

On August 6th, 1945, the *Enola Gay* took off from an air base in Tinian, carrying a package that would forever change the nature of war and be a subject of debate throughout the rest of the century. At approximately 9:15 in the morning, a large, mushroom-shaped cloud rose over Hiroshima, Japan. The first atomic bomb had been used in combat. The surrender of Japan a week later marked the end of a long struggle for freedom, democracy, and peace. At the same time, it marked a change in the nature of war, and the dawn of a new era. American President Harry Truman's controversial decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan ended the Second World War and began the nuclear age. Since the end of the war, Truman's decision has been the subject of much controversy, largely due to the high civilian death toll that resulted from the bombardments. However, the context of the time period and the need to end the Second World War made the use of the nuclear weapons a necessary action to compel the surrender of Japan. Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan was justified by the historical context of the Second World War, Japan's refusal to surrender unconditionally, and the high death toll expected from an invasion of mainland Japan.

Revisionists have deemed the use of the atomic bomb a crime against humanity due to the large number of civilian casualties and horrific effects that resulted from the bombings. The issue of morality has rendered this debate even more controversial. Judged by today's moral standards, the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, which produced hundreds of thousands of casualties, is commonly regarded as morally wrong. Almost 150,000 civilians were killed as a result of the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹ Only 43,000 of Hiroshima's population of 350,000 were soldiers.²

¹ Bragdon, Henry W., McCutchen, Samuel P., Ritchie, Donald A., History of a Free Nation. (Columbus: Glenroe/McGraw-Hill, 1998)

According to the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, all but 3,243 of the 70,000 people killed by the Hiroshima blast were civilians.³ As a result of the high civilian death toll from the bombings, the use of the atomic bombs is argued to be illegitimate.

According to the Draft Rules of Aerial Warfare, drafted in February 1923, the bombing of civilians was an illegitimate and illegal use of military power. The Draft Rules of Aerial Warfare state that: "Aerial bombardment is legitimate only when directed at a military objective, that is to say, an object of which the destruction or injury would constitute a distinct military advantage to the belligerent," and further state that if legitimate military objectives such as military establishments and factories used for military purposes "are so situated, that they cannot be bombarded without the indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population, the aircraft must abstain from bombardment."⁴ The targeting of Japan's war production industries inevitably led to the widespread bombings of vast areas inhabited by civilians. Therefore, according to international law, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not legitimate military targets. Since the bombardment of these cities was illegal, the use of the atomic bombs is argued to have been unjustified according to the existing international law during the Second World War.

The high civilian death toll that resulted from the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki took place in a horrific manner. Radiation sickness later claimed the lives of tens of thousands who were not immediately killed by the blast. Wilfred Burchett, a reporter who visited Hiroshima in September 1945, described the plight of radiation

² Ronald Takaki, Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Bomb (New York: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1995) 46.

³ Ronald Takaki, Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Bomb (New York: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1995) 47.

⁴ Draft Rules of Aerial Warfare, The Hague, Article XXIV, February 1923, <<http://www.dannen.com/decision/int-law.html>>

victims: “In Hiroshima, thirty days after the first atomic bomb, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly – people who were uninjured in the cataclysm from an unknown something which I can only describe as the atomic plague.”⁵ Because of the destructiveness of nuclear weapons, it is commonly argued that their use against the Japanese was morally wrong. William D. Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated: “My own feeling is that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to 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.”⁶ It is argued that the use of the atomic bomb created a new meaning of total war by destroying thousands of civilians in a grotesque manner, making its use unethical and immoral. Therefore, critics have argued that the use of the atomic bombs against Japan were morally unjustified. However, this claim does not consider the realities of total war and the horrors of the time period. Although the moral case against the use of the atomic bomb is a compelling one, it is essential to place the use of the atomic bombs in the context of the Second World War, where the use of these weapons was morally justified.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified in the historical context of the Second World War. During this time period, the world abandoned morality in a desperate struggle to repel the threatening forces of fascism, expansionism, and imperialism. Mass conventional bombings were used by both sides as legitimate military strategies, producing large numbers of civilian casualties. These raids aimed to destroy war production capabilities of a nation; thus, war production centers were considered legitimate military targets. U.S. President Harry Truman wrote:

⁵ William Burchett, *Shadows of Hiroshima* (London, 1983) 34.

⁶ William D. Leahy, *I Was There: The Personal Story of the Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, Based on his Notes and Diaries Made at the Time*, (New York, 1950) 441.

In deciding to use this bomb I wanted to make sure that it would be used as a weapon of war prescribed by the laws of war. That meant that I wanted it dropped on a military target. I had told Stimson that the bomb should be dropped as nearly as possible upon a war production center of prime military importance.⁷

The cities chosen to be bombed were military targets in the context of the Second World War, and were considered to be legitimate military targets by the Truman administration. The Draft Rules of Aerial Warfare were virtually abandoned and ignored as the war progressed, resulting in frequent and destructive mass bombings. This culminated in the use of the atomic bomb, a new and more destructive weapon against the enemy. Japan's ability to resist was dependent on its productivity and military-industrial capacity.⁸ The Japanese pattern of productivity was spread over many square miles. Urban areas contained many factories, and were surrounded by supporting cottage industries and small private producers within encompassing communities.⁹ These production centers, which included residential areas, became legitimate military targets, resulting in the widespread bombing of civilians in order to achieve military objectives. In a time of total war, bombing vast expanses of land became an accepted practice, justified by the need to destroy an enemy's industrial capabilities, and thus, its ability to resist. As Walter Smith Schoenberger, historian and author of Decision of Destiny wrote: "The distinction between civilian and military targets had approached a vanishing point as war became total."¹⁰ The strategic bombing used throughout the Second World War legitimized the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bomb was dropped on an industrial city in

⁷ Harry S. Truman, Memoirs (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955) 420.

⁸ Walter Smith Schoenberger, Decision of Destiny (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1969) 303.

⁹ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 336.

¹⁰ Walter Smith Schoenberger, Decision of Destiny (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1969) 303.

order to destroy Japan's war industries, a legitimate and frequent practice throughout the Second World War.

As the Second World War progressed, the world adopted a new morality, which consisted of using any weapon and any means to defeat enemies. Developments in the air war in Europe and Japan led to, and culminated in the use of the atomic bombs.¹¹ The war became increasingly more destructive, as mass conventional bombings leveled entire cities and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. General Henry H. Arnold, who directed the U.S. Army Air Forces throughout the Second World War, rationalized that bombing was "in effect, the most humane of all weapons," telling his air staff in April 1943: "This is a brutal war and...the way to stop the killing of civilians is to cause so much damage and destruction and death that the civilians will demand their government cease fighting."¹² The mentality that mass destruction through air power would end the fighting prevailed throughout the war, providing the precedent for mass bombings. The destruction wrought by the frequent and accepted conventional bombings throughout the Second World War was comparable to the results of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The practice of widespread destruction began with the Battle of Britain. Beginning on September 7, 1940, the raids on London and other British cities by the German Luftwaffe aimed to bomb Britain into submission through a merciless air campaign. Following the raid on Berlin by the British Royal Air Force on August 25, 1940, Hitler announced: "When [the British] declare that they will increase their attacks on our cities [Churchill had not done so], then we will raze their cities to the ground."¹³

¹¹ Ronald Takaki, Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Bomb (New York: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1995) 25.

¹² Ronald Schaffer, Wings of Judgement: American Bombing in World War II (New York, 1985) 3.

¹³ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 419.

Nightly bombings killed thousands of civilians in an attempt to destroy Britain's industrial centers. During the winter of 1940-1, London and other British cities were leveled by the Luftwaffe.¹⁴ During the battle, over 146,700 civilians were killed or seriously injured.¹⁵

The violent aerial bombings continued throughout the war, escalating as the Allies struck back against Germany. The air-raids in Germany cost approximately 600,000 civilian lives, and injured almost 800,000 more.¹⁶ The four-night raid on Hamburg in July 1943 produced a 'firestorm' that destroyed 62,000 acres of the North German port.¹⁷ The city was reduced to rubble and 30,000 of its inhabitants were killed, a large part of them being women and children.¹⁸ Allied bombings provoked similar conflagrations at Würzburg, Darmstadt, Heilbronn, Wuppertal, Weser, and Magdeburg.¹⁹ Raids on Berlin cost at least 50,000 civilian lives and left millions homeless.²⁰ Destruction wrought by aerial bombings reached new heights with the assault on Dresden on February 13-14, 1945. The city was leveled as a result of the bombs and ensuing fires. Estimates of the numbers of those killed by the raid have been as high as 135,000.²¹ Civilian casualties that resulted from the bombing of German cities were tragically high. As the Second World War progressed, aerial bombings grew more destructive as total war was re-defined.

Mass destruction through bombings was also prevalent in the war in the Pacific. This strategy inflicted an increasing amount of damage, finally culminating in the use of

¹⁴ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 433.

¹⁵ John R. Elting, "Costs, Casualties and Other Data", Grolier Online, <http://gi.grolier.com/wwii/wwii_16.html>

¹⁶ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 426.

¹⁷ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 426.

¹⁸ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 426.

¹⁹ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 427.

²⁰ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 426.

²¹ Roy Jenkins, Truman (New York: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1986) 27.

the atomic bombs to compel the surrender of Japan. United States Strategic Bombing Survey statistics estimate that 333,000 Japanese died as a result of the strategic air campaign on Japan, 120,000 of which were from the atomic bombs.²² On March 9-10, 1945, the assault on Tokyo reduced the city to an inferno of flaming rubble. The firebombing of the city claimed 83,000 lives, the majority of them being civilians.²³ By mid-June of 1945, American attacks against Japan had devastated Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka, Yokohama, and Kawasaki, five of Japan's largest industrial centers. These attacks killed 260,000 people and left between 9 and 13 million homeless.²⁴ As war continued and violence escalated, conventional bombings caused enormous destruction and high death tolls, leading inevitably to the use of the atomic bombs. The destruction wrought by conventional bombings, a common practice during the Second World War, had similar results to that of the atomic bombs. Therefore, the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented a culmination in the destructiveness of aerial bombings, not a significant deviation from previous aerial bombing practices.

The alternatives to the use of the atomic bomb were likely to have caused equal suffering for the Japanese people. Prolonged conventional bombardment, the blockade of Japan, and an invasion would have had devastating effects on the Japanese population and would have unnecessarily prolonged the war and their suffering. The use of the atomic bomb was no less moral than these horrific wartime practices. Opposition to the use of the atomic bombs on moral grounds neglects the utilitarian consideration surrounding this debate. Conventional bombardments killed and would have continued

²² Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 334.

²³ Ronald Takaki, Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Bomb (New York: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1995) 27.

²⁴ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 576.

to kill hundreds of thousands of civilians. The blockade in China killed millions of noncombatants, and the blockade of Japan aimed for the same effect.²⁵ Large numbers of Japanese civilians would have perished through starvation and disease as a result of the blockade.²⁶ As Richard B. Frank, acclaimed historian and author of Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire wrote, “alternatives to the atomic bombs carried no guarantee that they would end the war or reduce the amount of human death and suffering.”²⁷ In effect, nuclear weapons saved the Japanese people from the horrors of conventional bombings and an invasion. A nuclear attack was no less immoral than its alternatives, which were likely to have caused equal or greater suffering for Japan. As destruction and violence escalated throughout the Second World War, morality was re-defined, and desperate attempts to defeat an enemy through violent means became ethically permissible. In the context of the Second World War, the use of the atomic bombs against Japan was morally justified.

Revisionists and some members of the Truman administration alike have asserted that the use of the atomic bombs was unnecessary in order to end the war. The use of the bomb was viewed as unnecessary, since Japan had been devastated by the Allied blockade and conventional bombardments, and defeats by American forces in the Pacific. Japan’s surrender was considered imminent, as the Japanese Emperor pursued peace and a negotiated surrender. Japan was crippled as a result of the Allied blockade and bombings. After fourteen years of war, the country was in ruins. Conventional bombings had brought considerable damage to Japan’s war industries, killed hundreds of

²⁵ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 334.

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thousands of civilians, and left millions homeless.²⁸ Allied attacks on shipping and bombings had destroyed one-third of Japan's wealth and up to one-half of its potential income, according to occupation figures.²⁹ The United States had overwhelming material superiority over Japan, and had succeeded in destroying the country's material well-being and social cohesion.³⁰ In early July 1945, a top secret report prepared for the Combined Chiefs of Staff meetings at Potsdam stated: "We believe that a considerable portion of the Japanese population now consider absolute military defeat to be probable."³¹ The report stated that conventional bombings had destroyed from 25 to 50 percent of Japan's most important cities.³² Japan's collapse and surrender seemed imminent.

Many staff members within the Truman administration shared this view, asserting that the use of nuclear weapons was unnecessary and advocating a continuation of the blockade and strategic bombings using conventional weapons. U.S. Chief of Staff Admiral William D. Leahy stated:

My conclusion, with which the naval representatives agreed, was that America's least expensive course of action was to continue to intensify the air and sea blockade and at the same time occupy the Philippines. I believe that a completely blockaded Japan would fall by its own weight.³³

Nearing collapse, Japan was crippled as a result of the Allied blockade and bombings. Therefore, it is argued that the use of the atomic bombs to compel the surrender of Japan was unnecessary. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force and later president of the United States, recalled: "I voiced my

²⁸ Roy Jenkins, *Truman* (New York: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1986) 33.

²⁹ Thomas W. Zeiler, *Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2004) 192.

³⁰ Thomas W. Zeiler, *Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2004) 192.

³¹ Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985) 28.

³² Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985) 28.

³³ William D. Leahy, *I Was There: The Personal Story of the Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, Based on his Notes and Diaries Made at the Time* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1950) 384-385, 259.

misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary.”³⁴ Leahy later wrote in his autobiography that: “The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons.”³⁵ A report by the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey following the war supported these assertions, concluding that:

Certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.³⁶

As a result of Allied conventional bombings and the blockade on Japan, the country neared collapse, substantiating the argument that Japan could have been defeated by continued conventional bombardment, rendering an invasion and the use of the atomic bomb unnecessary.

Because of Japan’s futile situation, historians have argued that the Japanese government desired and actively pursued surrender prior to the use of the atomic bombs. Japanese Emperor Hirohito desired an end to war, fearing the destruction of Japan and the prolonged suffering of his people. After Japan’s defeat in the battle of Okinawa in June 1945, both Emperor Hirohito and his chief political advisor, Marquis Koichi Kido, sought to end the war.³⁷ An intercepted message from Japanese Foreign Minister Togo to Ambassador Sato in Moscow on July 12, 1945 revealed the Emperor’s intentions: “His Majesty the Emperor, mindful of the fact that the present war daily brings greater evil and

³⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe (Garden City, 1948) 443.

³⁵ William D. Leahy, I Was There: The Personal Story of the Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, Based on his Notes and Diaries Made at the Time, (New York: Whittlesey House, 1950) 441.

³⁶ “The United States Strategic Bombing Survey,” The Truman Administration: A Documentary History (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966) 45.

³⁷ Roy Jenkins, Truman (New York: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1986) 33.

sacrifice upon the peoples of all belligerent powers, desires from his heart that it may be quickly terminated.”³⁸ The Emperor’s god-like status in the country held great influence, and his desire for a negotiated peace could have rendered the use of the atomic bombs unnecessary to compel Japan’s capitulation. Many in the Japanese government hoped for a negotiated peace and a conditional surrender. Therefore, it is frequently asserted that the American demands for the unconditional surrender of Japan unnecessarily prolonged the war. On July 21, 1945, the Japanese government informed its representative in Moscow:

We cannot consent to unconditional surrender under any circumstances. Even if the war drags on and more blood must be shed, so long as the enemy demands unconditional surrender, we will fight as one man against the enemy in accordance with the Emperor’s command.³⁹

Based on the Japan’s situation of futility prior to the use of atomic weapons and the Emperor’s wishes for peace, many historians have described the use of the atomic bombs as unnecessary because of Japan’s willingness to surrender. However, despite the Emperor’s influence, he was unable to prevail over the fanatical military leaders in the Japanese government still bent on victory. Furthermore, a negotiated surrender was not politically desirable and would have made it even more difficult to compel a Japanese surrender.

The American demand for unconditional surrender from Japan was both justified and necessary. Agreement to America’s terms of surrender by Japan was crucial to the Allied goal of building a lasting peace in the post-war world. During the Second World War, the Allies had been engaged in a bitter struggle against the forces of fascism,

³⁸ Gar Alperovitz, The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb; and the Architecture of an American Myth (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995)

³⁹ James Byrnes, Speaking Frankly (New York: Greenwood Press, 1947) 211.

expansionism, and militarism. Unconditional surrender was demanded of Germany, Italy, and Japan in order to eliminate their war power, thus destroying the existing ideologies based upon the conquest and subjugation of other territories and peoples.⁴⁰ A victory over Japan and its unconditional surrender would eliminate a major threat to peace, as the country's military regime that had initiated conflict in the Pacific would be removed.⁴¹ The Office of War Information declared in June 1945 that:

Only [Japan's] unconditional surrender can lead to the smashing of [its] militaristic hopes and ambitions...Japan will seek a compromise peace that will leave intact her present ruling clique and enough territory and industrial strength to begin again a career of aggressive expansion.⁴²

The American insistence upon unconditional surrender from Japan sought to unseat the militaristic government that prevailed in the country in hopes of preventing future conflicts. In order to maintain a lasting peace in the years following the war, unconditional surrender needed to be demanded of Japan. Furthermore, America's pursuit of a negotiated surrender with Japan could have proven to be counterproductive. The United States would appear to be weakening its demands as a result of the high casualties endured during the Okinawa campaign.⁴³ This would strengthen the zealous military faction in the Japanese government, promoting the argument that the Japanese must confront an American invasion with fanatical resistance in order to secure more favourable terms in a peace settlement.⁴⁴ Members of the Supreme Council for the Direction of War who opposed peace initiatives took this view, hoping to inflict heavy

⁴⁰ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 43.

⁴¹ Walter Smith Schoenberger, Decision of Destiny (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1969) 89.

⁴² Office of War Information, Domestic Radio Bureau, "Japan's Unconditional Surrender," [June 1945], Office File 197 (Misc. 1945-46), Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

⁴³ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 44.

⁴⁴ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 44.

casualties on invading American forces in an effort to gain the upper hand during peace negotiations.⁴⁵ Japanese War Minister Anami expressed this, posing the question: “Wouldn’t it be to our advantage if peace were established after we had given the enemy a terrible beating in the decisive battle on the homeland?”⁴⁶ The American demand for Japan’s unconditional surrender was necessary for a decisive victory and a lasting peace.

The Allied strategic bombings and blockade had devastating effects of Japan, yet these efforts were not enough to compel the surrender of a Japanese military still bent on victory. Japan’s refusal to surrender made the use of the atomic bomb both necessary and justified. The Japanese military continued to fight, convinced they had to achieve victory through extreme sacrifice. Mounting a desperate last defense of mainland Japan, they hoped to inflict as severe damage on Allied forces as possible.⁴⁷ According to a combined Intelligence Committee report of July 8, 1945, Japanese military leaders planned to stall Japan’s surrender as long as possible in the hope that the Allies would falter as a result of war weariness, disunity, or even a Japanese victory during the invasion of the country.⁴⁸ The Japanese government would fight desperately to evade complete defeat, and thus, gain a better bargaining position in a negotiated peace.⁴⁹ According to American decrypts of Japanese intelligence, codenamed Ultra, Japanese military leaders were blind to defeat, and frantically preparing to repel an American invasion.⁵⁰ According to Ultra, a massive buildup of Japanese forces was taking place on

⁴⁵ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 44.

⁴⁶ Leon Sigal, Fighting to a Finish (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988) 73.

⁴⁷ Edward J. Drea, MacArthur’s ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan 1942-1945 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992) 213.

⁴⁸ David McCullough, Truman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 438.

⁴⁹ David McCullough, Truman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 438.

⁵⁰ Edward J. Drea, MacArthur’s ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan 1942-1945 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992) 204.

Kyushu.⁵¹ Throughout June 1945, Kyushu was built up as a military stronghold.⁵² Commanders ordered soldiers and civilian volunteers to attack American tanks, asking “all able-bodied Japanese, regardless of sex” to “be prepared to sacrifice his life in suicide attacks on enemy armored forces.”⁵³ Despite the futility of Japan’s situation, its military leaders demonstrated a willingness to fight to the death. American officials had no choice but to accept these threats at face value. After an examination of the situation in Japan in mid-July 1945, the Joint Chiefs “saw no prospect of surrender until the army leaders acknowledged defeat.”⁵⁴ The Japanese military could only be compelled to surrender through absolute defeat in an invasion of mainland Japan, or by the significant shock that resulted from the use of the atomic bombs.

The use of nuclear weapons produced sufficient shock to successfully demonstrate the power of the United States, forcing Japan to surrender. Defeat in the Pacific, the Allied blockade, and devastating conventional bombings could not persuade Japan to end its war. Therefore, the destructive power of the atomic bomb was necessary to compel the surrender of Japan through shock. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson wrote:

To extract a genuine surrender from the Emperor and his military advisers, they must be administered a tremendous shock which would carry convincing proof of our power to destroy the empire. Such an effective shock would save many times the number of lives, both American and Japanese, than it would cost.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Edward J. Drea, MacArthur’s ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan 1942-1945 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992) 204.

⁵² Edward J. Drea, MacArthur’s ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan 1942-1945 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992) 209.

⁵³ Ronald Spector, Eagle Against the Sun (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985) 544.

⁵⁴ Grace Person Hayes, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998) 152.

⁵⁵ Henry Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, On Active Service in Peace and War (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947) 635-36.

The destructive effects of nuclear weapons made them psychological weapons. The Truman administration believed the use of the atomic bomb would have a significant psychological effect on the military and civilian rulers of Japan.⁵⁶ According to Stimson and his associates on the Interim Committee, any alternatives to the use of nuclear weapons have been a “serious danger to the major objective of obtaining a prompt surrender from the Japanese.”⁵⁷ The atomic bomb was the weapon that won the war by compelling Japan to surrender. The first incendiary raid on Tokyo of March 1945 created more damage and produced more casualties than the bombing of Hiroshima, yet Japan refused to surrender after this attack.⁵⁸ Confronted with America’s nuclear technology, the Japanese had no choice but to end its war.

The atomic bomb attacks broke the political stalemate between the Emperor and the military, and offered Japan an opportunity to surrender. Prior to the use of the atomic bombs, Emperor Hirohito desired an end to the war, but was unable to prevail over the zealous military leaders within the Japanese government who desired victory, even if it meant “sacrificing 20 million Japanese lives.”⁵⁹ The nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki bolstered the arguments for surrender of the peace faction in the Japanese government, leading to Japan’s eventual capitulation. Hisatsune Sakomizu, the chief cabinet secretary, later said: “The atomic bomb was a golden opportunity given by heaven for Japan to end the war.”⁶⁰ One of the Emperor’s closest aids, Koichi Kido said: “We of the peace party were assisted by the atomic bomb in our endeavour to end the

⁵⁶ Herbert Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 48.

⁵⁷ Herbert Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 48.

⁵⁸ Herbert Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 199.

⁵⁹ Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999) 311.

⁶⁰ Nicholas Kristof, “Why the nuclear attack on Japan was right”, *The Age*, 6 August 2003, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/08/05/1060064179100.html>>

war.”⁶¹ The destructiveness of the atomic bombs allowed the Japanese to surrender by strengthening the Japanese peace faction, which was finally able to overrule the Japanese military leaders.

The Japanese government was able to escape the dishonour associated with surrender in Japanese culture as a result of the use of the atomic bombs. General George C. Marshall, chief of staff of the United States Army during the Second World War, reflected: “We thought the bomb would be a wonderful weapon as a protection and preparation for the landings. But we didn’t realize its value to give the Japanese such a shock that they could surrender without loss of face.”⁶² Because of the devastation wrought by the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Emperor was able to justify surrender by the vast number of civilian casualties that resulted from the use of atomic bombs. In his broadcast to the nation announcing the Japanese surrender, Emperor Hirohito explained that “the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives.”⁶³ The atomic bomb offered the Japanese military a way out of the war, as Marquis Koichi Kido, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and Emperor Hirohito’s closest advisor stated: “If military leaders could convince themselves that they were defeated by the power of science but not by lack of spiritual power or strategic errors, they could save face to some extent.”⁶⁴ Nuclear weapons convinced the military of its defeat, and allowed military leaders to capitulate honourably. The use of the atomic bombs

⁶¹ Nicholas Kristof, “Why the nuclear attack on Japan was right”, The Age, 6 August 2003, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/08/05/1060064179100.html>>

⁶² Herbert Feis, The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 11.

⁶³ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 320.

⁶⁴ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 347.

convinced Japan to end its war. Therefore, the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were necessary and justified to compel the surrender of Japan.

An invasion of Japan, America's alternative to the use of the atomic bomb, is argued to have been a viable course of action, rendering the use of nuclear weapons unnecessary. Critics have disputed the cost of an invasion of Japan, arguing that an invasion would result in a minimal number of American casualties, and therefore be an effective means to compel the surrender of Japan. General Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander of the Allied forces in the Pacific, stated in a memo on the subject of an invasion of Japan: "I regard the operation as the most economical one in effort and lives that is possible," and that he did not expect a "high rate of loss" as a result of an attack on Japan.⁶⁵ Military planners reached similar conclusions, predicting that "in terms of percentage of casualties the invasion of the Tokyo Plain should be relatively inexpensive."⁶⁶ According to members of the Truman administration and the Joint War Plans Committee, an invasion of mainland Japan would not have killed a large number of American soldiers, and was therefore an option that should have been pursued, not neglected, in order to defeat Japan.

In their condemnation of the use of nuclear weapons, critics have dismissed the official justification for their use, to save American and Japanese lives by avoiding a costly invasion, as a myth. U.S. President Harry Truman wrote in his memoirs that: "It might cost one half million lives to force the enemy's surrender on his home grounds."⁶⁷ However, this figure is claimed to be a fabrication in order to justify an atrocity. The

⁶⁵ Ronald Takaki, Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Bomb (New York: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1995) 24.

⁶⁶ Sherwin, World Destroyed, p. xxii; Joint War Plans Committee, report of June 18, 1945, reprinted in appendix of Sherwin, World Destroyed, p.349.

⁶⁷ Harry S. Truman, Year of Decisions, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955)

Joint War Plans Committee prepared a report for the Chiefs of Staff, dated June 18, 1945, projecting approximately a total of 132,000 casualties during an invasion of Kyushu, with about 25,000 of those casualties being fatalities.⁶⁸ The committee further speculated that if the invasion of Honshu was necessary, the American forces would suffer a further 87,000 casualties, with 21,000 of them being deaths.⁶⁹ Therefore, according to the committee's report, the two-stage invasion of Japan would cost 46,000 American lives, and result in 174,000 American soldiers wounded or missing.⁷⁰ Based on estimates by the Joint War Plans Committee, Truman's claim appears to be unsubstantiated. Although the most commonly cited figure representing the estimated American casualties from an invasion of Japan is half a million, this figure is not found in any document other than Truman's memoirs. J. Samuel Walker, historian of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and author on the subject of the history of American foreign policy and the history of nuclear energy, asserts in Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan, "There is no evidence that he [Truman] received information that an invasion of Japan would cost as many as 500,000 to 1 million American casualties or deaths, as he and some of his advisers claimed after the war."⁷¹ This statement attacks the credibility of Truman's justification for the use of the atomic bomb, yet it is misleading, as it neglects important evidence regarding the Japanese defenses prior to the use of the atomic bombs. Although many estimated a low loss of life as a result on an American invasion of mainland Japan, the Japanese military were

⁶⁸ Thomas W. Zeiler, Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2004)

⁶⁹ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 38.

⁷⁰ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 38.

⁷¹ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 39.

preparing a desperate defense of their homeland that would inevitably produce high casualties on both sides.

While many opposed to the use of the atomic bombs cite the report by the Joint War Plans Committee, these estimates ignore crucial evidence and present a misleading picture of the military situation in Japan prior to the use of the atomic bombs. The low casualty estimates given in June 1945 were based on flawed intelligence. In late July and early August of 1945, the Allies learned of a massive buildup of Japanese forces on Kyushu by decoding military traffic through Ultra, a code-breaking operation during the Second World War.⁷² This new information made casualty estimates contemplated in June far too low.⁷³ On June 18th, an estimated 350,000 Japanese were on Kyushu. By late July, Ultra reported 600,000 Japanese soldiers, prepared to defend the country.⁷⁴ After the war, this estimate was discovered to be very inaccurate; there were over 900,000 troops on Kyushu.⁷⁵ The estimates of 46,000 deaths in an invasion of mainland Japan were grounded on flawed intelligence. The likely idea that reinforcements would be dispatched to Kyushu in the time between June and the scheduled invasion in November was not considered in the estimates made in June 1945.⁷⁶ Logically, it is expected that the bolstering of Japanese defenses by sending additional troops to Kyushu would result in a rise in American casualties.

In light of this new intelligence, casualty estimates were revised. General Douglas MacArthur's staff had grossly underestimated the Japanese determination to defend their homeland. According to the Japanese decrypts, the number of Japanese

⁷² Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994) 212.

⁷³ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994) 212.

⁷⁴ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994) 212.

⁷⁵ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994) 213.

⁷⁶ Edward J. Drea, *MacArthur's ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan 1942-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992)

troops prepared to desperately defend their homeland by inflicting severe damage on American troops was almost three times the original estimate.⁷⁷ The number of Japanese aircraft on Kyushu was two to four times the June estimates.⁷⁸ Inevitably, this massive buildup of Japanese defenses would increase the number of Americans dead, wounded, or missing. As Dennis and Peggy Warner, Australian scholars and authors of The Sacred Warriors: Japan's Suicide Legions have pointed out: "The casualty figures tossed about in mid-June might have been surpassed in a single day by kamikaze attacks on packed troop transports."⁷⁹ Based on Japanese decrypts, General Marshall realized that the number of American casualties would rise as a result of the Japanese buildup to defend Japan. The invasion of Japan would result in a high loss of life. In the final week of July, Marshall informed the president at Potsdam, Germany, of his projections for the cost of an invasion of Japan. The wave of reinforcements on Kyushu revealed by Ultra caused him to predict significantly higher casualty estimates, telling the president that the invasion of Japan would result in a minimum of a quarter-million to as many as a million American casualties.⁸⁰ Although many historians have cited low casualty estimates in an effort to argue that the use of the atomic bombs was unnecessary, these figures ignore the buildup of Japanese forces that would inevitably lead to high losses in a costly invasion of Japan. The use of the atomic bomb was a military necessity in order to avoid the invasion of Japan, thus saving hundreds of thousands of lives on both sides.

The war in the Pacific had proven to be a difficult struggle for American forces in the time leading up to the defeat of Japan. Casualties from previous battles in the Pacific

⁷⁷ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999)

⁷⁸ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999)

⁷⁹ Robert James Maddox, Weapons for Victory: The Hiroshima Decision Fifty Years Later (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995) 4.

⁸⁰ Edward J. Drea, MacArthur's ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan 1942-1945 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992) 222.

had been high, forecasting a bloody and costly invasion of mainland Japan. The Japanese forces fought vehemently as they retreated from occupied islands to their homeland, inflicting large numbers of casualties on advancing American forces. As American forces neared Japan, they encountered increasing resistance from the Japanese. American battle casualties in the Pacific in the first three months since Truman took office were equal to half the number of casualties in the Pacific over the previous three years of war.⁸¹ As David McCullough, a biographer of U.S. President Harry Truman, wrote, “The nearer victory came, the heavier the price in blood.”⁸² The Americans were met with fanatical resistance as the Japanese defeat became imminent, resulting in large numbers of American and Japanese casualties.

During the battle of Iwo Jima, kamikaze attacks and the damage inflicted by Japanese defenders killed 6821 Americans and wounded 20,000, representing almost a third of those who had landed on the island.⁸³ Japanese casualties were significantly higher; approximately 21,000 of the defenders were killed.⁸⁴ During the battle of Okinawa, 1,465 kamikaze planes sunk 30 American ships and damaged 164 others. Over 38,000 Americans were wounded, and 12,000 were missing or killed.⁸⁵ More than 107,000 Japanese soldiers were killed. The civilian population suffered as well, as an estimated 160,000 Japanese civilians died, representing almost one-third of the population.⁸⁶ The prevention of an invasion of Japan not only saved American lives, but Japanese lives as well. Throughout the war in the Pacific, the Japanese sustained more

⁸¹ David McCullough, Truman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 437.

⁸² David McCullough, Truman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 437.

⁸³ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 566.

⁸⁴ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 566.

⁸⁵ “Battle of Okinawa,” Global Security, 21 October 2001, 28 March 2005,

<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/okinawa-battle.htm> >

⁸⁶ John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: The Penguin Group, 1990) 573.

casualties than the America forces. In the battles of Saipan and Okinawa, the number of Japanese casualties was about ten times that of the American losses, and twenty-five times more in the battle of Tinian and the Philippines.⁸⁷ Civilian casualties were extremely high, representing several hundred thousands on Saipan and Okinawa.⁸⁸ The high battle casualties sustained by both the Americans and the Japanese during the war in the Pacific, especially during the battle of Okinawa, foreshadowed a bloody and costly confrontation if American forces were to invade mainland Japan. Soviet intervention would have resulted in further Japanese losses. During the war, the Soviets captured about 2.7 million Japanese nationals.⁸⁹ At least 347,000, possibly as many as 376,000 of this number were dead or missing by the end of the war, two-thirds of which were civilians.⁹⁰ Herbert Feis, special consultant to the Secretary of War from 1944 to 1946 and Pulitzer Prize winner for his studies in diplomatic relations, wrote in The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II: “The people who would have suffered most, had the war gone on much longer and their country been invaded, were the Japanese.”⁹¹ The atomic bombs ended the war before an invasion was necessary, thus saving both American and Japanese lives.

The cost of an invasion of Japan justified the use of the atomic bomb by saving American lives. As American forces approached Japan, Japanese forces resisted further, inflicting a large number of casualties on Allied forces, and sustaining high numbers of casualties themselves. An invasion of mainland Japan was expected to be met with

⁸⁷ Thomas W. Zeiler, Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2004) 194.

⁸⁸ Thomas W. Zeiler, Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2004) 194.

⁸⁹ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 356.

⁹⁰ Richard B. Frank, Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire (New York: Random House, 1999) 356.

⁹¹ Herbert Feis, The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 193.

fanatical resistance, causing a high number of American casualties. As General George C. Marshall reflected:

The Japanese had demonstrated in each case they would not surrender and fight to the death...It was to be expected that resistance in Japan, with their home ties, could be even more severe...So it seemed quite necessary, if we could, to shock them into action...We had to end the war; we had to save American lives.⁹²

As a result of the Japanese defensive buildup in July, and the losses during previous battles in the Pacific, Truman was informed by General Marshall that an invasion of Japan could result in half a million American casualties.⁹³ This figure was projected by Pentagon planners, who estimated 132,000 American casualties for an invasion of Kyushu, and 90,000 for Honshu.⁹⁴ The United States Sixth Army's medical staff concluded from the number of casualties in the Battle of Okinawa that a battle to secure Kyushu alone could cost 98,500 Americans killed and 295,500 wounded.⁹⁵ An invasion of mainland Japan would have resulted in high casualties on both the American and Japanese sides. Prior to the use of the atomic bombs, Truman hoped that "there was a possibility of preventing an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other."⁹⁶ The atomic bomb offered America an alternative to an invasion of Japan that would save both American and Japanese lives by avoiding a long and bloody battle. The enormous American and Japanese casualties expected from an invasion of mainland Japan justified the use of the atomic bomb as a military necessity.

⁹² David McCullough, Truman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 395.

⁹³ Harry S. Truman, Year of Decisions, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955)

⁹⁴ Brian McNulty, "The Great Atomic Bomb Debate" Ohio University, 25 November 2003, <<http://www.ohiou.edu/perspectives/9701/bomb2.htm>>

⁹⁵ Brian McNulty, "The Great Atomic Bomb Debate" Ohio University, 25 November 2003, <<http://www.ohiou.edu/perspectives/9701/bomb2.htm>>

⁹⁶ J. Samuel Walker, Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997)

Despite moral objections to the use of the atomic bombs, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified in the context of the Second World War. As Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain during the Second World War, reflected:

The historical fact remains, and must be judged in the after-time, that the decision whether or not to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never even an issue. There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; nor did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise.⁹⁷

The bombings produced a sufficient shock to compel the surrender of a Japanese military struggling to fight until they were destroyed entirely, and prevented a costly invasion of mainland Japan. The historical context of the Second World War, Japan's refusal to surrender, and the high death toll expected from an invasion of mainland Japan justified the use of the atomic bombs against Japan. Though today it is easy to judge the use of the atomic bombs as wrong because of their destructiveness, the primary factor in Truman's decision to use these weapons was a desire to end the destruction of war, bringing peace to a war-weary world. The atomic bomb, or the destroyer of worlds, in truth, saved the world from war.

⁹⁷ Winston S. Churchill, Triumph and Tragedy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951) 639.

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