

On the Film *Oppenheimer* and the Real Lessons of History

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On August 6 and 9, 1945, the U.S. government dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, committing a crime against humanity the likes of which had never been seen and which has held humanity hostage ever since. This was the climax and end point of the Second World War, and the U.S. war with Japan in particular.

The “**A bomb**,” a blazing, million-degree fireball suddenly appeared just above the Japanese city of Hiroshima, instantly killing, burning alive, or vaporizing tens of thousands of human beings. Firestorms engulfed the city. Shockwaves and winds over 1,000 miles an hour came next, shattering bodies and buildings, and hurling men, women, and children through the air. Nearly all structures were destroyed over a mile from ground zero. Thousands who survived the blast soon experienced fevers, diarrhea, vomiting, hair and skin loss—the death knell of radiation sickness. By the end of 1945, between 140,000 and 150,000 people, **overwhelmingly civilians**, had perished in Hiroshima. Hundreds of thousands more were wounded.

The U.S. had known Japan would collapse without an invasion and that it had been suing for peace weeks before the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. On July 12, 1945, President Harry S. Truman referred in his private diary to a “telegram from Jap emperor asking for peace.” As the film *Oppenheimer* shows, the U.S. was not even picking military targets but choosing to incinerate cities of civilians. No U.S. president has ever apologized for this—including Biden when he went to Hiroshima. They all justify it on the grounds that it “saved the lives of U.S. soldiers.” Leaving aside the bogus character of this justification, which we have just shown, the mass murder of civilians to “save the lives” of combatants is the very definition of a war crime.

The U.S. government under the Democratic presidency of Truman wanted to totally control postwar Japan and to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining more ground in Japanese-held Manchuria and from having more influence in the postwar “balance of power.” The bombing of Hiroshima ended World War 2, but was more designed



Hiroshima, August 6, 1945. Photo: AP

to set the terms for U.S. domination of the postwar world. Hiroshima was to serve as a warning to any who might think about challenging America’s dominance of the postwar world, written in mounds of charred flesh and many tens of thousands of horribly disfigured survivors.

In the post-World War 2 years, the U.S. repeatedly considered and threatened the use of nuclear weapons to enforce its global dominance: In the 1950s, the U.S. planned for possible nuclear war with the Soviet Union, which they calculated would have killed 600 million people, and in 1958, they actively planned to use nuclear weapons in a crisis with China; in 1958, 1973, and 1980, the U.S. put its forces on nuclear alert during Middle East crises in Iraq, Israel, and Iran; in 1969, President Richard Nixon threatened to nuke Vietnam; and before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Pentagon secretly prepared for the possibility of using nuclear weapons. And then there was the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, in which the U.S. threatened nuclear war against Russia if it maintained nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba.

Today the U.S. is waging a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, with the objective of weakening Russia and its ability to challenge the dominance of the U.S.—a war which is dancing dangerously close to the actual use of nuclear weapons in the name of making “tough decisions” so as to inflict a “strategic defeat” on Russia.

Christopher Nolan’s film, which portrays the moral ambiguity of people like Robert Oppenheimer who built

the weapon and ushered in this horrific weapon and war crime—and the nuclear arms race he came to regret—is itself full of unacceptable moral relativism and apologia for what the U.S. did in World War 2. The film never really reckons with the nature of this crime, it doesn't even show what happened in Hiroshima, and continues to propagate this as a “tough but necessary decision” in war where the U.S. was “the good guys” in the “fight of democracy against fascism.”

The actual aims of the U.S. had little to do with “stopping fascism” and almost everything to do with extending domination deeper into Asia and Europe, and gaining control over the world. The U.S. refused throughout the war to allow any but the most minimal number of refugees, including of Jewish people who they knew were being systematically persecuted and rounded up, into the U.S. and thereby helped doom millions to extermination, and they delayed attacking Germany for years until the Nazis had been severely weakened by the Soviet Union.

Here it has to be said that the film more or less accurately portrays the way in which many people who fought for progressive causes and people who called themselves communists embraced enthusiastic support for “their own” imperialists in this war. The support of these communists and “leftists” actually actively assisted and participated in creating weapons that were and are an existential threat to humanity. This political line was a truly grievous error of the movement at the time which had—and continues to have—incalculable political costs. Then, in a bitter irony, once the imperialists had used them fully, these same imperialists then turned around to persecute, blacklist and

jail these people in the McCarthyite witch hunts that took place after World War 2.

What people should draw from this experience and what is covered over in this very ambiguous “history lesson” of a movie is, at a time when the prospects of nuclear war are currently higher than they have been since World War 2, with several imperialist powers with enough nuclear weapons to end the existence of humanity many times over, this essential truth from Bob Avakian, the revolutionary leader, stands out:

We can no longer afford to allow these imperialists to continue to dominate the world and determine the destiny of humanity. And it is a scientific fact that humanity does not have to live this way.

Those seeing this movie should ask if they are similarly being played to support the U.S. as “the good guys” in the current war in Ukraine and how much closer this is bringing the world to the point of the use of these horrific weapons again.

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To learn more about the war crime of Hiroshima and the actual character of the U.S.-Russia proxy war in Ukraine go to **REVOLUTION/REVCOM.US**



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