

What happened on 6 August 1945?

On 6 August 1945, the USA dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The blast devastated an area of five square miles, destroying more than 60 per cent of the city's buildings and killing around 140,000 people.

Three days later the USA dropped a second atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, killing around 74,000 people.

Why did America use the bomb?

End of the war. The bomb was dropped to force a quick Japanese surrender. American commanders said it would save money and the lives of American servicemen and Japanese soldiers and civilians too. They said that to continue the war for weeks or months with conventional bombing and a US land invasion could have caused millions of Japanese deaths.

Retribution against the Japanese. President Truman justified his decision by pointing to the unprovoked Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the murder of American prisoners. A few days after the bombing he wrote: "When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast."

Demonstration of power. The development of the bomb cost billions of dollars, and American leaders wanted to justify the expense. They wanted to demonstrate to the Japanese that they faced overwhelmingly superior forces. They also wanted their new rivals, the Soviet Union, to see their powerful new weapon in action.

Was it a **just** decision? In 1945, the idea of just war was firmly established in international law. In a just war, only combatants may be specifically targeted. Harm caused to civilians must be proportional to military ends and any harm caused must be necessary for the achievement of military goals. However, some argue that all citizens contribute to the war effort and can be a legitimate target in some cases.

Glossary:

Retribution – revenge

Just – fair

Questions:



Do *you* think it was a **just** decision by the USA?



What other options did the USA have?



Why might the USA have felt it was unavoidable that this new technology was used?