

The College Board
Advanced Placement Examination

AMERICAN HISTORY
SECTION II
(Suggested writing time—40 minutes)

Directions: The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation of Documents A-H and your knowledge of the period referred to in the question. In your essay, you should strive to support your assertions both by citing key pieces of evidence from the documents and by drawing on your knowledge of the period.

1. The United States decision to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima was a diplomatic measure calculated to intimidate the Soviet Union in the post-Second-World-War era rather than a strictly military measure designed to force Japan's unconditional surrender.

Evaluate this statement using the documents and your knowledge of the military and diplomatic history of the years 1939 through 1947.

Document A

Source: Memoirs of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson (1947)

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. . . .

In the middle of July, 1945, the intelligence section of the War Department General Staff estimated Japanese military strength as follows: in the home islands, slightly under 2,000,000; in Korea, Manchuria, China proper, and Formosa, slightly over 2,000,000; in French Indo-China, Thailand, and Burma, over 200,000; in the East Indies area, including the Philippines, over 500,000; in the bypassed Pacific islands, over 100,000. The total strength of the Japanese Army was estimated at about 5,000,000 men. These estimates later proved to be in very close agreement with official Japanese figures. . . .

As we understood it in July, there was a very strong possibility that the Japanese government might determine upon resistance to the end, in all the areas of the Far East under its control. In such an event the Allies would be faced with the enormous task of destroying an armed force of five million men and five thousand suicide aircraft, belonging to a race which has already amply demonstrated its ability to fight literally to the death.

The strategic plans of our armed forces for the defeat of Japan, as they stood in July, had been prepared without reliance upon the atomic bomb, which had not yet been tested in New Mexico. We were planning an intensified sea and air blockade, and greatly intensified strategic air bombing, through the summer and early fall, to be followed on November 1 by an invasion of the southern island of Kyushu. This would be followed in turn by an invasion of the main island of Honshu in the spring of 1946. The total U.S. military and naval force involved in this grand design was of the order of 5,000,000 men; if all those indirectly concerned are included, it was larger still.

We estimated that if we should be forced to carry this plan to its conclusion, the major fighting would not end until the latter part of 1946, at the earliest. I was informed that such operations might be expected to cost over a million casualties, to American forces alone.

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Document B

Source: Memoirs of General H. H. Arnold, Commander of the American Army Air Force in the Second World War (1949)

The surrender of Japan was not entirely the result of the two atomic bombs. We had hit some 60 Japanese cities with our regular H. E. (High Explosive) and incendiary bombs and, as a result of our raids, about 241,000 people had been killed, 313,000 wounded, and about 2,333,000 homes destroyed. Our B-29's had destroyed most of the Japanese industries and, with the laying of mines, which prevented the arrival of incoming cargoes of critical items, had made it impossible for Japan to carry on a large-scale war. . . . Accordingly, it always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse.

Document C

Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower, recollections of a July 1945 meeting with President Harry S Truman (1948)

Another item on which I ventured to advise President Truman involved the Soviet's intention to enter the Japanese war. I told him that since reports indicated the imminence of Japan's collapse, I deprecated the Red Army's engaging in that war. I foresaw certain difficulties arising out of such participation and suggested that, at the very least, we ought not to put ourselves in the position of requesting or begging for Soviet aid. It was my personal opinion that no power on earth could keep the Red Army out of that war unless victory came before they could get in.

Document D

Source: Agreements of the Yalta Conference (February 11, 1945)

Agreement Regarding Japan

The leaders of the three Great Powers—the Soviet Union, the United States of America and Great Britain—have agreed that in two or three months after Germany has surrendered and the war in Europe has terminated, the Soviet Union shall enter into the war against Japan on the side of the Allies on condition that:

1. The status quo in Outer Mongolia (The Mongolian People's Republic) shall be preserved;
2. The former rights of Russia violated by the treacherous attack of Japan in 1904 shall be restored, viz.:
 - (a) the southern part of Sakhalin as well as all the islands adjacent to it shall be returned to the Soviet Union,
 - (b) the commercial port of Dairen shall be internationalized, the preeminent interests of the Soviet Union in this port being safeguarded and the lease of Port Arthur as a naval base of the U.S.S.R. restored,
 - (c) the Chinese-Eastern Railroad and the South Manchurian Railroad which provides an outlet to Dairen shall be jointly operated by the establishment of a joint Soviet-Chinese Company, it being understood that the preeminent interest of the Soviet Union shall be safeguarded and that China shall retain full sovereignty in Manchuria. . . .

The Heads of the three Great Powers have agreed that these claims of the Soviet Union shall be unquestionably fulfilled after Japan has been defeated.

For its part the Soviet Union expresses its readiness to conclude with the National Government of China a pact of friendship and alliance between the U.S.S.R. and China in order to render assistance to China with its armed forces for the purpose of liberating China from the Japanese yoke.

Joseph V. Stalin
Franklin D. Roosevelt
Winston S. Churchill

Document E

Source: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's recollections of news received during the Potsdam Conference, July 1945 (1953)

On July 17 world-shaking news had arrived. . . .

The atomic bomb is a reality. . . . Here then was a speedy end to the Second World War, and perhaps to much else besides. . . . Up to this moment we had shaped our ideas towards an assault upon the homeland of Japan by terrific air bombing and by the invasion of very large armies. . . .

Now all this nightmare picture had vanished. In its place was the vision—fair and bright indeed it seemed—of the end of the whole war in one or two violent shocks. . . .

Moreover, we should not need the Russians. The end of the Japanese war no longer depended upon the pouring in of their armies for the final and perhaps protracted slaughter. We had no need to ask favours of them. A few days later I mentioned to Mr. Eden: "It is quite clear that the United States do not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan." The array of European problems could therefore be faced on their merits and according to the broad principles of the United Nations. We seemed suddenly to have become possessed of a merciful abridgment of the slaughter in the East and of a far happier prospect in Europe. I have no doubt that these thoughts were present in the minds of my American friends.

Document F

Source: Nuclear physicist Leo Szilard's recollection of a 1945 meeting between James Byrnes and a group of concerned atomic scientists (1949)

The question of whether the bomb should be used in the war against Japan came up for discussion. Mr. Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of Japan in order to win the war. He knew at that time, as the rest of the Government knew, that Japan was essentially defeated and that we could win the war in another six months. At that time Mr. Byrnes was much concerned about the spreading of Russian influence in Europe. . . . Mr. Byrnes' concern about Russia I fully shared, but his view that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable in Europe I was not able to share. Indeed I could hardly imagine any premise more false and disastrous upon which to base our policy, and I was dismayed when a few weeks later I learned that he was to be our Secretary of State.

Document G

Source: Report of a Scientific Panel (composed of nuclear physicists A. H. Compton, Enrico Fermi, E. O. Lawrence and J. R. Oppenheimer) to the Secretary of War (June 16, 1945)

The opinions of our scientific colleagues on the initial use of these weapons are not unanimous: they range from the proposal of a purely technical demonstration to that of the military application best designed to induce surrender. Those who advocate a purely technical demonstration would wish to outlaw the use of atomic weapons, and have feared that if we use the weapons now our position in future negotiations will be prejudiced. Others emphasize the opportunity of saving American lives by immediate military use, and believe that such use will improve the international prospects, in that they are more concerned with the prevention of war than with the elimination of this special weapon.

Document H

Source: Harry S Truman, radio address (August 1945)

I realize the tragic significance of the atomic bomb.

Its production and its use were not lightly undertaken by this Government. But we knew that our enemies were on the search for it. We know now how close they were to finding it. And we know the disaster which would come to this nation, and to all peaceful nations, to all civilizations, if they had found it first.

That is why we felt compelled to undertake the long and uncertain and costly labor of discovery and production.

We won the race of discovery against the Germans.

Having found the bomb, we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.

We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan's power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us.

END OF 1988 DBQ DOCUMENTS

enemy, and to assess with accuracy the line of conduct which might end his will to resist.

With these considerations in mind, I wrote a memorandum for the President, on July 2, which I believe fairly represents the thinking of the American government as it finally took shape in action. This memorandum was prepared after discussion and general agreement with Joseph C. Grew, Acting Secretary of State, and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, and when I discussed it with the President, he expressed his general approval.

July 2, 1945. Memorandum for the President.

PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR JAPAN

1. The plans of operation up to and including the first landing have been authorized and the preparations for the operation are now actually going on. This situation was accepted by all members of your conference on Monday, June 18.

2. There is reason to believe that the operation for the occupation of Japan following the landing may be a very long, costly, and arduous struggle on our part. The terrain, much of which I have visited several times, has left the impression on my memory of being one which would be susceptible to a last ditch defense such as has been made on Iwo Jima and Okinawa and which of course is very much larger than either of those two areas. According to my recollection it will be much more unfavorable with regard to tank maneuvering than either the Philippines or Germany.

3. If we once land on one of the main islands and begin a forceful occupation of Japan, we shall probably have cast the die of last ditch resistance. The Japanese are highly patriotic and certainly susceptible to calls for fanatical resistance to repel an invasion. Once started in actual invasion, we shall in my opinion have to go through with an even more bitter finish fight than in Germany. We shall incur the losses incident

to such a war and we shall have to leave the Japanese islands even more thoroughly destroyed than was the case with Germany. This would be due both to the difference in the Japanese and German personal character and the differences in the size and character of the terrain through which the operations will take place.

4. A question then comes: Is there any alternative to such a forceful occupation of Japan which will secure for us the equivalent of an unconditional surrender of her forces and a permanent destruction of her power again to strike an aggressive blow at the "peace of the Pacific"? I am inclined to think that there is enough such chance to make it well worthwhile our giving them a warning of what is to come and a definite opportunity to capitulate. As above suggested, it should be tried before the actual forceful occupation of the homeland islands is begun and furthermore the warning should be given in ample time to permit a national reaction to set in.

We have the following enormously favorable factors on our side—factors much weightier than those we had against Germany:

Japan has no allies.

Her navy is nearly destroyed and she is vulnerable to a surface and underwater blockade which can deprive her of sufficient food and supplies for her population.

She is terribly vulnerable to our concentrated air attack upon her crowded cities, industrial and food resources.

She has against her not only the Anglo-American forces but the rising forces of China and the ominous threat of Russia.

We have inexhaustible and untouched industrial resources to bring to bear against her diminishing potential.

We have great moral superiority through being the victim of her first sneak attack.

The problem is to translate these advantages into prompt and economical achievement of our objectives. I believe Japan is susceptible to reason in such a crisis to a much greater extent than is indicated by our current press and other current

reply: 105,050 battle casualties (dead and wounded) in the first 90 days alone, and another 12,600 casualties among American noncombatants. Marshall called these figures unacceptably high.

In connection with that same meeting on June 18, the document that has received the most attention by revisionists is a study by the Joint War Plans Committee, prepared on June 15. It estimated that casualties in an invasion of southern Kyushu on November 1, followed some months later by an assault on the Tokyo plain, would be a relatively low 40,000 dead, 150,000 wounded, and 3,500 missing, for a total of 193,500 casualties in the entire two-pronged operation.

There are, however, several problems with these estimates. To begin with, they did not include naval casualties, although experience at Okinawa showed these were certain to be numerous. A separate estimate did exist for such losses—9,700 in the Kyushu invasion—but it excluded the unknowable number of casualties that would be suffered by American soldiers and sailors on transports struck by kamikaze attacks. Intercepted Japanese military messages revealed that the Japanese had about 10,000 planes, half of them kamikazes, to defend the home islands. In addition, the Japanese counted on flying bombs, human torpedoes, suicide-attack boats, midget suicide submarines, motorboat bombs, and navy swimmers to be used as human mines. All of these "had been used at Okinawa and the Philippines with lethal results," and the intercepts showed that they were now being placed on Kyushu.

The report offering the figure of 40,000 dead, moreover, was peppered with disclaimers that casualties "are not subject to accurate estimate" and that the estimate was "admittedly only an educated guess." Indeed, when the report went from the original committee up to the Joint planners, it omitted the casualty figures altogether on the grounds that they were "not subject to accurate

estimate." The document then went to Assistant Chief of Staff General John E. Hull. In his accompanying memorandum to General Marshall, Hull suggested that losses in the first 30 days in Kyushu would be on the order of those taken at Luzon, or about 1,000 casualties per day. Hull's memorandum, and not the committee report listing specific figures, was read out by Marshall at the June 18 conference with the President.

At the meeting itself, Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, suggested that Luzon was not as sound an analogy as Okinawa. There, American casualties had run to 75,000, or some 35 percent of the attacking force. "Marshall," writes the historian Edward Drea, "allowed that 766,700 assault troops would be employed against Kyushu. Although unstated, a 35-percent casualty rate translated to more than a quarter-million American casualties." As for the President, he was very mindful of the bloodbath at Okinawa, and he demanded the "Joint Chiefs' assurance that an invasion of Kyushu would neither repeat that savagery nor degenerate⁴ into race war." There is no evidence that Truman ever saw or heard the omitted low figures for the entire operation that had been drawn up by the Joint War Plans Committee.

But whatever the value of any of these estimates, they soon became obsolete. Marshall's calculation rested on the assumption that Kyushu would be defended by eight Japanese divisions, or fewer than 300,000 men, and that American domination of the sea and air would make reinforcement impossible. Intercepts of Japanese military communications soon made a mockery of those expectations. By July 21, the estimate of Japanese troops on Kyushu had grown to 455,000; by the end of the month, to 525,000. Colonel Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's intelligence officer, took note of the new

⁴ degenerate—decline in physical, mental, or moral qualities.

situation: "This threatening development, if not checked, may grow to a point where we attack on a ratio of one (1) to one (1), which is not the recipe for victory." Soon the number of Japanese troops on Kyushu rose to 680,000 and, on July 31, a medical estimate projected American battle and nonbattle casualties needing treatment at 394,859. This figure, of course, excluded those killed at once, who would be beyond treatment.

Years later, in a letter, Truman described a meeting in the last week of July at which Marshall suggested the invasion would cost "at a minimum one-quarter-of-a-million casualties, and might cost as much as a million, on the American side alone, with an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men present agreed." If Truman's recollection was accurate, this may have been the last such estimate before the dropping of the bomb; but whether accurate or not, there can be no doubt that Marshall's own concern did not abate even after Hiroshima. On the very next day he sent a message to MacArthur expressing alarm at the Japanese strength on southern Kyushu, and asking for alternative invasion sites. On August 11, five days after Hiroshima, three days after the Soviets had entered the war, and two days after Nagasaki, when the Japanese had still not surrendered, Marshall thought it would be necessary "to continue a prolonged struggle" and even raised the possibility of using atomic bombs as tactical weapons against massed enemy troops during the invasion.

As the foregoing suggests, it was, and remains, impossible to make convincing estimates of the casualties to be expected in case of an American invasion of the Japanese home islands. From the beginning the debate has been **tendentious**,⁵ distracting attention from more important questions. The large numbers offered by

⁵ *tendentious*—biased, marked in favor of a particular point of view.

Stimson and Truman in their memoirs may not have been accurate, but the attacks on those numbers by the revisionists are at least as suspect. No one can be sure that the true figure would have been closer to the lower than to the higher estimates.

In any case, what matters is not what American leaders claimed after the war, but what they believed before the atomic bombs were used. On that point, there can be no doubt. In discussions that were not shaped by attempts to justify using the bomb, since it had not yet even been tested, men like Truman, Stimson, and Marshall were deeply worried over the scale of American casualties—whatever their precise number—that were certain to be incurred by an invasion. The President could not face another Okinawa, much less something greater. That is all we need to know to understand why he and his associates were prepared to use the bomb.

Yet this conclusion, supported both by the evidence and by common sense, has been furiously resisted by revisionists and their large cohorts of fellow-travelers. Thus, a 1990 account of the current state of the question reports: "The consensus among scholars is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan and to end the war within a relatively short time . . . an invasion was a remote possibility." This would have been welcome news indeed to General Marshall, who as we have seen was deeply concerned about the difficulty and human cost of such an invasion right up to the moment of surrender.

A second pillar of the argument that the dropping of the bomb was unnecessary goes as follows. The Japanese had already been defeated, and it was only a brief matter of time before continued conventional bombing and shortages caused by the naval blockade would have made them see reason. They were, in fact, already sending out peace feelers in the hope of ending