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Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Albert Camus and the shadow of the mushroom clouds

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On 6 August 1945 at 8.15 a.m. local time, while Japan was still at war with the USA, a uranium bomb exploded over the populous city of Hiroshima, which had hitherto been spared all bombardment so that all destructive effects could be attributed to this one atomic bomb. In the following seconds, weeks and years, it caused about 200 000 deaths. The survivors were marked for life.

Three days later, on 9 August at 11.01a.m. local time, a second US bomb, a plutonium bomb this time, exploded over Nagasaki as a result of a decision taken by four young men in mind-boggling circumstances. **(1)**

Since 13 July 1945, the US President and government had known that Japan was ready to capitulate, providing that two conditions were met (and they were subsequently met) : that they could surrender with honour and that Emperor Hiro-Hito could remain on the throne. But those two bombs were needed to demonstrate the power of the science, technologie, economy, and nation of the United States.

Europe and France were already at peace, freed three months earlier from the Nazi yoke ; and as in the USA, most commentators celebrated the technical and military exploit. Except for Albert Camus, in his editorial for the diary *Combat* :

« We'll sum it up in one sentence: mechanical civilization has just reached its final degree of savagery.

« ... Let's be clear. If the Japanese surrender after the destruction of Hiroshima due to intimidation, we'll be glad of it. But we refuse to draw from such grave news anything other than a determination to plead even more energetically for a real international society, in which great powers will not have rights superior to small or mid-sized ones, and in which war, a scourge that has become definitive through human intelligence alone, will not depend on the appetites or doctrines of this State or that.

« Faced with the terrifying prospects that are opening up before humanity, we see even more clearly than before that peace is the only fight worth waging. This isn't a plea any more, but an order that has to rise up from peoples to governments, the order to choose once and for all between hell and reason."

68 years later, we still live in the shadow of those deadly mushrooms, and Camus's call has still not been heeded or even heard by the men in the French Presidential Palace. **(2)**

Jean-Marie Matagne

(1) See: [The lessons of History: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, an unknown story](#)

(2) Meanwhile, 10 Downing Street is starting to ask serious questions in view of the Scottish referendum on independence in September 2014. Cf. [Time to let Trident rust in Peace, by Iain Macwhirter](#)