

Can the bombing of hiroshima be justified essay



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On 6th August 1945, a silverplate Boeing B-29 superfortress flew over the densely populated Japanese city of Hiroshima. The plane, 'Enola Gay', was carrying a highly radioactive atomic bomb containing the actinide Uranium-235. Hiroshima is the largest city in the Chugoku region of western Honshu, Japan's largest island and used to be an embarkation port and industrial centre that was the site of a major military headquarters. The bomb, 'Little boy', is estimated to have killed approximately 90,000 - 166,000 people; around 30% of the population were killed instantaneously as their bodies were vaporised.

Some bodies had viscera sucked out of them, while others were so badly mutilated from the effects of the bomb that it was hard to identify who was who. As always, there are two sides to every story. Many people argue that America's actions were wrong; however the Americans believed that what they did was right. There are sources that both support and disagree with America's action. In this essay I will explore these points and say why the bombing cannot be justified. Some people say that it was a justified decision to bomb Hiroshima.

This is because America wanted revenge on Japan for Pearl Harbor. In an interview with James Byrnes, the American Secretary of State, 1965 he says, "We were talking about the people who hadn't hesitated at Pearl Harbor to make a sneak attack, destroying not only ships but also the lives of many American sailors." The source suggests that the Japanese hadn't shown the U. S. any mercy, so they wanted the Japanese to pay for their actions in the Pacific. 2,403 Americans were killed during the unprecedented attack on the naval base and this gave America the excuse to drop the bomb.

The source was written by the American Secretary of State, James Byrnes, in 1965. This is significant because Byrnes was President Truman's chief advisor on Foreign Relations. He also was one of Truman's advisors on the atomic bomb. Byrnes had his own ideas about the bomb as he not only wanted to defeat Japan, but wanted to keep Russia from expanding their influence over Asia and Europe. This means that he would be biased and so would support the dropping of the bomb. There are other sources that back up source 10, for example the Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S.

Truman, 1945. President Truman says " 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 have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretence of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans".

This backs up source 10 because it shows that the U. S. wanted revenge for the brutality that Americans have received from Japan. The U. S. is saying that if the Japanese do not ' play ball' and get away with it, then why should the U. S. not break the rules and give Japan a taste of its own medicine? They are only avenging the lives of American troops because of Japan's actions, but then the U. S. is saying that if they took another course of action, Operation Downfall, then they would lose even more American lives and the war would drag on, to when exactly, no-one knows.

President Truman thought he was taking a safer option by dropping the bomb, however maybe they didn't quite know the plight that radiation would bring years after the event. However, there are some sources that disagree with source 10, for example, source 9. This is saying that it wasn't just revenge, but to preserve American lives. However not that many American lives would have been lost, as they had the resources to overthrow the Japanese on the beaches of Kyushu, despite the defences. Revenge is a plausible point for the dropping of the atomic bomb, however it is not the most important point and it does not justify the bombings.

Revenge may have satisfied the Americans, but it made civilians pay for something most of them did not even want to be involved in. The bomb did not differentiate between adults and children, doctors, nurses and soldiers. They could have had their revenge when they attacked the Japanese on Kyushu, but they wanted it over quickly and did not really want to know about the consequences. The Americans were bitter about Pearl Harbor and wouldn't let it slip.

The sources are valid, but they are biased and would, of course, defend the bombing. Revenge is still a valid reason for their attack, as the U. S. previously were isolationists and refused to get involved in the war up until this point. Some people say that the bombing of Hiroshima cannot be justified. This is because Japan was already defeated before the bomb was dropped. In *Manual for Change* by Dwight D. Eisenhower, he says, ". in [July] 1945... Secretary of War Stimson, visiting my headquarters in Germany, informed me that our government was preparing to drop an atomic bomb on Japan.

I was one of those who felt that there were a number of cogent reasons to question the wisdom of such an act. ... the Secretary, upon giving me the news of the successful bomb test in New Mexico, and of the plan for using it, asked for my reaction, apparently expecting a vigorous assent. During his recitation of the relevant facts, I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives.

It was my belief that Japan was, at that very moment, seeking some way to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face'. The Secretary was deeply perturbed by my attitude... " This source is saying that Japan had already been defeated before the bomb was dropped and were beginning to seek peace. The bomb was unnecessary and would just make the U. S. look bad as it could lead to other world powers developing atomic weapons.

Eisenhower knew that it would kill innocent people in a horrific way and that it could be avoided.

He was saying that it would also look bad because all they would use for an excuse for dropping the bomb was that it would preserve many American lives, but there is evidence to say otherwise. The Americans partly wanted to see just how horrific the damage it caused would be and how it would affect human life, but perhaps they didn't quite know the extent to which Hiroshima would be obliterated. The source was written by Dwight D.

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Eisenhower. This is significant because he became president after Truman and in his famous "Atoms for Peace" speech he asks all the UN members to stop nuclear proliferation and development.

He then goes on to say how Britain and Canada clandestinely helped them in creating and designing the atomic weapon and how the USSR (Russia) also knew the atomic secret. When he looks at what they (the U. S.) went on to do, he, unlike many other Americans, did not support it and thought it was an unjustified decision. There are other sources that back up this source, for example, source 11. This backs up what President Eisenhower said because it shows that the U. S. troops could have easily overwhelmed the Japanese army if they persevered and launched two or three attacks.

They could have avoided destroying innocent Japanese lives; the soldiers on both sides signed up knowing they were probably going to die, but the civilians just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Japanese did not have enough resources, so the Americans would have certainly won. However, there are some sources that disagree with the source. For example, source 14. This challenges the source said by President Eisenhower because it is saying that the Japanese would fight to the death and there was no way the Americans could win when they were up against five million men and 5000 suicide aircraft which would never surrender.

However this source was said by Henry Stimson, the American Secretary for war, which was the man who told Eisenhower about the U. S. 's plans to drop the bomb on Hiroshima. He would be biased as he would support the U. S. 's decision and he would advise Truman on the atomic bomb as he was the

American Secretary for War. He was also against what President Eisenhower said to him and would want to come up with an excuse to drop the bomb.

Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the opinion of the people surveyed 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. Overall this source is reliable as there is a lot of other evidence to support it and if they really had been desperate they could have avoided it and maybe negotiated with Japan about peace terms.

Toshiko Kase- Japanese Foreign Minister 1945, speaking in 1972, interviewed for the world at war, Thames TV, said, " I thought it was absolutely unnecessary. Because by the time the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, we were conducting negotiations with the Soviet government. We were completely exhausted. The navy and the army too were slowly becoming more amenable to the idea of peace. " This just goes to show that war could have been avoided and the outcome would have been more favourable for both parties. In contrast, some people say that it was a justified decision to bomb Hiroshima.

This is because in theory it probably would have saved thousands of American lives, instead of pursuing with Operation Downfall. In source 9, President Truman says that if the bomb had not been dropped, the fighting between the U. S. and Japan might have cost half a million American lives.

This is not a valid point because despite the fact that Japan seemed like they would fight to the death rather than surrender, if you look at source 10 it shows extracts from a document sent by the military chiefs of the U. S. to the President that show the previous losses.

For example, in the Battle of Luzon, 31, 000 soldiers died compared to the 156, 000 Japanese deaths. This shows that the American losses might not be too bad in comparison with the Japanese losses, also in source 11, it clearly describes that the Japanese could have actually been overthrown easily with minimal losses. The source was written by President Harry Truman, in 1958. This is significant because he would defend the action to bomb Hiroshima. He also wanted revenge on the Japanese, as previously said in The Public Papers of the President: Harry S. Truman in one of my earlier points.

He thought that by killing the thousands of Japanese citizens of Hiroshima, ironically, he was saving thousands more. There are other sources that back up source 9, for example, source 14. This backs up source 9 because it shows that the Japanese had 5 million men and 5000 suicide aircraft. This could mean that many American lives could be lost, however if they followed the advice given to President Truman in source 10, it might have been avoided. However, there are some sources that disagree with source 9, for example source 18.

This challenges source 9 because it is saying that if they tested the bomb in isolation it would not just save American lives, but it would spare the lives of the Japanese as well. They could then go on to threaten Japan and then there was a higher chance of Japan surrendering without there being any

casualties. In source 15, Stimson says that a demonstration in an isolated area was unlikely to make Japan surrender and that the test could be a dud. However, what if they came to drop it on Japan, the bomb had failed and then it had been a dud in the end anyway.

What would they do then? They would be humiliating themselves in the fact they failed, but Japan would be safe. If they had really wanted to, America could have found another way around Japan's apparent refusal to surrender rather than to drop the bomb. On the other hand, other people say the bombing of Hiroshima cannot be justified because of the inhumane, excruciating, diabolical way that thousands upon thousands of innocent Japanese civilians died and the after effects of the bomb that have been destroying people's lives years after the event.

A text from a survivor, Nakayama Shiro, in *The Impact of the A-Bomb, Hiroshima and Nagasaki* says, "I hated for people to stare at me.... Yet, every nerve in my body was attuned to the outside world; and to avoid even the slightest sinister look, I walked with a rigid on-guard posture.... Even so, I secluded myself at home and spent hours before the mirror, looking at my own face. What I saw was ugly hunks of flesh, like lava oozing from a crater wall, covering the left half of my face, with the eyebrow burned off and my eye pulled out of shape.

My neck was pulled over to one side, and however much I tried to straighten it out, it wouldn't move back to the normal position. (Shi no kage [The Shadow of Death]) Here, Nakayama is describing the terrible flash burns he received from the bomb. The bomb also caused radiation sickness which led

to a slow and painful death and cancers of various kinds in survivors.

Radiation sickness caused cell death, inhibited cell division, cell mutations and abnormalities in cell membranes. Around 10, 300 units of radiation were absorbed in total, an often deadly amount.

Radiation blood sickness was also a problem. The bombing left many children orphaned and older people without anyone to take care of them as the rest of their families died. Many people suffered with mental health conditions after the event. A total of 11, 470 survivors needed medical care in 1971, after the bombing. In conclusion, both historians and philosophers have debated and questioned for years over the moral laws of this event. At the time, most Americans thought they were making the right decision by dropping the bomb, as it would save American lives.

Other people, like Stimson, wanted to demonstrate the U. S. 's power to the USSR and to stop any growing influence over Europe and Asia. However, the main reasons for this event are revenge and also they wanted to know exactly what the effect of the bomb would be on human life. If the U. S. had really wanted to, they could have not dropped the bomb. In hindsight, we can see that although it ended World War 2, it obliterated both buildings and people and the effects of the radiation are still clear to see 70 years on.

There are still shadows on the street from where people were vaporised and some genetic aberrations have been passed down in some families; it can take hundreds of years or more for radiation to actually break down. It was not so much that the buildings were razed to the ground, but the catastrophic effect it had on human life. In some ways it can be justified,

because it did save American lives, but at a cost, one that the civilians of Hiroshima had to pay dearly. Admittedly, it did make Japan vow to never participate in war again, but it brought the world into the radioactive age of the atomic bomb.

Fortunately, no-one has used one since, but what if some Hitler-like psychopath happens to come into power and uses it against us? The bombing of Hiroshima probably seemed justified at the time, however 70 years on we can see it was unwarranted and could have been avoided. Japan were going to negotiate peace terms before the U. S. dropped the bomb, and the U. S. could have just used it on some barren desert island somewhere and then threatened to use it on the Japanese. Therefore, my verdict is that the bombing of Hiroshima cannot be justified because it caused suffering that could have otherwise been avoided.