

Manhattan Project continues to haunt the world about nuclear destruction

By [K. K. Tan](#) - August 8, 2023 @ 8:29pm



The nuclear power plant Isar in Essenbach near Landshut, southern Germany. - AFP file pic

THE only nuclear deterrence policy which has been universally accepted by all nuclear powers is called "MAD" or mutual assured destruction.

It means that if a nuclear power (initiator) launches nuclear missiles against another nuclear power, the response of nuclear missiles being fired back at the initiator would be so overwhelming that they and the whole world would all die together.

That's why the strategy has been uncannily called "MAD". With grossly overkill stockpiles of high precision and technologically advanced nuclear weapons, the nuclear powers are living in a state of fear and insanity.

Perhaps, the greatest game changer in human history and one that may seal the fate of humanity, is the Manhattan Project, 1942 - 1945, to develop the first atom bomb in the world, with leading US physicist, Dr Robert Oppenheimer, as project director.

The latest Hollywood blockbuster about Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project has stirred an intense debate on the eight billion question - referring to the world's population today - on whether the US government under President Harry Truman made the right decision to use nuclear weapons on Japan to end World War 2.

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I wrote a piece (entitled "Sustaining World Peace") published on Aug 15, 2019 on why the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never be forgotten if we are to avert a nuclear World War 3.

Those in favour on the use of atom bombs argued that it would help to end the war quickly, avoid a costly invasion of Japan and save many more lives from the Allies' forces. It would also prevent the Soviet Union from gaining greater influence over Japan after the war.

Those opposed to the use, believed that it was morally wrong to use atom bombs, especially on civilians as collateral damage. They also felt that a weapons demonstration in a non-inhabited but observable area would have been enough to compel Japan to surrender.

Others, including the loved ones and friends of those who had suffered the brutality and cruelty of the Japanese soldiers, had argued that the atom bombs should have been dropped on Tokyo instead, at the headquarters of the Japanese imperial government and military.

The greatest fears were from many scientists of conscience, including Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein (after the war) on how the use of nuclear weapons could unleash uncontrollable, unthinkable and horrific consequences on humanity.

When Oppenheimer first saw the burst of light followed shortly by the deep growling roar of the explosion for the first time that an atom bomb was tested at a site at Los Alamos in New Mexico on July 16 1945, it dawned upon him that he might have created a mega "monster" of science that had the ability to destroy all of mankind.

As a reader of the Hindu book of Bhagavad Gita, Oppenheimer was known to have said when he witnessed the test: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds".

After the war, Oppenheimer worked tirelessly to ensure the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, peaceful use of nuclear energy and to oppose the development of the much more powerful hydrogen or thermonuclear bomb but he was unsuccessful due to the political and geopolitical agenda of the then US government under Truman.

Due to his left leaning and progressive outlook in arguing for greater transparency to the American people, Oppenheimer himself became a target of a witch hunt by right wing forces during the McCarthy era and he was denied security clearance in 1954 and lost all his positions within the government.

In 1967, he passed away due to throat cancer.

On Dec 16, 2022, US Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm did the right thing in vacating the 1954 revocation of Oppenheimer's security clearance. Her statement said: "In 1954, the Atomic Energy Commission revoked Dr Oppenheimer's security clearance through a flawed process that violated the Commission's own regulations.

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"As time passed, more evidence has come to light of the bias and unfairness of the process that Dr Oppenheimer was subjected to while the evidence of his loyalty and love of country have only been further affirmed."

It is sad that a loyal and upright patriot who happened to be more progressive, peace-loving and accountable and who had devoted his entire life to the advancement of science in developing a nuclear weapon, thinking that it would quickly end World War 2 and save many millions of lives (which seemed to be the case), had been treated so unjustly then.

It is the same forces that was suspected of assassinating their own peace-loving president (John F. Kennedy) in 1963 and his brother Senator Robert Kennedy (a hopeful presidential candidate) in 1968.

If Oppenheimer were still alive today, he would deeply regret his involvement in the Manhattan Project.

After the war, he and some fellow scientists seemed to be at pains in coming to terms on this conclusion.

The world now needs serious peace projects and great leaders to promote sustainable peace, with the mass participation from just and peace-loving people of all countries, to counter the negative consequences of the Manhattan Project.

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