AN INTRODUCTION TO ATOMIC DIPLOMACY
by Gar Alperovitz

Atomic Diplomacy, by Gar Alperovitz, was first published in 1965. Immediately upon publication it became the subject of considerable debate. Focused on the few months of 1945 immediately before and after the atomic bombings of Japan, Atomic Diplomacy examined the historical record and argued that the possession of the atomic bomb profoundly affected U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union even before the bomb was used.

The book showed that the atomic secret had been held in U.S. strategy at the Potsdam Conference, a key meeting at which the Big Three allies—Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union—negotiated the disposition of spoils in postwar Europe. Among other things, Alperovitz found that President Harry Truman had postponed the Potsdam meeting until July 17, 1945, so that it would come after the July 16 bomb test near Alamogordo, New Mexico, that assured the effectiveness of the new secret weapon.

The term of greatest controversy in Atomic Diplomacy was its tentative argument that considerations related to the Soviet Union played a role in the final U.S. decision to bomb Japan. This month, on the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombings, Atomic Diplomacy is being reissued by Viking Penguin. The following article is adapted from Alperovitz’s introduction to the new edition. In it he examines the historical evidence that has emerged since 1965, focusing particularly on the question of why the United States bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To Save American Lives?

It is important at the outset to define the question with some precision. If one asks very generally, “Why were the atomic bombs used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki?” it is obvious that one reason was to end the war against Japan, since that is what they accomplished (at least in part). But this line of inquiry does not get us very far. To see why, it is necessary to ask several more narrowly focused questions. The first is, “From the military point of view, was the use of atomic weapons necessary to end the war without an invasion?” This is the justification President Harry Truman repeatedly offered: “The dropping of the bombs stopped the carnage of millions of lives.” Shortly after World War II ended, the official U.S. Strategic Bombing survey concluded, “Certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”

While this after-the-fact assessment cannot tell us what policy makers understood at the time, it does give a sense of how badly Japanese strength had deteriorated. It also brings into focus three critical dates. First, the invasion of Japan, which was estimated to cost between 600,000 and a million lives, was not scheduled until March 1946, roughly eight months after the Potsdam Conference and the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6. There is little doubt that President Truman and his top advisors knew at the time that the full invasion of Japan was extremely unlikely. The real issue was whether the war could be ended before November 1, the date fixed for an initial preliminary landing on the island of Kyushu. This was scheduled to occur three full months after the meeting at Potsdam, and one week shy of three months after Hiroshima was bombed.

A specific question we need to answer is whether American policy makers understood that there were ways to end the war without using the atomic bombs and without either a landing or an invasion which would cost significant numbers of American lives. And this question itself needs to be refined. It is, for instance, clear from the record that planning for an invasion had to go forward whatever the top policy makers hoped or believed; and, further, that troops in the field, the American public, and, above all, the Japanese, were given no inkling that an invasion might not be necessary. As Gen. George C. Marshall put it: “Every individual moving to the Pacific should be indoctrinated with: ‘I am determined to see it through.’ This understandably led many Westerners to believe that had Hiroshima not been destroyed, they might have had to risk or lose their lives in an invasion. However, it is not clear that the president believed the planned invasion would actually be launched; quite the contrary.

The Japanese communications code had been broken early in the war. Faint Japanese peace feelers appeared as early as September 1944. In April 1945 the adviser of the Joint Staff planners on the invasion included the possibility that a “sudden collapse or surrender” (though they did not say this) was imminent. Until about mid-June, it may still have been possible to believe an invasion was highly likely. At this time, however, six members of the Japanese Supreme War Council authorized Foreign Minister Togo
apprehend the Soviet Union with "a view to
terminating the war if possible by Sep-
tember. The recent activities of the Navy
James Forrestal described the latest
move as "one of the major steps, if not
the major steps, that could be taken by
the public" to end all fighting. But Truman understood that he could in
all likelihood end the war without using
the atomic bombs and without resorting to
an invasion if he could arrive at some terms of
conciliation, of men and children, by indirec-
type means. That was the role of the middle
(even if
like Hiroshima, which includes the
military installation) was "barbarous."
Japan used conventional bombs to destroy Japa-
ese cities and to bring the war to an end. The
bombing of Tokyo on March 9 by 10,045,
particular devastation, can also be regarded
as one of the foundation stones of our con-
cerned with the ethical issues.
For instance, the response of the Catholic
weekly Commonweal in an editorial entitled "Hiroor and Shamo
was
inconsistently wreathed in despair and secondly
I thought that our country should avoid
shockling world opinion by the use of
nuclear weaponry while remaining silent on
whether or not American forces had been
free.
In Eisenhower's judgment, "Japan was, at
that very moment, seeking some way to
resolve all of her problems with a minimum loss of
life.
language he used at other times was
more straightforward: "It wasn't necessary
to hit them with that awful thing.
Until very recently we knew only that
Eisenhower had expressed some interest in
the Secretary of War. However, we now
learn that he also expressed his desire to
meet with the president in a meeting on July 20. Gen-
eral Bradley confirms that in his presence
was at lunch that day, when Truman said he
was going to use the atomic weapon.
Truman also worked very closely with
the highly regarded chief of the Allied
forces in Europe and one of Roosevelt's most
trusted lieutenants, who were military men,
individuals who were devoted to the cause of
military matters could not be easily
Leahy, a five-star admiral, was the senior
U.S. military officer for the Japanese
forces in China and the Philippines. He
was, in effect, the second highest
officer in the United States military. He
was charged with the responsibility of
the war in China and of being ready to
lead the United States forces in the
expected war against Japan. The
Japanese were about to defend and could do
so because of the effective use of atomic
bombs and the successful bombing over
Japanese cities. My own feeling is that in
the circumstances, it was not advisable to
adopt the standard common to the barbarians
of the Dark Ages.
I have cited Leahy's general comment
for the record. It is an accurate
representation of his views in his private
diary on the day following the atomic
bombing of Hiroshima. Although the
recognition that the bomb was not
essential to victory was not isolated. Gen
Curley Leahy is reported to have
told that after the bomb had been used, the
Japanese had entered into ransom talks.
After the war, the Japanese were in the
position to have nothing to do with the
atomic bomb and its decision to surrender
was conditioned to the United States
Government's conditions.
I believe that the president and his closest
advisors had not contemplated using the atomic
bomb in the event that the Japanese
offered to surrender. They were not thinking about anything
else, they could not comprehend the
possibility of the president's decision. The
possibility of the president's decision to
surrender was that we would not kill a large
number of civilians.
In fact, Marshall also raised the idea that
the atomic bomb should not be first used on a
civilian area. Again, with Truman and
McKelvey, he thought that the
American people would not accept the
idea that the U.S. was deploying the
atomic bomb.
There is no doubt, of course, that the
atomic bomb was used as a weapon.
However, the intranation was not intended
as a means of forcing Japan to surrender.
rather, President Truman and his Cabinet
planning went forward on the assumption
of "unconditional surrender."
It is clear that American leaders preferred the use of the new weapon over other available options.

Unconditional Surrender

While the question of "unconditional surrender" is often considered, it is worth discussing whether Truman's decision was a necessary step in ending World War II. The concept of "unconditional surrender" was very much in the minds of leaders at the time, and it was a term that had clear implications. However, the situation in the Pacific was complex, and the outcome of the war was not yet certain.

Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a momentous one, and it is important to consider the context in which it was made. The United States had been involved in World War II for several years, and the war was not yet over. The Allied forces were bogged down in the Pacific, and the war was not yet decided. The use of the atomic bomb was a desperate measure, and it was a turning point in the war.

The decision to use the atomic bomb was not taken lightly, and it was made after careful consideration. The use of the atomic bomb was a necessary step, and it led to the end of World War II. The decision was made after long and careful deliberation, and it was a decision that was made with the safety of the American people in mind.

The decision to use the atomic bomb was not without its consequences, and it has been a topic of debate ever since. However, it is clear that the decision was made with the safety of the American people in mind, and it led to the end of World War II.

In conclusion, the decision to use the atomic bomb was a necessary step, and it led to the end of World War II. The decision was made after careful consideration, and it was a decision that was made with the safety of the American people in mind.
Toward the First Cold War

As one learns more about events surrounding the atomic bomb, it seems increasingly obvious that there were only two real insiders: Truman and Secretary of State James Byrnes. Despite the fact that we have of Stimson's thinking, Truman did not share a close relationship with the beginning of the cold war. Many of the best major strategy sessions probably occurred in the privacy of the Oval Office and during the conferences on the ship going to Potsdam.

Byrnes was a man at whose invitation as senator of state he believed it important to attempt to prevent the Chinese from coming to the aid of the Japanese. It is clear that American leaders preferred the use of the new weapon over other available options as the instant decision of the Potsdam declaration was not a matter of unimportant consequence.

As we have seen, a major American concern was to avoid the war between the Chinese and the Burmese, but, as they recognized, the time, the issues, the potential of the Chinese to be a self-supporting state was worth investigating. Byrnes did not argue that the Chinese were necessarily going to settle on their own in any event, whether or not the war ended a few weeks early. We begin by reviewing all the evidence of how American leaders came to use the bomb as a threat and of how they used the bomb to affect decision-making objectives in connection with the Potsdam declaration. But Byrnes was very much against any attempt to do so.

The top U.S. officials that the bomb would help them achieve diplomatic objectives is very clearly in connection with the Potsdam declaration, but it is also abundantly clear that the bomb would help achieve all diplomatic objectives. The Stimson declaration was still the basis of the new weapon 20 years ago, and the new information helps fill out the base of the most important

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