

**WAS HIROSHIMA THE BIGGEST EVENT OF WORLD WAR 2?**

**Extracts from a memorandum on the Atom Bomb from Prime Minister Clement Attlee, 28th August 1945**

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8 Scientists agree that we cannot stop the march of discovery. We can assume that any attempt to keep this as a secret in the hands of the U.S.A. and U.K. is useless. Scientists in other countries are certain in time to hit upon the secret.

12 The only course which seems to me to be feasible and to offer a reasonable hope of staving off imminent disaster for the world is joint action by the U.S.A., U.K. and Russia based upon stark reality.

13 We should declare that this invention has made it essential to end wars. The new World Order must start now.

All nations must give up their dreams of realising some historic expansion at the expense of their neighbours. They must look to a peaceful future instead of to a warlike past. (3)

15 This sort of thing has in the past been considered a utopian dream. It has become today the essential condition of the survival of civilisation and possibly of life in this planet.

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## PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

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### **What is this source?**

These extracts come from a memorandum on the Atomic Bomb from Prime Minister Clement Attlee, 28th August 1945.

Attlee became Prime Minister in July 1945 after defeating Winston Churchill in the General Election. This meant that Attlee took office during the final conference of the Allies in World War 2 at Potsdam in Germany (July 17–August 2, 1945).

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### **What's the background to this source?**

The war in the Pacific was fought mostly (but not solely) between US forces and the forces of Japan. It began in December 1941 and cost many thousands of lives. By early 1945 US forces were beginning to invade the islands that made up the Japanese homelands. In February–March 1945 the Allied forces suffered huge casualties when they invaded the tiny island of Iwo Jima. Soon afterwards they suffered heavy casualties again when they invaded Okinawa. After assessing the situation US military and political leaders decided to use the new weapon that they had just developed, the Atom Bomb.

US President Truman consulted his commanders, scientists and also his allies, particularly British leader Winston Churchill. Churchill felt the bomb should be used to shorten the war. The military leaders were divided and many of the scientists who developed the bomb also felt that it was wrong to use it. In the end, Truman did decide to use it, and even said later in his life that the decision was easy.

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### **It's worth knowing that...**

After the war the United States suggested passing the responsibility for controlling nuclear technology to the newly formed United Nations and offered to get rid of its atomic weapons. However Russia did not trust America to keep its word and refused, going on to test its own atomic bomb in 1949.

Clement Attlee expected the United States to share its nuclear discoveries. Britain had supplied technical information and scientists to the Manhattan Project to build the bomb. But the US government passed the McMahon Act forbidding the transfer of atomic secrets to other countries. Attlee's government then decided to develop its own nuclear weapons and Britain became the third nuclear power in October 1952.

<http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/worldwarII/>

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**How will you use this source?**

1. Why do you think the Prime Minister felt that it was "useless" to try and keep the scientific knowledge of the Atom Bomb secret from other countries?
2. Why do you think the Prime Minister said: "this invention has made it essential to end wars"?
3. Do you agree or disagree with any of the ideas in this source? Explain your views
4. Which parts of the source do you think will be useful in preparing for your TV debate?

Use this table to help you plan your work.