

Indiscriminate Bombing and the Enola Gay Legacy

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by Yuki Tanaka

"Suddenly

There was a brilliant white-hot flash.
Buildings crumbled,
Fire blazed,
Smoke swirled all around,
Wires dangled everywhere,
And a writhing mass of humanity fled for safety."

This passage from a poem by Hiroshima A-bomb victim Kurihara Sadako, graphically depicts the horror experienced not only by A-bomb victims, but by all who have suffered air raid attacks. There is little warning of such attacks as monstrous bombers overhead, emitting ferocious noises followed by the sharp, ear-splitting sound of on-coming missiles. The reality of such attacks is all too often scores, hundreds or thousands of bodies blown to pieces by the blast or consumed by fire. Yet, the attackers, high in the air above, have little sense of the horror below. For the bombardiers and pilots, the people on the ground are simply "abstract" targets. By contrast, the experience of their victims is the "concrete" reality of injury, death and destruction. This sharp juxtaposition of abstract and concrete within a distance of a few hundred meters is a phenomenon unique to aerial bombing. The frequent use of aerial bombing in modern warfare surely owes something to the attackers' complete inability to imagine the terrifying experiences of their victims.

The origin of aerial bombing can be traced to the application of hot-air balloons in warfare in

the late 18th century. Initially air balloons were used simply to locate the size and position of enemy forces, but military planners soon realized their potential for dropping grenades and other deadly objects on enemy forces. However, the use of airplanes in the early 20th century led to a quantum change in war strategy. One result was the expansion of war zones; another was indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

The indiscriminate bombing of civilians was first conducted by German planes against Parisians in August 1914, 11 years after the Wright brothers successfully flew the first aircraft in 1903. By the end of 1914, the Allies were also making serial air raids into German territories. By the time World War I ended in 1918, both sides had conducted indiscriminate bombing, killing or injuring several thousand civilians.

Shortly after World War I, planes from the British Royal Air Force (RAF) were sent to the Middle East to engage in a new type of operation -- the bombing of what an RAF document refers to as "rebels of uncivilized tribes" who refused to submit to British rule. Over several years from 1920 onward, the RAF attacked rebel groups in Iraq - for which Britain was the trustee nation at the time - dropping bombs, including incendiary bombs, on remote villages and tent encampments. The technique of indiscriminate or terror bombing targeting civilians was used throughout the British Empire, including India and South Africa. British administrators commended this use of airpower as "outstandingly effective, extremely economical and undoubtedly humane in the long run."

In the European theater of World War II, indiscriminate bombing -- now termed

"strategic bombing" -- was increasingly used to terrorize civilians as the war intensified. Both the Axis and Allied sides engaged in such bombing, resulting in the mass slaughter of civilians and destruction of cities. The Germans suffered particularly heavy casualties. By the end of the war, 131 German towns and cities had been bombed, and approximately 600,000 German civilians killed by indiscriminate bombing conducted primarily by the British with support from US forces.

The Japanese Imperial Navy engaged in the first indiscriminate bombing in the Asia-Pacific region with a January 1932 attack on civilians in Shanghai. Thereafter, Japanese bombers targeted civilians in Nanjing, Wuhan, Chongqing and other cities. In 1940, the U.S. Government condemned repeated Japanese aerial attacks on Chongqing as inhumane acts of terror.

A few years later, cities on the Japanese mainland became the targets of U.S. air raids. Beginning in March 1945, the U.S. carried out "saturation bombing," repeatedly attacking cities from Hokkaido to Okinawa, including Tokyo, Kawasaki, Osaka, Kobe, Fukuoka and Naha. In total 64 major cities were destroyed by firebombing, causing over one million casualties, including half a million deaths, the vast majority of them civilians.

Indiscriminate bombing reached its peak when mass-killing atomic weapons annihilated two Japanese cities in August 1945. The A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed between 70,000 and 80,000 people in one second, and an estimated 140,000 died by the end of 1945. In Nagasaki, an estimated 70,000 people died by the end of the same year. Tens of thousands of others died subsequently as a result not only of the blast and fire but also radiation, sometimes taking its deadly toll over many years. In his announcement of the bombing, Truman said, "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, in so far as possible, the killing of civilians." On the contrary, as the U.S.

Strategic Bombing Survey stated following Japan's surrender: "The air attack on Japan was directed against the nation as a whole, not only against specific military targets, because of the contribution in numerous ways of the civilian population to the fighting strength of the enemy, and to speed the securing of unconditional surrender." The clear intent, both of the fire bombing and atomic bombing was the terrorizing and killing of civilians and the elimination of Japan's cities.

Since then, indiscriminate bombing has been repeatedly used in the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and more recent wars in Kosovo, Chechen, Afghanistan and Iraq, notably, but not exclusively by the United States as its weapon of choice. In the Korean War, U.S. forces bombed and destroyed two large irrigation dams, causing enormous flood damage and wreaking havoc with North Korea's agricultural economy. In the Vietnam War, in addition to a new type of napalm bomb, cluster bombs, daisy-cutter bombs (so-called earthquake bombs), and agent orange (a chemical defoliant) were widely used. This new bombing strategy resulted not only in killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians, but also inflicted long-term damage on the environment. In recent aerial attacks conducted by the U.S. and British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, many civilians were killed or injured as a result of the bombing of "wrongly identified targets" by "incorrectly programmed smart bombs," or as "collateral damage." Such terror bombing also creates huge numbers of refugees, as seen in Afghanistan where thousands of people fled their homes shortly before the onset of U.S. bombing. Eventually, as a result of more than a decade of fighting, some one million Afghans ended up in refugee camps, while more than four million were forced into exile. Such aerial bombing, which inflicts enormous hardship on vast numbers of civilians, constitutes state terrorism.

U.S. and the British Forces started using munitions, bombs and missiles containing depleted uranium (DU) in the Gulf from 1991.

DU munitions and bombs are mainly used as penetrators on tanks. DU missiles are fired to destroy large buildings and bunkers deep under the ground. When exploded, exposed depleted uranium disperses as dust-like particles in a burning cloud of vapor. Settled dust is chemically poisonous and radioactive. By the end of the Gulf War, 320 tons of DU was dispersed throughout southern Iraq. Since then, thousands of American and British soldiers have developed a strange illness known as the Gulf War Syndrome and some children born after the war also suffering from physical deformities. In southern Iraq, deaths due to cancer and leukemia increased sharply, particularly among children. Many more Iraqi children are suffering from leukemia and various types of cancer as well as physical deformities. The link between such phenomena and the use of DU is strongly suspected. High dosages of radiation have been detected in various parts of Afghanistan, indicating that U.S. and British Forces used DU weapons there, too. An estimated 1,000 to 2,000 tons of DU was used in the recent Iraq War, gravely damaging the health both of Iraqi people and all troops on the ground.

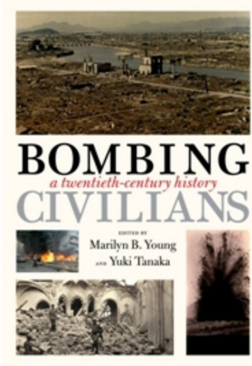
With the widespread use of DU weapons since the Gulf War and the development of super-large bombs including daisy-cutter bombs and mother bombs, the distinction between conventional and nuclear weapons is rapidly eroding. The number of countries seeking to equip themselves with weapons of mass destruction is increasing as nuclear powers like the U.S and Britain attempt to subjugate so-called "rogue nations" by the use of military

might.

"The September 11 Attack" was unquestionably an act of terrorism as it killed thousands of civilians indiscriminately. This act can be seen as a variation on indiscriminate bombing in which civilian planes rather than bombers are commandeered for a suicidal mission. Whether indiscriminate bombing of civilians is carried out by an armed group or by the military forces of a particular nation, it is clearly an act of terrorism.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki typifies two kinds of crimes against humanity -- indiscriminate bombing and mass killing -- which are phenomena common to modern and contemporary warfare as well as terrorist acts such as those of September 11. The Enola Gay, the plane that carried the atomic bombs dropped on civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is among the most powerful symbols of the long history of indiscriminate bombing and the mass killing that it produces. The exhibition of the Enola Gay without any explanation of this historical background will therefore contribute to justifying these crimes against humanity that mankind has suffered for more than a century in various parts of the world. It will also encourage future indiscriminate attack and mass killing, whether committed by military forces or by other violent organizations. Instead, the Enola Gay should be viewed as a reminder of our commitment to strive for universal peace and human fulfillment.

This was prepared on behalf of the Hiroshima Alliance for Nuclear Weapons Abolition (HANWA)



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