

Document A – Memoirs of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson (circa 1947)

The principal political, social and military objective of the U.S. in the summer of 1945 was the prompt and complete surrender of Japan. Only the complete destruction of her military power could open the way to lasting peace...

In the middle of July, 1945 the intelligence section of the War Department General Staff estimated Japanese military strength as follows:

- Home Islands of Japan – approximately 2,000,000 Japanese soldiers.
- Korea, Manchuria, China proper and Formosa – approximately 2,000,000 Japanese soldiers.
- French Indo China, Thailand and Burma over 200,000 Japanese soldiers.
- East Indies area, including the Philippines over 500,000 Japanese soldiers
- Pacific Islands bypassed during Island hopping campaign – 100,000 Japanese soldiers.

The total strength of the Japanese Army was estimated at about 5,000,000 men. These estimates later proved to be in very close agreement with official Japanese figures...

As we understood it in July, there was a strong possibility that the Japanese government might determine upon resistance to the end, in all areas of the Far East under its control. In such an event the allies would be forced faced with the enormous task of destroying an armed forces of five million men and five thousand suicide aircraft (kamikazes), belonging to a race which had already amply demonstrated its ability to fight literally to the death.

The strategic plans of our armed forces for the defeat of Japan, as they stood in July, had been prepared without reliance upon the atomic bomb, which had not yet been tested in New Mexico. We were planning an intensified sea and air blockade and greatly intensified strategic air bombing, through the summer and early fall, to be followed on November 1 by an invasion of the southern island of Kyushu. This would be followed in turn by an invasion of the main island of Honshu in the spring of 1946. The total U.S. military and naval force involved in this grand design was of the order of 5,000,000 men; if all those indirectly concerned are included, it was larger still.

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 coast over a million casualties, to American forces alone. Estimates on Japanese military and civilians were estimated at four to five times greater.

Document B – Memoirs of Gen. Hap Arnold, Commander of the American Army Air Force in the Second World War (circa 1949)

The surrender of Japan was not entirely the result of the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima & Nagasaki in August of 1945. We (U.S.A.A.C.) had hit some sixty (60) Japanese cities with our regular high explosive bombs and incendiary (fire) bombs and, as a result of our raids, about 241,000 people had been killed, 313,000 wounded and over 2 million homes destroyed. Our B-29's (bombers) had destroyed most of the Japanese industries and, with the laying of mines, which prevented the arrival of incoming cargoes of critical items, had made it impossible for Japan to carry on a large-scale war... Accordingly, it always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse.

Document C – President Harry S. Truman, radio address to the American people (August 1945)

I realize the significance of the atomic bomb.

Its production and its use were not lightly undertaken by this Government. But we knew that our enemies were on the search for it. We know how close they were to finding it. And we know the disaster which would come to this nation, and to all peaceful nations, to all civilizations if they (Axis powers) had found it first.

That is why we felt compelled to undertake the long and uncertain and costly labor of discovery and production (of the atomic bomb).

We won the race of discovery against the Germans.

Having found the bomb, we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save thousands and thousands of young Americans.

We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan's power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us (from dropping more bombs).

Document D – British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's recollections of news received that the Atomic bomb works (Trinity Test results) – July 1945

The atomic bomb is a reality... Here then was a speedy end to WWII, and perhaps much else besides... Up to this moment we had shaped our ideas towards an assault upon the homeland of Japan by terrific air bombing and by the invasion of very large armies...

Now all this nightmare picture has vanished. In its place was the vision... of the end of the whole war in one or two violent shocks...

Moreover, we should not need the Russians. The end of the Japanese war no longer depended upon the pouring of the armies for the final and perhaps protracted slaughter. We had no need to ask favors of them (Russia). It became quite clear that the U.S. do not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan. The array of European problems could therefore be faced on their merits and according to the broad principles of the United Nations.

Document E – Historian (unknown name or date)

The dropping of the atomic bombs by the U.S. on Hiroshima & Nagasaki saved lives in the long run and was therefore justified. It is true that the U.S. received some indication in the summer of 1945 that Japan was trying to surrender, Japan however would not surrender unconditionally and that was important to the U.S. and its allies. The Germans had not surrendered unconditionally at the end of WWI, and as a result they (Germany) rose again to start WWII. The U.S. was not going to let that mistake happen again. As President Roosevelt said, “This time there will be no doubt about who defeated whom.” And some Japanese leaders wanted much more than to keep the Emperor. They wanted the Japanese troops to surrender to their own government and they wanted no occupation of Japan and no trials of Japanese leaders for war crimes. These were the very things the U.S. was trying to avoid by insisting on unconditional surrender.

Some American scientists opposed using the bomb on civilian or military targets, and recommended using it as a demonstration on an uninhabited island instead. The recommendation was studied carefully by a committee that was set up to consider how to use the bomb. The committee said that a demonstration could have had a lot of problems, which would have wasted one of the atomic bombs and precious time. In light of the fact that it took two bombs, dropped on two different cities to bring about a surrender, it does not seem likely that a demonstration would have been effective. The committee recommended using the atomic bombs against military targets.

Document F – Newspaper account of Hiroshima Bombing – 1945

... A Japanese man who was about three miles from the blast center described the scene. “A blinding flash cut sharply across the sky... At the same moment as the flash, the skin over my body felt a burning heat... and then a huge boom.” He saw a large mushroom-shaped cloud rise over Hiroshima. The cloud rose to a height of about 27,000 feet.

The atomic bomb produced a huge fireball. The temperature in the center of the blast was at least 10,800 degrees F. Within ten minutes after the explosion, almost every house in Hiroshima was either heavily damaged or destroyed. Fires broke out everywhere.

The clothes people were wearing were burnt immediately. The blast shattered all windows. Many people were cut by flying glass. Shortly after the blast, black rain began to fall. The rain was made up of large, black drops. This black rain was radioactive. It gave off dangerous rays which caused what was called “A-bomb disease.” It led to blood cancer, loss of hair, high fever and often death.

No one knows for sure how many people died in the attack on Hiroshima. Perhaps as many as 140,000 to 150,000 persons died almost immediately from burns and radiation. However, the total number of people who died from the atomic blast and its effects was over 200,000.

Document G – Lester Bernstein – reminiscing about the dropping of the A-bombs. (Circa 1965)

The day was August 6, 1945. I was a G.I. (American soldier) who had weathered the war in Europe and now awaited my place in the storming of Japan's home islands. On Truman's orders, the first atomic bomb ever wielded in war exploded over Hiroshima. For Americans in uniform and those who waited for them to come home, outrageous as this might appear from the moral heights of hindsight, it was a sunburst of deliverance."

Document H – Historian (unknown name or date)

In the summer of 1945 the Japanese leaders were trying to surrender, and the American leaders knew it. Several times the Japanese went to the Russians to ask them to mediate a peace settlement with the U.S. The Japanese were insisting on only one condition: their ability to keep the Emperor, the symbol of Japanese culture. The U.S. never even talked with the Japanese about surrender terms. Instead American leaders kept demanding unconditional surrender. Then, after we used the bombs and the Japanese did surrender, we let the emperor stay anyway. We could have had the Japanese surrender earlier, and saved all those lives, by letting them have their one condition in the first place.

If the bombs were not used to bring about surrender, why were they used? The U.S. was not getting along with the Soviet Union in Europe in 1945. Some of our leaders felt that by showing the Soviets that we had this powerful weapon, we would get them to agree to our terms in Europe. As Secy. of War, Henry L. Stimson, said in his diary, in diplomacy the bomb would be a "MasterCard." Besides, the Soviets entered the war in Asia on August 8th, 1945. If they (the Russians) fought in the war for long, they would take over parts of China and stake a claim to occupy part of Japan itself. If we could speed up the Japanese surrender we could avoid all these problems. Pay close attention to these dates: We dropped the first bomb on August 6th; the U.S.S.R. entered the war on August 8th; and we dropped the second bomb on August 9th. No country could surrender in only three days – it takes longer than that to make such an important decision. We wouldn't wait longer because we wanted them to surrender before the Russians could get involved.

Some scientists who worked on the bomb recommended that it not be dropped on civilian or military targets. Rather, they proposed that the U.S. demonstrate the bomb's power to some Japanese leaders by dropping it on an uninhabited island.

Even top military leaders opposed the use of the bomb. The bomb would have little effect on the war, they argued, since the Japanese were already trying to surrender.