

Clinton P. Anderson to Harry S. Truman, September 25, 1945.
President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON

September 25, 1945

The President
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

You have asked that members of the Cabinet give you suggestions as to what your course should be in connection with the disposition of the secret of atomic energy. I understand that this is distinct from revealing to any of our allies, other than those who already know it, the secret of the manufacture of the atomic bomb.

I can only repeat the suggestions that I made in the Cabinet meeting, namely that I do not feel that we are under any obligations at this time to reveal commercial secrets such as the secret of atomic energy, nor are we under any obligations to reveal a military secret developed independently by the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, at a cost of at least \$2,600,000,000 to the United States.

I listened carefully to the testimony that the Russians might be able to make an atomic bomb in five years. I have my own doubts about this. It is not a question of cold science, or the application of certain mathematical laws. We know that in the production of the atomic bomb there was a certain element of American mathematical and mechanical genius which has given us the automotive industry, the great development of the telephone industry, and countless other inventive processes which are not always developed in every land, and which seem to be peculiarly the result of long years of mechanization of industry within the United States. I quoted to you those lines from Kipling which suggested that they had copied all they could copy, but they couldn't copy our minds.

We need to remember that the Russians have known how to make automobiles, they have known all the trade secrets of the automobile, yet today they have to depend upon us for the machine tools, the equipment, the "know-how," to turn out trucks, tanks, and automobiles in sufficient numbers to see them through a mechanized war.

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Let me remind you also that the Russians have been skillful in the knowledge of the airplane, and yet it was our planes which they needed in great numbers to defend their country. It isn't just a question of turning over to them a mechanical formula; there needs to be certain types of evidence that they possess the genius to apply these laws in a manufacturing process before they can ever make from the knowledge of atomic energy a proper atomic bomb.

I was, of course, greatly interested in the moving statement of the retiring Secretary of War, Mr. Stimson. I appreciate his fine qualities; he is truly a great man, and I respect him for the long and distinguished service which he has rendered to the American people. At the same time, I am not willing to accept his statement that Russia has steadfastly been our friend, and that, therefore, we should not hesitate to turn over to Russia the secret of this bomb. I would ask him who saw Russia from the inside and understood its military secrets during the war. We opened up a great many of our things to Russia, and when we finished the war we were almost as much in the dark as to what Russia was doing, what Russia was planning, as the day we entered it on their side.

If the Russians did not trust us in time of war when we were their allies and when we were standing by their side protecting their homeland as they were under invasion, what reason do we have to believe that they would be our friends in time of peace when they were in no particular danger?

I think we need to remember the story of 1921 and 1922. We were persuaded to sell our battleships after a former war. We did it in the cause of peace. Did we get peace? No, we got a 5-5-3 ratio, with the British and the Japanese, and when the time came under President Roosevelt to start our program of rearmament, we found that the 5-5-3 ratio did not apply; that England had a greater navy than we had; that Japan, whose ratio number was 3, had a greater navy than we had, and we began to rebuild from an inferior position rather than from a position of equality. We ought not to make that same mistake twice in succeeding generations. Has Russia always been friendly? Was she friendly when she signed a neutrality pact with Hitler when the back of civilization itself was against the wall? I would remind you that

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that pact was broken by Germany in its lust for further world conquest. It was not broken by Russia in fervor of her zeal for the democratic nations. Russia was quite content to see Germany sweep over every small nation in Europe, and never raised a finger until Hitler invaded its own homeland. Then Russia became indignant against the Nazis and against the principles of the Nazi State. But as long as she was getting her swag in Poland, as long as she was immune from attack, Russia saw nothing wrong in the entire program of the Nazi government. I want our country to remember that, when Russia now wants a part of the atomic bomb.

And then I think I would ask this question of the War Department; why didn't the War Department gamble on Russia while it was developing the bomb? Why didn't we take Russia into our confidence while we were doing the actual work in connection with the development of atomic energy? The answer is we could not trust Russia when she was our ally in the war. I wonder why we feel we can trust her when she is our competitor in the peace. But the great and to me the persuading argument is the feeling of the American people. Some how I cannot help but feel that the people, in their instinctive trust of certain people and distrust of certain others, usually have about the right answer. They do not know all the reasons, but they come out with some surprisingly good answers. In this particular instance, I think I can say to you that every person I talked to in the two weeks that I was in New Mexico felt that the United States should not at this time release to the Russians the secret of atomic energy or of the atomic bomb.

I got still more convincing proof while I was at Decatur, Illinois, making a speech to the combined Chamber of Commerce and the Farm Bureaus. It was a splendid banquet, with some 675 people drawn from every section of Illinois. I made it my point to ask every person I could get to what his opinion was on the question of how far we should go toward releasing the bomb, or the secret of atomic energy, to Russia. The answer was completely unanimous. I did not meet a single person who thought that Russia should be given any part in this secret. I did not meet one single soul who believed that we should now be frank to Russia when they recognized that Russia, throughout the period of the war, had not been frank with us. To be sure, they wanted us to get along with Russia, but not at the cost of revealing to them the secret of atomic energy.

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Now my point is this: the President is the leader of the American people. You have a responsibility to all classes of people in the United States. You now have their complete confidence. It is astonishing to people all over this country the development of support which you have from all classes. Republicans, as well as Democrats, tell me on the streets, and write me letters to say, that they trust you, and that they are delighted with the way you are going. I think you have a responsibility to hold that trust by whatever means is necessary. I think you are obligated to do those things that will preserve the confidence of the American nation in its present Executive, even though some of the things you have to do may run slightly against your judgment as to the wise thing over a course of a hundred years. It is one thing to plan wisely for a hundred years; it is another thing to steer this government and its world associations safely through the period of the next ten or twelve years when many of the nations of the world will be in ferment.

I am not satisfied with conditions in France. I am not happy over the development of certain political sentiments in many lands. I think, however, that those people have a right to the selection of the type of government that they may prefer. But somewhere in this world there needs to remain some of those strong ~~quantity~~ qualities of government and of representative government which we in America delight to point to as flowering best within our own land. As long as you hold the confidence, love, and respect of the American people, you can persuade them to take their part in a United Nations organization. You can persuade them to assume their share of necessary monetary and economic reform. You can persuade them to sacrifice ~~the~~ their stocks of food in order to prevent chaos and anarchy in the world. But the day they think you are slipping; the day they believe you are yielding to Russia on important matters like the atomic bomb, then you are likely to sacrifice some degree of their confidence and respect, and you might eventually be sacrificing enough so that you no longer could successfully lead the American people into the proper paths in the years that come.

That is my big and abiding concern. I think it far out-shadows the importance of getting on with Russia in the next few months. After all, primarily, you are the Executive of the American people. Your responsibility is solely to this nation, and as long as you can hold its confidence, I believe you are assured of eventual success, not

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only for your programs, but for the programs which have been fostered by this nation over a long period.

Respectfully yours,

Deven Anderson
Secretary



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