

# MOKUSATSU AND THE DECISION TO USE THE ATOMIC BOMB

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Individual Exhibit

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## Process Paper

In my experience, miscommunications can lead to bad results. I wanted my project to demonstrate how miscommunications have caused negative events in history. I researched examples of miscommunications in history during wars or battles. I read about the July 1945 allied leaders' decision to give Japan an ultimatum to force their surrender in World War II, and the ambiguous response given by the Japanese Prime Minister during a press conference that the U.S. government interpreted as a rejection of the ultimatum. I was surprised to learn that President Harry Truman authorized the use of an atomic weapon against Japan based on the Japanese Prime Minister's remark during a press conference instead of directly communicating with the Japanese leaders. I thought it was an important topic to highlight how the failure to effectively communicate can result in escalation of war.

I began my research by reviewing secondary sources that described the Potsdam Conference, the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation, the Japanese government response, the bombings, and the resulting destruction and loss of life. I learned that the Japanese Prime Minister responded to the ultimatum by using a word, *mokusatsu*, that is ambiguous. To determine how the U.S. government interpreted this response from the Japanese government and whether it directly led to the decision to bomb Japan, I identified letters, memos, and press statements written by U.S. government leadership from the period in 1945 shortly before the bombings. Later reflections in documents written by the U.S. Secretary of War and letters from President Truman confirmed my view that the Japanese government's ambiguous response to the ultimatum was a direct cause of the bombings. I also researched the Japanese

government perspective in 1945 before the bombings and determined through summaries of interviews I found that Japanese government officials had been debating whether to surrender before the bombings.

After reviewing photographs and first-hand accounts of the bombings of the Japanese cities and the resulting loss of life and destruction, I determined that an exhibit would best capture the horrific consequences of the bombing. I included a timeline on my exhibit that depicted the events, miscommunication, and decision that led to the bombings. I also used my exhibit to explain that subsequent to World War II, some governments learned to more effectively communicate with each other to avoid accidental war through the use of hotlines.

My research demonstrated that the Japanese government's use of the word *mokusatsu*, instead of clear words in response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation, led to President Truman's misunderstanding that the ultimatum had been rejected and decision to bomb Japan. My research showed that the Japanese government was moving towards surrender before the bombings, and had the Japanese and U.S. government communicated directly and more effectively, significant loss of life and injuries to the Japanese people could have been avoided. Direct and effective communication between world leaders is an important lesson to remember to avoid accidental war or the escalation of war.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

*Atomic burst over Hiroshima, 1945.* Photography. Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016. [quest.eb.com/search/132\\_1302513/1/132\\_1302513/cite](http://quest.eb.com/search/132_1302513/1/132_1302513/cite). Accessed 15 Jan 2021.

This is a primary source, as it is a photograph of the atomic bomb exploding over Hiroshima, Japan. The photograph captures the terrifying force of the bomb. I used this photograph to show what the explosion from the bomb looked like to the victims of Hiroshima.

*Atomic Burst over Nagasaki, 1945.* Photography. *Britannica ImageQuest*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016. [quest.eb.com/search/132\\_1302513/1/132\\_1302513/cite](http://quest.eb.com/search/132_1302513/1/132_1302513/cite). Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.

This is a primary source, as it is a photograph of the atomic bomb exploding over Nagasaki, Japan. The photograph captures the terrifying force of the bomb. I used this photograph to show what the explosion from the bomb looked like to the victims of Nagasaki.

August 5, 1963 Letter from Harry S. Truman to Irv Kupcinet. *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*. Post-Presidential File. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library*, [www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/harry-s-truman-irv-kupcinet](http://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/harry-s-truman-irv-kupcinet). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This primary source is a letter from Harry Truman post-presidency to a Chicago Sun-Times reporter, responding to the reporter's column. It helped me understand Truman's reflections on the bomb years later, in that he had no regrets and was clear about his justifications for the decision to bomb Japan.

"August 9-11 Correspondence between President Harry S. Truman and Samuel Cavert, General Secretary of the Federal Council of The Churches of Christ in America." *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*. Official File. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library*, [trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/correspondence-between-harry-s-truman-and-samuel-cavert?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1](http://trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/correspondence-between-harry-s-truman-and-samuel-cavert?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This primary source consists of an August 9, 1945 telegram from a major U.S. religious organization to President Truman expressing their opposition to the use of atomic weapons, and President Truman's responsive letter two days later, justifying the use of

atomic weapons against Japan. I thought this source was useful in showing President Truman's anger at the Japanese because of the attack on Pearl Harbor. This helped me understand the factors that probably contributed to the failure to try and communicate effectively after the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation before dropping an atomic bomb.

Cable, Secretary of War Henry Stimson to President Truman [Re: Atomic Bomb] With Truman's Handwritten Reply; 7/30/1945; Collection HST-GME: George M. Elsey Papers. [Online Version, [https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/cable-secretary-of-war-henry-stimson-to-president-truman-\[re-atomic-bomb\]-with-trumans-handwritten-reply](https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/cable-secretary-of-war-henry-stimson-to-president-truman-[re-atomic-bomb]-with-trumans-handwritten-reply), January 2, 2021]

This primary source consists of an original typed message from Secretary of War Henry Stimson to President Truman, and Truman's reply to the message is handwritten on the back of the paper. The typed message from Stimson and handwritten reply from Truman are important, because these documents appear to be documentation of Truman's approval of the use of the bomb prior to the bombing of Hiroshima. The message from Stimson tells Truman that they need to have his press statement of the bomb ready soon, given the ultimatum from Potsdam and the testing of the bomb, and Truman's reply was an approval of Stimson's suggestions and that the release should not occur before August 2, 1945, thus showing in my view Truman's approval of the use of the bomb and the release of a statement about it.

"Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and James Cate, with attached White House memos." *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*, pp. 1-17. President's Secretary's File. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library*, [www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/correspondence-between-harry-s-truman-and-james-cate-attached-white-house?documentid=NA&pagenumber=3](http://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/correspondence-between-harry-s-truman-and-james-cate-attached-white-house?documentid=NA&pagenumber=3). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This primary source has multiple versions of a letter written by President Truman to a professor in response to a letter from the professor and reflects the President's own thoughts as to why he approved the use of an atomic weapon against Japan. I used this source to see how the draft letter evolved as it was edited into a final form and signed by Truman, as it shows that the President understood the Japanese response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation as a rejection and includes his handwritten edit to the letter.

*The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb. Harper's Magazine Online,*

[www.asianstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/the-harpers-magazine-article-from-1947-the-decision-to-use-the-atomic-bomb-by-henry-stimson-to-accompany-peter-frosts-article-teaching-mr-stimson.pdf](http://www.asianstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/the-harpers-magazine-article-from-1947-the-decision-to-use-the-atomic-bomb-by-henry-stimson-to-accompany-peter-frosts-article-teaching-mr-stimson.pdf). Accessed 19 Dec. 2020.

This is an article written by Henry Stimson, Secretary of War during the Truman presidency, and originally published in Harper's Magazine that explained the events leading up to the decision to use the bomb against Japan. This is an important primary source, because it reflects the thinking of the Secretary of War in 1945 on why U.S. government leadership decided to bomb Japan. This first-hand account of the Secretary of War during the bombing of Japan helped me understand the direct connection between the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the ambiguous response by the Japanese premier to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation.

"Diary Entries of Eben Ayers, July-August, 1945." *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*. Subject File. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library*, [trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/diary-entries?documentid=NA&pagenumber=6](http://trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/diary-entries?documentid=NA&pagenumber=6). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This primary source consists of undated diary entries near in time to the bombings by Eben Ayers, the press secretary for President Truman and later personal assistant to the President. I used one of the entries to show another U.S. government perspective of the Japanese response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation that was communicated to President Truman through the former Japanese Ambassador to the U.S.

"Diary entry by Eben Ayers, August 6, 1951." 1951. *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*. Subject File. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library*, [trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/diary-entry-eben-ayers](http://trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/diary-entry-eben-ayers). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This primary source is a first-hand account by Eben Ayers, the press secretary for President Truman and later personal assistant to the President, of his conversation with President Truman regarding the development of, and decision to drop, the atomic bomb. I used this source to help me understand what factors the President considered in deciding to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

John F. Kennedy, White House Announcement of Agreement To Link Washington and Moscow by Direct Telecommunications Facilities. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/236725>.

This is a press statement put out by the White House when President Kennedy and the Soviet Union government established a direct communications link. I used this press statement, which is a primary source, because it explains in the U.S. government's own words why this link was important to improve communications between these countries. This communications link was a communications improvement and, in my view, would have helped during WWII if President Truman was able to directly communicate with the Japanese Prime Minister and Emperor.

Khaldei, Yevgeny. *Churchill, Truman, and Stalin at Potsdam*. July 1945. *Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery*, [collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record\\_ID=npg\\_NPG.99.151&repo=DPLA](https://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID=npg_NPG.99.151&repo=DPLA). Accessed 1 Jan. 2021.

This primary source is a photograph taken during July 1945 at the Potsdam Conference. The photo shows the point in time in July 1945 when the allied leaders met in Potsdam, and there were discussions by the allied leaders regarding how to deal with the war with Japan. The significance of this photo is that it captures three of the main allied leaders at that time - Truman, Churchill, and Stalin, during the time of the Potsdam Conference when the leaders gave Japan an ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation.

*Last meeting of the Potsdam Conference in Potsdam, Germany*. 1 Aug. 1945. *National Archives Catalogue*, [catalog.archives.gov/id/198951](https://catalog.archives.gov/id/198951). Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

This primary source is a photo of world leaders, including President Truman, that was taken at the Potsdam Conference. I used this photo to see a depiction of the world leaders who had given the ultimatum to Japan to surrender. This photo was taken on August 1, 1945, days before the bombing of Hiroshima, which was August 6, 1945.

Matsushige, Yoshito. *Hiroshima, 6th August 1945*. 6 Aug. 1945. *Iconicphotos.wordpress.com*, 6 Aug. 2010, [iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2010/08/06/hiroshima-6th-august-1945/](https://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2010/08/06/hiroshima-6th-august-1945/). Accessed 18 Dec. 2020.

I found within an article or post on the word press website five photographs taken by Yoshito Matsushige, a Hiroshima bombing survivor, and the only one to have first-hand photographic evidence of the destruction from the bombing in the immediate aftermath of it. I used one or more of these photos, which are primary sources, to bring to life the deadly results of a terrible decision by the U.S. military to bomb Japan after receiving a

mistranslation or incomplete translation of the Japanese leader's response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation.

---. "Yoshito Matsushige's Account of the Hiroshima Bombing." *Atomicheritage.org*, Atomic Heritage Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History, 2019, [www.atomicheritage.org/key-documents/yoshito-matsushiges-account-hiroshima-bombing](http://www.atomicheritage.org/key-documents/yoshito-matsushiges-account-hiroshima-bombing). Accessed 28 Dec. 2020. Interview.

This primary source is a first hand account of a survivor from the bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. This first hand account from someone who lived through the bombing reflects the terrible tragedy for the people of Hiroshima caused by a miscommunication that could have been avoided during WWII. It helped me understand from a witness of the bombing the inhumanity of war and terrible destruction from it.

"Memorandum of Understanding Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link." *U.S. Department of State*, 2009-2017.[state.gov/t/isn/4785.htm](http://state.gov/t/isn/4785.htm). Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

This primary source is the text of the treaty, referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding, between the U.S. and Soviet Union that established the direct communications link between the two countries. I used this primary source to see the actual text of the agreement about the communications link. The Annex, which is attached to the Memorandum of Understanding, helped me understand the details of how a direct communications link worked between the two countries to avoid miscommunications that could lead to accidental war.

Mydans, Carl. *The Japanese surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945*. 2 Sept. 1945. *National Museum of American History*, Smithsonian, [americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_1303405](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1303405). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This primary source is a photo of the official Japanese surrender in WWII to allied forces aboard the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945. It shows the formality of the surrender following the destruction of Japanese cities from the atomic bombs that had been dropped, and it helped me understand what it means to formally "surrender" in war.

*Photographs - atomic bomb. National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library,*

[www.trumanlibrary.gov/photographs?search=atomic+bomb&title=&accession\\_number=&field\\_color=All&field\\_restrictions=All&photographer=&creator=&description=&people\\_names=&date%5Bmin%5D=&date%5Bmax%5D=&sort\\_by=field\\_date&sort\\_order=A](http://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photographs?search=atomic+bomb&title=&accession_number=&field_color=All&field_restrictions=All&photographer=&creator=&description=&people_names=&date%5Bmin%5D=&date%5Bmax%5D=&sort_by=field_date&sort_order=A) SC. Accessed 3 Jan. 2021.

This website has a collection of photographs taken of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the destruction of these cities, the bombs themselves, and the planes that dropped the bombs. This collection of photographs also includes a photograph of allied leaders at the Potsdam Conference, photographs of President Truman at different points in history, and photos of the testing of the atomic bomb. This primary source collection of photographs, some of which I used in my exhibit, includes vivid photographs of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the terrible effects the bomb had on these cities and its population.

"Press Statement Containing Letter, Dated March 12, 1958, from former President Harry S.

Truman to Hon. Tsukasa Nitoguri, Chairman of the Hiroshima City Council." 1958. *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*. Post-Presidential File. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library,*

[trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/correspondence-between-tsukasa-nitoguri-and-harry-s-truman?documentid=NA&pagenumber=2](http://trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/correspondence-between-tsukasa-nitoguri-and-harry-s-truman?documentid=NA&pagenumber=2). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

I used this primary source press statement that contained former President Truman's letter to the Chairman of the Hiroshima City Council to better understand President Truman's justifications for why he thought dropping the atomic bomb on Japan was the right response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation. It helped me understand that one factor that contributed to President Truman's decision in addition to the Japanese response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation was the unprovoked attack by the Japanese on the Pearl Harbor Naval Base.

Proclamation by the Heads of Governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and China for Japan's Surrender; 7/1945; Volume XI - Miscellaneous papers: Japan; Berlin Conference Files, 1945 - 1945; Collection HST-NAVAL: Records of the Naval Aide to the President (Truman Administration); Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO. [Online Version, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/proclamation-us-uk-china-for-japan-surrender>, December 19, 2020].

This is a primary source. It is the original typed Potsdam Proclamation, signed by allied leaders in July 1945, seeking Japan's surrender in WWII. I used this primary source document to show the wording of the ultimatum used by the allied leaders to force Japan's surrender, which led to a response by the Japanese Prime Minister that was misunderstood.

"Truman Statement on Hiroshima." 1945. *Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Manhattan Project History, Manhattan Project Scientists and Leaders. Atomic Heritage Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History*, [www.atomicheritage.org/key-documents/truman-statement-hiroshima](http://www.atomicheritage.org/key-documents/truman-statement-hiroshima). Accessed 1 Jan. 2021.

This contained two primary sources - the August 6, 1945 press release from the White House with President Truman's justification for the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan and a photograph of President Truman reading the press release in the White House to reporters. The photograph captures this important day in history when the U.S. used an atomic weapon for the first time in combat. The press release helped me understand the specific justification the President used in explaining the bombing to the press and the American people, and it includes his belief that the Japanese rejected the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation.

"U.S News and World Report. 'Interview with Dr. Szilard.'" 1960. Leo Szilard Papers. Leo Szilard Papers. MSS 32. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library, [library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2766070z](http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2766070z). Accessed 8 May 2021.

These typewritten notes were from the full interview conducted by the U.S. News and World Report in July 1960 of physicist Leo Szilard, who helped persuade President Roosevelt to start the atomic bomb project but later opposed use of the bomb in 1945. This source was helpful in understanding a perspective of a scientist at the time the decision was made to bomb Japan, as this physicist felt that the war could have been ended by the U.S. communicating with Japan through diplomatic channels, especially given that the Japanese, in his view, were seeking peace. Szilard also said that "governments are guided by considerations of expediency rather than moral considerations," but I think that if Suzuki had used clearer words to indicate that Japan had not yet made a decision about the Potsdam Proclamation and was considering it, it would have been hard for President Truman to justify dropping the bombs.

War Department. U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. Pacific Survey. Physical Damage Division. *Photograph of Hiroshima after Atomic Bomb*. 1945. *National Archives Catalogue*, War Department. U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. Pacific Survey. Physical Damage Division, 1947, [catalog.archives.gov/id/22345672](https://catalog.archives.gov/id/22345672). Accessed 19 Dec. 2020.

This primary source is a photograph of Hiroshima after the atomic bomb was dropped that was taken by the U.S. military. It is a photograph maintained by the National Archives. I used this photograph to help me understand the terrible destruction of this city that ultimately resulted from a miscommunication or ineffective communication in response to the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation.

## Secondary Sources

Author Name Redacted. "Mokusatsu: One Word, Two Lessons." *NSA Technical Journal*, vol. XIII, no. No.4, Fall 1968. *Nsa.gov*, [www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/tech-journals/mokusatsu.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/tech-journals/mokusatsu.pdf). Accessed 18 Dec. 2020.

This is a secondary source likely written by a translator or linguist at the National Security Agency that I used to help me understand why the Japanese response to the ultimatum was ambiguous and subject to interpretation. This journal article provides the perspective of a linguist and explains that a word in one language may not be able to be exactly translated in every other language, and even if it can, it may have different meanings in different languages because of cultural differences. This helped me understand that it was important for a translator to have told U.S. decision makers about the different possible meanings in the word "mokusatsu" and that U.S. government decision makers should have sought clarification before making such a deadly decision to drop a bomb.

"Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 18 Nov. 2009, [www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/bombing-of-hiroshima-and-nagasaki](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/bombing-of-hiroshima-and-nagasaki). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

This article is a secondary source that contains information from other sources. The article helped me understand the destruction and aftermath from the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In particular, I used the article to understand the estimated

number of deaths from the two bombings, and the photos embedded in the article helped me understand the terrible destruction to these Japanese cities from the bombs.

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, editor. *Britannica*.

[www.britannica.com/topic/Potsdam-Declaration](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Potsdam-Declaration). Accessed 18 Dec. 2020.

This reference source, which is a secondary source, is general background on the Potsdam Conference and Proclamation, the ultimatum in the Proclamation, and the Japanese response. This background material also generally discussed the destruction from the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was one of my initial research sources, before I identified primary sources.

Electronic Dictionary Research and Development Group, translator. "Definition of 黙殺."

*Tangorin*, [tangorin.com/definition/黙殺](http://tangorin.com/definition/黙殺). Accessed 18 Dec. 2020.

This online dictionary is a secondary source that can translate Japanese words into English. I did not have a Japanese-English dictionary at home, and so I needed to use an online free dictionary like this to provide the actual definition for "mokusatsu," which is the Japanese word that was incorrectly or incompletely translated and led, in my view, to the U.S. bombing Japan in WWII. I wanted to use this definition from the dictionary to compare the different understandings of the word that I found in primary source accounts of statements or views of U.S. government leadership as to why the U.S. bombed Japan.

Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of

Berlin (The Potsdam Conference). U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960. 2 vols.

This secondary source contains a translation of an extract of Suzuki's July 1945 News Conference as heard and translated by the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service. This U.S. Government entity translated Mokusatsu as "ignore it entirely," and other documents included in this book show that some in the U.S. military saw this particular translation of mokusatsu.

Gup, Ted. "For Hiroshima's survivors, memories of the bomb are impossible to forget." *National Geographic*. *National Geographic*,

[www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2020/06/for-hiroshima-survivors-horror-of-nuclear-attack-is-still-vivid-feature/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2020/06/for-hiroshima-survivors-horror-of-nuclear-attack-is-still-vivid-feature/). Accessed 1 Jan. 2021.

This magazine article contains interviews with survivors of the bombing of Hiroshima, but because the article does not contain the full interviews of the survivors, I categorized the article as a secondary source. It helped me understand through the quotes from the survivor interviews the discrimination they faced after the bombing, because people feared the radiation the survivors were exposed to. This magazine article also contains photographs of the bombing of Hiroshima, some of the survivors of the bombing, and the destruction that resulted from the bombing, one or more of which I used in my exhibit, and thus, it helped me to understand the horrible destruction to the city and people of Hiroshima.

"Hotline Agreements." *Arms Control Association*, May 2020,  
[www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Hotlines](http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Hotlines). Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

The article, which is a secondary source, explains the establishment of the U.S. and Soviet Union hotline after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the fact that it was not an actual telephone, as I had initially thought, but rather communications carried on a circuit traveling through certain international points. This article helped me understand additional details on an improvement to communication between foreign leaders to reduce the chance of accidental war based on miscommunications or misunderstandings. This secondary source led me to a primary source document regarding the hotline agreement between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

"Japan surrenders, bringing an end to WWII." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 9 Feb. 2010, [www.history.com/this-day-in-history/japan-surrenders](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/japan-surrenders). Accessed 24 Dec. 2020.

I used this secondary source to better understand the events that led to the formal Japanese surrender in WWII aboard the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945. It helped me understand the unrest and debate that occurred in Japan, including an attempted coup after Prime Minister Suzuki proposed a surrender.

Office of the Historian, editor. "Press Conference Statement by Prime Minister Suzuki."  
*Department of State Office of the Historian*,  
[history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Berlinv02/d1258](http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Berlinv02/d1258). Accessed 19 Dec. 2020.

I categorized this as a secondary source, because it is a translated version of the original press conference statement by Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki following the Potsdam Proclamation. This is maintained by the U.S. Department of State historian and reflects a

translation of Prime Minister Suzuki's answer to the ultimatum. It shows one translation of "mokusatsu," but my review of another source reflects that the word was understood differently by Secretary of the Army Henry Stimson.

Reuters Staff. "Japan and China agree on security hotline after a decade of talks." *Reuters*, 9 May 2018. *Reuters*, [euters.com/article/us-japan-china-hotline/japan-and-china-agree-on-security-hotline-after-a-decade-of-talks-idUSKBN1IA17I](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-china-hotline/japan-and-china-agree-on-security-hotline-after-a-decade-of-talks-idUSKBN1IA17I). Accessed 28 Dec. 2020.

This secondary source is an article published by Reuters that reports that Japan and China agreed in 2018 to set up a security hotline to defuse maritime confrontations between these two countries, given the disputes over the sovereignty of certain islands in the East China Sea. This article helped me understand steps Japan has taken in the recent past to improve communications with other world leaders to avoid war and resolve international disputes.

"The Second World War: a timeline." BBC History Magazine. HistoryExtra, [www.historyextra.com/period/second-world-war/timeline-important-dates-ww2-exact/](http://www.historyextra.com/period/second-world-war/timeline-important-dates-ww2-exact/). Accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

This article about WWII in the BBC History Magazine is a secondary source. It helped me understand the significant events of WWII leading up to the U.S. dropping the atomic bombs on Japan, including the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, when Congress declared war on Japan, and when Germany surrendered. I used this article to help me construct a timeline of important events of WWII leading up to the bombings in Japan.

"This Day in History: June 20, 1963, United States and Soviet Union Agree to Establish a Nuclear 'Hot Line.'" *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 13 Nov. 2009, [www.history.com/this-day-in-history/united-states-and-soviet-union-will-establish-a-hot-line](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/united-states-and-soviet-union-will-establish-a-hot-line). Accessed 19 Dec. 2020.

This secondary source is an article on the website History.com that provided me general background information regarding a step taken by the U.S and Soviet Union to improve communication to avoid nuclear war. The two countries established a special communication system to help avoid war as a result of a misunderstanding or miscommunication. In my view, this is the kind of system the allied governments needed with Japan in 1945 to avoid escalating war.

"United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Japan's Struggle to End the War, July 1, 1946." *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*, pp. 1-59. Harry S. Truman Administration. *National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library*, [www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/united-states-strategic-bombing-survey-japans-struggle-end-war?documentid=NA&pagenumber=50](http://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/united-states-strategic-bombing-survey-japans-struggle-end-war?documentid=NA&pagenumber=50). Accessed 28 Dec. 2020.

This document was the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey of 1946 ordered by President Truman after Japan's surrender and focused on the debate within the Japanese government prior to the August 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was an important source prepared close in time to the bombings that helped me to understand the Japanese government perspective prior to and immediately after the ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation. This document, which I characterized as a secondary source, included summaries from interviews conducted of over 700 Japanese military and government officials, and concluded that Japan would have surrendered even if the bombs had not been dropped.

# Full Exhibit

## MOKUSATSU AND THE DECISION TO USE THE ATOMIC BOMB

### BACKGROUND

The United States and the United Kingdom had been developing atomic energy since the late 1930s. The discovery of nuclear fission in 1938 by Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassman, and the subsequent realization that it could be used as a source of energy or as a weapon, led to the Manhattan Project, a research and development project during World War II that produced the first atomic bombs.

### POTSDAM CONFERENCE



### POTSDAM PROCLAMATION

The Potsdam Declaration, issued on July 26, 1945, demanded that Japan surrender unconditionally. It stated that the Allies had accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration and that they would accept no substitutions for total and unqualified surrender. It also stated that the Allies would accept no substitutions for total and unqualified surrender.

### THESES

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a necessary and justified act to bring about the end of World War II. It was a necessary and justified act to bring about the end of World War II. It was a necessary and justified act to bring about the end of World War II.



### MOKUSATSU AND THE MISCOMMUNICATION

Mokusatsu was a Japanese word meaning "silence" or "no comment." It was used by the Japanese government to respond to the Potsdam Declaration. The Japanese government's use of mokusatsu was a miscommunication, as it was interpreted by the Allies as a refusal to surrender.

### MOKUSATSU DEFINED

Mokusatsu is a Japanese word meaning "silence" or "no comment." It was used by the Japanese government to respond to the Potsdam Declaration. The Japanese government's use of mokusatsu was a miscommunication, as it was interpreted by the Allies as a refusal to surrender.

### PROLOGUE: MOKUSATSU EXPLAINED



### THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

The Japanese government's response to the Potsdam Declaration was a refusal to surrender. The Japanese government's use of mokusatsu was a miscommunication, as it was interpreted by the Allies as a refusal to surrender.

### THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

The American government's response to the Japanese government's refusal to surrender was the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The American government's use of atomic bombs was a necessary and justified act to bring about the end of World War II.

### THE ATOMIC BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

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### CONCLUSION

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### CONSEQUENCES

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in the deaths of approximately 140,000 people. It also resulted in the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a necessary and justified act to bring about the end of World War II.

### DEATH AND DESTRUCTION



### THE ATOMIC BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI



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## BACKGROUND

World War II began in 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. In December 1941, Japan attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at its base in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and over 2500 Americans were killed. That same month, Congress declared war on Japan. In May 1945, Germany surrendered. In July 1945, Allied leaders, including President Harry Truman, Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of England, and the Chinese government leader met in Potsdam, Germany to discuss terms for Japan's surrender. The Russian leader, Joseph Stalin, was also present.

## POTSDAM CONFERENCE



"Crowded Meeting at the Potsdam Conference" - July 17, 1945

Photographs, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, [trumanlibrary.gov](http://trumanlibrary.gov)



"Last meeting of the Potsdam Conference in Potsdam, Germany"

Potsdam Conference, Aug. 1, 1945, National Archives Catalogue



"Churchill, Truman, and Stalin at Potsdam," July 1945,

Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery

Source Credit Text: Photographs, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, [trumanlibrary.gov](http://trumanlibrary.gov); Potsdam Conference, Aug. 1, 1945, National Archives Catalogue; "Churchill, Truman, and Stalin at Potsdam," July 1945, Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery.

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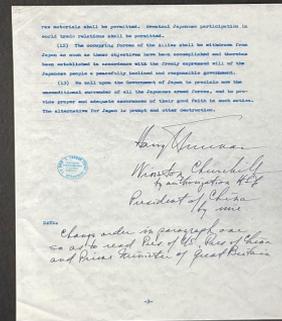
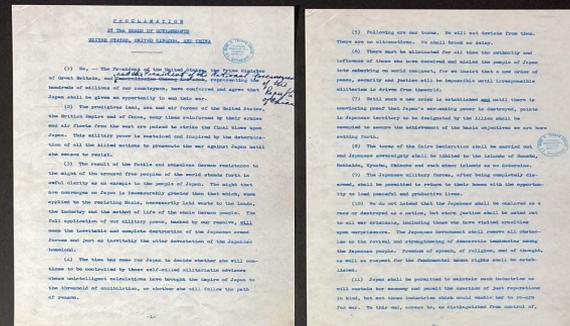
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“Last meeting of the Potsdam Conference in Potsdam, Germany”

“Crowded Meeting at the Potsdam Conference” - July 17, 1945

# Left Center Panel Photo

## POTSDAM PROCLAMATION



Proclamation by the Heads of Governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and China for Japan's Surrender, July 1945, docsteach.org

raw materials shall be permitted. Eventual Japanese participation in world trade relations shall be permitted.

(12) The occupying forces of the Allies shall be withdrawn from Japan as soon as these objectives have been accomplished and there has been established in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese people a peacefully inclined and responsible government.

(13) We call upon the Government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all the 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.

## ULTIMATUM



Source Credit Text: Proclamation by the Heads of Governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and China for Japan's Surrender, July 1945, docsteach.org.

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# **POTSDAM PROCLAMATION**

## **ULTIMATUM**

# Left Bottom Panel Photo

## U.S. SECRETARY OF WAR'S VIEWS

“The principal political, social, and military objective of the United States in the summer of 1945 was the prompt and complete surrender of Japan. Only the complete destruction of her military power could open the way to lasting peace.”

*Henry Stimson, The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb. Harper's Magazine Online.*

“It is therefore my conclusion that a carefully timed warning be given to Japan by the chief representatives of the United States, Great Britain, China, and if then a belligerent, Russia by calling upon Japan to surrender and permit the occupation of her country in order to insure its complete demilitarization for the sake of the future peace...the bomb would be the best possible sanction if our warning were rejected.”

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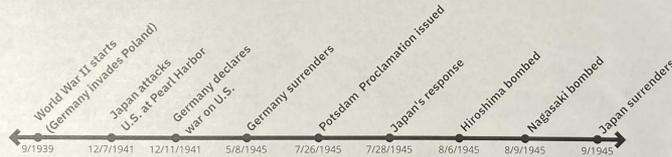
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## THESIS

In July 1945, allied leaders, including the U.S. President, met to negotiate the Japanese surrender in World War II and wrote the Potsdam Proclamation, which included an ultimatum demanding Japan's surrender. The Japanese Prime Minister responded to the ultimatum by using an ambiguous word, *mokusatsu*, that can be interpreted in different ways, but the U.S. interpreted the word as a rejection of the ultimatum, which caused the U.S. to use for the first and only time an atomic weapon in combat. The U.S. military's bombing and destruction of two Japanese cities based on this miscommunication and failure to properly communicate caused terrible loss of life and injuries to the Japanese people.



"Atomic Burst over Nagasaki, 1945"  
Atomic Burst over Nagasaki, 1945, Britannica  
ImageQuest.

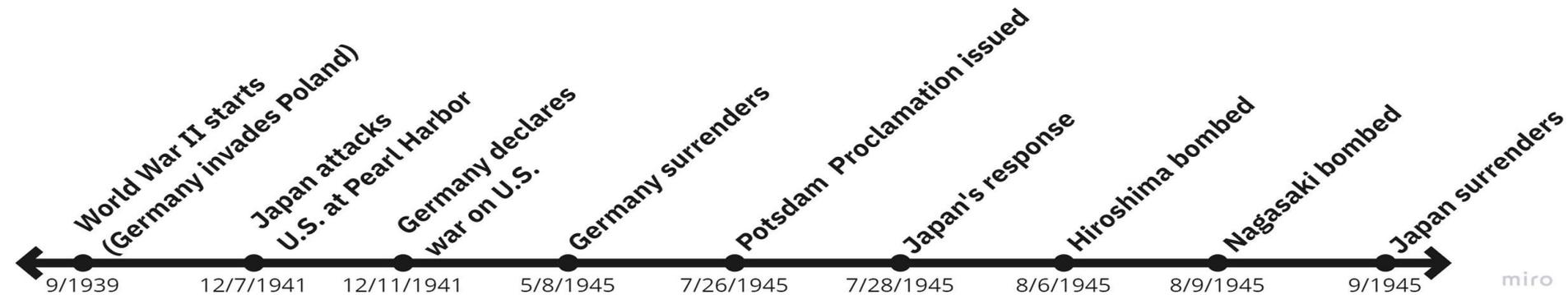


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Source Credit Text: Author Name Redacted. "Mokusatsu: One Word, Two Lessons." *NSA Technical Journal*, vol. XIII, no. No.4, Fall 1968; Electronic Dictionary Research and Development Group, translator. "Definition of 黙殺." *Tangorin*, tangorin.com/definition/黙殺. Accessed 18 Dec. 2020; "Press Conference Statement by Prime Minister Suzuki," Department of State Office of the Historian, history.state.gov; Henry Stimson, The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb. Harper's Magazine Online; "Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and James Cate, with attached White House memos," trumanlibrary.gov; Press Statement Containing Letter, Dated March 12, 1958, from former President Truman to Chairman of the Hiroshima City Council, trumanlibrary.gov; Truman Statement on Hiroshima, August 1945, Atomic Heritage Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History; August 5, 1963 Letter from Truman to Irv Kupcinet, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov.

## MOKUSATSU AND THE MISCOMMUNICATION

The ultimatum in the Potsdam Proclamation threatened destruction for Japan if they did not completely surrender. At a press conference, Prime Minister Suzuki expressed his view of the Proclamation by using the word "mokusatsu," an ambiguous word with multiple meanings. Whoever translated this word for U.S. leaders did not provide all meanings, as the President and Secretary of War considered the Japanese response to be a rejection of the ultimatum when it likely meant withhold comment. Suzuki could not have known that his informal, ambiguous comment in response to a question at a press conference would result in atomic warfare.

## MOKUSATSU DEFINED

"Definition of 黙殺  
黙殺 【もくさくmokusatsu】 Inflection  
noun ~ヲス noun:

- ignoring; disregarding; taking no notice of; refusing to comment on; turning a deaf ear to

Electronic Dictionary Research and Development Group, translator. "Definition of 黙殺." *Tangorin*, tangorin.com/definition/黙殺. Accessed 18 Dec. 2020.

"mokusatsu 黙殺 もくさく suru, v. take no notice of, treat (anything) with silent contempt; ignore by keeping silent; remain in a wise and masterly inactivity. —Kenkyusha's New Japanese – English Dictionary, p. 1129."

Author Name Redacted. "Mokusatsu: One Word, Two Lessons." *NSA Technical Journal*, vol. XIII, no. No.4, Fall 1968. [www.nsa.gov/Publishing/InformationSecurityData/Declassified-Documents/tech-journals/mokusatsu.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/Publishing/InformationSecurityData/Declassified-Documents/tech-journals/mokusatsu.pdf). Accessed 18 Dec. 2020.

## HOW U.S. LEADERS INTERPRETED "MOKUSATSU":

- "a very curt and discourteous reply"
- "ignores it entirely"
- "unworthy of public notice"
- "rejected"

## PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S VIEWS:



Truman Statement on Hiroshima, August 1945, Atomic Heritage Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History.

"The need for such a fateful decision, of course, never would have arisen, had we not been shot in the back by Japan at Pearl Harbor in December, 1941."

Press Statement Containing Letter, Dated March 12, 1958, from former President Truman to Chairman of the Hiroshima City Council, trumanlibrary.gov.

"I knew what I was doing when I stopped the war that would have killed half a million youngsters on both sides if those bombs had not been dropped. I have no regrets and, under the same circumstances, I would do it again."

August 5, 1963 Letter from Truman to Irv Kupcinet, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov.

"Press Conference Statement by Prime Minister Suzuki," Department of State Office of the Historian, history.state.gov; Henry Stimson, The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb, Harper's Magazine Online; "Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and James Cate, with attached White House memos," trumanlibrary.gov; Press Statement Containing Letter, Dated March 12, 1958, from former President Truman to Chairman of the Hiroshima City Council, trumanlibrary.gov; and Truman Statement on Hiroshima, August 1945, Atomic Heritage Foundation in partnership with the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History.

Truman refers to Japan having "rejected" the ultimatum and crosses out his initial word choice - "ignored."

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"My chief purpose was to end the war in victory with the least possible cost in the lives of the men in the armies which I had helped to raise."

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"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. For such a purpose the atomic bomb was an eminently suitable weapon. The New Mexico test occurred while we were at Potsdam, on July 16. It was immediately clear that the power of the bomb measured up to our highest estimates."

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**THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE**

The "United States Strategic Bombing Survey" was ordered by President Truman after Japan's surrender. "The Survey interrogated more than 700 Japanese military, government, and industrial officials."

**Findings:**

- "Early in May...the Supreme War Direction Council began to discuss ways and means of ending the war."
- "On 20 June the Emperor on his own initiative...stated that it was necessary to have a plan to close the war at once."
- "On 28 July the Potsdam declaration was issued. In their deliberations on that statement...no member of the Inner Cabinet had any objections to ending the war...Suzuki...felt that the declaration must be accepted as the final terms of peace at once, whether they liked it or not. The War Minister and two chiefs of staff on the other hand felt that the terms were 'too dishonorable.'"
- "On 6 August in the midst of these discussions an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima."

**Conclusion:**

"Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December, 1945...Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated."

United States Strategic Bombing Survey; Japan's Struggle to End the War, July 1, 1946, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov.

**JAPAN SURRENDERS**



The Japanese surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Sept. 2, 1945, National Museum of American History.



"Victims of the bomb rest in peace in a hillside cemetery on the wooded ground of the ninth-century Mitaki Temple" in Hiroshima, "For Hiroshima's survivors, memories of the bomb are impossible to forget," nationalgeographic.com.

Japan Surrenders, Sept. 1945, history.com.

Source Credit Text: United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Japan's Struggle to End the War, July 1, 1946, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov; Japan Surrenders, Sept. 1945, history.com; "For Hiroshima's survivors, memories of the bomb are impossible to forget," nationalgeographic.com; *The Japanese surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Sept. 2, 1945*, National Museum of American History.

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## **JAPAN SURRENDERS**

“As the 20-minute ceremony ended, the sun burst through low hanging clouds. The most devastating war in human history was over.”

“Victims of the bomb rest in peace in a hillside cemetery on the wooded ground of the ninth-century Mitaki Temple” in Hiroshima.

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**CONSEQUENCES**

**THE BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI**

"Little Boy, the Atomic Bomb that Destroyed Hiroshima"  
Photograph, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov

"Atomic burst over Hiroshima, 1945"  
Photography, Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica

"Fat Man, the Atomic Bomb Detonated Over Nagasaki"  
Photograph, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov

"A mushroom cloud billows above the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, after the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb ever used in warfare."  
"For Hiroshima's survivors, memories of the bomb are impossible to forget," nationalgeographic.com

**DEATH AND DESTRUCTION**

"Japanese family camps in ruins of Nagasaki, having both temporary shelter from bits of metal and wood debris on the terraced hill that was once row on row of houses."  
Photograph, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov

"Human Skeletons Lie Amid the Rubble Left By the Atomic Bomb in Nagasaki, Japan"  
Photograph, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov

"Destroyed Fire Trucks, Hiroshima, Japan"  
Photograph, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov

"Photograph of Hiroshima after Atomic Bomb"  
Photograph, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov

"Because of the extent of the devastation and chaos—including the fact that much of the two cities' infrastructure was wiped out—exact death tolls from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain unknown. However, it's estimated roughly 70,000 to 125,000 people died in Hiroshima and 60,000 to 80,000 people died in Nagasaki, both from acute exposure to the blast and from long-term side effects of radiation."  
"Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," history.com

Source Credit Text: Photographs, National Archives, Harry S. Truman Library, trumanlibrary.gov; “For Hiroshima's survivors, memories of the bomb are impossible to forget,” nationalgeographic.com; “Atomic burst over Hiroshima, 1945,” Photography. Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica; Hiroshima, 1945, War Department, National Archives Catalogue; “Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” *History.com*.

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## DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

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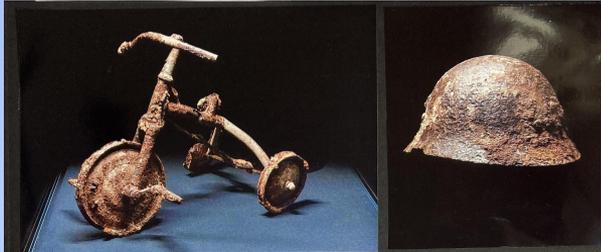
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"Three-year-old Shinichi Tetsutani was riding this tricycle when the bomb went off. The bike and helmet were buried with the child."

"For Hiroshima's survivors, memories of the bomb are impossible to forget," [nationalgeographic.com](http://nationalgeographic.com).

## **Yoshito Matsushige - Survived the Hiroshima Bombing**

*"There was a flash...the world around me turned bright white. And I was momentarily blinded as if a magnesium light had lit up in front of my eyes. Immediately after that, the blast came...the blast was so intense, it felt like hundreds of needles were stabbing me all at once...there were junior high school girls...outside when the bomb fell. Having been directly exposed to the heat rays, they were covered with blisters, the size of balls, on their backs, their faces, their shoulders and their arms. The blisters were starting to burst open and their skin hung down like rugs. Some of the children even have burns on the soles of their feet. They'd lost their shoes and run barefoot through the burning fire."*

*"When I saw this, I thought I would take a picture and I picked up my camera...Even today, I clearly remember how the view finder was clouded over with my tears...all future generations should not have to go through this tragedy. That is why I want young people to listen to our testimonies and to choose the right path, the path which leads to peace."*

"Yoshito Matsushige's Account of the Hiroshima Bombing," [Atomicheritage.org](http://Atomicheritage.org).

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This was what Matsushige saw through his window."

"A policeman, his head bandaged, issues certificates to civilians."

"People who escaped serious injury applying cooking oil to their burns near Miyuki bridge."

"The shadow of a person who was disintegrated at the moment of the blast."

**CONCLUSION**

Tens of thousands of Japanese deaths could have been avoided in World War II had (i) the U.S. government talked directly to the Japanese prime minister about his response to the ultimatum rather than assuming it was a rejection and (ii) Japanese leaders used clearer words in communicating a response to the ultimatum. In subsequent years, some world leaders, such as the U.S. and Soviet Union in 1963 and Japan and China in 2018, established "direct communications links" (hotlines) to prevent risk of war by miscommunication.

June 1963, MOU between U.S. and USSR, state.gov.

Source Credit Text: Matsushige, Yoshito. *Hiroshima*, Aug. 6, 1945, [ionicphotos.wordpress.com](https://www.ionicphotos.wordpress.com); June 1963, MOU between U.S. and USSR, [state.gov](https://www.state.gov).

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