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## DEBATE ON THE PROS AND CONS OF DROPPING THE ATOMIC BOMB ON JAPAN

Historians are still divided over whether it was necessary to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II. Here is a summary of arguments on both sides:

### **Why the bomb was needed or justified:**

- The Japanese had demonstrated near-fanatical resistance, fighting to almost the last man on Pacific islands, committing mass suicide on Saipan and unleashing kamikaze attacks at Okinawa. Fire bombing had killed 100,000 in Tokyo with no discernible political effect. Only the atomic bomb could jolt Japan's leadership to surrender.
- With only two bombs ready (and a third on the way by late August 1945) it was too risky to "waste" one in a demonstration over an unpopulated area.
- An invasion of Japan would have caused casualties on both sides that could easily have exceeded the toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The two targeted cities would have been firebombed anyway.
- Immediate use of the bomb convinced the world of its horror and prevented future use when nuclear stockpiles were far larger.
- The bomb's use impressed the Soviet Union and halted the war quickly enough that the USSR did not demand joint occupation of Japan.

### **Why the bomb was not needed, or unjustified:**

- Japan was ready to call it quits anyway. More than 60 of its cities had been destroyed by conventional bombing, the home islands were being blockaded by the American Navy, and the Soviet Union entered the war by attacking Japanese troops in Manchuria.
- American refusal to modify its "unconditional surrender" demand to allow the Japanese to keep their emperor needlessly prolonged Japan's resistance.
- A demonstration explosion over Tokyo harbor would have convinced Japan's leaders to quit without killing many people.
- Even if Hiroshima was necessary, the U.S. did not give enough time for word to filter out of its devastation before bombing Nagasaki.
- The bomb was used partly to justify the \$2 billion spent on its development.
- The two cities were of limited military value. Civilians outnumbered troops in Hiroshima five or six to one.
- Japanese lives were sacrificed simply for power politics between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.
- Conventional firebombing would have caused as much significant damage without making the U.S. the first nation to use nuclear weapons.

### Critical Dates for Understanding Truman's Decision

1. Truman delays Potsdam meeting with the Soviets until he is informed that the atomic bomb was successfully tested. The atomic bomb exploded in Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16th, and the Potsdam meeting began on July 17th, 1945.
2. At Potsdam, Truman gets the Soviets to agree to enter the war a week later than they had originally promised, moving the date from August 8th to August 15th, 1945.
3. After Soviets agree to enter the war against Japan on August 15th, Truman then orders that the Atomic bombs be dropped on August 6th and 9th, 1945.
4. If Truman thought that the war would be over as soon as the Soviets entered the war against Japan, why did he drop the atomic bombs on Japan before the Soviets could enter the war on August 15th, 1945?
5. Recognizing that the United States had misled them, after the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6th, the Russians entered the war against Japan on August 9th. After the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and the Russian entry into the war on August 9th, the Japanese surrendered on August 10th and the U.S. accepted their surrender on August 15th--the day the Russians were scheduled to enter the war against Japan.
6. In order to keep the Russians out of any peace settlement with Japan and prevent any Russian claims on Asia, the United States accepted the Japanese offer of conditional surrender on August 10th. The Japanese surrender wasn't an unconditional surrender, which President Truman had demanded of the Japanese since May 1945.
7. Had the United States allowed the Japanese to keep their emperor the Japanese would have surrendered much earlier, as early as June 1945 when the Japanese offered a conditional surrender through Russian and Italian intermediaries?

The Costs of the **Manhattan Project** - All figures in constant 1996 dollars -  
Expenditures through August 1945: **20 billion**

### Comparison with Selected WWII Expenditures:

(Source: *Statistical Review—World War II: A Summary of ASF Statistics*, Statistics Branch, Control Division, Headquarters, Army Service Forces, U.S. War Department, 1946, pp. 75-6. Cost data are for 1942-1945. The total cost to the United States for World War II was approximately \$3.3 trillion.)

All bombs, mines and grenades — **\$31.5 billion**  
Small arms materiel (not incl. ammunition) — **\$24 billion**  
All tanks — **\$64 billion**  
Heavy field artillery — **\$4 billion**  
All other artillery — **\$33.6 billion**

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#### Atomic devices/bombs produced and date detonated:

Gadget	July 16, 1945	Alamogordo New Mexico
Little Boy	August 6, 1945	Hiroshima
Fat Man	August 9, 1945	Nagasaki
Bomb No. 4	unused	

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Average cost per atomic device/bomb: **\$5 billion**

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Many Historians believe the following is the Real Reason Truman dropped the Atomic Bomb

"Secretary of State James Byrnes wanted to use the atomic bomb to end the war before 'Moscow could get in on the kill.' Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of the Japan in order to win the war.... Byrnes's...view was that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable." President Truman wanted to end the war before the Russians could enter the war against Japan in Asia. Truman didn't want Russia to play a major role in determining the post-war peace in Asia.

While at the Potsdam meeting, Truman National Security Advisor, James Byrnes advised Truman that a combat display of the weapon might be used to bully Russia into submission, and the bomb "might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war."