TRUMAN AND THE BOMB

TRUMAN AND THE BOMB DISCUSSION FLOW

1. Situation Analysis and Fact-Finding (25’)
   1.1. In this class, it is particularly important to counteract the “hindsight effect”— the tendency to let knowledge of subsequent events bias the evaluation of decisions made before such events had occurred. So let’s try to work our way back to the knowledge base that Harry Truman and Allied officials charged with the conduct of the war would have relied on in the Spring of 1945.
   1.2. From the readings, what facts do you believe are particularly important to the decision about whether to use the atomic bomb? What are the implications of those facts for the decision that Harry Truman had to make?

2. Analysis of Advisers’ Recommendations and Truman’s Rationale (25’)
   2.1. What were the arguments for using the atomic bomb?
       ● Which of these arguments were strategic, and which tactical?
       ● What assumptions were these arguments based on?
       ● Which of the argument were lodged on moral grounds— what kind of moral theories were appealed to?
   2.2. What arguments were raised against using the bomb?
   2.3. Why was there so little opposition to this decision? What factors led to such one-sided decision-making?
   2.4. Should there have been more debate? What could have been done to create more balance? Is unanimity in this situation desirable or harmful?
   2.5. What did Truman add to this thinking? What were his assumptions? How did he justify his actions?

3. Do You Agree with Truman’s Decision? (40’)
   3.1. Probes for Yes position
       ● Do you agree with all of the decisions that were made?
         ● Did you agree that the US should not issue a warning to Hiroshima? What would you have done if you were in charge of the decision- would you have issued a warning?
         ● How do you defend the use of the second bomb on Nagasaki?
         ● Did the Allies give enough time between the first and second bombs for real decision-making to take place? [August 6 – Hiroshima bomb; August 9 – Nagasaki bomb]
   3.2. Probes for No position
       ● Which of the decisions do you disagree with?
       ● There was significant effort made to apply “just war” rules as they understood them: they rejected Kyoto as a bomb site because of its cultural significance; looked for targets with military importance. What do you object to in what they did?
       ● What would you have wanted Truman to do?
3.3. Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with Truman’s decision, did he demonstrate what you would regard as moral leadership? Why or why not?

- If Truman had satisfied himself that he was acting in the world’s best interest, had thought it through, did not underestimate the impact of what he did…isn’t that moral leadership? What is missing here?

4. Leaders and Moral Rules (15’)

4.1. Walzer describes war as a rule-governed activity, and points out that “War is always judged twice: first with reference to the reasons states have for fighting, secondly with reference to the means they adopt.” It’s hard to imagine a way of thinking that is more different from Machiavelli’s view of war and leadership, which emphasizes flexibility, responsiveness, and few if any limitations on action.

4.2. In your view, is Walzer’s structure a helpful way to think about war and how it is managed and led? Why or why not?

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http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b01/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=607075

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