

1945: US responses to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki



Selected quotations from US officials about the dropping of nuclear weapons on Japan which demonstrate that the bombing was not to end the war, but was to issue a warning to its Cold War rival.

"...the greatest thing in history."

- Harry S. Truman

President of the United States during the Atomic Bombing

"It always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse."

- General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold

Commanding General of the U.S. Army
Air Forces Under President Truman

"I had been conscious of depression and so I voiced to (Sec. Of War Stimson) 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 this very moment, seeking a way to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face.' "

- General Dwight D. Eisenhower

"Japan was at the moment seeking some way to surrender with minimum loss of 'face'. It wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing."

- General Dwight D. Eisenhower

"It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was taught not to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying woman and children."

- Admiral William D. Leahy
Former Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

"I am absolutely convinced that had we said they could keep the emperor, together with the threat of an atomic bomb, they would have accepted, and we would never have had to drop the bomb."

- John McCloy

"P.M. [Churchill] & I ate alone. Discussed Manhattan (it is a success). Decided to tell Stalin about it. Stalin had told P.M. of telegram from Jap Emperor asking for peace."

- President Harry S. Truman
Diary Entry, July 18, 1945

"Some of my conclusions may invoke scorn and even ridicule.

"For example, I offer my belief that the existence of the first atomic bombs may have prolonged -- rather than shortened - World War II by influencing Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and President Harry S. Truman to ignore an opportunity to negotiate a surrender that would have ended the killing in the Pacific in May or June of 1945.

"And I have come to view the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings that August as an American tragedy that should be viewed as a moral atrocity."

- Stewart L. Udall
US Congressman and
Author of "Myths of August"

"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."

- U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey's 1946 Study

"Careful scholarly treatment of the records and manuscripts opened over the past few years has greatly enhanced our understanding of why Truman administration used atomic weapons against Japan. Experts continue to disagree on some issues, but critical questions have been answered. The consensus among scholars is the that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan. It is clear that alternatives to the bomb existed and that Truman and his advisers knew it."

- J. Samuel Walker
Chief Historian
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission