**Information Supporting 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 supports Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs & highlight/underline the **SPECIFIC** reasons in support of the atomic bombings.

President Truman drew largely upon the advice of Henry Stimson, the U.S. Secretary of War, when deciding whether or not to drop “the bomb.” Much of the information from this handout comes from an article written by Stimson in 1947. In his article, Stimson describes the plans that the American military officials had for attacking Japan *before* they knew that the atomic bomb would work effectively. According to Stimson, the original plans of attack would put millions of soldiers’ lives at risk, and would have involved at least another year of fighting. He writes, “We were planning an intensified sea and air blockade, and greatly intensified strategic air bombing…to be followed on November 1 by an invasion of the southern island of Kyushu [Japan]. …The total U.S. military and naval forces involved in this grand design was…5 million men…We estimated that if we should be forced to carry this plan to its conclusion, the major fighting would not end until the latter part of 1946, at the earliest. I was informed that such operations might be expected to cost over a million casualties, to American forces alone. Additional large losses might be expected among our allies, and of course, if our campaign were successful and if we could judge by previous experience, enemy casualties would be much larger than our own…”

American soldiers generally supported Truman’s decision to drop the bomb because it would save American soldiers’ lives. As one young soldier stated: “When the bombs were dropped and news began to circulate that [the invasion of Japan] would not take place after all, that we would not be obliged to run up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being mortared and shelled…we cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow up to adulthood after all.”

Stimson also supported the use of the atomic bomb because of his concern over Japan’s huge army and its refusal to surrender to America. “…As we understood it in July [1945], there was a very strong possibility that the Japanese government might determine upon resistance to the end, in all areas of the Far East [Asia] under its control. In such an event, the Allies would be faced with the enormous task of destroying an armed force of 5 million men and five thousand suicide aircraft [kamikaze], belonging to a race which had amply demonstrated its ability to fight literally to the death…In the middle of July 1945, the intelligence section of the War Department General Staff estimated…the total strength of the Japanese army at about 5 million men. These estimates later proved to be in very close agreement with official Japanese figures.”

On July 26, 1945, at the Potsdam Conference with Churchill and Stalin, President Truman warned the Japanese that they faced “prompt and utter destruction” unless they surrendered at once. The Japanese were worried that an unconditional surrender may threaten the existence of their Emperor (Emperor Hirohito) who they treated like a god. Some historians question whether or not Japan would have surrender if the U.S. made it clear that the Japanese emperor could keep his throne. America’s Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, argued, however, that the order…”implicitly (indirectly) recognized the Emperor’s position by prescribing that his power must be subject to the orders of the Allies Supreme Commander…” In other words, if the Americans had planned on executing the Emperor, then why would they have gone out of their way to explain this particular rule – the Emperor must still follow the orders of the Allies after surrender? On July 28, Japanese rejected the surrender, announcing it was “unworthy of public notice.”

The Japanese viewed surrender as dishonorable. They believed it was more honorable to commit suicide than to surrender to enemy forces. For example, during one of the last battles in the Pacific (Battle of Okinawa), 2,000 Japanese kamikaze pilots strapped themselves onto planes loaded with explosives and crashed them into American vessels. They managed to destroy 53 ships and damage 158 others. Furthermore, studies done by well-known scientist Karl T. Compton also support the Japanese’s unwillingness to surrender under any terms. Here are excerpts from an article he wrote in 1946:

“About a week after the victory over Japan, I was one of a small group of scientists and engineers interrogating an intelligent, well-informed Japanese officer in Yokohama. We asked him what, in his opinion, would have been the next major move if the war had continued. He replied, “You would probably have tried to invade our homeland with a landing operation in Kyushu…”

“Could you have repelled the landing?” we asked, and he answered, “”It would have been a very desperate fight, but I do not think we could have stopped you.”

“What would have happened then?” we asked. He replied, “We would have kept on fighting until all Japanese were killed, but we would not have been defeated,” by which he meant that they would not have been disgraced by surrender…”

The Japanese army’s unwillingness to surrender was also evident in their behavior *after* the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. After dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and immediately killing 70,000 people, the U.S. asked if Japan wanted to surrender, but the Japanese didn’t respond. On August 9, 1945, the U.S. dropped a second atomic bomb, this time on the city of Nagasaki, which immediately killed 37,500 people. After the second bombing, the Japanese war council was still deadlocked (3 to 3) on the deciding whether or not to surrender.

After eventually dropping the atomic bombs on Japan, the American government researched *former* attacks on Japan, which used traditional bombing methods (fire or “incendiary bombs,” etc.). In their research, the officials came to the following conclusions. “In March 1945, our air force had launched its great incendiary [firebombing] raid on the Tokyo area (the capital of Japan). In this raid, more damage was done and more casualties were inflicted than was the case at Hiroshima with the atomic bomb…Similar successive raids burned a great part of the urban area of Japan, but the Japanese fought on…Had the war continued until the projected invasion of November 1, additional fire raids by B-29s (bombers) would have been more destructive of life and property than the very limited number of atomic raids which we could have executed in the same period.”