**“The desire to defeat Japan was the main reason for the use of atomic weapons by the US.” Discuss.**

During the beginning of World War 2, the United States remained officially neutral despite selling great quantities of weapons to allied nations like Great Britain. The United States’ military involvement in World War 2 officially began when Japan launched a surprise bombing on U.S. ships and bases at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. While the attack was devastating, it served as a unifying force for the Americans, and an invigorated U.S. declared war on the Japanese Empire on December 8th, 1941. The U.S. fought Japan for a period of roughly 4 years, ending with the Japanese surrender on September 2nd, 1945. A major factor that caused the surrender was the U.S. decision to drop two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, destroying the cities and killing several thousand Japanese. The U.S. had several reasons to use the atomic bombs, and while some may argue that the U.S. mainly used them to deter the Soviet Union from expanding into East Asia, the main reason why they were used was the desire to defeat Japan in order to save countless American and Japanese lives, and the Japanese refusal to comply with the Potsdam Conference demands.

To begin, the U.S. decided to drop the atomic bombs on Japan to save the lives of both Americans and Japanese. The U.S. was fighting Japan in the Pacific Theater for roughly four years, winning decisive battles like the Battle of Luzon with General Douglas MacArthur bringing the Philippines under American control at the cost of around 60,000 American lives. The U.S. also took the strategically important islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa from their unyielding Japanese defenders at a cost of over 4,000 and 50,000 American soldiers respectively. In other words, the U.S. achieved several decisive victories over Japan at a devastating toll. In addition to these casualties, the U.S. fought Nazi Germany in Europe which only added to the American death toll. However, the Japanese had larger death tolls than the U.S. because the Japanese government encouraged its soldiers to engage in suicide attacks rather than surrender. Once the U.S. started winning more battles, the proportion of Japanese soldiers that died because of suicide attacks dramatically rose. The encouragement wasn’t limited to the military as the Japanese government encouraged its civilians to be hostile and engage in similar attacks if the U.S. invaded. In other words, the Japanese Empire encouraged its soldiers to engage in suicide attacks if they were losing a battle, which needlessly increased their casualties without improving their situation. The encouragement later spread to the civilian population when Japan’s war situation was getting more desperate. Since American war planners were considering an invasion of the main Japanese islands, both the U.S. and Japan would have faced an unprecedented number of casualties. War planners believed that the destruction of the atomic bombs could bring a quick end to the war, lowering U.S. and Japanese casualties. While the atomic bombs were incredibly destructive and had a horrible death toll, they likely saved countless lives on both sides by avoiding a lengthy invasion. Clearly, the atomic bomb was dropped in order to lower the number of wartime casualties.

Additionally, the U.S. decided to drop the atomic bombs due to the Japanese refusal to comply with the demands of the Potsdam Conference. To illustrate, leaders from the U.S., Great Britain, and Soviet Russia met in Berlin to settle issues regarding postwar Europe, as Nazi Germany had formally surrendered to the allies. These leaders also issued an ultimatum to Japan, to either surrender unconditionally or face destruction. Despite U.S. aircraft dropping warnings to Japanese civilians in the form of leaflets, Japan did not indicate any willingness to comply with the demands. Therefore, the war was still ongoing, causing the Potsdam threat to be fulfilled with the U.S. dropping the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima and the Soviet Union declaring war on Japan two days later. However, Japan still didn’t surrender, forcing the U.S. to drop a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, finally causing Japan to beg for peace with the allied nations. In other words, the Japanese government only begged for peace after two cities were wiped out and thousands of Japanese died, despite warnings of imminent destruction. Clearly, Japan’s refusal to surrender unconditionally in accordance with the Potsdam Conference caused the U.S. to use the atomic bombs.

On the other hand, some may argue that the U.S. used the atomic bomb to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining influence in Asia. To explain, during World War 2, the U.S. knew that Japanese peace feelers were being sent to Moscow and were willing to surrender conditionally. However, the U.S. viewed this as unacceptable, wanting nothing less than unconditional surrender. Furthermore, many leaders in the U.S. didn’t want to divide Japan into occupation zones like how they did in Germany, due to fears that the Soviet Union would expand into East Asia. They believed the atomic bomb would serve as a deterrent to any possible Soviet expansion, since the Soviet entry of the war against Japan was expected, meaning that they could influence the peace talks with Japan. In other words, U.S. leaders believed they could keep the Soviets out of the peace talks with Japan if they could force Japan to surrender with the atomic bombs before the Soviets inevitably entered the war. Therefore, some may argue that the desire to prevent the Soviet entry into the war and subsequent Soviet expansion into Asia was the main reason why the U.S. used the atomic weapons against Japan. While this may be true, the U.S. was primarily searching for a quick end to the war. Battles like Okinawa were some of the bloodiest in the entire Pacific Theater, claiming tens of thousands of American lives and far more Japanese lives. When American commanders considered a full-on invasion of the Japanese main islands, they knew that hundreds of thousands of American lives would be lost and far more Japanese would die since they would stop at nothing to defend their homeland. Despite their destructive capabilities, the overall death toll caused by the atomic bombs would have been meager when compared to the potential death toll if the U.S. launched an invasion that would only prolong the brutal conflict. To explain, the U.S. believed the death toll from the atomic bombs would’ve been lower than from an invasion. In summary, the U.S. wanted to use the atomic bombs to defeat Japan and finally end the bloodshed in the Pacific.

To sum up, the desire to defeat Japan was the main reason why the U.S. used the atomic bombs, even though some may argue that they were used to deter Soviet expansion into Asia. To start off, the atomic bombs would quickly end the war and save the lives of countless U.S. soldiers and even more Japanese lives. Additionally, the bombs were used to force the Japanese to surrender after refusing to listen to warnings of imminent destruction. While the atomic bombs had several negative effects such as the immediate death of several thousand people and the deaths of many more that suffered from radiation sickness, they ended this brutal conflict. While the atomic bomb ended World War 2, it caused the beginning of the arms race and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union which would last for over 40 years and greatly impact international affairs.