

→ Mark your confusion.

→ Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)

→ Write a 250+ word response to the article.

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The Hiroshima bombing: What you need to know about the nuclear attack

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff, 06.02.16

This article mentions President Obama's trip to Hiroshima, which took place in the summer of 2016. This visit is the topic of another article later on in this text set.

HIROSHIMA, Japan — President Barack Obama will go to Hiroshima, Japan, on Friday, becoming the only sitting U.S. president to visit the first city targeted for a nuclear attack.

The details of Obama's trip have yet to be revealed, but Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes said that the president would visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial to lay a wreath, tour the memorial grounds and "deliver a statement reflecting upon what his impressions are." Obama will be accompanied by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Many Hiroshima residents hope Obama's visit will rekindle global interest in nuclear disarmament — a topic Obama addressed in a major speech in Prague, the Czech capital, in 2009. More than 70 years have passed since a U.S. B-29 plane dropped the atomic bomb known as Little Boy on the city on Aug. 6, 1945, in the closing days of World War II. Another nuclear bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki on Aug. 9.

Here is a look at the Hiroshima bombing and its effects:

Question: How many people died in the bombing and how many were exposed to radiation?

Answer: About 350,000 residents and military members were living in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing. Thousands were killed instantly. By December 1945, about 140,000 people in Hiroshima are believed to have died from intense radiation and other immediate results of the blast, such as fires.

More than 6,000 of the dead were junior high school students. They had been mobilized that Monday morning by Japan's government to clear fire breaks in the city because authorities feared Hiroshima was going to be bombed with traditional weapons. Many other Japanese cities had been bombed in the previous months.

Among the dead were a dozen U.S. prisoners of war who were being held in Hiroshima. About 20,000 Koreans who were brought to the city as forced laborers died as well.

Q. What kind of bomb did the United States drop on Hiroshima, and where did it land?

A. Little Boy was a uranium bomb packed with about 110 pounds of fissile material. As it turned out, less than 2 pounds of that material actually underwent fission. The bomb never hit the ground. It exploded about 2,000 feet above the city — a height intended to cause the most damage. Ironically, the Yagi antenna used to achieve this midair detonation was designed and patented by a Japanese inventor.

Little Boy detonated above a hospital, about 1,000 feet from the Aioi Bridge, the aiming point. The force of the blast was equal to about 16,000 tons of traditional explosives.

Q. How far did the damage extend?

A. More than 90 percent of Hiroshima's buildings were destroyed or damaged beyond repair. Intense heat rays from the fireball extended more than two miles from where the bomb exploded, or the "hypocenter." Almost everyone within three-quarters of a mile perished. Only a few concrete and stone buildings were left standing.

Temperatures at the explosion altitude reached 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit. On the ground, railroad ties burst into flames, glass bottles melted and roof tiles bubbled. Windows more than 16 miles away were

broken. After the initial blast, the air pressure at the epicenter dropped sharply, creating a strong reverse wind. About half an hour after the blast, a sooty radioactive “black rain” began to fall. Those who survived the bombing were parched and drank this contaminated rain.

Fires burned for three days after the detonation. One of the few buildings near the epicenter to survive was the Bank of Japan building, which was about 1,200 feet from the hypocenter. It reopened within days.

Q. Is there radiation still left in Hiroshima?

A. Radiation released when the bomb detonated is called initial radiation. The amount that remained on the surface after the explosion is known as residual radiation. While the initial radiation in Hiroshima was intense, residual radiation faded rapidly. Residual radiation a week after the blast was one-millionth the original level, scientists say. Today, there is no residual radiation from the A-bomb affecting humans in Hiroshima.

Q. How does radiation harm the body?

A. Radiation penetrates human cells, damaging their chromosomes and causing serious health effects. These effects do not always appear right away, but can show up days, weeks or years later.

In the first two weeks after the blast, many people had nausea, fatigue, fever and diarrhea, as well as blood in their vomit and urine.

Between late August and October 1945, many victims who initially appeared healthy developed symptoms. They had hair loss, bleeding gums, purple spots on the skin, cold sores and intestinal bleeding.

Other disorders appeared later, including keloid scars, eye problems, leukemia and other cancers. Leukemia cases rose seven to eight years after the bombing. Radiation caused some stillbirths and microcephaly — the “small head” syndrome now associated with the Zika virus.

Q. How many people who survived the bombing are alive today?

A. About 187,000 people classified by the Japanese government as survivors were alive last year, according to the official 2015 count.

(Sources: Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum; Radiation Effects Research Center, Hiroshima.)

Famous Speeches: Truman Announces Dropping of Atom Bomb on Hiroshima

Original speech from the public domain, adapted by Newsela staff

Editor's Note: On Aug. 6, 1945, President Harry S. Truman ordered the dropping of an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. It was a huge bomb. The explosion wiped out 90 percent of the city. It killed an estimated 80,000 people immediately. Tens of thousands of other people died later. Only hours later, Truman gave this speech. He told the American people what the military did. Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki.

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese army base. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of TNT, a very powerful explosive. It had more than 2,000 times the blast power of the British “Grand Slam.” That was the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.

The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many times over. 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.

This is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been let loose against those who brought war to the Far East.

Before 1939, it was the accepted belief of scientists that it was theoretically possible to release atomic

energy. But no one knew any practical method of doing it. By 1942, however, we knew that the Germans were working feverishly to find a way to add atomic energy to the other engines of war with which they hoped to enslave the world. But they failed. We may be grateful to divine care that the Germans got the V-1 and V-2 rockets late, and in limited quantities. We may be even more grateful that they did not get the atomic bomb at all.

The battle of the laboratories held fateful risks for us as well as the battles of the air, land, and sea. We have now won the battle of the laboratories as we have won the other battles.

Beginning in 1940, before Pearl Harbor, scientific knowledge useful in war was shared between the United States and Great Britain. Many priceless helps to our victories have come from that arrangement. Under that general policy the research on the atomic bomb was begun. With American and British scientists working together we entered the race of discovery against the Germans.

The United States had available the large number of scientists of distinction in the many needed areas of knowledge. It had the tremendous industrial and financial resources necessary for the project. These supplies could be devoted to this project without damaging other vital war work. In the United States the laboratory work and the production plants, on which a large start had already been made, would be out of reach of enemy bombing. At the same time Britain was exposed to constant air attack. It was still threatened with the possibility of being invaded. For these reasons Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt agreed that it was wise to carry on the project here.

We now have two great plants and many lesser works devoted to the production of atomic power. Employment during peak construction numbered 125,000 and over 65,000 individuals are even now engaged in operating the plants. Many have worked there for two and a half years. Few know what they have been producing. They see great quantities of material going in and they see nothing coming out of these plants, for the physical size of the explosive charge is exceedingly small. We have spent \$2 billion on the greatest scientific gamble in history – and won.

But the greatest marvel is not the size of the enterprise, its secrecy, nor its cost. It is the achievement of scientific brains in putting together infinitely complex pieces of knowledge held by many men in different fields of science into a workable plan. And almost as marvelous has been the ability of industry to design, and of labor to operate, the machines and methods to do things never done before. Because of this, the brainchild of many minds could come forth in physical shape and perform as it was supposed to do. Both science and industry worked under the direction of the United States Army. Our Army achieved a unique success in managing a problem with so many parts in the advancement of knowledge in an amazingly short time. It is doubtful if such another combination could be got together in the world. What has been done is the greatest achievement of organized science in history. It was done under high pressure and without failure.

We are now prepared to destroy 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.

We gave the Japanese people an ultimatum, a choice between meeting our demands or being attacked, on July 26 at Potsdam. We tried to save them from utter destruction. Their leaders promptly rejected that final demand from us. 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 numbers and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware.

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 a workplace near Santa Fe, New Mexico. The workers at the sites have been making materials to be used in producing the greatest destructive force in history. However, they have not themselves been in danger more than they would be in many other occupations. We have done a lot to ensure 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 add to the power that now comes from coal, oil, and falling water. However, 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 keep back scientific knowledge from the world. Normally, therefore, everything about the work with atomic energy would be made public.

But for now, we cannot yet speak publicly about the technical processes of production or all the military uses. We must first further examine 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 toward the maintenance of world peace.

Response Options:

- Summarize Truman's points
- How would you describe Truman's tone?
- What was Truman's purpose in giving this speech?

Great Cities: How Hiroshima rose from the ashes of nuclear destruction

Justin McCurry, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff

Editor's Note: In August 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Japan, killing 140,000 people and reducing the thriving city to rubble. Six days later, Japan surrendered and World War II ended. Hiroshima has since been reborn as a place of peace and prosperity.

The people of Hiroshima describe their city's layout in a simple way. A particular street is "about a mile away," a building "500 yards north." No further explanation is required. The unspoken reference point is the place of the world's first nuclear attack.

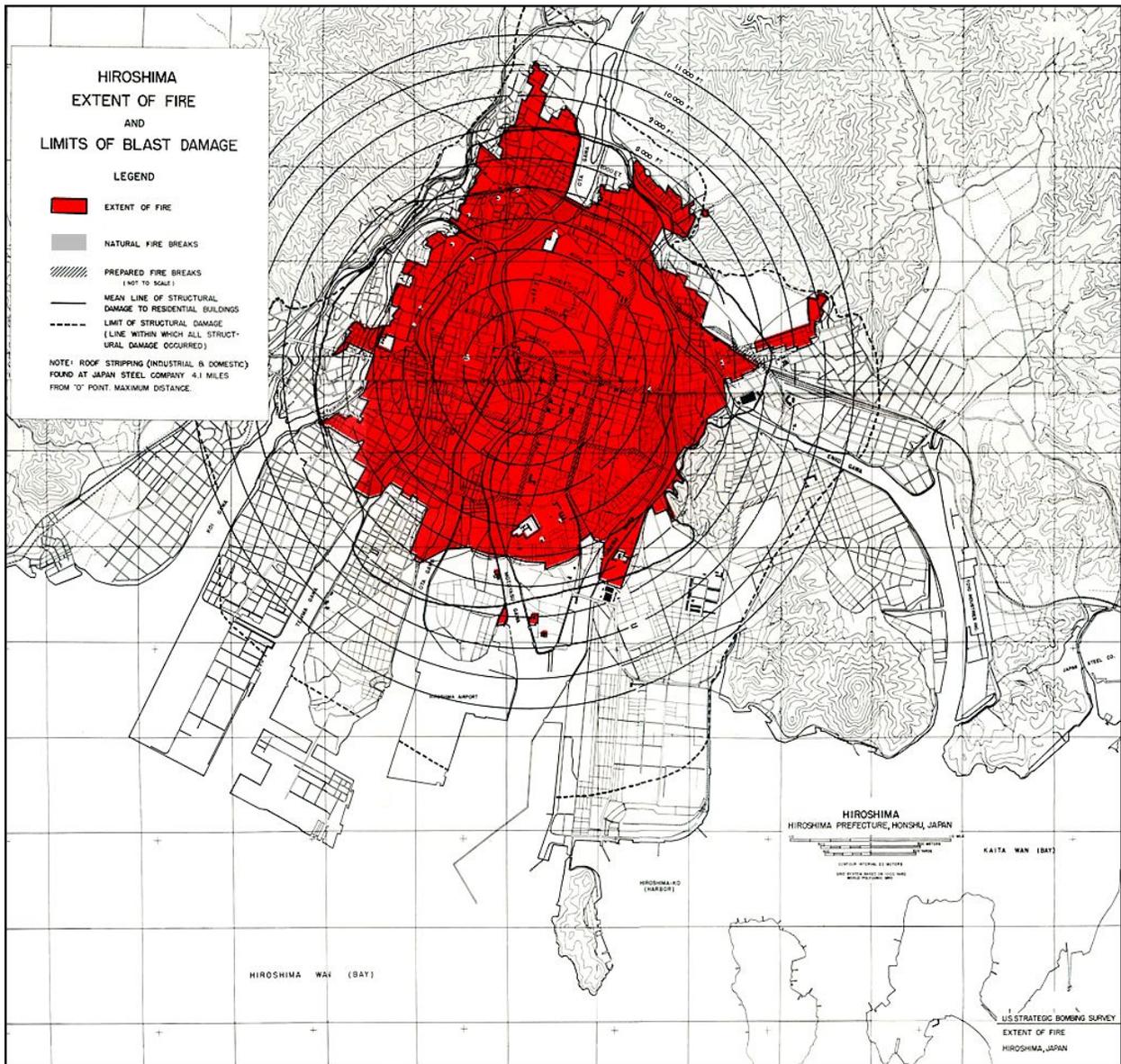
Visitors arriving by bullet train to Hiroshima's main railway station might have little notion of the city's tragic past. On a warm spring evening, groups of European tourists pause outside seafood restaurants. Others board pleasure boats to Miyajima, an island famous for its wild deer and "floating" Shinto shrine. But reminders of the city's unique role in history are never far away.

Southwest of the station, visitors to the city's Peace Memorial Museum fall silent in front of the ruins of Sumitomo Bank. There they can view the "shadow" of a human who died, leaving an outline of the body etched into the stone. One display case shows the shredded remains of a junior high school uniform. Others show the irradiated contents of a lunchbox and the frame of a tricycle. The small boy riding it was incinerated by the blast.

An Unrecognizable City

These are among the few physical reminders of the devastation that was unleashed at 8:15 am on Aug. 6, 1945. That was the moment that the U.S. B-29 bomber Enola Gay released Little Boy, a 16 metric ton atomic bomb.

Less than a minute later, the bomb exploded 1,900 feet above Shima Hospital. It created a wave of heat that momentarily reached 3,000 to 4,000 degrees centigrade on the ground. Winds of up to 1,000 miles per hour roared through the entire city. About 90 percent of the city's 76,000 buildings were destroyed. Of the 13 square miles of land considered usable before the attack, 40 percent was reduced to ashes.



The bombed city was barely recognizable. What a day earlier had been a sprawling military city and transportation hub, wedged between mountain ranges to the north and the Seto Inland Sea to the south, was now a nuclear wasteland. Wooden homes had been burned to the ground by firestorms; the city's rivers were filled with the corpses of people desperately seeking water before they died. With the exception of a handful of concrete buildings, Hiroshima had ceased to exist.

One Single Bomb Brought Total Chaos

A day after the attack, Keiko Ogura, then an 8-year-old schoolgirl, could barely believe her eyes as she looked down on her hometown from a hill. “The entire city had been burned to the ground,” says Ogura. “None of us could comprehend what had happened ... we kept asking ourselves how an entire city could have been destroyed by a single bomb.”

Ogura, whose home narrowly escaped the firestorms, recalls seeing people whose skin had melted or burned away. While her father cremated hundreds of corpses in the open, Ogura gave water to the severely injured, only to watch them die in front of her.

The blast instantly killed 80,000 of Hiroshima’s 420,000 residents. By the end of the year, the death toll would rise to 141,000 as survivors succumbed to injuries or illnesses connected to their exposure to radiation.

Yet, despite the horror, evidence has emerged of remarkable acts of courage and resourcefulness. Incredibly, Hiroshima's rebirth began just hours after it was effectively wiped from the map.

Prompt Restoration Of Services

The lights came back on in the Ujina area on Aug. 7, and around Hiroshima railway station a day later. Power was restored to 30 percent of homes that had escaped fire damage, and to all households by the end of November 1945.



Water pumps were repaired four days after the bombing. Damaged pipes created vast puddles among the ashes of wooden homes. The central telephone exchange office was destroyed and all of its employees killed. By the middle of Aug. 14, experimental lines were back in operation.

A limited streetcar service resumed on Aug. 9. That was the same day Nagasaki was destroyed by a plutonium bomb, killing more than 70,000 people. With the urgent need to move people and supplies into the city, two rail lines started moving again, just days after the bomb fell.

A City Without A Leader

Early attempts to rebuild on the scorched earth of ground zero were marked by chaos and confusion. The mayor, Senkichi Awaya, was among the dead, leaving the city without a leader. Thousands of public servants, teachers and health professionals were also among the victims. On Aug. 6, the municipal government office employed about 1,000 people. The following day just 80 reported for duty.

“They alone had to deal with emergency medical treatment, establish a food supply, and retrieve and cremate corpses,” says historian Yuki Tanaka. “They were incredibly difficult times.” Simply caring for the dying and seriously wounded was nearly impossible: 14 of Hiroshima's 16 major hospitals no longer existed; 270 of 298 hospital doctors were dead, along with 1,654 of 1,780 registered nurses. Demand for

housing turned the area near the hypocenter into a shantytown of 10,000 homes.

Hiroshima was not destined to be destroyed by a nuclear weapon. U.S. President Harry Truman and his advisers had a list of five cities to possibly target, including Hiroshima. However, there are compelling reasons why the Americans chose Hiroshima. The city began as a castle town at the end of the 1500s under the rule of the feudal warlord Mori Terumoto. By the end of the 19th century, it served as a regional station for the Imperial Japanese army. Later, as a major manufacturing center, it helped fuel the Japanese empire's military efforts in the Asia-Pacific.

A Memorial To Lasting Peace

The idea of transforming a large area of Hiroshima into a memorial to the A-bomb dead took hold in 1946. That was when a local newspaper ran a competition soliciting readers' visions for the city. First prize was awarded to Sankichi Toge. He envisioned a peace plaza memorial, a library, museum and a place where visitors could come from around the world. Toge, who lived through the attack, died in 1953 at the age of 36.

The city government liked Toge's utopian vision, but lacked the money to act. The bomb killed so many people the government had little money, as tax revenue declined by 80 percent. There were not enough people to pay taxes to pay for new buildings. The turning point came in 1949, when national politicians, recognizing Hiroshima's special status, passed the Peace Memorial City Construction Law. Article 1 of it states: "Hiroshima is to be a peace memorial city symbolizing the human idea of the sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace."

Response Options:

- Summarize Truman's points
- How would you describe Truman's tone?
- What was Truman's purpose in giving this speech?

Obama's visit to Hiroshima Highlights the Positive

By Yuriko Koike, Project Syndicate, adapted by Newsela staff, 05.31.16

TOKYO, Japan — Barack Obama will soon become the first U.S. president to visit Hiroshima. This is not only a demonstration of his own personal dignity, but it shows a brighter side of America: the country that has tried to keep the peace since the atomic bombings at the end of the second world war.

In coming to Hiroshima, Obama will learn the pain of a nation that was once America's enemy, but which is now a devoted friend. He will examine the ruins of the nuclear bomb sites at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and recognize the Japanese people's sorrow. And in doing this, he will prove our countries' ties are unbreakable. Peace in Asia can only continue because of the alliance — that is, the political and military agreement — between the United States and Japan.

A Strong Partnership, Despite A Painful Past

Obama's journey is also an important moment for Japan. In jointly recognizing the pain caused by the atomic bomb strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, both countries will show the world how to maintain a bond of solidarity. Their 60-year-long partnership is one of many miracles of American politics.

The United States also deserves credit for promoting European unity. The help of the United States ensured lasting peace between France and Germany, nations that had recently been at war. The United States encouraged China to open up to the world, even as its leader Mao Zhedong tried to reassert himself in his nation's Communist government. And the United States brought a peaceful end to the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Generations of American leadership have paid off for the world.

Until recently, America's relationship with Russia and China has been strained. Before 1991, Russia was part of the Soviet Union, a group of 15 countries that Russia largely controlled. Both it and China

supported communism, a system where the government owns all property and people have few freedoms. They were opposed to the United States and its system that allowed for more business activity. But America found leaders in even these countries who were willing to work together. These men were able to move beyond their own pasts and opinions to build a better and safer world. In Hiroshima, Obama will be standing alongside Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the most powerful politician in the country. Their meeting will be a strong symbol of the Japan-US alliance and America's role in creating Asia's postwar order.

After all, Abe is the grandson of Nobusuke Kishi, former prime minister of Japan. He pushed a treaty with the United States through the Japanese parliament, though it was very controversial. He sacrificed his political career for the sake of Japan's future and peace in Asia. Just 15 years before, Kishi had been an official in the Imperial Japanese government, which ruled Japan until the end of World War II. As such, he had seen the United States as his enemy. But he knew Asia would need a viable structure for maintaining peace after the war's end. And that structure had to be founded on a US-Japan alliance. Kishi's actions, like those of many postwar European leaders, show why the present international order has endured for so long. It is an order built by truly great politicians.

Leaders With A Vision For The Future

These were leaders whose vision extended well beyond concern for their own careers. They had the wisdom and courage to do what they felt was necessary for a peaceful future. They demonstrated a willingness to overlook their personal histories for the greater good of their people. Kishi and his peers in the United States and Europe refused to be bitter about the past. They chose not to poke at old wounds – even the radioactive wounds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

By visiting, Obama will draw attention to Hiroshima's scars and the horror of the American nuclear attack. But his trip will also symbolize the need for peace in Asia, both now and in the future.

This is how memories of the past should be thought of. They are not a way to fuel citizens' anger against others and distract them from important problems at home, as some leaders do. Through our pain, we share a common bond as people. That bond must be stronger than differences in our cultures, beliefs and past actions. It is only by sharing our sorrows and our humanity that any of us can stand before the sacred dead of Hiroshima.

Response Options:

- Summarize Koike's points. Do you agree with them? Why or why not?

Should America have dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

This article was first published in the August 2015 issue of BBC History Magazine

America's use of atomic bombs to attack the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 has long remained one of the most controversial decisions of the Second World War. Here, a group of historians offer their views on whether US president Truman was right to authorise these nuclear attacks...

“Yes. Truman had little choice” says Antony Beevor

Few actions in war are morally justifiable. All a commander or political leader can hope to assess is whether a particular course of action is likely to reduce the loss of life. Faced with the Japanese refusal to surrender, President Truman had little choice.

His decision was mainly based on the estimate of half a million Allied casualties likely to be caused by invading the home islands of Japan. There was also the likely death rate from starvation for Allied POWs and civilians as the war dragged on well into 1946.

What Truman did not know, and which has only been established quite recently, is that the Imperial Japanese Army could never contemplate surrender, having forced all their men to fight to the death since

the start of the war. All civilians were to be mobilised and forced to fight with bamboo spears and satchel charges to act as suicide bombers against Allied tanks. Japanese documents apparently indicate their army was prepared to accept up to 28 million civilian deaths.

*Antony Beevor is a bestselling military historian, specialising in the Second World War. His most recent book is *Ardennes 1944: Hitler's Last Gamble* (Viking, 2015).*

“No. It was immoral, and unnecessary” says Richard Overy

The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was justified at the time as being moral – in order to bring about a more rapid victory and prevent the deaths of more Americans. However, it was clearly not moral to use this weapon knowing that it would kill civilians and destroy the urban milieu. And it wasn't necessary either.

Militarily Japan was finished (as the Soviet invasion of Manchuria that August showed). Further blockade and urban destruction would have produced a surrender in August or September at the latest, without the need for the costly anticipated invasion or the atomic bomb. As for the second bomb on Nagasaki, that was just as unnecessary as the first one. It was deemed to be needed, partly because it was a different design, and the military (and many civilian scientists) were keen to see if they both worked the same way. There was, in other words, a cynical scientific imperative at work as well.

I should also add that there was a fine line between the atomic bomb and conventional bombing – indeed descriptions of Hamburg or Tokyo after conventional bombing echo the aftermath of Hiroshima. To regard Hiroshima as a moral violation is also to condemn the firebombing campaign, which was deliberately aimed at city centres and completely indiscriminate.

Of course it is easy to say that if I had been in Truman's shoes, I would not have ordered the two bombings. But it is possible to imagine greater restraint. The British and Americans had planned in detail the gas-bombing of a list of 17 major German cities, but in the end did not carry it out because the moral case seemed to depend on Germany using gas first. Restraint was possible, and, at the very end of the war, perhaps more politically acceptable.

*Richard Overy is a professor of history at the University of Exeter. He recently edited *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War Two* (OUP, 2015).*

“Yes. It was the least bad option” says Robert James Maddox

The atomic bombs were horrible but I agree with US secretary of war Henry L Stimson that using them was the “least abhorrent choice”. A bloody invasion and round the clock conventional bombing would have led to a far higher death toll and so the atomic weapons actually saved thousands of American and millions of Japanese lives. The bombs were the best means to bring about unconditional surrender, which is what the US leaders wanted. Only this would enable the Allies to occupy Japan and root out the institutions that led to war in the first place.

The experience with Germany after the First World War had persuaded them that a mere armistice would constitute a betrayal of future generations if an even larger war occurred 20 years down the line. It is true that the radiation effects of the atomic bomb provided a grisly dividend, which the US leaders did not anticipate. However, even if they had known, I don't think it would have changed their decision.

*Robert James Maddox is author of *Hiroshima in History: The Myths of Revisionism* (University of Missouri Press, 2007).*

“No. Japan would have surrendered anyway” says Martin J Sherwin

I believe that it was a mistake and a tragedy that the atomic bombs were used. Those bombings had little to do with the Japanese decision to surrender. The evidence has become overwhelming that it was the entry of the Soviet Union on 8 August into the war against Japan that forced surrender but,

understandably, this view is very difficult for Americans to accept.

Of the Japanese leaders, it was the military ones who held out against the civilian leaders who were closest to the emperor, and who wanted to surrender provided the emperor's safety would be guaranteed. The military's argument was that Japan could convince the Soviet Union to mediate on its behalf for better surrender terms than unconditional surrender and therefore should continue the war until that was achieved.

Once the USSR entered the war, the Japanese military not only had no arguments for continuation left, but it also feared the Soviet Union would occupy significant parts of northern Japan.

Truman could have simply waited for the Soviet Union to enter the war but he did not want the USSR to have a claim to participate in the occupation of Japan. Another option (which could have ended the war before August) was to clarify that the emperor would not be held accountable for the war under the policy of unconditional surrender. US secretary of war Stimson recommended this, but secretary of state James Byrnes, who was much closer to Truman, vetoed it.

By dropping the atomic bombs instead, the United States signalled to the world that it considered nuclear weapons to be legitimate weapons of war. Those bombings precipitated the nuclear arms race and they are the source of all nuclear proliferation.

Martin J Sherwin is co-author of American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J Robert Oppenheimer (Atlantic, 2008).

“Yes. It saved millions of lives in Japan and Asia” says Richard Frank

Dropping the bombs was morally preferable to any other choices available. One of the biggest problems we have is that we can talk about Dresden and the bombing of Hamburg and we all know what the context is: Nazi Germany and what Nazi Germany did. There's been a great amnesia in the west with respect to what sort of war Japan conducted across Asia-Pacific. Bear in mind that for every Japanese non-combatant who died during the war, 17 or 18 died across Asia-Pacific. Yet you very seldom find references to this and virtually nothing that vivifies it in the way that the suffering at Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been.

With the original invasion strategy negated by radio intelligence revealing the massive Japanese build-up on the planned Kyushu landing areas, Truman's alternative was a campaign of blockade and bombardment, which would have killed millions of Japanese, mostly non-combatants. For example, in 1946 the food situation would have become catastrophic and there would have been stupendous civilian deaths. It was only because Japan surrendered when it still had a serviceable administrative system – plus American food aid – that saved the country from famine.

Another thing to bear in mind is that while just over 200,000 people were killed in total by the atomic bombs, it is estimated that 300,000–500,000 Japanese people (many of whom were civilians) died or disappeared in Soviet captivity. Had the war continued, that number would have been much higher.

Critics talk about changing the demand for unconditional surrender, but the Japanese government had never put forth a set of terms on which they were prepared to end the war prior to Hiroshima. The inner cabinet ruling the country never devised such terms. When foreign minister Shigenori Togo was told that the best terms Japan could obtain were unconditional surrender with the exception of maintaining the imperial system, Togo flatly rejected them in the name of the cabinet.

The fact is that there was no historical record over the past 2,600 years of Japan ever surrendering, nor any examples of a Japanese unit surrendering during the war. This was where the great American fear lay.

Richard B Frank is a military historian whose books include Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (Random House, 1999).

“No. Better options were discarded for political reasons” says Tsuyoshi Hasegawa

Once sympathetic to the argument that the atomic bomb was necessary, the more research I do, the more

I am convinced it was one of the gravest war crimes the US has ever committed. I've been to Japan and discovered what happened on the ground in 1945 and it was really horrifying. The radiation has affected people who survived the blast for many years and still today thousands of people suffer the effects.

There were possible alternatives that might have ended the war. Truman could have invited Stalin to sign the Potsdam declaration [in which the USA, Britain and Nationalist China demanded Japanese surrender in July 1945]. The authors of the draft of the declaration believed that if the Soviets joined the war at this time it might lead to Japanese surrender but Truman consciously avoided that option, because he and some of his advisors were apprehensive about Soviet entry. I don't agree with revisionists who say Truman used the bomb to intimidate the Soviet Union but I believe he used it to force Japan to surrender before they were able to enter the war.

The second option was to alter the demand for unconditional surrender. Some influential advisors within the Truman administration were in favour of allowing the Japanese to keep the emperor system to induce so-called moderates within the Japanese government to work for the termination of the war. However, Truman was mindful of American public opinion, which wanted unconditional surrender as revenge against Pearl Harbor and the Japanese atrocities.

Bearing in mind those atrocities, it's clear that Japan doesn't have a leg to stand on when it comes to immoral acts in the war. However, one atrocity does not make another one right. I believe this was the most righteous war the Americans have ever been involved in but you still can't justify using any means to win a just war.

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa is a professor of history at the University of California at Santa Barbara and the author of Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan (Harvard University, Press 2005).

“Yes. The moral failing was Japan’s” says Michael Kort

Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb was the best choice available under the circumstances and was therefore morally justifiable. It was clear Japan was unwilling to surrender on terms even remotely acceptable to the US and its allies, and the country was preparing a defence far more formidable than the US had anticipated.

The choice was not, as is frequently argued, between using an atomic bomb against Hiroshima and invading Japan. No one on the Allied side could say with confidence what would bring about a Japanese surrender, as Japan's situation had been hopeless for a long time. It was hoped that the shock provided by the bombs would convince Tokyo to surrender, but how many would be needed was an open question.

After Hiroshima, the Japanese government had three days to respond before Nagasaki but did not do so. Hirohito and some of his advisers knew Japan had to surrender but were not in a position to get the government to accept that conclusion. Key military members of the government argued that it was unlikely that the US could have a second bomb and, even if it did, public pressure would prevent its use. The bombing of Nagasaki demolished these arguments and led directly to the imperial conference that produced Japan's offer to surrender.

The absolutist moral arguments (such as not harming civilians) made against the atomic bombs would have precluded many other actions essential to victory taken by the Allies during the most destructive war in history. There is no doubt that had the bomb been available sooner, it would have been used against Germany. There was, to be sure, a moral failing in August 1945, but it was on the part of the Japanese government when it refused to surrender after its long war of conquest had been lost.

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Response:

- On the page that follows, add these people's opinions and the evidence used to support them.

The Bombing of Japan with Atomic Force

It was justified to use atomic force on the Japanese	It was not justified to use atomic force on the Japanese

