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Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb, 1941-1945: A Reinterpretation

BARTON J. BERNSTEIN

Ever since the publication in 1965 of Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy*, scholars and laymen have developed a new interest in the relationship of the atomic bomb to wartime and postwar diplomacy and to the origins of the Cold War. This bold book revived and sometimes recast old themes and thereby sparked renewed interest in questions that once seemed settled: Why was the atomic bomb dropped on Japan? Why weren't other alternatives vigorously pursued? How did the bomb influence American policy before and after Hiroshima? Did the dropping of the bomb and postwar American atomic policies contribute to the cold war?¹

Unfortunately many studies of these questions have focused exclusively on the Truman period and thereby neglected the Roosevelt administration, which bequeathed to Truman a legacy of assumptions, options, and fears. Acting on the assumption that the bomb was a legitimate weapon, Roosevelt initially defined the relationship of American diplomacy and

¹ Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York, 1965); Gar Alperovitz, *Cold War Essays* (New York, 1970), pp. 51-73. For a critical discussion of the literature, see Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bomb and American Foreign Policy, 1941-1945: An Historiographical Controversy," *Peace and Change*, II (Spring 1974), 1-16.

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the atomic bomb. He decided to build the bomb, to establish a partnership on atomic energy with Britain, to bar the Soviet Union from knowledge of the project, and to block any effort at international control of atomic energy. These policies constituted Truman's inheritance—one he neither wished to abandon nor could easily escape. He was restricted politically, psychologically, and institutionally from critically reassessing this legacy.

Like Roosevelt, Truman assumed that the bomb was a legitimate weapon and also understood that it could serve as a bargaining lever, a military counterweight, a threat, or a combat weapon in dealing with the Soviet Union in the postwar world. In addition to speeding the end of the war, the combat use of the bomb, the Truman administration understood, offered the United States great advantages in the postwar world. Policy makers assumed that use of the bomb would help shape the world in a desirable mold: The bomb would impress the Soviets and make them more tractable. Contrary to some contentions, this consideration about the postwar world was not the controlling reason why the United States used the bomb. Rather, it was an additional reason reinforcing an earlier analysis. Ending the war speedily was the primary purpose; impressing the Soviet Union was secondary. This secondary aim did constitute a subtle deterrent to reconsidering combat use of the bomb and to searching for alternative means of ending the war. Had the use of the bomb threatened to impair, rather than advance, American aims for the postwar peace, policy makers would have been likely to reassess their assumptions and perhaps to choose other alternatives.

ROOSEVELT AND THE BOMB

America's policies on atomic energy began in the Roosevelt administration. In October 1941, nearly two months before Pearl Harbor, he sanctioned a major research project to investigate whether, and at what cost, the United States could build an atomic bomb. Vannevar Bush, scientific adviser to the president and chairman of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, had already counseled Roosevelt that it could be a decisive instrument capable of winning the war and shaping the peace. If it could be constructed, he wrote, "it would be a thousand times more powerful than existing explosives, and its use might be determining."² Even allowing for Bush's possible exaggerations, Roosevelt undoubtedly thought that the bomb could be significant in war and in diplomacy, for he certainly understood that powerful weapons could speed the end of

² Bush to Roosevelt, July 16, 1941, President's Secretary's File (hereafter PSF), Bush Folder, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (hereafter FDRL), Hyde Park, N. Y.

the war, strengthen American power, and influence the shape of the peace.

From the beginning, Roosevelt insisted upon great secrecy for the bomb project. The security apparatus was directed at Germany, our imminent enemy, and also at Russia, our potential ally.³ The Grand Alliance, as Roosevelt understood, was conceived in necessity and based upon mutual need, not mutual trust. It was not even a trial marriage, simply an arrangement of convenience. While Roosevelt was prepared to assist the Soviet Union in defeating the Axis menace, and he hoped for an enduring postwar settlement with the Soviet Union, he seldom assumed that the postwar peace would be easy or that Russia would comfortably accede to America's design for a world of peace and prosperity based on self-determination and an economic open door.⁴

As the war dragged on, he began, reluctantly, to grant the Soviet Union a freer hand in Eastern Europe, but he acted not out of naiveté or enthusiasm but because the United States then lacked the power to block Soviet efforts. In 1943, he told Francis Cardinal Spellman that the postwar world might be divided into spheres of influence; and in 1944–1945, by signing the armistice agreements for the Balkan states and then by endorsing an empty, but noble-sounding Declaration of Liberated Europe at the Yalta conference, the president acceded to the establishment of a Soviet sphere in the Balkans. Yielding to exigency, Roosevelt temporarily retreated from his goals and accepted a world that he did not want: a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe with a closed economic and political door. But he also held in reserve great power—economic aid and probably atomic energy—that might allow him in the future to modify or reverse arrangements and to create an open-door world.⁵

For Roosevelt, the *specific* role of the bomb in achieving this ideal world remains unclear, and certainly the evidence is skimpy. But it is clear that by late 1942, if not earlier, he regarded the bomb as very useful, perhaps even as potentially dominant, in shaping the postwar world.⁶ The future

³ Bush to James Conant, October 9, 1941, Atomic Energy Commission (hereafter AEC), Doc. 17, Atomic Energy Commission Archives; Groves in U. S. Atomic Energy Commission, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer, Transcript of Hearings Before Personnel Security Board* (Washington, 1954), p. 174; Leslie Groves, *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project* (New York, 1962), p. 141; Bush to Rudolph Forster, March 16, 1942, and Roosevelt to Bush, March 16, 1942, PSF, Bush Folder, FDRL.

⁴ Barton J. Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," in Barton J. Bernstein (ed.), *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 17–22. Also see: William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1962), pp. 204–218; Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War, 1943–1945* (New York, 1968), pp. 1–388; cf. Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy, passim*.

⁵ Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy," pp. 19–22, 30–31.

⁶ Bush to president, March 9, 1942, and reply, March 11, 1942, AEC Docs. 30 and 32.

role of the bomb, of course, would depend, among other matters, upon its actual power—whether it was ten, a hundred, or even a thousand times more powerful than earlier weapons. Also, whether the bomb would be used as a bargaining lever, military counterweight, threat, or weapon would depend upon Soviet resistance and American tactics.

In December 1942, Roosevelt acted to restrict scientific interchange on nuclear research with Britain, even at the risk of slowing down the bomb project, partly because he concluded—incorrectly—that an Anglo-Soviet treaty required Britain to share American nuclear secrets with the Soviets.⁷ He relaxed this policy in July–August 1943 after Prime Minister Winston Churchill assured him that Britain would neither pass nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union nor even inform the Soviets of the fact of nuclear research.⁸

Roosevelt's policies of moving into a closer Anglo-American alliance on the bomb confronted opposition within the administration from Vannevar Bush and James B. Conant, Bush's deputy. They well understood and counseled the president on the diplomatic-international importance of the bomb: It could be a decisive weapon in shaping the peace. Because they did not want to share the fruits of America's nuclear research with Britain, which was contributing little to the partnership, they felt free to oppose an Anglo-American alliance on atomic energy and objected to Roosevelt's seeming willingness to strengthen it. They wanted America to be free to determine her own future policy on atomic energy and feared that an alliance with Britain would impair future relations with Russia by making international control impossible. They correctly concluded that Churchill would oppose any approach to the Soviet Union and that he wanted to use the bomb to deal with the Soviet Union in the postwar world.⁹

also available in "S-1 Historical File B," Records of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (hereafter OSRD), box 3030, RG 277, National Archives; Bush to Roosevelt, December 16, 1942, in *ibid.*; and Bush to Roosevelt, June 17, 1942, Harrison-Bundy Files (hereafter H-B) 58, Records of the Manhattan Engineering District (hereafter MED), RG 77, National Archives.

⁷ Military Policy Committee, "Report to the President," December 15, 1942, "S-1 Historical File B," OSRD; Stimson Diary, December 27, 1945, Stimson Papers, Yale University; Roosevelt to Bush, December 28, 1942, "S-1 Historical File B," OSRD; Richard Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission*, Vol. I, *The New World, 1939–1946* (University Park, Pa., 1962), pp. 267–268 (hereafter *New World*).

⁸ Churchill to Hopkins, February 24 and 27, 1943; Bush to Hopkins, March 31, 1943; Churchill to Hopkins, June 10, 1943; Roosevelt to Churchill, July 20, 1943; Hopkins to president, July 20, 1943; all in Hopkins Papers, FDRL; Bush to Harvey Bundy, August 6, 1943, AEC Doc. 169; Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, pp. 273–280.

⁹ Bush to Roosevelt, June 19, 1942, and Bush to Hopkins, March 31, 1943, Hopkins

In August 1943, despite the opposition of Bush and Conant, Roosevelt moved to cement the alliance with Britain on atomic energy. At Quebec in August, Roosevelt signed an executive agreement providing, among other terms, that their two nations would “never use the bomb against each other,” that they would “not use it against third parties without each other’s consent,” and that they would not “communicate any information [about it] . . . except by mutual consent.” They had promised not to do what Roosevelt had foolishly once feared Churchill might do: give atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. It was an agreement, in summary, that had two key effects: It brought Britain and the United States closer together on atomic energy and excluded the Soviet Union from participation in an enterprise that, according to Churchill, Bush, Conant, and others, could produce a weapon that might dominate the postwar world.¹⁰

Some might contend that this agreement to exclude Russia did not express Roosevelt’s own wishes and that he was innocent and naive, that he was swept along by the persuasive Churchill, or that the president did not understand the implications of the agreement. This “innocent-naive” interpretation can be faulted on various grounds—especially because Roosevelt had been tutored on the value of the bomb and because the agreement to exclude Russia confirmed Roosevelt’s policy and actions of 1942 and was confirmed again in 1944 by two Anglo-American agreements. “Both Roosevelt and Churchill knew,” concludes the official Atomic Energy Commission history, “that the stake of their diplomacy was a technological breakthrough so revolutionary that it transcended in importance even the bloody work of carrying the war to the heartland of the Nazi foe.”¹¹

In June 1944, Roosevelt and Churchill signed an agreement that their two nations would cooperate in seeking control of the ores (uranium and thorium) thought necessary for an atomic bomb. That meant an Anglo-American monopoly and, in effect, barred the Soviet Union. In September 1944, in the Hyde Park agreement, Roosevelt reaffirmed the exclusion of the Soviet Union. He and Churchill rejected “the suggestion that the world should be informed regarding . . . [the bomb project], with a view

Papers; Conant to Bush, December 14, 1942, AEC Doc. 149; Bush to Conant, December 22, 1942; AEC Doc. 150; Bush, “Memorandum of Conference with President,” June 24, 1943, AEC Doc. 133; Conant to Bush, July 30, 1943, “British Liaison Special,” OSRD, box 3031; Bush, “Memorandum to File,” August 4, 1943, AEC Doc. 168; Bush to Harvey Bundy, August 6, 1943; Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, pp. 273–280.

¹⁰ “Agreement Relating to Atomic Energy,” August 19, 1943, reprinted in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Conferences at Washington and Quebec* (Washington, 1970), pp. 1117–1118 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*, year and volume).

¹¹ Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, p. 280; see Richard Hewlett, “Comments on Martin Sherwin’s Paper” (unpublished manuscript, AHA 1971 Convention), pp. 2–3.

to an international agreement regarding its control and use." Primarily at Churchill's behest, they also decided that Niels Bohr, the Danish nuclear physicist who had pleaded with both leaders for international control, should be watched "to ensure" that he did not leak atomic secrets to the Soviets.¹²

Is there any evidence that Roosevelt was not following a consistent policy of excluding the Soviet Union? On possibly four occasions in 1944, three times with Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, Roosevelt's old friend and administration gadfly, and once with Niels Bohr, the president apparently said he would move *toward* international control of atomic energy with the Soviet Union. Frankfurter, who learned independently about the secret bomb project, had first met privately with Bohr, who persuaded the justice that there were only two likely postwar alternatives—a nuclear arms race, which was undesirable, or some form of international control. In April, Frankfurter informed Roosevelt of this meeting and explained Bohr's fears that a nuclear arms race might result unless the United States informed Russia of the bomb research and sought an arrangement with the Soviets for controlling atomic energy. If the United States tried to maintain the secret, both Bohr and Frankfurter believed that postwar Soviet-American relations would be hopelessly embittered. Bohr, the Supreme Court justice explained, concluded that the Russians could independently build atomic weapons, so an approach to the Soviet Union was the only way of avoiding an arms race. Frankfurter, after discussing these issues for an hour and a half, left assured that Roosevelt was "plainly impressed by my account of the matter." The president even authorized Frankfurter to inform Bohr that he might tell "our friends in London that the President was most eager to explore the proper safeguards in relation to X [the atomic bomb]." According to Frankfurter, Roosevelt said that the problem of the bomb "worried him to death"¹³ and, in the words of the British historian on atomic energy, "agreed that a solution of this problem might be more important than all the schemes for a world organization."¹⁴

In May, Bohr was rudely rebuffed by a suspicious and evasive Churchill,¹⁵ but Frankfurter, who apparently discussed these issues on two

¹² For the agreement of June 13 and the aide-memoire of September 19, 1944, "Diplomatic History of the Manhattan Project," annexes 22a and 28, H-B 110. These documents are reprinted in various places, including Margaret Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* (London, 1964), pp. 44–47.

¹³ On the Frankfurter-Bohr meeting and the Frankfurter-Roosevelt meeting, Frankfurter to Lord Halifax, April 18, 1945, J. Robert Oppenheimer Papers (hereafter JROP), box 34, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy*, p. 350; Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, pp. 326–328.

¹⁵ Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy*, pp. 351–358; Hewlett and Anderson, *New*

other occasions with Roosevelt that summer, arranged for Bohr to see the president in August. On August 26, Bohr went to the White House to outline his fears and hopes, to warn against efforts to conceal the bomb from the Soviet Union and to maintain a nuclear monopoly, and to urge international cooperation and international control of atomic energy. At the end of their conversation, Roosevelt indicated that he agreed with the scientist, and Bohr departed happily believing that he had changed the course of policy and contributed to the cause of peace.¹⁶

How does one assess this evidence? Both Bohr, on one occasion, and Frankfurter, at least three times, concluded that Roosevelt agreed with Bohr's strategy. We may ask a series of questions to determine whether Roosevelt on these occasions was simply lulling and deceiving visitors, as was often his mode, or whether he was sincere. Did he take any action on the basis of these conversations to change policy? Is there any evidence that he even pursued with associates this proposed reversal of policy? No. Or did he move in the opposite direction from Bohr's program? Yes. The answers strongly suggest that Roosevelt was following his frequent practice of genial deception. He never took any action to implement Bohr's program, never discussed it with interest with any associate, but instead called for an investigation to determine how Frankfurter had learned about the bomb project,¹⁷ supported Churchill's demand for surveillance of Bohr, in June and July moved closer to Britain on atomic energy, and in September agreed to exclude the Soviet Union and to strengthen the Anglo-American partnership. "If," as Martin J. Sherwin shrewdly notes, "Roosevelt was indeed worried to death about the effect the atomic bomb could have on Soviet-American postwar relations, he took no action to remove the potential danger, nor did he make any effort to explore the possibility of encouraging the Soviet postwar cooperation on the problem."¹⁸ Instead, he was closing off or at least seriously delaying this matter, presumably in order to keep open other options—of us-

World, p. 326. Max Freedman (ed.), *Roosevelt and Frankfurter: Their Correspondence, 1928-1945* (New York, 1968), pp. 724-728 implies that there were three Frankfurter-FDR meetings on atomic energy.

¹⁶ Aage Bohr, "The War Years and the Prospects Raised by Atomic Weapons," in Stefan Rozental (ed.), *Niels Bohr* (New York, 1967), pp. 206-207. In preparation for his meeting with Roosevelt, Bohr prepared a nine-page memorandum (Bohr "Memorandum," July 3, 1944, JROP), which Frankfurter summarized and introduced for FDR. See Frankfurter to Roosevelt, July 10, 1944, in Freedman, *Roosevelt and Frankfurter*, p. 738. Also see Bohr to Roosevelt, September 7, 1944, JROP, box 34 in which he again urged Roosevelt to approach the Soviets, for "the present moment [is] most favorable."

¹⁷ Bush, "Memorandum of Conference," September 22, 1944, AEC Doc. 185.

¹⁸ Martin Sherwin, "The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War: U. S. Atomic-Energy Policy and Diplomacy, 1941-1945," *American Historical Review*, LXXVIII (October 1973), 959; see also pp. 954-970 for an interpretation similar to mine. Also see Barton J. Bernstein, "The Quest for Security: American Foreign Policy and In-

ing the bomb in a still undefined way to gain concessions from the Soviet Union. The president evidently thought, Bush complained after the Hyde Park agreement, that "he could join with Churchill in bringing about a US-UK post-war agreement . . . by which [the bomb] . . . would be held closely and presumably to control the peace of the world. . . ." ¹⁹

Running through the tangled skein of America's wartime policy on atomic energy is the persistent evidence of concern about the Soviet Union. Roosevelt knew that the Soviets were gathering information about the bomb project, and on September 9, 1943, Henry L. Stimson, the secretary of war, informed the president that spies "are already getting information about vital secrets and sending them to Russia." ²⁰ In late December 1944, at two sessions, they again discussed these issues. On December 31, Roosevelt told Stimson that he, too, was worried about how much the Soviets might know about the project, and they briefly discussed trading information for substantial Soviet concessions. As Stimson later summarized the conversation in his diary:

I told him . . . that I knew they [Russia] were spying on our work but that they had not yet gotten any real knowledge of it and that, while I was troubled by the possible effect of keeping from them even now that work, I believed that it was essential not to take them into our confidence until we were sure to get a real quid pro quo from our frankness. I said I had no illusions as to the possibility of keeping permanently such a secret but that I did think that it was not yet time to share it with Russia. He said he thought he agreed with me.

They did not discuss the specific nature of the concessions, and perhaps Stimson and the president would not have agreed on how to use the bomb as a bargaining lever and what to demand from the Soviet Union. Whatever their unexplored differences on these issues, they did agree to continue for a period the same policy: exclusion of the Soviets. ²¹ "It was

ternational Control of Atomic Energy, 1942-1946," *Journal of American History*, LX (March 1974), 1007-1009. Cf. Hewlett, "Comments on Sherwin."

¹⁹ Bush, "Memorandum for Doctor Conant," September 25, 1944, AEC Doc. 280. Some historians interpret the September agreement as a *volte-face* and believe Roosevelt was sincere in his earlier dealings with Bohr and Frankfurter. But these historians ignore or minimize that the 1944 agreement *continued* Roosevelt's policy of excluding Russia. What requires explanation is his occasional, but only verbal, deviations from policy when he spoke with these two men. See James M. Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York, 1970), pp. 458-459; Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy*, pp. 358-359.

²⁰ Stimson Diary, September 9, 1943; USAEC, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, pp. 171-173, 259-265; and Groves (draft) to Roosevelt, August 23, 1943, misc. file 2, Top Secret Documents of Interest to Groves (hereafter TSDGroves), MED Records.

²¹ Stimson Diary, December 31 and 30, 1944.

quite clear," recorded General Leslie Groves, commanding general of the Manhattan Project, "that no one present was interested in bringing Russia into the picture, at least at this time."²² It is less clear why Roosevelt and Stimson, faced with the realization that the Soviet Union knew about the American research, still did not want formally to notify the Soviets about the bomb project. There is no direct evidence on this subject, but probably they feared that formal disclosure would lead to explicit Soviet inquiries and then to demands for participation that American leaders were not prepared to handle. As long as the United States technically kept the project secret, the Soviets could never raise issues about the bomb without admitting their espionage.

On March 15, 1945, at their last meeting together, Stimson and Roosevelt again discussed atomic energy. Roosevelt acknowledged that he would have to choose between (1) continuing the policy of secrecy and the Anglo-American partnership that barred the Soviets or (2) moving to international control with a sharing of information. Under Roosevelt, there was no further resolution of these issues.²³ When he died in April, American policy had not advanced beyond the point where it had been in December.

Had Roosevelt lived, perhaps he would ultimately have reversed the policy of secrecy and decided to move toward international control in return for a *quid pro quo*—perhaps on Eastern Europe which he had "ceded" at Yalta to the Soviet Union. Any consideration of what "might have happened" is, of course, a matter of speculation, since the evidence is skimpy and oblique on what Roosevelt might have done. What is clear is that he had maintained the strategy of excluding the Soviets from knowledge of the bomb and of reserving the options of using it in the future as a bargaining lever, threat, military counterweight, or even a weapon against the Soviets.

It was not that he lacked opportunities to reverse his policy. He did not

²² Groves, "Memorandum," December 30, 1944, Top Secret Manhattan Engineering District Files (hereafter TSMEDF), folder 24, MED Records. Groves's statement, of course, was technically about the meeting of December 30 but properly summarizes the prevailing sentiment of all three men.

²³ Stimson Diary, March 15, 1945. Also see J. W. Pickersgill and D. F. Forster, *The Mackenzie King Record* (Toronto, 1968), II, pp. 326–327, for Roosevelt told the Canadian prime minister on March 9, 1945, in King's words, "the time had come to tell them [the Soviets] how far the [atomic research] developments had gone" and implied, so King understood, that Churchill was blocking this overture because he was concerned about later commercial use. Actually, Churchill had often stressed that he cared primarily about the military power, not the commercial advantages, of atomic energy. Moreover, according to the Quebec agreement the president could restrict Britain's rights in the commercial and industrial area. Either King misunderstood Roosevelt or the president was disingenuous or confused, and the last is unlikely.

want to change policy—at least not up to April. At Yalta, in February, for example, Roosevelt might have approached Stalin on the bomb, but the president neither discussed this subject nor the loan that the Soviets wanted, and thereby he simply kept open the options for the future of using economic leverage and the bomb to secure concessions.²⁴ His position, then, made possible the future strategy of “atomic diplomacy”—of using the bomb as an implied or explicit threat to influence negotiations and to compel concessions from the Soviets. Would he have practiced “atomic diplomacy”? Probably. But that answer is speculative and rests principally upon the theory that he would not have wasted the options he was jealously guarding.

Roosevelt and his advisers had more clearly defined another issue: the combat use of the bomb. From the inception of the project, when it was directed primarily against Germany, they usually assumed, and most policy makers never questioned, that the bomb was a legitimate weapon to be used in combat. This assumption was phrased as policy on a number of occasions. In October 1942, for example, Stimson had directed Groves that the mission is “to produce [the bomb] at the earliest possible date so as to bring the war to a conclusion.” Any time “that a single day could be saved,” the general should save that day.²⁵ In 1944, policy makers were also talking comfortably about “after S-1 [the bomb] is used.”²⁶ “At no time,” Stimson later wrote, “did I ever hear it suggested by the President, or by any other responsible member of the government, that atomic energy should not be used in war.”²⁷

Actually there is some spotty evidence that Roosevelt was mulling over the possibilities of not using the bomb in combat or of using it only after a warning or demonstration. In the Hyde Park agreement of 1944, there is a brief passage that suggests that Roosevelt might have been unsure about using the bomb: “when a ‘bomb’ is finally available, it *might perhaps*, after mature consideration, be used against the Japanese, who should be warned that this bombardment will be repeated until they

²⁴ On the loan, see John M. Blum, *From the Morgenthau Diaries, 1941–1945* (Boston, 1967), III, p. 305.

²⁵ Quoted in Elting E. Morison, *Turmoil and Tradition: The Life and Times of Henry L. Stimson* (Boston, 1960), p. 621.

²⁶ See, for example, Harvey Bundy, “Memorandum to the Secretary,” December 16 (emphasis added) and December 9, 1944, H-B 108; Derry to Groves, January 9, 1945, TSMEDE, Folder 4; Groves to J. Robert Oppenheimer, January 6, 1944, JROP. Also see FDR as reported in: Stimson Diary, October 29, 1942; Bush, “Memorandum of Conference with the President,” June 24, 1943, AEC Doc. 133; Pickersgill and Forster, *Mackenzie King*, II, p. 326; Grace Tully, *F.D.R., My Boss* (New York, 1949), pp. 265–266. Also see *FRUS: Yalta* (1955), p. 384.

²⁷ Stimson, “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” *Harper’s*, February 1947, p. 98. (Hereafter Stimson, “Decision.”)

surrender.”²⁸ Three days later, in a conference with Bush, Admiral William Leahy, and a British representative on atomic energy, the president, as Bush recorded then, briefly expressed some doubts:

[T]he President raised the question of whether . . . [the bomb] should actually be used against the Japanese or whether it should be used only as a threat with full-scale experimentation [noncombat demonstration?] in this country. He did so, I believe, in connection with Bohr’s apparent urging that a threat be employed against Germany, which would of course, I think, be futile. I stated that there were many sides to this question, that fortunately we did not need to approach it for some time, for certainly it would be inadvisable to make a threat unless we were distinctly in a position to follow it up if necessary. . . . [T]his [subject] could be postponed for quite a time, and the President agreed that the matter did not now need to be discussed.²⁹

For ten weeks Roosevelt apparently let the matter slip from his mind, or at least there is no evidence that he discussed it with anyone—especially Stimson and Bush, who kept careful records on the subject. In early December, according to Dr. Alexander Sachs, a financier and gadfly whose testimony is not fully reliable, he discussed the bomb with the president. Roosevelt agreed with Sachs upon a test and warning before using the bomb against an enemy area, from which humans and animals would be evacuated.³⁰

Because of certain clear errors in Sachs’s testimony, analysts must exercise caution in using it. The Hyde Park agreement and Bush’s memorandum, despite some troubling ambiguities, are reliable. But their significance is less clear. For even though Roosevelt had some doubts and apparently contemplated a warning or noncombat demonstration, he never discussed these subjects with anyone else in his last four months in the White House. Nor did anyone, even Bush, later recall this fleeting discussion or conclude that Roosevelt had serious doubts about whether the bomb was a legitimate weapon. Those who knew about the bomb at this

²⁸ (Emphasis added.) American officials did not know of these terms or even see the document until late June, for the agreement, because of code (“Tube Alloys”), was misfiled. After the British informed the United States of its terms and provided a copy, there is no evidence that anyone even noticed, much less stressed, the subjunctive phrasing (Stimson Diary, June 25, 1945). That phrasing had no influence on Truman’s policy.

²⁹ Bush to Conant, September 23, 1944, AEC Doc. 186. William Leahy, *I Was There* (New York, 1950), p. 269 omits this discussion.

³⁰ Finney, “How FDR Planned to Use the A-Bomb,” *Look*, March 14, 1950, p. 23, uncritically relates the tale of the alleged influence of Alexander Sachs on FDR and Sachs’s December 1944 suggestion of “rehearsal demonstration” for Allied countries and a warning to the enemy before combat use—proposals Sachs later alleged FDR endorsed. Also see Henry Wallace diary, October 24, 1945, in John M. Blum (ed.), *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942–1946* (Boston, 1973), pp. 499–500.

time, and usually the president himself, believed that it was a legitimate weapon. Under Roosevelt, policy was conducted on that basis.³¹

TRUMAN AND THE BOMB

When Harry S. Truman became president on April 12, 1945, he was only dimly aware of the existence of the Manhattan Project and unaware that it was an atomic-bomb project.³² Left uninformed of foreign affairs and generally ignored by Roosevelt in the three months since the inaugural, the new president inherited a set of policies and a group of advisers from his predecessor. While Truman was legally free to reverse Roosevelt's foreign policies and to choose new advisers on foreign policy, in fact he was quite restricted for personal and political reasons. Because Truman was following a very prestigious president whom he, like a great many Americans, loved and admired, the new president was not free psychologically or politically to strike out on a clearly new course. Only a bolder man, with more self-confidence, might have tried critically to assess the legacy and to act independently. But Truman lacked the confidence and the incentive. When, in fact, he did modify policy—for example, on Eastern Europe—he still believed sincerely, as some advisers told him, that he was adhering to his predecessor's agreements and wishes. When seeking counsel on foreign affairs, he usually did not choose new advisers but simply drew more heavily upon those members of Roosevelt's staff who were more anti-Soviet and relied less upon those who were more friendly to the Soviet Union. Even in this strategy, he believed that he was adhering to the policies of his predecessor, who, in his last weeks, Truman stressed, had become more suspicious of Stalin, more distressed by Soviet action in Eastern Europe, and more committed to resisting Soviet encroachments.³³

In the case of the international-diplomatic policy on the bomb, Truman was even more restricted by Roosevelt's decisions, for the new president inherited a set of reasonably clear wartime policies. Because Roosevelt had already decided to exclude the Soviets from a partnership on the bomb, his successor could not *comfortably* reverse this policy during the war—unless the late president's advisers pleaded for such a reversal or

³¹ On September 30, 1944, perhaps in response to FDR's conversation eight days before, Bush and Conant briefly mentioned to Stimson the possibility of a demonstration and warning before combat use of the bomb. (Bush and Conant to Stimson, September 30, 1944, AEC Doc. 282.)

³² Truman, *Memoirs: Year of Decisions* (New York, 1955), pp. 10 and 87; Stimson Diary, April 24 and 25, 1945.

³³ Truman, *Year of Decisions*, pp. 70–82; Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy," pp. 25–30.

claimed that he had been about to change his policy. They did neither. Consider, then, the massive personal and political deterrents that blocked Truman from even reassessing this legacy. What price might he have paid at home³⁴ if Americans learned later that he had reversed Roosevelt's policy and had launched a bold new departure of sharing with the Soviets a great weapon that cost the United States \$2 billion? Truman, in fact, was careful to follow Roosevelt's strategy of concealing from Congress even the dimensions of the secret partnership on atomic energy with Britain.³⁵

Truman, depending as he did upon Roosevelt's advisers, could not easily reassess the prevailing assumption that the bomb was a legitimate weapon to be used in combat against Japan. Truman lacked the will and the incentive to reexamine this assumption, and his dependence upon Roosevelt's advisers and the momentum of the project confirmed this tendency. Only one close adviser, Admiral William Leahy, may have later challenged the use of the bomb, but he was an old "war horse," an expert on explosives of another era, who had often proclaimed that the bomb would not work, that the scientists were duping the administration, and that they were squandering \$2 billion.³⁶ His counsel could not outweigh the continuing legacy of assumptions and commitments, of advisers and advice, that Truman had inherited from Roosevelt. It was a subtle legacy, one that infiltrated decisions and shaped actions, so that Truman accepted it as part of his unquestioned inheritance. For Truman, the question would never be how openly to challenge this legacy, only how to fulfill it, how to remain true to it.

During his first weeks in office, Truman learned about the project from Stimson and from James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt's former director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion who was to become Truman's secretary of state. Byrnes, despite his recent suspicions that the project might be a scientific boondoggle, told Truman, in the president's words, that "the bomb might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war."³⁷ On April 25, Stimson discussed issues

³⁴ Because of the recent enthusiasm by some historians for arguing that Truman could not have avoided the policies leading to the Cold War since he was restrained by American public opinion, let me stress that I am presenting a different position: He did *not want* to alter the policy of excluding the Soviets from a wartime partnership, and public and congressional opinion *helped* deter him. See John L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York, 1972), esp. pp. 352-361; and Barton J. Bernstein, "Cold War Orthodoxy Restated," *Reviews in American History*, I (December 1973), 459-461.

³⁵ Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, pp. 456-459, 289-290.

³⁶ Leahy, *I Was There* p. 441.

³⁷ Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 87. For Byrnes's recent doubts, see Byrnes to Roosevelt, March 3, 1945, TSMEDF 24.

about the bomb more fully with Truman, especially the “political aspects of the S-1 [atomic bomb’s] performance.” The bomb, the secretary of war explained in a substantial memorandum, would probably be ready in four months and “would be the most terrible weapon ever known in human history [for it] . . . could destroy a whole city.” In the future, he warned, other nations would be able to make atomic bombs, thereby endangering the peace and threatening the world. The bomb could be either a threat to or a guarantor of peace. “[I]n the light of our present position with reference to this weapon, the question of sharing it with other nations and, if so shared, upon what terms, becomes a primary question of our foreign relations,” Stimson lectured the president. If “the problem of the proper use of this weapon can be solved, we would have the opportunity to bring the world into a pattern in which the peace of the world and our civilization can be saved.”³⁸

The entire discussion, judging from Stimson’s diary record and Groves’s memorandum, assumed that the bomb was a legitimate weapon and that it would be used against Japan. The questions they discussed were not *whether* to use the bomb, but its relationship to the Soviet Union and the need to establish postwar atomic policies.³⁹ Neither Stimson nor Truman sought then to resolve these outstanding issues, and Truman agreed to his secretary’s proposal for the establishment of a high-level committee to recommend “action to the executive and legislative branches of our government when secrecy is no longer in full effect.”⁴⁰ At no time did they conclude that the committee would also consider the issue of whether to use the bomb as a combat weapon. For policy makers, that was not a question; it was an operating assumption.

Nor did Stimson, in his own charge to the Interim Committee, ever *raise* this issue. Throughout the committee’s meetings, as various members later noted,⁴¹ all operated on the assumption that the bomb would

³⁸ Stimson, “Memorandum for the President,” April 25, 1945, and reprinted in Stimson, “Decision,” pp. 99–100.

³⁹ Stimson Diary, April 25, 1945; Groves, “Memorandum to the Files . . .,” April 25, 1945, TSMEDF folder 24.

⁴⁰ Stimson, “Memorandum for the President,” April 25, 1945. Stimson’s invitation to committee members was similarly limited and did not include among specified committee responsibilities the question of whether the nation should use the bomb. (Stimson to Bush, May 4, 1945, H-B 77; also see Bush to Bundy, February 1, 1945, and Bundy to Stimson, May 1, 1945, H-B 77; and Harrison to Stimson, May 1, 1945, H-B 69.) Harrison’s memo, for example, spoke of the need to solve problems in “the short time available *before actual military use*.” (Emphasis added.)

⁴¹ Gordon Arneson, “Notes of an Informal Meeting of the Interim Committee, May 9, 1945, H-B 100; Arneson, “Memorandum for the Files,” May 24, 1946, H-B 76; Bundy to Stimson, May 30, 1945, with enclosure, H-B 100; Arthur H. Compton, *Atomic Quest* (New York, 1956), p. 238. Minutes of the meetings are available in H-B 100. In his

be used against Japan. They talked, for example, about drafting public statements that would be issued after the bomb's use. They did not discuss *whether* but how to use it. Only one member ultimately endorsed an explicit advance warning to Japan, and none was prepared to suggest that the administration should take any serious risks to avoid using the bomb.⁴² At lunch between the two formal meetings on May 31, some members, perhaps only at one table, briefly discussed the possibility of a noncombat demonstration as a warning to Japan but rejected the tactic on the grounds that the bomb might not explode and the failure might stiffen Japanese resistance, or that Japan might move prisoners of war to the target area.⁴³

What impact would the bomb have on Japan? At the May 31 meeting, the Interim Committee, joined by its four-member scientific advisory panel, discussed this question. Some felt, according to the minutes, that "an atomic bomb on an arsenal would not be much different in effect" from present bombing attacks. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the eminent physicist and member of the scientific panel, expecting that the bomb would have an explosive force of between 2,000 and 20,000 tons of TNT, stressed its visual effects ("a brilliant luminescence which would run to a height of 10,000 to 20,000 feet") and its deadly power ("dangerous to life for a radius of at least two-thirds of a mile"). Oppenheimer's predictions did not answer the question. There were too many unknowns—about the bomb and Japan. According to the official minutes, Stimson concluded, with unanimous support: "that we could not concentrate on a civilian area; but we should seek to make a profound psychological impression on as many of the inhabitants as possible." At Conant's suggestion, "the Secretary agreed that the most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers' houses."⁴⁴ ("I felt," Stimson later explained, "that

essay-defense of the dropping of the bomb, Stimson falsely implied that the Interim Committee carefully considered the question of whether to use the bomb ("Decision," pp. 100–102).

⁴² Ralph Bard, "Memorandum on the Use of the S-1 Bomb," June 27, 1945; and Harrison to Stimson, June 28, 1945, H-B 77. Bard, with the possible exception of Will Clayton, assistant secretary of state, was the only member who did not know about the bomb prior to appointment. He was, therefore, more able to be critical of earlier assumptions, and he was not committed by earlier actions to the bomb project.

⁴³ Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, pp. 357–359; Compton, *Atomic Quest*, pp. 238–239; James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York, 1947), pp. 261–262, and James F. Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime* (New York, 1958), p. 285. Lewis Strauss, an assistant to Secretary Forrester, endorsed a noncombat demonstration; Lewis Strauss, *Men and Decisions* (New York, 1962), pp. 192–193.

⁴⁴ Arneson, "Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting . . . , 31 May 1945," H-B 100. On June 1, the committee, on Byrnes's recommendation, approved that "the bomb

to extract a genuine surrender from the Emperor and his military advisers, they must be administered a tremendous shock . . . proof of our power to destroy the empire.”⁴⁵ The Interim Committee ruled out the strategy of several atomic strikes at one time, for, according to Groves, the United States would lose the benefit of additional knowledge from each successive bombing, would have to rush in assembling bombs and court error, and also would risk the possibility that multiple nuclear attacks “would not be sufficiently distinct from our regular Air Force bombing program.”⁴⁶

Two weeks later, after the Franck Committee recommended a noncombat demonstration,⁴⁷ Stimson’s assistant submitted this proposal to the four-member scientific advisory panel for advice. The panel promptly rejected the Franck Committee proposal: “we can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.”⁴⁸ Had the four scientists known that an invasion was not scheduled until November, or had they even offered their judgment after the unexpectedly impressive Alamogordo test on July 16, perhaps they would have given different counsel. But in June, they were not sure that the bomb explosion would be so dramatic, and, like many others in government, they were wary of pushing for a change in tactics if they might be held responsible for the failure of those tactics—especially if that failure could mean the loss of American lives.⁴⁹

A few days after the panel’s report, the issue of giving Japan an advance warning about the bomb was raised at a White House meeting with the president, the military chiefs, and the civilian secretaries. On June 18, after they agreed upon a two-stage invasion of Japan, beginning on about November 1, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy became clearly troubled by the omission of the bomb from the discussion and planning. When Truman invited him to speak, the assistant secretary

should be used against Japan as soon as possible . . . on a war plant surrounded by workers’ homes . . . /and/ without prior notice.” (Ibid., June 1) He reported these conclusions to Truman.

⁴⁵ Stimson, “Decision,” p. 101.

⁴⁶ “Notes of Interim Committee Meeting . . . , 31 May 1945.”

⁴⁷ The Franck report is reprinted, with some deletions and minor errors, in “A Report to the Secretary of War—June, 1945,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, I (May 1946), 2–4, 16. The entire report, “Social and Political Problems,” is in H-B 76, with covering letter from Arthur H. Compton to Stimson, June 12, 1945.

⁴⁸ Scientific Advisory Panel to Harrison, June 16, 1945, H-B 76.

⁴⁹ Oppenheimer later characterized the assignment of considering a demonstration as “quite slight.” (US AEC, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, p. 34.) In the betting pool for the Alamogordo test, Oppenheimer predicted the device would be equal to only 300 tons of TNT; Lansing Lamont, interview with William L. Laurence, Lamont Papers, box 1, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter HSTL), Independence, Mo.

argued that the bomb would make the invasion unnecessary. Why not warn the emperor that the United States had the bomb and would use it unless Japan surrendered? "McCloy's suggestion had appeal," the official history of the AEC later recorded, "but a strong objection developed" to warning Japan in advance, "which no one could refute—there was no assurance the bomb would work." Presumably, like the Interim Committee, they too feared that a warning, followed by a "dud," might stiffen Japan's morale. There was no reason, policy makers concluded, to take this risk.⁵⁰

LEAVING OPEN THE OPTIONS FOR ATOMIC DIPLOMACY

Though the Interim Committee and high administration officials found no reason not to use the bomb against Japan, many were concerned about the bomb's impact, and its later value, in Soviet-American relations. "[I]t was already apparent," Stimson later wrote, "that the critical questions in American policy toward atomic energy would be directly connected with Soviet Russia."⁵¹ At a few meetings of the Interim Committee, for example, members discussed informing the Soviets of the bomb before its use against Japan. When the issue first arose, Bush and Conant estimated that the Soviet Union could develop the bomb in about four years and argued for informing the Soviets before combat use as a preliminary to moving toward international control and thereby avoiding a postwar nuclear arms race. Conant and Bush had been promoting this strategy since the preceding September. Even though Roosevelt had cast them to the side in 1943, when he cemented the Anglo-American alliance, the two scientist-administrators had not abandoned hope for their notions. They even circulated to the Interim Committee one of their memoranda on the subject. But at the meetings of May 18 and 31 they again met defeat. General Groves, assuming that America was far more advanced technologically and scientifically and also that the Soviet Union lacked uranium, argued that the Soviets could not build a bomb for about twenty years. He contributed to the appealing "myth" of the atomic secret—that there was a secret and it would long remain America's monopoly. James Byrnes, with special authority as secretary of state-designate and Truman's representative on the committee, accepted Groves's analysis and argued for maintaining the policy of secrecy—which the

⁵⁰ Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, p. 364. Also see: James Forrestal Diary, March 8, 1947, Forrestal Papers, Princeton University, also reprinted in Walter Millis (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York, 1951), pp. 71–72; and John J. McCloy, *The Challenge to American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 40–44.

⁵¹ Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York, 1948), p. 636.

committee endorsed.⁵² Byrnes was apparently very pleased, and Stimson agreed, as he told Truman on June 6, "There should be no revelation to Russia or anyone else of our work on S-1 [the atomic bomb] until the first bomb has been laid successfully on Japan."⁵³

At a later meeting on June 21, the Interim Committee, including Byrnes, reversed itself. Yielding to the pleas of Bush and Conant, who were strengthened by the scientific panel's recommendations, the Interim Committee advised Truman to inform the Soviets about the bomb before using it in combat. Like the Franck Committee, the Interim Committee concluded (as the minutes record):

In the hope of securing effective future control and in view of the fact that general information concerning the project would be made public shortly after the [Potsdam] conference, the Committee *agreed* that there would be considerable advantage, if suitable opportunity arose, in having the President advise the Russians that we were working on this weapon with every prospect of success and that we expected to use it against Japan.

The President might say further that he hoped this matter might be discussed some time in the future in terms of insuring that the weapon would become an aid to peace.⁵⁴

Because of this recommendation, and perhaps also because of the continuing prodding of Bush and Conant, Stimson reversed his own position. He concluded that if the United States dropped the bomb on Japan without first informing the Soviet Union, that act might gravely strain Soviet-American relations. Explaining the committee's position to Truman, Stimson proposed that if the president "thought that Stalin was on good terms with him" at the forthcoming Potsdam conference, he would inform Stalin that the United States had developed the bomb, planned to use it against Japan, knew the Soviets were working on the bomb, and looked forward to discussing international control later. This approach left open the option of "atomic diplomacy"⁵⁵

⁵² Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, p. 354 on May 18; "Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting . . . 31 May 1945." At the May 31 meeting, according to the minutes, "Byrnes expressed the fear that if information were given to the Russians even in general terms, Stalin would ask to be brought into the partnership. He felt this to be particularly likely in view of our commitments and pledges of co-operation with the British . . . [and asserted] that the most desirable program would be to push ahead as fast as possible in production and research to make certain we stay ahead and at the same time better our political relations with Russia." Also see *ibid.*, June 1.

⁵³ Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945.

⁵⁴ "Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting . . . 21 June 1945," H-B 100.

⁵⁵ Stimson Diary, July 3, 1945. For advice on this matter, also see Conant and Bush to Harrison, June 22, 1945, and Harrison to Stimson, June 28, 1945, H-B 77. Roger Mankins, the British representative, preferred a policy of greater evasion in dealing with the Soviets. (Memorandum, ca. June 22, 1945, H-B 37.)

The issues of the bomb and the Soviet Union had already intruded in other ways upon policy and planning. Awaiting the bomb, Truman had postponed the Potsdam conference, delayed negotiations with Russia, and hoped that atomic energy would pry some concessions from Russia. Truman explained in late May to Joseph Davies, an advocate of Soviet-American friendship, and in early June to Stimson that he was delaying the forthcoming Potsdam conference until the Alamogordo test, when he would know whether the United States had a workable atomic bomb—what Stimson repeatedly called the “master card.” Truman also told some associates that he was delaying because he wanted to work out budget matters, but it is unlikely that the budget was the controlling reason. Certainly, there was no reason that he should have told Davies, who, unlike Stimson, was not counseling delay of the conference, that he was waiting for the bomb.⁵⁶ Stimson’s counsel of caution, offered on May 15, had apparently triumphed: it would be “a terrible thing to gamble with such high stakes in diplomacy without having your master card in your hand. . . . Over [the] tangled wave of problems the S-1 secret would be dominant.” This was not the counsel for a “delayed showdown,” as some have wrongly argued, but for no showdown and for delaying some negotiations until the bomb test so that policy makers could determine whether they would have to make concessions to the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

For the administration, the atomic bomb, if it worked, had great potential value. It could reduce the importance of early Soviet entry into the war and make American concessions unnecessary. It could also be a lever for extracting concessions from the Soviet Union. On June 6, for example, Stimson discussed with Truman “quid pro quos which should be established for our taking them [Russia] into [a nuclear] partnership. He [Truman] said that he had been thinking of the same things that I was thinking of, namely the settlement of the Polish, Rumanian, Yugoslav-

⁵⁶ Joseph Davies Diary, May 21, 1945, Davies Papers, box 17, Library of Congress; Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945; Stimson to Truman, May 16, 1945, Stimson Papers. Truman already knew that atomic bombs could not be laid on Japan until early August, so he was not delaying the conference until the bomb could be publicly unveiled in combat. (Stimson, memorandum, April 25, 1945.) In early March, the Alamogordo test was scheduled for July 4, but on June 9 it was postponed until July 13, and on June 30 until July 16. (Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, p. 376.) On May 15, Truman cited domestic matters, especially the budget, for delaying the meeting; *FRUS: Conference of Berlin (Potsdam)*, (Washington, 1960, 2 vols.), I, p. 13 (hereafter *Potsdam Papers*).

⁵⁷ Stimson Diary, May 15, 1945. Also see *ibid.*, May 14, 1945, and Stimson to Truman May 16, 1945. Cf., Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, esp. p. 58, who finds a carefully calibrated, elaborate “strategy of delay [of confrontation],” allegedly advanced by Stimson on or about April 25—though there is no evidence of such counsel then in available records. (Stimson Diary, April 25, 1945; Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 87.)

ian, and Manchurian problems." There is no evidence that they were planning explicitly to threaten the Soviets to gain these concessions, but, obviously, they realized that the Soviets would regard an American nuclear monopoly as threatening and would yield on some issues in order to terminate that monopoly and thereby reduce, or eliminate, the threat. Neither Stimson nor Truman discussed brandishing the bomb or using it explicitly as a threat to compel concessions.⁵⁸ "Atomic diplomacy," as a conception, advanced no further than the notion of possibly trading in the future an atomic partnership, which was still undefined, for Soviet concessions.

THE BOMB AND DEALING WITH THE SOVIETS

For policy makers, the atomic weapons scheduled for combat use against Japan were intimately connected with the problem of Russia. In recent years some historians have focused on this relationship and raised troubling questions: Did the bomb, for policy makers, constitute an alternative to Soviet intervention in the Pacific war? Did they delay or even try to prevent Soviet entry because the bomb made it unnecessary? If so, did they do this in order to use the bomb? Was the bomb dropped on Japan primarily to influence Russia? Did the bomb influence American policy at Potsdam?⁵⁹

At Yalta, Roosevelt had granted the Soviet Union concessions in China in order to secure Soviet entry into the Pacific war, which Stalin promised, within two to three months after V-E Day (May 8). Stalin made it clear that Soviet entry would await a Sino-Soviet pact ratifying these concessions.⁶⁰ At the time of Yalta, American military planners were counting on a Soviet attack in Manchuria to pin down the Kwantung army there and hence stop Japan from shifting these forces to her homeland to meet an American invasion.⁶¹

But by April, war conditions changed and military planners revised their analysis: Japan no longer controlled the seas and therefore could not shift her army, so Soviet entry was not essential.⁶² In May, the State Department asked Stimson whether Soviet participation "at the earliest possible moment" was so necessary that the United States should abide by

⁵⁸ Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945.

⁵⁹ See Bernstein, "The Atomic Bomb . . . Historiographical Controversy, pp. 1-6, 9-16; Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, *passim*.

⁶⁰ *FRUS: Yalta*, pp. 369-379, 384, 834-840.

⁶¹ Department of Defense, *The Entry of the Soviet Union into the War Against Japan: Military Plans, 1941-1945* (Washington, 1955), p. 43 (hereafter *Entry of Soviet Union*).

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 61-68.

the Far East section of the Yalta agreement.⁶³ Stimson concluded that the Soviets would enter the war for their own reasons, at their schedule, and with little regard to any American action, that the Yalta concessions would be largely within the grasp of Soviet military power, and that Soviet assistance would be useful, but not essential, if an American invasion was necessary. If there is an invasion, "Russian entry," he wrote, "will have a profound military effect in that almost certainly it will materially shorten the war and thus save American lives."⁶⁴ But if the bomb worked, he implied in other discussions, then an invasion would probably not be necessary and Soviet help would be less important.⁶⁵ As a result, he urged a delay in settling matters with Russia on the Far East until after the Alamogordo test, and the president apparently followed this counsel.

On June 18, when the joint chiefs of staff, the civilian secretaries, and the president discussed plans for an American invasion of Kyushu on about November 1 and of Honshu during the following March, the issue of Soviet intervention again received attention. General George Marshall, the army chief of staff and the military leader Truman most admired, presented as his own views a JCS memorandum:

It seems that if the Japanese are ever willing to capitulate short of complete military defeat in the field they will do it when faced by the completely hopeless prospect occasioned by (1) destruction already wrought by air bombardment and sea blockade, coupled with (2) a landing on Japan indicating the firmness of our resolution, and also perhaps coupled with (3) the entry or threat of Russian entry into the war.

With reference to clean-up of the Asiatic mainland, our objective should be to get the Russians to deal with the Japs [sic] in Manchuria (and Korea). . . .

An important point about Russian participation in the war is that the impact of Russian entry on the already hopeless Japanese *may well be the decisive action* levering them into capitulation at that time or shortly thereafter *if we land in Japan.* [Emphasis added.]

Marshall's counsel was ambiguous and should have raised questions at this meeting. In one place, he said that Soviet entry, when combined with an invasion and other continued destruction, might lead to Japan's capitulation. In another place, he suggested that Soviet entry alone, or followed by an American invasion, might lead to Japan's capitulation. And he

⁶³ Joseph Grew to Stimson and James Forrestal, May 12, 1945, Grew Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, and reprinted in *Entry of Soviet Union*, pp. 69–70.

⁶⁴ Stimson to Grew, May 21, 1945, and reprinted in *Entry of Soviet Union*, pp. 70–71. Forrestal concurred. (*Ibid.*, p. 71.)

⁶⁵ Stimson Diary, May 15 and 14, 1945.

was unclear whether Russia's "clean-up of the Asiatic mainland" was necessary if Japan surrendered without an invasion.⁶⁶

None apparently noted the ambiguities or raised questions about Marshall's meaning. After the group approved plans for an invasion of Kyushu on about November 1, with possibly 30,000 casualties in the first thirty days, Truman indicated that one of his "objectives [at Potsdam] . . . would be to get from Russia all the assistance in the war that was possible." Admiral Ernest L. King, chief of Naval Operations, pointed out, according to the minutes, that the Soviets "were not indispensable and he did not think we should go as far as to beg them to come in. While the cost of defeating Japan would be greater, there was no question in his mind but that we should handle it alone. . . . [R]ealization of this fact should greatly strengthen the President's hand" at Potsdam.⁶⁷ Admiral Leahy also expressed a "jaundiced view" of the need for Soviet participation.⁶⁸

Truman claimed that he went to Potsdam to secure Soviet entry and that he never changed his position.⁶⁹ The first part of that claim is correct, but the second part is dubious, for Truman did nothing substantive at Potsdam to encourage Soviet intervention and much to delay or prevent it. The successful test at Alamogordo emphasized to policy makers that prompt Soviet entry was no longer necessary and that the United States might even be able to end the war without Soviet entry. After the unexpectedly glowing report of the test, Truman wanted to know whether Marshall considered Soviet entry necessary. "Marshall felt," Stimson recorded, "that now with our new weapon we would not need the assistance of the Russians to conquer Japan."⁷⁰ "The bomb as a merely probable weapon had seemed a weak reed on which to rely, but the bomb as a colossal reality was very different," Stimson later ex-

⁶⁶ *Potsdam Papers*, I, pp. 904–905.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 903–910.

⁶⁸ Leahy, *I Was There*, p. 385.

⁶⁹ Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 411; cf., Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime*, p. 297. Kolko, *Politics of War*, pp. 556–563 claims that there was a clear split between Byrnes and Truman on the matter of Soviet entry and that the president, along with his other associates, continued to want and never sought to delay Soviet entry. But on pp. 560–561 Kolko briefly wavers. Also see Walter Schoenberger, *Decision of Destiny* (Athens, Ohio, 1969), pp. 219–221.

⁷⁰ Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945; Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 637: "The news from Alamogordo . . . made it clear to the Americans that further diplomatic efforts to bring the Russians into the Pacific war were largely pointless." Stimson had reached the position, Bundy recalled more than a decade later, "I hope to hell he [Stalin] doesn't come in." (Bundy oral history memoir, oral history collection, Columbia University.) For the opposite recollection, see Herbert Feis, "Talk with Mr. Harvey Bundy," July 30, 1958, Feis Papers, box 65, Library of Congress.

plained.⁷¹ From Potsdam on July 23, Churchill cabled London: "It is quite clear that the United States do not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan."⁷² The bomb had eliminated the importance of Russia's prompt entry, since the planned American invasion no longer seemed necessary. Invasion and the bomb were the likely alternatives. As a result, Truman had no reason to offer concessions to secure early Soviet entry.

Could the United States keep the Soviet Union out of the war? Did policy makers try to do this? In mid-July Soviet troops were stationed on the Manchurian border and would soon be ready to intervene. Marshall concluded that even if Japan surrendered on American terms before Soviet entry, Russia could still march into Manchuria and take virtually whatever she wanted there in the surrender terms.⁷³ Truman, if he believed Marshall's analysis, had nothing to gain politically from deterring Soviet entry, unless he feared, as did Stimson, that the Soviets might try to reach the Japanese homeland and put in a "claim to occupy and help rule it."⁷⁴ Perhaps Truman followed the counsel of Stimson and Byrnes, who, for slightly different reasons, were eager to restrain the Soviets.

Byrnes, unlike Stimson, was sometimes naively optimistic. Part of the

⁷¹ Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 637. The quote cited in n. 70 directly precedes this sentence.

⁷² Churchill, in John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy* (London, 1956), p. 292, Vol. VI in *History of the Second World War*. Churchill reached this conclusion when he learned from Byrnes that the secretary was not pushing for a Sino-Soviet settlement.

⁷³ Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945. Strangely, in view of Churchill's own judgment that Soviet entry was neither necessary nor desirable and of Marshall's counsel, Truman and Churchill approved on July 24 a military plan that included, "Encourage Russian entry. . . ." The JCS in this report also noted that the defeat of Japan's armies in her homeland, and her subsequent surrender, still left the "possibility" that her armies on the mainland might not surrender. Presumably, this meant that the military thought that Soviet entry might be necessary. (*Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 1462-1463; *Entry of Soviet Union*, p. 90. Also see Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 292-295. Bundy in his oral history, p. 262, also recollected that the military still wanted Soviet entry.) By August 10, Truman intended to demand complete surrender, including that of the Kwantung army on the mainland. ("Statement of Cong. Mike Mansfield," August 10, 1945, OF, 197B, HSTL.) On August 3, Truman told associates, in Walter Brown's words, "that we did not need the Russians" to enter the war. ("W.B.'s Notes," August 3, 1945, James F. Byrnes Papers, folder 602, Robert Muldrow Cooper Library, Clemson University.)

⁷⁴ Stimson Diary, August 10, 1945. In his memo of July 16 to Truman, Stimson was willing to countenance a "token role for the Soviets in the occupation if they provided "credible participation in the conquest of Japan." (Stimson Papers.) It is reasonable to conclude that he preferred, if possible, to exclude them from the occupation. For a substantiating recollection, see H. Bundy, "Notes on the Use by the United States of the Atomic Bomb," September 25, 1946, TSMEDF 20. Cf., Stimson, "Conference with Stalin . . ." July 25, 1945, in Stimson Diary.

time he hoped to keep the Soviet Union out of the war, and not simply delay her entry, in order to protect China. On July 28, he explained to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal (in Forrestal's words): "Byrnes said he was most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians got in, with particular reference to Dairen and Port Arthur."⁷⁵ These were the areas that both Stimson and Marshall acknowledged the Soviets could seize. Walter Brown, the friend who accompanied the secretary to Potsdam, recorded in his diary notes for July 20 Byrnes's strategy: "JFB determined to outmaneuver Stalin on China. Hopes Soong [the Chinese foreign minister] will stand firm and then Russians will not go in war. Then he feels Japan will surrender before Russia goes to war and this will save China." On July 24, four days later, Brown noted that Byrnes was linking the bomb and Japan's surrender but was less optimistic about excluding Russia: "JFB still hoping for time, believing after atomic bombing Japan will surrender and Russia will not get in so much on the kill, thereby [not] being in a position to press for claims against China."⁷⁶

Byrnes purposely impeded Sino-Soviet negotiations in order to *prevent* the Soviets from entering the war. Did Truman support Byrnes for the *same* reasons?—as Byrnes claimed⁷⁷ later and as Truman obliquely denied.⁷⁸ Perhaps. But, more likely, Truman supported his secretary's strategy for a different reason: the early entry of the Soviets was no longer important and, therefore, Truman did not want Chiang to make the required concessions, which could later weaken Chiang's government. In addition, Truman *may* have concluded that Russia's delayed entry would weaken her possible claims for a role in the postwar occupation government in Japan.

Why didn't Truman invite Stalin to sign the Potsdam Proclamation of July 26 calling for Japan's surrender?⁷⁹ Some analysts argued later that

⁷⁵ Forrestal Diary, July 28, 1945, also reprinted in Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, p. 78.

⁷⁶ "W. B.'s Notes," July 20 and 24, 1945, folder 602. Also see Warren Austin, memorandum (on discussion with Byrnes), August 20, 1945, Austin Papers, University of Vermont Library, called to my attention by Thomas G. Paterson.

⁷⁷ Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime*, pp. 297–298, 291; Feis, "HF mtg w/Byrnes 2/27/58," Feis Papers, box 68. On July 17, according to Leahy, Byrnes and Truman agreed that "Stalin would enter the war whether or not such Chinese concessions are made, and will thereafter satisfy Soviet demands regardless of . . . the Chinese attitude. . . ." (Leahy Diary, July 17, 1945, Leahy Papers, Library of Congress.) On impeding the settlement, see messages of July 23, 28, 29, 1945 in *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 1241, 1245.

⁷⁸ Feis, "Talk with Mr. Harvey Bundy," in which Feis mentions that Truman, in an earlier interview, denied that Byrnes had ever conveyed this purpose.

⁷⁹ For a lame explanation, see Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime*, pp. 296–299; "W. B.'s Notes," July 27, 1945, folder 54; *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 449–450. For later evasions

this omission was part of a devious strategy: that Truman wanted to use the bomb and feared that Stalin's signature, tantamount to a declaration of war, might catapult Japan to surrender, thereby making a nuclear attack impossible.⁸⁰ The major difficulty with this interpretation is that it exaggerates occasional, sometimes ambiguous, statements about the *possible* impact of Soviet entry and ignores the fact that this possible shock was not a persistent or important theme in American planning.⁸¹ Truman did not exclude the Soviets from the Proclamation in order to use the bomb. The skimpy, often oblique evidence *suggests* a different, more plausible explanation and a less devious pattern: he wanted to avoid requesting favors from the Soviets. As a result, he did not try this one possible, but not very likely, way of ending the war without using atomic weapons.

At Potsdam, on July 24, Truman told Stalin casually that the United States had developed "a new weapon of unusual destructive force" for use against Japan but did not specify an atomic weapon.⁸² Why didn't Truman explicitly inform Stalin about the atomic bomb? Was Truman, as some have suggested, afraid that the news would prompt Stalin to hasten Soviet intervention and therefore end the war and make combat use of the bomb impossible? Did Truman simply want to delay Soviet entry and did he, like Byrnes, fear that his news would have the opposite effect? Did Truman think that the destruction wrought by the bomb would

when Stalin asked the United States to request Soviet entry formally, see Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 444; Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, pp. 208–209; *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 1333–1334.

⁸⁰ Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 178–182.

⁸¹ For occasional evidence on this theme, see: Marshall in meeting of June 18, 1945, in *Potsdam Papers*, I, pp. 904–910, esp. pp. 904–905; Combined Intelligence Committee, "Estimate of the Enemy Situation," July 8, 1945, in *Entry of Soviet Union*, pp. 86–88. This report concluded: "An entry of the Soviet Union into the war would finally convince the Japanese of the inevitability of complete defeat" and presumably lead to surrender if the unconditional surrender terms, especially to allow continuation of the Imperial institution, were modified (p. 87). See Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 290–292, who concludes that Soviet entry was seen as "insurance and not as a solution in itself." On earlier expectation about Soviet entry, see Forrestal Diary, December 7, 1944, and for contemporary estimates, see Minutes of July 23, 1945, in Minutes of the General Council, Office of Deputy Chief of Staff, vol. for July–September 1945, Feis Papers, box 67. Also see Stimson Diary, June 19, 1945.

⁸² Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 416; Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, p. 263; Leahy, *I Was There*, p. 429; Winston Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston, 1953), pp. 669–670. Byrnes thought that Stalin did not understand Truman's meaning "but by tomorrow," according to Brown, the secretary "thinks the importance of what Truman told Stalin will sink in . . ." ("W.B.'s Notes," July 24, 1945, folder 54). Stalin apparently did understand. Georgii Zhukov, *The Memoirs of Marshall Zhukov* (London, 1971), p. 675.

not impress the Soviets as forcefully if they were informed in advance? Why did Truman reject the counsel of the Interim Committee, of Stimson, and even of Churchill, who, after the flowing news of the Alamogordo test, "was not worried about giving the Russians information on the matter but was rather inclined to use it as an argument in our favor in the negotiations"?⁸³

Many of these questions cannot be definitively answered on the basis of the presently available evidence, but there is enough evidence to refute one popular interpretation: that Truman's tactic was part of an elaborate strategy to prevent or retard Soviet entry *in order* to delay Japan's surrender and *thereby* make combat use of the bomb possible. That interpretation claims too much. Only the first part can be supported by some, albeit indirect, evidence: that he was probably seeking to delay or prevent Soviet entry. Byrnes later said that he feared that Stalin would order an immediate Soviet declaration of war if he realized the importance of this "new weapon"⁸⁴—advice Truman dubiously claimed he never received.⁸⁵ Truman was not trying to postpone Japan's surrender *in order* to use the bomb. In addition to the reasonable theory that he was seeking to prevent or retard Soviet entry, there are two other plausible, complementary interpretations of Truman's behavior. First, he believed, as had some of his advisers earlier, that a combat demonstration would be more impressive to Russia without an advance warning⁸⁶ and therefore he concealed the news. Second, he was also ill-prepared to discuss atomic energy with Stalin, for the president had not made a decision about postwar atomic

⁸³ Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945, paraphrases Churchill, who had reversed his position of July 17, as quoted in *Triumph and Tragedy*, p. 637, and cited in Stimson Diary, July 17, 1945.

⁸⁴ Feis, "HF mtg w/Byrnes 2/27/58," Feis Papers, and copy in Byrnes Papers, folder 92; Feis, "Talk with Former Secretary of State . . . Byrnes (c. November 25, 1957)," Feis Papers.

⁸⁵ Interview with Truman, January 14, 1962; Feis, "Talk with Mr. Harvey Bundy," July 30, 1958.

⁸⁶ Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945. In 1949, Leo Szilard, the nuclear physicist, recalled his meeting of May 28, 1945, in which "Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of Japan in order to win the war. . . . Byrnes's view [was] that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable in Europe. . . ." Leo Szilard, "A Personal History of the Atomic Bomb," University of Chicago *Roundtable*, no. 601 (September 25, 1949), pp. 13–14. Note that Byrnes was not claiming, according to Szilard, that the United States could end the war *as speedily* without using the bomb. In fact, Szilard, in this recollection, said that policy makers in late May "knew that . . . we could win the war in another six months" without the bomb. Byrnes allegedly later denied Szilard's recollection about their conversation. George Curry, "James F. Byrnes," in *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, XIV (New York, 1965), p. 344, n. 11. In 1960, Szilard slightly, but significantly, revised his earlier recollection: "Byrnes thought that the possession of the bomb would make the Russians more manageable in Europe." Leo Szilard, in "Was A-Bomb on Ja-

policy and how to exploit the bomb, and probably did not want to be pressed by Stalin about sharing nuclear secrets.⁸⁷ Perhaps all three theories collectively explain Truman's evasive tactics.

Even without explicit disclosure, the bomb strengthened American policy at Potsdam. The Alamogordo test stiffened Truman's resolve, as Churchill told Stimson after the meeting of the Big Three on July 22: "Truman was evidently much fortified . . . and . . . he stood up to the Russians in a most emphatic and decisive manner, telling them as to certain demands that they absolutely could not have."⁸⁸ Probably, also, the bomb explains why Truman pushed more forcefully at Potsdam for the Soviets to open up Eastern Europe.⁸⁹ It is less clear whether the bomb changed the substance of American policy at Potsdam. Probably Byrnes endorsed a reparations policy allowing the division of Germany because the bomb replaced Germany as a potential counterweight to possible Soviet expansion.⁹⁰

Not only did the bomb strengthen American resolve in dealing with the Soviets, but Stimson and Truman linked the bomb and the Soviet Union in another way: the selection of targets for atomic attacks. Kyoto, a city of religious shrines, was originally on the list, but Stimson removed it, with Truman's approval. Truman "was particularly emphatic in agreeing with my suggestion," Stimson wrote, because

the bitterness . . . caused by such a wanton act might make it impossible during the long post war period to reconcile the Japanese to us in that area rather than to the Russians. It might thus, I pointed out, be the means of preventing what our policy demanded, namely, a sympathetic Japan to the United States in case there should be any aggression by Russia in Manchuria.⁹¹

ALTERNATIVES TO THE USE OF THE BOMB

Scholars and laymen have criticized the combat use of the atomic bomb.

pan a Mistake?" *U.S. News and World Report*, August 15, 1960, p. 69. In this statement, the emphasis was possession, not use.

⁸⁷ See Bernstein, "Quest," pp. 1016–1022.

⁸⁸ Stimson Diary, July 22, 1945. Also see *ibid.*, July 21, 1945 for Truman's comment, according to Stimson, that the bomb "gave him an entirely new feeling of confidence." Bundy, oral history, p. 262, also reported that Truman's approach "hardened." Jonathan Daniels, an associate of Truman, reported Truman's words on the way to Potsdam: "If it explodes, as I think it will, I'll certainly have a hammer on those boys (Russia as well as the Japs)." Daniels Papers, HSTL.

⁸⁹ *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 371–372; Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 150–175; cf., Lisle Rose, *After Yalta: America and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 1972), pp. 47–49, 79.

⁹⁰ *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 277–281, 428–431, 490–491, 877–885, 900–901; Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 165–173.

⁹¹ Stimson Diary, July 24, 1945.

They have contended, among other points, that the bombs were not necessary to end the war, that the administration knew or should have known this, that the administration knew that Japan was on the verge of defeat and *therefore* close to surrender, and that the administration was either short-sighted or had other controlling international-political motives (besides ending the war) for using the bomb. These varying contentions usually focus on the alleged failure of the United States to pursue five alternatives, individually or in combination, in order to achieve Japanese surrender before using the bomb: (1) awaiting Soviet entry, a declaration of war, or a public statement of intent (already discussed); (2) providing a warning and/or a noncombat demonstration (already discussed); (3) redefining unconditional surrender to guarantee the Imperial institution; (4) pursuing Japan's "peace feelers"; or (5) relying upon conventional warfare for a longer period. These contentions assume that policy makers were trying, or should have tried, to avoid using atomic bombs—precisely what they were not trying to do.

In examining these contentions, analysts must carefully distinguish between those writers (like Alperovitz)⁹² who maintain that there were ulterior motives for rejecting alternatives and those (like Hanson Baldwin)⁹³ who regard policy makers as dangerously short sighted but without ulterior motives. It is logically possible to agree with Alperovitz and not Baldwin, or vice versa; but it is impossible logically to endorse both positions.

There were powerful reasons why the fifth alternative—the use of conventional weapons for a longer period *before* using atomic bombs—seemed undesirable to policy makers. The loss of American lives, while perhaps not great, would have been unconscionable and politically risky. How could policy makers have justified to themselves or to other Americans delaying the use of this great weapon and squandering American lives?⁹⁴ Consider the potential political cost at home. In contrast, few Americans were then troubled by the mass killing of enemy citizens, especially if they were yellow. The firebombings of Tokyo, of other Japanese cities, and even of Dresden had produced few cries of outrage in the United States. There was no evidence that most citizens would care that

⁹² Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy and Cold War Essays*, chap. V; P. M. S. Blackett, *Fear, War, and the Bomb* (New York, 1949), pp. 127–142; Norman Cousins and Thomas K. Finletter, "A Beginning for Sanity," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXIX (June 15, 1946), 7–9.

⁹³ Hanson Baldwin, *Great Mistakes of the War* (New York, 1950), pp. 88–107; Ellis M. Zacharias, "The A-Bomb Was Not Needed," *United Nations World*, III (August 1949), 25–29.

⁹⁴ Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 628–633; Bundy, "Notes on the Use . . . of the Atomic Bomb."

the atomic bomb was as lethal as the raids on Dresden or Tokyo. It was unlikely that there would be popular support for relying upon conventional warfare and not using the atomic bomb. For citizens and policy makers, there were few, if any, moral restraints on what weapons were acceptable in war.⁹⁵

Nor were there any powerful advocates within the high councils of the administration who wanted to delay or not use the bomb and rely instead upon conventional warfare—a naval blockade, continued aerial bombings, or both. The advocates of conventional warfare were not powerful, and they did not directly oppose the use of the bomb. Admiral Ernest L. King, chief of Naval Operations, did believe that the invasion and the atomic bomb were not the only alternative tactics likely to achieve unconditional surrender. A naval blockade, he insisted, would be successful. The army, however, he complained, had little faith in sea power and, hence, Truman did not accept his proposal.⁹⁶ Leahy had serious doubts about using the bomb, but as an old explosives expert who had long claimed that the bomb would never work, he carried little weight on this matter. Surprisingly, perhaps, he did not forcefully press his doubts on the president.⁹⁷ Had Marshall plumped for the strategy of stepping up conventional warfare and delaying or not using the bomb, he might have been able to compel a reassessment. He had the respect and admiration of the president and could command attention for his views. But Marshall had no incentive to avoid the use of the bomb, prolong the war, and expend American lives. For him, nuclear weapons and invasion were likely alternatives, and he wanted to avoid invasion.⁹⁸ If the bomb was used as quickly as possible, the invasion might be unnecessary and American lives would be saved.

⁹⁵ Robert Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision, 1939–1950* (New York, 1961), pp. 170–189, 246.

⁹⁶ Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King* (New York, 1952), p. 621.

⁹⁷ Leahy Diary, June 18, 1945; Leahy, *I Was There*, pp. 245, 259, 269, 384–385, 441. Gen. Henry H. Arnold of the army air forces found the atomic bombing of Japan attractive because it allowed the United States to “experiment.” Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York, 1949), pp. 492, 598. Arnold, partly on the basis of Gen. Curtis LeMay’s judgment, concluded in June 1945 that the United States could win the war by conventional bombing and without the full-scale invasion scheduled for about April 1946 (*Ibid.*, pp. 566–568). The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey later concluded that Japan would have surrendered “certainly prior to 31 December . . . and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945” without the atomic bombings, Soviet entry, or an invasion (emphasis added). *Summary Report* (Washington, 1946), p. 26.

⁹⁸ Marshall later concluded that the bombs “precipitated the surrender by months.” J. P. Sutherland, “The Story Gen. Marshall Told Me,” *U.S. News and World Report*, November 2, 1959, p. 52.

For policy makers, the danger was not simply the loss of a few hundred American lives *prior* to the slightly delayed use of the bombs if the United States relied upon conventional warfare for a few more weeks. Rather the risk was that, if the nuclear attacks were even slightly delayed, the scheduled invasion of Kyushu, with perhaps 30,000 casualties in the first month, would be necessary. After the war, it became fashionable to assume that policy makers clearly foresaw and comfortably expected that an atomic bomb or two would shock Japan into a speedy surrender. But the evidence does not support this view. "The abrupt surrender of Japan came more or less as a surprise," Henry H. Arnold, commanding general of the air force, later explained.⁹⁹ Policy makers were planning, if necessary, to drop at least three atomic bombs in August, with the last on about August 24, and more in September.¹⁰⁰ Before Hiroshima, only occasionally did some policy makers imply (but never state explicitly) that one bomb or a few bombs might shock Japan into a prompt surrender: capitulation within a few days or weeks.¹⁰¹ Usually they were less optimistic, sometimes even pessimistic. They often assumed that the war might drag on after the nuclear attacks. Faced with this prospect, policy makers were unprepared to take risks and delay using the bombs. So unsure was Truman of the likelihood of a speedy surrender after the first atomic attack that he left domestic officials unprepared for the surrender and thereby seriously weakened his stabilization program and lost political support at home.¹⁰² Because policy makers feared that the attack on Hiroshima might not speedily end the war, they continued conventional bombing¹⁰³ and also dropped the second bomb.¹⁰⁴ Their aim was to end the war without a costly invasion of Kyushu. According to their analysis,

⁹⁹ Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 598; Groves to Oppenheimer, July 19, 1945, TSMDF 5B; Groves, in US AEC, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, p. 167; Stimson Diary, August 9, 1945. Allegedly Marshall told Maxwell Taylor on July 28 that two atomic bombs, if both exploded, would force Japan's surrender. Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York, 1960), p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Groves to Oppenheimer, July 19, 1945; Sutherland, "The Story Gen. Marshall Told Me," p. 53; entry of June 12, 1947, in David Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal* (New York, 1964), II, pp. 198–199.

¹⁰¹ "W.B.'s Notes," July 20, and 25, 1945; Warren Austin, memorandum (on discussion with Byrnes), August 20, 1945.

¹⁰² Bernstein, "The Truman Administration and the Politics of Inflation," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, esp. chaps. ii–v; Robert P. Patterson to George Harrison, August 2, 1945, and reply, August 8, 1945, H-B 8; Patterson to Samuel Rosenman, August 9, 1945, Rosenman Papers, box 3, HSTL.

¹⁰³ C.C.S. 880/7, in Cabinet Papers 99/39, cat. 1015, Public Records Office, London; Forrestal Diary, August 13, 1945.

¹⁰⁴ Stimson, "Decision," pp. 105–106. The third bomb would have been ready after August 17 or 18, but could not have been used without Truman's express approval. (Groves to Marshall, August 10, 1945, TSMEDF 25Q.) There would have been three

atomic weapons, if employed promptly and combined with conventional attacks, were likely to achieve that goal. Delay was unconscionable, as Stimson later explained.¹⁰⁵

There have also been criticisms of the administration for failing to pursue two other alleged opportunities: (1) redefining the unconditional surrender demands before Hiroshima to guarantee the Imperial institution; and (2) responding to Japan's "peace feelers," which stressed the need for this guarantee. Byrnes and apparently Truman, however, were fearful at times that concessions might strengthen, not weaken, the Japanese military and thereby prolong, not shorten, the war. Some critics imply that Byrnes and Truman were not sincere in presenting this analysis and that they rejected concessions consciously in order to use the bomb.¹⁰⁶ That is incorrect. Other critics believe that these policy makers were sincere but disagree with their assessment¹⁰⁷—especially since some intelligence studies implied the need for concessions on peace terms to shorten the war. Probably the administration was wrong, and these latter critics right, but either policy involved risks and some were very unattractive to Truman.

Truman, as a new president, was not comfortable in openly challenging Roosevelt's policy of unconditional surrender and modifying the terms.¹⁰⁸ That was risky. It could fail and politically injure him at home. Demanding unconditional surrender meant fewer risks at home and, according to his most trusted advisers at times, fewer risks in ending the war speedily. Had his most powerful and trusted advisers pushed for a change in policy, perhaps he might have found reason and will to modify Roosevelt's policy well before Hiroshima. But most of Truman's closest advisers first counseled delay and then some moved into opposition. As a result, he too shifted from delay to opposition. At Potsdam, when Stimson pushed unsuccessfully for providing the guarantee in the Proclamation, Truman refused but told Stimson that he would carefully watch Japan's reactions on this issue and implied that he would yield if it seemed to be the only impediment to surrender.¹⁰⁹ After August 10,

more ready in September and possibly "seven or more" additional bombs in December. (Harrison to Stimson, July 23, 1945, H-B 64.)

¹⁰⁵ Stimson, "Decision," pp. 106–107.

¹⁰⁶ Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 227–237; David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1971), chap. iii. Alperovitz also implies the contrary (pp. 12–14).

¹⁰⁷ Baldwin, *Great Mistakes*, esp. pp. 92–102.

¹⁰⁸ See also Schoenberger, *Decision of Destiny*, pp. 81–82, 94–95. On April 16, 1945, in his speech to Congress, Truman reaffirmed the demand for "unconditional surrender." *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman* (Washington, 1961), 1945, p. 2 (hereafter *Truman Papers*).

¹⁰⁹ Stimson Diary, July 24, 1945.

when Japan made the guarantee the only additional condition, Truman yielded on the issue. He deemed it a tactical problem, not a substantive one. But even then, Byrnes was wary of offering this concession, despite evidence that it would probably end the war promptly—precisely what he wanted in order to forestall Soviet gains in the Far East.¹¹⁰

Within the administration, the issue of redefining the terms of surrender was a subject of discussion for some months before Hiroshima. Since at least April, Joseph Grew, undersecretary of state and at times acting secretary of state, urged the administration to redefine unconditional surrender to permit a guarantee of the Imperial institution. He argued that these moderate terms would speed Japan's surrender and perhaps make an invasion unnecessary.¹¹¹ Within the Department of State, he met opposition from some high-ranking officials, including Dean Acheson and Archibald MacLeish, both assistant secretaries, who regarded the emperor as the bulwark of Japan's feudal-military tradition, which all wanted to destroy, and who feared that the American press and public opinion would be enraged by Grew's proposed concession. Hirohito, Japan's emperor, like Hitler and Mussolini, had become a wartime symbol of a hated enemy, of depravity, of tyranny, and of inhumanity.¹¹²

On May 28, President Truman, perhaps then sympathetic to Grew's proposal, told him to discuss it with Stimson, Forrestal, Marshall, and King.¹¹³ Unlike Acheson and MacLeish, these military leaders approved the principle but apparently agreed with Marshall that publication of softened terms at that time would be premature. Grew later explained, "for certain military reasons, not divulged, it was considered inadvisable for the President to make such a statement just now. The question of timing was the nub of the whole matter according to the views of those present." Though Grew knew about the atomic bomb, its connection with the delay never seemed to occur to him, and he thought that Mar-

¹¹⁰ Forrestal Diary, August 10, 1945; Stimson Diary, August 10, 1945; Truman, *Year of Decisions*, pp. 426–428; Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, p. 209, and *All in One Lifetime*, p. 305.

¹¹¹ Grew to Randall Gould, April 14, 1945, and Grew, memorandum of conference, May 28, 1945, Grew Papers. For similar views in some sectors of military intelligence, see: Ellis Zacharias, *Secret Missions* (New York, 1946), pp. 342–350; Alexander Leighton, *Human Relations in a Changing World* (New York, 1949), pp. 60, 93, 227–291; and Ray Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, 1951), pp. 341–345.

¹¹² Minutes, Secretary's Staff Committee, July 7 and 4, 1945, Edward Stettinius Papers, University of Virginia; *Potsdam Papers*, I, pp. 895–897; Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearings on the Institute of Pacific Relations*, 82 Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 728–729.

¹¹³ Grew, memorandum of conference, May 28, 1945; Truman, *Year of Decisions*, pp. 416–417.

shall and others were concerned *only* about the impact of the announcement on the fighting on Okinawa.¹¹⁴ In his diary, Stimson explained the opposition more fully: "It was an awkward meeting because there were people present . . . [before] whom I could not discuss the real features which would govern the whole situation, namely S-1 [the atomic bomb]." Stimson never revealed this to Grew,¹¹⁵ who reported to Truman that they decided to postpone the statement—a position that the president endorsed.

Some analysts have argued, wrongly, that this evidence indicates that Stimson and the others blocked the statement *because* they wanted to use the bomb and did not want to risk a peace before the bomb could be used.¹¹⁶ That is incorrect. In view of Stimson's frequent judgments that the United States would issue a warning *after* the atomic bombing but before the scheduled attack on Kyushu, his objection was what Grew reported—an issue of timing.¹¹⁷ On July 2, for example, when Stimson proposed as part of the warning a guarantee of the Imperial institution, he was apparently assuming, as he stated explicitly a week earlier, that he hoped "to get Japan to surrender by giving her a warning after she had been sufficiently *pounded possibly with S-1*."¹¹⁸ Not until July 16, when Stimson learned of "the recent news of attempted approaches" by Japan for peace did he shift and call for a prompt warning *before* the atomic attacks.¹¹⁹

"There was a pretty strong feeling" by mid-June, Stimson wrote in his diary, "that it would be deplorable if we have to go through [with] the

¹¹⁴ Grew, memorandum of conference, May 29, 1945, Grew Papers. Grew later quoted the same phrase in his letter to Stimson, February 12, 1947, Grew Papers.

¹¹⁵ Stimson Diary, May 29, 1945. For reference only to Okinawa as the reason, see Stimson to Grew, June 19, 1947, Grew Papers. For fears of appearing weak, see Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 628.

¹¹⁶ Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, p. 110.

¹¹⁷ Stimson Diary, June 19, June 26, July 2, 1945; *Potsdam Papers*, I, pp. 887–888. See Stimson Diary, June 19, 1945 and Forrestal Diary, June 19, 1945, for differing estimates by Stimson and Grew on Truman's willingness to provide a guarantee. Also see the State Department briefing paper of July 3, 1945, that concluded that a guarantee might well speed surrender (*Potsdam Papers*, I, p. 886). Forrestal and Grew were both eager to have Japan as a possible postwar counterweight to Soviet power in the Far East.

¹¹⁸ Stimson, memorandum, July 2, 1945, Stimson Papers, reprinted in Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 620–624. Stimson suggested allowing a "constitutional monarchy," presumably with retention of the emperor, and the War Department added the provision: Japan might be permitted "a constitutional monarchy under the present dynasty if it be shown to the complete satisfaction of the world that such a government will never again aspire to aggression." (*Potsdam Papers*, I, pp. 893–894.) See Stimson Diary, June 26, 1945 for quote in text (emphasis added) and need for "every effort . . . to shorten the war."

¹¹⁹ Stimson, memorandum for the president, July 16, 1945, Stimson Papers.

military program with all its stubborn fighting to a finish."¹²⁰ On June 18, Grew again went to Truman with his proposal, and the president told him, in Grew's words, that he "liked the idea [but] he had decided to hold this up until it could be discussed at the Big Three meeting" starting on July 16. Grew properly lamented that the government was missing an opportunity but did not speculate on whether the president had ulterior motives.¹²¹ Truman did not. A few hours later, he uneasily told associates that he, too, thought the requirement of unconditional surrender might drag out the war; that with "that thought in mind . . . [he] had left the door open for Congress to take appropriate action . . . [but] he did not feel that he could take any action at this time to change public opinion on the matter."¹²² Truman, apparently uneasy about departing from Roosevelt's policy, later explained that he delayed the guarantee until what he regarded as a more propitious time—the Potsdam conference, when the allies, by signing the proclamation, could forcefully demonstrate their "united purpose."¹²³

Had Cordell Hull, former secretary of state, Byrnes, and the JCS not intervened, Truman probably would have included in the Potsdam Proclamation a provision guaranteeing the Imperial institution. The provision was in early drafts. But Byrnes deleted it when Hull warned that it might stiffen Japan's resistance, and, if it failed, it could create serious political problems for the administration at home.¹²⁴ The military chiefs, perhaps independently, also moved to delete the provision. Unlike Hull, they feared, among other problems, that the "guarantee would make it difficult or impossible to utilize the authority of the Emperor to direct a surrender of the Japanese forces in the outlying areas as well as in Japan proper."¹²⁵ The guarantee, then, was not removed for ulterior purposes

¹²⁰ Stimson Diary, June 19, 1945.

¹²¹ Grew, memorandum of conference, June 18, 1945, Grew Papers. Also see *ibid.*, June 15 and 16, 1945.

¹²² *Potsdam Papers*, I, p. 909; cf., McCloy in Forrestal Diary, March 8, 1947, who claimed to recall that Truman endorsed "a political offensive" to inform Japan that she could retain the emperor.

¹²³ Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 417, simply said "Allies" and did not explicitly include or exclude Russia. The draft proclamation included the possibility of Russia. Had Truman been eager to issue the proclamation in mid-June, he could have approached Chiang and Churchill then and not waited more than five weeks.

¹²⁴ Hull, in Grew to Byrnes, July 16, and reply, July 17, 1945, *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 1267–1268. Ironically, Grew worried on July 6 that some people around Truman would remove the guarantee because they opposed any effort, in Forrestal's words, "to get the Japanese war over with before Russia has an opportunity to enter." (Forrestal Diary, July 6, 1945.)

¹²⁵ *Potsdam Papers*, II, p. 1269; I, p. 40. The JCS proposed: "Subject to suitable guarantees against further acts of aggression, the Japanese people will be free to choose their own form of government" (p. 1269). See *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 36–37 for a

(because the administration wanted to use the bomb) but because advisers, with more power than Stimson and Grew, triumphed. Neither of these older men was close to Truman. Grew was headed for a quick retirement and was left behind in Washington when the president and top policy makers journeyed to Potsdam. Stimson, also headed for retirement, had so little influence by July that he was compelled to beg and scheme to attend the Potsdam conference and, while there, he was shunted to the side and seldom informed of negotiations.¹²⁶

Grew long maintained that America could have achieved peace without using atomic bombs if the United States had modified its demands and guaranteed the Imperial institution.¹²⁷ In 1948, Stimson provided some support for this position: "It is possible, in the light of the final surrender, that a clearer and earlier exposition of American willingness to retain the Emperor would have produced an earlier ending to the war. Only on this question did [Stimson] . . . later believe," he wrote in his "autobiography," "that history might find that the United States, by its delay in stating its position, had prolonged the war." By implication, he was also criticizing the wartime fear—that he sometimes shared with Byrnes and most military advisers—that conciliatory offers would be interpreted in Japan "as an indication of [American] weakness" and thereby prolong the war.¹²⁸ Probably policy makers were wrong in not acting earlier.

Let us look at the remaining, but connected, alternative—pursuing Japan's "peace feelers." Japan's so-called peace feelers were primarily a series of messages from the foreign minister to his nation's ambassador in Moscow, who was asked to investigate the possibility of having the Soviets serve as intermediaries in negotiating a peace.¹²⁹ American intelligence intercepted and decoded all the messages. Most, if not all, were sent on to Potsdam, where Truman and Byrnes had access to them.¹³⁰

discussion of the July 8, 1945, intelligence estimate that a guarantee of the Imperial institution might produce a surrender.

¹²⁶ Stimson Diary, July 3, 2, 19, 1945. Some analysts, in using the diary, have erred seriously by treating it as an accurate record portraying Truman's beliefs and commitments, and have not understood that Truman sometimes agreed politely with the aged secretary and then moved in another, even in the opposite, direction.

¹²⁷ Grew to Stimson, February 12, 1947; Eugene Dooman to Stimson, June 30, 1947, both in Grew Papers; Grew, *Turbulent Era* (Boston, 1952, 2 vols.), II, pp. 1417–1442.

¹²⁸ Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 628–629.

¹²⁹ The messages are reprinted in *Potsdam Papers*, I, pp. 874–883; II, pp. 1248–1264, 1291–1298. Also see *FRUS*, 1945, VI, pp. 475–496 on other "peace feelers," and Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, p. 308, for the message of August 2.

¹³⁰ It is difficult to determine whether all were sent to Potsdam and what messages Byrnes and Truman read. See *Potsdam Papers*, I, p. 873; *Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 74–77; *Forrestal Diary*, July 13, 15, 28, 1945; "W.B.'s Notes," July 24, 1945, folder 54; Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime*, p. 297.

Both men showed little interest in them, and may not even have read all of them, apparently because the proposed concessions were insufficient to meet American demands and because Truman and Byrnes had already decided that the peace party in Japan could not succeed until American attacks—including atomic bombs—crushed the military's hopes. The intercepted and decoded messages fell short of American expectations. Not only did Japan's foreign minister want to retain the Imperial institution, which was acceptable to some policy makers, but he also wanted a peace that would maintain his nation's "honor and existence," a phrase that remained vague.¹³¹ As late as July 27, the day after the Potsdam Proclamation, when Japan's foreign minister was planning a special peace mission to Russia, he was still unwilling or unable to present a "concrete proposal" for negotiations.¹³² What emerges from his decoded correspondence is a willingness by some elements in Japan's government to move toward peace, their fear of opposition from the military, and their inability to be specific about terms. Strangely, perhaps, though they feared that Stalin might be on the verge of entering the war, they never approached the United States directly to negotiate a peace settlement. For Truman and Byrnes, Japan was near defeat but not near surrender when the three powers issued the Potsdam Proclamation on July 26. When Japan's premier seemed to reject it,¹³³ the president and secretary of state could find confirmation for their belief that the peace party could not triumph in Japan without more American "aid"—including nuclear attacks.¹³⁴

Given the later difficulties of Japan's peace party, even after the atomic bombings, after Soviet entry, and after more large-scale conventional bombings, top American policy makers could find evidence in the ambiguous record for their assessment that Japan's leaders were not ready

¹³¹ See *Potsdam Papers*, II, pp. 1249 and 1258 for "honor and existence," and see p. 1261 for the foreign minister's proposal that Japan would accept a peace based upon the principles of the Atlantic Charter—terms outlined by Capt. Ellis Zacharias, whom Forrestal had appointed to broadcast peace terms.

¹³² *Potsdam Papers*, II, p. 1291.

¹³³ See *Potsdam Papers*, II, p. 1293 for a translation of the prime minister's response to the proclamation. And see *ibid.*, n. 2, for the controversy about the meaning of *mokusatsu* in his reply.

¹³⁴ Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 626, 628; Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, p. 308. At a meeting of the staff committee of the secretary of state on July 25, 1945, MacLeish complained that "public discussion [in America] of Japanese surrender terms . . . [is being used by] the Japanese . . . to prove that the United States is war-weary . . ."—a position endorsed by others present. (Secretary's Staff Committee minutes, July 25, 1945, Notter Files, box 304, Department of State Records, RG 59, National Archives.)

to surrender before Hiroshima.¹³⁵ More troubling were American policy makers' wartime convictions that any concessions or pursuit of unsure "peace feelers" might stiffen resistance. Most American leaders were fearful of softening demands. War had bred an attitude that any efforts at compromise might indicate to the enemy America's flaccidity of spirit and weakness of will. Toughness, for most policy makers, seemed to promise success.

Looking back upon these years, Americans may well lament the unwillingness of their leaders to make some concessions at this time and to rely upon negotiations before using the bombs. That lament, however, is logically separable from the unfounded charges that policy makers consciously avoided the "peace feelers" *because* they wanted to drop the bombs in order to intimidate the Soviets. It is true that American leaders did not cast policy in order to avoid using the atomic bombs. Given their analysis, they had no reason to avoid using these weapons. As a result, their analysis provokes ethical revulsion among many critics, who believe that policy makers should have been reluctant to use atomic weapons and should have sought, perhaps even at some cost in American lives, to avoid using them.

WHY THE BOMB WAS USED

Truman inherited the assumption that the bomb was a legitimate weapon to use to end the war. No policy maker ever effectively challenged this conception. If the combat use of the bomb deeply troubled policy makers morally or politically, they might have been likely to reconsider their assumption and to search ardently for other alternatives. But they were generally inured to the mass killing of civilians¹³⁶ and much preferred

¹³⁵ Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 628; Samuel E. Morison, "Why Japan Surrendered," *Atlantic Monthly*, CCVI (October 1960), 43-47; Byrnes, in "Was A-Bomb on Japan a Mistake," pp. 65-66. For intelligent but too brief speculation on the possibility of United States concessions producing an earlier surrender without awaiting atomic bombings, see Robert J. C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford, Calif., 1954), pp. 230-232.

¹³⁶ See Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945 for the secretary's hopes that the air force would practice "precision bombing" because he did not want the United States to "get the reputation of outdoing Hitler in atrocities" and because he wanted substantial undamaged areas left so that "the new weapon would have a fair background to show its strength." Also see "Notes of the Interim Committee . . .," May 31 and June 1, 1945. For earlier concern about United States attacks on enemy civilians, see Stimson Diary, March 5, May 16, June 1, 1945. For United States attitudes, see Batchelder, *Irreversible Decision*, pp. 170-189; W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate (eds.), *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago, 1953, 5 vols.), V, pp. 608-644; Kolko, *Politics of War*, pp. 539-540.

to sacrifice the lives of Japanese civilians to those of American soldiers.¹³⁷ As a result, they were committed to using the bomb *as soon as possible* to end the war. "The dominant objective was victory," Stimson later explained. "If victory could be speeded by using the bomb, it should be used; if victory must be delayed in order to use the bomb, it should *not* be used. So far as . . . [I] knew, this general view was fully shared by the President and his associates."¹³⁸ The morality of war confirmed the dictates of policy and reinforced the legacy that Truman had inherited. Bureaucratic momentum added weight to that legacy, and the relatively closed structure of decision making served also to inhibit dissent and to ratify the dominant assumption.

Had policy makers concluded that the use of the bomb would impair Soviet-American relations and make the Soviets intransigent, they might have reconsidered their assumption. But their analysis indicated that the use of the bomb would aid, not injure, their efforts to secure concessions from the Soviets. The bomb offered a bonus. The promise of these likely advantages probably constituted a subtle deterrent to any reconsideration of the use of the atomic bomb. Policy makers rejected the competing analysis advanced by the Franck Committee:

Russia, and even allied countries which bear less mistrust of our ways and intentions, as well as neutral countries, will be deeply shocked. It will be very difficult to persuade the world that a nation which was capable of secretly preparing and suddenly releasing . . . [the bomb] is to be trusted in its proclaimed desire of having such weapons abolished by international agreement.¹³⁹

Instead, policy makers had come to assume that a combat demonstration would advance, not impair, the interests of peace—a position shared by Conant, Oppenheimer, Arthur H. Compton, Nobel laureate and director of the Chicago Metallurgical Laboratory, and Edward Teller, the physicist and future father of the hydrogen bomb.¹⁴⁰ In explaining the

¹³⁷ Bush to John Tate, August 23, 1945, OSRD, box 164; Byrnes to B. S. Prince, August 21, 1945, Byrnes Papers, folder 497(2).

¹³⁸ Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 628–629.

¹³⁹ "Political and Social Problems." The version in Alice K. Smith, *A Peril and a Hope: The Scientists' Movement in America, 1945–47* (Chicago, 1965), p. 566, uses "may" in both cases where the verb in the original document is "will."

¹⁴⁰ On Conant, see Stimson to Raymond Gram Swing, February 4, 1947, Stimson Papers. On Compton, Compton to Stimson, June 12, 1945, H-B 76, and *Atomic Quest*, p. 236. On Teller, Teller to Szilard, July 2, 1945, JROP, box 71. Compton, for example, wrote: "without a military demonstration it may be impossible to impress the world with the need for national sacrifices in order to gain lasting security." (Compton to Stimson, June 12.) In May, an engineer on the Manhattan Project submitted a similar statement, which greatly impressed Stimson, who sent it to Marshall. (O. C. Brewster to Truman, May 24, 1945; Stimson to Marshall, May 30, 1945, H-B 77.)

thinking of the scientific advisory panel in recommending combat use of the bomb, Oppenheimer later said that one of the two “overriding considerations . . . [was] the effect of our actions on the stability . . . of the postwar world.”¹⁴¹ Stimson’s assistant, Harvey H. Bundy, wrote in 1946, that some thought “that unless the bomb were used it would be impossible to persuade the world that the saving of civilization in the future would depend on a proper international control of atomic energy.”¹⁴² The bomb, in short, would impress the Soviets.

In addition, there was another possible advantage to using the bomb: retribution against Japan. A few days after Nagasaki, Truman hinted at this theme in a private letter justifying the combat use of the bombs:

Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor. The only language they seem to understand is the one that we have been using to bombard them. When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.¹⁴³

In this letter, one can detect strains of the quest for retribution (the reference to Pearl Harbor), and some might even find subtle strains of racism (Japan was “a beast”). The enemy was a beast and deserved to be destroyed. War, as some critics would stress, dehumanized victors and vanquished, and justified inhumanity in the name of nationalism, of justice, and even of humanity.

In assessing the administration’s failure to challenge the assumption that the bomb was a legitimate weapon to be used against Japan, we may conclude that Truman found no reason to reconsider, that it would have been difficult for him to challenge the assumption, and that there were also various likely benefits deterring a reassessment. For the administration, in short, there was no reason to avoid using the bomb and many reasons making it feasible and even attractive. The bomb was used primarily to end the war *promptly* and thereby to save American lives. There were other ways to end the war, but none of them seemed as effective. They would not produce victory as promptly and seemed to have greater

¹⁴¹ Oppenheimer, in USAEC, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, p. 34. The other consideration, he explained, was “the saving of [American] lives.”

¹⁴² Bundy, “Notes on the Use . . . of the Atomic Bomb,” September 25, 1946.

¹⁴³ Truman to Samuel McCrea Cavert, August 11, 1945, OF 596A, HSTL. Truman, in Byrnes’s words, said in early June that use of the bomb was “regrettable” but necessary and that he was “reluctant to use this weapon . . . [but] saw no way of avoiding it.” Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, pp. 261–262, and *All in One Lifetime*, p. 286. These comments, if made, were ritualistic and did not express serious doubts or reservations—as other sources establish. (Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945; Churchill’s notes for July 18, 1945, in Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 302–303; Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, p. 548; Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 419.)

risks. Even if Russia had not existed, the bombs would have been used in the same way. How could Truman, in the absence of overriding contrary reasons, justify not using the bombs, or even delaying their use, and thereby prolonging the war and sacrificing American lives?

Some who have searched for the causes of Truman's decision to use atomic weapons have made the error of assuming that the question was ever open, that the administration ever carefully faced the problem of *whether* to use the bombs. It was not a carefully weighed decision but the implementation of an assumption. The administration devoted thought to how, not whether, to use them. As Churchill later wrote, "the decision whether or not to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never even an issue."¹⁴⁴

ATOMIC DIPLOMACY AFTER HIROSHIMA

In examining American policy for the few months after Hiroshima, scholars have disagreed on whether the United States practiced "atomic diplomacy."¹⁴⁵ Simply defined, this term means the use of nuclear weapons as threats or as bargaining levers to secure advantages from the Soviet Union. Since there were no *explicit* threats, some scholars have dubiously disposed of the problem by comfortably declaring that there was no "atomic diplomacy"—which they define too narrowly by excluding *implicit* threats.¹⁴⁶ That is too simple and avoids important issues. A full investigation of the complex problem of atomic diplomacy requires detailed attention to a number of questions: Did the United States threaten, or seem to threaten, the Soviet Union? Did observers think so? How did the Soviets react and how did observers interpret their reactions? The following analysis discusses some of the available evidence and briefly indicates answers to these important questions. Because of limitations of space, this section does not prove, but only sketches, an analysis.

¹⁴⁴ Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, p. 639. Also see Truman, *Year of Decisions*, p. 419; and Groves, *Now It Can Be Told*, p. 265. Truman's "decision was one of non-interference—basically, a decision not to upset the existing plans," wrote Groves (p. 265). There is even considerable doubt about when, and under what circumstances, Truman formally approved the use of the bomb. He later recalled a meeting with associates on July 16 but most do not recall that meeting. Will Hillman (ed.), *Mr. President* (New York, 1952), p. 248; cf., Stimson Diary, July 16–17; "W.B.'s Notes," July 16–17, Folders 54 and 602.) The final approval cited Stimson, not Truman. (Marshall to Handy, July 25, 1945, H-B 64.)

¹⁴⁵ See Bernstein, "The Atomic Bomb . . . Historiographical Controversy," pp. 9–16.

¹⁴⁶ Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1967* (New York, 1968), pp. 386–389, 402–408, 414, and Adam Ulam, "Re-reading the Cold War," *Interplay*, II (March–April 1969), 51–53. See also Rose, *After Yalta*, pp. 113–146.

On August 9, the day that Nagasaki was bombed, the president delivered a national address on the Potsdam meeting. The United States, he declared, "would maintain military bases necessary for the complete protection of our interests and of world peace." The secret of the bomb, he promised, would be retained until the world ceased being "lawless." "We must constitute ourselves trustees of this new force—to prevent its misuse, and to turn it into the channels of service to mankind." He also emphasized that the Balkan nations "are not to be the spheres of influence of any one power"—a direct warning to the Soviet Union. Here was the first, albeit muted, statement of atomic diplomacy: the implicit threat that the bomb could roll back Soviet influence from Eastern Europe.¹⁴⁷

"In many quarters," Stimson lamented in late August and early September, the bomb is "interpreted as a substantial offset to the growth of Russian influence on the continent."¹⁴⁸ He complained that Byrnes was wearing the bomb ostentatiously on his hip and hoping to use the weapon to secure his program at the September Conference of Foreign Ministers in London. "His mind is full of his problems," Stimson wrote in his diary. Byrnes "looks to having the presence of the bomb in his pocket, so to speak, as a great weapon to get through the thing. . . ." ¹⁴⁹ Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy concluded, after a long discussion with Byrnes, that he "wished to have the implied threat of the bomb in his pocket during the conference . . . [in London]."¹⁵⁰ This evidence is unambiguous as to Byrnes's intent, and it cannot be ignored or interpreted as misleading. Byrnes had no reason to seek to deceive Stimson and McCloy about his hopes and tactics. Byrnes had no incentive to posture with them or to appear militant, since they opposed his vigorous tactics and instead counseled moderation and international control of atomic energy.

How could the United States employ the bomb in dealing with the Soviet Union? Apparently Byrnes had not decided precisely how to exploit the weapon to strengthen his position. He did not explicitly threaten the Soviets but apparently assumed that the weapon itself would be a sufficient, though implicit, threat.¹⁵¹ Even before Hiroshima, Byrnes

¹⁴⁷ Truman, radio report on Potsdam Conference, August 9, 1945, *Truman Papers*, 1945, pp. 203, 212–213, 210. Also see Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 200–203; and *New York Times*, August 26, 1945.

¹⁴⁸ Stimson, "Memorandum for the President: Proposed Action for Control of Atomic Bombs," September 11, 1945, Stimson Papers, and reprinted in Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 642–646. For similar views, see his earlier draft, August 29, 1945, H-B 20.

¹⁴⁹ Stimson Diary, September 4, 1945.

¹⁵⁰ Stimson Diary, August 12–September 3, 1945, paraphrases McCloy.

¹⁵¹ Stimson Diary, September 4 and August 12–September 3, 1945; Minutes of a Meeting of the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy, October 16, 1945, EW/10–1645,

and others, including Stimson, had assumed that the bomb would impress the Soviet Union with the need for concessions. The bomb, itself, even without any explicit statements, as Conant told Bush, constituted a "threat" to the Soviet Union.¹⁵² Because Byrnes wanted the bomb's power in negotiations and distrusted the Soviets, he opposed Stimson's plea in September for approaching the Soviets promptly and directly on international control of atomic energy.¹⁵³ At the same time, he was urging America's scientists to continue their work to build even more powerful nuclear bombs.¹⁵⁴

At the London Conference, an uneasy Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet foreign minister, twitted Byrnes about America's nuclear monopoly and tried uneasily to minimize its importance. Molotov's humor betrayed Soviet fears. On September 13, three days into the conference, "Molotov asks JFB if he has an atomic bomb in his side pocket. 'You don't know Southerners,' Byrnes replied. 'We carry our artillery in our hip pocket. If you don't cut out all this stalling and let us get down to work I am going to pull an atomic bomb out of my hip pocket and let you have it.'" In response to this veiled threat, according to the informal notes, "Molotov laughed as did the interpreter."¹⁵⁵ Byrnes's barb emphasized American power. A few nights later, after a stormy session during the day, Molotov commented once more, with strained jocularly, that Byrnes had two advantages that the Soviet minister could not match—eloquence and the atomic bomb.¹⁵⁶

In this period, the Soviets never officially admitted great concern or anxiety about America's nuclear monopoly. They never claimed that it actually constituted a threat to their welfare, and they publicly minimized its strategic value.¹⁵⁷ Presumably they adopted these tactics because they did not want to reveal their fears and encourage the United States to continue atomic diplomacy. They even devised stratagems to suggest that they had also developed the bomb. At the London Conference, for example, Molotov contrived a scene where he "accidentally" let

Department of State Records; and Edward Stettinius, "Calendar Notes," September 28, 1945, Stettinius Papers. Also see Davies Journal, June 28, 1945, and Davies Diary, June 28 and 29, 1945, box 19.

¹⁵² Conant to Bush, September 27, 1945, Bush Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵³ Stimson Diary, September 4, 1945; *FRUS*, 1945, II, pp. 55–57, 59–62.

¹⁵⁴ Oppenheimer to E. O. Lawrence, August 30, 1945, Lawrence Papers, Bolton Library, University of California (Berkeley); Hewlett and Anderson, *New World*, pp. 417–424.

¹⁵⁵ "W.B.'s Notes," September 13, 1945, folder 602.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, September 17, 1945.

¹⁵⁷ Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, p. 414; see also Leland Fetzer (trans.), *The Soviet Air Force in World War II* (New York, 1973), pp. 366–377.

slip the statement, "You know we have the atomic bomb," and then was quickly hustled out of the room by an associate.¹⁵⁸ In November, this time in a national address, he implied that the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons.¹⁵⁹ During this period, as later sources made clear, Soviet scientists were rushing to build the bomb.¹⁶⁰

Though Soviet officials at this time never publicly charged the United States with conducting atomic diplomacy, the Soviet media carried oblique charges. A Soviet columnist contended, for example, "The atomic bomb served as a signal to the incorrigible reactionaries all over the world to launch a lynching campaign against the Soviet Union."¹⁶¹ After Truman's militant Navy Day address¹⁶² in late October, Moscow radio charged that the United States was keeping the bomb as part of the American program "to pursue power."¹⁶³

On October 19, J. Robert Oppenheimer complained to Henry Wallace about America's nuclear policy and about Byrnes's attitudes. According to Wallace's diary notes, Oppenheimer "says that Secretary Byrnes' attitude on the bomb has been very bad. It seems that Byrnes has felt that we could use the bomb as a pistol to get what we wanted in international diplomacy. Oppenheimer believes that this method will not work." Oppenheimer, who did not attend the London meeting, did not indicate his source. He had served with Byrnes at some Interim Committee meetings and had later communicated with the secretary on at least a few occasions, so perhaps his conclusion was based upon a conference with Byrnes and knowledge of Byrnes's earlier attitudes. Significantly, Wallace, long a foe of Byrnes on foreign policy, did not challenge Oppenheimer's conclusion. Oppenheimer rightly forecast that the Soviets would rush to build the atomic bomb and that the result would be an arms race. The Soviets, Oppenheimer implied, were worried about their security,

¹⁵⁸ H. K. Calvert to Groves, November 13, 1945, with enclosure, TSMDF 20. For a different interpretation of Soviet attitudes, see Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, p. 414.

¹⁵⁹ Embassy of the Soviet Socialist Republics, *Information Bulletin*, V, November 27, 1945, reprints Moltov's speech of November 6.

¹⁶⁰ Zhukov, *Memoirs*, p. 675.

¹⁶¹ A. Sokolov, "International Cooperation and Its Foes," *New Times*, no. 12 (November 15, 1945), 15; *New York Times*, September 4, October 10, November 3, 1945.

¹⁶² Truman, speech of October 27, 1945, *Truman Papers, 1945*, pp. 431-438.

¹⁶³ M. Tolchenov, "The Atomic Bomb Discussion in the Foreign Press," *New Times*, no. 11 (November 1, 1945), 17; and Joseph Noguee, *Soviet Policy Towards International Control of Atomic Energy* (South Bend, Ind., 1961), pp. 14-16. Also see Byrnes's speech of November 16, 1945, disclaiming that the United States was using the bomb as a diplomatic or military weapon against the Soviets. Department of State, *International Control of Atomic Energy: Growth of a Policy* (Washington, 1947), pp. 121-124.

and his analysis suggested that they were not unreasonable in being uneasy.¹⁶⁴

Some British and American observers stressed that the bomb frightened the Soviets and injured Soviet-American relations. The bomb “overshadowed” the unsuccessful London Conference, Prime Minister Clement Attlee told Truman in October.¹⁶⁵ Clark Kerr, the British ambassador to the Soviet Union, explained the growing bitterness of the Soviet Union toward the United States in terms of the bomb. “When the bomb seemed to them to become an instrument of . . . [American policy, the reaction was] spleen.”¹⁶⁶ Writing from Moscow, the American ambassador, W. Averell Harriman, outlined a similar diagnosis:

Suddenly the atomic bomb appeared and they recognized that it was an offset to the power of the Red Army. This must have revived their old feeling of insecurity. . . . It is revealing that in early September in the Bulgarian elections campaign the Communist Party used posters to the effect that “we are not afraid of the atomic bomb.” This attitude partially explains Molotov’s aggressiveness in London. I have confirmation of this from a former member of the Communist party. It is not without significance that Molotov, in his November 7th [6th] speech bragged about bigger and better weapons [implying the bomb]. The Russian people have been aroused to feel that they must face an antagonistic world. American imperialism is included as a threat to the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁷

In Russia, America’s use of the bomb and her nuclear monopoly undoubtedly provoked anxiety and insecurity. Assessing the impact of the atomic bomb on the Soviet Union after Hiroshima, Alexander Werth, the British correspondent, later concluded, “It was clearly realised that this was a New Fact in the world’s power politics, that the bomb represented a threat to Russia. . . .”¹⁶⁸

The combat use of the bomb against Japan added weight to American demands for freer elections in Eastern Europe and may have helped bring about some Soviet concessions—especially delay of the scheduled election in Bulgaria in August and a broadening of the multiparty ticket there to enlarge the representation of noncommunist groups.¹⁶⁹ When

¹⁶⁴ Henry A. Wallace diary notes, October 19, 1945, Wallace Papers, University of Iowa; also in Blum, *The Price of Vision*, p. 497.

¹⁶⁵ Attlee to Truman, October 16, 1945, Atomic Energy Files, State Department Records, State Department; and reprinted in *FRUS*, 1945, II, pp. 58–59.

¹⁶⁶ Clark Kerr to Ernest Bevin, December 3, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, II, p. 83.

¹⁶⁷ Harriman to Byrnes, November 27, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, V, p. 923.

¹⁶⁸ Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941–1945* (New York, 1964), p. 1044. Also see Reston and Sulzberger in *New York Times*, August 26, 1945.

¹⁶⁹ On Bulgaria, Byrnes’s statement of August 18, 1945, in Department of State *Bulletin*, XIII (August 19, 1945), p. 274; cf., Byrnes in *FRUS*, 1945, IV, pp. 308–309.

the American public and Congress compelled partial demobilization after the war, the bomb constituted a valued counterweight to the large armies that policy makers mistakenly thought the Soviet Union possessed. The military use of the bomb, policy makers presumably assumed, provided some credibility that the United States might use it again, in still undefined situations against the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁰

Though the bomb strengthened American policy and partly compensated for reductions in conventional forces, Truman had private doubts about whether he could use atomic weapons against the Soviet Union. On October 5, in talking with Harold Smith, his budget director, the president worried about the international situation and that the United States might be demobilizing too fast. "There are some people in the world who do not seem to understand anything except the number of divisions you have," he complained. Smith replied, "You have an atomic bomb up your sleeve." "Yes," Truman acknowledged, "but I am not sure it can ever be used."¹⁷¹ He did not explain his thinking, but presumably he meant that, short of a Soviet attack on Western Europe or on the United States, the American people, given the prevailing sentiments of late 1945, would not tolerate dropping atomic bombs on the Soviet Union. Certainly, they would not then countenance the military use of the bomb to roll back the Soviets from Eastern Europe. Few Americans then cared enough about Eastern Europe or were willing to endorse war against the Soviet Union.¹⁷² The bomb, rather than conferring omnipotence on the United States, had a more restricted role: it was a limited threat. Perhaps partly because of popular attitudes, policy makers felt restrained from employing explicit threats. Implicit threats, however, may have seemed equally useful and have allowed more flexibility: Policy makers were not committed publicly to using the bomb as a weapon in future situations.

CONCLUSION: THE BOMB AND THE COLD WAR

Did the bomb make a critical difference in shaping the early Cold War? Roosevelt's repeated decisions to bar the Soviets from the nuclear project and Truman's decision to use the bomb in combat without explicitly in-

Also see *New York Herald-Tribune*, August 29, 1945, which cited Truman's firmness, the bomb, and the U.S. Navy to explain Russia's "about-face" in Bulgaria. See also Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 201–204; cf., Rose, *After Yalta*, p. 117.

¹⁷⁰ Stettinius, "Calendar Notes," September 28, 1945; Smith Diary, September 19, 1945, Bureau of the Budget Library and copy in HSTL; Bush, in USAEC, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, p. 561.

¹⁷¹ Smith Diary, October 5, 1945.

¹⁷² See polls in Hadley Cantril, assisted by Mildred Strunk (eds.), *Public Opinion, 1935–1946* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), pp. 370–371.

forming the Soviet Union and inviting her to join in postwar control of atomic energy undoubtedly contributed to the Cold War and helped shape the form that it took. Yet, in view of the great strains in the fragile wartime Soviet-American alliance, historians should not regard America's wartime policy on the bomb as *the* cause, but only as one of the causes, of the Cold War. The wartime policy on atomic energy represented one of a number of missed opportunities at achieving limited agreements and at testing the prospects for Soviet-American cooperation on a vital matter.

The atomic bomb, first as prospect and then as reality, did influence American policy. The bomb reduced the incentives for compromise and even stiffened demands by the time of the Potsdam meeting in July 1945 because the weapon gave the United States enhanced power. Without the bomb, policy makers probably would have been more conciliatory after V-J Day in dealing with the Soviet Union, especially about Eastern Europe. The president certainly would have been unable to try to use atomic diplomacy (implied threats) to push the Soviets out of Eastern Europe. Rather, he might have speedily, though reluctantly, agreed to the dominance of Soviet power and to the closed door in that sector of the world. The bomb, as potential or actual weapon, did *not* alter the administration's conception of an ideal world, but possession of the weapon did strengthen the belief of policy makers in their capacity to move toward establishing their goal: an "open door" world with the Soviets acceding to American demands. This ideal world included free elections, an open economic door, and the reduction of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. Without the bomb, the Truman administration would not have surrendered these ultimate aims, but policy makers would have had to rely primarily on economic power as a bargaining card to secure concessions from the Soviet Union. And economic power, taken alone, would probably have seemed insufficient—as the record of lend-lease and the Russian loan suggests.

The atomic bomb was the most important weapon in the American arsenal, but its promise proved to be disappointing, for it did not make America omnipotent. It did not allow her to shape the world she desired, perhaps because in 1945–1946 neither policy makers nor most citizens were willing to use the bomb as a weapon to "liberate" Eastern Europe, a section of the world that was not then deemed worth war or the risk of war.

Without the bomb, in summary, American policy after V-J Day would have been more cautious, less demanding, less optimistic. Such restraint would not have prevented the breakdown of the Soviet-American alli-

ance, but probably the cold war would not have taken the form that it did, and an uneasy truce, with less fear and antagonism, might have been possible.¹⁷³ *

¹⁷³ For other views, see Herbert Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton, N. J., 1966), pp. 194–197; Kolko, *Politics of War*, pp. 555–593, 617–623; Bernstein, “The Atomic Bomb . . . Historiographical Controversy,” pp. 1–16.

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