THE ATOMIC BOMB

On April 25, 1945, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson had an appointment with the President at the White House. Stimson later, in his book "On Active Service In Peace And War" wrote:

"When Stimson went to the White House on April 25, 1945, to discuss the atomic bomb with a President from whom hitherto the matter had been kept secret, he took with him a memorandum which dealt not so much with the military use of the bomb as with its long-range political meaning."

In his book Stimson qaoted the memorandum as follows:

"1. Within four months we shall in all probability have completed the most terrible weapon ever known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city.

"2. Although we have shared its development with the U.K., physically the U.S. is at present in the position of controlling the resources with which to construct and use it and no other nation could reach this position for some years.

"3. Nevertheless it is practically certain that we could not remain in this position indefinitely.

"a. Various segments of its discovery and production are widely known among many scientists in many countries, although few scientists are now acquainted with the whole process which we have developed.

"b. Although its construction under present methods requires great scientific and industrial effort and raw materials, which are temporarily mainly within the possession and knowledge of U.S. and U.K., it is extremely probable that much easier and cheaper methods of production will be discovered by scientists in the future, together with the use of materials of much wider distribution. As a result, it is extremely probable that the future will make it possible to be constructed by smaller nations or even groups, or at least by a large nation in a much shorter time.

"4. As a result, it is indicated that the future may see a time when such a weapon may be constructed in secret and used suddenly and effectively with devastating power by a willful nation or group against an unsuspecting nation or group of much greater size and material power. With its aid even a very powerful unsuspecting nation might be conquered within a very few days by a very much smaller one. . . .

"5. The world in its present state of moral advancement compared with its technical development would be eventually at the mercy of such a weapon. In other words, modern civilization might be completely destroyed.

"6. To approach any world peace organization of any pattern now likely to be considered, without an appreciation by the leaders of our country of the power of this new weapon, would seem to be unrealistic. No system of control heretofore considered would be adequate to control this menace. Both inside any particular country and between the nations of the world, the control of this weapon will undoubtedly be a matter of the greatest difficulty and would involve such thorough-going rights of inspection and internal controls as we have never heretofore contemplated.

"7. Furthermore, in the light of our present position with reference to this weapon, the question of sharing it with other nations and, if so shared, upon what terms, becomes a primary question of our foreign relations. Also our leadership in the war and in the development of this weapon has placed a certain moral responsibility upon us which we cannot shirk without very serious responsibility for any disaster to civilization which it would further.

"8. On the other hand, if the problem of the proper use of this weapon can be solved, we would have the opportunity to bring the world into a pattern in which the peace of the world and our civilization can be saved. . . ."

In outlining the history of the development of the atomic bomb in his book, Stimson referred to a paper which he published in February, 1947, in Harper's Magazine and he quoted at length from that article.

He said that it was in the Fall of 1941 that the question of atomic energy was first brought directly to his attention. At that time President Roosevelt appointed a committee consisting of Vice President Henry Wallace, General Marshall, Dr. Vannevar Bush, President of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, Dr. James B. Conant, President of Harvard University and himself to advise the President on questions of policy relating to the study of nuclear fission which was then proceeding both in the United States and Great Britain. He said that from May 1, 1943, until his resignation as Secretary of War on September 21, 1945, he was directly responsible to the President for administration of the entire undertaking with General Marshall, Bush, Conant and Major General Leslie R. Groves, the Officer-in-charge of the project, as his chief advisor.

He said the policy adopted and steadily pursued by Roosevelt and his advisors was to spare no effort in securing the earliest possible successful development of an atomic weapon. The original experimental achievement of atomic fission, he pointed out, had occurred in Germany in 1938 and it was known that the Germans had continued their experiments. In 1941 and 1942 they were believed to be ahead of us and it was vital that they should not be the first to bring atomic weapons into the field of battle.

"At no time, from 1941 to 1945," Stimson wrote, "did I ever hear it suggested by the President or by any other responsible member of the Government that atomic energy should not be used in the war." He said the entire purpose of the project was production of a military weapon; "on no other ground could the war-time expenditure of so much time and money have been justified."

Stimson, in addition to general supervision of the work of General Groves, became Chairman of a combined policy committee, composed of British and American officials and responsible directly to the President and Prime Minister Churchill.

Until 1944, Stimson said work on the atom was financed from funds "elastically" available from other appropriations but as expenditure increased it was decided that direct appropriation would be necessary. Therefore, in February, 1944, Stimson, Marshall and Bush took it up with Speaker Rayburn and Representatives McCormack and Martin, Democratic and Republican Leaders of the House, who piloted the necessary appropriation through the House without public discussion. A meeting in June with Senators Barkley, White, Bridges and Thomas of Oklahoma, brought similar results in the Senate. In 1945 additional large appropriations were likewise obtained.

Stimson said that as time went on it became clear that the weapon would not be available in time for use in an European war and that war was successfully ended without it. In the Spring of 1945, however, it became evident that the climax of the effort was nearing but it was impossible to state with certainty that success had been achieved until a bomb was actually exploded. A test was to be made at the Alamogordo Reservation in New Mexico.

On March 15, 1945, Stimson said he had his last talk with President Roosevelt. He said he took with him a memorandum which the President had sent him from an unnamed person "who had been alarmed at the rumors of extravagance in the Manhattan Project." This man suggested that a body of outside scientists be formed to pass upon the project because there were rumors that Bush and Conant had "sold the President a lemon on the subject and ought to be checked upon." He said it was a rather jittery and nervous memorandum and rather silly but that he was prepared for it and gave the President a list of the scientists who were actually engaged on the project to show their high standing. The list he said comprised four Nobel prize men

and practically every physicist of standing. He said he then outlined the future of it, and "went over with him the two schools of thought that exist in respect to the future control after the war of this project, in case it is successful, one of them being the secret close-in attempt to control the project by those who control it now, and the dther being the international control based upon freedom both of science and of access." He told him that those things must be settled before the first projectile is used and that he must be ready with a statement to come out with the people on it just as soon as that is done. He agreed to that."

He said the conversation covered the three aspects of this question then uppermost in their minds — first that it was always necessary to suppress a lingering doubt that such a titanic undertaking could be successful; second the implications of success in terms of a long-range post-war effect; third the problem that would be presented at the time of the first use of the weapon, for with that first use he said there must be some public statement.

In April, Stimson set up a committee, charged with the functions of advising the President on the various questions raised "by our apparently imminent success in developing an atomic weapon." The committee, known as the Manhattan Committee consisted of Stimson as Chairman, George L. Harrison, who acted as Chairman in Stimson's absence; James F. Byrnes, then a private citizen, as personal representative of the President; Ralph A. Bard, Under Secretary of the Navy; William L. Clayton, Assistant Secretary of State; Dr. Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Scientific Research & Development, and President of the Carnegie Institute of Washington; Dr. Karl T. Compton, Chief of the Office of Scientific Research & Development, and President of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Dr. James B. Conant, Chairman of the National Defense Research Committee, and President of Harvard University.

The committee's work included the drafting of statements issued immediately after the first bombs were dropped, preparation of a bill for domestic control of atomic energy, and recommendations looking toward international control of atomic energy.

On June 1st, this committee recommended that the bomb be used against Japan, without specific warning, as soon as possible and against such a target as to make its devastating strength clear.

Stimson wrote that an advisory panel of the distinguished atomic physicists reported that they could propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war -- "we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use." Stimson said that the conclusions of the committee were similar to his own although he reached his independently and he felt that to extract a genuine surrender from the Japanese Emperor and his military advisors there must be administered a tremendous shock which would carry convincing truth of our power to destroy the Empire. He felt such an effective shock "would save many times the number of lives, both American and Japanese, that it would cost." He set forth an argument in support of his opinion which opinion he said was held not only by himself but by all his senior military advisors.

In July, 1945, although Japan had been seriously weakened, he said there was no indication of any weakening in the determination to fight rather than to accept unconditional surrender. Estimates of the War Department General Staff indicated that the Japanese army had a total strength of about five million men and there was a warm possibility that the Japanese Government might determine upon resistance to the end which would face the Allies with the task of destroying an armed force of five million men and five thousand suicide aircraft. Plans of the armed forces for the defeat of Japan had been prepared without reliance upon the atomic bomb. They included an intensified sea and air blockade, strategic air bombing through the summer and early fall to be

followed on November 1st by invasion of the southern island of Kyushu. This to be followed by an invasion of the main island of Honshu in the Spring of 1946. The total United States military and naval force of five million men would be involved. He said they estimated that if we should be forced to carry this plan to a conclusion with major fighting it would not end until the latter part of 1946 at the earliest. With these thoughts in mind he wrote a memorandum for the President on July 2nd. This was prepared after general discussion and agreement with Joseph C. Grew, Acting Secretary of State and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal. He said this was prompted not by the problem of atomic energy but by American desire to achieve a Japanese surrender without invading the home island.

The memorandum was of considerable length and bore the title "Proposed Program For Japan" and did not mention the atomic bomb. It would propose a carefully-timed warning to Japan before thy invasion of the Empire was attempted. He said there was much discussion in Washington about the timing of this warning and that the controlling factor in the end was the date set for the Potsdam Conference. He said it was President Truman's decision that such a warning should be issued by the United States and the United Kingdom from this meeting, with the concurrence of the Head of the Chinese Government so that it would be plain that all Japan's enemies were united. This was done in the Potsdam ultimatum of July 26th. On July 28th, the Japanese Premier rejected the ultimatum.

The New Mexico test of the atomic bomb occurred on July 16th while the President was at Potsdam.

He said a list of suggested targets for the atom bomb was made up and he approved four, including the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The former was bombed on August 6th and the latter on August 9th.

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