
Item Information

Item Code: TU01E0308 Passage Title:

Standard Code: US.69 Passage Code: Position No: 65

Standard Text: Write an opinion piece evaluating the Manhattan Project, including the rationale for using the atomic bomb to end the war.

Reporting Category: US Policy between the Wars, World War II, and the Cold War

SEP: CCC:

Correct Answer: DOK Level: 3 Item Type: O

Analyze President Harry S. Truman’s decision to use the atomic bomb in World War II.

- How did President Truman justify the use of the bomb?
- What were the results of its use?
- How was this action different from other actions of war?

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Use evidence from the sources and your knowledge of history to support your answer.

Source 1

There is probably no more controversial issue in 20th-century American history than President Harry S. Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. Many historians argue that it was necessary to end the war and that in fact it saved lives, both Japanese and American, by avoiding a land invasion of Japan that might have cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Other historians argue that Japan would have surrendered even without the use of the atomic bomb and that in fact Truman and his advisors used the bomb only in an effort to intimidate the Soviet Union. The United States did know from intercepted messages between Tokyo and Moscow that the Japanese were seeking a *conditional* surrender. American policy-makers, however, were not inclined to accept a Japanese "surrender" that left its military dictatorship intact and even possibly allowed it to retain some of its wartime conquests. Further, American leaders were anxious to end the war as soon as possible. It is important to remember that July–August 1945 was no bloodless period of negotiation. In fact, there were still no overt negotiations at all. The United States continued to suffer casualties in late July and early August 1945. . . . The people of Japan, however, were suffering far more by this time. Air raids and naval bombardment of Japan were a daily occurrence, and the first signs of starvation were already beginning to show.

Alternatives to dropping the atomic bomb on a Japanese city were many, but few military or political planners thought they would bring about the desired outcome, at least not quickly. They believed the shock of a rapid series of bombings had the best chance of working. . . .

The only alternative to the atomic bomb that Truman and his advisors felt was certain to lead to a Japanese surrender was an invasion of the Japanese home islands. . . . No one knew how many lives would be lost in an invasion, American, Allied, and Japanese, but the recent seizure of the island of Okinawa . . . had taken over ten weeks.

— U.S. Department of Energy

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Source 2

Historian J. Samuel Walker notes five reasons why Truman chose to use the bomb.

Ending the war at the earliest possible moment — The primary objective for the U.S. was to win the war at the lowest possible cost.

To justify the cost of the Manhattan Project

To impress the Soviets — With the end of the war nearing, the Soviets were an important strategic consideration. . . . This idea is thought to be more appropriately understood as an ancillary benefit of dropping the bomb and not so much its sole purpose.

A lack of incentives not to use the bomb

Responding to Pearl Harbor — When a general raised objections to the use of the bombs, Truman responded by noting the atrocities of Pearl Harbor.

— Center for Strategic and International Studies

Source 3

The following are excerpts from President Truman's diary and papers that have relevance to the atomic bombing of Japan.

6/17/45 Diary Entry: I have to decide Japanese strategy — shall we invade Japan proper or shall we bomb and blockade? That is my hardest decision to date. But I'll make it when I have all the facts. . . .

7/18/45 Diary Entry: (at Potsdam) P.M. [*Prime Minister Winston Churchill*] & I ate alone. Discussed Manhattan [*atomic bomb*] (it is a success). Decided to tell Stalin about it. Stalin had told P.M. of telegram from [Japanese] Emperor asking for peace. Stalin also read his answer to me. It was satisfactory. Believe [Japanese] will fold up before Russia comes in. I am sure they will when Manhattan appears over their homeland. I shall inform Stalin about it at an opportune time. . . .

7/25/45 Diary Entry: We met at 11 A.M. today. That is Stalin, Churchill and the U.S. President. But I had a most important session with Lord Mountbatten & General Marshall before then. We have discovered the most

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terrible bomb in the history of the world. . . .

Anyway we 'think' we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexican desert was startling — to put it mildly. Thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower 60 feet high, created a crater 6 feet deep and 1,200 feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower 1/2 mile away and knocked men down 10,000 yards away. The explosion was visible for more than 200 miles and audible for 40 miles and more.

The weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. I have told the Sec. of War, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. . . . We as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old capital or the new [*Kyoto or Tokyo*]. He [*Stimson*] and I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement. . . .

8/9/45 Letter to Senator Richard Russell: I am not going to do it until it is absolutely necessary. . . . My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a humane feeling for the women and children in Japan.

8/10/45 Diary Entry: Ate lunch at my desk and discussed the [Japanese] offer to surrender which came in a couple of hours earlier. They wanted to make a condition precedent to the surrender. Our terms are 'unconditional'. They wanted to keep the Emperor. We told 'em we'd tell 'em how to keep him, but we'd make the terms.

8/11/45 Letter to the Federal Council of Churches: Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them.

8/14/45: Japan accepted the surrender terms.

— President Harry S. Truman Library

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