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AT THE END OF 2025 [2025 VÉGÉN]

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Abstract. The author, as the president of the Research Council of Wesley College speak about commemorative programs in 2024–2025 were of special importance for celebrating the Holocaust and the antifascist victory; the series' closing English-language commemoration was held in September 2025. Eighty years have passed since the end of the Second World War; the events marking the war's end included the atomic bombings, the announcement of Japan's capitulation and the Japanese instrument of surrender signed aboard the USS Missouri on September 2, as well as the surrenders to the British in Asia. Although the Asian and European conclusions resembled each other in many respects — for example the formation of Soviet and Anglo Saxon spheres of influence and territorial expansion - there were also significant differences. The turning points of Germany's military collapse occurred in early 1945: the failed German counterattacks in the Ardennes and in the Lake Balaton operations; the mass production of "wonder weapons" proved technically impossible; the possible conflict that might have arisen when Soviet and Anglo Saxon forces met was avoided through cautious political and military measures, with demarcation lines and communication channels established. Germany did indeed collapse militarily. Japan, however, continued to fight, hoping for a compromise or a military solution. In the summer of 1945 the situation did not seem hopeless to Japan because of the size of its forces and its extensive territorial control. The Potsdam ultimatum - demanding Japan's unconditional surrender — was realistic only because the atomic bomb had been completed. Yet even the destruction of Hiroshima did not break Japan. The tragedy of Nagasaki is the sole responsibility of the Japanese fascist elite, since the leadership was prepared even after the nuclear attack to sacrifice further cities to retain power. In 2025 the author warns that the Russian-Ukrainian war could expand into a Russia-NATO conflict, because Russia is provoking Europe with border violations, cyberattacks, and election interference. If European soldiers or civilians die, that is primarily the consequence of Moscow's decisions; responsibility also rests with those who encouraged or weakened Europe's responsive measures. The author highlights the role of civil diplomacy and the Wesley community's solidarity with Ukraine.

Keywords: Memory of the end of WWII, Memory of the Holocaust, relation to the Russian agression of 2020s

The years 2024 and 2025 were of outstanding significance in Wesley College's memory-cultural activity. Every year we consider it a priority to commemorate the Holocaust and the world-shaking victory of the antifascist coalition with events. Because 2024 and 2025 were round anniversaries, our activity included several Hungarian-language events. I closed the series of events in September 2025 — as chair of Wesley's Scientific Council — with the following English-language commemoration.

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Eighty years have passed since the end of the Second World War, and the calendar of memory politics is crowded with events: the August atomic attacks, the debates over capitulation in Japan, the announcement of surrender, and then in September the closing acts of the war — on September 2 the signing of the Japanese instrument of surrender aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, the surrender of the Japanese command in the Philippines, the lifting of Britain's declaration of war against Thailand, and the surrender of Japanese forces in Hong Kong, Malaya, Indonesia, and Indochina to the British.

Although this story in many respects resembles the end of the war in Europe, which is better known in European public consciousness, and its aftermath is similar in many ways — for example, Soviet and Anglo-Saxon spheres of influence were established in Asia as well, and at the expense of the defeated the Soviet Union here too extended its borders (in Europe the Soviet territorial gain is called the Kaliningrad enclave, in Asia the Kuril Islands; unlike some other territorial gains later recognized as belonging to the Soviet Union's successor state Russia [the Baltics, Moldova], these territories have not been lost) — the Asian war ended differently in many significant respects.

This difference, without recalling too many details, perhaps justifies an overview on the eightieth anniversary.

It is known that Germany's fate in military terms was decided when the last large German counterattack in the Ardennes (on Belgian, Luxembourg and German territory) — thwarted in January 1945 primarily thanks to General Patton, but of course also due to Supreme Commander Eisenhower and Bradley — failed. That made clear that the Anglo-Saxon forces could not be driven into the Atlantic by conventional means.

The last major German counterattack, known as the lake Balaton battle, was defeated at the end of March 1945 by the Soviet armies led by Tolbukhin and Malinovsky and their Romanian allies. That made clear that the Soviets could not be pushed back across the left bank of the Danube by conventional means, and that the German army's last oil reserve, southern Transdanubia, could not be defended. Moreover, the battle did not in any way affect the more important part of the eastern front, the Soviet advance across the German-Polish-Russian plain toward the heart of Germany.

Mass production of Germany's "wonder weapons" was already technologically inconceivable. Hitler hoped for retaliatory power in the V-2 rocket attacks on London. He spoke of the V-3 and V-4 as weapons possibly combined with some super-explosive that would destroy all life within a 3–4 km radius; this can be read as hope for a German atomic bomb, but historically — due to Heisenberg's mistakes or, as Teller suggested, deliberate sabotage — that had no real basis. Jet-powered aircraft existed in small numbers, and heavy armored vehicles in a total of only two examples; the former were intended for the western front, the latter for the eastern front as devices to turn the tide of war. Only a prototype was built of a stealth-equipped aircraft capable of climbing to great height (15 km!), while 300 night-vision equipped planes were indeed produced and used — whereas the submachine gun intended to supplement them was in service in roughly a thousand times the number.

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Perhaps more realistic was the German expectation that Soviet and Anglo-Saxon forces, meeting, might come into conflict with each other. This was avoided in the Balkans at the end of 1944: the Soviets did not reach Greece, while the British did not reach Romania; the liberation of western Yugoslavia — perhaps precisely to avoid such a meeting — was left to Tito. The symbolic meeting on the Elbe occurred only at the end of April; before that there was no technical chance for it. German units (on the order of 2.2 million) and their allies would have counted on fighting together — also because of their considerable combat experience — against the six-million Soviet army in the event of a Soviet-American clash. Soviet and American politicians and commanders, however, had prepared appropriately for this risk: they pre-designated demarcation lines and opened radio channels between commands that would reach the potential conflict zone. On April 25 American reconnaissance forces tried to cross the Elbe; the Soviets prevented this at the cost of wounding a single American soldier, and no further "accidents" occurred.

On May 2 British units arriving from Lübeck and units of the Belarus Front met at the port of Wismar, but no conflict occurred; on May 4–5 they reached the Enns River in Austria from two directions. The planning of the latter operation particularly shows that avoiding confrontation was a political and military priority, even though on April 30 Hitler committed suicide, which formally increased the probability that Germany might coordinate with the Anglo-Saxons against the Soviets, since command effectively passed into military hands.

All this is relevant to the memory-political problem of the Japanese–American conflict because the Germans, even if not realistically, could hold out a small chance that the war would not end solely according to the hopeless German versus Soviet/Anglo-Saxon balance of forces, but rather that some global political rearrangement would precede the end of hostilities.

Japan, however, remained an actively fighting party after Germany's capitulation, hoping for a *military* solution — if not victory, then at least a compromise peace.

After Germany's surrender on 8 May 1945, Japan's 4.2-million army faced 1.8 million American troops, clearly not without hope. The Soviets began redeploying their European army in early June 1945; by 20 July some 1.4 million soldiers had arrived at the Mongolian–Chinese border, but no more. The Americans were able to increase their Pacific presence by 0.1 million. The British did not begin to reinforce their Asian forces at all.

As the above troop figures show, the situation of the Japanese army in the summer of 1945 was not hopeless even in the event of Soviet entry into the war.

All available information indicated that there was no serious problem with the morale of the Japanese army and population; the 7.4 million square kilometers under Japanese control (one and a half times the largest territory controlled by Nazi Germany) and its 350 million human resources pushed the war's end into an unforeseeable distance.

The direct military realities therefore did not justify the July 26 Potsdam declaration by the United States, the United Kingdom and China calling on Japan to surrender unconditionally.

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Toppling Japan into chaos by bombing was not realistic either, since history's largest bombing raid — the March 9 attack on Tokyo, which amounted to 1.6 kilotons of bombs, produced a firestorm that caused one hundred thousand Japanese deaths and left one million homeless — had already occurred. The Japanese government's position had not been shaken, nor had its determination to continue the war diminished.

The only reason that July's ultimatum made sense was that, ten days earlier, the successful New Mexico atomic detonation could be used to threaten Japan with "prompt and utter destruction."

The New Mexico atomic detonation had a yield of twenty kilotons, so a single bomb represented twelve times the destructive power of the great Tokyo raid, which had required 334 American bombers to deliver.

Those figures alone justified the first use of the atomic bomb — the war simply seemed unwinnable by conventional means.

Hiroshima's symbolic tragedy — regarded by many as the "beginning of the atomic age" — therefore actually spared millions of American and Japanese lives (a large proportion of the Japanese casualties would otherwise have been civilians), and a Soviet–Japanese war unfolding on Chinese territory without atomic attacks would likewise have led to millions of casualties. Before American troops landed on Japanese soil or the Soviets reached Chinese coasts suitable for approaching Japan, the Japanese army would have used Chinese, Indonesian, Korean and other cities as fortresses and human shields, costing millions of civilian lives and wiping out the basic conditions of life for many tens of millions of people. For a landing operation the Japanese army had trained millions of city residents, armed with bamboo weapons, for suicidal, kamikaze-style resistance.

Following the Hiroshima attack at 8:15 a.m. on 6 August (Japanese time), the afternoon Tokyo cabinet meeting concentrated mainly on preventing the population from learning that a nuclear strike had occurred. On the morning of the 7th, taking advantage of the still-existing Soviet-Japanese neutrality, Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori sent a secret telegram to Moscow asking the Soviet Union to mediate for a relaxation of the Potsdam terms — in particular to guarantee the inviolability of the "symbolic institution of the emperor".

The Tokyo cabinet sitting on the afternoon of the 7th expected a Soviet declaration of war the next day, but proponents of unconditional surrender remained in the minority. The Soviet declaration of war on the morning of the 8th did not change the situation, and after eight in the evening Tokyo radio continued to urge endurance, with no sign of a shift in position. At one o'clock on the morning of the 9th the Japanese foreign ministry, via Switzerland, sent another telegram to the Americans seeking further negotiation.

That morning's sequence was followed by the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Even after that, the hardliners in the Japanese government did not want to surrender, but by the 12th the emperor had already inclined toward capitulation, apparently to avoid a third atomic bomb (which, according to the Americans' secret schedule, would have been used on the 19th). At noon on the 15th Emperor Hirohito delivered a radio address



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announcing Japan's unconditional surrender, citing the destructive power of "an extraordinary new weapon."

It is therefore clear that the Japanese political-military elite did not accept unconditional surrender after the first atomic bomb. The military leadership's "resolve" was not even shaken by the knowledge that, apart from the Chinese fighting, a Soviet expeditionary force had already been formed at the port of Vladivostok prepared to occupy at least part of Japan.

The story shows that Japan's autocratic system — backed by controlled mass communications and a fanaticized population — after Hiroshima was prepared to sacrifice another major city purely to preserve its political system.

Hiroshima was destroyed by the Japanese–American war. The victims of Hiroshima are as innocent as the civilians killed in European cities during the Second World War, perhaps no different even from the few thousand French civilians who fell in the path of the frontal German advance in the First World War.

Nagasaki, however, was destroyed by the unprecedented selfishness of the Japanese fascist elite.

In the summer of 2025, when the forces of the free world (however reluctantly) again face off against empires of Evil, it is worth keeping this distinction in mind.

We should remember this 1945 historical episode more than, say, the 1350 Battle of Puglia for the following reason. The difference matters because it cannot be ruled out that the Russian-Ukrainian war will develop into a conflict between Russia and NATO.

This is not because anyone favors war, but because

- a) Russia probes how far it can go by violating the borders of NATO countries, waging cyberwarfare, and interfering in elections, and it is possible that one day it will receive a response so severe that it will regret it.
- b) For military reasons, Europe cannot and should not be defended from the outskirts of Warsaw or Iaşi, but rather somewhere in central Ukraine, so it is quite possible that the states directly threatened will sooner or later send troops to help Ukraine. (Viktor Orbán might veto NATO intervention, but Poland and Romania cannot be stopped from entering a war.)

Such a development could indeed have consequences beyond material losses: it could mean the deaths of European Union citizens — soldiers and civilians alike. Many find this unthinkable or unacceptable, forgetting that in recent decades numerous soldiers died defending European nation states' interests in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, and many European civilians died in Europe in terrorist attacks linked to Europe's defense of its interests outside Europe. Naturally, those wars and their European victims often sparked significant antiwar resistance within European societies. However: Europe's exclusion from handling affairs in Indochina, North Africa, or the Congo basin obviously harmed French, British, Belgian, etc. economic and political interests, but it did not threaten Viet Cong fighters or Angolan guerrillas with the disruption of the way of life or civil liberties of Europeans; by contrast, defending Ukraine is a defensive struggle of European civilization itself.



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There will still be people who blame the European governments that intervened more intensely in the Russian-Ukrainian war for any European casualties. Those well-meaning humanitarians and pacifists should be warned that

- a) if Europeans happen to die on the Russian-Ukrainian front, they will die for their own country's freedom just as surely as the English, French, and Belgians who died in 1939 did not die for Polish freedom alone. (And although there were contemporaries who opposed these countries' entry into that war, no serious school of historical thought today condemns that decision; disagreements in historiography concern only whether the opponents of the anti-German war were naive fools or Nazi agents.)
- b) the responsibility for those deaths will lie solely with the Russians, because they chose to settle their dispute with Ukraine by means of war, they began interfering in European elections, they began violating European airspace, and so on.

Not solely the Russians will be held responsible: those who encouraged Moscow's chief warlord with threats of Brussels vetoes will also bear blame. Today's leaders in Moscow would do well to remember that Laval, the French prime minister who collaborated with the Germans, was hanged, and even Marshal Pétain (a First World War hero) spent the rest of his life imprisoned.

At the end of the present war there will likewise be no shortage of prosecutors eager to try Europe's traitors.

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Absztrakt. A szerző, mint a Wesley János Lelkészképző Főiskola Tudományos Tanácsának elnöke arról beszél, hogy a 2024–2025-ös megemlékezési programok különleges jelentőséggel bírtak a holokauszt és az antifasiszta győzelem ünneplése szempontjából; a sorozat záró, angol nyelvű megemlékezését 2025 szeptemberében tartották. Nyolcvan év telt el a második világháború befejezése óta; a háború végét jelző események között szerepelt az atomtámadás, Japán kapitulációjának bejelentése és a japán fegyverletétel hivatalos aláírása a USS Missouri fedélzetén szeptember 2-án, valamint Ázsiában a britek előtt történő kapitulációk.

Bár az ázsiai és európai háború-zárások sok szempontból hasonlítottak egymásra – például a szovjet és az angolszász érdekszférák kialakulása és a szovjet területi terjeszkedés –, jelentős különbségek is voltak. Németország katonai összeomlásának fordulópontjai 1945 elején következtek be: az Ardennekben és a Balaton-menti hadműveletekben elszenvedett sikertelen német ellentámadások; a "csodafegyverek" tömeggyártása technikailag lehetetlennek bizonyult; az esetleges konfliktust, amely a szovjet és angolszász erők találkozásakor merült volna fel, óvatos politikai és katonai intézkedésekkel, demarkációs vonalak és kommunikációs csatornák kialakításával kerülték el. Németország valóban katonailag összeomlott.

Japán azonban tovább harcolt, kompromisszumos vagy katonai megoldásban reménykedve. 1945 nyarán a helyzet a japán erők nagysága és kiterjedt területi ellenőrzése miatt nem tűnt reménytelennek a számukra. A potsdami ultimátum – amely Japán feltétel nélküli megadását követelte – csak az atombombagyártás elért eredményei miatt volt reális. Ám még Hirosima pusztulása sem törte meg Japánt. Nagaszaki tragédiája kizárólag a japán fasiszta elitet terheli, mivel a vezetés a nukleáris támadás után is kész volt további városokat feláldozni a hatalom megtartásáért.

2025-ben a szerző arra figyelmeztet, hogy az orosz-ukrán háború Oroszország-NATO konfliktussá terjedhet, mert Oroszország határsértésekkel, kibertámadásokkal és választási beavatkozással provokálja Európát. Ha európai katonák vagy civilek halnak meg, az elsősorban Moszkva döntéseinek a következménye; a felelősség azokat is terheli, akik bátorították vagy gyengítették Európa válaszlépéseit. A szerző kiemeli a civil diplomácia és a Wesley közösség Ukrajnával vállalt szolidaritásának szerepét.



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