



## Why did Truman decide to use the atomic bomb?

At 5.30am on 16 July 1945, in the New Mexico desert, a team of Allied scientists carried out an atomic explosion for the first time in history. The development of the atomic bomb, based on massive funding and intensive scientific research, had given the United States the most powerful weapon in the world. The decision to use this weapon passed into the hands of a man who had been president for less than three months, Harry Truman.

By this time, the Allies had defeated Germany, but the Japanese fought on. Both sides had suffered great casualties in the fighting in the Pacific since 1941. The Allies were gradually defeating the Japanese in a series of battles, advancing slowly from island to island. They were also beginning to discover the atrocities that Japanese soldiers had committed against prisoners of war and civilians in occupied territories.

The Japanese leaders declared they would fight to the end rather than surrender unconditionally. The atomic bomb, with its awesome power, offered the USA a way to bring the war against Japan to a speedy conclusion, saving the lives of many Allied servicemen.

However, the effects of the bomb were so terrible that we must ask why Truman decided to use it. The Allies were winning the war. There is also new evidence that the Japanese had been trying to surrender since 1944. They had a condition for surrender - that Emperor Hirohito be allowed to stay on the throne. Hirohito supported the moderate forces in the government who wanted to negotiate for peace. Perhaps Truman could have dropped the insistence on unconditional surrender and entered negotiations.

If the Japanese had surrendered before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, then the power of the weapon would not have been demonstrated to other countries, especially to the USA's emerging rival, the USSR.

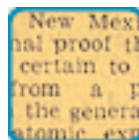
**Examine these sources to find out more:**



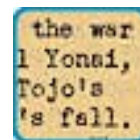
**Radio broadcast by Truman, 9 August 1945**



**Newspaper headlines on the bomb**



**Stimson: 'The Decision to use the Atomic Bomb'**



**US report on Japanese surrender**