

# Atomic bombing of nagasaki and hiroshima: was it justified?

War



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On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb dubbed “ Little Boy” was dropped on Hiroshima and was followed by another, named “ Fat Boy” at Nagasaki three days later in an attempt by the United States to end WWII. Germany had been defeated and the allied forces were sure to win the war. The main concern was how to defeat Japan. Japan surrendered unconditionally on August 14th, 1945. President Truman’s decision to use the bombs is often criticized given that the effects of an atomic bomb are so devastating and long lasting. Was the atomic bomb really necessary? There were four major alternatives to dropping the atomic bomb: using the atomic bomb in a non combat demonstration, altering the demand for unconditional surrender, invade Japan with Allied and Soviet assistance, and continuing conventional war techniques. One of the reasons Truman decided to drop the bomb was pressure from his military advisors, who believed that a full scale military invasion was too expensive. Truman was also under domestic pressure due to the fact that he wanted to please the public because he was up for re-election. America harbored strong feelings of prejudice against the Japanese people for the attack on Pearl Harbor and though it is speculation, it is thought that this had an effect on the decision to use an atomic weapon. Admiral William D. Leaky, Chief of Staff to Truman, said that it was in his opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was one of no material assistance in our war with Japan. The effects of the atomic bomb were overwhelming: The exact number of dead and injured will never be known because of the confusion after the explosions. Persons unaccounted for might have been burned beyond recognition in the falling buildings, disposed of in one of the mass cremations of the first week of

recovery, or driven out of the city to die or recover without any record remaining. The Survey believes the dead at Hiroshima to have been between 70, 000 and 80, 000, with an equal number injured; at Nagasaki over 35, 000 dead and somewhat more than that injured. The first alternative would have been to demonstrate the effects of an atomic bomb by dropping it on an unpopulated area with plenty of observers. This would have shown Japan what they would be facing should they refuse to surrender. This demonstration could have saved numerous lives. The outright killing of so many non-combatants bothered many American officials. Herbert Hoover wrote that the use of the atomic bomb, with its indiscriminate killing of women and children, revolted his soul. Bob Lewis (co-pilot of the Enola Gay) wrote in his log after Little Boy was dropped on Hiroshima, " My God, what have we done? " The reason America did not employ this method was because they wanted a quick resolution and feared that a demonstration of such a powerful weapon could cause Japan to further research nuclear warfare of their own. A second alternative would have been for America to modify their demand for unconditional surrender. The common belief of the Japanese people was that if they surrendered, their emperor, whom they believed to be a God, would be taken away from them. America could have allowed the Japanese to keep their emperor in exchange for a peaceful surrender. The American government did not use this method because they feared it would result in Japan fighting for better terms. In the end, Japan was allowed to keep their emperor. The third alternative would have been to wait for the Soviets and other Allied powers to help invade Japan. The combined force of these powers would have strained Japan's greatly feared military "

machine. " Japan could not have held against the mutual effort of the Soviets and Allies. They would have simply been outnumbered and over powered.

The reason America didn't do this is that they couldn't wait for the other countries to come to their aide and a full scale invasion would have been far too expensive. A fourth alternative was to continue conventional warfare.

America could have continued the naval blockade which would have caused Japan to run low on food, munitions, and other basic necessities and forced them into surrender. There are a few problems with this, the main one being time. America dropped the atomic bomb essentially as a quick end to war.

Continuance of conventional techniques would have drug out the war much longer. Another issue would have been that the Japanese are raised in pride, pride for yourself, your family name, but most importantly, pride for your country. They were known to fight to the death and suicide missions were an honor. This pride could have kept Japan from surrendering. As it has been established, there were many options, from demonstrations to continuing as the war was. The American government was placed in a very delicate situation, the lives of thousands in their hands, lives they chose to take. The decision they made would suffice and ultimately end WWII. They saved countless American lives in the process and that is what mattered. Any argument as to if the alternatives had been a better decision is purely speculative. Bibliography " Primary Sources." Redirection to Equivalent @ Cengage. <http://college.cengage.com/history/us/resources/students/primary/atomicbomb.htm> (accessed May 10, 2012). Rosenberg, Jennifer. " The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." 20th Century History. <http://history1900s.about.com/history/us/resources/students/primary/atomicbomb.htm>

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