

Options in Brief

Option 1: Make This a Time for Peace

Japan is defeated. Japan's top military officials have undoubtedly recognized the hopelessness of their position. The main stumbling block to Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration is the confusion surrounding the status of the Japanese emperor. The Japanese believe that the emperor is a direct descendent of the gods who created their islands and their people. The United States must now step forward and assure the Japanese that we do not intend to put their emperor on trial as a war criminal. To unleash the power of the atom against a desperate, defeated people would damage the moral leadership that the United States has gained during the war. Once the guns fall silent, we will need all the good will we have earned to build a world of peace and democracy. In the name of American values and honor, we should clear away the last obstacles to Japan's surrender.

Option 2: Take Responsibility for a New Era

The atomic bomb must be used as a force to end the war and strengthen the peace. The United States should demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb to the world by staging an explosion on a deserted island in the Pacific. Americans have paid too high a price to accept anything less than Japan's unconditional surrender. However, how our country ends the war against Japan will have an enormous impact on the postwar world. By demonstrating the atomic bomb, we can begin the process of constructing a postwar world based on peace and respect for human rights. Inevitably, other nations will unlock the secrets of atomic energy. Before long, humanity will possess the power to destroy the entire planet. How the United States uses these first products of the atomic age will serve as an example for the rest of the world. Let us act firmly and responsibly.

Option 3: Push Ahead to Final Victory

For four years, Americans have willingly sacrificed their lives and their resources to overcome the evil forces of fascism and militarism. Now, with final victory within reach, we owe it to our troops to end the war as quickly and decisively as possible. Dropping atomic weapons without warning on Japan's cities, at reasonable intervals, is the surest method of ending the war on our terms and preventing further American casualties. We must not deceive ourselves. The Japanese will admit defeat only in the face of overwhelming military force. Victory over fascism and militarism has not been achieved through hesitation and halfway measures. As the defenders of democracy and freedom, we must remain strong and confident in our convictions.

Option 2: Take Responsibility for a New Era

The Manhattan Project has given the United States a weapon of almost inconceivable power. After spending more than \$2 billion and assembling the greatest team of scientists the world has ever known, the United States has mastered the secrets of the atom. Our leaders have no choice but to accept the responsibility that is in their hands. The atomic bomb must be used as a force to end the war and strengthen the peace.

The United States should demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb to the world by staging an explosion on a deserted island in the Pacific. Japanese leaders must see with their own eyes the awesome might they are up against. They must recognize the futility of their continued resistance and surrender without condition. Only if the Japanese refuse to surrender should the United States drop an atomic bomb on Japan itself. In that case, however, the blame for the deaths of thousands of Japanese civilians will fall on the heads of Japan's leaders, not on the United States.

Americans have paid too high a price to accept anything less than Japan's unconditional surrender. There must be no compromise with the Japanese militarists who brought this terrible war to the United States. Their authority must be crushed so that it never re-emerges, as it did in Germany after World War I. Japanese society can be reformed only if U.S. occupation forces are allowed to conduct their mission without interference.

How our country ends the war against Japan will have an enormous impact on the postwar world. As Americans, we can take pride in the values we have upheld throughout the fighting, despite the barbarism of the Japanese. By demonstrating the atomic bomb, we can begin the process of constructing a postwar world based on peace and respect for human rights. The combination of moral leadership and unrivaled military strength will put us in a unique position. Our trusted allies will be reassured and our enemies will be vanquished. Moreover, the Soviet Union, the only other country capable of challenging our supremacy, will be compelled by the power of the atomic bomb to behave reasonably in charting the future of postwar Europe.

We have been entrusted with an awesome challenge. Japan's leaders need to be jolted into accepting their utter defeat. Clarifying our surrender terms will not open their eyes to reality. However, there is no need to use the atomic bomb against Japanese civilians. An atomic attack would only serve to cast a dark cloud of fear and suspicion over the postwar world. A demonstration of the atomic bomb addresses both the immediate military situation and the fate of coming generations. A demonstration will both shock Japan into surrendering and set a standard for the new era we are entering.

Pros and Cons

Supporting Arguments

1. Demonstrating the awesome power of the atomic bomb will be the most humanitarian way to force the Japanese to accept unconditional surrender.

2. Bringing the war to an end through a demonstration of the atomic bomb will save the lives of thousands of American troops without lowering our international stature.

3. A demonstration of the atomic bomb will strengthen the moral leadership of the United States in the postwar world and set an international standard for the use of atomic weapons.

4. Gaining nothing less than the unconditional surrender of Japan while avoiding the slaughter of innocent civilians is the best tribute to the great sacrifices that the American people have made to defeat fascism and militarism.

5. Exhibiting the power of the atomic bomb to the world will suffice to compel the Soviets to back away from their efforts to expand their influence in Europe.

Opposing Arguments

1. If Japan's militarist officials have not given up their insane war by now, a demonstration of the atomic bomb will not convince them to surrender.

2. Undertaking the lengthy preparations for a demonstration of the atomic bomb will prolong the war, thus opening the door to a Soviet invasion of northern China.

3. Staging a demonstration of the atomic bomb will invite Japanese sabotage, with potentially disastrous consequences.

4. Considering the resources involved in producing each atomic bomb, the United States cannot afford to waste one on a demonstration.

5. The atomic bomb is an unreliable weapon that has been tested only once. A failed demonstration of the bomb will hurt American morale, encourage the Japanese to continue fighting, and lower the stature of the United States internationally.

From the Historical Record

Memorandum from Secretary of War Henry Stimson to President Truman, April 25, 1945

"Within four months we shall in all probability have completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city.... It is extremely probable that the future may see a time when such a weapon may be constructed in secret and used suddenly...with devastating power by a willful nation or group against an unsuspecting nation.... The world in its present state of moral advancement compared with its technical development would be eventually at the mercy of such a weapon.... Our leadership in the war and in the development of this weapon has placed a certain moral responsibility upon us which we cannot shirk without very serious responsibility for any disaster to civilization which it would further."

Summary of discussion between Gen. George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, May 29, 1945

"[General Marshall] said he thought these weapons might first be used against straight military objectives such as a large naval installation, and then if no complete result was derived from the effect of that, he thought we ought to designate a number of large manufacturing areas from which people would be warned to leave....Every effort should be made to keep our record of warning clear. We must offset by such warning methods the opprobrium which might follow from an ill-considered employment of such force."

Notes taken at a meeting of the Interim Committee, May 31, 1945

"Dr. Oppenheimer stated that the visual effect of an atomic bombing would be tremendous. It would be accompanied by a brilliant luminescence which would rise to a height of 10,000 to 20,000 feet. The neutron effect of

the explosion would be dangerous to life for a radius of at least two-thirds of a mile."

Memorandum, also known as the Franck Report, from the Committee of Social and Political Implications—a group of scientists working in Chicago on the Manhattan Project, June 1945

"In the past science has been able to provide also new methods of protection against new weapons of aggression it made possible, but it cannot promise such efficient protection against the destructive use of nuclear power. This protection can only come from the political organization of the world....

"The military advantages and the saving of American lives achieved by the sudden use of atomic bombs against Japan may be outweighed by the ensuing loss of confidence and by a wave of horror and repulsion sweeping over the rest of the world and perhaps even dividing public opinion at home. From this point of view, a demonstration of the new weapon might best be made....

"The best possible atmosphere for the achievement of an international agreement could be achieved if America could say to the world, 'You see that sort of weapon we had but did not use.'"

Memorandum from Undersecretary of the Navy Ralph Bard, 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.... I don't see that we have anything in particular to lose in following such a program."