Truman speech : Hiroshima

Present the document

This document is an extract from a Truman’s speech. Harry Truman was elected president of the United States after the death of president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on April, 12, 1945. By the time he became president, they were still heavy fights in the pacific area between the Japanese and the American forces. Island by island, the American were regaining the territories conquered by the Japanese since the beginning of their expansion policy (in 1931 in Manchuria). But the losses were more and more hard to suffer for the Americans and the Japanese civilians from the Island. For example, the 4 weeks fighting (end of may 1945 to mid-June) battle of Okinawa left on the ground 20000 marines.

In this extract, Harry Truman explain that the city of Hiroshima had to suffer an atomic bombing on august, 6, 1945. He explain the true nature of this new weapon and give the reasons for using it against the Japanese.

What is this new weapon? Which reasons gives Truman for using it ? What were the other reasons?

The A-Bomb (Atomic bomb) is a new type of weapon based on an atomic reaction which can deliver a tremendous energy and capacity of destruction. “That bomb had more power than 20000 tons of TNT. – (note: you can blow the roof of a Cadillac with only 200 grams of it)- It had more than two thousand times the blast power of the British “Grand Slam”(l. 3-4) –(note: the “Grand slam” is a 500kgs bomb which can destroy an entire block)-. This surely make the A-Bomb, the most powerful bomb ever used in the history of warfare. (speaking of the “Grand slam”: “which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare”). Two bomb (Fat Boy and Little big man) had been launched from two The A-Bomb will be followed by the H-Bomb (Hydrogen bomb) which power will tremendously grow during the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s, as to reach the capacity of more than one million Hiroshima.

For Truman the reason for launching an A-Bomb on Tokyo is quite clear: the Japanese are to be taken responsible for the outbreak of the war and they must face the consequences (“The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold” l. 6-7). And, furthermore, this war hasn’t yet finished in August 1945 and must find an end. (“And the end is not yet”). The use of such a terrifying weapon is excused by the fact that the Japanese began the war (“The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East”). The goal of Truman is clearly explained: destroy the military and industrial potential of Japan. (“WE ARE NOW PREPARED TO OBLITERATE (…) WE SHALL COMPLETELY DESTROY JAPAN’S POWER TO MAKE WAR” l. 37-41 ).

Could this tragedy have been avoided by the Japanese leaders? Yes, according to Truman, who furthermore, Truman explains that a peace proposal and a warning had been sent to the Japanese leaders. (“It was to spare the Japanese from utter destruction…” l. 42-43).
Lesson

In fact Truman doesn’t state on all the reasons for using this bomb. That’s truly a fact that the war in the pacific was longing and that each battle was deadliest than the other. The Japanese were prepared to win at all cost as American could see with the Kamikaze planes. Truman had been thinking of the eventuality of a landing on the coasts of Japan but he said that the casualties would have been too heavy to face such an eventuality. (The estimation which was given by the military sources were approximately 100,000 dead soldiers). In fact, the industrial and military potential of Japan was already too diminished in 1945 to face the war. The Japanese had since long lost the war at this date, in spite of the stubbornness of the Japanese command. The terrible bombing of Tokyo showed that the American had the power to ruin the industries and the big cities of Japan without using the A-Bomb. And even the estimations concerning the US landing in Japan recently appeared to be false. In fact, the US command had estimated that a US landing would have cost no more than 15,000 men.

So, why use the bomb?

Because:
- The fights were really cruel and harsh in the pacific and the American public opinion had more and more difficulties to stand the human cost of this war. On the battlefield, the morale of the troops was low, especially since the scuttling of several boats and aircraft carrier of the American fleet by the kamikaze.
- If you look at the map of the pacific military operation, you can see that the Russians had declared the war on Japan since the Yalta and Potsdam conference. On the map we can see they drive the Japanese back in Manchuria. Truman was in fact very concerned by the fact that the Russian could land in Japan. The same situation that Churchill described in east Europe (“we can shake the hand of the Russian but the more possible far to the east”). Truman was truly afraid of a communist military take over in Japan. So, he needed to create a psychological shock as strong as possible to make the war end as soon as possible. It was urgent to win the war.
- In the context of hard negotiation with the Stalin’s USSR which had a strong position in Europe, it was clear that Truman was keen to demonstrate his military power in order to strengthen the position of the USA.

Concerning the ultimatum addressed to the Japanese command. It appears now that before the bombing of Hiroshima, several Japanese diplomats were trying to set an agreement with the Americans in order to soften the Japanese command (where a minority was in favour of the peace and was growing stronger everyday even if the majority of Japanese leaders stay resolutely on the side of the war) but the US command never took very seriously those offers. It was true that after the bombing of Hiroshima, an ultimatum was sent to the Japanese. President Truman had agreed that if the Japanese did not accept unconditional surrender by August, 11, a second atomic bomb would be dropped that day. But the weather forecast for August 11 was bad, and the date for the second bomb was brought forward two days, to August 9. This gave the Japanese three days rather than five in which to surrender. But they were not told of that. This was also a mean for Truman to show the Russian he didn’t have only bomb. Similarly, after the bombing, in order to integrate the Japanese government into the American era, Japan became a protectorate under the authority of General Mc Arthur, but the Emperor of Japan Hiro-Hito wasn’t dismissed and remained on his throne even if, for the first time in the history of the country, the Japanese could hear the voice of
their emperor, announcing that Japan had lost the war. Furthermore, the butchers of the Unit 731 (a special place in Manchuria where the POW and civilians were gathered in order to be used as guinea-pig for new virus, experiment or chemical weapons—they were called Maruta – “log”), or the responsible of the slaughtering of 10 to 30 million Chinese and Korean civilians (between 1931 to 1945) were never threatened (the acknowledgement of this massacre is very recent in Japanese history and school books) in spite of the Tokyo trial (1946). At this time, another war had almost already began…Between the USA and the USSR.