

LEADERSHIP DEBATE ON THE ATOMIC BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

DOCUMENT 1: THE FRANCK REPORT, a report by Manhattan Project scientists advising against use of atomic bombs against Japan, June 1945

The development of nuclear power not only constitutes an important addition to the technological and military power of the United States, but also creates grave political and economic problems for the future of this country.

Nuclear bombs cannot possibly remain a "secret weapon" at the exclusive disposal of this country, for more than a few years. ... Unless an effective international control of nuclear explosives is instituted, a race of nuclear armaments is certain to ensue following the first revelation of our possession of nuclear weapons to the world. Within ten years other countries may have nuclear bombs, each of which, weighing less than a ton, could destroy an urban area of more than ten square miles. In the war to which such an armaments race is likely to lead, the United States, with its agglomeration of population and industry in comparatively few metropolitan districts, will be at a disadvantage compared to the nations whose population and industry are scattered over large areas.

"We believe that these considerations make the use of nuclear bombs for an early, unannounced attack against Japan inadvisable. If the United States would be the first to release this new means of indiscriminate destruction upon mankind, she would sacrifice public support throughout the world, precipitate the race of armaments, and prejudice the possibility of reaching an international agreement on the future control of such weapons."

DOCUMENT 2: THE POTSDAM DECLARATION, July 26, 1945

1. We, the President of the United States, the President of the National Government of the Republic of China, and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, representing the hundreds of millions of our countrymen, have conferred and agree that Japan shall be given an opportunity to end this war.
2. The prodigious land, sea and air forces of the United States, the British Empire and of China, many times reinforced by their armies and air fleets from the west, are poised to strike the final blows upon Japan. ...

3. The result of the futile and senseless German resistance to the might of the aroused free peoples of the world stands forth in awful clarity as an example to the people of Japan. The might that now converges on Japan is immeasurably greater than that which, when applied to the resisting Nazis, necessarily laid waste to the lands, the industry and the method of life of the whole German people. The full application of our military power, backed by our resolve, will mean the inevitable and complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces and just as inevitably the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland.
5. Following are our terms. We will not deviate from them. There are no alternatives. We shall brook no delay.
6. There must be eliminated for all time the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest, for we insist that a new order of peace, security and justice will be impossible until irresponsible militarism is driven from the world.
10. We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation, but stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners. The Japanese Government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established.
13. We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.

DOCUMENT 3: WHITE HOUSE PRESS RELEASE, August 6, 1945

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese Army base. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of T.N.T. It had more than two thousand times the blast power of the British "Grand Slam" which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.

The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development.

It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.

Before 1939, it was the accepted belief of scientists that it was theoretically possible to release atomic energy. But no one knew any practical method of doing it. By 1942, however, we knew that the Germans were working feverishly to find a way to add atomic energy to the other engines of war with which they hoped to enslave the world. But they failed. ...

The battle of the laboratories held fateful risks for us as well as the battles of the air, land and sea, and we have now won the battle of the laboratories as we have won the other battles.

...

We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war.

It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware.

HARRY S. TRUMAN, 33rd President of the United States

“The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used. The top military advisers to the President recommended its use, and when I talked to Churchill he unhesitatingly told me that he favored the use of the atomic bomb if it might aid to end the war...”

WINSTON CHURCHILL, Prime Minister of Great Britain:

“There never was a moment’s discussion (at Potsdam) as to whether the atomic bomb should be used or not. The historic fact remains, and must be judged in the after time, that the decision to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never an issue...There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; not did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise...”

HENRY L. STIMSON, Secretary of War:

“My chief purpose was to end the war in victory with the least possible cost in the lives of men in the armies which I had helped to raise. In the light of the alternatives which, on a fair estimate, were open to us I believe that no man, in our position and subject to our responsibilities, holding in his hands a weapon of such possibilities for accomplishing this purpose and saving those lives, could have failed to use it and afterwards looked his countrymen in the face...”

GENERAL LESLIE R. GROVES, in charge of the Manhattan Project:

“...In my opinion, his [Truman’s] resolve to continue with the original plan will always stand as an act of unsurpassed courage and wisdom – courage because, for the first time in the history of the United States, the President personally determined the course of a major military strategical and tactical operation for which he could be considered directly responsible; and wisdom because history, if any thought is given to the value of American lives, has conclusively proven that his decision was correct...”

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe

"...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..."

"...the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing."

ELLIS ZACHARIAS, Deputy Director of the Office of Naval Intelligence

"Just when the Japanese were ready to capitulate, we went ahead and introduced to the world the most devastating weapon it had ever seen and, in effect, gave the go-ahead to Russia to swarm over Eastern Asia.

"Washington decided that Japan had been given its chance and now it was time to use the A-bomb. I submit that it was the wrong decision. It was wrong on strategic grounds. And it was wrong on humanitarian grounds."

LEO SZILARD, Theoretical Physicist with the Manhattan Project

"In the spring of '45 it was clear that the war against Germany would soon end, and so I began to ask myself, 'What is the purpose of continuing the development of the bomb, and how would the bomb be used if the war with Japan has not ended by the time we have the first bombs?'".

"[Secretary of State James Byrnes] was concerned about Russia's postwar behavior. Russian troops had moved into Hungary and Rumania, 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."

"I was concerned at this point that by demonstrating the bomb and using it in the war against Japan, we might start an atomic arms race between America and Russia which might end with the destruction of both countries."

ADMIRAL WILLIAM D. LEAHY, White House Chief of Staff to Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman

"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 the successful bombing with conventional weapons.

"The lethal possibilities of atomic warfare in the future are frightening. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children."

RALPH BARD, Under Secretary of the Navy

"...it definitely seemed to me that the Japanese were becoming weaker and weaker. They were surrounded by the Navy. They couldn't get any imports and they couldn't export anything. Naturally, as time went on and the war developed in our favor it was quite logical to hope and expect that with the proper kind of a warning the Japanese would then be in a position to make peace, which would have made it unnecessary for us to drop the bomb and have had to bring Russia in..."

"In my opinion, the Japanese war was really won before we ever used the atom bomb. Thus, it wouldn't have been necessary for us to disclose our nuclear position and stimulate the Russians to develop the same thing much more rapidly than they would have if we had not dropped the bomb."

LEWIS STRAUSS, Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy

"I proposed to Secretary [of the Navy] Forrestal that the weapon should be demonstrated before it was used. ... My proposal to the Secretary was that the weapon should be demonstrated over some area accessible to Japanese observers and where its effects would be dramatic. I remember suggesting that a satisfactory place for such a demonstration would be a large forest of cryptomeria trees not far from Tokyo. The cryptomeria tree is the Japanese version of our redwood... I anticipated that a bomb detonated at a suitable height above such a forest... would lay the trees out in windrows from the center of the explosion in all directions as though they were matchsticks, and, of course, set them afire in the center. It seemed to me that a demonstration of this sort would prove to the Japanese that we could destroy any of their cities at will... Secretary Forrestal agreed wholeheartedly with the recommendation..."

PAUL NITZE, Vice Chairman, U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey

"The plan I devised was essentially this: Japan was already isolated from the standpoint of ocean shipping. The only remaining means of transportation were the rail network and intercoastal shipping, though our submarines and mines were rapidly eliminating the latter as well. A concentrated air attack on the essential lines of transportation ... would isolate the Japanese home islands from one another and fragment the enemy's base of operations. I believed that interdiction of the lines of transportation would be sufficiently effective so that additional bombing of urban industrial areas would not be necessary.

"Even without the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it seemed highly unlikely, given what we found to have been the mood of the Japanese government, that a U.S. invasion of the islands [scheduled for November 1, 1945] would have been necessary."

BRIGADIER GENERAL CARTER CLARKE, U.S. Army intelligence officer in charge of intercepted Japanese cables

"...when we didn't need to do it, and we knew we didn't need to do it, and they knew that we knew we didn't need to do it, we used them as an experiment for two atomic bombs.

Document 1: The Frank Report

1. What political and economic problems does nuclear power create?
2. Why does the report advise against the use of nuclear bombs against Japan?

Document 2: The Potsdam Declaration

3. What does Japan have to do to have peace?
4. What type of future do the United States, Britain, and China envision for post-war Japan?
5. What is Japan warned will be the consequence if it does not accept unconditional surrender?

Document 3: White House Press Release of August 6, 1945

6. Why does the atomic bomb's power have to be explained?
7. How did Truman plan to end the war?
8. What reasons does President Truman use to justify dropping the bomb?

What is the position of each of the following policy-makers regarding use of the atomic bombs?

9. Truman

15. Szilard

10. Churchill

16. Leahy

11. Stimson

17. Bard

12. Groves

18. Strauss

13. Eisenhower

19. Nitze

14. Zacharias

20. Clarke

21. According to the various individuals above, what were some of the reasons the bomb was used?

22. According to these accounts, what other options did the United States have?

23. Albert Einstein is reported to have said "I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." In your words, what do you think he meant?

24. In your opinion, was the use of atom bombs against Japan the correct choice?