

Dropping the Atomic Bomb DBQ

Historical Context:

By August 1945, Nazi Germany had surrendered and Japan's empire in the Pacific had been smashed. Scientists in New Mexico had successfully tested a powerful new weapon—an atomic bomb—to further strengthen the country's arsenal. President Harry Truman made the decision to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and a second one on Nagasaki to end the war without an Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands. Since that time, there has been considerable debate as to whether dropping the atomic bombs was a military necessity.

Question:

Utilizing all documents, analyze the arguments for and against dropping the atomic bomb on Japan, and evaluate whether Truman was justified in his decision.

Directions:

- Keep in mind:
 - Answer the question using the documents included in this packet.
 - Write the essay in third person.
 - Cite documents by name and parenthetical reference: (Doc 1) or (Author's name)
 - BE AS DETAILED AS POSSIBLE. *For example, if you are stating that the atomic bomb was necessary, make sure you are referring to specific documents/authors and analyzing what their specific opinions/perspectives were.*
- Formatting:
 - Introduction (thesis)
 - Body
 - Arguments for
 - Arguments against
 - Evaluation
 - Conclusion

Document 1

Radio address by President Harry S. Truman (August 1945):

Having found the bomb, we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands of young Americans.

We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan's power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us.

Document 2

Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson in his memoirs, *The Decision to Use the Bomb* (1947):

As we understood it in July, there was a very strong possibility that the Japanese government might determine upon resistance to the end, in all the areas of the Far East under its control. In such an event the Allies would be faced with the enormous task of destroying an armed force of five million men and five thousand suicide aircraft, belonging to a race, which has already amply demonstrated its ability to fight literally to the death.

The strategic plans of our armed forces for the defeat of Japan, as they stood in July, had been prepared without reliance upon the atomic bomb, which had not yet been tested in New Mexico. We were planning an intensified sea and air blockade, and greatly intensified strategic air bombing, through the summer and early fall, to be followed on November 1 by an invasion of the southern island of Kyushu. This would be followed in turn by an invasion of the main island of Honshu in the spring of 1946. The total U.S. military and naval force involved in this grand design was of the order of 5,000,000 men; if all those indirectly concerned are included, it was larger still.

We estimated that if we should be forced to carry this plan to its conclusion, the major fighting would not end until the latter part of 1946, at the earliest. I was informed that such operations might be expected to cost over a million casualties to American forces alone.

Document 3

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's recollections of news received during the July 1945 Potsdam Conference (1953)

On July 17 world-shaking news had arrived. . .

The atomic bomb is a reality. . . Here then was a speedy end to the Second World War, and perhaps to much else besides. . . Up to this moment we had shaped our ideas towards an assault upon the homeland of Japan by terrific air bombing and by the invasion of very large armies. . .

Now all this nightmare picture had vanished. In its place was the vision—fair and bright indeed it seemed—of the end of the whole war in one or two violent shocks. . .

Moreover, we should not need the Russians. The end of the Japanese war no longer depended upon the pouring in of their armies for the final and perhaps protracted slaughter. We had no need to ask favors of them. A few days later I mentioned to Mr. Eden: "It is quite clear that the United States do not at the present time desire Russian participation in" the war against Japan." The array of European problems could therefore be faced on their merits and according to the broad principles of the United Nations. We seemed suddenly to have become possessed of a merciful abridgment of the slaughter in the East and of a far happier prospect in Europe. I have no doubt that these thoughts were present in the minds of my American friends

Document 4

Admiral William E. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff, in his memoirs *I Was There* (1950):

It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender.

My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was taught not to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying woman and children.

Document 5

Memoirs of General H.H. Arnold, Commander of the American Air Force in the Second World War (1949):

The Surrender of Japan was not entirely the result of the two atomic bombs. We had hit some 60 Japanese cities with our regular H.E. [high explosive] and incendiary bombs and, as a result of our raids, about 241,000 people had been killed, 313,000 wounded, and about 2,333,000 homes destroyed. Our B-29s had destroyed most of the Japanese industries and, with the laying of mines, which prevented the arrival of incoming cargoes of critical items, had made it impossible for Japan to carry on a large-scale war...Accordingly, it always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse.

Document 6

Memorandum by Ralph A. Bard, Undersecretary of the Navy, to Secretary of War Stimson (June 27, 1945):

Ever since I have been in touch with this program I have had a feeling that before the bomb is actually used against Japan that Japan should have some preliminary warning for say two or three days in advance of use. The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible in the main for this feeling.

During recent weeks I have also had the feeling very definitely that the Japanese government may be searching for some opportunity which they could use as a medium of surrender...together with whatever assurances the President might care to make with regard to the Emperor of Japan and the treatment of the Japanese nation following unconditional surrender. It seems quite possible to me that this presents the opportunity which the Japanese are looking for.

I do not believe under present circumstances existing that there is anyone in this country whose evaluation of the chances of the success of such a program is worth a great deal. The only way to find out is to try it out.