

Revisionist Historical Arguments Against the Use of the Atomic Bombs

1. The Japanese government wanted to surrender; its leaders, military as well as civilian, rationally understood that the war was lost. But they had a determined attachment (irrational?) to the emperor. Japan would have surrendered, very possibly as early as June 1945, had its ruling establishment received guarantees of the emperor's personal safety and continuance on the throne. This should have been the first step in an American surrender strategy.
2. Any remaining Japanese reluctance to quit the war would have been quickly overcome by the second step, entry of the Soviet Union in August 1945.
3. American failure to accept and implement this "two-step logic" for an expeditious end to World War II was largely a result of the emerging Cold War and especially American concern over Soviet ambitions in Eastern Europe and northeast Asia.
4. The American public would have accepted some modification of the unconditional surrender policy in order to avoid prolongation of the war. The Washington Post and Time magazine advocated its abandonment; so did some United States senators. Many military leaders and diplomats-British as well as American concurred.
5. President Harry S. Truman seemed inclined to give assurances on the emperor, then pulled back. He did so out of concern with Soviet behavior and with increasingly firm knowledge that the United States would soon have atomic weapons available. Coming to believe that the bomb would be decisive and anxious to keep the Soviet Union out of Manchuria, he dropped modification of unconditional surrender; moreover, he sought to prevent a Soviet declaration of war against Japan by encouraging China not to yield to Soviet demands beyond those granted at Yalta. In so doing, he acted primarily at the urging of James F. Byrnes, the arch-villain in the plot.
6. Truman also refused to move on Japanese peace feelers, apparently in the belief that it was necessary to prevent a Japanese surrender before the bomb could be demonstrated to the world, and especially to the Soviet Union. The result was the needless destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - and many allied casualties that need not have happened.
7. In subsequent years, the American decision makers of 1945 devoted considerable energy to the construction of a misleading "myth" that attempted to vindicate the use of the bomb by denying Japanese efforts at peace and by asserting grossly inflated estimates of American casualties that would have been sustained in an invasion of Japan.