

Henry L. Stimson's Role in the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb against Japan

Brian D. Murphy

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Professor Kenneth B. Pyle

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INTRODUCTION

Henry L. Stimson was perhaps one of the most prominent individuals involved in ushering in the new era that would characterize the postwar international environment. He has been referred to by some as the father (or one of the fathers) of the atomic age and the subsequent Cold War.¹ Among all of the individuals involved in the decision to use the atomic bombs against Japan, Henry Stimson stands out for several reasons. His position as Secretary of War charged him with immense responsibilities. These were not limited to the war with Japan; Stimson also had to craft a strategy to defeat Germany and liberate Europe. He labored over the moral issues surrounding the creation and potential use of atomic weapons, but this was part of his character. Henry Stimson was a very moral man and campaigned for peace throughout his career. It was a central theme in his life and one that drove him unerringly toward a future vision of lasting peace – one secured by a leading role played by the United States. These were some of the more influential aspects of Henry L. Stimson that served to define his role in history. They are all equally important in understanding his role in the use of the atomic bomb against Japan.

My intent is not to write a biography of Henry Stimson, but to limit my focus on the events of his life that led up to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In order to do this, I have looked at the various accounts of relevant historians and identified what I believe to be the three most important issues that shaped the policies that allowed for atomic weapons to be used against Japan. First, is the “context of use,”² as put forth by Sean Malloy in his book *Atomic Tragedy*. This argument posits that no single consideration can be attributed to the eventual decision to use the bomb against Japan, but instead considers a range of factors such as

¹ David F. Schmitz, *Henry L. Stimson: The First Wise Man* (Delaware, Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), 153. Also see Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb* (New York, Random House, 1995), 432-434.

² Sean L. Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 7

military concerns, political expectations, diplomatic repercussions for postwar relations and moral issues as all influencing the decision to use the bomb against Japan. Second is the goal of a military victory coupled with the interest of a lasting peace – and how these interests drove the actions of Stimson and others. And third, is Stimson himself and the role he played – more specifically how his actions (and inactions) determined the manner in which events would unfold. It is my intent to limit the bulk of this essay to the events that relate directly to Japan and U.S.-Japan relations, in as far as these events can be connected to Henry Stimson and the atomic bombings. To this end, I have contained the majority of my discussion on events that span from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombings in August 1945. However, it is necessary to look briefly outside this span in order to get an adequate understanding of Stimson as a person.

STIMSON'S BACKGROUND

Henry Lewis Stimson was a decidedly moral person and a patriot. Though a stalwart Republican, he was not a man driven by partisan politics but by morals and ideals. His conviction that immoral means of warfare must be abolished at all costs was tempered by his belief that any lasting peace in the international system would demand that the United States play a dominant role in such a system. This can be attributed to many things, among them his respect for Theodore Roosevelt and the nature of his presidency. His character was consistently that of a gentleman, a fact that consistently governed his decisions with regard to international affairs, extending to intercepted coded transmissions. Stimson believed that any information acquired in such a way was subject to “impairment of relations of the only class of officers who are supposed to deal internationally on a gentleman’s basis,” and gentlemen “do not read each

other's mail."³ To do so was "not only immoral but also undercut the diplomatic trust necessary to avoid future wars."⁴

He believed in order and precedent, and in the role of a strong executive authority. He was also a staunch conservative who firmly believed that the educated, male elite (preferably those of political like-mindedness and social status similar to his own) should be in the positions of power. This was especially so when it came to navigating foreign relations. He studied law at Yale and became a partner at the Wall Street law firm of Root & Clarke at the age of 26. He was greatly influenced by his mentors, particularly Elihu Root; it was through Root that Stimson became a public figure after being introduced to Theodore Roosevelt. In 1906, he was named United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. In 1911 he was chosen by President Taft to be Secretary of War, placing him for the first time in direct involvement with foreign affairs. Being tasked with overseeing America's colonial possessions and international relations, Stimson found himself in the ideal position to shape foreign policy in America's increasingly prominent place in the world. This provided him with the perfect opportunity to continue the efforts of Theodore Roosevelt and move the United States into a role of world leadership.⁵

When war broke out in Europe, he enlisted in the army despite his age of 49 years and earned the rank of colonel. In 1928, Stimson became the governor-general of the Philippines. Given the opportunity to take the position of Secretary of State in Hoover's administration, Stimson returned to the United States. While in Asia, Stimson had the opportunity to meet on many occasions with Japanese officials and came away from the encounters with great respect

³ *The Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries in the Yale University Library* (New Haven, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, 1973), June 1, 1931.

⁴ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 35, referencing *Stimson Diaries*, June 1, 1931.

⁵ Schmitz, *Henry L. Stimson: The First Wise Man*, 21.

for the island nation. As late as 1928, Stimson noted in his diaries that he believed that the Japanese could be a valuable US ally in the Pacific.⁶ It was therefore immensely troubling to him in September of 1918 when fighting broke out near the South Manchurian Railway and the Kwantung army moved quickly to occupy virtually all of Southern Manchuria.⁷

Domestic concerns, the increasing strain of the Great Depression and a different global view held by President Hoover countered Stimson's desire to engage the Japanese directly (diplomatically or militarily) to resolve the conflict and counter Japanese aggression. President Hoover didn't elicit the same respect from Stimson that Theodore Roosevelt did and Hoover's resistance to any kind of intervention in Asia was a source of endless frustration to Stimson.⁸ Hoover's secretary of state responded by crafting the so called "Stimson Doctrine" of non-recognition, effectively denouncing Japanese aggression.⁹ Unfortunately, this did little to alter the momentum of Japanese expansionism¹⁰ and although the concept of direct military conflict with the Japanese seemed remote at the time, Stimson began to look for ways to ensure the peace through deterrence.

THE ROAD TO WAR

Stimson believed that a lasting peace was the goal to which the United States should commit itself, but recognized the obstacles to such an idealistic endeavor.¹¹ He committed himself to finding alternatives to war – in the 1930 London Naval Conference, he petitioned for the abolition of the submarine as an instrument of war. When negotiations broke down and

⁶ *Stimson Diaries*, February 20, 1928.

⁷ Armin Rappaport, *Henry L. Stimson and Japan, 1931-33* (University of Chicago Press, 1963), 30-31.

⁸ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 33.

⁹ Godfrey Hodgson, *The Colonel: The Life and Wars of Henry Stimson, 1867-1950* (New York, Random House, 1990), 158.

¹⁰ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 37.

¹¹ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 47.

Japan left the League of Nations, matters turned for the worse and Stimson turned to deterrence as an alternative to war. Amidst fears of Nazi aggression in Europe that Stimson became Secretary of War for the second time, this time under President Roosevelt in June 1940. It was around this time that he became aware of a new weapon that was in production, the B-17 bomber. Stimson believed that technological superiority was a key to American dominance if a lasting peace were to be brought to the international order. In the Pacific, as diplomatic efforts to contain Japanese aggression in Asia were met with an increase in the veracity of Japanese expansion, Stimson began to look to the B-17 as a means to prevent conflict with the Japanese.¹² This bomber, with its long range, would deter the Japanese from making any aggressive moves towards the United States' holdings in the Pacific and would serve to keep them in check, perhaps convincing the Japanese to pursue diplomatic resolution to the escalating tensions. In this sense, Stimson used the B-17 as a diplomatic tool to influence relations with the Japanese, again looking for alternatives to war. As negotiations with the Japanese over their aggression in China and Southeast Asia broke down, Stimson was convinced that hostilities with the Japanese were inevitable. As secretary of war, Stimson's concern was not focused solely on the Japanese threat, but on the Nazi advance across Europe. For a lasting peace to be realized, Europe would have to be liberated and U.S. allies like Great Britain must survive, but his hands were tied as long as the United States remained neutral.

In late November, 1941, negotiations with the Japanese failed to reach a settlement. In a meeting with Secretary Hull and President Roosevelt on November 25, 1941, Stimson no longer sought to avoid hostilities with the Japanese, but instead made it his goal to maneuver them into

¹² Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 44-45.

firing the first shot so the U.S. could enter the war.¹³ Foreboding reports of Japanese fleet movements made it clear that a Japanese attack was a definite possibility, but Stimson believed that the first likely target would be the U.S. bases in the Philippines. For this reason, he stationed the new B-17 bombers, his deterrent “ace in the hole,” in Hawaii. When the Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor and the new bombers laid smoking on the runways, he vowed never to make such a mistake again. He took relief, however, in the fact that he could at last focus on addressing the problem of a world spiraling into war now that the United States was free to act. Managing the war against Japan constituted only one burden among many – the war with Germany took precedence. Not only did he feel that it was strategically and militarily imperative that Germany be dealt with first, but the postwar environment was always on his mind. His long-term plans for the postwar diplomatic situation in Europe placed the United States squarely in a leadership role and this required that the United States play a quintessential role in liberating Europe¹⁴. It would not be until the fall of Germany in the spring of 1945 that Stimson could direct all of his attention on Japan, making it his “primary occupation.”¹⁵

THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

In addition to the responsibility of managing a two-ocean war, Henry Stimson had to wrestle with the moral issues involved in this terrible war. Stimson first became aware of the possibility of an atomic bomb when Dr. Vannevar Bush, director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, reported to him the possibility of such a weapon. Though Roosevelt had been informed of such a possibility, the American program to develop this technology received little funding before Pearl Harbor. Stimson’s immediate reaction to a weapon that

¹³ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 47.

¹⁴ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 73.

¹⁵ *Stimson Diaries*, May 28, 1945.

could destroy an entire city was that this was “a most terrible thing.”¹⁶ In a subsequent meeting on December 16, 1941, clearance was given to fund a full-scale project to develop such a weapon and Stimson, as the head of the war department, would have complete control.

It was clear that this kind of weapon could wreak unfathomable destruction upon civilian populations and it was unmistakably suited to such usage. Stimson had long been an opponent to any form of warfare that targeted civilians, yet he went along with the development and management of this project despite its implications. This is most likely due to the fact that he had greater concerns on his mind, namely the invasion of Europe and the defeat of Germany, and development of an atomic weapon would take years. The atomic bomb had serious implications for the postwar world, a topic from which Stimson’s mind never strayed.¹⁷ His initial opinion of the atomic bomb was that it was “unsuitable as a weapon,”¹⁸ instead noting its value as a deterrent, or a diplomatic tool. This coupled with his taxing obligations to the war effort and the long development period for the project allowed him to defer the moral issue of the bomb’s use until closer to its completion.

This sense of ambivalence may be seen as a form of pragmatism was it not for the matter of the bomb’s planned use. Well before the weapon was completed, in 1942, the Military Policy Committee was established to discuss how and against what enemy the weapon should be used. It was in these meetings that the question of demonstrations was first discussed and the necessity of demonstrating the “maximum destructive effect” became paramount in any first-use scenario. It was also decided in these meetings, in mid-1943, that Japan would be the first target. It was widely believed that the Nazis had been developing their own atomic weapons program, placing

¹⁶ *Stimson Diaries*, November 6, 1941.

¹⁷ Elting Morrison, *Turmoil and Tradition* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 613.

¹⁸ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 51-56.

them in a potential race with the Americans. This raised all sorts of problems for usage against Germany. If the first deployment of the weapon were to be a dud, the Germans could conceivably retrieve it, possibly advancing their own efforts. Any such failure would only serve to bolster the enemy's efforts at developing such a weapon. Japan was not believed to be pursuing development of atomic weapons, so the risk was negligible. Also, as early discussions of the weapon (at least those that Stimson condoned) were in the context of usage against purely military targets such as the Japanese naval concentration at Truk. In the event of a dud, the weapon would fall into the ocean and recovery by the enemy was not a significant risk. Since the naval situation in the Pacific was impossible to predict by the time the weapon was completed, this again allowed Stimson to defer confrontation with the complicated issues of the bomb's use until a later time.¹⁹

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BOMB

The original concept of the atomic bomb was not necessarily that of a weapon to be used expressly against a civilian target. It was, however, encouraged and "tailored" throughout its development to achieve the maximum observable effect. To this end, scenarios began to be contemplated at Los Alamos in which the bomb would be used against a target city occupied primarily by simple wood structures to measure the full effect of such a weapon.²⁰ As development progressed, these assumptions began to characterize the weapon itself, and General Groves did little to alter this evolution. In the targeting committee meetings, Groves repeatedly pushed to have the ancient city of Kyoto as the primary target. Its topography, in addition to the city being spared for the most part from allied bombing, made it a perfect target for

¹⁹ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 58.

²⁰ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 61.

demonstrating the potential of the weapon. Stimson, however, recognized the historical significance of Kyoto, and intervened on every one of Groves' attempts to put Kyoto on the list of targets. Stimson believed that the choice of target "should be governed by the historical position that the United States would occupy after the war." He felt that "anything that would tend in any way to damage this position would be unfortunate."²¹ These meetings were, however, yet another avenue in which the characterization of the atomic bomb as a weapon to be used against civilians was reinforced despite being in direct contradiction to Stimson's belief that the weapon be used against a purely military target, should it be used at all.

THE INTERIM COMMITTEE

The existence of the Manhattan Project signified not only the development of atomic weapons, but of atomic energy as well – a realization that was not lost on Stimson. A committee was established to deal with the issues surrounding the use of atomic weapons from the development of the weapon until such a time as its existence became public (i.e. such a time as it was announced as a threat or actually used). Determining how the bomb would be deployed was *not* the express purpose of the Interim Committee, but dissent amongst its members helped facilitate how it would eventually be used. The lack of consensus in committee meetings helps to illustrate the rifts between its members. In the minutes of the May 14 meeting, it is clear that many of the committee members assumed that Truman would make an announcement of the bomb's existence as a clear warning to the Japanese, promptly bringing about a Japanese surrender. General Lesley Groves objected vehemently to this assumption, insisting that its use be unannounced, to achieve maximum effect.

²¹ *Stimson Diaries*, June 1, 1945.

The disagreement over targeting decisions between Groves and Stimson didn't help matters in the Interim Committee meetings. In the May 31 meeting, Stimson expressed concern over the context of use. Disagreements with the Soviets over the governing of Poland were making it clear that the postwar situation would be a difficult landscape to navigate, and any exposure of the atomic bomb to the Soviets would have a severe impact on relations. However, Stimson was unable to find a way to use the atomic bomb as a diplomatic tool in this capacity and instead favored a strategy of delay, again deferring his decision until the weapon was available. The possibility of informing the Soviets of the bomb's existence prior to its use was brought up but quickly struck down by Byrnes. Other alternatives, such as non-combat demonstrations and strictly-military targets were proposed and struck down as not yielding maximum observable effect. Strangely, Stimson joined in the consensus.

Why did Stimson agree to use the bomb against a civilian target in the May 31 meeting? There are no records, either in Stimson's diaries or elsewhere, that adequately explain this. Grew's diary only vaguely addresses this decision with references to "certain military reasons, not divulged,"²² but there are several likely possibilities, many of which rely on context. Only two days prior, Stimson had met with General Marshall to discuss revisions to the unconditional surrender policy in order to clarify the American terms of surrender to the Japanese, but Stimson had urged a delay in any modification to the policy. This was likely due to the fact that fierce fighting was taking place on Okinawa and any public concession on the part of the United States on this issue might only serve to embolden the Japanese, and incite domestic outrage at home.²³ It is also likely that Stimson regarded the atomic bomb as a psychological weapon. In a meeting

²² Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952), 1434.

²³ Robert P. Newman. "Hiroshima and the Trashing of Henry Stimson." *The New England Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (1998): 23.

with the “big three” (Roosevelt, Churchill and General Marshall) less than a month later, Stimson made it clear that he would consider using the bomb against Japan in order to bring about a quick end to the war:

“I took up at once the subject of trying to get Japan to surrender by giving her a warning after she had been sufficiently pounded, possibly with S-I. This is a matter about which I feel very strongly and feel that the country will not be satisfied unless every effort is made to shorten the war.”²⁴

Once Okinawa had been captured and Japanese cities were now within range of U.S. B-29 bombers, plans for the eventual invasion of the home islands were progressing quickly. Stimson’s diary indicates that he was weighing the loss of life in the event of an invasion of Japan and felt that the controlled use of atomic weapons was a “lesser evil.”²⁵ Whatever the true reason for going along with the consensus of the May 31 meeting of the Interim Committee, Stimson did not take direct action to prevent the use of the atomic bomb against Japanese cities. Perhaps similar reasons caused him to delay addressing the issue of unconditional surrender until Potsdam.

STIMSON, TRUMAN AND UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Stimson’s first impression of the new commander in chief was dominated by concern over whether or not he was up to the task. Stimson and Truman came from very different backgrounds (Truman was not from a similarly privileged background). Stimson had also been close to FDR and no such rapport developed with Truman. Truman was first told about the bomb offhandedly by Byrnes on April 12, 1945, but did not receive a full briefing from Stimson until April 25. In this meeting, Stimson laid out not only the technical specifics of the project but

²⁴ *Stimson Diaries*, June 26, 1945.

²⁵ Hodgson, *The Colonel*, 279.

the military, diplomatic and moral implications as well. Stimson urged caution, lamenting that the “world in its present state of moral advancement compared with its technical development would be eventually at the mercy of such a weapon.”²⁶ FDR had been noncommittal to the use of the bomb until his death, but when Truman inherited the Manhattan Project it had accrued a cost of \$2 billion. This made its use all but inevitable as long as war existed with Japan – to have such a weapon and not use it would be a politically indefensible position. From the moment he was informed of its development, Truman considered the bomb to be a legitimate military weapon in the arsenal and had no reservations about its use.²⁷

The matter of the planned November invasion of the Japanese home islands weighed heavily on Stimson’s mind. Shortly after V - E Day, Stimson received a memo from ex-president Hoover claiming that any invasion of Japan would be disastrous. This sentiment was echoed amongst the Army General Staff.²⁸ The demonstrated ferocity of Japanese resistance at Okinawa convinced Stimson that the conservative casualty estimates provided by MacArthur (who desperately wanted to lead the “greatest invasion in human history”) for the Kyushu invasion were likely not representative of the losses that would be incurred. In addition, numerous reports projected that in any invasion, Japanese casualties would far outnumber Germans in a similar scenario, leading to an estimated 5 to 10 million Japanese deaths.²⁹

Joseph Grew, the acting secretary of state, pointed out that the “greatest obstacle to unconditional surrender by the Japanese is their belief that this would entail the destruction or

²⁶ Stimson, “Memorandum discussed with the President,” *Stimson Diaries*, April 25, 1945.

²⁷ Hodgson, *The Colonel*, 277.

²⁸ Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., First Harvard University Press, 2005), 80-82.

²⁹ Newman: 27.

permanent removal of the Emperor and the institution of the Throne.”³⁰ Stimson wanted to end the war quickly and had no interest in dictating the postwar restructuring of the Japanese government,³¹ so he was supportive of “clarifying” the terms of unconditional surrender to the Japanese. This was not without precedent. Stimson backed Eisenhower’s plan to place the 1942 North Africa landings under the command of Vichy French commander Darlan. He supported this plan because it would ultimately save American lives (Germany after all was the enemy, not Vichy France) though it incited domestic outrage at home. Stimson also urged an easing of the unconditional surrender stance on Italy, citing that Italy posed little direct military threat to the United States and he believed that the U.S. had little interest in the postwar management of Italy. Through negotiations, supported by Stimson, Italy achieved a conditional surrender with the Allies. Stimson’s belief was that the need for victory was great, but must take into account the “dangers of prolonged warfare.”³²

POTSDAM

Though Stimson was not an official member of the diplomatic mission to Potsdam, he nonetheless remained an important advisor. It quickly became clear, however, that diplomatic concerns would dominate the decisions of Truman and Byrnes. Information about Japanese peace feelers to Moscow and the imminent availability of the bomb caused the secretary of war to finally take decisive action, but his efforts met with repeated resistance. Stimson’s insistence that the bomb be used against a purely-military target outweighed by conventional wisdom of the nature of the bomb as a weapon designed from the beginning to be used against a city. In

³⁰ Grew, “Memorandum of Conversation with the President,” May 28, 1945, enclosed in Grew to Stimson, *Stimson Diaries*, February 12, 1947.

³¹ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 101. Also see Stimson, “Memorandum for the President: The Conduct of the War with Japan,” enclosed in Stimson to James F. Byrnes, *Stimson Diaries*, July 16, 1945.

³² Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 101.

contrast to his early vacillation on the subject, Stimson chose this time to assert his views, which he shared with General George Marshall, that the Japanese people would be likely to accept surrender if the terms were to be clarified to guarantee the imperial institution. With the availability of the weapon quickly approaching, he again returned to his strategy of deterrence. Combined with the guarantee of the emperor, the threat of the bomb would be an excellent diplomatic tool to secure peace and end the war, thus obviating the need for an invasion of Japan and saving many American lives. These efforts ultimately failed, as any mention of the emperor or of the bomb itself was removed from the declaration by Byrnes. Control over the weapon's use was now effectively out of Stimson's hands.

CONCLUSION

Henry Stimson was always burdened with the short-term necessity of military victory and the long-term concerns of the postwar diplomatic situation. Stimson's frame of mind is also a matter of concern, aware of the problem of making important moral and ethical decisions amidst the emotions stirred up by war. This was no more evident than in the accounts of his personal assistant, Harvey Bundy, which convey the concern felt by Stimson over toll that the war was taking on civilians.³³ In addition to the exhaustion of a long war effort, Stimson's conversations with Bundy also acknowledged the difficult nature of the decisions pertaining to the bomb and that "time is approaching when we can no longer avoid them."³⁴ Being tasked with the heavy burden of a two-ocean war prevented him from allocating all of his thought and effort on the issue of the manner in which the atomic bomb would eventually be used until it was too late.³⁵

³³ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 63.

³⁴ *Stimson Diaries*, March 5, 1945. Also see Hodgson, 313.

³⁵ Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 125. Also see Richard Current, *Secretary Stimson, A Study in Statecraft* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1954), 213.

As the head of the war department, this burden fell to no other than Stimson, but the connotations of such a responsibility were not made clear until the bomb's successful test at Alamogordo. By then many things had changed to fundamentally shape policy regarding the bomb's usage. FDR had died in April and taken his concerns about the weapon with him. Truman and Stimson were never as close as the secretary of war and the previous president had been; Truman had his own coterie of advisors with Byrnes being his closest confidant. Passing the mantle also meant that the nature of the bomb was dramatically altered by its cost – a \$2 billion project that had not demonstrated its worth. Without the trepidation toward the bomb and confidence that FDR likely would have shown in trusting Stimson's counsel over the bomb's use, the ultimate decision was largely taken out of Stimson's hands when the bomb was finally available to be used. Stimson's recurring deferment and failure to grapple with the difficult diplomatic, ethical and moral implications of the bomb allowed the issue to remain unresolved until such a time when decisions over its use could be taken from his control. If Stimson had addressed these difficult issues earlier and established a definite policy, perhaps the bomb would not have been tailored through its development as a weapon designed to be used against a primarily civilian target (for maximum observable effect).

Stimson was in a unique position to shape policy regarding the bomb's use. A 1964 *NBC White Paper* entitled "The Decision to Drop the Bomb," stated that:

"Only Stimson was informed on all the facets of the atomic project: the progress of its development, the plans to use the bomb, the arguments over how to use it...Only Stimson was personally and professionally involved in all its aspects: political, scientific, fiscal, military and moral."³⁶

³⁶ Hodgson, *The Colonel*, 315.

From the moment he was first informed of the efforts of the Manhattan Project, Stimson alone was in a position to shape policy over its use. If its purpose had been narrowly defined as a weapon to be used against purely military targets, with adequately documented understanding of the truly horrific nature of the weapon, it is conceivably possible that the momentum that brought its “inevitable” use against cities to the level of conventional wisdom would have been averted. Whether or not FDR would have supported these policies had Stimson acted soon enough is unknown, but his confidence and trust in Stimson was evident in his decision to place the project under Stimson’s complete control. It is also impossible to predict whether or not Truman, and his closest advisors, would have adhered to these policies or if they would have discarded them in view of postwar diplomatic concerns, such as the growing tensions with the Soviets – something that could not have been predicted as clearly when Stimson first learned of the Manhattan Project. Ultimately, I believe that it was Stimson’s failure to make these difficult decisions that made the bomb’s use that much more likely. The crushing demands of managing a two-ocean war combined with the unprecedented nature of atomic weapons and the implications associated therewith were too much for even a man of Stimson’s considerable moral stature to reconcile.

Bibliographic Essay

I went into this project knowing of specific events leading up to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of the significant role that Henry L. Stimson played in these events, but most of my knowledge pertaining to Henry Stimson was in the context of the Revisionist school of thought put forth by Gar Alperovitz and the Harper's Article, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*. I chose to investigate the reasons for Henry Stimson's actions by looking at his background particularly with regard to U.S.-Japanese relations as I believed this was absolutely essential to understanding Stimson's motivations.

From my research I found a variety of sources ranging from wide-view historical accounts of Stimson's public life to biographies. I found that some sources, like Elting Morrison's *Turmoil and Tradition* remained relatively favorable in their accounts of Stimson's career, while others, like Richard N. Current's *Secretary Stimson: A Study in Statecraft* were slightly more critical. Other sources, such as Armin Rappaport's *Henry L. Stimson and Japan, 1931-33* gave me a necessary understanding of Stimson's experience with the increasingly difficult matter of Japanese aggression in the 1930s. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's book, *Racing the Enemy* allowed me to understand the political and diplomatic complexities of the Soviet threat as it pertained to the postwar situation.

The Harper's Article, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* was an important document to consider in my research, but ultimately I chose not to use it as a source. I felt that for numerous reasons, it holds much greater potential as a source of discussion rather than evidence. Since it was not written directly by Stimson, but rather is a compilation of many contributors

assembled by McGeorge Bundy (son of Stimson's personal assistant, Harvey Bundy), and the impetus of Gar Alperovitz's book (and perhaps the entire Revisionist school of thought on the bomb's use), I believe that it remains highly subjective as a source of evidence.

Ultimately, it was Sean L. Malloy's book, *Atomic Tragedy* that provided the focus for this essay. This book, while remaining highly critical of Stimson's actions at every point in his public life, remains focused on the central issue of the use of the atomic bombs against Japan, the main reason for which it was written. This allowed me to form an argument, based on the background and corroboration of other historians' works that looks critically at Stimson's role as it pertains to the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb. Above all, however, it is from the Stimson Diaries that all of these books draw their most supportive evidence, especially when it comes to debating Stimson's motivations and actions. It was the fact that Henry Stimson wrote nearly 10,000 pages worth of information that drew me to this topic, since such a primary source is often not available for important events such as this. For this reason, it would have been much more difficult to assemble the relevant entries without the works of all of these historians and even more difficult to create an informed analysis on the role that Henry L. Stimson played in the events that led to the use of the atomic bombs.

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