CHAPTER VII

American Diplomacy Takes the Offensive

By the time the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the shock of the bombing was already felt in the United States. It required an extraordinary feat of historical imagination to recreate the surprise and horror of the day when the world first learned of the atomic bomb. And it is all but impossible to recall the instant change in American thinking, the new sense of confidence and power that the atomic explosions engendered.

To understand the impact of the new weapon on diplomacy, one must go beyond the simple assertion that the added military power could be useful in war and in diplomatic maneuvering. In the first instance, its influence was psychological.

Truman's exuberance and Churchill's excitement at Potsdam show some of the emotional force of the new development. Though he had expected the bomb to be a success for many months, and despite the fact that at Potsdam he learned how greatly the test had exceeded expectations, when the President was informed of the successful bombing of Hiroshima, the effect was remarkable. Aboard the cruiser Augusta, Truman hurried back and forth telling officers and crew alike the news. "I was greatly moved," the President has told us; and his sentiment was not remorse, but satisfaction. His first remark to those with him at the time was the unqualified assertion, "This is the greatest thing in history!"

To the average American, as well as to most senior government officials, news of the atomic bomb came first from the newspapers. Here too the weapon's power was disclosed in a way which produced great emotion and optimism about its usefulness as an instrument of high policy. On August 7, newspapers were filled with banner headlines announcing the devastation of Hiroshima. Not only was the development an unprecedented and amazing—indeed, at the time, fantastic—scientific feat, but at once the bomb's seemingly incredible power for war and peace was dramatically disclosed. In less than a week, it took to read a newspaper, the American public learned that the bomb might reduce the Japanese war from a publicly estimated year and a half to a few short weeks or even days. Immediately, news of Nagasaki convinced those who might have doubted the extent of the new power. In less than a week, the war—which until then had been a long series of costly island-to-island battles against an enemy who fought to the death—was suddenly over. Not only was the atomic bomb spectacular in itself, but it immediately demonstrated its apparent capacity to force surrender upon a powerful enemy.

While the public at large was treated to the dramatic news of the weapon, the President and his senior advisers worked feverishly to end the Japanese war quickly. Ironically, the atomic bomb had not fulfilled one hope of the strategy of delay; with the Soong negotiations still stalled, on August 8—three months, to the day, after German capitulation—the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, and early the
next morning the Red Army crossed the Manchurian border. In the few days between the Soviet declaration and the formal surrender of Japan, Stimson, Byrnes, and Truman continued to follow the basic line of strategy they had adopted during the summer. Stimson urged the President that "the thing to do was to get this surrender through as quickly as we can before Russia... should get down in reach of the Japanese homeland... It was of great importance to get the homeland into our hands before the Russians could put in any substantial claim to occupy and help rule it."6

Byrnes, of course, emphatically agreed.7 But an August 10 Japanese message accepting the Potsdam Proclamation was conditional; it asked guarantees that the Emperor's position be respected.8 Stimson urged that American assurances for the Emperor would produce a quick surrender.9 Byrnes, agreeing with the objective, disagreed on tactics—such assurances might appear as a sign of weakness and could "cause much delay."10 Finally, Truman accepted a suggestion by Forrestal that a message which implicitly recognized the Emperor's position but which was explicitly "unconditional" would be the best way to secure a prompt response.11 In the meantime, "the President observed that we would keep up the war at its present intensity."12

Byrnes now attempted to arrange quick approval for this approach from the other Allies.12 When Molotov asked for a day to consider the

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* The tremendous desire to end the war quickly was expressed in many ways. Since the bomb dropped on Hiroshima accomplished the shock effect, the use of the second bomb against Nagasaki may well be explained by noting that Truman and Byrnes wished to leave absolutely no doubt about their resources or their intentions, and were anxious to avoid any time-consuming delays. Byrnes has testified that they knew "the Japanese were patently anxious to surrender," but after the first Japanese acceptance message came in, Truman ordered conventional military operations to continue full force. At the Cabinet meeting on August 10, Stimson "suggested... that it would be a humane thing... that might affect the settlement if we stopped the bombing..." However, his view was "rejected on the ground that it couldn't be done at once because we had not yet received in official form the Japanese surrender..." Stimson's diary entry continues: "This of course was a correct but narrow reason, for the Japanese had broadcast their offer of surrender through every country in the world." (Stimson Diary, Aug. 10, 1945.) Forrestal's diary shows that Stimson also "cited the growing feeling of apprehension and misgiving as to the effect of the atomic bomb even in our own country," and that the Secretary of the Navy supported the advice that conventional bombing should cease. (Forrestal, Diaries, p. 83.) Truman refused to let up the pace even after the Japanese accepted the final American message, which implicitly acknowledged the position of the Emperor. Long after Radio Tokyo had broadcast acceptance of these terms (on August 14), but before the message had reached Washington through official channels, General Arnold (who wished to stage as big a finale as possible) was permitted to send 1,014 aircraft (approximately 800 B-29's and 200 fighters) to drop six thousand tons of conventional explosives on Honshu. (Byrnes, All in One Lifetime, p. 305; Truman, Year of Decisions, p. 423; Leahy, I Was There, pp. 434-36; Craven and Cate, Air Forces in World War II, Vol. V, pp. 699, 732-33; New York Times, Aug. 15, 1945.)
Similarly, Stalin could do very little when Truman simply refused his request that the Red Army be allowed to take a token surrender in the Japanese homeland (on the northern half of the island of Hokkaido). And Stalin's readiness to accept American conditions after Hiroshima was underscored a week after surrender when an American proposal for a Far Eastern Advisory Commission was accepted.

This body, unlike the Control Commissions governing the other enemy states, was to be virtually powerless. Its location—in Washington—stressed the fact that it would have little control over the operating decisions of the Supreme Commander, General Douglas MacArthur, in Tokyo. Thus, it was with the general approval of the Russians that Truman told the press on August 16 that Japan would not be divided into occupation zones, and declared in the first week of September that as far as Japan was concerned, "in the event of any differences of opinion [among the Allied powers] the policies of the United States will govern." *

That the atomic bomb had strengthened the American hand was even more clearly demonstrated when the "tangled weaves" of Manchurian issues was taken up. Japan, of course, was beyond the reach of the landlocked Red Army. But even in the area of Soviet military operations, Truman now found Stalin prepared to accept most American terms. The President had delayed the Manchurian negotiations all summer, and he had rejected the State Department's suggestion that they be concluded at Potsdam. However, as soon as the news of Hiroshima was made public, on August 7, 9, and 10, following his instructions, Harriman told Stalin and Soong that the United States believed the Chinese should make no further concessions. With only a short debate, Stalin now conceded almost all of the points he had pressed so diligently during the past month of talks with Soong: Dairen was to become a free port under Chinese administration (except in time of war), and the jointly owned Manchurian railways were to be governed by a ten-man board of directors (five from each country) whose President was to be a Chinese Nationalist with decisive power to cast two votes. A treaty was initialed on August 14 which "generally satisfied" Chiang Kai-shek, and Ambassador Harriman cabled that T. V. Soong "was very grateful for our support and is convinced that unless we had taken an active part in the negotiations he would have had to accede to all Stalin's demands.*†

In Chungking, Ambassador Hurley was enthusiastic about the value of the treaties to internal Chinese politics. As in 1927, the Russians took a stand against the Chinese Communists: "The publication . . . has demonstrated conclusively that the Soviet Government supports the National Government of China and also that the two governments are in agreement regarding Manchuria."† In America, most commentators expressed great satisfaction with the settlement in an area not administered by China for many years and under the direct military control of the Soviet Union. On August 29, Madame Chiang visited Truman to thank him for his support. The President told his press conference: "She was very happy over the Russian-Chinese treaty, just as all of us are."*‡

To be sure, at a later date the hopes these successful negotiations produced were to be dissipated. But at the time—and for a very considerable period—Stalin respected the treaties. Chiang Kai-shek's administrators were permitted to take over civilian control in the Red Army zone of operations and the American Air Force and Navy ferried thousands of Nationalist troops (who had no independent way to reach the area) to Manchuria to take over responsibilities from the Russians. Although Stalin took advantage of his position to remove a number of Manchurian industries as "war booty," the Red Army withdrew in April 1946. As the State Department later summarized the situation: "It was considered that Russia had accepted

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* Later, during the London Conference, Stalin reversed his attitude, demanding a greater role in Japan. As Walter Lippmann, James Reston, the London Times, the Christian Science Monitor, and others noted at the time, his reversal was probably in retaliation to the pressure Byrnes put on the Soviet position in the Balkans. (New York Herald Tribune, Sept. 25; New York Times, Oct. 14; London Times, Oct. 2; Christian Science Monitor, Oct. 3, 1945.)
† See above, pp. 122-125.
‡ For the texts of the agreements, see Department of State, Relations with China, Annexes 51-59, pp. 585-96.
§ As I have noted, in the late autumn of 1945 a new Soviet démarche in the Far East seemed to be a direct response to the American effort in the Balkans. (See above, p. 192n.) It may well be that the Soviet interest in industrial reparations and "war booty" from Manchuria was also a response to the West's reluctance to adhere to the Yalta reparations formula and the subsequent breakdown of German administrative arrangements.
definite limitations on its activities in China and was committed to withhold all aid from the Chinese Communists. . . .” 

Thus the primary American objectives in the Far East were achieved. Moreover, as had been expected throughout the summer, now Truman and Byrnes began to take the initiative to secure further political and commercial concessions in Manchuria. At Stimson’s suggestion, Truman had also deferred an approach to the Russians on these additional matters during the summer.† At Potsdam he had rejected the suggestion that negotiations begin while Stalin and he were together. However, now the “appropriate time”‡ had arrived. In his first approach to Molotov after Potsdam, Harriman was instructed to attempt to secure a new public statement affirming Soviet support for America’s traditional “Open Door” policy in the area. Molotov initially responded that such a statement was superfluous, since Stalin had repeatedly confirmed his support for this policy. But Truman and Byrnes persisted, on August 22 instructing Harriman to press the matter with Stalin himself. This effort succeeded. On August 27 the Soviet Premier overruled his foreign minister and said he was prepared to issue the declaration sought by Washington. 

THE SECRET CLOSE-IN APPROACH

In the whirlwind days immediately after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American diplomacy changed so swiftly that few observers have caught the sweep of all the policy decisions unveiled in a few short weeks. Secretary Byrnes, however, has emphasized the importance of this brief period. Underscoring the breadth and scope of new diplomatic departures, he has recalled: “Those . . . days . . . were full of action.” In fact, the sheer volume of work caused the Secretary of State to ask that the London foreign ministers’ meeting set for September 1 be postponed until September 10.†

Amongst all the activities, however, unquestionably the most important concerned atomic energy. At precisely the same time American Far Eastern diplomacy was achieving its objectives, Truman and Byrnes also made it clear that the United States intended to maintain its atomic monopoly.

Truman’s August 6 statement—released with the news of Hiroshima—revealed that “it is not intended to divulge the technical processes of production or all the military applications.” In his August 9 report to the nation, the President declared: “The atomic bomb is too dangerous to be loose in a lawless world . . . We must constitute ourselves trustees of this new force.” Within a week of the presidential statement, the War Department released a long report on atomic energy with the notice: “The best interests of the United States require the utmost cooperation by all concerned in keeping secret now and for all time in the future all scientific and technical information.” In another week Truman directed that no information on the nuclear development project be released without the specific approval of the President.

Thus, Truman made public his resolve to maintain the production secrets of the new weapon. His declarations revealed that Stimson’s early idea of exchanging information on nuclear energy (and simultaneously establishing international controls) had been rejected. Instead of the theory that the new development might be used as a bargaining counter with which to obtain diplomatic quid pro quos from the Russians, there was to be what Stimson had once described as “the secret close-in attempted control of the project by those who control it now.” Although initially Truman had had to decide only that diplomacy would be delayed until the atomic weapons were demonstrated, by the end of July he had also resolved the nascent dispute between Stimson and Byrnes; the President had adopted the Secretary of State’s more narrow view that a temporary monopoly of nuclear weapons, in itself, would be valuable to diplomacy.†

* Although it is still a matter of dispute to what extent Stalin sided the Chinese Communists in the postwar years, there is substantial agreement that his assistance, if of any importance at all, was extremely limited. (Beloff, Soviet Policy, pp. 42-43; Department of State, Relations with China, p. 121.) The Red Army withdrew from Manchuria in April 1946. (Ibid., p. 147; McNell, America, Britain and Russia, 1941-1946, p. 709.) As late as June 1947, Byrnes made complaints that Stalin was supporting the Chinese Communists. At that time Byrnes was still able to write: “Whether Stalin will continue to resist the temptation . . . is a question which . . . remains in the balance.” (Byrnes, Speaking Frankly, pp. 227-29, 293.) Similarly, as late as September 1947 the Chinese Foreign Minister wished to do nothing which might cause Stalin to reconsider his obligations under the Sino-Soviet treaty. (Department of State, Relations with China, p. 121.)

† See above, pp. 98, 101-103.
‡ See above, p. 124.

* Churchill praised this decision in the House of Commons. (5th Series, Harward, Vol. 413, Commons, 76-86.) Shortly thereafter Stimson’s successor, Robert Patterson, reassured Congress that “the President has already said that he would not reveal the atomic bomb itself at all . . .” (U.S. House of Representatives, Hearings: Atomic Energy Act, Oct. 9, 18, 1945, p. 66.)
† See above, pp. 62-64.