

## “Hot” Historical Issues:

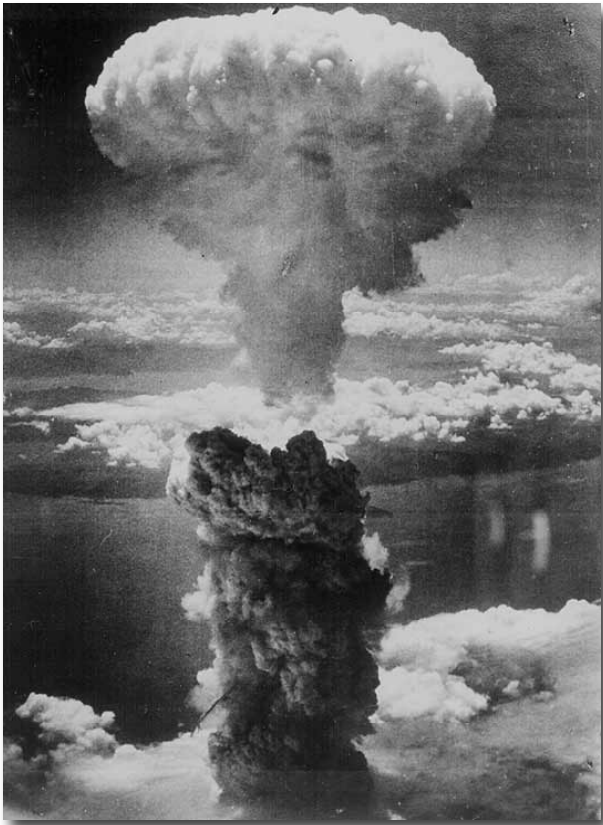
Was the use of the atomic bombs by the United States justifiable given the historical circumstances at the time?

### Evidence from Henry L. Stimson

1. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were military targets
2. Firebombing had been effective, but not enough to convince the Japanese to stop fighting (Senjinkun Code – fight to the last)
3. 5 million Japanese troops spread across the Pacific meant that it would take at least 5 million American troops to defeat them
  - a. Casualties estimated to be at least 1 million Americans
  - b. War would last at least until early 1946
4. Complete destruction was the only way to achieve a lasting peace
  - a. Japanese tried to get Soviets as mediators – show no signs of giving up on American terms (must be able to keep Emperor as their leader)
5. Potsdam Ultimatum offers good terms
6. A-Bomb works as a psychological weapon
  - a. Threat of many more strengthens the desire for a lasting peace

### Revisionist Historical Research

1. If Hiroshima and Nagasaki true “military targets” why had they not been firebombed until this point?
2. Japan would have had no army left to fight with by the end of 1945 if the blockade had continued
  - a. Japan’s main army isolated/surrounded in China and cut off from supplies
  - b. Japanese air force rapidly deteriorating (no defense from aerial attacks from US planes)
3. Numbers are grossly inflated:
  - a. Joint War Plans Committee (15 June 1945) predicted total casualties at no more than 193,500 American soldiers
    - i. KIA – 40,000
    - ii. WIA – 150,000
    - iii. MIA 3,500
  - b. Top military officials told Truman that losses in an invasion of Japan would be less than Okinawa
    - i. Tokyo beach head/geography much more assailable, easier to maneuver
    - ii. Tokyo firebombed to desolation (little resistance)
    - iii. “in terms of percentage of casualties the invasion of the Tokyo Plains should be relatively inexpensive” (Joint War Plans Committee)
  - c. 1946 report by U.S. Bombing Survey: “certainly prior to 31 December 1945 and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 [the date of the planned Kyushu invasion], Japan would have surrendered even if the bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”
4. July 1945 (Potsdam Conference):
  - a. Japan approached the Soviet Union to ask them to be mediators, the only condition being that they wanted to keep their Emperor
  - b. In July, the American govt. required an unconditional surrender, BUT Japan was allowed to have their Emperor as a figurehead after the bombs were dropped
5. The “good terms” offered hope for surrender and destruction for resistance (VAGUE and unpromising) → “Good terms” would have involved allowing the Emperor as a figurehead (which the US readily accepted less than two months later)
6. A-Bomb *was* a psychological weapon, but used to impress and intimidate NOT the Japanese, but the Russians (see evidence on the back)



**\*Revisionist History Argument:**

**The Americans used the Atomic Bombs not just as a method of quickly ending the war with Japan, but also to intimidate the Soviet Union diplomatically and politically.**

1. General Groves of the Manhattan Project in testimony to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission:
  - a. “There was never from about two weeks from the time I took charge of this Project any illusion on my part but that Russia was our enemy, and the Project was conducted on that basis.”
2. Truman/Stimson carefully orchestrated a “strategy of delayed showdown”
  - a. Moved the Potsdam Conference with the Russians from July 1 to mid-July in order to have time to test the bomb (testing of first Atom Bomb occurred on July 16)
  - b. Stimson wrote in his diary: The atomic bomb would be the “master card” which he wanted to have “in hand” at the Potsdam Conference
  - c. Truman administration does not want the Soviets at the peace tables (cannot allow another Eastern European division to happen)
3. The Truman Administration dropped the bomb to avoid controversy at home
  - a. Manhattan Project had cost Congress over \$2 billion between January and July of 1945 alone
  - b. If the bombs had not been used their would have been an embarrassing investigation

**\*Questions to consider:**

1. **How would numbers of American lives (big or small), and public opinion about the need to end the war as quickly as possible affect the decision-making ability of the President?**
2. **Even if we accept the use of the first atomic bomb as a fact of the necessities of war, is there any way to justify dropping a second bomb only 3 days later, and less than 24 hours after the Soviet declaration of war? Does this qualify under the “just war” theory?**
3. **If the United States was unwilling to accept the Japanese terms offered in July, why did they drag the war out another few weeks before finally ending the war with the bombs and accepting those same terms in September? If the bombs were really intended to save American lives, how many lives were lost between July and when the fighting stopped?**
4. **Could Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been used as a “testing ground” for this new weapon?**
5. **Is it possible that those who were responsible for the dropping of the bomb had ulterior motives in mind (meaning objectives that did not only concern the war in the Pacific)?**