**Information Against Truman’s Dropping of the Atomic Bombs**

**Directions:** President Harry Truman said he dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6, 1945 and August 9, 1945, respectively, to end WWII as quickly as possible and to save lives (mainly American lives).

Read the info below that opposes Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs & highlight/underline the **SPECIFIC** reasons against the atomic bombings. To strengthen your argument, you should include a few suggestions/alternatives that Truman could have done instead of dropping the bombs, shorten the war, and/or save lives.

Despite the references to Japan’s refusal to surrender and the use of suicide attacks, called kamikaze, one cannot ignore the bad condition that Japan was in by July 1945. First, Allied bombing runs over the Japanese Home Islands were killing tens of thousands of civilians and military personnel. Second, an Allied naval blockade made it impossible for Japan to import the goods necessary to continue fighting and prevented one million Japanese troops in China from returning to their homeland for defense. Third, the massive Soviet Red Army was poised to enter the war and assist the United States. (On August 8, 2 days after dropping the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan.) Conditions like these would make it very difficult for the Japanese to continue fighting effectively. One top military official, Admiral William D. Leahy stated, “It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and successful bombing with conventional weapons…”

Many top American generals believed that if the atomic bomb were to be used at all, it should only be used after very specific warnings were made. Many believe that the warning by Truman at the Potsdam Conference (that the Japanese would face “prompt and utter destruction” if they didn’t surrender) was too general. Perhaps the Allies could have dropped the bomb in an unpopulated area in/near Japan and Asia to demonstrate its destructive capabilities. This could have served as the ultimate warning. Some believe, however, that Truman and his military advisors rejected this idea because they wanted to actually test the effectiveness of the bomb in an actual battle situation.

Some historians believe that the Japanese would have surrendered if the U.S. made it clearer that the Japanese emperor could have kept his throne, even after surrendering. The Japanese were worried that an unconditional surrender may threaten the existence of their Emperor (Emperor Hirohito) who they treated like a god. It was believed that many Japanese would rather continue fighting than give up their emperor and/or be disgraced. Some historians believe that the language of the demand for surrender was too general, and understand why the Japanese could believe all this. Others point out that the Japanese were considering surrendering, just not on the “unconditional” terms put forth by the Americans. Reports show that the Japanese were trying to develop relations with the Russians to work out an alternative surrender that could be offered to the Americans.

Other historians point out that Emperor Hirohito was considering and maybe even favoring surrender and peace with the Americans as early as June 20, 1945. On June 20, the emperor told the Japanese governing council (the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War) that it “was necessary to have a plan to close the war at once as well as a plan to defend the home islands.” Eventually, after the bombs were dropped on both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was Emperor Hirohito who broke the deadlocked council’s vote to finally surrender to the Americans.

Many government or military officials did not want to use the atomic bomb because it would ruin America’s image. The Undersecretary of the Navy, Ralph Bard, said that dropping the bomb would threaten “the position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation.” Admiral Leahy said, “…being the first to use [the atomic bomb], we adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.” Even Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, expressed hope that the U.S. would never have to use such a weapon against an enemy again because he disliked seeing the country “initiate the use of anything so horrible and destructive.”

Other historians point out that America’s image in the world was, in fact, the primary motive for the use of the bombs. The atomic weapons, they argued, were used primarily as a way to intimidate other nations in the world, particularly the Russians, who would stand to become the United States’ main rival in the postwar world. Although the U.S. and the Soviet Union were allies during WWII, they had very different versions for the postwar world. The Russians wanted to maintain control over Eastern Europe. The U.S. wanted the Russians to provide independence to Eastern European countries. Truman, then, may have used the atomic bombs mainly to scare the Russians out of Eastern Europe and to keep them from gaining more territory in Asia.

Lastly, many argue that the use of atomic weapons is a poor decision because it inevitably leads to the death of innocent civilians. It is easier to discriminate between military targets (soldiers) and civilians with conventional weapons. The effects of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were truly horrific. The blast killed approximately 100,000 people; some died instantly and others died several months later as a result of their injuries and radiation poisoning. The temperature of the blast was 100 million degrees. People located at the center were instantly vaporized; the remains of their bodies left only shadows on pavements and building walls. People located further away from the center received deadly burns. One survivor said, “The people all had skin blackened by burns…they had no hair because their hair was burned, and at a glance you couldn’t tell whether you were looking at them from the front or the back…their skin – not only their hands, but on their faces and bodies too – hung down.”

People further from the epicenter survived the bombings, but lived out the rest of their lives with many health issues caused by radiation poisoning and sickness. Survivors are known as *hibakusha.* There were over 450,000 *hibakusha* survivors with 183,519 still alive as of March 31, 2015. *Hibakusha* and their children were (and still are) victims of severe discrimination due to public ignorance about the consequences of radiation sickness, with much of the public believing it to be hereditary or even contagious.

**Alternatives to Dropping the Bombs, Shorten the War, and/or Save Lives:**