**Arguments Against Dropping the Bombs**

Argument 1: The Bomb Was Made For Defense Only

The origins of the Manhattan Project go back to 1939, when Hungarian-born physicist Leo Szilard, who had moved to the U.S. in 1938 to conduct research at Columbia University, became convinced of the feasibility of using nuclear chain reactions to create new, powerful bombs. German scientists had just conducted a successful nuclear fission experiment, and based on those results, Szilard was able to demonstrate that uranium was capable of producing a nuclear chain reaction.  Szilard noted that Germany had stopped the exportation of uranium from Czechoslovakian mines which they had taken over in 1938.  He feared that Germany was trying to build an atomic bomb, while the United States was sitting idle. Although WWII had not yet started, Germany was clearly a threat, and if the Germans had a monopoly on the atomic bomb, it could be deployed against anyone, including the United States, without warning. Szilard worked with Albert Einstein, whose celebrity gave him access to the president, to produce a letter informing Roosevelt of the situation.  Their warning eventually resulted in the Manhattan Project.  Bomb opponents argue that the atomic bomb was built as a defensive weapon, not an offensive one.  It was intended to be a deterrent, to make Germany or any other enemy think twice before using such a weapon against the United States.  To bolster their argument, these critics point out that ever since WWII, the weapon has been used *only* as a deterrent.  From 1949-1991 the Cold War was waged under the shadow of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and even though the United States fought major wars in Korea (while Truman was still in office), Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, nuclear weapons were never again deployed. In other words, not using them in those wars has been an admission that they should never have been used offensively in the first place.

Argument 2: Use of the Bomb was Illegal

On September 39, 1938, the League of Nations, "under the recognized principles of international law," issued a unanimous resolution outlawing the intentional bombing of civilian populations, with special emphasis against bombing military objectives from the air.  The League warned, *"Any attack on legitimate military objectives must be carried out in such a way that civilian populations in the neighborhood are not bombed through negligence."* Significantly, the resolution also reaffirmed that *"the use of chemical or bacterial methods in the conduct of war is contrary to international law."*  In other words, a special category of illegal weapons had been recognized, a category today called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). However, bomb supporters point out that since the United States was not a member of the League of Nations; its laws did not apply.  And anyway, the League had been disbanded in 1939, long before the atomic bomb was used.  Additionally, the law did not specifically outlaw nuclear weapons.  To that counter-argument, bomb opponents reply that since America presents itself to the world as a model for human rights, the U.S. should aspire to at least meet the basic code of conduct agreed to by the rest of the civilized world. They also point out that nuclear weapons were not specifically outlawed because they did not exist, but as a weapon of mass destruction, they most certainly would have been.

Argument 3: There Were Alternatives

Supporters of President Truman’s decision to use atomic weapons against Japan tend to paint the decision as a difficult choice between two stark options—it was either American boys, or the bomb.  Opponents of the bomb are adamant that there were other options available to the President, which at the very least should have been tried before resorting to the bomb.

Alternative #1 The Soviets Declare War on Japan

The Japanese had reason to fear the Soviets.  In the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union put aside their ideological differences to form an alliance against Nazi Germany.  It was an uneasy alliance; Joseph Stalin believed that the Americans and British had purposely delayed opening a second front in Europe (D-Day—June 6, 1944) so that the Russians would bear the brunt of defeating the Nazis.  Nevertheless, in a secret meeting between President Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta, the Soviet leader had promised that three months after the end of the European campaign he would declare war on Japan and move against Japanese forces in China.  In July, when President Truman traveled to Germany to meet his Allied leaders for the first time, pinning down Stalin on the exact date was at the top of his agenda.  When Truman and Stalin met on the 17th, the Soviet leader confirmed they would declare war on Japan on August 15.  Later that night, Truman wrote in the diary, *“Most of the big points are settled. He'll be in the Jap(anese) War on August 15th. Fini Jap(anese) when that comes about”* (meaning, they’ll be finished). Some bomb supporters point out that according to post-war interviews of Japanese leaders, none of the high-ranking officials were of a mind that a Soviet attack alone would have convinced them to surrender.  However, this is irrelevant if Truman believed it would.

Alternative 2: Let the Japanese Keep Their Emperor

The second and perhaps most important alternative to both the bomb and the land invasion was to modify the demand for unconditional surrender and allow the Japanese to keep their emperor.  Of course, he would have to be demoted to a powerless figurehead (much like the Royal Family in Great Britain), but it was possible that this one condition alone might have been enough to satisfy the American War Department’s conclusion that it was necessary to convince the Japanese that they would not be “annihilated” if they surrendered.  The American government clearly understood that if they harmed the emperor, whom the Japanese revered as a god, the Japanese would resist forever.  And the key to this argument lies in the fact that the American government already planned on letting the emperor stay.  All they had to do was find a way to hint their intentions loud enough for the Japanese to hear.  On June 13, in a memorandum to President Truman from Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew (former American ambassador to Japan), Grew wrote: Every evidence, without exception, that we are able to obtain of the views of the Japanese with regard to the institution of the throne, indicates that the non-molestation of the person of the present emperor and the preservation of the institution of the throne comprise irreducible Japanese terms...They are prepared for prolonged resistance if it be the intention of the United Nations to try the present emperor as a war criminal or to abolish the imperial institution...Failure on our part to clarify our intentions in this regard..will insure prolongation of the war and cost a large number of human lives.

Alternative 3: Continue Conventional Bombing

Some military analysts were convinced in the summer of 1945 that Japan was very near surrender, that the pounding they were taking from conventional weapons would soon convince the Japanese cabinet that further resistance was futile.  That position was bolstered when, after the war, Secretary of War Stimson commissioned a board to perform a detailed investigation into the effectiveness of Allied bombings during the war.  They subsequently interrogated 700 Japanese military, government and industrial officials, and they recovered and translated documents related to the war effort.  Their report, the Strategic Bombing Survey, makes the obvious observation that Japan might have surrendered earlier if they had had a different government. But it goes on to express a more startling opinion:

Nevertheless, it seems clear that, even without the atomic bombing attacks, air supremacy over Japan could have exerted sufficient pressure to bring about unconditional surrender and obviate the need for invasion...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, and in all probability prior to 1 November 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.

Argument #5: Use of the bomb was more to scare Russia than to defeat Japan.

As discussed above, bomb opponents question why the United States used atomic bombs on August 6 and 9, when they knew the Russians were going to declare war on Japan a week later, and when Operation Torch wasn’t scheduled for months.  Why not wait?  Bomb opponents believe that the American government did not wait for the Russians because they were already thinking about the post-war world and how they could best limit Soviet gains when they redrew the map of Europe. They believed the shock-and-awe effect of using the atomic bomb against Japan would make the Soviet Union more manageable in post-war negotiations. There was certainly reason to be concerned about the Soviet Union.  When Germany collapsed, the Russians had made huge advances.  Russian troops moved into Hungary and Rumania and showed no inclination to leave there or the Balkans. The U.S. was worried that the Soviets were interested in not only spreading their form of government, Communism, throughout Europe and also in Asia.