

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 3: Push Ahead to a Final Victory

The United States has always stood for justice and fair play. Throughout our country's history, the United States has not meddled in the affairs of other countries nor entered disputes for selfish reasons. This hateful war was thrust upon us. 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. After spending more than \$2 billion to develop an atomic bomb, President Truman has a moral responsibility to use whatever means are at his disposal to save American lives. Any other method to secure peace will likely result in huge numbers of American casualties, as the Japanese army and even its citizens will continue to fight barbarically, with the aim of killing as many Americans as possible before they themselves are killed. Furthermore, dropping atomic weapons without warning on Japan's cities, at reasonable intervals, is the surest method of ending the war on our terms. Even the most hardened Japanese militarist will be forced to accept unconditional surrender—if not after the first atomic bomb, then after the second or third.

We must not deceive ourselves. The Japanese will admit defeat only in the face of overwhelming military force. If we choose not to drop the atomic bombs, we should prepare for a full-scale invasion of Japan that will cost the lives of tens of thousands of our fathers, sons, and brothers. This is not the time for a guilty conscience. The Japanese have fought a merciless war of aggression. They neither expect nor deserve mercy. In light of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, the "Bataan Death March," and the torture and execution of Allied prisoners, no Japanese leader can dare accuse us of immoral behavior. Other nations, too, understand that the United States is justified in employing any and all means to destroy Japanese militarism. This is why our closest allies, the British, have already approved the use of atomic weapons against Japan.

It is far too late for negotiations. The Japanese militarists must not be permitted to reach a face-saving compromise that will rescue them from utter defeat. The Japanese emperor must not be allowed to remain as a divine symbol for legitimizing Japan's aggression. Moreover, the Japanese government itself is seriously divided. We might very well reach an agreement with one faction and then face continued resistance from a faction of defiant militarists. Likewise, a demonstration of the atomic bomb serves no purpose at this late stage. An explosion that carves out a crater on a deserted Pacific island is far less convincing than one that flattens thousands of buildings. In addition, we cannot risk the possibility that Japan would shoot down the plane dropping a demonstration bomb. Using the atomic bomb against an enemy city is the only way to deliver our message to the leaders of Japan. Demonstrating our strength and resolve will also have a sobering effect on Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. 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.

Pros and Cons

Supporting Arguments

1. Only the destruction of several Japanese cities will shock Japan's leaders into immediately accepting unconditional surrender.
2. Using the atomic bomb on Japanese cities is the surest, most effective way to prevent further American casualties.
3. Considering that the war has already resulted in more than fifty million deaths worldwide, the use of the atomic bomb hardly represents an escalation in the level of violence.
4. The destruction of a Japanese city caused by an atomic bomb will impress the Soviets with our country's power and compel them to soften their position on the future of Eastern Europe.
5. The immediate unconditional surrender and complete defeat of Japan's militarists are essential if the United States is to establish a stable, lasting peace and promptly conclude the war without Soviet involvement in East Asia.

Opposing Arguments

1. Slaughtering thousands of innocent Japanese civilians when less destructive roads to peace are open is a violation of the values and principles for which Americans have fought this war.
2. Dropping an atomic bomb on Japanese civilians will damage U.S. moral leadership and undercut our country's ability to construct a lasting peace in the postwar world.
3. Destroying a Japanese city and killing thousands of people will prompt other countries, particularly the Soviet Union, to rush to develop atomic weapons for their own protection.
4. Using an atomic bomb against Japan will deepen anti-American feelings among the Japanese and undermine U.S. plans to reform Japanese society after the war.
5. Conventional military tactics, especially the air bombardment and the naval blockade, have brought the Japanese to their knees, making use of the atomic bomb unnecessary.

From the Historical Record

State of the Union address by President Roosevelt, January 6, 1942

“No compromise can end [this] conflict.... Only total victory can reward the champions of tolerance and decency and freedom and faith.”

Until They Eat Stones, a best-selling book published in 1944 by Associated Press correspondent Russell Brines

“[The Japanese] will continue the war until every man—perhaps every woman and child—lies face downward on the battlefield.... To ignore this suicide complex would be as dangerous as our pre-war oversight of Japanese determination and cunning which made Pearl Harbor possible.... This is a war of extermination. The Japanese militarists have made it that way.”

Report to Congress by President Roosevelt, March 1, 1945

“The unconditional surrender of Japan is as essential as the defeat of Germany...if our plans for world peace are to succeed. For Japanese militarism must be wiped out as thoroughly as German militarism.”

Notes by Arthur Compton from a meeting of the Interim Committee, May 31, 1945

“If a bomb were exploded in Japan with previous notice, the Japanese air power [is] still adequate to give serious interference. An atomic bomb [is] an intricate device, still in the development stage. The operation would be far from routine. If during the final adjustment of the bomb the Japanese defenders should attack, a faulty move might easily result in some kind of failure. Such an end to an advertised demonstration of power would

be much worse than if the attempt had not been made.... If such an open test were made first and failed to bring surrender, the chance would be gone to give the shock of surprise.”

Report of the Scientific Panel to the Interim Committee, June 1, 1945

“We can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.”

Minutes of the Interim Committee, June 1, 1945

“The present view of the [Interim] Committee was that the bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible; that it be used on a war plant surrounded by homes; and that it be used without prior warning.”

Letter from Arthur Compton to Secretary of War Henry Stimson, June 15, 1945

“Failure to make a military demonstration [dropping it on a city] of the new bombs may make the war longer and more expensive in human lives.... Without a military demonstration it may be impossible to impress the world with the need for national sacrifices in order to gain lasting security.”

Army Air Force publication, July 1945

“The entire population of Japan is a proper military target.... THERE ARE NO CIVILIANS IN JAPAN. We are making War and making it in the all-out fashion which saves American lives, shortens the agony which War is, and seeks to bring about an enduring peace. We intend to seek out and destroy the enemy wherever he or she is, in the greatest possible numbers, in the shortest possible time.”