Truman: The Man Behind the Cold War

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I

President Harry S. Truman was one of the most influential figures of the Twentieth Century because his decisions within a few years of becoming president following Franklin D. Roosevelt directly impacted future events, such as the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb rather than exploring other alternatives such as conditional surrender of Japan, and his containment policy towards the Soviet Union, were due to his personal paranoia of communist expansionism throughout the world. Some scholars try to suggest that Truman's decisions were not major factors in the creation of the Cold War, and that he had no other alternatives. Truman however, did have other possible alternatives to encourage or force Japanese surrender and for dealing with the Soviet Union following the War. He, nonetheless, continued to ignore opportunities for cooperation with the other Super Power, and his actions were largely responsible for pushing the countries into the Cold War.

Following the war, liberal explanations of Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan focused on Truman's intent in saving millions of American lives that otherwise would have been lost in a land invasion. Revisionist historians such as Gar Alperovitz, from the mid

1960's to 1970's criticized liberal explanations and attacked Truman's decision to drop the bomb. Revisionists suggested that his decision had less to do with trying to avoid war but more to do with using the bomb to influence Soviet diplomacy.[1]

In 1992, David McCullough joined other Truman revivalists defending Truman against these attacks from the revisionists. The revivalist response began around the time of Truman's death in the early 1970s, and then became dominant once again after the end of the cold war during the late 1980s. Historians like McCullough argued Truman's policies were positive contributors, and cited the fall of the Soviet Union as evidence of that. These interpretations were dominant in the late 1990s and 2000s as studies of the factors leading to Truman's decisions at the end of the war. In his book, "Truman", McCullough defended the traditional, liberal interpretation and argued that Truman's motives had nothing to do with using the bomb for leverage against the U.S.S.R. in negotiations, but were purely to save American lives and that he had no other options. He asked how Truman would have justified not

[1] Gar Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess," Foreign Policy 99 (1995).

using the bomb to the American people after they had lost lives in an invasion.[2]

In response to historians such as McCullough, Gar Alperovitz wrote, “Hiroshima: Historians Reassess,” in 1995. Alperovitz argued that the use of the bomb was not necessary to end the war with Japan without an invasion. He mentioned that there were alternatives that could have been used in order to accomplish conditional surrender, and Truman and his advisors were aware of these options. However, Truman insisted on unconditional surrender of Japan and, according to Alperovitz, Truman felt the bomb would end the war before the Soviet Union could enter; therefore, he could use it and the shock of the weapon’s power as a tool in trying to control Soviet actions.[3]

Ronald Takaki’s, “Hiroshima” appeared in the same year, which was also the year of the 50th anniversary of the first use of the atomic bomb. Takaki supported Alperovitz’s argument that the decision to drop the bomb had less to do with Japanese surrender and more to do with postwar concerns with Russia. He argued that Truman did it to try and control the future of governing in the Far East region and that he also used it as a tool of diplomacy to

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[2] David McCullough, Truman, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).
[3] Alperovitz, “Hiroshima: Historians Reassess.”

get his way with policy in Eastern Europe. Takaki discredits the liberal argument that Truman used the bomb to save half a million American lives, and he also points to racism towards the Japanese people as a leading factor in Truman's decision to bomb Hiroshima.[4]

II

In early 1944, Truman was merely a Senator from Missouri who had no plans to become the vice-presidential candidate with Roosevelt's 1944 re-election campaign. Henry A. Wallace, Roosevelt's Vice-President at that time, was well liked by the President, and many assumed that he would remain as Vice-President. However, in the spring of 1944, leading Democratic Party leaders told Roosevelt that Wallace made his ticket weak and with him, the party might not win the upcoming Presidential election. Edward Flynn of the Bronx in New York was one of these prominent party leaders known as the big city bosses. He was a good friend of Roosevelt with a lot of influence over the President.[5] Flynn and the other big city bosses viewed Wallace as too liberal and wanted to get rid of him.[6] He was also

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[4] Ronald T. Takaki, Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995).
[5] David McCullough, "'I Hardly Know Truman'," American Heritage 43, no. 4 (1992): 48.
[6] Robert A. Divine, Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections, 1940-1948, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 119.

considered “soft” on Communism, and in his diary on July 5th 1944, Wallace mentioned how the President told him, “many people looked on me as a communist or worse.”[7]

When Wallace was dismissed as a candidate for re-election, Truman emerged as one of many who were considered to replace him on the ticket. Truman at first had no intentions of becoming Vice-President and he often told people that he wasn’t interested in being nominated.[8] In a letter to his daughter he wrote, “It is funny how some people would give a fortune to be as close as I am to it and I don’t want it.”[9] While Truman was meeting with the commissioner of internal revenue, Robert Hannegan, at the Blackstone hotel in Chicago just prior to the Democratic Convention, Truman overheard Hannegan’s phone conversation with the President Roosevelt. In this phone conversation, Roosevelt urged Hannegan to ask Truman if he was willing to sacrifice the party’s chances at winning the election because he didn’t want to be Vice-President. Immediately afterwards Truman finally agreed to run for the nomination.[10]

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[7] Henry A. Wallace, The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace 1942-1946, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), 363.
[8] McCullough, “’I Hardly Know Truman’,” 50.
[9] McCullough, “’I Hardly Know Truman’,” 50.
[10] McCullough, “’I Hardly Know Truman’,” 60.

Truman's supporters, who urged Roosevelt to pick him as his running mate for the upcoming election, were big city bosses who opposed Wallace's re-nomination. These men knew that whoever became the next Vice-President would most likely be the next President because they didn't expect Roosevelt would survive a fourth term.[11] Flynn and the other big city bosses liked Truman as a favorable candidate because they viewed him as a professional politician who could be easily manipulated.[12] Truman throughout his time in the Senate always voted in favor of Roosevelt's New Deal policies. In his memoirs Truman wrote, "I was a New Dealer from the start."[13] The vast expenditures from the New Deal went to these big city bosses and gave them even greater power.[14] Truman was well aware of those who backed him. He mentioned that when meeting with Hannegan at the Blackstone Hotel, that all of the political bosses, Ed Pauley, Frank Walker, Ed Kelly, Flynn, and Rank Hague, were there trying to convince him to run for the vice-presidency.[15] Since Truman would replace a man they considered too liberal and soft on Communism, he perceived himself as being placed in the office because he was the opposite. He was a

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[11] McCullough, "'I Hardly Know Truman'," 48.
[12] Divine, 120.
[13] Harry S. Truman, Year of Decisions, Vol. 1 of Memoirs. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955) 149.
[14] McCullough, Truman, 224.
[15] Merle Miller, Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman, (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1974), 181.

politician who supported big business and someone who was against the principles of Communism.

Prior to Truman's nomination to the vice-presidency, he was elected U.S. Senator from Missouri as the result of the influence of a big city boss. The Prominent political boss in Missouri was Tom Pendergast from Kansas City. Pendergast's power was as great as any political boss in the country, and his vote influenced all elections in Missouri, because his organization provided most of the jobs.[16] Truman realized that he could not advance in politics without the blessing of Pendergast. Truman even stated that things would be fine as "long as the Big Boss believes in me…"[17]

When Truman won the election for the Senate in 1936, the local press argued that Truman had little to do with his victory, but rather Pendergast was the actual reason. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote, "Under our political system, an obscure man can be made the nominee of a major political party for the high office of United States Senator by virtue of the support given him by a city boss. County judge Truman is nominee because Tom Pendergast

[16] McCullough, Truman, 195-196.
[17] McCullough, Truman, 195.

willed it so."[18] Once Truman was in the Senate, his ties and loyalty remained with Pendergast and his Kansas City organization. In the reception area of his office, Truman hung a portrait of Pendergast.[19]

During Truman's eight years in the Senate from 1936-1944, there were increasingly greater conflicts between labor organizations and the industrial bosses. During the 1930s, the two labor organizations, the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) began to fight over influence and control in labor. The conflicts between the A.F.L. and C.I.O. caused strikes to break out in every industry during 1937 and 1938. As one result, anti-labor sentiment began to grow in the pre-war United States.[20] In 1941, the labor unions controlled by these organizations demanded higher wages, but industrial employers refused to recognize these unions or their demands. As a result, 4,300 strikes broke out throughout the country in 1941.[21] Since these strikes harmed the country's national defense program, the public accused these communist inspired labor unions as putting

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[18] Bert Cochran, Harry Truman and the Crisis Presidency, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1973), 76.
[19] McCullough, Truman, 216.
[20] Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), 364-365.
[21] Rayback, 371.

their own desires above the country's well being.[22] They connected these labor unions with communism because many of the leaders in the C.I.O. in charge of these industrial unions were communist.[23]

Truman, whose loyalties and ties were with industrial bosses like Pendergast, supported anti-union during his years in the Senate. As chairman of the Senate Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, Truman blamed labor unions for the inefficiency of the national defense program.[24] In a letter to his wife, Bess, on August 21, 1941, Truman wrote, "Labor is a problem. The same brand of racketeer is getting his hand in as did in the camp construction program. Some of 'em should be in jail."[25]

Truman opposed labor's use of sit down strikes and in 1937 supported a measure that condemned the use of the tactic.[26] During 1941, when news was reported that Germany had turned its attack against the Soviet Union, (then Senator) Truman stated, "If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we out to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible, although I don't want to see Hitler victorious

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[22] Rayback, 373.
[23] Rayback, 366-367.
[24] Cochran, 108.
[25] McCullough, Truman, 264.
[26] Truman, 153.

under any circumstances."[27] During Truman's years in the Senate from 1936-1944, he had already began to view communism as a menace that needed to be dealt with.

III

One of the main consequences of Truman's effort to prepare for an ideological war against Communism was his decision to use the atomic bomb. President Truman claimed that his decision to drop the bomb was influenced strictly by trying to accomplish Japanese surrender quickly without the loss of many American lives. In reality, though, his motives were not purely saving peoples lives, but were affected by his fear of Russian expansion following the war and also his hatred of Japanese and his wanting to take revenge for Pearl Harbor. Truman mentioned in his memoirs that following the Potsdam Conference he realized what he must do in shaping future foreign policy. He wrote, "Force is the only thing the Russians understand. And while I was hopeful that Russia might someday be persuaded to work in co-operation for peace, I knew that the Russians should not be allowed to get into any control of Japan."[28] Truman had many other alternatives that would have provided the

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[27] McCullough, Truman, 262.
[28] Truman, 412.

Japanese surrender without invasion. These included allowing a conditional surrender with the Emperor intact or he could wait for the Soviet entry into the war, but he wanted to use the atomic bomb to help out with Russian diplomacy.[29]

In the morning of Tuesday August 7, 1945, the New York Times reported the atomic bomb had been dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. According to the Times, Truman blamed the Japanese government for forcing the United States to use the bomb. The article quoted Truman, who said that the Japanese were unwilling to accept the demands of surrender from the Potsdam conference and that if they did not accept, they could expect "a rain of ruin from the air the like of which has never been seen on this earth."[30] Secretary of War Henry Stimson stated in the article that the Japanese people would rather die than surrender and it was a relief to have a bomb that could be used against this type of enemy. He claimed that the bomb helped shorten the war. In reference to dropping the bomb on Hiroshima in Japan, Truman reportedly said, "What has been done, is the greatest achievement of organized science in history."[31]

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[29] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 33.
[30] Sidney Shalett, "New Age Ushered," New York Times, 7 August 1945, 1.
[31] Shalett, 2.

Truman rationalized his decision to use the bomb as trying to save American lives. He later said that if the U.S. was forced to invade Japan, then a half a million soldiers would have been killed and a million more would have been injured for life.[32] This suggests that Truman believed that without the bomb, the U.S. would have had to invade Japan in order to force its surrender and that would have resulted in great casualties. In relation to his decision, Truman said "When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast."[33] Truman also made sure that he was the one who was in charge of the final decision. He never relinquished responsibility and he actually wrote in his memoirs, "The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used."[34]

In reality, though, there was a good chance that the Japanese would have surrendered even without the United States bombing of Hiroshima, or a U.S. invasion, and Truman knew this was possible. Japan faced shortages on everything from their ammunition to fuel, which made their military position very weak and would soon have forced

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[32] Miller, 227.

[33] Robert J. Donovan, Conflict and Crises: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948, (New York: Norton, 1977), 97.

[34] Truman, 419.

their surrender.[35] Many high-ranking officers such as General MacArthur and Eisenhower knew this and disagreed with Truman on using the bomb, saying it was not necessary. In the South Pacific, on the same day the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, General MacArthur gave a press conference on the situation with the Japanese. In that press conference, MacArthur mentioned that the war might be over sooner than most expected and that Japan was already beaten. He stated that their Navy was impotent and that their shipping had been destroyed. Following that press conference, he received news of the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima.[36]

General Eisenhower supported MacArthur's stance and told Secretary Stimson at the Potsdam Conference, that the atomic bomb should not be used because the Japanese had already been defeated.[37] John Galbraith, who was a member of a U.S. strategic bombing survey group that looked at the necessity and effects of bombing tactics, studied the effect the atomic bomb had on ending the war in Japan shortly after the war. He concluded that the bomb only made a difference of two-to-three weeks in advancing the surrender of Japan. He claims the decision to seek peace had already been made prior to the Hiroshima bombing and

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[35] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 17-18.
[36] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 31.
[37] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 30.

that it took time for the heavily bureaucratic Japanese government to accomplish this. In his oral history interview with Studs Terkel, he states, "There would have been negotiations for surrender within days or a few weeks under any circumstances. Before the A-bombs were dropped, Japan was a defeated nation."[38]

Truman claimed an invasion would cost half a million American lives, but he knew that the casualties of an invasion would be much lighter. At Okinawa, American forces suffered tremendously large numbers of deaths due to Japanese unwillingness to surrender, and Truman was at first afraid that this would also happen with a mainland invasion, but to a higher degree. In a June 18th meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Truman that an invasion of the Japanese homeland would not be another Okinawa because the beaches near the Tokyo Plain were more suitable for invasion. The reason was that on Okinawa, there was only one direction the invasion could come from and that spot was heavily fortified, but on Kyushu they could attack from three fronts. Also, the beaches were more suitable because they were not as steep and the terrain of the Tokyo

[38] John Galbraith in Studs Terkel, The Good War, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 210.

plain would allow them to use their maneuver abilities better.[39]

When General Marshal, in June, sent a message to General MacArthur on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff asking him whether or not he still estimated casualties for an invasion at around 50,800 deaths, MacArthur assured them that he didn't anticipate the numbers to be so high. He claimed, instead that battle deaths would be no greater than 31,000.[40] Truman and his advisors were well aware that the numbers of death they stated to rationalize their use of the atomic bomb were exaggerated.

Truman and his advisors were also quite aware of the Japanese efforts to seek peace. After the tragic results on Okinawa for the Japanese, where 109,629 people died during the U.S. invasion,[41] Emperor Hirohito was anxious to find a way to bring the war to an end. He sent offers to Moscow seeking Soviet help in negotiating peace. Stalin announced during a meeting at Potsdam that the Japanese were asking Soviet help in mediating peace to end the war. Truman wrote, "It now appeared that the Japanese had sent another message, advising the Soviet government that Prince

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[39] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 24.

[40] Herbert Feis, The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), 8-9.

[41] Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "World War II," n.d., <http://search.eb.com/ebi/article?eu=299985> (24 May 2003).

Konoye would request Russian mediation and that he was acting on behalf of the Emperor, who wanted to prevent further bloodshed in the war."[42]

Japan's primary concern was the desire for a guarantee there would be no abolition of the Emperor system in Japan's government upon surrender.[43] Truman knew the Japanese were seeking peace because the U.S. had broken the Japanese codes and were able to acquire direct information on Japanese actions and communications.[44] With this knowledge, Truman and his advisors knew they had multiple options in how to end the war without invading Japan.

IV

One possible option was combined assault. The Japanese military was in poor shape and the people also lacked essentials for survival. The theory behind the method of combined assault was to beat up the Japanese until they could no longer fight. This would be done through continuous air attacks and a naval blockade of the country. Admiral William Leahy, the personal chief of staff to the President, favored this option and believed

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[42] Truman, 396.
[43] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 33.
[44] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 18.

that with this combined assault the Japanese could be forced to surrender.[45]

Another option was by inducement. The main obstacle to Japanese surrender was the Japanese fear that the Emperor would be abolished. Many United States officials, including Secretary of State Joseph Grew, believed that surrender could be accomplished by allowing the Japanese to retain their Emperor. The Japanese would not surrender if they knew that the Emperor would be abolished because they viewed him as a deity.[46] The elites' privileged position also relied on the continuance of the Emperor and his dynasty, and they were unwilling to accept surrender with the abolishment of the Emperor.[47]

Men like Grew knew that Japan would not accept surrender with the abolishment of the Emperor included and tried to convince the President to issue a proclamation for surrender with the assurance that the Emperor would remain. In his memoirs, Truman recalled, "Acting Secretary of State Grew had spoken to me in late May about issuing a proclamation that would urge the Japanese to surrender but would assure them that we would permit the Emperor to

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[45] Feis, 5.
[46] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 19.
[47] Sterling Seagrave and Peggy Seagrave, The Yamato Dynasty (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 194.

remain as head of the state."[48] Admiral Leahy said on June 18, 1945 that this would be consistent with the 1941 Atlantic Charter promise which created a new global organization to help manage international affairs, issued by the U.S. and England, guaranteeing the right of people to choose their own government.[49]

Many officials, including General Marshall, also believed that the Soviet Union's entry into war with Japan would dishearten the Japanese and encourage them to surrender.[50] Joseph Stalin, at the February 1945 Yalta Conference, promised he would join the war with Japan no later than three months following the German surrender. This placed the approximate time for Soviet entry into the war around August 8th, and at Potsdam, Stalin confirmed the Soviets would follow through with this commitment.[51] General Marshal and many military leaders believed that the attack on Japan by the U.S.S.R. would bring about Japanese surrender.[52]

In addition to the possible assurances that the Emperor could remain and the likely effect that Soviet entry into the war would have on Japanese die-hards, Truman

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[48] Truman, 416.
[49] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 32.
[50] Feis, 14.
[51] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 21.
[52] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 20.

also could have used the option of demonstrating the use of the bomb and possibility of non-military to secure Japanese surrender. The idea of a non-military demonstration was rejected on June 1st by Truman's Interim Committee, which was supposed to advise the president on the use of the bomb, and its recommendation was based on the fear that when demonstrating the bomb, it would turn out to be a dud. They argued that if the demonstration failed that the chance of shock and surprise would be gone.[53]

Truman rejected all of these options. He didn't like the idea of allowing Soviet entry into the war, because if that happened, the U.S.S.R. would gain leverage and influence at the peace table, which Truman and his advisors didn't want.[54] Truman stated in his memoirs that the Soviets were always trying to acquire their own advantage and after negotiations over Germany, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, and Poland, he didn't want them involved in control over Japan, because the Soviets were trying to conquer the world.[55] He also rejected the idea of providing some type of warning, or even a provision in the July 26, 1945 Potsdam Declaration, allowing the Emperor to stay after surrender. However, after the use of the atomic bomb

[53] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 39-40.
[54] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 65.
[55] Truman, 412.

and the Japanese surrender, he did allow the Emperor to remain. Prior to that decision, however, Truman didn't do anything to improve possibilities for prompt surrender.[56]

Japan had just changed their Premier in their government due to Premier Kuniaki Koiso's lack of support from militarists or peace groups, and the recent defeats of Japan at Leyte and Iwo Jima.[57] In response to the Potsdam declaration, the new Japanese Premier, Kantara Suzuki, told the press that, since the declaration demanded Japan's unconditional surrender but didn't propose anything new, Japan would just ignore it.[58] Winston Churchill suggested that Truman offer Japan a warning to surrender on terms just short of unconditional surrender in order to allow the Japanese to save their national identity and military honor. Truman's response was, "The Japs had no longer any military honor after Pearl Harbor."[59]

Truman pushed for quick surrender from Japan by shocking them with the atomic bomb. When Truman made the final decision, he followed the three recommendations of the interim committee. The first recommendation was that the bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible.

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[56] Richard F. Haynes, The Awesome Power, Harry S. Truman as Commander in Chief, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 40.
[57] John Toland, The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945, (New York: Random House, 1970), 679-687.
[58] Haynes, 55.
[59] Haynes, 38.

The Committee argued this would accomplish a quick end to the war without need for assistance from the Soviets. The second recommendation was that the bomb should be used on a dual target. They wanted it to be a military target to justify the actions, but they also wanted it to be surrounded by houses to accomplish a more psychological effect on the people. The third recommendation was to use it without any prior warning to the Japanese to provide the initial shock desired. The committee argued the United States had already provided a warning in the form of the Potsdam Proclamation, which had indicated that four Japanese cities would soon be destroyed from the air.[60]

One reason Truman decided to drop the bomb rather than follow one of the other alternatives was the great amount of money already invested into the project in creating the atomic bomb. Federal expenditures on the bomb totaled over $2 billion dollars and congress planned to suspend funding if the war ended before the bomb was used.[61] This expense probably made it impossible, in Truman's mind, not to use the bomb in the end.[62] The continuance of federal expenditures also benefited the industrial bosses who Truman supported and was likely another reason for wanting

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[60] Feis, 47-48.
[61] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 38-39.
[62] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 28.

to make sure that federal funding continued on nuclear production.

Truman's willingness to use the bomb on Hiroshima also had to do with racism and the desire for revenge towards the Japanese by America. People in the United States viewed the Japanese as demons, savages, and beasts.[63] The Europeans were viewed as good people subjected to bad leadership, but the Japanese were viewed as bad people and Americans wore buttons that read "Jap hunting license." In a 1945 July edition of Time magazine, the magazine declared, "The ordinary unreasoning Jap is ignorant. Perhaps he is human. Nothing … indicates it."[64] Americans developed an attitude of no mercy on Japan because they believed Japan had no mercy on them.[65] In reference to that time, E.B. Sledge stated in his oral history interview with Terkel, "You developed an attitude of no mercy because they had no mercy on us."[66]

A survey in a December 1945 issue of Fortune magazine, reported that 53.5 percent of Americans polled agreed with using the bombs the way Truman did, and 22.7 percent thought he should have used as many as he could before they

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[63] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 73.
[64] Ronald Takaki, Double Victory, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 169.
[65] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 74.
[66] E.B. Sledge in Studs Terkel, The Good War, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 61.

could surrender.[67] Truman shared this hatred of the Japanese race and, like many other Americans; he wanted revenge because of his bitterness about Pearl Harbor.[68]

In his diary, Truman referred to Japanese as savages, and in reference to Hiroshima he said, "Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid manifold."[69] This reveals that Truman had no compassion for the Japanese people and revenge was on his mind when making the decision to use the atomic bomb.

V

The most important factor in Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb was his effort to affect foreign diplomacy with the Soviet Union. Truman was concerned with Russian expansionism. He wrote that after Potsdam his feeling was that "The Russians were planning world conquest."[70] Secretary of State James Byrnes later described Truman's ideas when he began to define the atomic attack on Japan as a way to challenge Soviet expansionism.[71] In his memoirs, Truman wrote that he met with Stimson at noon on the 25th of April. He recalled that Stimson, "…wanted specifically to

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[67] Elmo Roper, "The Fortune Survey," Fortune, December 1945, 305.
[68] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 99.
[69] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 100.
[70] Truman, 412.
[71] Takaki, "Hiroshima", 62.

talk to me today about the effect the atomic bomb might likely have on our future foreign relations… And he had added that in his belief the bomb might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war."[72]

Truman and his advisors found it important to use the bomb to end the war with Japan before the Soviet Union got involved. Once they were given notice at Potsdam that the bomb worked, Truman tried to stall Stalin, delaying Soviet entry in the war. The reasoning was, in Byrnes words, that the Administration was "hoping for time, believing [that] after [the] atomic bomb Japan will surrender and Russia will not get in so much on the kill, thereby being in a position to press claims against China."[73]

Months prior to using the bomb, the way in which Truman dealt with Stalin at the Potsdam conference during the summer of 1945 provides evidence that the power of the atomic bomb would be used to leverage negotiations with the Soviet Union over post-war issues. Truman began to take a more aggressive and non-compromising approach in dealing with Stalin. While at Potsdam, Truman received news that the tests on the atomic bomb were successful. Secretary of War Henry Stimson observed this new attitude and said in

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[72] Truman, 87.
[73] Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess", 26.

reference to President Truman that it "gave him an entirely new feeling of confidence."[74]

The two biggest issues at Potsdam that divided American and Soviet negotiators involved the amount of reparations the Soviet Union would receive from Germany, and the location of Poland's western boundary.[75] Soviet interests in these two issues were a matter of security. Stalin was determined to receive the reparations promised to them during the Yalta agreements to help rebuild Soviet industry. These reparations also would ensure that Germany wouldn't ever be able to wage another war on the Soviet Union. The amount that the Soviets demanded was $10 billion.[76]

Soviets viewed the Poland boundary issue as vital to their security. Historically, Poland had been the door for attack on Russia. One of Stalin's top priorities following the war was to somehow close that door.[77] After the war, Stalin wanted Poland to occupy parts of German territory along its western boundary. He also pushed to make sure that the Polish government was friendly to the Soviet Union. This would buffer the Soviet Union from other

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[74] Arnold A. Offner, Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953, (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 75.
[75] Offner, 87.
[76] Offner, 80.
[77] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Origins Of The Cold War," in Consensus at the Crossroads: Dialogues in American Foreign Policy. (New York: Dodd, 1972), 121.

countries in Europe. Truman would not agree to this and said he refused to give away Germany in many pieces.[78]

Stalin tried to compromise and stated the Soviets would accept $1-$2 billion less than what the Yalta agreements had proposed. Both Truman and Secretary of State James Byrnes refused this offer because both believed that the bomb would allow them to achieve their goals without having to compromise with Stalin.[79] In referring to the bomb, Truman wrote on July 18th, "I have several aces in the hole."[80] He truly believed he held the upper hand on everyone else, including the Soviet Union.

VI

In the 1960s, revisionists attacked Truman and his role in starting the Cold War. Their critiques were based on their dissatisfaction with liberal democratic capitalism. Revisionists also did not trust presidential powers and disliked the continued growth of the military and the buildup of nuclear weapons. Many also wrote in response to the failing campaign of the Vietnam War.[81] D.F. Fleming's "The Cold War and its Origins," published in

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[78] Offner, 83.
[79] Offner, 84.
[80] Offner, 82.
[81] Franklin D. Mitchell, "Harry S. Truman and the Verdict of History." South Atlantic Quarterly 85, no. 3 (1986): 265.

1961, argued that Truman shifted the policy of cooperation that Roosevelt had established with the Soviet Union and was therefore, the main cause of the Cold War. He suggested that the ideological war between the two countries was not inevitable, but rather that Truman's uncompromising approach with the Soviet Union pushed Stalin towards opposing the United States.[82]

In 1967, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. defended Truman in "Origins of the Cold War," challenging the revisionist interpretation. He claimed that any alternative U.S. policy towards the U.S.S.R. would not have made a difference. Rather, he argued, the Cold War was inevitable. He argued that Stalin's paranoia was responsible for the beginning of the Cold War. Even if Truman had compromised with Stalin, Schlesinger argued, Stalin thought the world needed to be dominated by communist ideology and he eventually would have tried to expand Soviet influence throughout the world. No Truman policy, therefore, would have been successful, if it required compromise with Stalin.[83]

Barton J. Bernstein, in "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War,"(1970) responded to

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[82] D.F. Fleming, The Cold War and Its Origins, 1917-1960, vol. 1 (Garden City New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961).
[83] Schlesinger, 111-133.

Schlesinger's liberal defense of Truman. He wrote this book during the Vietnam War and was most likely influenced by what he saw as the failure of American foreign policy. Bernstein argued that leaders of the U.S. wanted to reshape the world to meet American needs and standards. Truman's administration, for example, tried to eliminate Soviet influence in Eastern Europe, which contradicted Roosevelt's agreement with the Soviet Union at the Yalta Conference. This "Truman Doctrine" destroyed any chance for accommodation between the two countries and directly led to the Cold War. Bernstein argued that the Truman administration took this stance in a fearful effort to protect American political economy from expansive Soviet Communism.[84]

This policy toward the Soviet Union was a shift from the policy that Roosevelt had followed while he was president. Roosevelt adopted a policy of accommodation and cooperation when dealing with the Soviets. He believed that the Communist government couldn't last, that it was too unnatural, and that its control would eventually falter away. Therefore, he believed that the U.S. should use the

[84] Barton J. Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," in Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 15-77.

policy of cooperation and eventually both countries would come more united as the Communist government failed.[85]

Roosevelt revealed this accommodating stance when he entered into armistice agreements with Britain and Russia in early 1945. In the agreements, he accepted Russian military control over the governments of the ex-Nazi satellites in Eastern Europe.[86]

An editorial in the February 26, 1945 issue of Life magazine, mentions that Roosevelt had been criticized by the United States press and Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg for his policy of abstention in European policy. The article regarding Yalta praised Roosevelt for his new involvement in European matters. It also expressed hopes that the United States and "Russia" could work together. The editor wrote, "Russia, too, has proved again at Yalta that, while she may have her own plans for Europe, especially on her borders, she would rather promote them within the Big Three framework than through a lone-wolf imperialism. Thus America and Russia have edged a little closer to each other, like partners in a Virginia reel."[87]

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[85] W. Averell Harriman, "U.S.-Soviet Relations and the Beginning of the Cold War," in Consensus at the Crossroads: Dialogues in American Foreign Policy. (New York: Dodd, 1972), 103.

[86] Gar Alperovitz, "How Did The Cold War Begin?," in Consensus at the Crossroads: Dialogues in American Foreign Policy. (New York: Dodd, 1972), 95.

[87] Editorial, "After Yalta," Life, February 26 1945, 24.

Other high-ranking officials who supported cooperation with the Soviet Union were General Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower. Their reasoning was that up to the end of the war, Soviet President Joseph Stalin had fulfilled all of his military commitments.[88] During the war, Americans also perceived Stalin in a friendly and popular way. He was nicknamed Uncle Joe, who was tough but friendly to the United States.[89] Truman at first showed a liking for Stalin. Truman said while at Potsdam, in referring to the Soviet President, "I can deal with Stalin. He is honest—but smart as hell."[90] This positive outlook towards Stalin changed, however, during 1945. Following the Potsdam Conference, Truman claimed that the Soviets were seeking their own aims and were tough to bargain with. He wrote, "Yet I was not altogether disillusioned to find now that the Russians were not in earnest about peace."[91]

Due to his unwillingness to work with the Soviets, Soviet diplomats became frustrated with Truman. They tried to compromise, expressing willingness to accept $8 billion rather than the $10 billion in reparations proposed at Yalta, but Truman would not give them what they believed

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[88] Harriman, 103.

[89] Les k. Adler, and Thomas G. Paterson. "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930's-1950's." American Historical Review 75, no. 4 (1970): 1060.

[90] Offner, 72.

[91] Truman, 411-412.

was their due for their contribution in the war.[92] Soviet diplomats felt as though Truman had abandoned Roosevelt's policy of cooperation. Secretary of State Byrnes suggested that this complaint was very understandable, since Truman was reversing Roosevelt's agreements to let Soviets have control in Eastern Europe, because he wanted to reduce Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.[93]

The U.S. questioned Soviet intentions following the war. In 1945, Americans did not view Soviet policy as expansionist and were not worried about expansion of communism at that time.[94] In a New York Times article on June 22nd 1945, Admiral William H. Standley observed, "that Stalin 'sincerely and fervently' wants a lasting peace."[95] The next day, the New York Times printed another article quoting Bernard M. Baruch as saying, "I have no fear of the spread of bolshevism in the United States."[96] After the war, however, Truman and his administration started to claim that the Soviets were out to expand their Empire. Many Americans began to express fears that the Soviet Union was not willing to compromise and wanted to dominate them internationally. They argued that efforts to compromise

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[92] Offner, 90.
[93] Alperovitz, "How Did The Cold War Begin?", 98.
[94] Alperovitz, "How Did The Cold War Begin?", 94.
[95] "Russia Seen Eager For Lasting Peace," New York Time, 22 June 1945, 8.
[96] Frederick R. Barkley, "Baruch Says Peace Depends on Ending Reich's War Power," New York Time, 23 June 1945, 6.

were useless. Instead, Americans favored a get-tough policy with the Soviet Union.[97] Truman argued that if the United States failed to help the countries in Eastern Europe escape Soviet dominance, the Soviets would not be satisfied with just having that area. Rather, they would then penetrate into Western Europe and would conquer that area next.[98]

This claim that Soviet policy was mainly expansionist and could not be negotiated with was false. There was really no indication of an interest in world conquest on Stalin's part. In Adam Ulman's study of Soviet foreign policy, he observed, "Soviet leaders sensibly enough concentrated on the area deemed of direct importance to the Soviet Union: eastern and southeastern Europe."[99] This suggests that the U.S.S.R. was primarily concerned with just the areas in their sphere of influence, like Eastern Europe, and not areas that had no impact on their country's interests.

Soviet interests following the war aimed at protecting their frontiers from future attacks. The U.S.S.R. had suffered many invasions, with the latest one (World War II)

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[97] Adler, 1063.
[98] Harriman, 105.
[99] Adler, 1062.

costing them the deaths of about twenty million people.[100] Stimson told Truman that Soviet demands for security in Eastern Europe were not unreasonable, and were comparable to the U.S. position in Latin America.[101]

This point was proven in 1948, when the United States attempted the same type of security control at the Bogotá conference. Historian Rollie E. Poppino observed that in response to U.S. concerns about international communism in Latin America, "the conference declared international communism incompatible with the American concept of freedom and called on the member states to control the activities of local Communists."[102]

Ex-vice president Henry Wallace, who was later released from his cabinet position, Secretary of Commerce, because of his public criticisms of Truman's administration in dealing with the Soviet Union, argued that Truman should have allowed Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. He wrote to Truman in 1946, suggesting that the U.S.S.R. had legitimate security needs in Europe.[103] In a letter he wrote to Truman on March 14, 1946, Wallace suggested that

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[100] Schlesinger, 117-118.
[101] Schlesinger, 116-117.
[102] Rollie E. Poppino, "The Early Cold War Period." Current History 56, no. 334 (1969): 343.
[103] Adler, 1061.

these needs included political and economic security from Western hostilities.[104]

Along with the evidence that suggests Russia was not interested in expansion, Soviets also took many actions that show they were willing to compromise and cooperate with America. When Truman first took over as President, Stalin stated, "President Roosevelt has died but his cause must live on. We shall support President Truman with our forces and all our will."[105] Stalin and his government allowed free elections in Finland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Stalin and Byrnes also worked out agreements to control the atomic bomb, but Truman and Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg overturned them in December of 1945.[106] Between March 20th and 23rd of 1946, the Soviets even offered to leave Iran and completely withdraw from China by the end of April.[107]

In response, the U.S. rejected the legitimate expression of security interests desired by the Soviets in Eastern Europe, and U.S. policy-makers refused to meet the Soviets halfway. Rather, the U.S. demanded that the U.S.S.R. should give up all land gained by occupation

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[104] Truman, 555.

[105] Harriman, 108.

[106] Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War." Journal of American History 83, no. 4 (1997): 1313.

[107] Fraser Harbutt, "American Challenge, Soviet Response: The Beginning of the Cold War, February-May, 1946." Political Science Quarterly 96, no. 4 (1981-82): 635.

during the war.[108] Stimson argued that conditions in Eastern Europe would have turned out differently if the U.S. had been willing to negotiate with the Soviets and had helped provide for their security requirements to be met.[109] In Hungary for example, the Soviet Union allowed Soviet sponsored free elections to occur in 1945.[110]

Truman's administration wanted something that would give it a clear picture on Soviet foreign policy and it found it in 1946. Following a speech by Stalin in February 1946, which Truman perceived as threatening. Truman asked the Charge d' Affairs of the American embassy in Moscow, George Kennan, what he felt Soviet intentions were.[111] Kennan's long telegram in that year argued against negotiating and emphasized containment of the Soviet Union.[112] Kennan, who due to his embassy position in Moscow, was considered an expert in relation to Soviet government, attacked the Soviet leadership and claimed the Soviets were dangerous and committed to destroying the United States. Kennan's telegram helped Truman's administration develop a picture of the Soviet Union, and

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[108] Alperovitz, "How Did The Cold War Begin?", 94.
[109] Alperovitz, "How Did The Cold War Begin?", 98.
[110] Alperovitz, "How Did the Cold War Begin?", 99.
[111] Willard Hogeboom, "The Cold War and Revisionist Historiography." Social Studies 61, no. 7 (1970): 314.
[112] Costigliola, 1309.

his containment suggestion supported the stance already taken by the Truman administration.[113]

Along with Kennan's telegram, Truman's administration used the tactic of fear to accomplish their policies and objectives in relation to the Soviet Union. Truman asked Republican Senator Vandenberg how he could get his Greek-Turkish aid bill passed and Vandenberg told him, "There is only one way to get it. That is to make a personal appearance before Congress and scare hell out of the country."[114] That is exactly what Truman and his administration attempted to accomplish.

Truman's administration began a campaign of comparing Stalin and the Russian government to Hitler's Nazi government. In 1947, Truman said, "There isn't any difference in totalitarian states. I don't care what you call them, Nazi, Communist or Fascist…"[115] In Truman's speech to Congress on New Foreign Policy, reported in the March 13th 1947 edition of New York Times, Truman challenged America to ensure peaceful development of nations. He declared, "We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity

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[113] Costigliola, 1313.
[114] Howard Bliss, ed. Consensus at the Crossroads: Dialogues in American Foreign Policy. (New York: Dodd, 1972), 134.
[115] Adler, 1046.

against aggressive movements that seek to impost on them totalitarian regimes."[116]

Bliss Lane, American ambassador to Poland, even suggested that Soviet security police were the same as Germany's Gestapo.[117] The Truman Doctrine asserted that totalitarian regimes imposed on free people and threatened international peace and U.S. security. Truman linked international peace with U.S. security.[118] In reference to the civil war between the Greek government and the communist rebels, Truman stated that the fall of Greece to communists would start a chain reaction that led to them dominating the world and is why it is necessary for the U.S. to fight against such actions that threaten their security.[119]

The Truman Doctrine, urged all Americans to join a moral crusade against the evil of communism and Truman described his stand on aid to Greece as a "counter-Russia move."[120] In a speech, reported in the New York Times on March 13th, Truman said, "If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely

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[116] "Text of President Truman's Speech on New Foreign Policy," New York Times, 13 March 1947, 2.
[117] Adler, 1054.
[118] Lee Edwards, "Congress and the Origins of the Cold War: The Truman Doctrine." World Affairs 151, no. 3 (1988-89): 131.
[119] Edwards, 135-136.
[120] Richard J. Barnet, "The Truman Doctrine and the Greek Civil War," in Consensus at the Crossroads: Dialogues in American Foreign Policy. (New York: Dodd, 1972), 154, 156.

endanger the welfare of this nation."[121] Without this scare tactic, Truman probably would not have been able to get his bill approved to provide military aid to the Greek government. During this time, his power in the government dwindled. The Republicans dominated both houses of Congress, and Truman's approval rate was down to only 32 percent.[122] Using fear enabled Truman, with help from leading Republicans like Vandenberg, to regain power in the government, and he was then re-elected.

Although Truman made this connection between Greece and Russia, Stalin and the Soviet government were not involved with the communist guerillas who were creating problems in Greece for the government through violent conflicts. Stalin provided no aid to Greek communists and was actually willing to accept a form of democracy in Greece, as long as it was friendly to Russia.[123] He did so in Finland by accepting their moderate government in 1945, as long as they kept a foreign policy "friendly to Russia.[124] Stalin actually viewed the communist guerillas as a nuisance to him because they just caused problems for him. Along with providing no aid, he also asked

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[121] "Text of President Truman's Speech on New Foreign Policy", 2.
[122] Barnet, 149.
[123] Alperovitz, "How Did The Cold War Begin?", 99.
[124] Alperovitz, "How Did the Cold War Begin?", 99.

Yugoslovakia to stop providing help to the communist rebels.[125]

The Truman Doctrine frustrated the Soviets in their attempts to work with America, beginning in 1945 when Truman started his aggressive negotiating campaign at the Potsdam conference. His uncompromising approach forced the Soviets to tighten their grip on Eastern Europe in order to maintain their security interests. The Truman Doctrine escalated the Cold War for the first time, by publicly declaring an ideological war on the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was not innocent in the beginning of the Cold War, and it played a major part in the starting of it, but President Harry S. Truman had other alternatives that were available to him, which he refused to consider. The same was true of his decision to drop the nuclear bomb. He had other alternatives that he could have explored in an effort to try and avoid such a devastating move against the civilian population of Japan, but he went ahead with the option to use the bomb in an effort to establish the upper hand in his diplomacy with the Soviet Union.

As a professional politician who was supported by powerful big city bosses, his stance against communism, and his fear of Soviet desires to expand, kept him from

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[125] Barnet, 155-156.

following the approach of cooperation with the U.S.S.R. that Roosevelt had taken and that others (like Wallace) believed should be used. His approach of containment and uncompromising attack on the Soviet government and its principles never allowed an opportunity for a compromise between the two countries, even if the Soviets had desired one. The decisions that Truman made during his first few years in office definitely helped create the Cold War between the two Super Powers and he used scare tactics on the American people to create the same paranoia in the U.S. that he had promoted in response to Soviet Communist expansionism.

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