

What Should Truman Do?

It is July 17, 1945. You are a group of President Truman's closest advisors. For four years the United States and its allies have been at war with the Axis powers. Germany and Italy have recently surrendered. Japan's cities have been gutted and hundreds of thousands of its citizens killed as a result of American and British bombing raids. Yet, the Japanese still refuse to accept terms of "unconditional" surrender, demanded by the Allies. The Japanese insist on keeping their emperor, the symbol of Japanese culture. The Japanese believe that their emperor is a god, and that to die in his service is an honor. So they often fight to the last soldier. President Truman is aware, however, that the Japanese have asked the Russians to mediate a peace settlement with the United States.

Secretly, American military personnel and scientists have been working on a new weapon—an atomic bomb. Yesterday, July 16, 1945, President Truman met with his British and Russian allies at Potsdam and was informed that the bomb had been successfully tested. This atomic bomb has 2,000 times the blast power of what was previously the world's most destructive bomb.

Military leaders estimate that an invasion of Japan's home islands would result in the deaths of 1,000,000 American and British soldiers. They also state that if Japanese cities were warned in advance that a new, devastating bomb would be dropped, American prisoners of war might be moved to those cities. Some scientists propose that, instead of just dropping the bomb, the Japanese be invited to view a test demonstration of one A-bomb (the United States only has two) in some uninhabited place. Other advisors recommend that the atomic bomb be dropped on Japan to frighten the Soviets, who will soon enter the war against Japan, with an example of America's military power, and keep them in their place after the war. The Soviets already have established puppet communist regimes in the eastern European countries they overran as they advanced on Germany. It is feared that they plan to spread their system of government with its lack of freedom for the individual around the world.

President Truman, standing before a chalkboard labeled as follows, turns to you, his closest advisors, and says, "What can we do to bring the war with Japan to an end?" Help him complete the chart below.

DECISION: WHAT CAN PRESIDENT TRUMAN DO TO END THE WAR WITH JAPAN?		
Possible Choices	Advantages Long & Short Range	Disadvantages Long & Short Range
Invade Japan with millions of troops.		
Warn Japan very specifically of this terrible new weapon. Threaten to use it if Japan doesn't surrender.		
Don't give Japan any specific warning. Demand unconditional surrender and drop the bomb if Japan refuses.		
Invite the Japanese to a test demonstration firing of one A-bomb in a desert.		
Other:		

