

# *Was the United States justified in dropping the atomic bomb on Japan?*

## Document Analysis and Debate

Directions: Use the documents provided as supports to arguments you will create based on your assigned role. Use the chart below (or similar one) to guide your initial analysis.

Document	Justified: Yes/No	Argument (or anticipated counterargument)	Evidence
A, Textbook			

\*By creating the argument represented in each document you will be not only preparing for your side but also anticipating the counterargument of the opposing side. For example, if you are arguing that bombing was NOT justified, Document B gives reasons why it was- therefore in the argument column you will anticipate what your opponent will say so that you can refute it. Once you have completed the initial analysis, go back through and back note of the main points you would like to make during the debate.

# Examples of the different views

## Two Historical Narratives

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: Excerpts from "Three Narratives of our Humanity" by John W. Dower, 1996. The following is from a book written by a historian about how people remember wars. John W. Dower explains the two different ways that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is remembered.*

### **Hiroshima as Victimization**

Japanese still recall the war experience primarily in terms of their own victimization. For them, World War II calls to mind the deaths of family and acquaintances on distant battlefields, and, more vividly, the prolonged, systematic bombings of their cities.

If it is argued that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima was necessary to shock the Japanese to surrender, how does one justify the hasty bombing of Nagasaki only three days later, before the Japanese had time to investigate Hiroshima and formulate a response?

### **Hiroshima as Triumph**

To most Americans, Hiroshima—the shattered, atomized, irradiated city – remains largely a symbol of triumph – marking the end of a horrendous global conflict and the effective demonstration of a weapon that has prevented another world war.

It is hard to imagine that the Japanese would have surrendered without the atomic bomb. Japanese battle plans that were in place when the bombs were dropped called for a massive, suicidal defense of the home islands, in which the imperial government would mobilize not only several million fighting men but also millions of ordinary citizens who had been trained and indoctrinated to resist to the end with primitive makeshift weapons. For Japanese to even discuss capitulation (surrender) was seditious (against the law).

### **Guiding Questions → To help analysis**

1. In 1-2 sentences each, explain the two narratives (stories) about Hiroshima.
2. Which narrative do you agree with more? Why?

## Document A: Textbook

Even before the bomb was tested, American officials began to debate how to use it. Admiral William Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed using the bomb because it killed civilians indiscriminately. He believed that an economic blockade and conventional bombing would convince Japan to surrender.

Secretary of War Henry Stimson wanted to warn the Japanese about the bomb while at the same time telling them that they could keep the emperor if they surrendered. Secretary of State James Byrnes, however, wanted to drop the bomb without any warning to shock Japan into surrendering.

President Truman later wrote that he "regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubts that it should be used." His advisers had warned him to expect massive casualties if the United States invaded Japan. Truman believed it was his duty as president to use every weapon available to save American lives.

*Source:* American History Textbook, *American Vision*, pg. 615.

## Document B: *Thank God for the Atomic Bomb*

My division, like most of the ones transferred from Europe was going to take part in the invasion at Honshu (an island of Japan). The people who preferred invasion to A-bombing seemed to have no intention of proceeding to the Japanese front themselves. I have already noted what a few more days would mean to the luckless troops and sailors on the spot.... On Okinawa, only a few weeks before Hiroshima, 123,000 Japanese and Americans killed each other. War is immoral. War is cruel.

*Source:* Paul Fussell, a World War II Soldier, *Thank God for the Atom Bomb*, 1990.

## Document C: Stopping Russia

"[Byrnes] was concerned about Russia's postwar behavior. Russian troops had moved into Hungary and Romania, and Byrnes thought it would be very difficult to persuade Russia to withdraw her troops from these countries, that Russia might be more manageable if impressed by American military might, and that a demonstration of the bomb might impress Russia."

*Source: James Byrnes was one of Truman's advisors on the atomic bomb. In addition to defeating Japan, he wanted to keep the Soviet Union from expanding its influence in Asia and to limit its influence in Europe. Manhattan Project scientist Leo Szilard met with Byrnes on May 28, 1945. Leo Szilard wrote about his meeting with Byrnes in 1980.*

## Document D: Survivor

One of my classmates, I think his name is Fujimoto, he muttered something and pointed outside the window, saying, "A B-29 is coming." He pointed outside with his finger. So I began to get up from my chair and asked him, "Where is it?" Looking in the direction that he was pointing towards, I got up on my feet, but I was not yet in an upright position when it happened. All I can remember was a pale lightening flash for two or three seconds. Then, I collapsed. I don't know much time passed before I came to. It was awful, awful. The smoke was coming in from somewhere above the debris. Sandy dust was flying around. . .

I crawled over the debris, trying to find someone who were still alive. Then, I found one of my classmates lying alive. I held him up in my arms. It is hard to tell, his skull was cracked open, his flesh was dangling out from his head. He had only one eye left, and it was looking right at me. . . . he told me to go away.

I, so, was running, hands were trying to grab my ankles, they were asking me to take them along. I was only a child then. And I was horrified at so many hands trying to grab me. I was in pain, too. So all I could do was to get rid of them, it is terrible to say, but I kicked their hands away. I still feel bad about that. I went to Miyuki Bridge to get some water. At the river bank, I saw so many people collapsed there. . . I was small, so I pushed on the river along the small steps. The water was dead people. I had to push the bodies aside to drink the muddy water. We didn't know anything about radioactivity that time. I stood up in the water and so many bodies were floating away along the stream.

*Source: Yoshitaka Kawamoto was thirteen years old. He was in the classroom at Zakoba-cho, 0.8 kilometers away from the hypocenter. He is now working as the director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, telling visitors from all over the world what the atomic bomb did to the people of Hiroshima.*

## Document E: Hiroshima and Nagasaki Casualties

**TABLE A: Estimates of Casualties**

	Hiroshima	Nagasaki
Pre-raid population	255,000	195,000
Dead	66,000	39,000
Injured	69,000	25,000
<b>Total Casualties</b>	<b>135,000</b>	<b>64,000</b>

**TABLE B: Cause of Immediate Deaths**

Hiroshima	
Cause of Death	Percent of Total
Burns	60%
Falling debris	30
Other	10

Nagasaki	
Cause of Death	Percent of Total
Burns	95%
Falling debris	9
Flying glass	7
Other	7

## Document F

*In 1945 Ralph Bard was Under Sec. of the Navy. He was also a member of the Interim Committee, a small, secret government advisory group on the atomic bomb and nuclear energy.*

### MEMORANDUM ON THE USE OF S-1 BOMB

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. Following the three-power conference emissaries from this country could contact representatives from Japan somewhere on the China Coast and make representations with regard to Russia's position and at the same time give them some information regarding the proposed use of atomic power, 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 don't see that we have anything in particular to lose in following such a program. The stakes are so tremendous that it is my opinion very real consideration should be given to some plan of this kind. 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.

RALPH BARD

27 June 1945

*(MEMORANDUM ON THE USE OF S-1 BOMB, Harrison-Bundy Files, RG 77, microfilm publication M1108, folder 77, National Archives, Washington, DC).*

## Document G

"...in [July] 1945... Secretary of War Stimson, visiting my headquarters in Germany, informed me that our government was preparing to drop an atomic bomb on Japan. I was one of those who felt that there were a number of cogent reasons to question the wisdom of such an act. ...the Secretary, upon giving me the news of the successful bomb test in New Mexico, and of the plan for using it, asked for my reaction, apparently expecting a vigorous assent.

"During his recitation of the relevant facts, I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives. It was my belief that Japan was, at that very moment, seeking some way to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face'. The Secretary was deeply perturbed by my attitude..."

- Dwight Eisenhower, *Mandate For Change*, pg. 380

## **Document H**

# **Protection of Civilian Populations Against Bombing From the Air in Case of War, League of Nations, September 30, 1938**

### **PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN POPULATIONS AGAINST BOMBING FROM THE AIR IN CASE OF WAR**

**Unanimous resolution of the League of Nations Assembly,  
September 30, 1938.**

The Assembly,

Considering that on numerous occasions public opinion has expressed through the most authoritative channels its horror of the bombing of civilian populations;

Considering that this practice, for which there is no military necessity and which, as experience shows, only causes needless suffering, is condemned under the recognised principles of international law;

Considering further that, though this principle ought to be respected by all States and does not require further reaffirmation, it urgently needs to be made the subject of regulations specially adapted to air warfare and taking account of the lessons of experience;

Considering that the solution of this problem, which is of concern to all States, whether Members of the League of Nations or not, calls for technical investigation and thorough consideration;

Considering that the Bureau of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments is to meet in the near future and that it is for the Bureau to consider practical means of undertaking the necessary work under conditions most likely to lead to as general an agreement as possible:

I. Recognizes the following principles as a necessary basis for any subsequent regulations:

1) The intentional bombing of civilian populations is illegal;

2) Objectives aimed at from the air must be legitimate military objectives and must be identifiable;

3) Any attack on legitimate military objectives must be carried out in such a way that civilian populations in the neighborhood are not bombed through negligence;

II. Also takes the opportunity to reaffirm that the use of chemical or bacterial methods in the conduct of war is contrary to international law, as recalled more particularly in the resolution of the General Commission of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments of July 23rd 1932, and the resolution of the Council of May 14th, 1938.

## Document I

Harry S. Truman, Diary, July 25, 1945

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President Truman told his diary on July 25, 1945, that he had ordered the bomb used.

**Emphasis has been added to highlight Truman's apparent belief that he had ordered the bomb dropped on a "purely military" target, so that "military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children."**

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We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. It may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley Era, after Noah and his fabulous Ark.

Anyway we "think" we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexico 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.

This 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.** Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop that terrible bomb on the old capital or the new.

He and I are in accord. The **target will be a purely military one** and we will issue a warning statement asking the Japs to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful...

Truman quoted in Robert H. Ferrell, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) pp. 55-56. Truman's writings are in the public domain.



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NO. 1 OF 12 COPIES, SERIES A

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE IMMEDIATE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

A. H. Compton  
E. O. Lawrence  
J. R. Oppenheimer  
E. Fermi

[signature]  
J. R. Oppenheimer  
For the Panel

June 16, 1945

You have asked us to comment on the initial use of the new weapon. This use, in our opinion, should be such as to promote a satisfactory adjustment of our international relations. At the same time, we recognize our obligation to our nation to use the weapons to help save American lives in the Japanese war.

(1) To accomplish these ends we recommend that before the weapons are used not only Britain, but also Russia, France, and China be advised that we have made considerable progress in our work on atomic weapons, that these may be ready to use during the present war, and that we would welcome suggestions as to how we can cooperate in making this development contribute to improved international relations.

(2) The opinions of our scientific colleagues on the initial use of these weapons are not unanimous: they range from the proposal of a purely technical demonstration to that of the military application best designed to induce surrender. Those who advocate a purely technical demonstration would wish to outlaw the use of atomic weapons, and have feared that if we use the weapons now our position in future negotiations will be prejudiced. Others emphasize the opportunity of saving American lives by immediate military use, and believe that such use will improve the international prospects, in that they are more concerned with the prevention of war than with the elimination of this specific weapon. We find ourselves closer to these latter views; we can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.

(3) With regard to these general aspects of the use of atomic energy, it is clear that we, as scientific men, have no proprietary rights. It is true that we are among the few citizens who have had occasion to give thoughtful consideration to these problems during the past few years. We have, however, no claim to special competence in solving the political, social, and military problems which are presented by the advent of atomic power.

## Document K

### World War II casualties

country	military		prisoners or missing <sup>2</sup>	civilian deaths due to war	estimated total deaths
	killed, died of wounds, or in prison <sup>1</sup>	wounded			
<b>Allied Powers</b>					
<b>Belgium</b>	12,000	—	—	76,000	88,000
<b>Brazil</b>	943	4,222	—	—	1,000
<b>British Commonwealth</b>	373,372	475,047	251,724 <sup>3</sup>	92,673	466,000
<b>Australia</b>	23,365	39,803	32,393	—	24,000
<b>Canada</b>	37,476	53,174	10,888	—	38,000
<b>India</b>	24,338	64,354	91,243	—	—
<b>New Zealand</b>	10,033	19,314	10,582	—	10,000
<b>South Africa</b>	6,840	14,363	16,430	—	7,000
<b>United Kingdom</b>	264,443	277,077	213,919	92,673 <sup>4</sup>	357,000
<b>Colonies</b>	6,877	6,972	22,323	—	7,000
<b>China<sup>5</sup></b>	1,310,224	1,752,951	115,248	—	—
<b>Czechoslovakia<sup>6</sup></b>	10,000	—	—	215,000	225,000
<b>Denmark</b>	1,800	—	—	2,000 <sup>7</sup>	4,000
<b>France<sup>8</sup></b>	213,324	400,000	—	350,000	563,000
<b>Greece<sup>9</sup></b>	88,300	—	—	325,000	413,000
<b>Netherlands</b>	7,900	2,860	—	200,000	208,000

<b>Norway</b>	3,000	—	—	7,000	10,000
<b>Poland<sup>10</sup></b>	123,178	236,606	420,760	5,675,000	5,800,000
<b>Philippines</b>	27,000	—	—	91,000	118,000
<b>United States<sup>11</sup></b>	292,131	671,801	139,709	6,000	298,000
<b>U.S.S.R.<sup>12</sup></b>	11,000,000	—	—	7,000,000	18,000,000
<b>Yugoslavia</b>	305,000	425,000	—	1,200,000	1,505,000
<b>Axis Powers</b>					
<b>Bulgaria<sup>13</sup></b>	10,000	—	—	10,000	20,000
<b>Finland</b>	82,000	50,000	—	2,000	84,000
<b>Germany<sup>14</sup></b>	3,500,000	5,000,000	3,400,000	780,000	4,200,000
<b>Hungary<sup>13</sup></b>	200,000	—	170,000	290,000	490,000
<b>Italy<sup>15</sup></b>	242,232	66,000	350,000	152,941	395,000
<b>Japan</b>	1,300,000 <sup>16</sup>	4,000,000	810,000	672,000	1,972,000
<b>Romania<sup>13</sup></b>	300,000	—	100,000	200,000	500,000

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/648813/World-War-II/53606/The-Japanese-surrender>