



Source 4

Section of a US report on the atomic bombings, June 1946, looking at the Japanese surrender

(Catalogue ref: FO 371/59640)

the war
I Yonai,
Tojo's
's fall.

4a

Russian
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4b

Questions

1. How would you describe the viewpoint of this source?
2. What new light does this source shed on the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan?
3. The date of this source is 1946. Do you think Truman could have known all this information in 1945 when he took his decision to drop the bomb?
4. Other than getting the Japanese to surrender, can you think of any other reasons for the USA to use their atomic weapons?



HEROES & VILLAINS

Truman & the atomic bomb > Why did Truman use it?

Source 4a

Even in the target cities, it must be emphasized, the atomic bombs did not uniformly destroy the Japanese fighting spirit. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when compared with other Japanese cities, were not more defeatist than the average. The bombs were tremendous personal catastrophes to the survivors, but neither time nor understanding of the revolutionary threat of the atomic bomb permitted them to see in these personal catastrophes a final blow to Japan's prospects for victory or negotiated peace.

3. The Japanese Decision to Surrender

The further question of the effects of the bombs on the morale of the Japanese leaders and their decision to abandon the war is tied up with other factors. The atomic bomb had more effect on the thinking of government leaders than on the morale of the rank and file of civilians outside of the target cities. It cannot be said, however, that the atomic bomb convinced the leaders who effected the peace of the necessity of surrender. The decision to seek ways and means to terminate the war, influenced in part by knowledge of the low state of popular morale, had been taken in May, 1945 by the Supreme War Guidance Council.

As early as the spring of 1944 a group of former prime ministers and others close to the Emperor had been making efforts toward bringing the war to an end. This group, including such men as Admiral Okada, Admiral Yonai, Prince Konoye, and Marquis Kido, had been influential in effecting Tojo's resignation and in making Admiral Suzuki Prime Minister after Koiso's fall. Even in the Suzuki Cabinet, however, agreement was far from unanimous. The Navy Minister, Admiral Yonai, was sympathetic, but the War Minister, General Anami, usually represented the fight-to-the-end policy of the Army.



HEROES & VILLAINS

Truman & the atomic bomb > Why did Truman use it?

Source 4b

The atomic bombings considerably speeded up these political maneuverings within the government. This in itself was partly a morale effect, since there is ample evidence that members of the Cabinet were worried by the prospect of further atomic bombing, especially on the remains of Tokyo. The bombs did not convince the military that defense of the home islands was impossible, if their behavior in government councils is adequate testimony. It did permit the Government to say, however, that no army without the weapon could possibly resist an enemy who had it, thus saving "face" for the Army leaders and not reflecting on the competence of Japanese industrialists or the valor of the Japanese soldier. In the Supreme War Guidance Council voting remained divided, with the War Minister and the two Chiefs of Staff unwilling to accept unconditional surrender. There seems little doubt, however, that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki weakened their inclination to oppose the peace group.

The peace effort culminated in an Imperial conference held on the night of 9 August and continued into the early hours of 10 August, for which the stage was set by the atomic bomb and the Russian war declaration. At this meeting the Emperor, again breaking his customary silence, stated specifically that he wanted acceptance of the Potsdam terms.