

The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II

A Collection of Primary Sources

National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 162

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Posted - August 5, 2005

Updated - April 27, 2007

Washington, D.C., August 5, 2005 - Sixty years ago this month, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, and the Japanese government surrendered to the United States and its allies. The nuclear age had truly begun with the first military use of atomic weapons. With the material that follows, the National Security Archive publishes the most comprehensive on-line collection to date of declassified U.S. government documents on the atomic bomb and the end of the war in the Pacific. Besides material from the files of the Manhattan Project, this collection includes formerly "Top Secret Ultra" summaries and translations of Japanese diplomatic cable traffic intercepted under the "Magic" program. Moreover, the collection includes for the first time translations from Japanese sources of high level meetings and discussions in Tokyo, including the conferences when Emperor Hirohito authorized the final decision to surrender.[\[1\]](#)



A nuclear weapon of the "Little Boy" type, the uranium gun-type detonated over Hiroshima. It is 28 inches in diameter and 120 inches long. "Little Boy" weighed about 9,000 pounds and had a yield approximating 15,000 tons of high explosives. (Copy from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-AEC)



A nuclear weapon of the "Fat Man" type, the plutonium implosion type detonated over Nagasaki. 60 inches in diameter and 128 inches long, the weapon weighed about 10,000 pounds and had a yield approximating 21,000 tons of high explosives (Copy from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-AEC)

Ever since the atomic bombs were exploded over Japanese cities, historians, social scientists, journalists, World War II veterans, and ordinary citizens have engaged in intense controversy about the events of August 1945. John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, first published in the *New Yorker* in 1946 made some unsettled readers question the bombings while church groups and a few commentators, most prominently Norman Cousins, explicitly criticized them. Former Secretary of War Henry Stimson found the criticisms troubling and published an influential justification for the attacks in *Harper's*.[\[2\]](#) During the 1960s the availability of primary sources made historical research and writing possible and the debate became more vigorous.

Historians Herbert Feis and Gar Alperovitz raised searching questions about the first use of nuclear weapons and their broader political and diplomatic implications. The controversy, especially the arguments made by Alperovitz and others about "atomic diplomacy" quickly became caught up in heated debates about Cold War "revisionism." The controversy simmered over the years with major contributions by Martin Sherwin and Barton J. Bernstein but it became explosive during the mid-1990s when curators at the National Air and Space Museum met the wrath of the Air Force Association over a proposed historical exhibit on the Enola Gay.^[3] The NASM exhibit was drastically scaled down but historians and journalists continued to engage in the debate. Alperovitz, Bernstein, and Sherwin made new contributions to the debate as did historians, social scientists, and journalists such as Richard B. Frank, Herbert Bix, Sadao Asada, Kai Bird, Robert James Maddox, Robert P. Newman, Robert S. Norris, Tsuyoshi Hagesawa, and J. Samuel Walker.^[4] The controversy has revolved around the following, among other, questions:

- Were atomic strikes necessary primarily to avert an invasion of Japan in November 1945?
- Did Truman authorize the use of atomic bombs for diplomatic-political reasons-- to intimidate the Soviets--or was his major goal to force Japan to surrender and bring the war to an early end?
- If ending the war quickly was the most important motivation of Truman and his advisers to what extent did they see an "atomic diplomacy" capability as a "bonus"?
- To what extent did subsequent justification for the atomic bomb exaggerate or misuse wartime estimates for U.S. casualties stemming from an invasion of Japan?
- Were there alternatives to the use of the weapons? If there were, what were they and how plausible are they in retrospect? Why were alternatives not pursued?
- How did the U.S. government plan to use the bombs? What concepts did war planners use to select targets? To what extent were senior officials interested in looking at alternatives to urban targets? How familiar was President Truman with the concepts that led target planners to choose major cities as targets?
- Did President Truman make a decision, in a robust sense, to use the bomb or did he inherit a decision that had already been made?
- Were the Japanese ready to surrender before the bombs were dropped? To what extent had Emperor Hirohito prolonged the war unnecessarily by not seizing opportunities for surrender?
- If the United States had been more flexible about the demand for "unconditional surrender" by guaranteeing a constitutional monarchy would Japan have surrendered earlier than it did?
- How greatly did the atomic bombings affect the Japanese decision to surrender?



Taken at Tinian Island on the afternoon of August 5, 1945, this shows the tail of the Enola Gay being edged over the pit and into position to load "Little Boy" into the bomb bay. The weapon is in the pit covered with canvas. Various personnel and guards are standing around the loading area. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-BT)

- Was the bombing of Nagasaki unnecessary? To the extent that the atomic bombing was critically important to the Japanese decision to surrender would it have been enough to destroy one city?
- Would the Soviet declaration of war have been enough to compel Tokyo to admit defeat?
 - Was the dropping of the atomic bombs morally justifiable?



This shows the "Little Boy" weapon in the pit ready for loading into the bomb bay of Enola Gay. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-BT)

This briefing book will not attempt to answer these questions or use primary sources to stake out positions on any of them. Nor will it attempt to substitute for the extraordinarily rich literature on the atomic bombs and the end of World War II. This collection does not attempt to document the origins and development of the Manhattan Project. Nor does it include any of the miscellaneous sources (interviews, documents prepared after the events, post-World War II correspondence, etc.) that participants in the debate have brought to bear in framing their arguments. Instead, by gaining access to a broad range of U.S. and Japanese documents from the spring and summer

of 1945, interested readers can see for themselves the crucial source material that scholars have used to shape narrative accounts of the historical developments and to frame their arguments about the questions that have provoked controversy over the years. To help readers who are less familiar with the debates, commentary on some of the documents will point out, although far from comprehensively, some of the ways in which they have been interpreted. With direct access to the documents, readers may be able to develop their own answers to the questions raised above. The documents may even provoke new questions.

Contributors to the historical controversy have deployed the documents selected here to support their arguments about the first use of nuclear weapons and the end of World War II. The editor has closely reviewed the footnotes and endnotes in a variety of articles and books and selected documents cited by participants on the various sides of the controversy.^[5] While the editor has a point of view on the issues, to the greatest extent possible he has tried not to let that influence document selection, e.g., by selectively withholding or including documents that may buttress one point of view or the other. The task of compilation took the editor to primary sources at the National Archives, mainly in Manhattan Project files held in the records of the Army Corps of Engineers, Record Group 77 but also in the files of the National Security Agency. Private collections were also important such as the Stimson Diary at Yale University (although available on microfilm elsewhere) and the papers of W. Averell Harriman at the



This shows "Little Boy" being raised for loading into the Enola Gay's bomb bay. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-BT)

Library of Congress. To a great extent the documents selected for this compilation have been declassified for years, even decades; the most recent declassifications were in the 1990s.



The mushroom cloud billowing up 20,000 feet over Hiroshima on the morning of August 6, 1945 (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-AEC)

The U.S. documents cited here will be familiar to many expert readers on the Hiroshima-Nagasaki controversy. To provide a fuller picture of the transition from U.S.-Japanese antagonism to reconciliation, the editor has done what could be done within time and resource constraints to present information on the activities and points of view of Japanese policymakers and diplomats. This includes a number of formerly top secret summaries of intercepted Japanese diplomatic communications; the documents enable interested readers to form their own judgments about the direction of Japanese diplomacy in the weeks before the atomic bombings. Moreover, this briefing book includes new translations of Japanese primary sources on crucial events, including accounts of the conferences on August 9 and 14, where Emperor Hirohito made decisions to accept Allied terms of surrender. This material sheds light on the considerations that induced Japan's surrender.

Documents

Note: The following documents are in PDF format.

You will need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to view.

I. Background on the Atomic Project

[Document 1](#): Memorandum from Vannevar Bush and James B. Conant, Office of Scientific Research and Development, to Secretary of War, September 30, 1944, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 77, Records of the Army Corps of Engineers (hereinafter RG 77), Manhattan Engineering District (MED), Harrison-Bundy Files (H-B Files), folder 69

Months before the bomb would be available, key War Department advisers, among others, worried about the political and military problems and possibilities raised by the project—the possibility of enormously powerful hydrogen bombs, enormous military potential, the limits of secrecy, the danger of a global arms race, and the need for international exchange of information and international inspection to stem dangerous nuclear competition. Martin Sherwin and James Hershberg see this memorandum flowing from Bush and Conant's concern about President Roosevelt's "cavalier" belief that it would be possible to maintain an Anglo-American atomic monopoly after World War II. To disabuse senior officials that such a monopoly was possible, they drafted this memorandum.^[6]

Document 2: Commander F. L. Ashworth to Major General L.R. Groves, "The Base of Operations of the 509th Composite Group," February 24, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5g

The force of B-29 nuclear delivery vehicles that was being readied for first nuclear use—the Army Air Force’s 509th Composite Group—required an operational base in the Western Pacific. In late February 1945, months before atomic bombs were ready for use, the high command selected Tinian, an island in the Northern Marianas Islands.



The Enola Gay returns to Tinian Island after the strike on Hiroshima. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-BT)

Documents 3a-c: President Truman Learns the Secret:

a. Memorandum for the Secretary of War from General L. R. Groves, "Atomic Fission Bombs," April 23, 1945

Source: RG 77, Commanding General’s file no. 24, tab D

b. Memorandum discussed with the President, April 25, 1945

Source: Henry Stimson Diary, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers (microfilm at Library of Congress)

c. Untitled memorandum by General L.R. Groves, April 25, 1945

Source: Record Group 200, Papers of General Leslie R. Groves, Correspondence 1941-1970, box 3, "F"

d. Diary Entry, April 25, 1945

Source: Henry Stimson Diary, Sterling Library, Yale University (microfilm at Library of Congress)



A "Fat Man" test unit being raised from the pit into the bomb bay of a B-29 for bombing

Soon after he was sworn in as president, after President Roosevelt's death, Harry Truman learned about the top secret Manhattan Project. It was not until he received a briefing from Secretary of War Stimson and Manhattan Project chief General Groves, who went through the "back door" to escape the watchful press, that Truman understood the full scope of the enterprise. Stimson, who later wrote up the meeting in his diary, also prepared a discussion paper, which raised broader policy issues associated with the imminent possession of "the most terrible weapon ever known in human history." In a background report prepared for the meeting, Groves provided a detailed overview of the atomic bomb project from the raw materials to processing nuclear fuel to assembling the weapons to plans for using them, which had already crystallized. With respect to the last point, the first gun-type weapon "should be ready about 1 August 1945" while an implosion weapon would be available that month. "The target is and was always expected to be Japan." The question whether Truman "inherited assumptions" from the Roosevelt administration that the bomb would be used has been a controversial one. Alperovitz and Sherwin have argued that Truman made "a real decision" to use the bomb on Japan by choosing "between various forms of diplomacy and warfare." In contrast, Barton Bernstein finds that Truman "never questioned [the] assumption" that the bomb would and should be used. Robert S. Norris has also noted that "Truman's 'decision' was a decision not to override previous plans to use the bomb."^[7]

practice during the weeks before the attack on Nagasaki. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-BT)

II. Defining Targets

Document 4: Notes on Initial Meeting of Target Committee, May 2, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5d (copy from microfilm)

In late April, military officers and nuclear scientists met to discuss bombing techniques, target selection, and overall mission requirements. The discussion of "available targets" included Hiroshima, the "largest untouched targets not on the 21st Bomber Command priority list."

Document 5: Memorandum from J. R. Oppenheimer to Brigadier General Farrell, May 11, 1945

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5g (copy from microfilm)

Discussing the radiological dangers of a nuclear



A photo prepared by U.S. Air Intelligence for analytical work on destructiveness of atomic weapons. The total area devastated by the atomic strike on Hiroshima is shown in the darkened area (within the circle) of the photo. The numbered items are military and industrial installations with the percentages of total destruction. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-AEC)

detonation, Oppenheimer explained to General Farrell, Groves's deputy, the need for precautions.

Document 6: Memorandum from Major J. A. Derry and Dr. N.F. Ramsey to General L.R. Groves, "Summary of Target Committee Meetings on 10 and 11 May 1945," May 12, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5d (copy from microfilm)

Scientists and officers held further discussion of bombing mission requirements, including height of detonation, weather, plans for possible mission abort, and the various aspects of target selection, including priority cities ("a large urban area of more than three miles diameter") and psychological dimension.

Document 7: Diary Entries, May 14 and 15, 1945

Source: Henry Stimson Diary, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers (microfilm at Library of Congress)

On May 14 and 15, Stimson had several conversations involving S-1 (the atomic bomb); during a talk with Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, he estimated that possession of the bomb gave Washington a tremendous advantage—"held all the cards," a "royal straight flush"-- in dealing with Moscow on post-war problems: "They can't get along without our help and industries and we have coming into action a weapon which will be unique." The next day a discussion of divergences with Moscow over the Far East made Stimson wonder whether the atomic bomb would be ready when Truman met with Stalin in July. If it was, he believed that the bomb would be the "master card" in

U.S. diplomacy. This and other entries from the Stimson diary (as well as the entry from the Davies diary that follows) are important to arguments developed by Gar Alperovitz and Barton J. Bernstein, among others, although with significantly different emphases, that in light of controversies with the Soviet Union over Eastern Europe and other areas, top officials in the Truman administration believed that possessing the atomic bomb would provide them with significant leverage for inducing Moscow's acquiescence in U.S. objectives.ii[8]



The polar cap of the "Fat Man" weapon being sprayed with plastic spray paint in front of Assembly Building Number 2. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-BT)

Document 8: Diary entry for May 21, 1945

Source: Joseph E. Davies Papers, Library of Congress, box 17, 21 May 1945

While officials at the Pentagon continued to look closely at the problem of atomic targets, President Truman, like Stimson, was thinking about the diplomatic implications of the bomb. During a conversation with Joseph E. Davies, a prominent Washington lawyer and former ambassador to the Soviet Union, Truman said that he wanted to delay talks with Stalin and Churchill until July when the first atomic device would have been tested. Alperovitz treats this entry as evidence in support of the atomic diplomacy argument, but other historians, ranging from Robert Maddox to Gabriel Kolko, deny that the timing of the Potsdam conference had anything to do with the goal of using the bomb to intimidate the Soviets.iii[9]

Document 9: Minutes of Third Target Committee Meeting – Washington, May 28, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5d (copy from microfilm)

More updates on training missions, target selection, and conditions required for successful detonation over the target. “Pumpkins” referred to bright orange, pumpkin-shaped high explosive bombs—shaped like the “Fat Man” implosion weapon--used for bombing run test missions.

Document 10: General Lauris Norstad to Commanding General, XXI Bomber Command, "509th Composite Group; Special Functions," May 29, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5g (copy from microfilm)

The 509th Composite Group’s cover story for its secret mission was the preparation of “Pumpkins” for use in battle. In this memorandum, Norstad reviewed the complex requirements for preparing B-29s and their crews for successful nuclear strikes.

Document 11: Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, "Memorandum of Conversation with General Marshall May 29, 1945 – 11:45 p.m.," Top Secret

Source: Record Group 107, Office of the Secretary of War, Formerly Top Secret Correspondence of Secretary of War Stimson (“Safe File”), July 1940-September 1945, box 12, S-1

Apparently dissenting from the Targeting Committee’s recommendations, Army Chief of Staff George Marshall noted the “opprobrium which might follow from an ill considered employment of such force.” This document has played a role in arguments developed by Barton J. Bernstein that a few figures such as Marshall and Stimson were “caught between an older morality that opposed the intentional killing of noncombatants and a newer one that stressed virtually total war.”iv[10]

Document 12: "Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting Thursday, 31 May 1945, 10:00 A.M. to 1:15 P.M. – 2:15 P.M. to 4:15 P.M.," n.d., Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, H-B files, folder no. 100 (copy from microfilm)

With Secretary of War Stimson presiding, members of the committee heard reports on a variety of Manhattan Project issues, including the stages of development of the atomic project, problems of secrecy, the possibility of informing the Soviet Union, cooperation with “like-minded” powers, the military impact of the bomb on Japan, and the problem of “undesirable scientists.” Interested in producing the “greatest psychological effect,” the Committee members agreed that the “most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers’ houses.” Bernstein argues that this target choice represented an uneasy endorsement of “terror bombing”--the target was not exclusively military or civilian; nevertheless, workers' housing would include noncombatant men, women, and children.v[11]

Document 13: General George A. Lincoln to General Hull, June 4, 1945, enclosing draft, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 165, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, American-British-Canadian Top Secret Correspondence, Box 504, ABC 387 Japan (15 Feb. 45)

George A. Lincoln, chief of the Strategy and Policy Group at the U.S. Army’s Operations Department, commented on a memorandum by former President Herbert Hoover that Stimson had passed on for analysis. Hoover proposed a compromise solution with Japan that would allow Tokyo to retain part of its empire in East Asia (including Korea and Japan) as a way to head off Soviet influence in the region. While Lincoln believed that the proposed peace terms were militarily acceptable he doubted that they were workable or that they could check Soviet “expansion” which he saw as an inescapable result of World War II. As to how the war with Japan would end, he saw it as “unpredictable” but speculated about “Russian entry into the war, combined with a landing, or imminent threat of a landing, on Japan proper by us, to convince them of the hopelessness of their situation.” Lincoln derided Hoover’s casualty estimate of 500,000. J. Samuel Walker has cited this document to make the point that “contrary to revisionist assertions, American policymakers in the summer of 1945 were far from certain that the Soviet invasion of Manchuria would be enough in itself to force a Japanese surrender.”vi[12]

Document 14: Memorandum from R. Gordon Arneson, Interim Committee Secretary, to Mr. Harrison, June 6, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, H-B files, folder no. 100 (copy from microfilm)

In a memorandum to George Harrison, Stimson's special assistant on Manhattan Project matters, Arneson noted actions taken at the recent Interim Committee meetings, including target criteria and an attack "without prior warning."

Document 15: Memorandum of Conference with the President, June 6, 1945, Top Secret

Source: Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers (microfilm at Library of Congress)

Stimson and Truman began this meeting by discussing how they should handle a conflict with French President deGaulle over the movement by French forces into Italian territory. (Truman finally cut off military aid to France to compel the French to pull back).vii[13] As evident from the discussion, Stimson strongly disliked de Gaulle, whom he regarded as "psychopathic." The conversation soon turned to the atomic bomb, with some discussion about plans to inform the Soviets but only after a successful test. Both agreed that the possibility of a nuclear "partnership" with Moscow would depend on "quid pro quos": "the settlement of the Polish, Rumanian, Yugoslavian, and Manchurian problems." At the end, Stimson shared his doubts about targeting cities and killing civilians through area bombing because of its impact on the U.S.'s reputation as well as on the problem of finding targets for the atomic bomb. Barton Bernstein has also pointed to this as additional evidence of the influence on Stimson of "an older morality."

III. Debates on Alternatives to First Use and Unconditional Surrender

Document 16: Memorandum from Arthur B. Compton to the Secretary of War, enclosing "Memorandum on 'Political and Social Problems,' from Members of the 'Metallurgical Laboratory' of the University of Chicago," June 12, 1945, Secret
Source: RG 77, MED Records, H-B files, folder no. 76 (copy from microfilm)

Physicists Leo Szilard and James Franck, a Nobel Prize winner, were on the staff of the "Metallurgical Laboratory" at the University of Chicago, a cover for the Manhattan Project program to produce fuel for the bomb. The outspoken Szilard was not involved in operational work on the bomb and General Groves kept him under surveillance, but Met Lab director found Szilard useful to have around. Concerned with the long-run implications of the bomb, Franck chaired a committee, in which Szilard and Eugene Rabinowitch were major contributors, that produced a report rejecting a surprise attack on Japan and recommended instead a demonstration of the bomb on the "desert or a barren island." Arguing that a nuclear arms race "will be on in earnest not later than the morning after our first demonstration of the existence of nuclear weapons," the committee saw international control as the alternative. That possibility would be difficult if the United States made first military use of the weapon. Arthur Compton, the "Met

Lab's" director, raised doubts about the recommendations but urged Stimson to study the report. Martin Sherwin has argued that the Franck committee shared an important assumption with Truman et al.--that an "atomic attack against Japan would 'shock' the Russians"--but drew entirely different conclusions about the import of such a shock.viii[14]

Document 17: Memorandum from Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew to the President, "Analysis of Memorandum Presented by Mr. Hoover," June 13, 1945

Source: Record Group 107, Office of the Secretary of War, Formerly Top Secret
Correspondence of Secretary of War Stimson ("Safe File"), July 1940-September 1945, box 8, Japan (After December 7/41)

A former ambassador to Japan, Grew's knowledge of Japanese politics and culture informed his critical stance toward the concept of unconditional surrender. He believed it essential that the United States declare its intention to preserve the institution of the emperor. As he argued in this memorandum to President Truman, "failure on our part to clarify our intentions" on the status of the emperor "will insure prolongation of the war and cost a large number of human lives." Documents like this have played a role in arguments developed by Alperovitz that Truman and his advisers had alternatives to using the bomb such as modifying unconditional surrender and that anti-Soviet considerations weighed most heavily in their thinking. By contrast, Herbert P. Bix has argued that the Japanese leadership would "probably not" have "surrendered if the Truman administration had clarified the status of the emperor" when it demanded unconditional surrender.ix[15]

Document 18: Memorandum from Chief of Staff Marshall to the Secretary of War, 15 June 1945, enclosing "Memorandum of Comments on 'Ending the Japanese War,'" June 14, 1945

Source: Record Group 107, Office of the Secretary of War, Formerly Top Secret
Correspondence of Secretary of War Stimson ("Safe File"), July 1940-September 1945, box 8, Japan (After December 7/41)

Commenting on another memorandum by Herbert Hoover, George A. Lincoln discussed war aims, face-saving proposals for Japan, and the nature of the proposed declaration to the Japanese government, including the problem of defining "unconditional surrender." Lincoln argued against modifying the concept of unconditional surrender: if it is "phrased so as to invite negotiation" he saw risks of prolonging the war or a "compromise peace." J. Samuel Walker has observed that those risks help explain why senior officials were unwilling to modify the demand for unconditional surrender.x[16]

Document 19: Memorandum by J. R. Oppenheimer, "Recommendations on the Immediate Use of Nuclear Weapons," June 16, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, H-B files, folder no. 76 (copy from microfilm)

In a report to Stimson, Oppenheimer and colleagues on the scientific advisory panel--Arthur Compton, Ernest O. Lawrence, and Enrico Fermi--tacitly disagreed with the report of the "Met Lab" scientists. The panel argued for early military use but not before informing key allies about the atomic project to open a dialogue on "how we can cooperate in making this development contribute to improved international relations."

Document 20: "Minutes of Meeting Held at the White House on Monday, 18 June 1945 at 1530," Top Secret

Source: Record Group 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Central Decimal Files, 1942-1945, box 198 334 JCS (2-2-45) Mtg 186th-194th

With the devastating battle for Okinawa winding up, Truman and his military advisers stepped back and considered the implications and requirements of the invasion of Japan. In this meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff Truman reviewed plans to land troops on Kyushu on 1 November, heard a range of casualty estimates, and contemplated the possible impact of eventual Soviet entry into the war with Japan. This account hints at discussion of the atomic bomb ("certain other matters") but no documents disclose that part of the meeting. This document has figured in the highly complex debate over the estimates of casualties stemming from a possible invasion of Japan. While post-war justifications for the bomb suggested that an invasion of Japan could have produced very high levels of casualties (dead, wounded, or missing), from hundreds of thousands to a million, historians have vigorously debated the extent to which the post-war estimates were inflated.xi[17]

This meeting has also played a role in the historical discussions of the alternatives to nuclear weapons use in the summer of 1945. According to accounts based on post-war recollections and interviews, McCloy raised the possibility of winding up the war by guaranteeing the preservation of the emperor albeit as a constitutional monarch. If that failed to persuade Tokyo, he proposed that the United States disclose the secret of the atomic bomb to secure Japan's unconditional surrender. While McCloy later recalled that Truman expressed interest, he said that Secretary of State Byrnes quashed the proposal because of his opposition to any "deals" with Japan. Yet, according to Forrest Pogue's account, when Truman asked McCloy if he had any comments, the latter opened up a discussion of nuclear weapons use by asking "Why not use the bomb?"xii[18]

Document 21: Memorandum from R. Gordon Arneson, Interim Committee Secretary, to Mr. Harrison, June 25, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, H-B files, folder no. 100 (copy from microfilm)

For Harrison's convenience, Arneson summarized key decisions made at the 21 June meeting of

the Interim Committee, including a recommendation that President Truman use the forthcoming conference of allied leaders to inform Stalin about the atomic project. The Committee also reaffirmed earlier recommendations about the use of the bomb at the “earliest opportunity” and urban-industrial targets. In addition, it recommended revocation of part two of the 1944 Quebec agreement which stipulated that neither the United States nor Great Britain would use the bomb “against third parties without each other’s consent.” Thus, an impulse for unilateral control of nuclear use decisions predated the first use of the bomb.xiii[19]

Document 22: Memorandum from George L. Harrison to Secretary of War, June 26, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED, H-B files, folder no. 77 (copy from microfilm)

Reminding Stimson about the objections of some Manhattan project scientists to military use of the bomb, Harrison summarized the basic arguments of the Franck report. One recommendation shared by many of the scientists, whether they supported the Franck report or not, was that the United States should inform Stalin about the bomb before it was used. This proposal had been the subject of positive discussion by the Interim Committee on the grounds that Soviet confidence was necessary to make possible post-war cooperation on atomic energy.

Document 23: Memorandum from George L. Harrison to Secretary of War, June 28, 1945, Top Secret, enclosing Ralph Bard "Memorandum on the Use of S-1 Bomb," June 27, 1945

Source: RG 77, MED, H-B files, folder no. 77 (copy from microfilm)

Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard joined those scientists who sought to avoid military use of the bomb; he proposed a “preliminary warning” so that the United States would retain its position as a “great humanitarian nation.” Alperovitz cites evidence that Bard discussed his proposal with Truman who told him that he had already thoroughly examined the problem of advanced warning. This document has also figured in the argument framed by Barton Bernstein that Truman and his advisers took it for granted that the bomb was a legitimate weapon and that there was no reason to explore alternatives to military use. Bernstein, however, notes that Bard later denied that he had a meeting with Truman and that White House appointment logs support that claim.xiv[20]

Document 24: Memorandum for Mr. McCloy, "Comments re: Proposed Program for Japan," June 28, 1945, Draft, Top Secret

Source: RG 107, Office of Assistant Secretary of War Formerly Classified Correspondence of John J. McCloy, 1941-1945, box 38, ASW 387 Japan

Despite the interest of some senior officials such as Joseph Grew, Henry Stimson, and John J. McCloy in modifying the concept of unconditional surrender so that the Japanese could be sure that the emperor would be preserved, it remained a highly contentious subject. For example, one of McCloy's staffers, Colonel Fahey, argued against modification of unconditional surrender (see "Appendix 'C'").

Document 25: Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy to Colonel Stimson, June 29, 1945, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 107, Office of the Secretary of War, Formerly Top Secret
Correspondence of Secretary of War Stimson ("Safe File"), July 1940-September 1945, box 8, Japan (After December 7/41)

McCloy was part of a drafting committee that was working on the text of a proclamation to Japan which would be signed by heads of state at the forthcoming Potsdam conference. As McCloy observed the most contentious issue was whether the proclamation should include language about the preservation of the emperor: "This may cause repercussions at home but without it those who seem to know the most about Japan feel there would be very little likelihood of acceptance."

Document 26: Memorandum, "Timing of Proposed Demand for Japanese Surrender," June 29, 1945, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 107, Office of the Secretary of War, Formerly Top Secret
Correspondence of Secretary of War Stimson ("Safe File"), July 1940-September 1945, box 8, Japan (After December 7/41)

Probably the work of General George A. Lincoln at Army Operations, this document was prepared a few weeks before the Potsdam conference when senior officials were starting to finalize the text of the declaration that Truman, Churchill, and Chiang would issue there. The author recommended issuing the declaration "just before the bombardment program [against Japan] reaches its peak." Next to that suggestion, Stimson, or someone in his immediate office, wrote "S1", implying that the atomic bombing of Japanese cities was highly relevant to the timing issue. Also relevant to Japanese thinking about surrender, the author speculated, was the Soviet attack on their forces after a declaration of war.

Document 27: Minutes, Secretary's Staff Committee, Saturday Morning, July 7, 1945, 133d Meeting, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 353, Records of Interdepartmental and Intradepartmental Committees, Secretary's Staff Meetings Minutes, 1944-1947 (copy from microfilm)

The possibility of modifying the concept of unconditional surrender so that it guaranteed the

continuation of the emperor remained hotly contested within the U.S. government. Here senior State Department officials, Under Secretary Joseph Grew on one side, and Assistant Secretary Dean Acheson and Archibald MacLeish on the other, engage in hot debate.

Document 28: Combined Chiefs of Staff, "Estimate of the Enemy Situation (as of 6 July 1945, C.C.S 643/3, July 8, 1945, Secret (Appendices Not Included)

Source: RG 218, Central Decimal Files, 1943-1945, CCS 381 (6-4-45), Sec. 2 Pt. 5

This review of Japanese capabilities and intentions portrays an economy and society under "tremendous strain"; nevertheless, "the ground component of the Japanese armed forces remains Japan's greatest military asset." Alperovitz sees statements in this estimate about the impact of Soviet entry into the war and the possibility of a conditional surrender involving survival of the emperor as an institution as more evidence that the policymakers saw alternatives to nuclear weapons use. By contrast, Richard Frank takes note of the estimate's depiction of the Japanese army's terms for peace: "for surrender to be acceptable to the Japanese army it would be necessary for the military leaders to believe that it would not entail discrediting the warrior tradition and that it would permit the ultimate resurgence of a military in Japan." That, Frank argues, would have been "unacceptable to any Allied policy maker".xv[21]

IV. The Japanese Search for Soviet Mediation

Document 29: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1204 – July 12, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18

Since September 1940, under the covername "Magic," U.S. military intelligence had been routinely decrypting the intercepted cable traffic of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. The National Security Agency kept the "Magic" diplomatic and military summaries classified for many years and did not release the series for 1942 through August 1945 in its entirety until the early 1990s. This summary includes a report on a cable from Japanese Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo to Ambassador Naotake Sato in Moscow concerning the emperor's decision to seek Soviet help in ending the war. Not knowing that the Soviets had already made a commitment to its Allies to declare war on Japan, Tokyo fruitlessly pursued this option for several weeks. The "Magic" intercepts from mid-July have figured in Gar Alperovitz's argument that Truman and his advisers recognized that the emperor was ready to capitulate if the Allies showed more flexibility on the demand for unconditional surrender. This point is central to Alperovitz's thesis that top U.S. officials recognized a "two-step logic" that moderating unconditional surrender and a Soviet declaration of war would have been enough to induce Japan's surrender without the use of the bomb.xvi[22]

Document 30: John Weckerling, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, July 12, 1945, to Deputy Chief of Staff, "Japanese Peace Offer," 13 July 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: RG 165, Army Operations OPD Executive File #17, Item 13 (copy courtesy of J. Samuel Walker)

The day after the Togo message was reported, Army intelligence chief Weckerling proposed several possible explanations of the Japanese diplomatic initiative. Robert J. Maddox has cited this document to support his argument that top U.S. officials recognized that Japan was not close to surrender because Japan was trying to “stave off defeat.” Having analyzed the document closely, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa argues that each of the three possibilities proposed by Weckerling “contained an element of truth, but none was entirely correct”. For example, the “governing clique” that supported the peace moves was not trying to “stave off defeat” but was seeking Soviet help to end the war.^{xvii}[23]

Document 31: "Magic"- Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1205 – July 13, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18

The day after he told Sato about the current thinking on Soviet mediation, Togo requested the Ambassador to see Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and tell him of the emperor’s “private intention to send Prince Konoye as a Special Envoy” to Moscow. Before he received Togo’s message, Sato had already met with Molotov on another matter.

Document 32: Cable to Secretary of State from Acting Secretary Joseph Grew, July 16, 1945, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 59, Decimal Files 1945-1949, 740.0011 PW (PE)/7-1645

The draft of the proclamation to Japan that reached Truman contained language that modified unconditional surrender by promising to retain the emperor. When former Secretary of State Cordell Hull learned about that development he outlined his objections to Secretary of State Byrnes. The latter was already inclined to reject that part of the draft but Hull’s arguments may have reinforced his decision.

Document 33: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1210 – July 17, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security

Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

Another intercept of a cable from Togo to Sato shows that the Foreign Minister rejected unconditional surrender and that the emperor was not "asking the Russian's mediation in anything like unconditional surrender." Incidentally, this "Magic' Diplomatic Summary" indicates the broad scope and capabilities of the program; for example, it includes translations of intercepted French messages (see pages 8-9). [Page 14 missing from original]

Document 34: R. E. Lapp, Leo Szilard et al., "A Petition to the President of the United States," July 17, 1945

Source: RG 77, MED Records, H-B files, folder no. 76 (copy from microfilm)

In a final effort to discourage military use of the bomb, Szilard circulated a petition, which he hoped would reach President Truman, and which was signed by about 68 Manhattan Project scientists, mainly physicists and biologists (copies with the remaining signatures are in the archival file). Not explicitly rejecting military use, the petition raised questions about an arms race that military use could inspire and called Truman to publicize detailed terms for Japanese surrender. Truman, already on his way to Europe, never saw the petition.xviii[24]

V. The Trinity Test, the Potsdam Conference, and the Execution Order

Document 35: Cable War 33556 from Harrison to Secretary of War, July 17, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File 5e (copy from microfilm)

An elated message from Harrison to Stimson reported on the success of the "Trinity" test of a plutonium implosion weapon. The light from the explosion could be seen "from here [Washington, D.C.] to "high hold" [Stimson's estate on Long Island—250 miles away]" and it was so loud that Harrison could have heard the "screams" from Washington, D.C. to "my farm" [in Upperville, VA, 50 miles away]xix[25]

Document 36: Memorandum from General L. R. Groves to Secretary of War, "The Test," July 18, 1945, Top Secret, Excised Copy

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 4 (copy from microfilm)

The first atomic test took place in the New Mexico desert on 16 August. General Groves prepared for Stimson, then at Potsdam, a detailed account of the "Trinity" test.xx[26]

Document 37: Diary Entry for July 20, 1945:

Source: Takashi Itoh, ed., *Sokichi Takagi: Nikki to Joho* [Sokichi Takagi: Diary and Documents] (Tokyo, Japan: Misuzu-Shobo, 2000), 916-917 [Translation by Hikaru Tajima]

In 1944 Navy minister Mitsumasa Yonai put rear admiral Sokichi Takagi on sick leave so that he could undertake a secret mission to find a way to end the war. Takagi was soon at the center of a cabal of Japanese defense officials, civil servants, and academics, which concluded that, in the end, the emperor would have to “impose his decision on the military and the government.” Takagi kept a detailed account of his activities, part of which was in diary form, the other part of which he kept on index cards. The material that follows gives a sense of the state of play for Foreign Minister Togo’s attempt to secure Soviet mediation. Hasegawa cites it and other documents to make a larger point about the inability of the Japanese government to agree on “concrete” proposals to negotiate an end to the war.^{xxi}[27] The last item discusses Japanese contacts with representatives of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Switzerland. The reference to “our contact” may refer to Bank of International Settlements economist Pers Jacobson who was in contact with Japanese representatives to the Bank as well as Gero von Gävernitz, then on the staff, but with non-official cover, of OSS station chief Allen Dulles. The contacts never went far and Dulles never received encouragement to pursue them.^{xxii}[28]

Document 38: Truman's Potsdam Diary

Barton J. Bernstein, "Truman At Potsdam: His Secret Diary," *Foreign Service Journal*, July/August 1980, excerpts, used with author’s permission^{xxiii}[29]

Some years after Truman died a hand-written diary that he kept during the Potsdam conference surfaced in his personal papers. For convenience Barton Bernstein’s rendition is provided here but linked here are the scanned versions of Truman’s handwriting on the Truman Library’s web site (for [16 July](#) and [17-30 July](#) respectively).

The diary entries cover July 16, 17, 18, 20, 25, 26, and 30 and include Truman’s thinking about a number of issues and developments, including his reactions to Churchill and Stalin, the atomic bomb and how it should be targeted, the possible impact of the bomb and a Soviet declaration of war on Japan, and his decision to tell Stalin about the bomb. Receptive to pressure from Secretary of War Stimson, Truman recorded his decision to take Japan’s “old capital” (Kyoto) off the atomic bomb target list. Barton Bernstein and Richard Frank, among others, have argued that Truman’s assertion that the atomic targets were “military objectives” suggested that either he did not understand the power of the new weapons or had simply deceived himself about the nature of the targets. Another statement—“Fini Japs when that [Soviet entry] comes about”—has also been the subject of controversy over whether it meant that Truman thought it possible that the war could end without an invasion of Japan.^{xxiv}[30]

Document 39: Diary entries for July 16 through 25, 1945

Source: Henry Stimson Diary, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers (microfilm at Library of Congress)

Stimson did not always have Truman's ear but historians have frequently cited his diary when he was at the Potsdam conference. There Stimson kept track of S-1 developments, including news of the successful first test (see entry for July 17) and the ongoing nuclear deployments for use against Japan. When Truman received a detailed account of the test, Stimson reported that the "President was tremendously pepped up by it" and that "it gave him an entirely new feeling of confidence" (see entry for July 21). Whether this meant that Truman was getting ready for a confrontation with Stalin over Eastern Europe and other matters has also been the subject of debate.

An important question that Stimson discussed with Marshall, at Truman's request, was whether Soviet entry into the war remained necessary to secure Tokyo's surrender. Marshall was not sure whether that was so although Stimson privately believed that the atomic bomb would suffice to force surrender (see entry for July 23). This entry has been cited by all sides of the controversy over whether Truman was trying to keep the Soviets out of the war.xxv[31] During a meeting on August 24, Truman agreed with Stimson that Kyoto, Japan's cultural capital, would not be one of the nuclear targets. For Stimson destroying that city could have caused such "bitterness" that it might have become impossible "to reconcile the Japanese to us in that area rather than to the Russians." Stimson vainly tried to preserve language in the Potsdam Declaration designed to assure the Japanese about "the continuance of their dynasty" but received Truman's assurance that such a consideration could be conveyed later through diplomatic channels (see entry for July 24). Hasegawa argues that Truman realized that the Japanese would refuse a demand for unconditional surrender without a proviso on a constitutional monarchy and that "he needed Japan's refusal to justify the use of the atomic bomb."xxvi[32]

Document 40: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1214 – July 22, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

This "Magic" summary includes messages from both Togo and Sato. In a long and impassioned message, the latter argued why Japan must accept defeat: "it is meaningless to prove one's devotion [to the emperor] by wrecking the State." Togo rejected Sato's advice that Japan accept unconditional surrender except for one provision: the "preservation of the Imperial House." Probably unable or unwilling to take a soft position in an official cable, Togo declared that "the whole country ... will pit itself against the enemy in accordance with the Imperial Will as long as the enemy demands unconditional surrender."

Documents 41 a-d: Framing the Directive for Nuclear Strikes:

a. Cable VICTORY 213 from Marshall to Handy, July 22, 1945, Top Secret

b. Memorandum from Colonel John Stone to General Arnold, "Groves Project," 24 July 1945, Top Secret

c. Cable WAR 37683 from General Handy to General Marshall, enclosing directive to General Spaatz, July 24, 1945, Top Secret

d. Cable VICTORY 261 from Marshall to General Handy, July 25, 1945, 25 July 1945, Top Secret

e. General Thomas T. Handy to General Carl Spaatz, July 26, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, Files no. 5b and 5e (copies from microfilm)

Apparently top Army Air Force commanders did not want to take responsibility for the first use of nuclear weapons on urban targets and sought formal authorization from Chief of Staff Marshall who was then in Potsdam.xxvii[33] On 22 July Marshall asked Handy to prepare a draft; General Groves wrote a draft which went to Potsdam for Marshall's approval. Colonel John Stone, an assistant to commanding General of the Army Air Forces Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, had just returned from Potsdam and updated his boss on the plans as they had developed. On 25 July Marshall informed Handy that Secretary of War Stimson had approved the text; that same day, Handy signed off on a directive which ordered use of atomic weapons on Japan, with the first weapon assigned to one of four possible targets—Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, or Nagasaki. "Additional bombs will be delivered on the [targets] as soon as made ready by the project staff."



Ground view of Nagasaki before and after the bombing; 1,000 foot circles are shown. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-MDH)

Document 42: Diary Entry, July 24, 1945, "Japanese Peace Feelers"

Source: Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives, James Forrestal Diaries

Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal was a regular recipient of "Magic" intercept reports; this substantial entry reviews the dramatic Sato-Togo exchanges covered in the 22 July "Magic" summary (although Forrestal misdated Sato's cable as "first of July" instead of the 21st). In contrast to Alperovitz's argument that Forrestal tried to modify the terms of unconditional surrender to give the Japanese an out, Frank sees Forrestal's account of the Sato-Togo exchange as additional evidence that senior U.S. officials understood that Tokyo was not on the "cusp of surrender." xxviii [34]

[Document 43](#): Diary entry for July 29, 1945

Source: Joseph E. Davies Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, box 19, 29 July 1945

Having been asked by Truman to join the delegation to the Potsdam conference, former Ambassador Davies sat at the table with the Big Three throughout the discussions. This diary entry has figured in the argument that Byrnes believed that the atomic bomb gave the United States a significant advantage in negotiations with the Soviet Union. Plainly Davies thought otherwise.xxix[35]

[Document 44](#): "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1221- July 29, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

The day before the governments of China, Great Britain, and the United States had issued the [Potsdam Declaration](#) demanding the “unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces. “The alternative is prompt and utter destruction.” In response to questions from journalists about the government’s reaction to the ultimatum, apparently Prime Minister Suzuki said that “We can only ignore [*mokusatsu*] it. We will do our utmost to complete the war to the bitter end.” That, Bix argues, represents a “missed opportunity” to end the war and spare the Japanese from continued U.S. aerial attacks.xxx[36] Togo’s private position was more nuanced than Suzuki’s; he told Sato that “we are adopting a policy of careful study.” That Stalin had not signed the declaration (Truman and Churchill did not ask him to) led to questions about the Soviet attitude. Togo asked Sato to try to meet with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov as soon as possible to “sound out the Russian attitude” on the declaration as well as Japan’s end-the-war initiative. Sato cabled Togo earlier that he saw no point in approaching the Soviets on ending the war until Tokyo had “concrete proposals.” “Any aid from the Soviets has now become extremely doubtful.”

[Document 45](#): Memorandum from Major General L. R. Groves to Chief of Staff, July 30, 1945, Top Secret, Sanitized Copy

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5

With more information on the Alamogordo test available, Groves provided Marshall with more detail on the destructive power of atomic weapons. Barton J. Bernstein has observed that Groves’s recommendation that troops could move into the “immediate explosion area” within a half hour demonstrates the prevalent lack of knowledge of the dangers of nuclear weapons effects.xxxi[37] Groves also provided the schedule for the delivery of the weapons: the components of the gun-type bomb to be used on Hiroshima had arrived on Tinian, while the

parts of the second weapon to be dropped were leaving San Francisco. By the end of November over ten weapons would be available, presumably in the event the war had continued.

Document 46: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1222 – July 30, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

This report included an intercept of a message from Sato who reported that it was impossible to see Molotov and that unless Togo had a “concrete and definite plan for terminating the war” he saw no point in attempting to meet with the Soviet Foreign Minister.

Document 47: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1225 – August 2, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

An intercepted message from Togo to Sato showed that Tokyo remained interested in securing Moscow’s good office but that it “is difficult to decide on concrete peace conditions here at home all at once.” “[W]e are exerting ourselves to collect the views of all quarters on the matter of concrete terms.” Barton Bernstein, Richard Frank, and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, among others, have argued that the “Magic” intercepts from the end of July and early August show that the Japanese were far from ready to surrender. According to Herbert Bix, for months Hirohito had believed that the “outlook for a negotiated peace could be improved if Japan fought and won one last decisive battle,” thus, Hirohito delayed surrender, continuing to “procrastinate until the bomb was dropped and the Soviets attacked.”xxxii[38]

Document 48: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1226 - August 3, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

This summary included intercepts of Japanese diplomatic reporting on the Soviet buildup in the Far East as well as a naval intelligence report on Anglo-American discussions of U.S. plans for the invasion of Japan. Part II of the summary includes the rest of Togo’s 2 August cable which instructed Sato to do what he could to arrange an interview with Molotov.

Document 49: Meeting Notes, August 3, 1945

Source: Clemson University Libraries, Special Collections, Clemson, SC; Mss 243, Walter J. Brown Papers, box 10, folder 12, Byrnes, James F.: Potsdam, Minutes, July-August 1945

A number of scholars have used this item in the papers of Byrne's aide, Walter Brown, to make a variety of points. Richard Frank sees this brief discussion of Japan's interest in Soviet diplomatic assistance as crucial evidence that Admiral Leahy had been sharing "MAGIC" information with President Truman. He also points out that Truman and his colleagues had no idea what was behind Japanese peace moves, only that Suzuki had declared that he would "ignore" the Potsdam Declaration. Alperovitz, however, treats it as additional evidence that "strongly suggests" that Truman saw alternatives to using the bomb.xxxiii[39]

Documents 50a-c: Weather delays

[Document 50a](#): CG 313th Bomb Wing, Tinian cable APCOM 5112 to War Department, August 3, 1945, Top Secret

[Document 50b](#): CG 313th Bomb Wing, Tinian cable APCOM 5130 to War Department, August 4, 1945, Top Secret

[Document 50c](#): CG 313th Bomb Wing, Tinian cable APCOM 5155 to War Department, August 4, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, Tinian Files, April-December 1945, box 21 (copies courtesy of Barton Bernstein)

The Hiroshima "operation" was originally slated to begin in early August depending on local conditions. As these cables indicate, reports of unfavorable weather delayed the plan. The second cable on 4 August shows that the schedule advanced to late in the evening of 5 August. The transcriptions on the documents appear on the archival originals.

[Document 51](#): "Magic" – Far East Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, no. 502, 4 August 1945

Source: RG 457, Summaries of Intercepted Japanese Messages ("Magic" Far East Summary, March 20, 1942 – October 2, 1945), box 7, SRS 491-547

This "Far East Summary" included reports on the Japanese army's plans to disperse fuel stocks to reduce vulnerability to bombing attacks, the text of a directive by the commander of naval forces on "Operation Homeland," the preparations and planning to repel a U.S. invasion of Honshu, and the specific identification of army divisions located in, or moving into, Kyushu. Both Richard Frank and Barton Bernstein have used intelligence reporting and analysis of the major buildup of Japanese forces on southern Kyushu to argue that U.S. military planners were so concerned about that development that by early August 1945 they were reconsidering their invasion plans.xxxiv[40]

Document 52: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1228 – August 5, 1945, Top Secret Ultra
Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18.

This summary included several intercepted messages from Sato, who conveyed his despair and exasperation over what he saw as Tokyo's inability to develop terms for ending the war: "[I]f the Government and the Military dilly-dally in bringing this resolution to fruition, then all Japan will be reduced to ashes." Sato remained skeptical that the Soviets would have any interest in discussions with Tokyo: "it is absolutely unthinkable that Russia would ignore the Three Power Proclamation and then engage in conversations with our special envoy."

VI. The First Nuclear Strikes

Document 53: Memorandum from General L. R. Groves to the Chief of Staff, August 6, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5b (copy from microfilm)

The day after the bombing of Hiroshima, Groves provided Chief of Staff Marshall with a report which included messages from Captain William S. Parsons and others about the impact of the detonation which immediately killed at least 70,000, with many dying later from radiation sickness and other causes. xxxv[41]

How influential the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and later Nagasaki compared to the impact of the Soviet declaration of war were on the Japanese decision to surrender has been the subject of controversy among historians. Sadao Asada emphasizes the shock of the atomic bombs, while Herbert Bix has suggested that Hiroshima and the Soviet declaration of war made Hirohito and his court believe that failure to end the war could lead to the destruction of the imperial house. Frank and Hasegawa divide over the impact of the Soviet declaration of war, with Frank declaring that the Soviet intervention was "significant but not decisive" and Hasegawa arguing that the two atomic bombs "were not sufficient to change the direction of Japanese diplomacy. The Soviet invasion was." [42]



Hiroshima, after the first atomic bomb explosion. This view was taken from the Red Cross Hospital Building about one mile from the bomb burst. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, Still Pictures Branch, Subject Files, "Atomic Bomb")

Document 54: Memorandum of Conversation, "Atomic Bomb," August 7, 1945

Source: Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, box 181, Chron File Aug 5-9, 1945.

The Soviets already knew about the U.S. atomic project from espionage sources in the United States and Britain so Molotov's comment to Ambassador Harriman about the secrecy surrounding the U.S. atomic project can be taken with a grain of salt, although the Soviets may have been unaware of specific plans for nuclear use.

Documents 55a and 55b: Early High-level Reactions to the Hiroshima Bombing

Document 55a: Cabinet Meeting and Togo's Meeting with the Emperor, August 7-8, 1945

Source: Gaimusho (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) ed. Shusen Shiroku (The Historical Records of the End of the War), annotated by Jun Eto, volume 4, 57-60 [Excerpts] [Translation by Toshihiro Higuchi]

Document 55b: Diary Entry for Wednesday, August 8, 1945

Source: Takashi Itoh, ed., *Sokichi Takagi: Nikki to Joho* [Sokichi Takagi: Diary and Documents] (Tokyo, Japan: Misuzu-Shobo, 2000), 923-924 [Translation by Hikaru Tajima]

Excerpts from the Foreign Ministry's compilation about the end of the war show how news of the bombing reached Tokyo as well as how Foreign Minister's Togo initially reacted to reports about Hiroshima. When he learned of the atomic bombing from the Domei News Agency, Togo believed that it was time to give up and advised the cabinet that the atomic attack provided the occasion for Japan to surrender on the basis of the Potsdam Declaration. Togo could not persuade the cabinet, however, and the Army wanted to delay any decisions until it had learned what had happened to Hiroshima. When the Foreign Minister met with the Emperor, Hirohito agreed with him; he declared that the top priority was an early end to the war, although it would be acceptable to seek better surrender terms--probably U.S. acceptance of a figure-head emperor--if it did not interfere with that goal. In light of those instructions, Togo and Prime Minister Suzuki agreed that the Supreme War Council should meet the next day. [\[42a\]](#)



Ground Zero at Hiroshima Today: This was the site of Shima Hospital; the atomic explosion occurred 1,870 feet above it (Photo courtesy of Lynn Eden, www.wholeworldonfire.com)

An entry from Admiral Tagaki's diary for August 8 conveys more information on the mood in elite Japanese circles after Hiroshima, but before the Soviet declaration of war and the bombing of Nagasaki. Seeing the bombing of Hiroshima as a sign of a worsening situation at home,

Tagaki worried about further deterioration. Nevertheless, his diary suggests that military hard-liners were very much in charge and that Prime Minister Suzuki was talking tough against surrender, by evoking last ditch moments in Japanese history and warning of the danger that subordinate commanders might not obey surrender orders. The last remark aggravated Navy Minister Yonai who saw it as irresponsible. That the Soviets had made no responses to Sato's request for a meeting was understood as a bad sign; Yonai realized that the government had to prepare for the possibility that Moscow might not help. One of the visitors mentioned at the beginning of the entry was Iwao Yamazaki who became Minister of the Interior in the next cabinet.

Document 56: Navy Secretary James Forrestal to President Truman, August 8, 1945

Source: Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives, James Forrestal Diaries

General Douglas MacArthur had been slated as commander for military operations against Japan's mainland, but this letter to Truman from Forrestal shows that the latter believed that the matter was not so settled. Richard Frank sees this as evidence of the uncertainty felt by senior officials about the situation in early August; Forrestal would not have been so "audacious" to take an action that could ignite a "political firestorm" if he "seriously thought the end of the war was near."xxxvi[43]

Document 57: Memorandum of Conversation, "Far Eastern War and General Situation," August 8, 1945, Top Secret

Source: Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, box 181, Chron File Aug 5-9, 1945

Shortly after the Soviets declared war on Japan, in line with commitments made at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, Ambassador Harriman met with Stalin, with George Kennan keeping the U.S. record of the meeting. After Stalin reviewed in considerable detail Soviet military gains in the Far East, they discussed the possible impact of the atomic bombing on Japan's position (Nagasaki had not yet been attacked) and the dangers and difficulty of an atomic weapons program. According to Hasegawa, this was an important, even "startling," conversation: it showed that Stalin "took the atomic bomb seriously"; moreover, he disclosed that the Soviets were working on their own atomic program.xxxvii[44]

Document 58: Memorandum of Conference with the President, August 8, 1945 at 10:45 AM

Source: Henry Stimson Diary, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers (microfilm at Library of Congress)

At their first meeting after the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, Stimson briefed Truman on the scale of the destruction, with Truman recognizing the “terrible responsibility” that was on his shoulder. Consistent with his earlier attempts, Stimson encouraged Truman to find ways to expedite Japan’s surrender by using “kindness and tact” and not treating them in the same way as the Germans. They also discussed postwar legislation on the atom and the pending Henry D. Smyth report on the scientific work underlying the Manhattan Project and postwar domestic control of the atom.

Documents 59 a-c: The Attack on Nagasaki:

a. Cable APCOM 5445 from General Farrell to O’Leary [Groves assistant], August 9, 1945, Top Secret

b. COMGENAAF 8 cable CMDW 576 to COMGENUSASTAF, for General Farrell, August 9, 1945, Top secret

c. COMGENAAF 20 Guam cable AIMCCR 5532 to COMGENUSASTAF Guam, August 10, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, Tinian Files, April-December 1945, box 20, Envelope G Tinian Files, Top Secret

The prime target for the second atomic attack was Kokura, which had a large army arsenal and ordnance works, but various problems ruled that city out; instead, the crew of the B-29 that carried "Fat Man" flew to an alternate target at Nagasaki. These cables are the earliest reports of the mission; the bombing of Nagasaki killed immediately at least 39,000 people with more dying later. According to Frank, the "actual total of deaths due to the atomic bombs will never be known," but the "huge number" ranges somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 people. Barton J. Bernstein and Martin Sherwin have argued that if top Washington policymakers had kept tight control of the delivery of the bomb instead of delegating it to Groves the attack on Nagasaki could have been avoided. The combination of the first bomb and the Soviet declaration of war would have been enough to induce Tokyo's surrender. By contrast, Maddox argues that Nagasaki was necessary so that Japanese "hardliners" could not "minimize the first explosion" or otherwise explain it away.^{xxxviii}[45]



The mushroom cloud over Nagasaki shortly after the bombing on August 9. (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 77-AEC)

Document 60: Ramsey Letter from Tinian Island

a. Letter from Norman Ramsey to J. Robert Oppenheimer, undated [mid-August

1945], Secret, excerpts

Source: Library of Congress, J. Robert Oppenheimer Papers, box 60, Ramsey, Norman

b. Transcript of the letter prepared by editor.

Ramsey, a physicist, served as deputy director of the bomb delivery group, Project Alberta. This personal account, written on Tinian, reports his fears about the danger of a nuclear accident, the confusion surrounding the Nagasaki attack, and early Air Force thinking about a nuclear strike force.

VII. Toward Surrender

Document 61: "Magic" – Far East Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, no. 507, August 9, 1945

Source: RG 457, Summaries of Intercepted Japanese Messages ("Magic" Far East Summary, March 20, 1942 – October 2, 1945), box 7, SRS 491-547

Within days after the bombing of Hiroshima, U.S. military intelligence intercepted Japanese reports on the destruction of the city. According to an "Eyewitness Account (and Estimates Heard) ... In Regard to the Bombing of Hiroshima": "Casualties have been estimated at 100,000 persons."

Document 62: "Hoshina Memorandum" on the Emperor's "Sacred Decision [*go-seidan*]," 9-10 August, 1945

Source: Zenshiro Hoshina, *Daitoa Senso Hishi: Hoshina Zenshiro Kaiso-roku* [Secret History of the Greater East Asia War: Memoir of Zenshiro Hoshina] (Tokyo, Japan: Hara-Shobo, 1975), excerpts from Section 5, "The Emperor made *go-seidan* [= the sacred decision] – the decision to terminate the war," 139-149 [translation by Hikaru Tajima]

Despite the bombing of Hiroshima, the Soviet declaration of war, and growing worry about domestic instability, the Japanese cabinet (whose decisions required unanimity) could not form a consensus to accept the Potsdam Declaration. Members of the Supreme War Council—“the Big Six”^{xxxix}[46]—wanted the reply to Potsdam to include at least four conditions (e.g., no occupation, voluntary disarmament); they were willing to fight to the finish. The peace party, however, deftly maneuvered to break the stalemate by persuading a reluctant emperor to intervene. According to Hasegawa, Hirohito had become convinced that the preservation of the monarchy was at stake. Late in the evening of 9 August, the emperor and his advisers met in the bomb shelter of the Imperial Palace.



An overview of the destruction of Hiroshima [undated, circa August-September 1945] (Photo from U.S. National Archives, RG 306-NT)

Zenshiro Hoshina, a senior naval official, attended the conference and prepared a detailed account. With Prime Minister Suzuki presiding, each of the ministers had a chance to state his view directly to Hirohito. While Army Minister Anami tacitly threatened a coup (“civil war”), the emperor accepted the majority view that the reply to the Potsdam declaration should include only one condition not the four urged by “Big Six.” Nevertheless, the condition that Hirohito accepted was not the one that foreign minister Togo had brought to the conference. What was at stake was the definition of the *kokutai* (national policy). Togo’s proposal would have been generally consistent with a constitutional monarchy because it defined the *kokutai* narrowly as the emperor and the imperial household. What Hirohito accepted, however, was a proposal by the extreme nationalist Kiichiro Hiranuma which drew upon prevailing understandings of the *kokutai*: the “mythical notion” that the emperor was a living god. “This was the affirmation of the emperor’s theocratic powers, unencumbered by any law, based on Shinto gods in antiquity, and totally incompatible with a constitutional monarchy.” Thus, the Japanese response to the Potsdam declaration opposed “any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of his Majesty as a sovereign ruler.” This proved to be unacceptable to the Truman administration.^[47]

Document 63: "Magic" – Far East Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, no. 508, August 10, 1945

Source: RG 457, Summaries of Intercepted Japanese Messages ("Magic" Far East Summary, March 20, 1942 – October 2, 1945), box 7, SRS 491-547

More intercepted messages on the bombing of Hiroshima.

Documents 64 a-b: The First Japanese Offer Intercepted

a. "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1233 – August 10, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

b. Translation of intercepted Japanese messages, circa 10 August 10, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18

The first Japanese surrender offer was intercepted shortly before Tokyo broadcast it. This issue of the diplomatic summary also includes Togo’s account of his notification of the Soviet declaration of war, reports of Soviet military operations in the Far East, and intercepts of French diplomatic traffic. A full translation of the surrender offer was circulated separately. The translations differ but they convey the sticking point that prevented U.S. acceptance: Tokyo’s condition that the Potsdam Declaration “not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler.”

Document 65: Diary Entry, Friday, August 10, 1945, Henry Wallace Diary

Source: Papers of Henry A. Wallace, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa (copy courtesy of Special Collections Department)

Note: The second page of the diary entry includes a newspaper clipping of the Associated Press's transmission of the Byrnes note. Unfortunately, AP would not authorize the Archive to reproduce this item without payment. Therefore, we are publishing an excised version of the entry, with a link to the [Byrnes note](#).

Secretary of Commerce (and former Vice President) Henry Wallace provided a detailed report on the cabinet meeting where Truman and his advisers discussed the Japanese surrender offer, Russian moves into Manchuria, and public opinion on "hard" surrender terms. With Japan close to capitulation, Truman asserted presidential control and ordered a halt to the atomic bombings. Barton J. Bernstein has suggested that Truman's comment about "all those kids" showed his belated recognition that the bomb caused mass casualties and that the target was not purely a military one.xli[48]

Document 66: Diary Entries, Friday and Saturday, August 10 and 11, 1945

Source: Henry Stimson Diary, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers (microfilm at Library of Congress)

Stimson's account of the events of 10 August focused on the debate over the substance of the reply to the Japanese note, especially the question of the emperor's status. The U.S. reply, drafted during the course of the day, did not explicitly reject the Japanese note but suggested that any notion about the "prerogatives" of the emperor would be superceded by the concept that all Japanese would be "Subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers." The language was ambiguous enough to enable Japanese readers, upon Hirohito's urging, to believe that they could decide for themselves the emperor's future role. Stimson accepted the language believing that a speedy reply to the Japanese was necessary so that the United States could "get the homeland into our hands before the Russians could put in any substantial claim to occupy and help rule it." If the Note had included specific provision for a constitutional monarchy, Hasegawa argues, it would have "taken the wind out of the sails" of the military faction and Japan might have surrendered several days earlier, on August 11 or 12 instead of August 14.xlii[49]

Document 67: General L. R. Groves to Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, August 10, 1945, Top Secret

Source: George C. Marshall Papers, George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, VA (copy courtesy of Barton J. Bernstein)

While Groves was making plans for the use of a third atomic weapon sometime after 17 August, depending on the weather, Marshall's note on this memo shows that he was following Truman's

instructions to halt nuclear strikes: “It is not to be released over Japan without express authority from the President.”

Document 68: Memorandum of Conversation, "Japanese Surrender Negotiations," August 10, 1945, Top Secret

Source: Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, box 181, Chron File Aug 10-12, 1945

Japan’s prospective surrender was the subject of detailed discussion between Harriman, British Ambassador Kerr, and Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov during the evening of August 10 (with a follow-up meeting occurring at 2 a.m.). In the course of the conversation, Harriman received a message from Washington that included the proposed U.S. reply and a request for Soviet support of the reply. After considerable pressure from Harriman, the Soviets signed off on the reply but not before tensions surfaced over the control of Japan--whether Moscow would have a Supreme Commander there as well. This marked the beginning of a U.S.-Soviet “tug of war” over occupation arrangements for Japan.xliii[50]

Document 69: Diary Entry for August 12 [, 1945]

Source: Takashi Itoh, ed., *Sokichi Takagi: Nikki to Joho* [Sokichi Takagi: Diary and Documents] (Tokyo, Japan: Misuzu-Shobo, 2000), 926-927 [Translation by Hikaru Tajima]

As various factions in the government were maneuvering on how to respond to the Byrnes note, Navy Minister Yonai and Admiral Tagaki discussed the latest developments. Yonai was upset that Chief of Staff Yoshijiro Umezu and naval chief Suemu Toyada had sent the emperor a memorandum arguing that acceptance of the Brynes note would “desecrate the emperor’s dignity” and turn Japan into virtually a “slave nation.” The emperor chided Umezu and Toyoda for drawing hasty conclusions; in this he had the support of Yonai, who also dressed them down. As Yonai explained to Tagaki, he also confronted naval vice chief Takijiro Onishi to make sure that he too obeyed any decision by the emperor. Yonai made sure that Takagi understood his reasons for bringing the war to an end and why he believed that the atomic bomb and the Soviet declaration of war were making it easier for Japan to surrender.xliv[51]

Document 70: Memorandum from Major General Clayton Bissell, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, for the Chief of Staff, "Estimate of Japanese Situation for Next 30 Days," August 12, 1945, Top Secret

Source: National Archives, RG 165, Army Operations OPD, Executive Files 1940-1945, box 12, Exec #2

Not altogether certain that surrender was imminent, Army intelligence did not rule out the possibility that Tokyo would try to “drag out the negotiations” or reject the Byrnes proposal and

continue fighting. If the Japanese decided to keep fighting, G-2 opined that “Atomic bombs will not have a decisive effect in the next 30 days.” Richard Frank has pointed out that this and other documents show that high level military figures remained unsure as to how close Japan really was to surrender.

Document 71: The Cabinet Meeting over the Reply to the Four Powers (August 13)

Source: Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], ed., *Shusen Shiroku [Historical Record of the End of the War]* (Tokyo: Hokuyosha, 1977-1978), vol. 5, 27-35 [Translated by Toshihiro Higuchi]

The Byrnes Note did not break the stalemate at the cabinet level. An account of the cabinet debates on August 13 prepared by Director of Information Toshiro Shimomura showed the same divisions as before with Anami and a few other ministers continuing to argue that the Allies threatened the *kokutai* and that setting the four conditions (no occupation, etc.) did not mean that the war would continue. Nevertheless, Anami argued, “We are still left with some power to fight.” Suzuki, who was working quietly with the peace party, declared that the Allied terms were acceptable because they gave a “dim hope in the dark” of preserving the emperor. At the end of the meeting, he announced that he would report to Hirohito and ask him to make another “Sacred Judgment”. Meanwhile, junior Army officers plotted a coup to thwart the plans for surrender.xlv[52]

Document 72: Telephone conversation transcript, General Hull and Colonel Seaman [sic] – 1325 – 13 Aug 45, Top Secret

Source: George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, VA, George C. Marshall Papers (copy courtesy of Barton J. Bernstein)

While Truman had rescinded the order to drop nuclear bombs, the war was not yet over and uncertainty about Japan’s next step motivated war planner General John E. Hull (assistant chief of staff for the War Department’s Operations Division), and one of Groves’ associates, Colonel L. E. Seeman, to continue thinking about further nuclear use and its relationship to the problem of an invasion of Japan. As Hull explained, “should we not concentrate on targets that will be of greatest assistance to an invasion rather than industry, morale, psychology, etc.” “Nearer the tactical use”, Seeman agreed and they discussed the tactics that could be used for beach landings. In 1991 articles, Barton Bernstein and Marc Gallicchio used this and other documents to develop the argument that concepts of tactical nuclear weapons use first came to light at the close of World War II.xlvi[53]

Document 73: "Magic" – Diplomatic Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 1236 – August 13, 1945, Top Secret Ultra

Source: Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries 1942-1945, box 18

That important elements in the Japanese Army were unwilling to surrender is evident from intercepted messages dated 12 and 13 August. Willingness to accept the "destruction of the Army and Navy" rather than surrender inspired the military coup that unfolded and failed during the night of 14 August.

Document 74: "The Second Sacred Judgment", August 14, 1945

Source: Hiroshi [Kaian] Shimomura, Shusenki [Account of the End of the War] (Tokyo, Kamakura Bunko, [1948], 148-152 [Translated by Toshihiro Higuchi]

Frightened about the rapid movement of Soviet forces into Manchuria and worried that the army might launch a coup, the peace party set in motion a plan to persuade Hirohito to meet with the cabinet and the "Big Six" to resolve the stalemate over the response to the Allies. Japan was already a day late in responding to the Byrnes Note and Hirohito agreed to move quickly. At 10:50 a.m., the emperor met with the leadership at the bomb shelter in his palace. This account, prepared by Director of Information Shimomura, conveys the drama of the occasion (as well as his interest in shifting the blame for the debacle to the Army). After Suzuki gave the war party-- Umeza, Toyoda, and Anami--an opportunity to present their arguments against accepting the Byrnes Note, he asked the emperor to speak. Asking the leadership to accept the Note, Hirohito argued that continuing the war would reduce the nation "to ashes." Hirohito's language about "bearing the unbearable" and sadness over wartime losses and suffering prefigured the language he would use in his public announcement the next day. According to Bix, "Hirohito's language helped to transform him from a war to a peace leader, from a cold, aloof monarch to a human being who cared for his people" but "what chiefly motivated him ... was his desire to save a politically empowered throne with himself on it." xlvii[54]

Hirohito said that he would make a recording of the surrender announcement so that the nation could hear it. That evening army officers tried to seize the palace and find Hirohito's recording, but the coup failed. Early the next day, General Anami committed suicide. On the morning of August 15, Hirohito broadcast the message to the nation (although he never used the word "surrender"). On September 2, 1945 Japanese representatives signed surrender documents on the USS Missouri, in Tokyo harbor. xlviii[55]

Document 75: "Magic" – Far East Summary, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, no. 515, August 18, 1945

Source: RG 457, Summaries of Intercepted Japanese Messages ("Magic" Far East Summary, March 20, 1942 – October 2, 1945), box 7, SRS 491-547

This summary includes an intercepted account of the destruction of Nagasaki.

VIII. Confronting the Problem of Radiation Poisoning

Document 76: Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between General Groves and Lt. Col. Rea, Oak Ridge Hospital, 9:00 a.m., August 28, 1945, Top Secret

Source: RG 77, MED Records, Top Secret Documents, File no. 5b

Despite the reports pouring in from Japan about radiation sickness among the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, General Groves and Dr. Charles Rea were not ready to accept the evidence and dismissed the news as “propaganda”. For them the injuries were nothing more than “good thermal burns.”xlix[56]

Documents 77a-b: General Farrell Surveys the Destruction

a. Cable CAX 51813 from USS Teton to Commander in Chief Army Forces Pacific Administration, From Farrell to Groves, September 10, 1945, Secret

b. Cable CAX 51948 from Commander in Chief Army Forces Pacific Advance Yokohama Japan to Commander in Chief Army Forces Pacific Administration, September 14, 1945, Secret

Source: RG 77, Tinian Files, April-December 1945, box 17, Envelope B

A month after the attacks Groves’s deputy, General Farrell, traveled to Japan to see for himself the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His vivid accounts show that senior military officials in the Manhattan Project were no longer dismissive of reports of radiation poisoning. As he observed in his discussion of Hiroshima, “Summaries of Japanese reports previously sent are essentially correct, as to clinical effects from single gamma radiation dose.”

The editor thanks Barton J. Bernstein, J. Samuel Walker, and Gar Alperovitz for their suggestions. The editor also gratefully acknowledges the scholarship of Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, whose recent book, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005), includes invaluable information on Japanese primary sources. Professor Hasegawa kindly provided copies of some of the materials that were translated in this compilation. The editor also thanks Kyle Hammond for research assistance and Toshihiro Higuchi and Hikaru Tajima, graduate students in history at Georgetown University and the University of Tokyo respectively, for translating documents and answering many questions on the Japanese sources.

Notes

1 [1] . The World Wide Web includes significant documentary resources on these events. The Truman Library has published a helpful collection of archival documents, some of which are included in the present collection, see http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/index.php. The documents, however, were scanned with earlier software and are not as easy to use as they could be. Also useful is a collection edited by Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin, authors of the recently published Oppenheimer biography, *American Prometheus, The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, that includes transcriptions of a wide-ranging selection of documents, at <http://www.historyhappens.net/index.html>. Another collection of transcribed documents is Gene Dannen's "Atomic Bomb: Decision" at <http://www.dannen.com/decision/index.html>. For a print collection of documents, see Dennis Merrill ed., *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency: Volume I The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan* (University Publications of America, 1995).

l[2] . For the early criticisms and their impact on former officials, see Barton J. Bernstein, "Seizing the Contested Terrain of Early Nuclear History: Stimson, Conant, and Their Allies Explain the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Diplomatic History* 17 (1993): 35-72, and James Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995), 291-301. Social critic Dwight MacDonald wrote severe criticisms immediately after Hiroshima-Nagasaki; see *Politics Past: Essays in Political Criticism* (New York: Viking, 1972), 169-180. For Stimson's article, see "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Harper's* 194 (February 1947): 97-107.

[3] . The proposed script for the Smithsonian exhibition can be seen at Philippe Nobile, *Judgment at the Smithsonian* (New York: Matthews and Company, 1995), pp. 1-127. For reviews of the controversy, see Barton J. Bernstein, "The Struggle Over History: Defining the Hiroshima Narrative," *ibid.*, 128-256, as well as Charles T. O'Reilly and William A. Rooney, *The Enola Gay and The Smithsonian* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2005).

li[4] . For the extensive literature, see the references in J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) at 131-136, as well as Walker's latest contribution, "Recent Literature on Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground," *Diplomatic History* 29 (April 2005): 311-334.

lii[5] . The editor particularly benefited from perusing the sources cited in the following works: Robert S. Norris, *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie S. Groves, The Manhattan Project's Indispensable Man* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2002); Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999), Martin Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arm Race* (New York, Vintage Books, 1987), and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005). Barton J. Bernstein's numerous articles in scholarly publications (many of them are listed in

Walker's assessments of the literature) also constitute an invaluable guide to the primary sources. An article that Bernstein published in 1995, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered," *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 1995, 135-152, nicely summarizes his thinking on the key issues.

liii[6] . Sherwin, 126-127; James Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995), 203-207.

liv[7] . Alperovitz, 662; Bernstein (1995), 139; Norris, 377.

lv[8] . Alperovitz argues that the possibility of atomic diplomacy was central to the thinking of Truman and his advisers, while Bernstein, who argues that Truman's primary objective was to end the war quickly, suggests that the ability to "cow other nations, notably the Soviet Union" was a "bonus" effect. See Bernstein (1995), 142.

lvi[9] . Alperovitz, 147; Robert James Maddox, *Weapons for Victory: The Hiroshima Decision Fifty Years Later* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 52; Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 421-422. As Alperovitz notes, the Davies papers include variant diary entries and it is difficult to know which versions are the most accurate.

lvii[10] . Bernstein (1995), 146.

lviii[11] . Bernstein (1995), 144.

lix[12] . Walker (2005), 320.

lx[13] . Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 38-39.

lxi[14] . Barton J. Bernstein, Introduction to Helen S. Hawkins, et al. editors, *Toward a Livable World: Leo Szilard and the Crusade for Nuclear Arms Control* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), Sherwin, 210-215.

lxii[15] . Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2000), 523.

lxiii[16] . Walker (2005), 319-320.

lxiv[17] . For a recent review of the debate on casualty estimates, see Walker (2005), 315, 317-318, 321, 323, and 324-325.

lxv[18] . Hasegawa, 105; Alperovitz, 67-72; Forrest Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945-1959* (New York: Viking, 1987), 18. Pogue only cites the JCS transcript of the meeting; presumably, an interview with a participant was the source of the McCloy quote.

lxvi[19] . The Truman administration would later blame the 1946 Atomic Energy Act for the nullification of the Quebec Agreement. See National Security Archive electronic briefing book no. 159, "Consultation is Presidential Business": Secret Understandings on the Use of Nuclear Weapons, 1950-1974," at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB159/index.htm.

lxvii[20] . Alperovitz, 226; Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender," *Diplomatic History* 19 (1995), 237, note 22.

lxviii[21] . Alperovitz, 242, 245; Frank, 219.

lxix[22] . "Magic" summaries for post-August 1945 remain classified at the National Security Agency. Information from John Taylor, National Archives; Alperovitz, 232-238.

lxx[23] . Maddox, 83-84; Hasegawa, 126-128. See also Walker (2005), 316-317.

lxxi[24] . Bernstein, introduction, *Toward a Livable World*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

lxxii[25] . For the distances, see Norris, 407.

lxxiii[26] . For on-line resources on the first atomic test, see www.trinityremembered.com/

lxxiv[27] . Hasegawa, 28, 121-122.

lxxv[28] . Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 170-174, 248-249.

lxxvi[29] . Bernstein's detailed commentary on Truman's diary has not been reproduced here except for the opening pages, where he provides context and background on the diary.

lxxvii[30] . Frank, 258; Bernstein (1995), 147; Walker (2005), 322.

lxxviii[31] . Maddox, 102; Alperovitz, 269-270; Hasegawa, 152-153.

lxxix[32] . Hasegawa, 292.

lxxx[33] . Maddox, 105.

lxxxi[34] . Alperovitz, 392; Frank, 148.

lxxxii[35] . Alperovitz, 281-282. For Davies at Potsdam, see Elizabeth Kimball MacLean, *Joseph E. Davies: Envoy to the Soviets* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 151-166

lxxxiii[36] . Hasegawa, 168; Bix, 518.

lxxxiv[37] . Barton J. Bernstein, "Reconsidering the 'Atomic General': Leslie R. Groves," *The Journal of Military History* 67 (July 2003): 883-920.

lxxxv[38] . Bix, 490, 521.

lxxxvi[39] . Alperovitz, 415; Frank, 246.

lxxxvii[40] . Frank, 273-274; Bernstein, "The Alarming Japanese Buildup on Southern Kyushu, Growing U.S. Fears and Counterfactual Analysis: Would the Planned November 1945 Invasion of Southern Kyushu Have Occurred?" *Pacific Historical Review* 68 (1999): 561-609.

[41] . Frank, 273-274; Bernstein, "The Alarming Japanese Buildup on Southern Kyushu, Growing U.S. Fears and Counterfactual Analysis: Would the Planned November 1945 Invasion of Southern Kyushu Have Occurred?" *Pacific Historical Review* 68 (1999): 561-609.

lxxxviii[42] . Sadao Asada, "The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender: A Reconsideration," *Pacific Historical Review* 67 (1998): 101-148; Bix, 523; Frank, 348; Hasegawa, 298. Recently, Bix appears to have moved toward a position like Hasegawa's; see Bix, "Japan's Surrender Decision and the Monarchy: Staying the Course in an Unwinnable War," *Japan Focus* at <japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=321>. For emphasis on the "shock" of the atomic bomb, see also Lawrence Freedman and Saki Dockrill, "Hiroshima: A Strategy of Shock," in Saki Dockrill, ed., *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima : the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific, 1941-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 191-214.

[42a] . For more on these developments, see Asada, "The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender: A Reconsideration," 486-488.

1[43] . Frank, 300.

lxxxix[44] . Hasegawa, 191-192. For the inception of the Soviet nuclear program and the role of espionage in facilitating it, see David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994).

xc[45] . Sherwin, 233-237; Bernstein (1995), 150; Maddox, 148.

xcii[46] . The Supreme War Council comprised the prime minister, foreign minister, army and navy ministers, and army and navy chiefs of staff. Hasegawa, 72.

xciii[47] . For the maneuverings on August 9 and the role of the *kokutai*, see Hasegawa, 3-4, 205-214

xciiii[48] . For Truman's recognition of mass civilian casualties, see also his [letter to Senator](#)

Richard Russell, 9 August 1945.

xciv[49] . Hasegawa, 295.

xcv[50] . For “tug of war,” see Hasegawa, 226-227.

xcvi[51] . Hasegawa, 228-229, 232.

xcvii[52] . Hasegawa, 235-238.

xcviii[53] . Barton J. Bernstein, “Eclipsed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Early Thinking about Tactical Nuclear Weapons,” *International Security* 15 (Spring 1991): 149-173; Marc Gallicchio, “After Nagasaki: General Marshall’s Plans for Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Japan,” *Prologue* 23 (Winter 1991): 396-404. An exchange of correspondence on Bernstein’s article between Robert Messer, Gar Alperovitz, and Bernstein provides insight into some of the interpretative issues. “Correspondence,” *International Security* 16 (Winter 1991/1992): 214-221.

xcix[54] . Bix, “Japan's Surrender Decision and the Monarchy: Staying the Course in an Unwinnable War,” *Japan Focus*.

c[55] . Hasegawa, 238-249, 285. For translations of Hirohito’s broadcast, see www.japanorama.com/surrendr.html and www.free-definition.com/Gyokuon-housou.html (the latter includes the actual broadcast).

ci[56] . For Groves and the problem of radiation sickness, see Norris, 339-441 and Bernstein, “Reconsidering the ‘Atomic General’: Leslie R. Groves,” *Journal of Military History* 67 (2003), 907-908.
