

Expert: Atomic bombings still part of political diplomacy

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The next few weeks will be filled with differing opinions on how the United States should commemorate the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan, and a Purdue University political communication expert can talk about how President Ronald Reagan used the bombings as a part of his diplomacy to end the Cold War.

"This is certainly a polarizing topic," says Buddy Howell, an instructor of communication who specializes in presidential rhetoric and the Cold War. "Some people say the use of the atomic bombs had peaceful intentions to end the war. Others consider it an act of terror. Sixty years later, it still matters to us how we, and our presidents, talk about and remember events like this because it defines us as Americans."

On Aug. 6, 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, in an attempt to end War World II. A few days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and only then Japan surrendered. The bombings killed hundreds of thousands of people instantly and also contributed to the start of the Cold War and nuclear arms race with the former Soviet Union.

Forty years later, President Reagan spoke of the bombings when trying to reconcile with Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, says Howell, who studies presidents' roles as diplomats-in-chief.

"Reagan referenced the bombings to make a point that if the United States wanted to attack the former Soviet Union, it would have had to

when America had a monopoly on atomic power in the 1940s," Howell says. "Now after 9/11 and other recent events, it will be most interesting to see how the current administration talks about the bombings. I expect the current administration will follow Reagan's lead in using this event as a way to promote diplomacy and freedom."

Source: Purdue University

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