

## Introduction: Values and Ethics in Warfare

**W**ar is hell!" That was the declaration of General William Tecumseh Sherman in early 1865 as he surveyed the devastation brought by his sixty thousand Union troops to the people of Georgia during the closing months of the Civil War.

Like leaders in other times and places, President Abraham Lincoln had approved the policy of waging war on civilians in order to hasten the end of a long and bloody struggle. Sherman's Union troops devastated the towns in their path. Unlike previous campaigns in which civilian losses were unintentional, Sherman specifically targeted the property of the local people. Although Lincoln was deeply troubled by Sherman's campaign against the South, he believed he had to break the fighting spirit of the Confederacy.

### *What factors and questions do democracies have to consider during war?*

War raises agonizing moral questions. In a democracy, the decisions faced by policymakers and the public are particularly complex. To understand the implications of war, we must begin with values.

Values are the beliefs, customs, and relationships that individuals or societies believe are central to their identity, security, and survival. They provide the foundation for the goals and standards that shape our daily lives and guide us in making important decisions. Values also inspire individuals to risk their well-being, even their lives, for a common purpose. During wartime, values serve to unite a society to take up arms to uphold its highest ideals and interests. When a democratic society goes to war, the decisions made and actions taken are not just the responsibility of those in authority; they are the collective responsibility of the people.

Democracies at war thus have a special obligation to confront the "ends-means di-

lemma." Once war has begun, few Americans would deny that bringing the conflict to a speedy and victorious conclusion is a justifiable goal, or end. The moral difficulty comes in deciding which military actions, or means, should be employed to attain a worthy end. Where does a democracy draw the line in the use of violence? How does the end being pursued determine which means are justifiable?

### *What is the focus of this reading?*

In this reading, you will consider one of the most difficult and controversial decisions ever made by a democratic society in wartime: the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II. You will travel back to the 1940s and review the events leading up to the bombing. Developments will unfold for you just as they did for U.S. policymakers. Using letters, memoranda, reports, speeches, and other documents, you will follow both the scientific race to harness the power of the atom and the military course of the most destructive war in history. With your classmates, you will reconstruct the debate about the atomic bomb that took place within the administration of President Harry Truman in late July 1945.

The background reading has been designed to help you assess the policy choices considered by the Truman administration. Beginning with examples from ancient history, this reading uses selected examples to trace the evolution of warfare from "total war" involving civilians, through "just war" theory which sought to limit the boundaries of war in the Middle Ages, and finally to the use of aerial bombardment and the return to total war in World War I. Part II traces military developments in World War II and the simultaneous scientific path that led to the construction of the atomic bomb. Together, the readings will help you to understand the complexity of warfare and the role of technology in war.



## Option 1: Make This a Time for Peace

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Japan is defeated. Its cities have been reduced to rubble, its army smashed, and its dreams of empire shattered. The U.S. Navy has cut off the Japanese main islands from supplies of raw materials. The United States has achieved the goals our country set out to accomplish four years ago. Now the time has come to make peace.

Japan's top military officials have undoubtedly recognized the hopelessness of their position. Japanese diplomats have already approached the Soviet Union in hopes of negotiating their surrender to our country. What has kept the Japanese fighting for so long is the fear that their emperor may be removed. The Japanese believe that the emperor is a direct descendent of the gods who created their islands and their people. The emperor is thus an essential symbol of Japanese heritage and culture, and Japanese troops will fight desperately, even committing suicide, before they break their obligations to him by surrendering. In a U.S. invasion of Japan's main islands, Japanese fanaticism would kill tens of thousands of American soldiers.

The main stumbling block to Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration is the confusion surrounding the status of the Japanese emperor. The United States must now step forward and precisely explain our country's terms for peace to Japan. We should assure the Japanese that we do not intend to put their emperor on trial as a war criminal. On the contrary, we should allow Emperor Hirohito to remain as a symbolic national figurehead, much like King George VI of Britain. Once the war is over, U.S. troops will have to occupy Japan just as they are currently occupying Germany. In that setting, the emperor will be a useful tool in helping the United States implement the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. The task of sweeping away the influence of aggressive militarism and implanting democratic institutions will be much easier if we can count on the support of Hirohito.

Dropping atomic bombs on Japan would be a mistake. Japan is so close to surrender that even a demonstration of the atomic bomb is not necessary to bring the war to an end. Atomic weapons were developed to counter the threat of Nazi Germany's atomic program, not to slaughter civilians. Understandably, many Americans have little sympathy for Japan. Japanese leaders treacherously attacked our country at Pearl Harbor. They have waged war with cruelty and barbarity. However, we as Americans must send a message to the world. Americans have fought bravely and honorably. We have not sunk to the level of our enemies. We should end the war now in a manner that reflects the value we place on human life and the dignity of the individual. To unleash the power of the atom against a desperate, defeated people would damage the moral leadership that the United States has gained during the war. Once the guns fall silent, we will need all the good will we have earned to build a world of peace and democracy. In the name of American values and honor, we should clear away the last obstacles to Japan's surrender.

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### Option 2: Take Responsibility for a New Era

The atomic bomb must be used as a force to end the war and strengthen the peace. The United States should demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb to the world by staging an explosion on a deserted island in the Pacific. Americans have paid too high a price to accept anything less than Japan's unconditional surrender. However, how our country ends the war against Japan will have an enormous impact on the postwar world. By demonstrating the atomic bomb, we can begin the process of constructing a postwar world based on peace and respect for human rights. Inevitably, other nations will unlock the secrets of atomic energy. Before long, humanity will possess the power to destroy the entire planet. How the United States uses these first products of the atomic age will serve as an example for the rest of the world. Let us act firmly and responsibly.

### Option 3: Push Ahead to Final Victory

For four years, Americans have willingly sacrificed their lives and their resources to overcome the evil forces of fascism and militarism. Now, with final victory within reach, we owe it to our troops to end the war as quickly and decisively as possible. Dropping atomic weapons without warning on Japan's cities, at reasonable intervals, is the surest method of ending the war on our terms and preventing further American casualties. We must not deceive ourselves. The Japanese will admit defeat only in the face of overwhelming military force. Victory over fascism and militarism has not been achieved through hesitation and halfway measures. As the defenders of democracy and freedom, we must remain strong and confident in our convictions.

## Pros and Cons

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### Supporting Arguments

1. Removing obstacles to Japan's surrender will produce a speedy end to the war and save thousands of American lives.
2. Allowing the Japanese to give up without betraying their emperor will prevent the deaths of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Japanese civilians and will make the Japanese more willing to cooperate with U.S. occupation forces after the war.
3. Quickly reaching surrender terms with Japan will keep the Soviet Union out of the war in East Asia and prevent the Soviets from demanding a share of the spoils.
4. Permitting the emperor to remain strengthens the hand of the moderates in Japan who wish to end the war and weakens the position of militarist officials.
5. Maintaining the emperor as a national symbolic figurehead will promote stability in postwar Japan and lend legitimacy to U.S. occupation forces.
6. Achieving peace through a flexible, practical policy will bolster U.S. authority and leadership in the postwar world.

### Opposing Arguments

1. Allowing the emperor to retain his position will endanger lasting peace. The cult of emperor worship has enabled the Japanese militarists to establish an aggressive, authoritarian regime in Japan and lead their people into war.
2. After suffering nearly one million casualties to defeat fascism and militarism, the American people have a right to expect that their leaders will live up to their pledge to achieve nothing less than the unconditional surrender of Japan.
3. Through their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor and their torture and execution of American prisoners, the Japanese have proven themselves to be evil, ruthless enemies who deserve no mercy.
4. The willingness of our country to negotiate will be viewed by the Japanese as a sign of weakness and will encourage them to continue fighting.
5. Entering into negotiations with Japan will prolong the war and permit Soviet forces to advance into northern China.
6. As the aftermath of World War I showed, unless the roots of aggressive militarism are completely destroyed, new dictators and new wars will spring up again.

## From the Historical Record

*Letter from President Roosevelt to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, April 5, 1944*

"I want at all costs to prevent it from being said that the unconditional surrender principle has been abandoned.... I understand perfectly well that from time to time there will have to be exceptions not to the surrender principle but to the application of it in specific cases. That is a very different thing from changing the principle."

*Memorandum from Secretary of War Henry Stimson to President Truman, July 2, 1945*

"We have the following enormously favorable factors on our side—factors much weightier than those we had against Germany: Japan has no allies. Her navy is nearly destroyed and she is vulnerable to a surface and underwater blockade which can deprive her of sufficient food and supplies for her population. She is terribly vulnerable to our concentrated air attack upon her crowded cities, industrial and food resources. She has against her not only the Anglo-American forces but the rising forces of China and the ominous threat of Russia. We have inexhaustible and untouched industrial resources to bring to bear...."

"We have great moral superiority through being the victim of her first sneak attack.... I believe Japan is susceptible to reason in such a crisis to a much greater extent than is indicated by our current press and other current comment.... I personally think that if...we do not exclude a constitutional monarchy under her [Japan's] present dynasty, it would substantially add to the chance of acceptance [of the surrender demands]."

*Draft position paper from Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Grew to Secretary of State James Byrnes, July 1945*

"The occupying forces of the Allies shall be withdrawn from Japan as soon as [our objectives] have been accomplished and there has been established a peacefully inclined, responsible government of a character rep-

resentative of the Japanese people. This may include a constitutional monarch under the present dynasty if the peace loving nations can be convinced of the genuine determination of such a government to follow policies of peace which will render impossible the future development of aggressive militarism in Japan."

*Report from Combined British-American Intelligence Committee to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, July 8, 1945*

"We believe that a considerable portion of the Japanese population now consider absolute military defeat to be probable. The increasing effects of sea blockade and cumulative devastation wrought by strategic bombing, which has already rendered millions homeless and has destroyed from 25 to 50 percent of the built-up area of Japan's most important cities, should make this realization increasingly general. The entry of the Soviet Union into the war would finally convince the Japanese of the inevitability of complete defeat. Although individual Japanese willingly sacrifice themselves in the service of the nation, we doubt that the nation as a whole is predisposed toward national suicide. Rather, the Japanese as a nation have a strong concept of national survival, regardless of the fate of individuals. They would probably prefer national survival, even through surrender, to virtual extinction.

"The Japanese believe, however, that unconditional surrender would be the equivalent of national extinction.... Foreign occupation of the Japanese homeland, foreign custody of the person of the Emperor, and the loss of prestige entailed by the acceptance of 'unconditional surrender' are most revolting to the Japanese. To avoid these conditions, if possible, and, in any event, to insure the survival of the institution of the Emperor, the Japanese might well be willing to withdraw from all the territory they have seized...and even to agree to the independence of Korea and to the practical disarmament of their military forces."

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## Option 2: Take Responsibility for a New Era

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The Manhattan Project has given the United States a weapon of almost inconceivable power. After spending more than \$2 billion and assembling the greatest team of scientists the world has ever known, the United States has mastered the secrets of the atom. Our leaders have no choice but to accept the responsibility that is in their hands. The atomic bomb must be used as a force to end the war and strengthen the peace.

The United States should demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb to the world by staging an explosion on a deserted island in the Pacific. Japanese leaders must see with their own eyes the awesome might they are up against. They must recognize the futility of their continued resistance and surrender without condition. Only if the Japanese refuse to surrender should the United States drop an atomic bomb on Japan itself. In that case, however, the blame for the deaths of thousands of Japanese civilians will fall on the heads of Japan's leaders, not on the United States.

Americans have paid too high a price to accept anything less than Japan's unconditional surrender. There must be no compromise with the Japanese militarists who brought this terrible war to the United States. Their authority must be crushed so that it never re-emerges, as it did in Germany after World War I. Japanese society can be reformed only if U.S. occupation forces are allowed to conduct their mission without interference.

How our country ends the war against Japan will have an enormous impact on the postwar world. As Americans, we can take pride in the values we have upheld throughout the fighting, despite the barbarism of the Japanese. By demonstrating the atomic bomb, we can begin the process of constructing a postwar world based on peace and respect for human rights. The combination of moral leadership and unrivaled military strength will put us in a unique position. Our trusted allies will be reassured and our enemies will be vanquished. Moreover, the Soviet Union, the only other country capable of challenging our supremacy, will be compelled by the power of the atomic bomb to behave reasonably in charting the future of postwar Europe.

We have been entrusted with an awesome challenge. Japan's leaders need to be jolted into accepting their utter defeat. Clarifying our surrender terms will not open their eyes to reality. However, there is no need to use the atomic bomb against Japanese civilians. An atomic attack would only serve to cast a dark cloud of fear and suspicion over the postwar world. A demonstration of the atomic bomb addresses both the immediate military situation and the fate of coming generations. A demonstration will both shock Japan into surrendering and set a standard for the new era we are entering.

## Options in Brief

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### Option 3: Push Ahead to Final Victory

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## Pros and Cons

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### Supporting Arguments

1. Demonstrating the awesome power of the atomic bomb will be the most humanitarian way to force the Japanese to accept unconditional surrender.
2. Bringing the war to an end through a demonstration of the atomic bomb will save the lives of thousands of American troops without lowering our international stature.
3. A demonstration of the atomic bomb will strengthen the moral leadership of the United States in the postwar world and set an international standard for the use of atomic weapons.
4. Gaining nothing less than the unconditional surrender of Japan while avoiding the slaughter of innocent civilians is the best tribute to the great sacrifices that the American people have made to defeat fascism and militarism.
5. Exhibiting the power of the atomic bomb to the world will suffice to compel the Soviets to back away from their efforts to expand their influence in Europe.

### Opposing Arguments

1. If Japan's militarist officials have not given up their insane war by now, a demonstration of the atomic bomb will not convince them to surrender.
2. Undertaking the lengthy preparations for a demonstration of the atomic bomb will prolong the war, thus opening the door to a Soviet invasion of northern China.
3. Staging a demonstration of the atomic bomb will invite Japanese sabotage, with potentially disastrous consequences.
4. Considering the resources involved in producing each atomic bomb, the United States cannot afford to waste one on a demonstration.
5. The atomic bomb is an unreliable weapon that has been tested only once. A failed demonstration of the bomb will hurt American morale, encourage the Japanese to continue fighting, and lower the stature of the United States internationally.

## From the Historical Record

*Memorandum from Secretary of War Henry Stimson to President Truman, April 25, 1945*

"Within four months we shall in all probability have completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city... It is extremely probable that the future may see a time when such a weapon may be constructed in secret and used suddenly...with devastating power by a willful nation or group against an unsuspecting nation.... The world in its present state of moral advancement compared with its technical development would be eventually at the mercy of such a weapon.... Our leadership in the war and in the development of this weapon has placed a certain moral responsibility upon us which we cannot shirk without very serious responsibility for any disaster to civilization which it would further."

*Summary of discussion between Gen. George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, May 29, 1945*

"[General Marshall] said he thought these weapons might first be used against straight military objectives such as a large naval installation, and then if no complete result was derived from the effect of that, he thought we ought to designate a number of large manufacturing areas from which people would be warned to leave....Every effort should be made to keep our record of warning clear. We must offset by such warning methods the opprobrium which might follow from an ill-considered employment of such force."

*Notes taken at a meeting of the Interim Committee, May 31, 1945*

"Dr. Oppenheimer stated that the visual effect of an atomic bombing would be tremendous. It would be accompanied by a brilliant luminescence which would rise to a height of 10,000 to 20,000 feet. The neutron effect of

the explosion would be dangerous to life for a radius of at least two-thirds of a mile."

*Memorandum, also known as the Franck Report, from the Committee of Social and Political Implications—a group of scientists working in Chicago on the Manhattan Project, June 1945*

"In the past science has been able to provide also new methods of protection against new weapons of aggression it made possible, but it cannot promise such efficient protection against the destructive use of nuclear power. This protection can only come from the political organization of the world....

"The military advantages and the saving of American lives achieved by the sudden use of atomic bombs against Japan may be outweighed by the ensuing loss of confidence and by a wave of horror and repulsion sweeping over the rest of the world and perhaps even dividing public opinion at home. From this point of view, a demonstration of the new weapon might best be made....

"The best possible atmosphere for the achievement of an international agreement could be achieved if America could say to the world, 'You see that sort of weapon we had but did not use.'"

*Memorandum from Undersecretary of the Navy Ralph Bard, June 27, 1945*

"Ever since I have been in touch with this program I have had a feeling that before the bomb is actually used against Japan that Japan should have some preliminary warning for say two or three days in advance of use. The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible in the main for this feeling.... I don't see that we have anything in particular to lose in following such a program."

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### Option 3: Push Ahead to a Final Victory

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The United States has always stood for justice and fair play. Throughout our country's history, the United States has not meddled in the affairs of other countries nor entered disputes for selfish reasons. This hateful war was thrust upon us. For four years, Americans have willingly sacrificed their lives and their resources to overcome the evil forces of fascism and militarism.

Now, with final victory within reach, we owe it to our troops to end the war as quickly and decisively as possible. After spending more than \$2 billion to develop an atomic bomb, President Truman has a moral responsibility to use whatever means are at his disposal to save American lives. Any other method to secure peace will likely result in huge numbers of American casualties, as the Japanese army and even its citizens will continue to fight barbarically, with the aim of killing as many Americans as possible before they themselves are killed. Furthermore, dropping atomic weapons without warning on Japan's cities, at reasonable intervals, is the surest method of ending the war on our terms. Even the most hardened Japanese militarist will be forced to accept unconditional surrender—if not after the first atomic bomb, then after the second or third.

We must not deceive ourselves. The Japanese will admit defeat only in the face of overwhelming military force. If we choose not to drop the atomic bombs, we should prepare for a full-scale invasion of Japan that will cost the lives of tens of thousands of our fathers, sons, and brothers. This is not the time for a guilty conscience. The Japanese have fought a merciless war of aggression. They neither expect nor deserve mercy. In light of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, the "Bataan Death March," and the torture and execution of Allied prisoners, no Japanese leader can dare accuse us of immoral behavior. Other nations, too, understand that the United States is justified in employing any and all means to destroy Japanese militarism. This is why our closest allies, the British, have already approved the use of atomic weapons against Japan.

It is far too late for negotiations. The Japanese militarists must not be permitted to reach a face-saving compromise that will rescue them from utter defeat. The Japanese emperor must not be allowed to remain as a divine symbol for legitimizing Japan's aggression. Moreover, the Japanese government itself is seriously divided. We might very well reach an agreement with one faction and then face continued resistance from a faction of defiant militarists. Likewise, a demonstration of the atomic bomb serves no purpose at this late stage. An explosion that carves out a crater on a deserted Pacific island is far less convincing than one that flattens thousands of buildings. In addition, we cannot risk the possibility that Japan would shoot down the plane dropping a demonstration bomb. Using the atomic bomb against an enemy city is the only way to deliver our message to the leaders of Japan. Demonstrating our strength and resolve will also have a sobering effect on Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Victory over fascism and militarism has not been achieved through hesitation and halfway measures. As the defenders of democracy and freedom, we must remain strong and confident in our convictions.

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## Pros and Cons

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### Supporting Arguments

1. Only the destruction of several Japanese cities will shock Japan's leaders into immediately accepting unconditional surrender.
2. Using the atomic bomb on Japanese cities is the surest, most effective way to prevent further American casualties.
3. Considering that the war has already resulted in more than fifty million deaths worldwide, the use of the atomic bomb hardly represents an escalation in the level of violence.
4. The destruction of a Japanese city caused by an atomic bomb will impress the Soviets with our country's power and compel them to soften their position on the future of Eastern Europe.
5. The immediate unconditional surrender and complete defeat of Japan's militarists are essential if the United States is to establish a stable, lasting peace and promptly conclude the war without Soviet involvement in East Asia.

### Opposing Arguments

1. Slaughtering thousands of innocent Japanese civilians when less destructive roads to peace are open is a violation of the values and principles for which Americans have fought this war.
2. Dropping an atomic bomb on Japanese civilians will damage U.S. moral leadership and undercut our country's ability to construct a lasting peace in the postwar world.
3. Destroying a Japanese city and killing thousands of people will prompt other countries, particularly the Soviet Union, to rush to develop atomic weapons for their own protection.
4. Using an atomic bomb against Japan will deepen anti-American feelings among the Japanese and undermine U.S. plans to reform Japanese society after the war.
5. Conventional military tactics, especially the air bombardment and the naval blockade, have brought the Japanese to their knees, making use of the atomic bomb unnecessary.

## From the Historical Record

*State of the Union address by President Roosevelt, January 6, 1942*

"No compromise can end [this] conflict... Only total victory can reward the champions of tolerance and decency and freedom and faith."

*Until They Eat Stones, a best-selling book published in 1944 by Associated Press correspondent Russell Brines*

"[The Japanese] will continue the war until every man—perhaps every woman and child—lies face downward on the battlefield.... To ignore this suicide complex would be as dangerous as our pre-war oversight of Japanese determination and cunning which made Pearl Harbor possible.... This is a war of extermination. The Japanese militarists have made it that way."

*Report to Congress by President Roosevelt, March 1, 1945*

"The unconditional surrender of Japan is as essential as the defeat of Germany...if our plans for world peace are to succeed. For Japanese militarism must be wiped out as thoroughly as German militarism."

*Notes by Arthur Compton from a meeting of the Interim Committee, May 31, 1945*

"If a bomb were exploded in Japan with previous notice, the Japanese air power [is] still adequate to give serious interference. An atomic bomb [is] an intricate device, still in the development stage. The operation would be far from routine. If during the final adjustment of the bomb the Japanese defenders should attack, a faulty move might easily result in some kind of failure. Such an end to an advertised demonstration of power would

be much worse than if the attempt had not been made.... If such an open test were made first and failed to bring surrender, the chance would be gone to give the shock of surprise."

*Report of the Scientific Panel to the Interim Committee, June 1, 1945*

"We can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use."

*Minutes of the Interim Committee, June 1, 1945*

"The present view of the [Interim] Committee was that the bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible; that it be used on a war plant surrounded by homes; and that it be used without prior warning."

*Letter from Arthur Compton to Secretary of War Henry Stimson, June 15, 1945*

"Failure to make a military demonstration [dropping it on a city] of the new bombs may make the war longer and more expensive in human lives.... Without a military demonstration it may be impossible to impress the world with the need for national sacrifices in order to gain lasting security."

*Army Air Force publication, July 1945*

"The entire population of Japan is a proper military target.... THERE ARE NO CIVILIANS IN JAPAN. We are making War and making it in the all-out fashion which saves American lives, shortens the agony which War is, and seeks to bring about an enduring peace. We intend to seek out and destroy the enemy wherever he or she is, in the greatest possible numbers, in the shortest possible time."