**WAS JAPAN FAIRLY WARNED AND GIVEN A CHANCE TO SURRENDER?**

Critics of President Truman contend that he failed to warn the Japanese that they would be attacked with an atomic bomb and thus gave them no opportunity to surrender until the bomb was dropped. The critics also contend that the bomb could have been dropped in an unpopulated are to demonstrate its power. Such a demonstration they argue, would have convinced the Japanese to surrender without needless bloodshed and long-term suffering.

On July 26, 1945, the governments of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great

Britain issued a joint statement known as the Potsdam Declaration. This document included a call for Japan to surrender and warned Japan of what would happen if it did not surrender. From the Potsdam Declaration…July 26, 1945:…We call upon the Government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction…

**HENRY L. STIMSON, the United States Secretary of War:**

On July 28 the Premier of Japan, Suzuki, rejected the Potsdam ultimatum by announcing that it was ‘unworthy of public notice.’ In the face of this rejection we could only proceed to demonstrate that the ultimatum had meant exactly what it said…

**HANSON W. BALDWIN, journalist and author:**

Not only was the Potsdam ultimatum merely a restatement of the politically impossible – unconditional surrender – but it could hardly be construed as a direct warning of the atomic bomb and was not taken as such by anyone who did not know the bomb had been created…American ingenuity could have found ways to bring home to the Japanese the impossibility of their position and the horrors of the weapon being held over them; yet we rushed to use the bomb as soon as the unconditional surrender was rejected.

Had we devised some demonstration or given a more specific warning than the Potsdam ultimatum, and had the Japanese still persisted in continued resistance after some weeks of our psychological offensive, we should perhaps have been justified in the bomb’s use; at least, our hands would have been more clean…

Critics of Truman’s decision further argue that a harmless demonstration of the power of the atomic bomb would have convinced the Japanese to surrender without bloodshed.

**HENRY L. STIMSON, Secretary of War:**

The Interim Committee on June 1, recommended that the bomb should be used against

Japan, without specific warning, as soon as possible, and against such a target as to make clear its devastating strength. Any other course, in the opinion of the committee, involved serious danger to the major objective of obtaining a prompt surrender from the Japanese. An advisory panel of distinguished atomic physicists reported that “we can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use…

**JAMES F. BYRNES, Special Advisor to President Truman:**

We feared that, if the Japanese were told that the bomb would be used on a given locality, they might bring our boys who were prisoners of war to that area. Also the experts had warned us that the static test which was to take place in New Mexico, even if successful, would not be conclusive proof that a bomb would explode when dropped from an airplane. If we were to warn the Japanese of the new highly destructive weapon in the hope of impressing them and if the bomb then failed to explode we would have given aid and comfort to the Japanese militarists…

**RALPH A. BARD, Undersecretary of the Navy:**

(Before the bomb was dropped)

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 in use. The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible for this feeling…

(After the bomb was dropped)

…It was quite logical to hope and expect that with the proper kind of warning the Japanese would have made peace and we wouldn’t have had to drop the bomb and have to bring Russia in and we wouldn’t have had to give them all the tremendous things we gave them for five days’ participation in the war…

**ARTHUR H. COMPTON, scientist and advisor to Truman:**

…We (the scientists) were determined to find, if we could, some effective way of demonstrating the power of an atomic bomb without the loss of life that would impress Japan’s warlords. If only this could be done!

Though the possibility of a demonstration that would not destroy human lives was attractive, no one could suggest a way in which it could be made so convincing that it would likely stop the war…

In your opinion, was the Potsdam Declaration a fair warning to Japan? Why or why not?