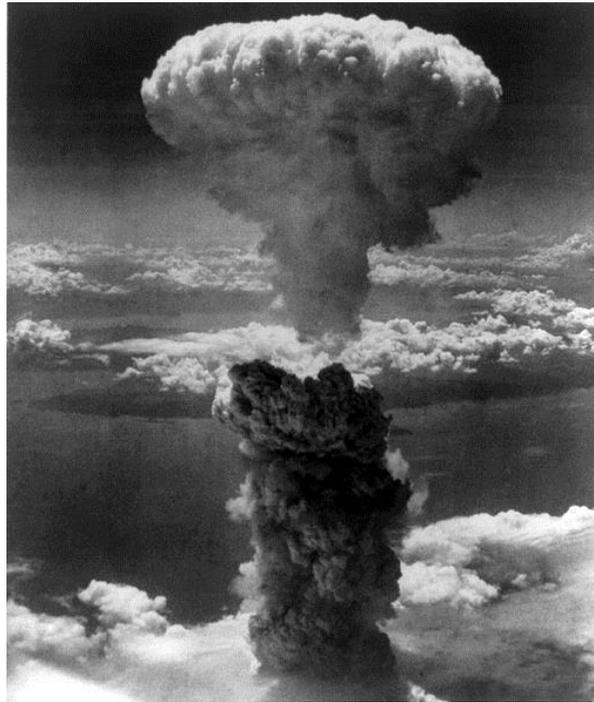


Document Based Question



Should Truman have dropped the bomb?

It is 1945. You are a top advisor to President Truman and a close, personal friend. He values your opinion and wants to know what you think about using atomic bombs to try to end the war with Japan. You are to write President Truman a Letter supporting or rejecting the use of atomic bombs. Because you are an intelligent, well-read individual, you should have at least four reasons (using the documents provided) to support your argument as well as any background knowledge.

Should President Truman have decided to, or not to, drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? If so, what was Truman's rationale? If not, how else could World War II have ended?

Historical Background:

With the advent of the nuclear age, new dilemmas in the art of warfare arose. The war in Europe had concluded in May. The Pacific war would receive full attention from the United States War Department. As late as May 1945, the U.S. was engaged in heavy fighting with the Japanese at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. In these most bloody conflicts, the United States had sustained more than 75,000 casualties. These victories insured the United States was within air striking distance of the Japanese mainland. The bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese to initiate United States entrance into the war, just four years before, was still fresh on the minds of many Americans. A feeling of vindication and a desire to end the war strengthened the resolve of the United States to quickly and decisively conclude it. President Harry Truman had many alternatives at his disposal for ending the war: invade the Japanese mainland, hold a demonstration of the destructive power of the atomic bomb for Japanese dignitaries, drop an atomic bomb on selected industrial Japanese cities, bomb and blockade the islands, wait for Soviet entry into the war on August 15, or mediate a compromised peace. Operation Olympia, a full scale landing of United States armed forces, was already planned for Kyushu on November 1, 1945 and a bomb and blockade plan had already been instituted over the Japanese mainland for several months.

The Japanese resolve to fight had been seriously hampered in the preceding months. Their losses at Iwo Jima and Okinawa had been staggering. Their navy had ceased to exist as an effective fighting force and the air corps had been decimated. American B-29's made bombing runs over military targets on the Japanese mainland an integral part of their air campaign. Japan's lack of air power hindered their ability to fight. The imprecision of bombing and the use of devastating city bombing in Europe eventually swayed United States Pacific theater military leaders to authorize bombing of Japanese mainland cities. Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe all were decimated by incendiary and other bombs. In all, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed in these air strikes meant to deter the resolve of the Japanese people. Yet, Japanese resolve stayed strong and the idea of a bloody "house to house" invasion of the Japanese mainland would produce thousands more American and Allied casualties. The Allies in late July 1945 declared at Potsdam that the Japanese must unconditionally surrender.

After Japanese leaders flatly rejected the Potsdam Declaration, President Truman authorized use of the atomic bomb any time after August 3, 1945. On the clear morning of August 6, the first atomic bomb, nicknamed Little Boy, was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Leveling over 60 percent of the city, 70,000 residents died instantaneously in a searing flash of heat. Three days later, on August 9, a second bomb, Fat Man, was dropped on Nagasaki. Over 20,000 people died instantly. In the successive weeks, thousands more Japanese died from the after effects of the radiation exposure of the blast.

Vocabulary:

Incendiary bomb: a bomb that uses explosives to create fire to burn buildings. Tokyo and many other Japanese cities had been bomb by these weapons for one year prior to the Atomic bombs.

Unconditional surrender: the loser of a conflict will make no demands after their defeat.

Providence: guided by a higher force or God.

Ultimatum: a demand whose fulfillment is requested within a specific period of time.

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SOURCE 1: PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S ADDRESS

Vocabulary:

- *Infamy: an extremely shameful action.*
- *Solicitation: being asked to do something.*
- *Deliberately: on purpose.*

Document Note: On December 7, 1941 the Empire of Japan began an air assault on the United States when it bombed the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Over 3,500 Americans died, 350 aircraft were destroyed and 8 ships were sunk or badly damaged. The Americans were given no warning of the attack. This excerpt is President Roosevelt address to the nation the day after the attack.

Document:

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our secretary of state a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

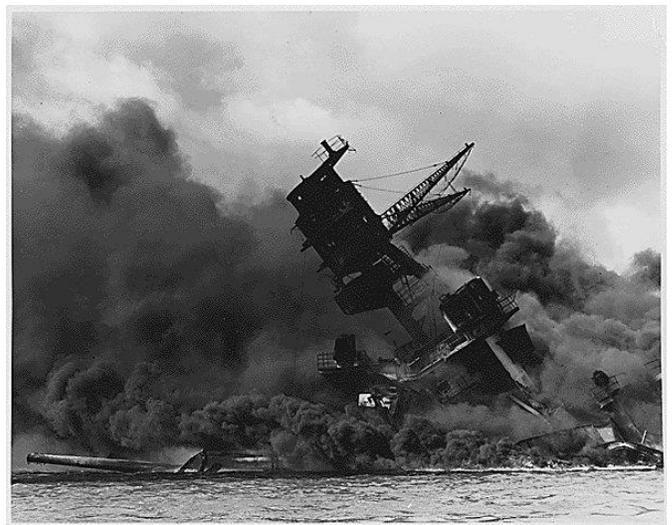
It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu."

-President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's address to the American People on December 8th, 1941

SOURCE 1B: IMAGES OF ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

Photo # NH 86118 USS Shaw explodes during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941



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PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT DOCUMENTS 1A & 1B.

1. What sorts of emotions would an American newspaper reader feel towards Japanese after viewing these images the day after the bombing?
2. Does President Roosevelt seem surprised at the attack on Pearl Harbor? Use a quote from the document to support your answer.
3. How do you think that President Roosevelt want American citizens to react to the attack?
4. How might the memory of Pearl Harbor affect President's Truman's opinion on whether or not we should drop the bomb?

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SOURCE 2: BATAAN DEATH MARCH

Document Note:

Bataan Death March: The conditions the American soldiers encountered and the aftermath of the battle were unique. They fought in a malaria-infested region, surviving on half or quarter rations with little or no medical help. They fought with outdated equipment and virtually no air power.

On April 9, 1942, tens of thousands of American and Filipino soldiers were surrendered to Japanese forces. The Americans were Army, Army Air Corps, Navy and Marines. Among those seized were members of the 200th Coast Artillery, New Mexico National Guard.

They were marched for days in the scorching heat through the Philippine jungles. Thousands died. Those who survived faced the hardships of a prisoner of war camp. Others were wounded or killed when unmarked enemy ships transporting prisoners of war to Japan were sunk by U.S. air and naval forces.



Source Photos: Taken during the March of Death from Bataan to the prison camp march at Cabanatuan. National Park Service

Document Note: Bataandeathmarch.org.

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SOURCE 3: PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S PRESS RELEASE

Vocabulary

- Potsdam: The Potsdam conference was held May 8, 1945 after Germany had surrendered. Truman, Stalin and Churchill discussed how the post war world would be governed and when Russia would get involved in Japan.
- Ultimatum: a demand whose fulfillment is requested within a specific period of time.

"...The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development..."

...We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war.

It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such number that and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware...."

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The Secretary of War, who has kept in personal touch with all phases of the project, will immediately make public a statement giving further details.

His statement will give facts concerning the sites at Oak Ridge near Knoxville, Tennessee, and at Richland near Pasco, Washington, and an installation near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Although the workers at the sites have been making materials to be used in producing the greatest destructive force in history they have not themselves been in danger beyond that of many other occupations, for the utmost care has been taken of their safety.

The fact that we can release atomic energy ushers in a new era in man's understanding of nature's forces. Atomic energy may in the future supplement the power that now comes from coal, oil, and falling water, but at present it cannot be produced on a basis to compete with them commercially. Before that comes there must be a long period of intensive research.

It has never been the habit of the scientists of this country or the policy of this Government to withhold from the world scientific knowledge. Normally, therefore, everything about the work with atomic energy would be made public.

But under present circumstances it is not intended to divulge the technical processes of production or all the military applications, pending further examination of possible methods of protecting us and the rest of the world from the danger of sudden destruction.

I shall recommend that the Congress of the United States consider promptly the establishment of an appropriate commission to control the production and use of atomic power within the United States. I shall give further consideration and make further recommendations to the Congress as to how atomic power can become a powerful and forceful influence towards the maintenance of world peace.

- 3 -

HARRY S TRUMAN LIBRARY
Papers of:
Eben A. Ayers

Source: The Truman library: www.trumanlibrary.org

Source: www.pbs.org The American Experience.

Should President Truman have decided to, or not to, drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? If so, what was Truman's rationale? If not, how else could World War II have ended?

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT DOCUMENT 3.

1. What does President Truman say the purpose of the bomb is? What is its main objective to destroy?
2. What "utter destruction" at Potsdam is President Truman referring to?
3. If Japan does not submit to surrender after the air attack, what will be the next action for the United States?

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SOURCE 4: A HISTORIAN'S ACCOUNT

Vocabulary

- *Mediate*: to help decide an outcome.
- *Lenient*: easier, softer.
- *Congenial*: convenient to believe.
- *Manchuria*: Part of Asia that Japan had invaded during World War II and once was part of Russia

Document Note: Ward Wilson is a contributing historian to the Belfer Center at Harvard University. He works as a historian who has studied the dropping of the atomic bomb.

“In the summer of 1945, Japan’s leaders had two strategies for negotiating an end to World War II: to convince the Soviets (neutral at the time) to mediate, or to fight one last decisive battle that would inflict so many casualties that the United States would agree to more lenient terms. Both plans could still have succeeded after the bombing of Hiroshima; neither plan was possible once the Soviets invaded. From the Japanese perspective, the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and other Japanese-held territory was the event that dramatically changed the strategic landscape and left Japan with no option but to surrender unconditionally. The Hiroshima bombing was simply an extension of an already fierce bombing campaign.

Once they had surrendered, Japan’s leaders had strong reasons for misleading their people (and historians) about the role the atomic bomb played in their decision. Who could blame them, after all, if they had lost the war not because they were not brave enough or smart enough, but because they failed to anticipate an unimaginable scientific breakthrough? Similarly, the United States had considerations of national prestige of its own that made the belief that the bomb was decisively congenial.”

Source: Wilson, Ward. "The Winning Weapon? Rethinking Nuclear Weapons in Light of Hiroshima." *International Security* 31, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 162-179.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT DOCUMENT 4.

1. What does Dr. Wilson suggest that the real motive behind the Japanese’s unconditional surrender was? Was it directly caused by the bomb?

2. Why would it be in the best interest of the United States to not consider the possibility that the Russian invasion triggered Japan’s unconditional surrender?

Should President Truman have decided to, or not to, drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? If so, what was Truman's rationale? If not, how else could have World War II ended?

SOURCE 6B: HIROSHIMA AFTER THE ATTACK



Source: National Archives.

Should President Truman have decided to, or not to, drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? If so, what was Truman's rationale? If not, how else could World War II have ended?

SOURCE 7: LEO SZILARD PETITION TO PRESIDENT TRUMAN

Vocabulary

- *Precedent: Example*

Document Note: The Szilárd petition, drafted by scientist Leó Szilárd, was signed by 155 scientists working on the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and the Metallurgical Lab in Chicago, Illinois. It was circulated in July 1945 and asked President Harry S. Truman to consider an observed demonstration of the power of the atomic bomb first, before using it against people. However, the petition never made it through the chain of command to President Truman. It also was not declassified and made public until 1961.

...The development of atomic power will provide the nations with new means of destruction. The atomic bombs at our disposal represent only the first step in this direction, and there is almost no limit to the destructive power which will become available in the course of their future development. Thus a nation which sets the precedent of using these newly liberated forces of nature for purposes of destruction may have to bear the responsibility of opening the door to an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale.

If after this war a situation is allowed to develop in the world which permits rival powers to be in uncontrolled possession of these new means of destruction, the cities of the United States as well as the cities of other nations will be in continuous danger of sudden annihilation. All the resources of the United States, moral and material, may have to be mobilized to prevent the advent of such a world situation. Its prevention is at present the solemn responsibility of the United States -- singled out by virtue of her lead in the field of atomic power...

In view of the foregoing, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition: first, that you exercise your power as Commander-in-Chief, to rule that the United States shall not resort to the use of atomic bombs in this war unless the terms which will be imposed upon Japan have been made public in detail and Japan knowing these terms has refused to surrender; second, that in such an event the question whether or not to use atomic bombs be decided by you in light of the considerations presented in this petition as well as all the other moral responsibilities which are involved.

-Leo Szilard and 69 co-signers

Source: Szilard to Frank Oppenheimer, July 23, 1945, Robert Oppenheimer Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

