

**TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE
ATOMIC BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA
AND NAGASAKI A JUSTIFIABLE
WARTIME ACTION?**



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QUESTION: To what extent was the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a Justifiable wartime action?

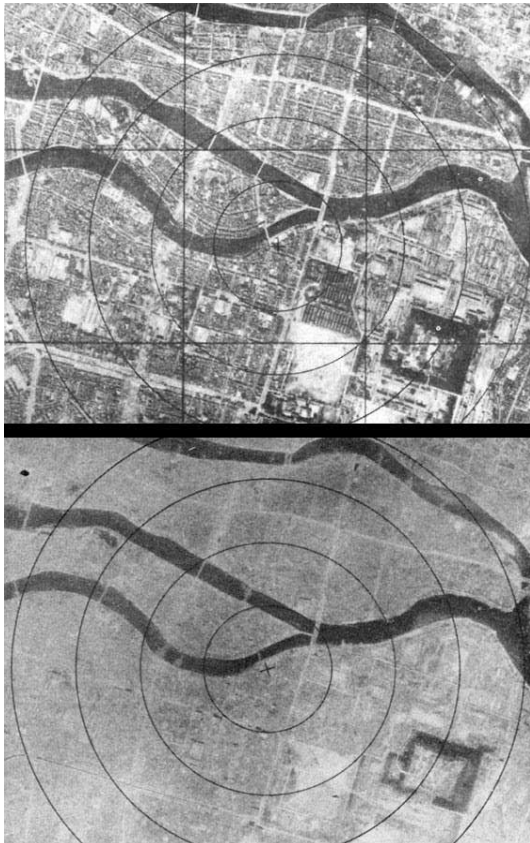
ABSTRACT:

My project discusses the atomic bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the close of the Second World War, and to what extent this action was justifiable as a wartime action by the allies. The reason I chose to cover this topic was due to various factors, such as my close link to the subject matter due to my both Japanese and English heritage. Additionally, the state of the world with the imminent approach of the 80th anniversary of the bombing (at the time) and tense international relations due to conflicts such as in the West Bank and Ukraine has led to increased concerns over world peace and additional discussion of the topic.

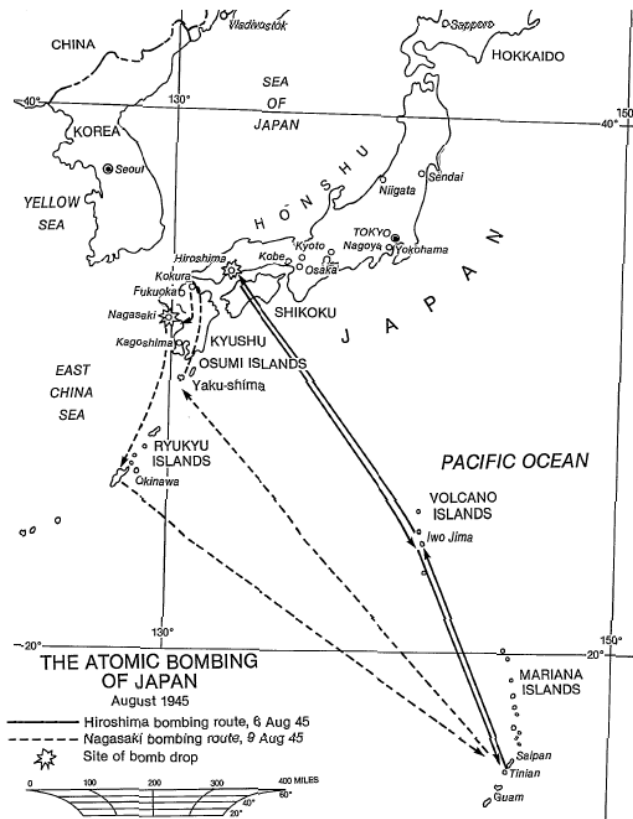
My research was carried out by dividing the arguments for and against the justification of the strike into categories: namely that of wartime tactics, foreign and internal affairs and the impact/effect it had on the war effort and any involved nations. While a judgement was extremely difficult to reach due to factors such as shortage/censorship of information as well as the multitude of pertinent factors, I elect to argue that the bombing was not justified: as less harmful routes could have been taken to bring about the same effect, and the events the bombing was said to prevent may have never occurred at all. I conclude with notes on the wider impact of my research, in decrying nuclear defense as a viable strategy for furthering world peace or human prosperity.

INTRODUCTION:

On the 6th of August 1945, from the bay of the B29 Superfortress *Enola Gay*, The United States dropped “little boy”, the gun-type uranium fission bomb, and the first nuclear weapon used in war onto the Japanese city of Hiroshima. 3 days later, the “fat man” Implosion-type plutonium bomb was dropped from the bombing bay of the B29 Bomber *Bockscar*¹. These two weapons remain to this day the only nuclear weapons ever utilised against an enemy during wartime, and the images of buildings gutted by radioactive fire, city blocks wiped from the ground and humans reduced to silhouettes blasted onto walls, remain in the minds of people all around the world today.



6th August 1945, Cpt. George Marquardt, US Air Force Ground Zero Before and After²



Post August 1945, US Dept of Energy Hiroshima and Nagasaki Flight path mission overview³

With the world renown of this event as two of the deadliest single strikes in the history of warfare, sources on the topic are plentiful. Researchers from all over the globe and both sides of the conflict have contributed their often contentious statistics, analyses and breakdown of events to the vast and controversial body of work on the event, such as

¹ Kelly, C. (23rd July 2014), 'Little Boy and Fat Man', Atomic Heritage Foundation, Washington DC- Available at: <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/history/little-boy-and-fat-man/>

² Cpt. Marquardt, G. (6th August 1945), 'Ground Zero - Before and After', US Air Force- Available at: <https://www.atomicarchive.com/media/photographs/hiroshima/image-4.html>

³ Creator Unknown (Date Unknown), Flight paths for Hiroshima and Nagasaki missions, US Department of Energy Available at: https://www.osti.gov/opennet/manhattan-project-history/images/mission_map_image.htm

Hirofumi Ueda of Osaka city university⁴, or AJP Taylor corresponding for the BBC⁵. Additionally, the 80th anniversary of both the bombing and the end of the war on August 6th/9th and September 2nd 2025 respectively has sparked further discussion from eastern and western sources such as The Asahi Shimbun⁶, and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists⁷. Despite this, actual statistical information is either disputed to the point of complete irrelevance in order to support the national or political rhetoric of the author, or utterly nonexistent, with documentation of the cities and their population prior to the bomb being neglected by the empire's government. Beat by beat events immediately preceding the bombings are lost to time, with the chemical reaction of the bombs and its physical effects being much more understood than the experience of the people irradiated, skinned or mutilated by the blast.

This project seeks to answer the question of whether such an extreme weapon, wielded to carry out such a devastating attack was a justifiable action by the allies (primarily the USA) at the time of the Second World War. Considering factors such as the contributions the atom bomb made towards the surrender of Imperial Japan, the nature of governments and leadership systems, the deaths prevented by the attack and what the bomb communicated to the state of Japan and foreign bodies such as the USSR. Additionally, the precursors/reasoning of the development and use of the weapons, as well as its impacts on the affected cities and its people can be considered as part of my decision making. Such factors can assist me in determining whether the bombing was an action justifiable in its tactical and political motives, and retrospectively justifiable when considering its effects on the world.

The topic is controversial in many ways, with the dispute over figures of casualties making a precise reckoning almost unattainable⁸, and the extent of data manipulation by any party is unknowable. The Second World War was (and is) the largest conflict in human history, with an estimated 80 million lives lost and participation from over 30 nations, and thus is host to an innumerable number of complexities. Whether the authors of a source of information view Japan as the victim of an unjustifiable war crime, or as a cruel regime combatted in a manner appropriate to their threat greatly affects the way in which information and statistics may be presented: to better provide evidence for their viewpoint.

Additionally, censorship regarding the war and lack of education on any events save those that present Japan as victims, such as the stories of families killed in bomb raids in my childhood Japanese school textbooks present difficulties in my research and my attempts to balance source origins by nation. Issued by the “Nippon no Zento to Rekishi Kyōiku wo Kangaeru Giin no Kai”(The Diet Members For Japan's Future and History Education), that explicitly seeks to support the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform- the textbooks

⁴ Ueda, H. (1997), 'The Subcontracting System during the Japanese Wartime Economy', *Japanese Yearbook on Business History* - Vol.13, Business History Society of Japan- Available at: https://www.istage.jst.go.jp/article/jrbh1984/13/0/13_0_73/article-char/en

⁵ Taylor, A.J.P. (6th September 1976), 'War Lords Anonymous', *The War Lords*, BBC- Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00fcp21/the-war-lords-6-war-lords-anonymous>

⁶ Fukutomi, T. (29th June 2022), 'Inspired by A-bomb victim, punk rocker promotes peace', The Asahi Shimbun, Japan Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/a1w/articles/14642189>

⁷ Wellerstein, A. (August 4th 2020), 'Counting the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Chicago- Available at: <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>

⁸ Wellerstein, A. (August 4th 2020), 'Counting the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Chicago- Available at: <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>

themselves pursue a revisionist education under the spearheading of the ultranationalist lobbying group Nippon kaigi: of which 5 prime ministers since 2020 have been a member⁹. Even before organisations explicitly censoring “unpatriotic” education came into power, stigma on the discussion of the topic all across the country has led to relatively few sources being written and published, and my own mother- unaware of the meaning of the swastika upon her arrival to this country- exemplifies this. However, such manipulated data rears its head in the west, with the strong sentiment of the justified nature of the bombing ignoring the actual data of the event shown in a Pew research centre survey revealing 56% of Americans believe in the justifying of the bombings, overshadowing opposed and neutral opinions combined¹⁰. Yet, the increased liberty of speech socially in the west has led to the publications of countless works, and vast disparities in opinions on this particular topic. In my discussion of the topic, with experience and insights into the sentiments of both Japan and the West, I can compile information while avoiding national biases and viewing both sides of this argument, making judgements based on the real events, statistics of the war and aftermath only.

⁹ Yoshifumi, T., Yamaguchi, T. (1st November 2017), ‘What is the Aim of Nippon Kaigi, the Ultra-Right Organization that Supports Japan’s Abe Administration?’, Asia Pacific Journal- Available at: <https://apijif.org/2017/21/tawara>

¹⁰ Smith, M. (6th May 2025), ‘VE Day 80: European and American attitudes towards World War 2’, YouGov, London
Available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/52114-ve-day-80-european-and-american-attitudes-towards-world-war-2>

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Background/contextual studies

One issue to confront when considering sources and writing topics was the range of factors that I needed to consider- i.e. how much of WW2 I wished to reference to come to a conclusion on my question. Thus, sources that cover all of the events of the conflict could prove useful, with one such example being the book *A Short History of World War II* by DK UK/Richard Holmes¹¹. The book contains dates, information, statistics and photographs for the entire conflict and more, and thus also holds information specifically on Japan and the atomic bombings. Most of the information is secondary, with only a few sources cited and not linked to specific pages or passages, but contributing historians such as Charles Messenger and Ann Kramer, as well as the chief editor Richard Holmes are listed- figures who likely may have skewed views such as Messenger being an ex soldier and almost all figures being British. Despite this, little bias or imbalance can be found in both statistics and accounts. More pressing issues include the often vague nature of the information- with statements such as "It heaped unhappiness upon hardship and despair for many individuals, families, urban populations and ethnic groups" being both nonspecific and glaringly obvious. Additionally, generalised statements veer into untruthfulness, such as "Japan's rulers made no demands to meet the demands of the potsdam declaration"- being categorically untrue compared to primary accounts and quotes from government figures. These generalisations are likely due to the lack of focus, and the more universally aged target audience which prevents the accounts from being too detailed or too in depth, yet the broad overview of information makes this source very useful for my project.

Another source that confronts/ discusses an issue relevant to the surrounding context of the bombings, but not them in particular is "The Subcontracting System during the Japanese wartime economy" by Japanese author Hirofumi Ueda¹²- https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jrbh1984/13/0/13_0_73/_article/-char/en, which describes in meticulous detail the subcontracting system that assisted greatly in Japanese manufacturing during the war. The source provides absolutely no information on the Atomic bombing itself, and instead simply gives statistics, terminologies and developments in Japanese manufacturing, more specifically in reference to how Subcontracting: the system by which large scale manufacturers (primary factories) hire smaller workers privately such as collectives or civilians creating product out of their own homes (co-operating factories). Sources on other articles written by both historians and economists are cited, and the fact that these are Japanese works is likely simply a product of the author's nationality. As such, the source is invaluable when exploring this particular factor as a reasoning for the strike occurring, but not in any way usable for discussion of differing topics- though it generally doesn't need to be. While a Japanese author may imply that some national bias exists, the source does not cover any aspects of the nuclear bomb, and thus no opinions are shared on the topic. The only form of opinions given is Ueda's conclusions that certain systems, such as record keeping, were poorly managed by Imperial Japan- and such judgements display

¹¹ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK

¹² Ueda, H. (1997), 'The Subcontracting System during the Japanese Wartime Economy', *Japanese Yearbook on Business History* - Vol. 13, Business History Society of Japan- Available at: https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jrbh1984/13/0/13_0_73/_article/-char/en

no sort of national bias affecting the accounts, which mainly consist of raw data, statistics and processes anyway.

Nationalist writings

The Asahi Shimbun's "Hidden Motive to Honor LeMay, who ordered air raids on Japan" by staff writer Ryuichi Kitano¹³- <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15723156>, is another source with Japanese authorship, though here with more likelihood of some sort of national bias affecting the content of the article. The source is a shimbun (newspaper) article reports on the recent Gamfuya groups attempt to revoke LeMays war honours bestowed on him by Japan, with the group putting forward the petition on March 10th, the 80th anniversary of the Tokyo air raids. No sources are cited, likely due to the historical facts mentioned being well known and the political ramifications of the honors bestowal being televised news already released to the public- as newspapers often do. The topic does mention the atomic bombs, though primarily by recounting how LeMay was mischaracterised as the mastermind behind the Atom bombs, and thus no particular opinion on the subject is given. However, the rest of the article does display some biases- mentioning his perception as a "brute", citing his "hard-line" approach in Vietnam with more bombings of civilians, called his low altitude bombing tactics indiscriminate and mentioning censorship of American "atrocities" against Japan by the US and Japanese government. While no official stance is given to conform to news reporting standards, the clear negative presentation of LeMay, the Japanese bombing campaign and the Censoring of American war crimes displays the newspapers Japanese sympathies, evident in countless others of Asahi's articles. Veracity is not under question, as the article contains few facts or stats, but events and actions are described subtly as incriminating of the US and LeMay. Despite this, the newspaper is still useful for my project, as it not only provides insight into past and present Japanese public perception of the US and its military leadership, but can also be used as an example of Nationalist influence in the Japanese media, which I intend to cover in my project in some capacity.

Another Informative source with potential issues of author bias is the article The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign by David Bashlow of the Royal military college of Canada¹⁴-

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh> , a highly specified article on the "essential part as a guarantor of Allied victory" that the bombing campaign played, with a section devoted to the bombing campaigns into mainland Japan and the A-bombs. A large array of sources is present in the notes section, although many of these are accounts from allied soldiers and organisations, meaning these reported statistics and more commonly stories of combat are not exactly unbiased representations of the truth. Additionally, while discussion on the justification of overall bombings of civilian areas is justified with statistics of military production ("7% of wartime military manufacturing expenditure" etc), the sections on the justification of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings appears to be centred around the ideological refusal to surrender of the Japanese people,

¹³ Kitano, R. (21st May 2025), 'Hidden motive to honor LeMay, who ordered air raids on Japan', The Asahi Shimbun, Japan
Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15723156>

¹⁴ Bashlow, D.L. (2006), 'The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign', *Canadian Military History* 15, Scholars Commons
Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh>

citing “the sacrifice of 2,530 Japanese Navy aircrew members and at least as many Army aircrew on Kamikaze missions” and a quote from Churchill discussing instances of officers committing ritualistic samurai suicides by harakiri as evidence that the Japanese military would refuse any surrender deal short of one dealt by a forceful hand, and calls from the Japanese command for the sacrifices of hundreds of millions of Japanese citizens are depicted as legitimate military proposals, whereas in reality these were merely hypothetical fantasies ideologically fuelled by a suicidal fanaticism, not a true plan of action- as unimaginably cruel the statements are. The article concludes that the tactical bombings of the 2 cities via atomic weapons was “undoubtedly” a life saving measure in preventing a mainland invasion, ignoring other factors such as the Soviet occupation or the moves towards surrender already being taken by Japanese leaders. These inaccuracies and misrepresentations make sense when considering the author of the source, the Royal Military College of Canada, who even proudly state their assistance of the allies at the close of the article- “Canada’s contribution to this campaign was highly significant, and the nation should be extremely grateful to those warriors of the night.”, and such a statement makes it clear to me that this source cannot be seen as entirely impartial on matters of ideology or morals, despite the fact that the statistics on military expenditure, command goals and proportional casualties will prove very useful to my discussion.

Specifics

A source that displays the strengths of a highly specific source is the piece “Counting the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki” by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*¹⁵- <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>, which covers extensive discussion on the casualty numbers and how it may have been over or underexaggerated by various primary information collectors such as official inquiries by the US military or the “joint commission” spearheaded by Japanese authorities. Acknowledgement that the figure of dead may double depending on whether one believes either “the official estimates of the United States military in the 1940s, or the later estimates by a group of anti-nuclear weapons scientists, largely spearheaded by Japan” shows that either group may have skewed figures to convince people of their respective arguments- justification for the attack as a preventative for a more life-costly mainland siege OR decrying the dropping of the bombs as an utterly indefensible terror tactic, and thus demonstrates the impartiality of the source. This may seem odd, coming from the “Doomsday Clock” which adamantly campaigns for worldwide, irreversible nuclear disarmament as an organisation obsessed with the prevention of a human extinction event, yet the writing insists that both collections of primary data should not “be easily dismissed with aspersions that they were deliberately trying to under- or over-count the data.”- and comes to the conclusion that the true figure is potentially inaccessible and thus inclusion of factors such as long-term radiation sickness or Japanese government record reliability should be considered. Additionally, countless reliable sources from the time are cited, and many of the statistics can prove vital for the discussion of my question, meaning the source is overall valuable to my discussion.

¹⁵ Wellerstein, A. (August 4th 2020), ‘Counting the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Chicago- Available at: <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>

Another example of a source focusing on a very specified subject is the series *The War Lords* presented by A.J.P. Taylor¹⁶-

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00fcp21/the-war-lords-6-war-lords-anonymous> , a renowned British historian with an expertise in 19th and 20th century diplomacy. The episode I have cited as a source is the 6th, entitled War Lords Anonymous, discussing the many different leaders of the Japanese war effort, thus helping my discussion of the where the responsibility for the actions of the Japanese imperial army lies, and the geopolitical complexities within the nation that may have prevented a surrender deal from being enacted. Specific information such as martial disorganisation “following the death of Marshal Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto” helps to explain the complexity of Japan's leadership system. However, a large issue arises with controversies surrounding the creator of the show, Taylor, who has many reasons for a political bias that I believe is present in the show. Taylor was dismissed from the BBC for cases of heavy germanophobia- the prejudice against Germany, which was said to obstruct his judgement of historical topics. Such examples can be seen in criticisms of his works such as *The Origins of the Second World War*, which faced widespread outrage from the public and historians for misrepresentations of leadership, also present in his characterisation of Benito Mussolini as “an inept leader with no beliefs”, and traces of this belittling presentation of axis war leaders can also be seen in *The War Lords*, with Taylor's descriptions of the Japanese wartime commanders as being “fearful of the threat of assassination” by fellow Japanese being an essentially unfounded comment with little supporting evidence, serving more to present the axis as impotent commanders as Taylor liked to do, meaning the source holds value but information must be taken with a grain of salt.

Narrative

Another source with information worth citing in describing the bombings is *Hiroshima* by John Hersey¹⁷, a non fiction collection of accounts from six survivors of the attack, and a section on the aftermath, told in a more narrative style in order to highlight the worst points in the experiences of the people. Since the book's main section was written just a year after the attacks, Hersey was able to receive the survivors accounts directly, and thus no additional sources are cited, and while the truthfulness of the accounts could be called into question, there are few to no statistics that can be verified or skewed, and the book is mainly a collection of events such as piling up “festered, limp bodies high enough on the sandpit”, while more verifiable data can be drawn from the radio announcements broadcast to the area at the time, or the medical notes of a doctor that can be cross referenced with those from present healthcare professionals or relief organisations. A part of the source more possible to be criticised is the “cherry picking” of eyewitness accounts that could have been utilised in order to make the situation seem as dire as possible, although all this assumes that the author wishes to push an ideology more than report on an event, which is not indicated throughout the book. Despite this, there are little statistics to cite and the factual parts of the story are either verifiable facts found elsewhere or as common knowledge or simply the personal experience of the particular survivors, making this source limited in its value.

¹⁶ Taylor, A.J.P. (6th September 1976), ‘War Lords Anonymous’, *The War Lords*, BBC- Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00fcp21/the-war-lords-6-war-lords-anonymous>

¹⁷ Hersey, J. (1946), ‘Hiroshima’, Penguin Classics

Hiroshima- The Last Witnesses by M.G. Sheftall¹⁸, another book with non fiction accounts from survivors of the bomb, is a book of stories presented in a narrative style and derived from real interviews with the hibakusha (survivors). The book has a vast index containing hundreds of reliable sources to cross reference information from both the common knowledge of society and the stories of the hibakusha. This book is much longer and more in depth than the previous despite using similar methodologies, and thus contains countless more facts, data, statistics and information overall to be used in my project. This can range from the physical effects of the immediate explosion (“a kilometers-wide atmospheric vacuum over the center of the city that sucked the air out of the lungs of everyone in the ZTD”), the atomic effect of decay on human genetics (“Even water turns against the organism when ionizing radiation breaks the bonds between hydrogen and oxygen in a water molecule”) to the preceding Japanese military's war tactics (“There they would set up and defend fortified village settlements surrounded by fields or pastures- snatched away from the local natives by hook or by crook”). Additionally, the information does not politically misrepresent Japan itself as victimised, with frequent and detailed accounts of their cruel wartime campaigns or their brainwashing propaganda spurred forward by state mandated shintoism, meaning that any political agenda of the book can be, for the most part, ignored in its argument. Despite the vast qualities of useful information, the majority of the book is still comprised of personal stories and accounts of the survivors, and therein lies a major weakness not suffered as much by Hersey's *Hiroshima*- much of the narrative writing is near irrelevant information on the lives of the Hibakusha in an effort to humanise them as opposed to providing figures to come to a more rational conclusion. While the source is still extremely useful for my project simply due to its vast quantity of information in comparison with other sources, this leaves space for much of the writing to be intended for emotional effect, biasing the reader into a strictly anti-nuclear mindset not with details of the attack itself but with other humanising detail of the lives of the people, which proves less useful for my investigation, where the factor that the victims were all human beings is already accounted for.

In conclusion, the most useful sources are in my opinion those who provide vast quantities of statistical and data driven information on both the event and the surrounding causes, such as the wikipedia articles and overview history texts such as “the rise and fall of the great powers”, while other sources such as the articles from the Canadian military or vehemently anti-nuclear activists may hold biases and preconceived notions towards one side or another, yet even these sources are extremely useful in my discussion, providing select pieces of valuable knowledge or otherwise demonstrating the views of certain organisations and demographics.

¹⁸ Sheftall, M.G. (10th September 2024), ‘Hiroshima: The Last Witnesses’, *Embers Book 1*, Dutton, New York

DISCUSSION:

August 14th 1945 (V-J Day), SUN-GAZETTE Williamsport Pennsylvania
 JAPANESE SURRENDER~ Truman announces Japs accept terms of peace¹⁹

Tactical:

The citing of tactical necessity for the usage of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is often used as both legitimate motives for the bombings and to overshadow other, more conspiratory grounds such as scientific research or ideological threats. This justification- the one often brought up first by those who argue for the justness of the strike such as beneficiaries/representatives of ex-allied militaries like President Truman himself²⁰, or western traditionalist faction historians, such as Rosemary Giles, writer for the American Military museum cooperative history site²¹- claims that it was a tactical military decision, made in an effort to quickly end the war and prevent further drawn out and costly military campaigns. The most often cited piece of data to support this is the potential lives saved by the bombing, via preventing a mainland invasion by Allied forces to force Japanese surrender instead. Opinions at the time and now claim 500,000 troop deaths would have been lost on both sides- with ex-president Hoover, and subsequently Truman in his memoirs

¹⁹ Creator Unknown (14th August 1945), 'Headline – Japanese Surrender', Sun Gazette, Pennsylvania- Available at: <https://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/575410?srsId=AfmBOoq3xr8vUMBfrBJQchM65TBxYn98N6TheTsAkWfCrHtfpm8sijs>

²⁰ Overy, R. (6th March 2025), 'Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan', Penguin Books UK, London- Pg.71

²¹ Giles, R. (9th August 2023), 'Nearly 500,000 Purple Hearts Were Made In Preparation for the Proposed American Invasion of Japan', War History Online- Available at: <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/operation-downfall.html>

measuring this number at 1,000,000 overall²². This figure is further reinforced by the massive surplus of Purple heart medals: the medal for American servicemen wounded/killed in combat, produced in anticipation of the mainland invasion (with 500,000 of the 1,500,000 medals produced being reserved for this action).²³

Yet this figure represents a worst case scenario, and only presents a number for casualties, not exclusively deaths. The 500,000 figure may be reinforced by the losses suffered in Okinawa: with a death toll of 90,000 Japanese combatants and possibly as high as 150,000 Okinawan civilians (Through suicide enforced by the IJA or to avoid capture)²⁴. These numbers paint a picture of a defensive force and civilian body that would react with extreme hostility towards a mainland infantry attack, and yet MacArthur and his joint war plans committee came up with a more conservative estimate of damages, with 100,000 battle casualties predicted for the Kyushu and Tokyo plain.²⁵ If this alternate prediction is to be believed, the deaths of the atomic bombings, going either by the low predictions made immediately following the explosions or the higher death tolls made later, factoring in conscripted foreigners and radiation sickness deaths, outnumbers the toll that would have been incurred in an invasion, and additionally was vast majority civilian, considered less morally acceptable by most bodies of wartime military command.

Yet a decision to condemn this many civilians to death is only forgivable when fighting for one's country- or so military commanders in a war would argue. Examples of this low valuation of Japanese lives can be seen in senior figures of the US military, such as Curtis LeMay, the US air force general largely spearheading the Pacific campaign, who admitted that "Killing Japanese didn't bother me very much ... I suppose if I had lost the war, I would be tried as a war criminal"²⁶. Another example is Henry H Arnold, the Commanding General of the US air force, who had extensive knowledge of the Japanese Pacific campaigns²⁷, including their atrocities committed in Manchurian China and the Philippines, and no contest between the value of his own troops and citizenry of the "murdering Japs"²⁸ would have occurred in his mind: coinciding with the ethical shift experienced by the near entirety of the allied military²⁹. Prioritising the lives of the enemy citizenry is not a phenomenon very common in the brutal and unsympathetic state of war.

Another factor to consider was the strategic targeting of the largely residential cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki specifically, as Japan's war economy was not nearly as centralised

²² Overy, R. (6th March 2025), 'Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan', Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 74

²³ Giles, R. (9th August 2023), 'Nearly 500,000 Purple Hearts Were Made In Preparation for the Proposed American Invasion of Japan', War History Online- Available at: <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/operation-downfall.html>

²⁴ Author Not Listed (14th December 2025), 'Iwo Jima and Okinawa: Death at Japan's Doorstep', The National WWII Museum, New Orleans. Available at: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/iwo-jima-and-okinawa-death-japans-doorstep>

²⁵ Overy, R. (6th March 2025), 'Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan', Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 74

²⁶ Fuller, E.W. (2023), 'An Economic Case against the Atomic Bombing of Japan', *The Independent Review*, Independent Institute, Oakland. Available at: <https://www.independent.org/tir/2023-summer/an-economic-case-against-the-atomic-bombing-of-japan/#ftn1>

²⁷ Overy, R. (7th October 2025), 'IWM in conversation: Richard Overy, Rain of ruin', Imperial War Museums, London- Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/events/iwm-in-conversation-richard-overy-rain-of-ruin>

²⁸ Baldwin, T. (Date Not Listed), 'Anti-Japanese Propaganda in WWII', AP US History Study Guide and Exam Prep, Study.com. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/anti-japanese-propaganda-poster-during-world-war-ii.html>

²⁹ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 491

as that of the west, instead one of extensive subcontracting. This process consists of the hiring of smaller private workers by an employer (in this case the IJA) to contribute to a greater project, and such subcontracted specialists often assisted in manufacturing out of their back gardens and home workshops³⁰, and residential areas supposedly accounted for “7% of all military manufacturing expenditure³¹”, thus serving to justify the A-bombs as hindrances to the military manufacturing of Japan, measures which any nation involved in the conflict would have to consider in their push for victory: despite harm to civilians.

However, this highly subcontract-based war manufacturing is studied extensively by business historians such as Hirofumi Ueda, and written instructions from Japanese command to manufacturers show that there was an incentive for primary factories (large scale manufacturers) to guide cooperating factories (subcontractors and small scale manufacturers) into being subsumed into primaries, and also to reduce the number of cooperatives isolated away from primaries and their surrounding urban centres.³² Such strategies were indicative of the relatively weak war economy of Imperial Japan, indicated by its abysmal production statistics, with America producing 4 times more guns (12,000,000 vs 3,000,000), 5 times more planes (300,000 vs 60,000) and 20 times more military ground vehicles (2,400,000 vs 120,000) over the course of the war³³, and this indicates the poor quality of the Japanese war manufacturing, and the dominion the US held over them in a production war. This led to a lack of investment in AA (anti-aircraft) gun defenses and other fortifications, meaning a single, large long range bomber such as the B-29 superfortress: avoiding ground defences and out of the reach of low-flying, outpaced and underproduced A6M fighter planes³⁴ could deliver an easy, risk-free attack with a single fission bomb.

The true extent of this manufacturing model is still contested, and records prove unreliable, with cities such as Osaka not even distinguishing between designated/official and unofficial cooperating factories³⁵, only exacerbating the poor documentation of this system. American intelligence of the time however was convinced of this model of war economy, and that the cities were crucial military centres for the IJA³⁶, despite the true army presence being very low in comparison to the populations of the cities, especially in Nagasaki. Thus the targeting of residential areas was completely validated as an action to hinder the imperial Japanese war machine- despite Truman's assurances that the target was “Not women and children and innocent civilians”³⁷. However, this unsurprisingly ended up being the largest group turned into ash by the blasts, as Hiroshima suffered only 10,000 military personnel deaths, while Nagasaki lost even less, an almost negligible 150: due primarily to the military sector of

³⁰ Overy, R. (7th October 2025), 'IWM in conversation: Richard Overy, Rain of ruin', Imperial War Museums, London- Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/events/iwm-in-conversation-richard-overy-rain-of-ruin>

³¹ Bashow, D.L. (2006), 'The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign', *Canadian Military History* 15, Scholars Commons- Pg. 25. Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh>

³² Ueda, H. (1997), 'The Subcontracting System during the Japanese Wartime Economy', *Japanese Yearbook on Business History - Vol. 13*, Business History Society of Japan- Pg.88 Available at: https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jrbh1984/13/0/13_0_73/article-char/en

³³ Fuller, E.W. (2023), 'An Economic Case against the Atomic Bombing of Japan', *The Independent Review*, Independent Institute, Oakland Available at: <https://www.independent.org/tir/2023-summer/an-economic-case-against-the-atomic-bombing-of-japan/#ftn1>

³⁴ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 484-485

³⁵ Ueda, H. (1997), 'The Subcontracting System during the Japanese Wartime Economy', *Japanese Yearbook on Business History - Vol. 13*, Business History Society of Japan- Pg.83 Available at: https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jrbh1984/13/0/13_0_73/article-char/en

³⁶ Rogan, T. (14th August 2020), 'Seventy-five years ago today, a bloody and atomic victory', *Washington Examiner*, Washington Available at: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2408219/seventy-five-years-ago-today-a-bloody-and-atomic-victory/>

³⁷ Overy, R. (6th March 2025), 'Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan', Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 84

the towns being manned by young boys or regular civilian arsenal workers³⁸. While such sentiments of the destruction of residential manufacturing infrastructure spurred the saturation firebombing campaigns over other areas of Japan such as Tokyo, the statement of an US Air Force intelligencer: “THERE ARE NO CIVILIANS IN JAPAN”³⁹ seemed to indicate the military advantage in the killing of Japanese citizens, through the elimination of both a labour force and paramilitary defensive front. The horrifyingly optimistic “Kokumin Kosen Hikkei”(“National Resistance Manual”) describes “hatchets, sickles, hooks and cleavers” as acceptable weapons to combat invading American infantrymen⁴⁰ and it was likely with the guidance of such publications that my grandfather, at the age of 10, drilled with bamboo sticks given to the last lines of civilian defence⁴¹ to stab the oncoming “American dogs”.

However, despite all these justifications for the destruction of such easy and supposedly high value targets, the reasonings for the specific utilisation of an Atomic weapon was more than tactical convenience, and the reason that the Atom bombs were saved for these cities untouched by saturation firebombing was simple: a test. The marking of 5 different locations: Kyoto, Hiroshima, Yokohama, Kokura and Niigata (later revised to include Nagasaki) under Robert Oppenheimer's “Target committee” was to determine what prefecture to leave untouched by firebombs, in order to best observe the technical capabilities of the Nuclear weapons on the locations. Effects on humans was not a topic of interest or prediction, and death tolls projected by scientists hovered at an incredulously low 20,000-⁴² perhaps conveying that rather than any consideration of impact on populations, the scientific curiosity that kickstarted the infamous Manhattan project and led to the attacks was one of interest in displaying power, and damaging the cities themselves.

Oppenheimer's “Terrible” moral qualms expressed in his 1954 security hearing⁴³, following the unprecedented deaths does not alleviate him of guilt, of both the development and spearheading of the Manhattan programme and ensuing weaponry, nor of the even more incriminating quashing of a petition against the Bombing of Japan headed by fellow atom bomb developer Leo Szilard of Chicago's met lab⁴⁴. However, this responsibility does not completely discredit the notion that the Bomb was necessary to save the lives of Allies (and even Japanese) servicemen who would have died in a mainland attack. Whether such an attack would have even occurred, or how many would have died in it are also points of contention, making a definitive conclusion on tactical justification very difficult to reach. However, the most commonly cited justification of mainland assault is dubious in both scope and probability of existence, and the information that we do have to hand (what little escaped the information purge of the Empire's final days) indicates the existence of Japanese plans

38

Tomonaga, M. (2019), ‘The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A Summary of the Human Consequences, 1945-2018, and Lessons for Homo sapiens to End the Nuclear Weapon Age’, *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol 2. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2019.1681226>

39 Overy, R. (6th March 2025), ‘Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan’, Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 76

40 Imperial Japanese Army / Shahan, E. M. (1945 / 23rd April 2022), ‘IJA National resistance Manual’, Eric Michael Shahan, Japan- Pg. 49

41 Bashow, D.L. (2006), ‘The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign’, *Canadian Military History* 15, Scholars Commons- Pg. 24. Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh>

42 Overy, R. (6th March 2025), ‘Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan’, Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 64-

43 Linder, D.O. (2020), ‘Oppenheimer Security Hearing’, UMKC School of Law famous trials, Missouri- Available at: <https://famous-trials.com/oppenheimer>

44 Griffith, C. (2023), ‘Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’, Atomic Archive, AJ Software & Multimedia, San Diego- Pg. 6- Available at: <https://www.atomicarchive.com/history/atomic-bombing/index.html>

to submit to American forces anyway, the sufficiency of the first Bomb alone in displaying nuclear power to Japan and the effectiveness of other methods of manufacturing/moral suppression. With these factors in mind, I conclude that the tactical motive of the decision does not justify the bombing. No great degree of certainty backs my choice, and while the bombs resulted in the deaths of possibly hundreds of thousands of civilians, it is still possible that it prevented an even bloodier assault on the ground into mainland Japan, which would have seen my grandfather killed among legions of women, children and the elderly: unable to tell to his grandchildren wartime stories of training for child conscription in the service of his emperor.

Foreign & Internal Affairs

Attitudes of both Japan and allied nations had massive influence on the decision to Bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki- with the individual goals of said nations likely trumping tactical wartime decisions in importance regarding the decision, despite being mentioned far less. However, some factors of governmental ideology/aims are often spoken about, such as Imperial Japan's stubbornness. "Terminating the war" was used by Japanese officials and leadership when referring to surrender, as that word would have been forbidden from use by Leaders of Imperial Japan⁴⁵. This fact stands as an example of the Wartime Japanese sentiment of refusing surrender, and the stereotype of the uncompromising "Japanazi"⁴⁶ became the symbol of a fanatic enemy refusing to give up the war effort. This was a shared sentiment among all ranks of the allies, with Churchill himself citing the "Desperate resistance of the Japanese fighting to the death with samurai devotion"⁴⁷ as a sign that the blood cost of an invasion would be unimaginable, and that the very nature of these Japs prevented them from surrendering, unless presented with extreme measures. Such devotion was present in the soldiery, like the 2500 Okha kamikaze planes and the sacrifice of the Yamato and her crew, Japan's largest warship, in the Operation Ten-go suicide attack exemplifying the militarisation of suicide in the pacific conflict⁴⁸. Additionally, leading figures of Imperial Japan displayed similar sentiment, such as general Korechika Anami, who expressed desire for the Japanese race to be "destroyed like a beautiful flower" rather than submit to American occupation. Notably, he committed ritual seppuku suicide following the surrender, and the attempted suicides of other Japanese leaders such as Hideki Tojo suggested the this defiance remained ingrained in Japanese leadership.⁴⁹ With this in mind, Allied command could have determined that an action as drastic as the dropping of the Atomic bombs was necessary to force the hand of the government, or so writes Royal Military college of Canada member David bashlow, claiming that the Atom bombs were what "convinced the Japanese that further resistance was pointless"⁵⁰, a hypothesis widely accepted as the truth among traditionalists.

⁴⁵ Taylor, A.J.P. (6th September 1976), 'War Lords Anonymous', *The War Lords*, BBC- Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00fcp21/the-war-lords-6-war-lords-anonymous>

⁴⁶ Baldwin, T. (Date Not Listed), 'Anti-Japanese Propaganda in WWII', AP US History Study Guide and Exam Prep, Study.com Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/anti-japanese-propaganda-poster-during-world-war-ii.html>

⁴⁷ Bashow, D.L. (2006), 'The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign', *Canadian Military History* 15, Scholars Commons- Pg. 24. Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh>

⁴⁸ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 486

⁴⁹ Rogan, T. (14th August 2020), 'Seventy-five years ago today, a bloody and atomic victory', Washington Examiner, Washington Available at: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2408219/seventy-five-years-ago-today-a-bloody-and-atomic-victory/>

⁵⁰ Bashow, D.L. (2006), 'The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign', *Canadian Military History* 15, Scholars Commons- Pg. 25. Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh>

However, in actuality, plans to “terminate the war” were being drafted by sections of Japanese high command in early 1944, with Emperor Hirohito himself being involved in pushing surrender options⁵¹. Additionally, firebombing campaigns were seen as a more pressing threat to the nation than the A-bombs ever were, due to the considerably higher death toll and damage to infrastructure. At least 250,000 were killed, 500,000 were wounded and 40% of all buildings in over 65 of Japan's most industrialised cities were destroyed as a result of the area bombing strategies,⁵² only exacerbated by the lack of government provisions for air raid shelters combined with combustible wooden houses fitted with paper sliding doors⁵³. Thus, a form of agreement seemed open between the US and Japan, but not for any assistance, aid or warning to the targeted Japanese populations. Of more concern to the Imperial government than the lives of their people was their perception, and the Japanese command were grateful for the opportunity to skirt blame for the suffering of the Japanese people by prolonging surrender. In fact, the Navy Minister Mitsuma Yonai horrifyingly stated that the “atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war are, in a sense, gifts from the gods. This way we don't have to say that we have quit the war because of domestic circumstances.”⁵⁴, revealing that the Japanese leaders may have delayed a surrender deal, despite the suffering of the Japanese people, in order for the conditions to be perfect for a scapegoating of blame to the perpetrators of the Nuclear strikes. This sentiment was returned by the US, as despite the universal vote from the senate to try Hirohito and members of his cabinet for War crimes and Crimes against humanity, Military forces elected to keep the government in power. Seen as a source of stability in Japan, the emperor Showa prevented uprising due to the near fanatic devotion of the Japanese citizenry to the orders of their God-emperor, and the prioritisation of preventing civil dissatisfaction over the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians is a scathing indictment against the US and Japanese governments, as well as the decision to drop the bombs.

This means the generally accepted view of the Atomic bombs being a necessary action to force the hand of the uncompromising Japanese government is a concept that holds less validity upon knowledge of the Japanese government's true concerns. The analysis of IJA command's internal affairs disproves this justification somewhat, implying that the bombing was not an action made out of necessity or to save lives by ending a conflict in the only viable way, but rather to ensure America could exert their own control through occupation in a politically stable post-war nation.

While it is sometimes echoed that the Manhattan project was started to create a weapon capable of forcing Japanese surrender, the scientific curiosity that motivated the researchers behind the fission bomb as well as the desire for the US military to expand their arsenal for intimidation purposes were much larger contributors to the formation of this project, and moreover, Oppenheimer expressed regret that the bomb was not used on the reich rather than the Japanese,⁵⁵ disproving the theory of the project's drafting as a trump card against the Japanese, considering the initial plan was to utilise it against Germany. These facts imply

⁵¹ Overy, R. (7th October 2025), 'IWM in conversation: Richard Overy, Rain of ruin', Imperial War Museums, London- Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/events/iwm-in-conversation-richard-overy-rain-of-ruin>

⁵² Bashow, D.L. (2006), 'The Balance Sheet: The Costs and the Gains of the Bombing Campaign', *Canadian Military History* 15, Scholars Commons- Pg. 24. Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=cmh>

⁵³ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 486

⁵⁴ Bix, H. (2000), 'Hirohito and the making of modern Japan', HarperCollins, New York

⁵⁵ Overy, R. (6th March 2025), 'Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan', Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 65-

the importance of the project as a testing ground for the A-bombs, and additionally to exert the USA's intimidation tactics on the USSR.

The Allies (primarily Britain and the USA) had pursued intimidation of the Soviet Union in response to the establishment of pro soviet communist regimes in eastern Europe- as opposed to democratic republics as promised by Stalin in the Yalta conference.⁵⁶ This treaty violation led first to the drafting of Operation Unthinkable in May 1945 (the end of the war in Europe), a drastic decision for a surprise attack against Russia on German soil and a subsequent plan for defense against Russians advancing towards the Atlantic, and later, directly following the Potsdam conference in August of 1945, The misinformation campaign of Operation Totality: setting out a faux plan of over twenty nuclear strikes on Russian cities⁵⁷. The latter of these two clearly displays the fear of nuclear domination which the USA attempted to exert over the USSR, and explains why the Manhattan project targeting committee chose two unscathed cities: as a display of the power of the weapons to be seen by the USSR.

This reasoning additionally provides motives for the Nagasaki bombing as a way for the US to prove the size of its arsenal (despite the true numbers being far lower than what they attempted to convey) and a display of the more powerful Plutonium Bomb, which operated much more efficiently and released 21,000 Tons of TNT worth of energy compared to the 15,000 of The uranium "Little boy" weapon⁵⁸. Thus, the decision to kill an estimated minimum additional 50,000 residents of Nagasaki city can be attributed to furthering the effectiveness of the USA's scare tactic- which would have already been substantial following the Hiroshima strike- and detracts from the stated reasons of a more tactical, self-preservational motive. Additionally, if the argument that the prevention of a soviet invasion would also lead to benefits by prevention of loss of life is used, this feared Soviet invasion is also disputed in its severity or even its likelihood of ever being carried out at all, corroborated by the notoriously trigger happy Curtis LeMay, leader of the 21st bomber command that commenced the Japan bombing campaign, who admitted that "The war would have been over in two weeks without the Russians entering and without the atomic bomb"⁵⁹. This displays that this Soviet front was not thought to be a true deciding factor in Japan's surrender, therefore lessening the devastation it supposedly would have carried out in Japan.

Though opposition to the decision did exist within the US inner circle, the growing hostility of public opinion towards the "murdering jap"⁶⁰ and the shift of comically alluding to crushing Japanese "Pests" morphing into serious considerations of exterminating the entire Yamato race certainly did not remedy this. Dehumanising sentiments such as those reported by war correspondent Ernie Pyle, stating "the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice" meant the popular

⁵⁶ Pidgeon, K.X. (2025), 'Operation Unthinkable and the Origins of the Cold War', Webster Review of International History 5- Pg. 3- Available at: <https://websterreview.lse.ac.uk/articles/101/files/687742ab6cfc0.pdf>

⁵⁷ Pidgeon, K.X. (2025), 'Operation Unthinkable and the Origins of the Cold War', Webster Review of International History 5- Pg. 9- Available at: <https://websterreview.lse.ac.uk/articles/101/files/687742ab6cfc0.pdf>

⁵⁸ Kelly, C. (23rd July 2014), 'Little Boy and Fat Man', Atomic Heritage Foundation, Washington DC- Available at: <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/history/little-boy-and-fat-man/>

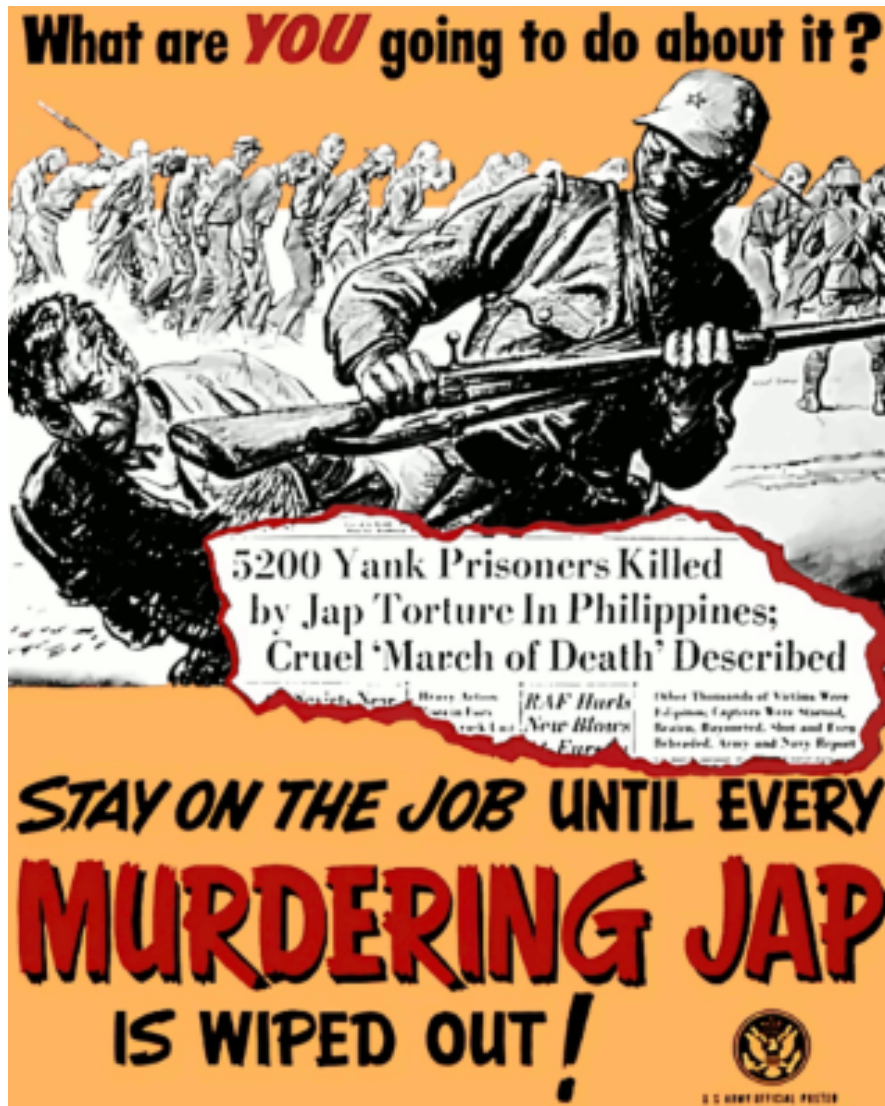
⁵⁹ Fuller, E.W. (2023), 'An Economic Case against the Atomic Bombing of Japan', *The Independent Review*, Independent Institute, Oakland Available at: <https://www.independent.org/tir/2023-summer/an-economic-case-against-the-atomic-bombing-of-japan/#ftn>

⁶⁰ Baldwin, T. (Date Not Listed), 'Anti-Japanese Propaganda in WWII', AP US History Study Guide and Exam Prep, Study.com Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/anti-japanese-propaganda-poster-during-world-war-ii.html>

sentiment was not one that held any concern for the lives of Japanese citizenry.⁶¹ This allowed for calls against the bombing of Japan such as Leo Szilard's petition to be silenced, and Polls of the researchers to be manipulated to display overwhelming support for the attack that they had disagreed with (46% calling for a demonstration before actual usage of the weapon against populations was twisted to express an 88% approval for the military usage of the bombs)⁶², and the decision to kill upwards of 200,000 civilians to advance dominance in foreign relations becomes an easy choice for political advancement that faces no repercussions for its moral unjustifiability. However, the decision can be viewed as far more reasonable if this same intimidation logic is applied to the Japanese- who may have been seen by the allies as needing further pressure to force an unconditional surrender, and overall the extent to which the Americans prioritised the intimidation factor of the bombs will remain unknown, though preference in using the bomb on real humans suggests testing was also considered as a motivating factor. The knowledge that soviet dissuasion and testing played such a key role in the decision makes it a less justifiable wartime measure, and the committing of atrocities on civilians high irrelevant to a hostility between agitated foreign nations cannot be considered an acceptable decision.

⁶¹ Stern, W. 'Race and War In The Pacific – A Propaganda Gallery Walk', *War In The Pacific - Lesson Plan*, The National WWII Museum, New Orleans- Pg. 68- Available at: https://www.ww2classroom.org/system/files/wip031_0.pdf

⁶² Griffith, C. (2023), 'Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki', Atomic Archive, AJ Software & Multimedia, San Diego- Pg. 6- Available at: <https://www.atomicarchive.com/history/atomic-bombing/index.html>



1944, U.S. Government printing office
Stay on the job until every MURDERING JAP is wiped out!⁶³

Impact & Effects:

The Atomic bombs had an astounding impact, with both Little boy and Fat man being more devastating than any single weapon has been in wartime to this day. They were detonated in such an environment that their effects could be best observed and understood, and the Enola gay was accompanied by support planes equipped with monitoring and photography equipment, and yet the documentation of the event is astoundingly poor. While details such as the 30,000 foot high drop height, the names of Colonel Paul Tibbets and his crew and the exact time of the detonation down to the minute, (indicated by logs and the watches of hibakusha frozen at 8:15 local time)⁶⁴ are known, the impact on the humans whom the bomb detonated above is a topic less agreed upon. The death toll is now a source of infinite speculation and dispute, with the overall count doubling or even tripling. Western affiliate/wartime sources suggest around 70,000 in Hiroshima and 40,000 in Nagasaki,

⁶³ US Army (1944) 'What are you going to do about it?--Stay on the job until every murdering Jap is wiped out!', US Printing Office, US Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90712749/>

⁶⁴ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 502

totalling at 110,000. A higher estimate from the new wave of anti-nuclear revisionists⁶⁵ and their analytically detailed studies suggest double this number, at 220,000⁶⁶. Those who subscribe to theories of undocumented populations such as Korean conscript workers, POW's or miscounted citizenry suggest even more than that.⁶⁷ With such a ridiculously high variation between figures given by Traditionalist and Revisionist factions, deciding on a truth is seemingly impossible. Extremes are often disregarded, with the initial, low end predictions dismissed due to ignorance to the long-term harm of radiation poisoning, and later overly high predictions are often dismissed like conspiracy theories, not uncommon when it comes to determining massive loss of life- such as the infamous holocaust.

However, such disparities in data should not be attributed entirely to error, as many were deliberate attempts to manipulate numbers to justify one's own position. For example, a likely reason that many early predictions ignored long-term radiation sickness effects was due to the fact that General Leslie Groves had branded radiation sickness as "Japanese propaganda", insisting doctors had assured him nuclear action was always "a very pleasant way to die"⁶⁸. Such an account does not coincide with the harrowing stories given by Hibakusha: the Japanese names for the survivors that saw the horrors from the ground. Accounts of humans and animals "de-gloved" and left entirely flayed but still conscious, boiled muscle fiber separating from human bones in water,⁶⁹ and skin hanging limply from corpse like faces of wandering victims⁷⁰ include some of the milder accounts of the sights of the injured and dead in Hiroshima, with even more grotesque accounts being collected from the cities. 50% of the deaths resulted from flash and heat, 30% from slower ionising radiation and 18% from blast force. Of these, only those unshielded in the *zone of total destruction* and those killed instantly by kinetic force died painlessly through carbonisation/vaporisation or the blast equivalent to 15,000 tons of tnt,⁷¹ a likely very small figure compared to those who suffered from radiation poisoning for weeks, or succumbed to bleeding, melting and disembowelment. While political and tactical factors can be speculated in their effects on the justifiability of the bombs, the agonising deaths of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of innocents should never be underestimated in its terrible significance.

Another aspect of the impacts of the bombing is the impacts that the atomic bombings have had on society, and the truly lasting effects that can still be felt today. While continued animosity towards America from Japan is low considering the nature of their pasts, the bombing has left a permanent impact on Japan's social landscape. This is remarkable when one considers how the death toll of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is likely superseded by that of the sustained Firebombing campaign preceding it, which saw at least a quarter million killed

⁶⁵ Rogan, T. (14th August 2020), 'Seventy-five years ago today, a bloody and atomic victory', Washington Examiner, Washington Available at: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2408219/seventy-five-years-ago-today-a-bloody-and-atomic-victory/>

⁶⁶ Wellerstein, A. (August 4th 2020), 'Counting the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki', Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Chicago Available at: <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>

⁶⁷ Tomonaga, M. (2019), 'The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A Summary of the Human Consequences, 1945-2018, and Lessons for Homo sapiens to End the Nuclear Weapon Age', Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament, Vol 2.- Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2019.1681226>

⁶⁸ Overy, R. (6th March 2025), 'Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan', Penguin Books UK, London- Pg. 83

⁶⁹ Shrouded Hand. (2nd September 2024), 'The ant-walkers of Hiroshima', YouTube, California- Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK19NTfWvNM>

⁷⁰ Hersey, J. (1946), 'Hiroshima', Penguin Classics- Pg. 39

⁷¹ Kelly, C. (23rd July 2014), 'Little Boy and Fat Man', Atomic Heritage Foundation, Washington DC- Available at: <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/history/little-boy-and-fat-man/>

(80,000 in 2 hours⁷² within Tokyo's "operation meetinghouse" action), 10 million homeless and 60% of Tokyo annihilated.⁷³ One example is the widespread opposition to nuclear armament, a sentiment I hear echoed nearly unanimously from Japanese friends and family. A T&F survey shows an overall 75% approval rate for the TPNW (Treaty for the prohibition of nuclear weapons), nearly unchanged across age groups, party affiliation and gender demographics⁷⁴ - which displays a far above average global support for such a motion, unswayed by the usual worries of national security and threats of attack (perhaps further reinforced by their demilitarisation as a result of WW2 actions). However, the atomic bomb in the cultural zeitgeist also holds its place, with world renowned characters such as Godzilla being metaphors for the destruction via nuclear attacks. Even in my Japanese education, I recall stories in government mandated school textbooks such as "chiichan no kageokuri", a story of a young girl's family killed by the bombs⁷⁵, which remains a powerful, emotional anti-war message despite implementation by hypernationalist government revisionists. Other pieces of Japanese media on the topic of the A-bomb include Barefoot gen: Keiji Nakazawa's autobiographical manga on the Hiroshima bombing, which he experienced firsthand as a 6 year old boy⁷⁶, or the punk rock band HIROSHIMA: composed of members of that city, inspired by vigils held on the anniversaries of the bombings as well as developing conflicts in Eastern Europe between Russia and Ukraine to perform for peace and nuclear disarmament⁷⁷. Japan may, of all the axis nations, have learned the least of its wrongs, with the Nippon Kaigi backed government seeking a revisionist, patriotic portrayal of war history: but the atomic bombs may have remained in the memory of the Japanese, and taught us of the dangers of the atom bomb.

Another aspect of the impact of the bomb that should be considered in this argument is the benefit of ending the war for Japanese citizens. Though the Nuclear end of the war was none too beneficial for the hibakusha themselves: skinned, burned, crushed and irradiated to develop tumours the size of pingpong balls,⁷⁸ the continuation of the war was also devastating to civilian populations all over the country. The aptly named "Operation Starvation" begun in March of 1945 by Admiral Chester Nimitz was a series of blockading actions carried out in sea and air, halting and destroying 670 supply ships, and with them a million tons of cargo⁷⁹. This in conjunction with the low food productivity rates of Japan- with all foodstuffs and fertilizers except for rice accounting for less than 2% of world production- meant that the Japanese citizenry were extremely vulnerable to the famine inducing campaign, and the nearly 90% reduction in imports and stock from 1941 led to an almost immediate food crisis. Reduction of rations for citizens is well documented due to the severity of this crisis, and the just barely sufficient 2000 calorie ration in 1941 had been

⁷² Overy, R. (7th October 2025), 'IWM in conversation: Richard Overy, Rain of ruin', Imperial War Museums, London- Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/events/iwm-in-conversation-richard-overy-rain-of-ruin>

⁷³ Paridon, S. (8th March 2020), 'Hellfire on earth: Operation MEETINGHOUSE', The National WWII Museum, New Orleans Available at: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/hellfire-earth-operation-meetinghouse>

⁷⁴ Baron, J., Gibbons, R.D., Herzog, S. (2020), 'Japanese Public Opinion, Political Persuasion, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons', Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament, Vol 3.- Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2020.1834961#d1e299>

⁷⁵ Aman, K. (1981) 'Chiichan No Kageokuri', Akane Shobo, Tokyo

⁷⁶ Kyono, Y. (22nd June 2023), 'Barefoot Gen Turns 50: A-bomb manga masterpiece born out of anger at mother's death', The Asahi Shimbun, Japan- Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14922301>

⁷⁷ Fukutomi, T. (29th June 2022), 'Inspired by A-bomb victim, punk rocker promotes peace', The Asahi Shimbun, Japan- Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14642189>

⁷⁸ Hersey, J. (1946), 'Hiroshima', Penguin Classics- Pg. 23/60/173

⁷⁹ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 488

reduced to 1600 in 1945, leading to the outbreak of diseases such as beriberi, tuberculosis and countless others.⁸⁰ Other more obvious harms of the war included the casualties suffered through Japan's defense of their collapsing home front, pacific campaign and bombing campaigns, leading to over two million dead soldiers and over a million dead citizens (though this figure does include those lost in Hiroshima and Nagasaki)⁸¹. The benefits of a surrender were obvious, and the immediate end to the devastating war can be seen as a lifesaver for many more Japanese and foreign lives in a campaign which the nation was slow to concede. The surrender did not lead to an immediate improvement in the harms of the war, as exemplified by the rations falling even further to an abysmal 1040 calories per person in 1946 (if you were lucky enough to be a Tokyo citizen: rural communities were forced to subsist on around 800)⁸², but the impact that a quick surrender had in benefitting the Japanese people should not be written off as entirely harmful, especially when one considers the alternatives, such as General Leahey's plans to maintain the naval blockade and the starvation campaign, that could have seen more Japanese dead from famine and disease.⁸³

The end of the war was no doubt a good thing for Japan, and despite what many honour-bound fanatics may have claimed, was much preferable to the notion of the annihilation of the Yamato Japanese people, and the benefits of the forcing of a surrender at the earliest possible time certainly assists in my conclusion that the overall impacts of the bomb largely lean towards retrospectively portraying it as justifiable. Additionally, today nearly everyone knows of the images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of the ruins of the Atomic bomb dome or the shadows left in the ground following the blasts. Though no unified opinion on the 1945 bombings justification exists here in the west, almost everyone agrees that such events must never be repeated- calls that should be emphasised in our increasingly militant and nuclear world. While the impact of the bombs on the people upon which they were dropped pushes them towards being a difficult to justify atrocity of war, the impact that they still have now may do some good for the human race.

⁸⁰ Fuller, E.W. (2023), 'An Economic Case against the Atomic Bombing of Japan', *The Independent Review*, Independent Institute, Oakland
Available at: <https://www.independent.org/tir/2023-summer/an-economic-case-against-the-atomic-bombing-of-japan/#ftn1>

⁸¹ Holmes, R. (7th May 2020), 'A Short History of World War II', DK- Pg. 517

⁸² Frank, R. B. (1999), 'Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire' Random House, New York- Pg. 350-351

⁸³ Fuller, E.W. (2023), 'An Economic Case against the Atomic Bombing of Japan', *The Independent Review*, Independent Institute, Oakland
Available at: <https://www.independent.org/tir/2023-summer/an-economic-case-against-the-atomic-bombing-of-japan/#ftn1>



7th August 1945, American Allied Correspondent force
Allied correspondent sees the ruins of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall⁸⁴

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I believe that the Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not a justified wartime action in its benefits over its costs to human life- despite the potential that it may have been a justified decision. This decision is due to the justifications for the bombing being largely based on speculative figures such statistics include the projected casualties of the land invasion, which range from 50% to 500% of the A-bomb casualties. Additionally, proof is present in evidencing incriminating factors as more important than justifying ones, such as intimidation tactics compared to the forcing of surrender. Thus, additional questions arise with many of the aims, which could simply have been solved in a non-nuclear option. This resulted in arguments for justification often not holding water due to completely unconfirmed nature, in conjunction with arguments against which were able to rely on at least a degree of confirmed statistics, and political analysis such as desires to utilise nuclear power as a bargaining chip and experimental device.

However, the decision is not one made easily. Compelling statistics such as the possible lives saved by preventing Operation Downfall nearly made me switch my conclusion, and given more concrete statistics in many parts of this topic, I believe I could have easily put forward a completely different answer. Other factors that made me consider the pro-nuclear angle was the manufacturing importance of the cities to the Japanese war machine, as well

⁸⁴ Photographer unknown, (7th August 1945), 'Allied correspondent sees the ruins of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall', US military- Accessible at: <https://www.atomicarchive.com/media/photographs/hiroshima/image-6.html>

as the lasting effects of the bombings in keeping messages of nuclear disarmament and peace alive in Japan and across the world to this very day; through a Japanese people united against Nuclear war, as well as organisations such as *The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* and *The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*.⁸⁵ However, previously mentioned factors such as less harmful alternatives and evidence for incriminating motives of testing and political blackmail lead me to my judgement.

Consulting sources from either side of the argument, such as the Royal military college of Canada and the Bulletin of the atomic scientists gave often contrasting information, including death toll numbers, reasonings for decisions or outcomes of events. However, an overall presence of omitted information, manipulated statistics and outdated figures weakened my impression of vehemently pro-nuclear sources. In comparison, balanced and seemingly impartial source authors presented raw data with little instruction as to what one should believe, allowing me to measure statistics with statistics, and reach my own conclusion.

In my research I have found a staggering lack of documentation into the subject, which I blame largely on the age and chaos of the Second World War, yet still seems peculiar considering the magnitude and worldwide relevance of the event. Population censuses in Japan at the time were rare, and only attendance records of soldiers and schoolchildren were corroborateable with the bombings. Even cities with much more advanced documentation such as Nagasaki in particular had their figures greatly confused by topography and population distribution, making it difficult for response teams to identify the worst affected areas⁸⁶. While many of these statistics are likely lost to time, I believe that research should be carried out on the event: particularly regarding the internal decision making practices of both governments at the time, despite the potential difficulties of this due to censorship or lack of records. Additionally, gaps in my own research may have made this conclusion difficult to reach. Through research into particular factors such as the IJA's harmful actions in the larger timescale of the war and the opinions/arguments of the modern day international community, I could have revealed more on the effects, motives and events of the bombings, thus making my conclusion easier to reach. Such insufficiency of information can be attributed to my themes, and explorations into viewpoints of morality would have given me an entirely new set of judgements to base my final answer off, and compose a more informative and holistic view of both the bombings and the war.

The implications of these key findings are hard to pin down, as this leads into discussions on the overall justifiability of war, especially one as massive in scale as this, and so perspectives of wartime decision makers on either side of the conflict, as well as the non-combatants outside and inside the blast zone (in a global sense) must be consulted. I believe that at the very least, my research draws attention to the severity of wartime actions, and allows for the consideration of the behaviours of military leaders in regard to civilian casualties, and why such powers must be scrutinized closely to minimise the amount of death and bloodshed brought about as a result of conflict

⁸⁵ Baron, J., Gibbons, R.D., Herzog, S. (2020), 'Japanese Public Opinion, Political Persuasion, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons', *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol 3.- Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2020.1834961#d1e299>

⁸⁶ Tomonaga, M. (2019), 'The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A Summary of the Human Consequences, 1945-2018, and Lessons for Homo sapiens to End the Nuclear Weapon Age', *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol 2. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2019.1681226>

EVALUATION:

Within my project, I believe that I have compiled a relatively effective discussion on my chosen topic, considering, citing and utilising information from a varied range of sources, thus introducing balance into my argument. I have also evaluated this information to the best of my ability, in a way that exposes bias affecting other sources, thus removing myself from any national/social/cultural bias in answering my question. Additionally, the connection and interest I hold for my theme allows me to go into further depth with research, thus accruing information necessary to write this extensive essay, though I believe I distanced myself enough from this personal and cultural linkage for it to not impede my judgement.

However, there are aspects of my themes and methods that I feel require improvement. For my thematic shortfalls, I believe that the three categories I selected do not allow for all of the information I have recorded to be categorised within them. For example, the fanatic nationalism of the IJA soldiers and leadership does not fit in perfectly with the other more foreign affairs related discussion of the external/internal influences paragraph. Additionally, methodological problems with time management, mainly due to work often being carried out in chunks as opposed to being spread out evenly over time, made writing exhausting.

Researching was often sporadic, and switching between different sources mid-reading in the case of physical books, and seeking out specific facts/stats in the case of online sources made documenting less consistent. However, nearing the end of this project, I learned more effective time management techniques to alleviate problems with my research and writing methods, and through activities such as logging milestones onto a personal calendar and consulting guidance material and examples more often, I was able to overcome a vast amount of these difficulties.

Differing parts of my EPQ went worse or better than others. My presentation went particularly well, with the slides being collated quickly, meaning I was able to go over talking points, and deliver an informed talk on the topic without any notes for reference, with a well constructed slideshow to accompany. The Q&A section of the presentation was also successful, with overall knowledge of the Second World War now proving useful, and I was able to tackle all the questions effectively utilising this surrounding contextual knowledge. The question that I answered best was likely one pitched by an audience member on Japanese Government historical education, where I was able to cite my experiences and how I noticed certain trends, as well as that of my mother and other Japanese peers- citing governmental organisations and motives to explain background. Aspects that were less successful include citations and information tracking- due to my neglecting to keep track of where certain pieces of information came from. Additionally, poor time management left me writing in exhausting bursts, as opposed to gradually building a large body of text as I researched. Such issues have arisen in my coursework assignments/ written work for my A-level subjects, with citation and writing becoming disorganised and rushed due to a lack of timetabling. For future long form writing work I hope to incorporate some of these strategies, to build better essays and allow me to work effectively.

Overall, I believe that the EPQ has been a very beneficial experience for me in furthering my studying, researching and writing capabilities, as this sometimes daunting project has better prepared me for future pieces. Management of my schedule, especially as the deadlines for important schoolwork increase in frequency, has enabled me to work harder than I possibly ever have on an academic piece, and taught me important lessons in workload

management. Additionally, the nature of the EPQ in being a single piece with a very extended timeframe for completion has given me room to perfect and alter aspects of the project to maximise the quality of my final result. Examples of such change include the revision of the title question: from “should we consider the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki legally and morally justified”, which restricts my criteria for judgement to factors that I end up not researching or exploring, due to the irrelevance and complexity of legality and morality in global conflicts such as World War II. Instead, my current title outlines the background of the event, and the context in which the bombings should be deemed justifiable or unjustifiable. Other changes, due to the tutor feedback and guidelines include removing unevidenced factors, adding key new statistics, including definitions of key terminology for accessibility, trimming unnecessary segments and reorganising entire sections of the text to build a cohesive and understandable flow of argument. Such perfectionist edits may be seen as unnecessary for smaller scale essays in other subjects, but here they have taught me how to identify stronger or weaker parts in my own writing, and helped me understand the merit of creating something I can truly take pride in.

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PRESENTATION:





9th August 1945,
The Mushroom Cloud over Nagasaki

REASONS

- Importance
- Infamy
- Relevance

QUESTIONS:

- What have you been taught about the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
- What don't you know about the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
- What do you think those from previously axis nations have been taught?



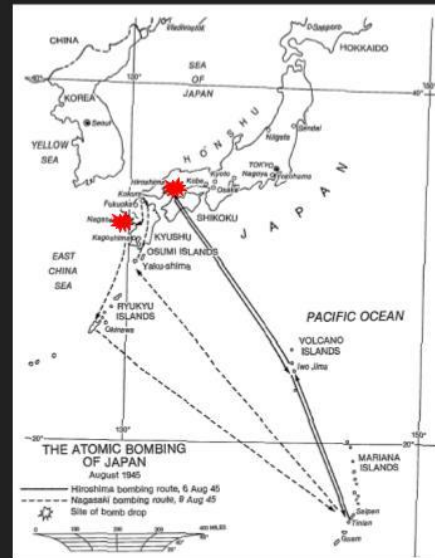
August 6th 1945
Nuclear shadow on Sumitomo bank

SIGNPOST- LOCATION

- Where is Hiroshima?
- Where is Nagasaki?
- Why Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
- Pre-WW2 purpose
- The locations of the “ground zero” drops
- Isolation

FUN FACTS...

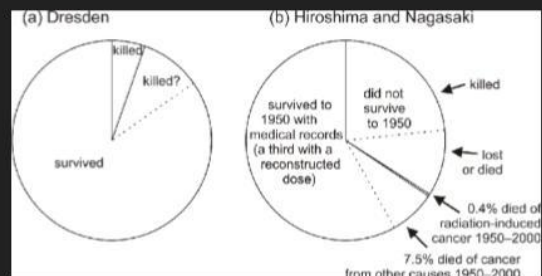
- Hiroshima's christianity
- Largest cathedral of east asia
- Conscripts & POWs



Post August 1945, US Armed forces
Hiroshima and Nagasaki Flight path
mission overview

CRITERIA FOR JUDGEMENT

- Number of lives saved by the atomic bombing compared the the number of lives lost
- Benefits that the atom bomb had for the allied war effort
- Motives for the bombing: political, tactical, experimental
- Impact of the atomic bombing outside of the war
- Discussion of wartime ethics



June 2011, Wade William Allison
Pie charts of the mortality of the
bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima +
Nagasaki.

FACTORS

Tactical motives and justifications

- American mainland invasion prevention via surrender
- Hindrance to Japanese war effort

Foreign affairs/ political motives and justifications

- Internal US military experimentation with Manhattan project
- Threat of USSR and expansion into eastern Europe

Impact on populations and society, miswarrants or justifications

- The death toll
- The legacy

01- TACTICAL DECISION?



23rd February 1945, Joe Rosenthal
Raising the flag over Iwo Jima



Circa 1943
Kawasaki Ki-61-II assembly

02- OUTSIDE INFLUENCES?



1945, Ullstein bild dtl
Joseph vissarionovich stalin



1945, Edmonston studio
Harry S Truman



Circa 1944, Corbis historical
Julius Robert Oppenheimer

TW!

03- IMPACT ON HUMANS AND SOCIETY?



7th August 1945
Hibakusha burns



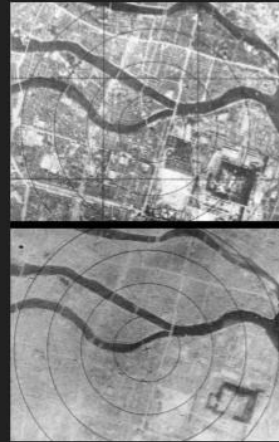
Circa 1946, Hiroshima peace memorial museum exhibit
Mass Grave



27th October 1954, Ishirō Honda
Still from ゴジラ (Gojira/godzilla)

CONCLUSION- WAS IT A JUSTIFIED WARTIME ACTION

- Ambiguity on number of lives saved AND lost
- Corruption of motives by scare tactics
- True reasonings for area selection= experimentative
- Justifications presented to public deceptive/ incorrect
- Necessity heavily dubious, moves towards surrender
- Nagasaki & Fat man comparatively unjustifiable



NO

6th/7th August 1945, US Armed forces
Ground Zero Before and After

CONCLUSION- COUNTERARGUMENT

- Did lead to the unconditional surrender of Japan and the resolution of WW2 without a mainland invasion
- A Nation should always put its own ahead of the enemy in war
- Probability of lives saved relatively high
- Showed the world the horror of the atom bomb



2nd September 1945, US armed forces
Japanese instrument of Surrender, USS Missouri

WIDER IMPLICATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH



7th August 1945,
Kazuma Hayashi
Atomic Bomb Dome

Wider implications

- Gives further insights into the impact of nuclear weapons, helps raise awareness on disarmament arguments
- Provides unbiased statistics so viability of nuclear strikes in wartime can be assessed without national/political biases
- Provides opinions of foreign countries on the strikes, opens channels of communication and information



2020, Hiroshima Peace
Tourism
Atomic Bomb Dome SPOT

Further research

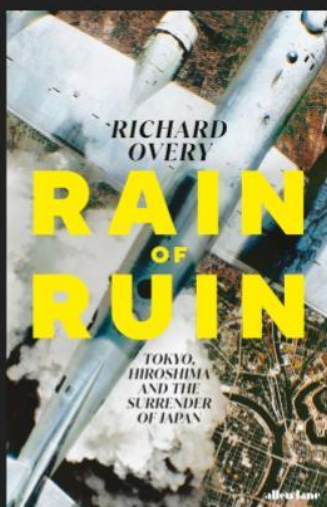
- A more accurate death toll
- Internal consults of Japanese govt
- Record/account of the cities pre-bomb
- Allied govt discussions on reasonings

EVALUATION-

WWW	EBI
- Strong interest in topic of WW2 history spurred forward research - Strong interest in heritage (of both sides) spurred forward research - Access to references from all sides of the conflict, and during different periods - Access to opinions from all sides of the conflict due to personal ties - Perfect balance between contentious and relatively widely-researched topic	- Slight lack of resources/information - Japanese sources in detail more difficult to come by - Contrasting information - Timings and depth required to research sources - Cultural bias and other (possibly personal) topics not discussed - Very split judgement worldwide makes final judgement difficult

**ANY MORE
QUESTIONS...?**

MOST USEFUL:



 **Bulletin
of the
Atomic
Scientists**

