

Christopher Acheson
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James Byrnes and the Pacific War

Only one individual in history has served in the Senate, as a Supreme Court Judge, and in the White House as an advisor, and eventually the Secretary of State. His name is James Byrnes. He played a central role in the development and ultimate use of the atomic bomb against Japan, making critical decisions to push the project forward on many occasions. The roles he played in the Manhattan Project, close relationship with both FDR and Truman, and involvement in the Potsdam declaration are nothing short of impressive. Some could argue that he was responsible for laying the groundwork in securing a western line of defense against the Soviet Union through the pursuit of unconditional surrender by the Japanese. Others claim that his lack of foreign policy experience was of great detriment during the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. His diplomatic tactics in dealing with the USSR may have cost the United States a key strategic military position in the Pacific during the cold war. However, Mr. Byrnes' attention to detail ensured that the United States could choose whether Japan would keep its Emperor after surrender.

After careful examination of his professional career and the events leading up to, and after the dropping of the atomic bomb, one must conclude that Byrnes was a politically "sly and able" individual despite his international diplomatic inexperience. There is a high level of concern with the lack of moral consideration Byrnes displayed during the discussions on how the new atom bombs would be used in the Pacific theater. However, the more pressing issue is of Byrnes' performance as an individual

with a considerable amount of influence over United States foreign policy. This paper examines Byrnes' life from the beginning until the end of the Pacific War. In this paper, I will argue that the single major criticism of Byrnes' service to the United States was this lack of foreign policy experience, particularly with regard to the Yalta conference and the agreements made there.

James Byrnes was born on May 2nd, 1882 in Charleston, South Carolina. While his childhood was filled with considerable hardship, Byrnes was able to quickly educate himself; eventually rising to one of the most powerful foreign policy positions in the United States government. His father passed away shortly before he was born, forcing his mother to take over income earning for the household.¹ Despite the significant economic challenges Byrnes faced during his childhood, he remained motivated to assist his family by helping out his mother in her business ventures. His willingness to go to any length at such a young age to preserve the economic stability of his family speaks volume about his personality. Byrnes was willing to do anything it took to achieve what he wanted, and to ensure that his family had adequate financial support. It is important to note that as the Civil War had taken place only a few decades earlier, the economic situation of many Southern states was dire. This economic depression in the South made it difficult for many families to sustain a moderate level of income, especially in cases of a single parent with more than one child. Byrnes' early education compromised of lessons in a parochial school, and by the time he was fourteen had exhausted the level of education that the nuns could provide.² Entering the world of adulthood by starting a position in a law firm as an office boy, Byrnes was able to help

¹ Robertson, David. *Sly and Able: a Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. New York: Norton, 1994. Print. P. 17

² Ibid. P. 22

supplement the family income. His first position as an office boy helped to start him on a journey that would in its peak allow Byrnes to find himself in the White House.

The high value placed on education by Byrnes' mother helped to play a role in the development and success early in Byrnes' professional career. One particular skill that Byrnes' was able to learn was how to take accurate shorthand notes, after many lessons through a business school that Byrnes' mother was able to afford on her basic level of income.³ After much practice, and entering a competition for a stenographer's position with the state of South Carolina, Byrnes ended up being the best candidate, and was offered the position. However, in order to meet the legal age requirements, he swapped birthdates with his sister, and was able to keep this secret from many individuals, including the State of South Carolina for a significant period of time. This was in fact, only discovered after him and his sister had both passed away many years later.⁴

Constantly pushing forward, James Byrnes moved quickly up the social and professional ladder in South Carolina. Passing the state bar exam marked his entry into the world of law, and Byrnes soon learned the importance of professional relationships on his journey to a high public office. His law practice was not particularly successful, and when Byrnes learned that the local representative to the U.S. House of Representatives was not running for another term, he pounced on the opportunity to try and get himself elected. After a grueling election, James Byrnes became a representative for South Carolina by a margin of only 57 votes.⁵ He would spend the next 14 years in the U.S. House of Representatives serving his constituents, building

³ Ibid. P. 23

⁴ Ibid. P. 24

⁵ Ibid. P. 32

relationships with those in higher positions of power, and later preparing for his next step up in the world. This would come in the fall of 1930, when Byrnes won his campaign for a position in the U.S. Senate. He would serve his state faithfully for 10 years, forming solid connections with numerous legislators and White House staff, virtually ensuring that he would be given a more prestigious appointment in the future. Although one might think that Byrnes would have acted in all instances to place himself at an advantage, he realized the importance of party loyalty, and never broke with the Democratic Party during his time in the Senate.⁶

In 1941, Byrnes' hard work and dedication granted him a nomination to the Supreme Court, where he would serve the United States as an Associate Justice for less than 12 months. The respect that Byrnes commanded for his bipartisanship was impressive, as most nominees to the Supreme Court must be examined in countless hours of confirmation meetings in Senate committees. Unlike a vast majority of Supreme Court nominees, Byrnes was well liked by both the Republicans and the Democrats; his nomination was unanimously approved by the Senate a mere eight minutes after his nomination was formally received.⁷ Such a rapid confirmation to the Supreme Court had never occurred before, and has not occurred since Byrnes' nomination. It was a testament to his practical understanding of politics and connections. As he was able to grant favors to his fellow legislators on both sides of the aisle, Byrnes had accrued a significant amount of political credit. He was able to use it to his advantage in this instance, granting him one the highest judicial position in the nation with a lifetime appointment. President Roosevelt had hoped that this appointment

⁶ Ibid. P. 247

⁷ Ibid. P. 299

to the Supreme Court would last longer, and that it might have possibly been the height of Byrnes' career. However, the start of the Pacific War held opportunities that Byrnes would eventually take advantage of when given the opportunity by President Roosevelt, and eventually President Truman.

Roosevelt's trust in Byrnes' political savvy and capabilities was underscored at the beginning of the Pacific War on December 7th, 1941. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt made it clear to his staff that newly constructed war legislation that affected the economy was to be first reviewed by Justice Byrnes.⁸ This placed a significant amount of power in Byrnes' hands, as he was able to alter and re-draft upcoming legislation that would impact the American industrial war effort. Byrnes quickly voiced his opinions about the structure of the federal government at the time and criticized the organization as inefficient and difficult to manage and supervise. At the beginning of the Pacific War, there were numerous agencies responsible for war planning; all of whom ultimately were responsible to Roosevelt. In order to streamline wartime operations, Byrnes suggested that a more central planning authority be created, the head of which who would be responsible to only one individual: the President.⁹ Byrnes at the time did not envision himself in this particular position, but Roosevelt quickly realized that the political skills that Byrnes possessed would be invaluable during the war. In 1942, Roosevelt created the War Production Board (WPB), under the suggestion and guidance of Byrnes, giving the head of the WPB unprecedented powers that allowed for authority over domestic economic issues related to wartime

⁸ Ibid. P. 312

⁹ Ibid. P. 312

production.¹⁰ From the sidelines, Byrnes was starting to shape domestic policy in ways that no previous Supreme Court justice was able to. His political connections and countless favors owed to him by various high-ranking government officials made it easy for Byrnes to manipulate situations to his advantage.

As his role in the federal government through advising of President Roosevelt became greater, there was significant pressure for him to resign from the Supreme Court. By October 1942, it became apparent to the press that Byrnes was being “borrowed” by Roosevelt.¹¹ Although not in an official capacity during his Supreme Court appointment, Byrnes was in constant contact with Roosevelt and had advised him on a number of domestic and foreign policy matters. Byrnes had successfully maneuvered himself into yet another position in which he could exert influence over a greater swath of the American public. His sly political maneuvering resulted in Roosevelt initially owing him a seat on the Supreme Court, as Roosevelt wanted to pay the political debt he owed to Byrnes because of the significant amount of advice given. Through the continued advisement of the President, Byrnes was once again accruing significant political capital; capital, that he would later collect with his appointment to the U.S. Secretary of State. The press at the time thought that Byrnes had so much impact on Roosevelt’s decision-making that he was nicknamed the “assistant president.”¹²

After Byrnes resigned from the Supreme Court, he was able to secure himself the top position at the Office of Economic Stabilization (OES), giving him new authority over the wartime economy of the United States. Quickly after starting his new job, Byrnes carefully consolidated the responsibilities of other positions under the OES in

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 314

¹¹ Ibid. P. 314

¹² Bernstein, Barton J. "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered." *Foreign Affairs* 74.1 (1995): 135-52. Print. P 139

order to expand his authority beyond the original intended scope. This once again illustrates how politically capable Byrnes was, and would go to great lengths to acquire significant amounts of power, pushing the limits of the position he inhabited. Although Roosevelt appreciated, and sometimes resented Byrnes' advice, there seemed to be a tension between the two men. Byrnes was passed over for the vice-presidency in the previous election; a position that Byrnes thought he had earned and was highly qualified for. He did not approve of Harry Truman, the man who would become President when Roosevelt died on April 12th, 1945.

Although Byrnes did not approve of Truman, he was determined to once again utilize the position of power he was in to the best of his advantage. Truman had very little political experience, and Byrnes felt that Truman did not earn the vice-presidency. However, by being one of the first individuals who provided Truman information about the Manhattan Project, Byrnes secured a position for himself as an individual of considerable influence. His policy advice and successes with his appointment to the OES eventually led Truman to request that Byrnes become the Secretary of State, on July 3, 1945. This position was perhaps an overextension of the strengths and abilities of Byrnes, as he had little international diplomatic experience prior to being offered the position. This inexperience would severely damage the position of the United States in the Cold War years.

The conference at Yalta held in early February of 1945 was concentrated on dividing up post-war Germany between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Soviet Russia. However, in addition to the lengthy discussions about Germany, two other important items were discussed at Yalta pertaining to the war in the Pacific.

Byrnes attended as an adviser to Roosevelt during the conference, and provided him with suggestions and strategy on how to deal with the USSR over the breakup of Germany.¹³ It appears Byrnes did not have access to a significant portion of the information discussed and decided upon at the Yalta conference, as he did not hold the Secretary of State position at the time. However, what is of interest is that Byrnes had knowledge of a secret agreement made with the USSR at the conference, providing reason to believe that Byrnes had access to much more than he did officially. According to historical documents, the agreements made at Yalta did not become public until later, as the war with Germany was not yet over. On the surface, it appears as if Byrnes had little knowledge of any of any Far Eastern agreements for dealing with the breakup of Germany after the war.¹⁴ Despite this apparent lack of access to official records and documents at the Yalta Conference, Byrnes was able to interact with Roosevelt in an unofficial capacity, advising him on issues of international diplomacy with the USSR. Byrnes' had a significant interest in controlling the USSR after the conclusion of the Pacific War, and this allowed him to insert his concerns and opinions into the Yalta Discussion despite the lack of any official government representative status. This once again indicates Byrnes' understanding of the political system, to which he took advantage of in any capacity possible.

One of the primary criticisms of Byrnes was that he had little foreign policy and foreign diplomatic experience. He was not apt at negotiating difficult items through traditional diplomatic methods; rather, he wanted quick closure to problems, almost irrespective of what the outcome was as long as an agreement was reached. Although

¹³ Theoharis, Athan. "James F. Byrnes: Unwitting Yalta Myth-Maker." *Political Science Quarterly* 81.4 (1966): 581-92. Print. P. 583

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 584

Byrnes was a savvy individual when it came to domestic politics in the United States, his interactions with the UK and the USSR were not by any means impressive. In fact, the British were so displeased by the manner in which Byrnes treated them, because Byrnes considered the UK to be a "junior partner" to the United States.¹⁵ His international inexperience was of significant concern, especially since he later represented the United States as Secretary of State; his foreign policy experience consisted of the Yalta Conference alone. Perhaps more telling of the concern about Byrnes' international diplomatic experience was significant concerns about Byrnes' performance voiced by one of the Soviet experts within the State Department, George Kennan.¹⁶ It is challenging to comprehend why Roosevelt trusted Byrnes to such a high degree when seeking advice about foreign policy issues. On one hand, Byrnes had very little foreign policy or diplomacy experience; on the other, he was politically connected, and Roosevelt could trust him to get the job done. However, this high level of trust in Byrnes' ability was at significant cost to the future of U.S. Cold War strategy.

While Byrnes was at the conference, it is evident that he made serious mistakes in dealing with the Soviets, and may have acted at a great cost to the United States in terms of Cold War planning. Although not discussed publicly until after the close of the Pacific War, Byrnes apparently knew of a secret agreement that was made at Yalta, ceding the Kurile Islands to the USSR after the defeat of Japan.¹⁷ The knowledge of such an agreement clouds the initial assessment that Byrnes was simply not privy to

¹⁵ Gormly, James L. "Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, an Initial British Evaluation." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 79.3 (1978): 198-205. Print. P. 7

¹⁶ Richards, Miles S. "James F. Byrnes on Foreign Policy." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92.1 (1991): 34-44. Print. P. 35

¹⁷ Theoharis, Athan. "James F. Byrnes: Unwitting Yalta Myth-Maker." *Political Science Quarterly* 81.4 (1966): 581-92. Print. P. 591

much of what was happening at Yalta. Instead, it paints a different picture: Roosevelt appears to have heavily relied on the advice of Byrnes during the conference. If Roosevelt did not, there would have been little chance that Byrnes would have had knowledge of this secret agreement with the Soviets. The original secret agreement may prove difficult, if not impossible to locate due to classification restrictions. However, according to Byrnes it does exist, perhaps in "the White House Files".¹⁸ It is of significant interest to locate these files, as it may provide clues as to why the USSR continued its assault on the Japanese army more than three weeks after Japan had surrendered and agreed to the terms of the Potsdam Declaration to the United States.

The first steps of the Cold War occurred before the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, one on Hiroshima, the other on Nagasaki. Instead, the beginning of the Cold War was with the Manhattan Project, a vast undertaking by the United States to research and develop atomic weapons. After Roosevelt's death on April 12th, 1945, the Vice President, Harry Truman was sworn into office and began the laborious task of catching up on all the information he was not privy to in his previous position. Byrnes was one of the individuals President Truman spoke with on his first few days in office. Truman had no prior knowledge of the Manhattan Project, or its goals to create an atomic weapon, initially destined for use against the Germans before becoming President.¹⁹ During his briefing with Truman, Byrnes discussed that there here was great emphasis on the destructive power of the bomb, and that the project could ultimately lead the United States into being able to determine its own terms to the

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 591

¹⁹ Bernstein, Barton J. "The Quest for Security: American Foreign Policy and International Control of Atomic Energy, 1942-1946." *The Journal of American History* 60.4 (1974): 1003-044. Print. P. 1010

end of World War II on the European, and perhaps Pacific fronts.²⁰ This turning point in the war was of great importance, as Byrnes now knew more than Truman about the Manhattan Project, requiring Truman to rely significantly on Byrnes for information and guidance about the use of the new nuclear weapons.

The Manhattan Project was conducted under the utmost level of secrecy, and was an extremely difficult undertaking for its chief scientist, Robert Oppenheimer. In order to ensure that as little as possible information leaked from the project, individuals working on the project knew little of what their work might be ultimately used for. Carefully managing human resources was one of the keys to the success of the Manhattan Project. It is not clear exactly when Byrnes first gained knowledge of the project, but it appears to have occurred sometime after his resignation from the Supreme Court.

While Byrnes was not directly in charge of the scientific portion of the project, he had considerable influence in the ultimate use of the new weapons through his careful management of information to Truman. One of the primary concerns that Byrnes had with the Manhattan Project was not the ethics of nuclear weapons, but rather the domestic political implications of the large expenditure of \$2 billion in 1945 dollars in case the project did not prove fruitful. Not only was Byrnes concerned over the potential political backlash in case the bomb was not used, it appears as if he was adamant about its use before the conclusion of the war. This was because Byrnes was especially interested in the use of the atomic bomb for another, separate purpose: to influence and perhaps control the actions of the USSR after the war was over.²¹ Byrnes was also

²⁰ Rhodes, Richard. *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986. Print. P 618

²¹ Rhodes, Richard. *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986. Print. P. 638

“most anxious to get the Japanese affair over before the Russians got [involved],” as it was not clear how far the USSR was going to push if they entered the conflict.²²

In May of 1945, the Secretary of War Stimson created the Interim Committee, which was responsible for determining the post-war use of nuclear energy and technology. As this committee dealt directly with the Manhattan Project, Byrnes was placed on the committee for his input regarding these issues. He played a central role in convincing a number of the committee members to align their opinions with his over the course of the numerous committee meetings. After the Interim Committee met, the committee reports were given to Truman in order to advise him on matters discussed during the meetings. In particular, the usage of the core achievement of the Manhattan Project, nuclear weapons, was a frequent topic of discussion, rather than nuclear energy and technology as a whole.

Searching back through the available meeting minute records, it appears as if Byrnes did not monopolize all of the conversations, although many members seemed to agree with his tactics and viewpoints on the use of the atomic bomb. One particular concern that Byrnes held, expressed during the committee meeting on May 31st, 1945 was that if the United States gave Japan any warning as to where the bomb was going to be dropped, the Japanese might move US prisoners of war directly into the line of fire.²³ Later, Byrnes stated in the meeting on June 1st, 1945, that he understood that the final authority as to when and where the bomb was to be used was up to the military, and ultimately, to the Commander in Chief. However, it was of critical importance that the bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible, on a wartime production

²² Alperovitz, Gar. "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess." *Foreign Policy* 99, Summer (1995): 15-34. Print. P. 26

²³ Robertson, David. *Sly and Able: a Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*. New York: Norton, 1994. Print. P 407

plant preferably one that was surrounded by worker's homes. Perhaps the most chilling suggestion that Byrnes had was that the bomb be used against Japan with no warning.²⁴ The committee agreed with Byrnes, and there seems to have been no further discussion as to why Japan should receive no warning as to the bomb's final target. If Byrnes did not hold a significant amount of political influence, he would not have been able to sway the Interim Committee to agree with his proposal. In addition, it is once again of importance to highlight that Byrnes did not believe that "it was necessary to use the bomb against cities of Japan in order to win the war."²⁵ There was a significant concern over the "spreading of Russian influence in Europe," and the bomb could be used to contain this.²⁶ His strong character continued to serve him in achieving the manner in which the atomic bomb would be used on Japan, demonstrating that Byrnes was able to manipulate the meetings to achieve his own personal policy goals.

Although Byrnes had a high level of influence over the Interim Committee, and used it to achieve what he thought as the optimal strategic use of the bomb, it is not particularly clear from the Interim Committee meeting minutes as to any discussion of the issue of morality on the use of this highly destructive weapon. Byrnes appeared to have little, if no concern about the lives that were going to be extinguished by the use of the bomb on a target that would eliminate a large number of civilians in addition to the targeted military facilities. The larger concern that Byrnes had, giving further insight into his calculating personality, was the future position of the United States and the USSR after the Pacific War was over. This lack of moral consideration is of particular concern.

²⁴ United States. Executive. Interim Committee. *Notes of Meeting of the Interim Committee, June 1, 1945*. Comp. R. Gordon Arneson. U.S. Government, Circa 1995. Print.

²⁵ Bernstein, Barton J. "Truman and the A-Bomb: Targeting Noncombatants, Using the Bomb, and His Defending the "Decision"" *The Journal of Military History* 62.3 (1998): 547-70. Print. P. 555

²⁶ Ibid. 555

Although one may argue to defend Byrnes' actions due to the nature of war-time conflict, one must question how an individual can simply dismiss any moral consideration of the use of the destructive power of an atomic bomb. It appears as if not only Byrnes was politically capable, but also had a surprising lack of concern for the human cost during armed conflict. Rather, he was preoccupied with the potential political ramifications for President Truman was the atomic bomb not used against Japan, and the Manhattan Project investigated for its significant use of taxpayer funds.

At the Potsdam conference, there were a number of items pertaining to the end of the war in Germany, in addition to the question of how to force a Japanese surrender in order to end the Pacific War. Byrnes was involved in both of these matters. Although not directly related to the use of the bomb, his interactions with the USSR repeatedly demonstrate lack of international experience. During the Potsdam conference, Byrnes was interested in expanding the influence of the United States and Britain in Eastern Europe, partly to ensure that the Soviet Union was not able to exert significant amounts of pressure on American interests.²⁷

He also held considerable influence over the decision-making process of Truman, and constantly provided input into what he thought should be done at the Potsdam conference with regard to the unconditional surrender policy that the United States had. He was able to secure passage on the same vessel that Truman was taking to Potsdam, and one can imagine the considerable opportunity that Byrnes had to speak privately with Truman on the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. One particular contribution to the Potsdam conference and subsequent Potsdam Declaration was the content of the

²⁷ Leffler, Melvyn P. "Adherence to Agreements: Yalta and the Experiences of the Early Cold War." *International Security* 11.1 (1986): 88-123. Print. P. 101

declaration itself. The Potsdam Declaration was issued on the 26th of July, 1945; however, it was not sent directly to any Japanese consular mission, nor was it sent to the central Japanese government. Instead, Japan learned of this proclamation through international radio broadcasts. This was because the United States did not have any formal diplomatic relations with Japan, and was not interested in negotiating a peace agreement with the Japanese government.

The content of the declaration closely mirrored the stance of the United States, requiring Japan to unconditionally surrender. This declaration was signed by the US, Britain, and China; the USSR did not sign the Potsdam declaration because of its existing non-aggression pact with Japan. However, the USSR did not notify Japan that it would be ending this pact and would enter armed conflict with Japan 90 days after the defeat of Germany. Terms of surrender included that Japan would be occupied by Allied forces, Japanese sovereignty would be restricted to the main four home islands of Japan, the Japanese military would be disarmed, and that there would be war crimes trials for those individuals deemed to be war criminals by the Allied Powers. Although this declaration was not a departure from previously stated the Allied Powers unconditional surrender policy, there were three particular items that were omitted from the declaration that were of significant importance.

These three omissions to the Potsdam Declaration were not trivial by any means. Rather, they were of such importance one must question why these omissions were allowed at all. At the beginning of the Potsdam conference, Secretary of War Henry Stimson brought to Byrnes information urging him to warn the Japanese about the

bomb, and to provide assurances about the emperor.²⁸ Byrnes was not open to either idea. In the Potsdam Declaration, there was no mention of the secret agreement made by the USSR to enter the war 90 days after Germany had been defeated, no mention of the atomic bomb that the United States had in its possession, nor was there any information as to whether or not Japan would be allowed to keep its Emperor, even if it was limited to a ceremonial capacity. According to Alperovitz, the decision to keep these three items out of the Potsdam Declaration went against the better judgment of other top government officials who knew what was going on. Whether these three items would or would not have an impact on the central Japanese government in their decision to continue the war effort is beyond the scope of this paper. It is however, of critical importance to understand that Byrnes was the individual who decided that it was best to proceed without providing the Japanese with any substantive information as to what the next moves would be by the Allied Powers.

It was also during the Potsdam Conference that the Manhattan Project finally came to fruition. Truman was given notice that there had been a successful test of an atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16th, 1945. The Trinity test had made itself more successful than many of the scientists had imagined. After the successful test of America's ultimate new weapon, Truman had little incentive to continue discussions with the USSR as to their future participation in the Pacific War. The United States could now singlehandedly win the Pacific War without help from the Soviets. However, Byrnes was also delighted to hear this news for perhaps a different reason: a successful test and subsequent use of the bomb might impress the Soviets, and help to

²⁸ Mee, Charles L. *Meeting at Potsdam*. New York: M. Evans, 1975. Print. P. 88

manage their behavior in the post-war climate, given that they most likely would soon know of the bomb's destructive power.

Before Japan officially surrendered to the United States, there was considerable discussion among high level officials, including Byrnes, as to the best course of action regarding the status of the emperor. Byrnes did not want to back down from the unconditional surrender policy, and it is of interest to note that he was not particularly passionate about the imperial system.²⁹ However, as Byrnes had much experience in the domestic political arena, he understood the potential political ramifications if Truman suddenly backed away from the unconditional surrender policy. In order to secure Byrnes' position on the unconditional surrender of Japan and the acceptance of the Potsdam declaration, he made sure that he would play a central role in crafting the response to the Japanese government. One of the key provisions of the response by the United States that Byrnes was able to insert was extremely clever; the Japanese Emperor would be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers at the conclusion of the war.³⁰ This ambiguous response crafted by Byrnes did not specifically address the question of whether or not the imperial system would remain, just that it would be subject to control by the victors of the war. Byrnes was able to successfully out-manuever the Japanese government to give the United States a superior and favorable position as the Japanese surrendered.

Although Byrnes clearly was a capable individual in the domestic political arena, one must question his actions specifically at the Yalta conference, and his willingness to set foreign policy with little direction from Roosevelt or Truman. His political inexperience

²⁹ Bernstein, Barton J. "The Perils and Politics of Surrender: Ending the War with Japan and Avoiding the Third Atomic Bomb." *Pacific Historical Review* 46.1 (1977): 1-27. Print. P. 5

³⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 7

with interacting with the international community did not go unnoticed by the British or the Soviet Union, and may have possibly damaged relations between the US and the Britain during the Yalta conference. It is not clear if Byrnes understood how his actions were perceived by other nations, but it is apparent that Byrnes wanted to act in an almost unilateral manner to the advantage of the United States. While one cannot criticize Byrnes for doing so, interacting with other nations during the construction of international agreements requires a significant amount of diplomatic finesse.

It is of significant interest that Byrnes apparently did not have access to much of what happened at Yalta while the conference was taking place. He was an adviser to Roosevelt, but still on the Supreme Court at the time of the conference. What is unclear is why Byrnes would know of the secret agreement made at Yalta to allow the USSR to hold the Kurile Islands at the close of the Pacific War if he was not privy to the rest of the conference. This leads one to believe that Byrnes did know a great deal more than the records indicate at the time. Although it may be difficult to pin down exactly what Byrnes knew of the Yalta conference at the time, the Kurile Islands issue is more pressing. Why he knew of the agreement, and why his opinions about it are troubling at best.

This secret agreement between at least the United States and the USSR then explains the actions taken by the Soviet Army after the Japanese surrendered. Continuing on for almost three weeks after the surrender by the Japanese government, the Soviet Union quietly took the Kurile Islands and the island of Sakhalin. Since Byrnes knew of this agreement, and was particularly interested in controlling the USSR through a show of force by using the atomic bombs on Japan, one must question why Byrnes

seemingly did not understand the strategic importance of the Kurile Islands. These particular Islands, in addition with the eventual occupation of Japan would have provided the United States with an enormous line of defense from the influence and any possible military action by the USSR during the Cold War. If Byrnes was so politically calculating and wary of the threat of Soviet Russia after the close of the Pacific War, it is curious as to why he did not come out publically with this agreement, or at the very least criticize it after the conclusion of the war. More information on exactly what this agreement was may never surface, but any additional information that sheds light onto what the agreement was would be of significant value in order to determine to what capacity Byrnes was involved.

James Byrnes was a capable and calculating individual who rose to power quickly from his origins in South Carolina. He was one of very few people to participate in all three branches of the federal government, with his career culminating as the Secretary of State from July of 1945 to January of 1947. Although he was a very capable individual, he was also extremely secretive; documents pertaining to his involvement in the Manhattan Project, his full influence over the Interim Committee, and the extent to which he knew of the secret agreement made at Yalta are difficult to obtain. In one of his finest moments, Byrnes was able to craft a response to the Japanese acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, giving the United States ultimate authority with regard to the future of the Japanese imperial system. However savvy James Byrnes was, one must question his understanding of long-term strategic affairs. He was willing to allow the USSR access to the Kurile Islands, placing the United States at a strategic disadvantage for the duration of the Cold War. Despite this shortcoming, he has left his

mark on history through his involvement in a significant portion of the Pacific War, the full extent to which may never be known.

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Bibliographic Essay

James Byrnes was able to maneuver himself into many high positions of power, ultimately securing a place in the White House as Secretary of State. His large ambitions and far-reaching influence over the United States appears across a large portion of literature dedicated to reviewing, understanding, and outlining Byrnes' involvement in the world of politics. It is critical to first review Byrnes' life history before being able to delve into how he was able to influence a significant number of America's top minds.

In the beginning portion of this essay, a great deal of attention is paid to Byrnes' biography, aptly names *Sly and Able*. This work is an excellent resource that outlines his life in an understandable format from the outset. However central this work is to analyzing Byrnes' rise to power, it falls short in that the work does not provide a complete picture as to Byrnes' involvement in the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For this, I turn to a number of secondary sources, describing the relationship Byrnes had with the individuals he worked with, and emphasizing his character.

A few of the sources that are referenced in this essay are written by Barton Bernstein, who has examined in detail much of the Pacific War. By reviewing the articles he has written, a better understanding of the depth to which Byrnes was involved in many high level decisions about the atomic bombs becomes clear. However, these works alone do not provide a complete picture as to the specific ideas that Byrnes shared with his colleagues during the latter portions of the Japanese conflict. For this, it is important to turn to volumes dealing with Byrnes' involvement in the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam declaration.

One particular challenge with researching Byrnes was the difficulty in finding original source material with written instructions, memos, and notes from Byrnes himself. Although for example the Interim Committee Meeting Notes highlight Byrnes' wish to bomb Japan without warning or a military demonstration, I was not able to locate any particular notes by Byrnes himself on the subject. It would be of significant benefit to this paper to have additional resources by which to specifically cite particular actions, decisions, and thought processes that Byrnes had.