things changed when people were hard to find daily needs and foods were distributed using coupon. People of Hiroshima started to receive negative impact of prolonged wars.

<sup>4</sup> Fascist soldier in Japan.

<sup>5</sup> Shobara Forced Labor in 1943 based on National Order Mobilization in 1939. Workers in civil companies were forced to work in military industries. They were not just Japanese, but also Korean, Chinese, and others who were forced to work in military factories of building power plant.

### E. Pacific War

Although there are many books describing Pacific War, some of them are “*Pearl Harbor as History Japanese-American Relations 1931-1941*” wrote by Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto (1973) and book “*And I was There: Pearl Harbor and Midway-Breaking The Secrets*” by Rear Admiral Edwin T. Layton (1985), these two books did not describe Pacific war completely. Author then used book entitled “*Perang Pasifik*” by Peng Koen Ojong (2005), which completely described about Pacific War. Peng Koen Ojong is a well known and respected senior journalist in Indonesia. Ojong wrote that on Sunday, 7 December 1941, there was an immediate attack on US naval base Pearl Harbor, where Japan deployed 360 air fighters and sunked or damaged 8 battleships. The incident marked as the beginning of Pacific War. On 8 December 1941, US Congress declared war against Japan, which was signed by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Cornelia Schmitz-Berning (2007 : 745) stated that countries involved in World War II and Pacific War were countries allied in two blocks : Axis block and Allied block. Axis block consisted of countries of Japan, Germany and Italy. Allied blocks consisted of countries of USA, Britain, Uni Soviet, and Cina. Pacific war was the beginning of World War II in Asia.

Japan launched attacks to conquer Western colonies in Asia once controlled by Britain and Dutch<sup>6</sup>. Allied naval fleet was vanquished on Java Sea at 8 April 1942 and US Army surrendered to Japan in Philippine. The situation had made USA prepared large scale of naval fleet to face Japan.

Japan attacked Port Moresby, New Guinea and Tulagi island at Solomon island. The attack was known as Battle of Coral Sea<sup>7</sup> where Japan losted four major aircraft carriers in the battle. 1943 is the consolidation year for all conflicting parties in the Pacific war. Japan prepared next moves to fight against allied forces, while allied forces were consolidating the best efforts to optimize their resources<sup>8</sup>. In 1943, USA manufactured military equipments such as fighter plane and warship. In the end of 1943, USA manufactured more than 7.000 fighter planes per month, while Japan only manufactured 1.500 planes per month. USA manufactured 500 warships while Japan only manufactured 30 warships<sup>9</sup>. These data showed how USA had managed their potential much better than Japan. It could be also the reason why Japan lost Pacific War.

<sup>6</sup>“Pacific Summary,” *The War Times Journal*.

[http://www.wtj.com/articles/pacific\\_summary/index.htm](http://www.wtj.com/articles/pacific_summary/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup>James Bowen, “Japan Attacks The Philippines, 1941- 42.” 2009,

<http://www.pacificwar.org.au/Philippines/Philindex.htm>

<sup>8</sup>“Pacific Summary,” *The War Times Journal*.

[http://www.wtj.com/articles/pacific\\_summary/index.htm](http://www.wtj.com/articles/pacific_summary/index.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

### F. Manhattan Project and Decision for Atomic Bomb

Leslie R. Groves (1962 : 3) stated that in September 1942, Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, through Lieutenant General Brehon Somervell as Commanding General of the Army Services of Supply, asked Leslie to come to Washington. Leslie was Deputy Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, to summon important project later known as Manhattan project. It was led by USA and supported by Britain and Canada. The whole research was led by US Physist Julius Robert Oppenheimer. The origin research of atomic bomb was actually from world known physist Albert Einstein. He did not take part in Manhattan project, but initiated the research of atomic bomb in the USA. The formula of  $E = MC^2$  was formula designed by Albert Einstein as basic theory for atomic bomb<sup>10</sup>.

The Manhattan project was started by physist immigrants in USA<sup>11</sup> after they ran away from Adolf Hitler because they suspected NAZI were also developing atomic bomb. President Roosevelt, after receiving letter from Albert Einstein, asked physist to develop atomic bomb secretly. The Manhattan project was designed to anticipate German attack which also conducted research on atomic bomb. The bomb was finally dropped in two Japan’s cities because Germany had surrendered. *Little Boy*, the atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima was manufactured by the Manhattan project, using Uranium-235<sup>12</sup>. It had 3 meters length, 71 cms wide, and total weight of 4000 kgs<sup>13</sup>. *Little Boy* was the first atomic bomb exploded and destroyed a city in the world. There were 292.325 people killed in Hiroshima<sup>14</sup>.

J. Samuel Walker wrote “*The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update*” in *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Horgan, Michael J.1996: 11-37). He stated that, there were some opinions among experts on decision to drop atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Herbet Feis (1961) supported the decision made by The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey where the war might end in late 1945 without atomic bomb as Uni Soviet would take part on invasion to Japan.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Isaacson, “Chain Reaction: From Einstein to the Atomic Bomb,” *Discover Magazine*, 2008.

<http://discovermagazine.com/2008/mar/18-chain-reaction-from-einstein-to-the-atomic-bomb>

<sup>11</sup> Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, (United States:1988).

<sup>12</sup> Isotop uranium-235 had to be physically separated from isotop uranium-238 because uranium-238 is not match for explosive.

<sup>13</sup> Editor Plimbi, “*Melihat Kembali Struktur Bom Atom Little Boy dan Fat Man*,” 2013. <http://www.plimbi.com/article/131281/melihat-kembali-struktur-bom-atom-little-boy-and-f>

<sup>14</sup> Muhaimin, “*Kisah Ngeri Korban Selamat Bom Atom AS di Hiroshima*,” *Sindonews*, 2015. <https://international.sindonews.com/read/1029776/40/kisah-ngeri-korban-selamat-bom-atom-as-di-hiroshima-1438769832>

Gar Alperovitz (1965) stated that, political issue was the key factor on the use of atomic bomb in Hiroshima. He insisted that the use of atomic bomb would made significant impression to the Uni Soviet not to defeat Japan. Alperovitz agreed with Feis argument that atomic bomb is not necessary in Pacific War, but had another opinion on the issue. Alperovitz stated that President Truman and his councillors should see atomic bomb as “diplomatic key” to prevent Uni Soviet ambition in Eastern Europe and Asia. Lisle A. Rose (1973) disagreed with Alperovitz arguments. He stated that Truman adopted late strategy by delivering Postdam agreement and hoping that atomic bomb would be used on the right time. He rejected political reason behind the use of atomic bomb in Hiroshima.

Martin J. Sherwin (1975) stated that, the main reason on the use of atomic bomb was to end the war as soon as possible. Barton J. Bernstein (1975), on the other side stated that, all alternatives were not approved by decision makers, as considered too risky than using atomic bomb. Bernstein stated that there was no reason not to drop the atomic bomb in Japan. They should use the bomb to end the war, save American lives and hope for diplomatic impact<sup>15</sup> from Uni Soviet.

Based on original notulent kept by Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, on 17 July until 2 August 1945, USA, Britain and Uni Soviet held Postdam Conference. Based on the Postdam conference, scientists had sent a letter to President Harry S. Truman, USA should not use atomic bomb without a warning. Based on a book published by Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, USA had invited Uni Soviet to Postdam Conference because President of USA knew Japan was negotiating with Uni Soviet for peaceful solution. USA believed that the use of atomic bomb may end the war and prevent Uni Soviet influence in East Asia aftermath.

On 26 July 1945, USA, Britain and China signed Postdam Declaration or unconditional surrender for Japan. The declaration decided the future of Japan’s Emperor in the future, secret agreement between Uni Soviet and USA to declare war against Japan, and the use of atomic bomb. Japan rejected Postdam declaration and USA decided to drop atomic bomb on 6 August 1945 in Hiroshima.

## VI. RESULTS

There were many debates on why US decided to drop atomic bomb at Hiroshima not Tokyo, capital of Japan. The selection of targeted city was based on three conditions: (1) The diameter of targeted city should be more than 4.8 kilometers and hold key role as major city. (2) Effective blast impact, (c) Targeted city might have never been attacked by August 1945<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Indonesian Language Dictionary:Providing permit or right

<sup>16</sup>“The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Selection of the Target,”*Atomic Archives*.

War committee proposed five major cities as target: (1) Kokura, the city had the largest amunition factory, (2) Hiroshima, the city was the key place for personnel deployment, warfare logistic and headquarter of the armed forces, (3) Yokohama, the city was the place for aircraft and warship manufacturing, machinery, electrical and oil refinery, (4) Nīgata, the city was also key place for personnel deployment, oil refinery, and place for major industries, (5) Kyoto, the city was location of major industries in Japan<sup>17</sup>.

Kyoto was selected as main target and Hiroshima as secondary target. However, Kyoto was dropped from target list due to cultural preservation. Harry S. Truman, wrote in his diary that, after watching the potential devastation of Kyoto by atomic bomb, he decided to dropped Kyoto (the old capital of Japan) and Tokyo (the caiptal of Japan) from target list for the shake of humanity and his position as the world leader. He considered the list was made based on military perspective. Henry L. Stimson, US Secretary of War, was actually the person who gave advice to Harry S. Truman not to dropped the bomb in Kyoto. Based on an article published by BBC (2015), Prof. Wellerstein stated that Stimson had visited Kyoto several times in 1920s when he served as Governor of Philippine. Prof. Wellerstein also stated that, Stimson experience in Kyoto during his honey moon had given him enough knowledge on Kyoto as the city preserving Japan’s tradition.

Based on the book of *The Spirit of Hiroshima*, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum stated that Hiroshima was secondary capital of Japan in wartime and center of modern industry. During World War II, Hiroshima was almost never being hit by air strike<sup>18</sup>. Hiroshima was also important military base, harbor city for personnel deployment and the situation around the city was suitable as target for atomic bomb<sup>19</sup>. A *website* in Japan named *The Spirit of Hiroshima* stated that at the end of the war, most major cities in Japan was destroyed by air strike, unless Hiroshima. USA had made Hiroshima as AA target, meaning the main target for atomic bomb by USA, with reasons as follow: (1) The size and landscape of Hiroshima matched to the needed target for *Little Boy*, Hiroshima was never been attacked and made impact calculation easier, (2) Hiroshima had large military base,

[http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med\\_chp5.shtm](http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp5.shtm)

<sup>17</sup>“Summary of *Target Committee Meetings* on 10 and 11 May 1945,”*U.S National Archives*.<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/6.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>Fajar Nugraha,“Alasan Hiroshima dan Nagasaki di Bom Atom oleh AS,”*Okezone News*, 2011.

<http://news.okezone.com/read/2011/08/07/413/489128/ala-san-hiroshima-dan-nagasaki-dibom-atom-oleh-as>

<sup>19</sup>Don Hale, “U.S Planned to Drop 12 Bombs on Japan. The Daily Beast,” (London:2015).

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/14/u-s-planned-to-drop-12-atomic-bombs-on-japan.html>

military storage facility and manufacturer that had not been destroyed.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Based on explanation above, US chose Hiroshima based on military reasons. Hiroshima was the actual military challenge. The city was center for Japan's military industry, major harbor city, headquarter for Japan military, and played role as secondary capital during the 1st Sino-Japan war. Hiroshima layout and landscape as dense residential city also became reason for USA to drop the atomic bomb in the heart of Hiroshima. The selection of target in the city was based on calculation of blast impact that would destroy entire infrastructure of Hiroshima city.

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