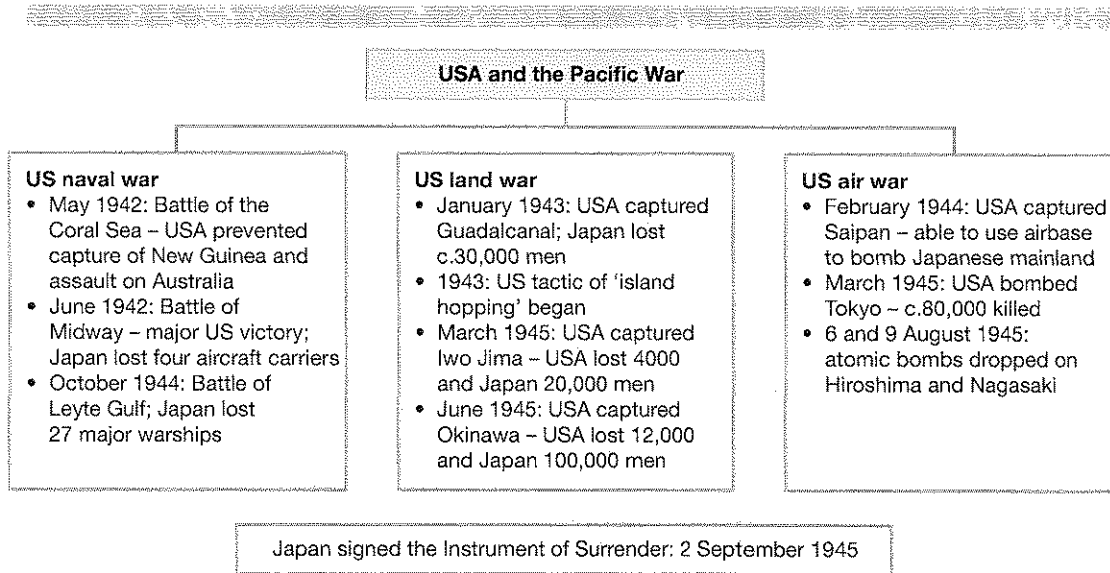


With the war in Europe over, the industrial might of the USA turned against Japan. Attacks on the Japanese mainland could be made at will. The Japanese government's attitude needed to change to end the conflict.



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

The USA and the Pacific War

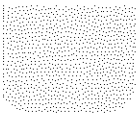
Key debate

► *Key question: Why did President Truman decide to use the atomic bomb?*

At the time of the bombings, the orthodox view was that the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were to bring a swift end to the war. However, revisionist historians have refuted this, arguing that there were several other key reasons why the bombs were used, not least the issue of US–Soviet relations and the USSR's position in Asia. Truman faced many senior advisers and military commanders who offered conflicting advice. He had to consider moral and political issues as well as the possibility of huge US casualties.

The orthodox view

Winston Churchill, then British prime minister, supported Truman's decision to use the bomb, as did Stimson, who stated that the Japanese army was large and powerful and that fighting would not end until late 1946.



What does Source K suggest about Stimson's attitude to using the bomb?

SOURCE K

Extract from 'The decision to use the bomb', by Henry Stimson, published in *Harper's Magazine*, February 1947.

My chief purpose was to end the war in victory with the least possible cost in the lives of the men in the armies which I had helped to raise. The face of war is the face of death; death is an inevitable part of every order that a wartime leader gives. The decision to use the atomic bomb was a decision that brought death to over a hundred thousand Japanese. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to the Japanese war. It stopped the fire raids and the strangling blockade; it ended the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies.

Historians such as Herbert Feis, writing in *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (1966), put forward the orthodox view that Truman made his decision on purely military grounds in order to ensure a speedy victory. David McCullough, the author of a biography of Truman (1992), also accepted this. William O'Neill in *A Democracy at War* (1993) stated that the Japanese military had no intention of surrendering and meant to fight to the last man, woman and child. He also points out that the Japanese military did not consider surrender even after Hiroshima. In the three months after Truman became president, the USA had sustained nearly half of the casualties inflicted upon it by the Japanese in three years of fighting. Robert J.C. Butow, writing in *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (1954), stressed the crucial importance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in bringing about surrender. Butow's text is still seen as an important part of the debate.

Alonzo L. Hamby, writing in *Man of the People* (1995), said that Truman was motivated by the thought of more and more US soldiers dying. Richard Frank has argued in *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999) that the USA would have changed its mind about invading Japan in November 1945 because the latter was still a power to be reckoned with. Frank writes that the bomb's use was better than all existing alternatives, and saved not only Allied lives but Japanese lives as well. Sadao Asada and Professor Barton Bernstein have also argued that there was a possibility that Japan would not have surrendered by November. Hence, using the atomic bomb ended the conflict.

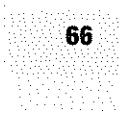
SOURCE L

Extract from Truman's letter of 11 August 1945 to the General Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of the USA (www.nccusa.org/centennial/augustmoment.html).

Nobody is more disturbed over the use of atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them ... When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.



What does Source L suggest about Truman's character?



The revisionist view

Truman has been criticized on several grounds for his decision. Military advisers told Truman that Japan was a defeated nation and that the US naval blockade of the home islands meant that its war effort would wane quickly. Reportedly there were also three million Japanese soldiers stranded in China who could not return to Japan to defend the homeland.

SOURCE M

Excerpt from *Mandate for Change 1953–1956*, by Dwight Eisenhower, published by Doubleday, USA, 1963, page 380.

I voiced ... 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 the very moment, seeking to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face.'

According to Source M, why did Eisenhower not wish to 'shock world opinion'?

Senior commanders from all arms (Eisenhower, MacArthur, Leahy, King, Nimitz, Arnold and LeMay) opposed its use. Admiral Leahy saw the use of the bomb as no different to using poisonous gas or bacteriological weapons. Indeed, some of them saw that the USA was surrendering its moral high ground if it became the first to use such a weapon.

SOURCE N

Extract from *I Was There*, by Admiral William Leahy, published by Whittlesey House, USA, 1950, page 441.

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. We were the first to have this weapon in our possession, and the first to use it. There is a practical certainty that potential enemies will develop it in the future and that atomic bombs will at some time be used against us.

What does Source N show about the morality of using the atomic bomb?

SOURCE O

Excerpt from the Japanese newspaper *Nippon Times*, 10 August 1945. This was published the day after the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

How can a human being with any claim to a sense of moral responsibility deliberately let loose an instrument of destruction which can at one stroke annihilate an appalling segment of mankind? This is not war; this is not even murder; this is pure nihilism. This is a crime against God and humanity which strikes at the very basis of moral existence. What meaning is there in any international law, in any rule of human conduct, in any concept of right and wrong, if the very foundations of morality are to be overthrown as the use of this instrument of total destruction threatens to do? What more barbarous atrocity

According to Source O, what distinguished the atomic bomb from other weapons?

can there be than to wipe out at one stroke the population of a whole city without distinction – men, women, and children; the aged, the weak, the infirm; those in positions of authority, and those with no power at all; all snuffed out without being given a chance of lifting even a finger in either defence or defiance!

Revisionist historians have written that the use of the atomic bomb had more to do with keeping the USSR out of Asia and warning them of the military power that the USA now possessed. The publication of the US Strategic Bombing Survey's Report bolstered this view after the war. It concluded that the US blockade would have obliged Japan to surrender by November. Historian Gar Alperovitz in *Atomic Diplomacy* (1965) wrote that Truman *et al.* knew it was unnecessary and there was evidence, by the late summer of 1945, that Truman was engaging in 'atomic diplomacy' by trying to intimidate the USSR. The Soviet historian Vadim Nekrasov in *The Roots of European Security* (1984) stated that the US decision to use the bomb was simply to show its power to the world, especially to the USSR.

SOURCE P

Extract from *The Roots of European Security*, by V. Nekrasov, published by Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Russia, 1984.

Officially, the Americans claimed that the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki intended to bring the end of the war nearer and avoid unnecessary bloodshed and casualties, but there were entirely different objectives. The purpose of the bombings was to intimidate other countries, above all the Soviet Union. In other words, the US decision to use atomic energy for military purposes intended to produce a diplomatic and psychological impact, and this has since involved the world in a nuclear arms race.

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa in *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan* (2006) has written that Truman used the atomic bomb to win the war against Japan without Soviet assistance, thus limiting Soviet expansion in Asia. He argues that it was the anticipated Soviet participation in the war which had the greatest influence on Japan's decision to surrender. These arguments have also been supported by several other historians, especially Martin Sherwin in *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies* (1975).

Critics have also said Truman used the bomb because it cost \$2 billion in development (see Chapter 8, pages 190–2) and there had to be some return on such high investment. Importantly, Truman was aware of the peace-feelers that the Japanese government had made towards the USSR. Another theory of the motive for using the bomb is that it avenged Pearl Harbor and the ill-treatment of US soldiers.

John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (1986) and Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb* (1995) have even cited racism as a reason behind Truman's decision to use the atomic bombs.

How reliable is Source P as evidence of the motives of the USA in using the atomic bombs?

How might a utilitarian ethical argument be applied to Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? (Logic, Ethics.)

NOT