

PEARL HARBOR AND HIROSHIMA : AN IRONIC COMPARISON

PEARL HARBOR VE HIROŞİMA : İRONİK BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMA

Leo J. MAHONEY

Kafkas University, Department of English Language and Literature

ABSTRACT : In the past century, veterans of America's wars have shown extraordinary human longevity in the postwar eras. As a result, contemporary public historical interpretations of the American second world war experience have been influenced by veterans' perceptions of historical issues for a longer time than was true of postwar eras before the twentieth century. Public historical debates in the United States have recently focused on the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (1941) and the American attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945). These events may seem quite dated by now, but they have remarkable contemporary resonance in light of debates over proliferation of nuclear weapons and tactics of so-called pre-emptive warfare. Though the aerial attacks are often related in popular American perception, the truth is they were incommensurate events in terms of their military and political objectives, their physical scale and results, and the natures of their targets.

Keywords : Longevity, veterans, second world war, incommensurate, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Pearl Harbor, nuclear proliferation.

ÖZET : II. Dünya Savaşı gazileri, bu savaşın en önemli iki olayında halk hissiyatında büyük bir yer tutmuşlardır: 1941'deki Japonların Pearl Harbor ve Amerika'nın 1945'deki Hiroşima saldırıları. Bu çalışma, II. Dünya savaş döneminden itibaren bu iki saldırının Amerikan kamu oyununda bir benzeri olup olmadığını inceler. Bu karşılaştırmada; 1) Japon ve Amerikan saldırılarının amaçları; 2) bu saldırıların boyutları; 3) bu saldırıların şekli irdelenmektedir. Ancak, tam bir karşılaştırma yapmak olanaksızdır. İronik olarak, Amerika yeni küçük bir nükleer silah geliştirmeyi düşünürken, Japon hükümeti, Pearl Harbor saldırısında olduğu gibi, potansiyel Kuzey Kore saldırısı korkusuyla caydırıcı nükleer programı planlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Gazi, II. Dünya Savaşı, Eşitsizlik, Hiroşima, Nagasaki, Pearl Harbor, Nükleer Silahlanma.

The old cliché about wars finally being over after fifty years was coined before the lifetimes of recent generations, who have enjoyed extraordinary human longevity brought about by clean environments, healthy foods and improved medical technique in the past century. In a report on high incidences of childhood mortality in sub-Saharan Africa, Geoffrey Cowley says that the cause is not complex. "Most die for a lack of clear water, adequate nutrition and the most basic medical necessities. . . ." (Cowley, 2003 : 48) In the West before 1945, it could be assumed that eldest soldiers who had fought in a war would have departed this vale of tears about half a century afterwards at most. That is clearly not the case with large numbers of American veterans of the Second World War. Dates of the start of this war vary from 1937 in East Asia to 1939 in western Europe and to 1941 in the

western hemisphere. For the United States armed forces, the war began on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, in Hawaii.

As for longevity of the war's survivors, we may cite as an example the not unusual case of Thomas Ferebee (1918-2000), the unapologetic bombardier who aimed the atomic bomb dropped from the *Enola Gay* B-29 aircraft on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 (Fountain, 2000 : 10; "Warning to Revisionists" : 9B). From the other end of the American war, December 7, 1941, during December, 2001, a group of survivors traveled to Hawaii for 60th anniversary commemorative ceremonies there. Of course, this celebration occurred only three months after terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City and on the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Partly as a consequence, "the old men of Pearl Harbor . . . were applauded all week in airport departure lounges, beatified by pilots in mid-flight monologues, and pestered for autographs in Honolulu hotel lobbies" (Hardin, 2001 : 1).

The partially medically induced longevity of military veterans has produced an important social impact on our times. Unusually large numbers of aged citizens, whose geriatric health care is a growing financial burden on proportionally smaller cadres of the young, is one such effect (Izard, 1998 : 3). Another, perhaps more tumultuous, consequence is the attenuation of politically potent warbred emotions into a long future. This is no minor issue. There are still almost five million living American veterans of World War II (Sciolino, 2001 : 2). The total number of American veterans of World War II, and the Korean (1950-1953) and Vietnam (1964-1975) wars, now stands at 26 million souls – that is, voters – hardly a statistic to be ignored by democratic politicians ("Glory Days," 2003 : 47).

On the fiftieth anniversary of the American military victories over Germany and Japan, severe controversy marked aspects of the commemoration of one of the events called VJ (Victory over Japan) Day. At the time, in 1995, an imaginative, revisionist Smithsonian Institution exhibition about the war with Japan was hastily dismantled under outraged public pressures, emanating especially from veterans of the war ("A Very Misguided Exhibit," 1994 : 4B). In the same year, issuance of an American postage stamp depicting an atomic bomb's familiar mushroom cloud was canceled in order to assuage angry Japanese sensibility, an act which also caused an outcry among organized veterans' groups in the United States ("White House Backs Japan on A-Bomb Stamp," 1994 : 16A). Taking advantage of the hoopla, politicians, veterans and some journalists, in both America and Japan, essayed simplistic and occasionally crude commentaries about the Japanese-American war of 1941-1945 ("Claptrap Distortion of History," 1995 : 11B).

The aftereffects of the controversies of 1995 have been lasting. As late as six years after the fiftieth anniversary of VJ Day, a legislative proposal to rename the state of Maine's coastal turnpike after the popular American president, Ronald Reagan, failed of approval because the road was already designated as a "Gold Star Memorial Highway" in honor of those mothers from Maine whose sons had died in World War II (Slevin, 2001 : 8). Two years later, in March, 2003, an exhibit of an artist's nature photographs were moved to a basement floor of one of the Smithsonian's museums after they were mentioned in a United States Senate debate on wildlife protection (Bailey, 2003 : 8).

By contrast, commemorations of the still controversial American war with Vietnam do not seem to arouse much public debate in the United States, though Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, initially stirred a storm of controversy ("Even Enemy Is Represented at Vietnam Art Museum," 2001 : 15; Knowlton, 2003 : 20). The deeply unpopular war with Vietnam is hardly a vaunted American success story and, in fact, it was marked by severe social and political schisms in the United States during its course from 1964 to 1975. Yet, the American Civil War of 1861-1865, surely a highly divisive conflict in its own time, is still a focus of emotional controversy even after almost 140 years have passed. For example, in November, 2001, Robin Reed, director of the Museum of the Confederacy, in Richmond, Virginia, was pressurized to resign because he had supported an exhibit "presenting Confederate, black and Union veterans of the War Between the States under one all-inclusive, all-tolerant roof". As one of Reed's museological colleagues explained, "Robin wasn't pro-Southern enough. His taking a balanced approach in his own exhibits disturbed members of his [museum's executive] board" (Clines, 2001 : 18).

Pro-Confederate sympathizers in the southern United States are not alone in their partisan outlooks. During the past few years, in Japan, sanitized histories of the country's brutal actions in China and in southeast Asia, during the late 1930s and early 1940s, have found their way into students' textbooks. There is, however, demonstrably less interest in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in 1941, if the lukewarm reactions to (an equally sanitized version for Japanese of) Hollywood's film, *Pearl Harbor*, is an accurate indicator (Woollacott, 2001 : 8; French, 2001 : 1, 4; "Japan History Textbook Sells Briskly," 2001 : 10).

Not surprisingly, public *contretemps* in the United States over the war with Japan have focused on the highly charged events marking the war's beginning and its ending - that is, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, and the American atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945. Though public interest in the Pearl Harbor attack has always eclipsed interest in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, Hollywood's efforts of spring, 2001, to boost its film about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and, especially, the spectacular events of September 11, 2001, have marked a new appreciation of the Pearl Harbor story in the United States (Cagle, 2001 : 63-64; Scott, 2001 : 24).

In spite of the greater public interest in Pearl Harbor, many Americans view the Japanese attack of 1941, and the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, as psychologically related. For instance, an American veteran of the war with Japan was quoted in Little Rock's *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, on August 8, 1995, as saying he thought "the world would be better off if, while the charred bodies of the American sailors were still smoldering in the sunken battleships of Pearl Harbor, we could have dropped a hundred a-bombs on Japan". In the same commemorative issue of the newspaper, another writer, less excitedly but just as pointedly, connected the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to the American atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki four years later. "The Japanese were warned (at Potsdam in July, 1945)" wrote this knowledgeable American veteran and prisoner of war. "Pearl Harbor was not." Then, too, in a distinctly unfriendly review of the 2001 American film, *Pearl Harbor*, even a British critic, Peter

Bradshaw, asked rhetorically, “Is producer Jerry Bruckheimer going to hint at a big historical truth : that Pearl Harbor led to Hiroshima and Nagasaki?” (Bradshaw, 2001 : viii).

Perhaps producer Bruckheimer was disinclined to emphasize an imagined link in American thinking between Japan’s nefarious surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, in 1941, and a vindictive American atomic retaliation in Japan, in 1945, because the relation was clearly characteristic of popular American attitudes towards the war with Japan, even as the 60th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor assault approached in 2001. Robert McIlvaine has shown that the vengeful nuclear response to Pearl Harbor’s destruction is childish , while Ian Buruma has pointed out that the most important Japanese film about Pearl Harbor, made in 1942, did not vilify the American enemy (McIlvaine, 1997 : A10; Buruma, 2001 : 3). In contrast, “The feeling in America, now, as it was then,” said Professor Donald M. Goldstein of the University of Pittsburgh, “is that World War II was a good war. There was a truly evil enemy, and we were the good guys” (“Hollywood Varies Its Views on World War II,” 2001 : 2). At the time, in 1945, Americans believed that Japan deserved whatever devastation came to it on account of what President Franklin D. Roosevelt had called its “unprovoked and dastardly attack” on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941 (Blum in C. Vann Woodward, 1968 : 317). Many elderly Americans, however, harbor the same attitude towards Japan today. “Seeing all these people, it’s like coming home again,” remarked Yuell Chandler, 83, who was present at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. “I wish all them guys that’s in the [USS] *Arizona* [sunk on that day] was up here instead of me. All the thousands that got shot up that day. It was a mess” (“Disney Launches ‘Pearl Harbor’ Blockbuster on Navy Aircraft Carrier,” 2001 : 2; “Pearl Harbor Survivors Have Mixed Reaction to Movie,” 2001 : 2).

By now, almost a decade after the emotional polemics of the golden anniversary of VJ Day, in 1995, it is tempting to try to make a less passionate and more detached analysis of the Japanese and American aerial assaults on each other’s territories in 1941 and 1945, respectively. In fine, the rhetorical weather may be sufficiently calm at this time – just before another storm arises, perhaps, in 2005 – to permit judicious inquiry into the question of whether the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor were actually commensurate events.

The facts are unsettling. Despite the persistence of rather crude retributive moral perceptions in the United States, the Japanese and American attacks of 1941 and 1945 were not commensurable events when calmly measured by important differences between them in (1) their military and political objectives, (2) the physical scale and results of the attacks, and in (3) the nature of their targets. An analysis of these three distinctive features is both revealing and provocative.

First, as to the different military objectives of the two attacks, it is certainly the case that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were carried out in order to convince the imperial war cabinet in Tokyo that continued resistance to American arms would result in the reduction of Japanese civilization to radioactive rubble. It is also arguably the case that President Harry S Truman’s incidental political objective in ordering the atomic attacks on the two Japanese cities was to demonstrate to

Soviet Generalissimo Josef Stalin a determined will to power in East Asia on the part of Truman's new American administration (Alperovitz, 1995; Norton, et. al., 1994 : 844-845).

By contrast, the Japanese aerial assault on Pearl Harbor was, in actual fact, the specific military objective against the United States of the Japanese government in December, 1941. Politically, the Japanese attack was mounted to retard or discourage the United States government from an active military participation against Japan in its war in China and with British, French, and Dutch colonial territories in Asia ("Need for Resources Led Japanese to Attack on Pearl Harbor," 2001 : 2). Incidentally, the Japanese attacks on American territory in December, 1941, demonstrated to Stalin – then at war with Adolf Hitler's German armies since June, 1941 – that Japan's imperial interests did not threaten the Soviet empire in Asia. But the important fact about the objectives of the Japanese conventional aerial attack of December, 1941, and the American atomic bombings of August, 1945, is that the latter amounted to threats of genocide (national extinction) of Japan, while the former was limited to traditional military and political aims. James Carroll has pointed out that the Americans' use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki signaled that "ultimately all of Japan would be transformed into a radioactive wasteland" if the Japanese government refused to surrender (1997 : A13). Recently, North Korea's irascible regime has claimed it possesses nuclear weapons and the ballistic means to deliver them. Certainly, America's ostentatious naval posturings and its constraints on North Korea's illicit trading in drugs and weapons and fake currency have given the North Koreans a chance to put on a show of their nuclear prowess (Weisman, 2003 : 1A, 10A). If Pyongyang should decide to stage a nuclear demonstration somewhere in the western Pacific ocean, that action-propaganda would certainly stand in marked contrast to the American decision of August, 1945, to actually employ atomic weapons in battle (Jae-Suk Yoo, 2003 : 8; "North Korea Hardens Stance on Nukes," 2003 : 9).

A second important comparison shows that the scale of the two separate and devastating attacks, in 1941 and 1945, also differed significantly. The Americans' atomic blasts over Hiroshima and Nagasaki took the lives of as many as 250,000 to 300,000 Japanese citizens between 1945 and 1947. Pathological and genetic damage in succeeding generations of Japanese is a technical matter of continuing debate. However, it is an indisputable fact that most of the Japanese casualties of the two atomic attacks of August, 1945, were civilians living in the two cities that were destroyed by the atomic bombs.

Reports of the total numbers of American casualties from the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor vary slightly. One reputable source puts the number of American casualties at 2,403 dead and 1,178 wounded, along with destruction of or damage to eight battleships and 160 aircraft. These figures include 49 civilians killed and 83 wounded ("Pearl Harbor," 1978 : 457; Norton, et. al., 1994 : 812).

To a great degree, although not entirely so, the difference in scale of the Japanese and American bombardments is equivalent in magnitude to the seismic difference in the military and scientific technologies employed by the two antagonists' air forces, navies and technological and industrial establishments, in 1941 and 1945,

respectively. Although Japanese scientists knew about the potential military utility of atomic fission, neither their laboratories nor their industrial facilities were even minimally adequate to the gargantuan enterprise of producing an atomic bomb during the Second World War (Mahoney, 1981 : 389). Nor would any but conventional weapons of the day have been needed by the Japanese air forces to cripple American battleships and airplanes at their Hawaiian bases in 1941.

Thirdly, in attempting a judicious comparison of these infamous, hostile attacks of long ago, it is instructive to consider the essential differences in the nature of their respective targets. In their atomic attacks on Japan, in August, 1945, through the additional force of atomic blasts and radiation aftereffects, the Americans' destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki amounted to qualitatively radical extensions of the devastating so-called saturation bombings of big cities begun by Japanese pilots, at Shanghai, and German air squadrons, at Guernica, in 1937. The Germans then dealt out the same fates to Warsaw (1939) and Rotterdam (1940). The United States and British air forces went on to perfect aerial saturation bombing over Germany itself after 1942 (Hamburg, Dresden, Nuremberg, Schweinfurt, Berlin), and on Japan, in 1944 and 1945, with dreadful physical consequences for civilian targets. In a report to the U. S. Manhattan Project's atomic bomb target committee, in April, 1945, an American military officer noted that "It should be remembered that ... the 20th Air Force is operating primarily to [sic] laying waste all the main Japanese cities. . . . The 20th Air Force is systematically bombing out the following cities with the prime purpose of not leaving one stone lying upon another : Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, Yawata, & Nagasaki" (Rhodes in Stross, ed., 1989 : 174-175). The 20th Air Force's efforts were successful. Ian Buruma recalls "Major General Curtis LeMay, who gloated that 100,000 people in Tokyo had 'scorched and boiled and baked to death in one night' of conventional American saturation bombing raids" (Buruma, 2001 : 3).

According to Andrew Gordon, in 1944-1945, some nine million Japanese civilians were left homeless by the Allies' conventional saturation air raids, and nearly 200,000 others died in them. As for the American atomic attacks of August, 1945, Gordon goes on to say that "All human beings within a two-mile radius of the [blast's] epicenter were incinerated in an instant. . . . Another one hundred thousand or more bomb victims died in the following months and years because of the lingering effects of radiation sickness" (2003 : 255). These horrific effects are not likely to be repeated if current (2003) projections of physical consequences of tactical use of miniaturized nuclear weapons should ever be tested in practice (Cooper, 2003 : A18; Broad, 2003 : 1, 7; Ramberg, 2003 : 6; Bay, 2003 : A16). Of course, such conditions are still quite unsettling and it is perhaps important to note that American nuclear strategy nowadays bears little relation to the purposes of the atomic bombs employed on Japan in August, 1945, as well as to the nuclear weapons developed afterwards during the decades of the Soviet-American nuclear arms race. Already by 1958, for example, the United States was tinkering (as it still is) with the idea of nuclear-powered spaceships, and – rather more primitively, perhaps – in 1961, the Soviet Union's nuclear scientists and engineers tested a 60-megaton hydrogen bomb, as a nuclear deterrent, that was fully 6,000 times more explosive than the bombs that obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945 (Dyson, 2002 : 2, 17; Davidson, 2003 : A10).

Compared to the civilian holocausts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a curious irony – and a suggestive fact – about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in December, 1941, is that it was a precisely executed surgical strike on American military targets. (This sort of tactical effect is exactly what is now being planned for miniature nuclear weapons.) Very few civilians were killed and wounded by Japanese aircraft over Hawaii in 1941. Additionally, John D. Hays has noted that, despite the extensive physical damage and the casualties left behind by Japanese airplanes at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese air forces failed to find and destroy some 4.5 million barrels of petrol stored in the United States Navy's facilities nearby; Japan's admirals thereby lost a good chance to cripple the powerful American aircraft carriers in the United States Pacific Fleet and to make re-supply of the Hawaiian Islands impossible for several months of 1942 (Hays, 1978 : 483).

In both of the Second World War attacks examined here, the combatants' short-term military objectives were achieved with stunning surprise and sensational success. It is equally clear, however, that the longer term political, technological and moral consequences of the two kinds of aerial assaults are still highly debatable. On the positive side of the historical ledger, it may well be that the sheer physical and human devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945, has had at least as much to do with preserving the world from nuclear war, since then, as the Cold War's more melodramatic ballistic balance of terror. It is also true that, in spite of the carnage due to the atomic blasts in Japan in 1945, the atomic bomb attacks seemed to Americans at the time to be the only way to end a brutally destructive war with Japan. According to Ben Bova, "Dr. Taro Takemi, a former president of the Japan Medical Association, said in 1983 that 'many people would have starved to death if the atomic bomb had not been dropped. . . . When one considers the possibility that the Japanese military would have sacrificed the entire nation if it were not for the atomic bomb attack, then the bomb might be described as having saved Japan' " (Bova, 1986 : 105). Dr. Takemi's judgement was echoed after the second world war by one of Emperor Hirohito's close aides, Koichi Kido, and by Japan's navy minister, Mitsumasa Yonai (Kristof, 2003 : 7).

The lessons of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor are more rooted in their time but no less significant for that, when one considers that the current \$10 billion annual budget of America's Tactical Intelligence and Related Activities (TIARA) branch of the Defense Intelligence Agency is prompted by contemplation of that 1941 event (Adams, 1995 : 47). Sadly, the echoes of these long-past concrescent explosions of national, racial and cultural pride are still – occasionally and obdurately – present in both the United States and Japan more than half a century after the end of the war between them. On Friday, August 1, 2003, Tokyo's police arrested a 22-year-old university student whom they suspected of setting fire to thousands of paper cranes symbolizing victims of the American atomic bomb attacks of August, 1945 ("In Brief, " 2003 : 5). In light of the Japanese government's recent deliberations about adopting a nuclear deterrent capability against possible North Korean attack, the student's vandalism may have been a harbinger of things to come (Kageyama, 2003 : A15; "At Hiroshima Rite, Fears of a New Nuclear Age" : 5).

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