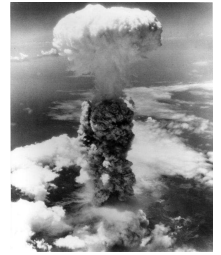


## Was the Atomic Bomb Necessary to Win World War II?

The use of atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 is one of the most controversial debates in history. The fundamental decision of how to end the war not only plagued leaders of the time, but have been scrutinized ever since. Some claim it was the most efficient way to end the fighting, whereas others thought it was done to influence the post-war world order. While the U.S. monopoly on the weapon proved only temporary, the Atomic Age that followed would pit the nuclear powers against each other for worldwide dominance. The following statements are excerpts from historians' different interpretations on this matter.



### YES

The demand for unconditional surrender had been asserted by Roosevelt and had become a national rallying cry. Truman could not lightly abandon it, nor is there any reason to think he wanted to. Both he and Roosevelt had clear memories of World War I and how its unsatisfactory conclusion had helped bring on World War II.

At a conference on June 8, 1945, in the presence of the emperor, the Japanese government formally affirmed its policy: "The nation would fight to the bitter end."

Japan's chief of the army general staff expressed his confidence in the military's "ability to deal a smashing blow to the enemy," and "it would be inexcusable to surrender unconditionally."

Intercepted military messages revealed that the Japanese had about 10,000 planes, half of them kamikazes, to defend the home islands. In addition, they counted on flying bombs, human torpedoes, suicide-attack boats, and navy swimmers to be used as human mines. All of these 'had been used at Okinawa and the Philippines with lethal results,' and the intercepts showed that they were now being placed on Kyushu.

In preparation for a meeting with President Truman scheduled for June 18, 1945, the army's Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, asked General Douglas MacArthur for a figure of American casualties in the projected invasion of Kyushu. Marshall was shocked by MacArthur's reply: 105,050 battle casualties in the first 90 days alone, and another 12,600 casualties among American noncombatants. Marshall called these figures unacceptably high.

Years later... Truman described a meeting in the last week of July at which Marshall suggested the invasion would cost "at a minimum one-quarter-of-a-million casualties, and might cost as much as a million, on the American side alone, with an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men agreed."

On several occasions, Truman made abundantly clear that the main reason he went to Potsdam to meet Stalin was to make sure the Soviets would enter the war. The bomb had not yet been tested, and as Truman later stated in his memoirs, "If the test should fail, then it would be even more important to us to bring about a surrender before we had to make physical conquest of Japan."

Men like Truman, Stimson, and Marshall were deeply worried over the scale of American casualties – whatever their precise number – that were certain to be incurred by an invasion. The President could not face another Okinawa, much less something greater. That is all we need to know to understand why he and his associates were prepared to use the bomb.

On August 6, 1945 the American war plane *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing between 70,000 and 100,000 Japanese. Three days later another atomic device as exploded over Nagasaki. Within a few days Japan surrendered, and the terrible struggle we call World War II was over.

Even after the atomic bomb had exploded at Hiroshima on August 6, the Japanese refused to yield... The Minister of War, General Korechika Anami, went so far as to deny that Hiroshima has been struck by an atomic bomb. Other insisted that the U.S. had used its only bomb there, or that world opinion would prevent the Americans from using any others they might have.

It was the emperor who was decisive in causing Japan to surrender. He was moved by the bomb – and by the Soviet declaration of war. But statements by the emperor and the premier show clearly that the viewed the Soviet invasion as only another wartime setback. It was the bomb that changed the situation entirely.

We learned to our astonishment that we would not be obliged in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared, and shelled, and for all the practiced phlegm and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live.

## NO

Japanese diehards... had acknowledged since 1941 that Japan could not fight Russia as well as the United States and Britain.

Some Japanese officials did try to end the war by diplomatic negotiation before it was too late.... But they were given no support from Tokyo.

Japan's military position was so poor that its leaders would likely have surrendered before invasion, and at roughly the same time in August 1945, even if the United States had not employed strategic bombing or the atomic bomb.

The atomic bomb was used to impress American strength on the Soviet Union and hence the first act of the Cold War.

A study by the Joint War Plans Committee estimated that casualties in an invasion of southern Kyushu on November 1, followed some months later by an assault on the Tokyo plain, would be a relatively low 40,000 dead, 150,000 wounded, and 3,500 missing, for a total of 193,500 casualties... There is no evidence that Truman ever saw or heard these figures.

A study done in August 1944 for the joint Chiefs of Staff projected that an invasion of Japan would "cost a half-million American lives and many more that number in wounded," while a memorandum from Herbert Hoover to President Truman in May 1945 estimated that a negotiated peace with Japan would "save 500,000 to one million lives."

By mid-June [1945], (Army Chief of Staff General George) Marshall advised Truman directly that "the impact of the Russian entry on the already hopeless Japanese may well be the decisive action." Marshall's advice came almost a month before the emperor's personal intervention was received and four and a half months before even a preliminary landing was to take place.

The U.S. had long since broken the enemy codes... a critical message of July 12, 1945 – just before Potsdam – showed that the Japanese emperor himself had decided to intervene to attempt to end the war. In his private journal, Truman bluntly characterized the message as the "telegram from [the] Jap Emperor asking for peace."

As of April 29, 1945, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), in a report titled *Unconditional Surrender of Japan*, informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "increasing numbers of informed Japanese, both military and civilian, already realize the inevitability of absolute defeat." The JIC further advised that "the increasing effects of air-sea blockade, the progressive and cumulative devastation wrought by strategic bombing, and the collapse of Germany should make this realization widespread within the year.

Intercepted messages suggested that the main obstacle to peace was the continued Allied demand for unconditional surrender... it is now clear that the entire top echelon of the U.S. government advocated a change in the surrender formula to provide assurances for Japan's emperor. So, too, had the British... including Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

The United States had sought Russia's help primarily to pin down Japanese armies and thus make a U.S. invasion of the home islands easier. By midsummer... Japan's position had deteriorated so much that top U.S. military planners believed the mere shock of a Red Army attack might be sufficient to bring about surrender and thus make an invasion unnecessary.

A top-secret April 1946 War Department Study, *Use of Atomic Bomb on Japan*, declassified during the 1970s... found that "the Japanese leaders had decided to surrender and were merely looking for sufficient pretext (reason) to convince the die-hard Army Group that Japan had lost the war... that Russia's early August entry into the war "would almost certainly have furnished this pretext"... and that the full invasion of Japan would not have occurred.

As early as 1946 the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, in its report *Japan's Struggle to End the War*, concluded that "certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated."