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Reflections on the Atomic Bomb's effect on America since its dropping on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

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**Reflections on the Atomic Bomb's effect on America since its
dropping on Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

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2012

History Department

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the issues and controversies that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused in the United States. Four chapters all deal with different periods in the history of these controversies. The first chapter deals with the actual decision to drop the bomb and the American public's initial reactions, while the second chapter deals with subsequent reactions as the topic got more controversial. One of these topics include Henry Stimson's article entitled "The Decision to Use the Bomb," which attempted to justify the use of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The third looks at the beginnings of the Cold War and its consequences, including the Cuban Missile Crisis. The last chapter examines more modern issues such as Chernobyl and the ultimate fear of nuclear war.

The most useful primary documents found for this thesis included declassified documents during the Cold War, diaries and correspondences between leaders, and articles from those who saw Hiroshima first hand. Many letters written between world leaders, diaries and articles released to the public proved very helpful in figuring out just how the most powerful people in the world were reacting to the bombings. Many of these controversies happened more than fifty years ago including the Cuban Missile Crisis, so it is very fortunate that so many documents from the CIA have been released to the public to enjoy. From this research I have concluded that the history of atomic weaponry is a long and complicated one, even though it has all happened in the 20th century. I came across many documents and books that contained shocking facts and stories that I didn't know were possible. We did not need to drop any nuclear weapons on Japan, and later on, during the 60's, we were much closer to nuclear war than many thought.

Chapter 1: The Decision to Drop the Bomb and the Initial Reactions

The decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is one of, if not the most scrutinized and controversial war decision ever made. From the time the war ended just eight days after the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, people in the United States and around the world have contemplated other possible options to ending the war besides the utter cruelty unleashed from the bomb. Harry Truman and his advisors had many reasons for dropping the bomb, but all of them were not made public after the war was finally over. The most common justification for dropping the bomb was to simply save American lives because the invasion of Japan's mainland would be a deadly task and hundreds of thousands more soldiers' lives would be lost. Some historians think that it is possible that Truman wanted to impress the Soviet Union with the awesome power of the atomic bomb.¹ This would have given America the edge in the coming Cold War and prove to the world that the United States is the ultimate superpower. Truman may have also not wanted the Soviets to succeed in conquering the Japanese mainland and showing up the Americans just as they did by getting into Berlin first. It is also worth considering that if the Soviet Union successfully invaded Japan, they would demand an occupation zone. The Soviet Union did officially declare war on Japan on August 9th, 1945 which was just one day before the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.² In this chapter, all these theories will be discussed as well as the initial reactions in America and the military's cover up of the effects that the bomb's radiation had on the people of Japan. Did the atomic bombs really did end the war or was it Japan's weakness in the eyes of their leaders that truly forced them to surrender? Overall, Truman's decision to drop the bomb was not solely justified

¹ Gar Alperovitz, *"Historians Reassess: Did we Need to Drop the Bomb?"* Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) *"Hiroshima's Shadow"* (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998) 6-8.

² Alperovitz, 13.

by the desire to prevent casualties and the military did its best to cover up the harmful affect that the bomb had on the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The overwhelming sentiment at the time was joy that the war was over. Nothing else mattered. This was undoubtedly the case because a Gallup poll in August 1945 also observed that from a 69 to 17 percent margin, the public thought that the construction of the bomb was a good thing rather than a bad thing.³ From these people polled, they were also asked if the bombs would eventually lead to an explosion that would end the world. An astounding 27 percent said yes. So, this essentially meant that many of those who were happy with the bomb stated that it had the potential to eventually destroy humanity and our planet.⁴ This is how enamored people were that the war was finally over. It didn't matter how it happened at all, just as long as it was done with. Accounts from soldiers stationed in the Pacific were even more joyous. "Thank God for the atomic bomb," was the statement released by a servicemen published in Life Magazine.⁵ Any serviceman in the Pacific had to feel the same way because many assumed a full invasion of Japan involving 700,000 men was being planned. Now that the war was over these men could go home or be part of the occupation force. There were also many other reasons that the public felt joy due to the end of the war.

Pride in our military power and scientific accomplishment also contributed to the general public's feeling of American pride. We must not forget that we had already defeated Germany so there was already a great feeling of pride and victory in the United States. People were now playing the waiting game and hoping that the war in the Pacific would come to a quick and

³ Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: 50 years of Denial* (New York: GP Putnam & Sons, 1995), 33.

⁴ Lifton and Mitchell, 33.

⁵ Lifton and Mitchell, 33.

abrupt end. The victory in Europe had made Americans feel great pride in the military leaders and one would assume that any decision they made to end the war would not be questioned.⁶ People also had to feel great about the ability by American scientists to create a weapon so decisive in the war. One of the most interesting factors was also the American belief in virtue and true morality. We didn't start this war; we did not carry out any atrocities. We were simply fighting for the freedom of the world and against tyranny. There was never any outrage at the firebombing at Dresden or in Tokyo. The common thought process among Americans was that we were fighting the moral war and wouldn't commit the kind of atrocities that Germany or Japan had.⁷ People at the time, however, did not know the true cruelty that the atomic bombs had unleashed on more than 200,000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Whatever the case, Truman claimed that the targets were all taken out for military reasons.

Harry Truman's first public statements on August 7th, 1945 regarding the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima described the city as a military base, and this strategy was solely in an effort to "destroy Japan's capacity to make war."⁸ Truman also stated that America was in a life and death "race against the Germans."⁹ These assertions were however, difficult to accept because Germany had already been defeated and the majority of people killed and hurt in the atomic bombings were civilians, not soldiers and workers in war factories. The United States also possessed air superiority which gave them the ability to routinely bomb factories and other military facilities. Also, saying that the city of Hiroshima was a "military base" is irresponsible

⁶ Lifton and Mitchell, 34.

⁷ Lifton and Mitchell, 34.

⁸ Robert L. Messer, "New Evidence on Truman's Decision," Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) "Hiroshima's Shadow (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998), 90.

⁹ Messer, 90.

because it was a city with a population of over 350,000.¹⁰ It goes without saying that the impact of dropping a weapon like the atomic bomb would mostly harm civilians and those who had no bearing on the war. It had been reported that Truman thought that the city was only made up of about 60,000 people, but still the atomic bomb being dropped on a city isn't solely for the destruction of military establishments.¹¹ It sent a message to the Soviet Union and the rest of the world that the United States had firepower like the world had never seen before. Using this kind of bomb on so many civilians did however, deserve an explanation. When defending the dropping of the bomb, the argument was often that it would have saved countless American lives.

The argument that the bomb saved thousands of lives was true but not to the extent that the military portrayed. In 1959 Harry Truman said "I wanted to save a half million on our side. I never lost any sleep over it."¹² After the war there was an evaluation of how many lives could have been lost if we invaded Japan's mainland and military planners put the number between 20,000 and 46,000 lives lost.¹³ The Joint War Plans Committee, which was an advising group to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised that the most likely scenario of an U.S invasion would come from the south, starting at Kyushu and culminating in an attack on Tokyo.¹⁴ They also theorized that going all the way to Tokyo might not even be necessary because a victory at Kyushu would destroy Japan's capability to make war. The sudden claim that Truman and his advisors saved half a million lives by dropping the bombs came out of nowhere and had no sufficient

¹⁰ Messer, 91.

¹¹ Messer, 91.

¹² Quoted in Alfred Steinberg, *The Man from Missouri* (New York: Putnam Publishers, 1962), 259.

¹³ Barton J. Bernstein, "A Post War Myth: 500,000 U.S Lives Saved," Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds) "Hiroshima's Shadow" (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998) 130.

¹⁴ Bernstein, 131.

justification to it. There were many reasons why Americans could have believed this due to the brutality of the war. Nonetheless, these estimates were still unbelievably high.

Looking at past battles in the Pacific made it seem less likely that we would have lost over half a million men. There is no doubt that the island hopping strategy had become tremendously bloody and the battles at Iwo Jima and Okinawa were perfect examples. In the five week battle on Iwo Jima 80,000 Americans battled while 6,281 died and 19,000 were wounded.¹⁵ On the Japanese side 21,000 soldiers died basically all during the battle. At Okinawa, in two months of battle about 13,000 Americans died while 36,000 were wounded and about 70,000 Japanese soldiers were also killed.¹⁶ Looking at these numbers it would be quite shocking that the battle for the Japanese mainland would cost 500,000 American lives. These battles were bloody and the Japanese fought very bravely but there was no way that anyone can justify saying that they saved 500,000 lives by dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is very possible that Truman felt the need to exaggerate these numbers to fully justify this terrifying weapon. Despite whether it was the truth or not, most Americans believed these justifications. It was either this bomb or the loss of so many more sons, fathers, and husbands. Even though it is common memory that the bombs ended the war, there are other facts that indicate otherwise.

One of the most interesting questions to consider when speaking of the bomb is whether it really was the deciding factor in ending the war. In the summer of 1945 the Japanese military was poor in weapons, ammunitions, and personnel.¹⁷ Their capabilities to make war were so diminished that if an invasion ever occurred, it would be very difficult for the Japanese to put

¹⁵ Bernstein, 131.

¹⁶ Bernstein, 131.

¹⁷ Gar Alperovitz, 6.

together a fighting force to adequately defend their home island. It was also clear from a declassified document released in 1989 that Truman knew that Japan wanted to surrender.¹⁸ If Truman and his advisors knew this, then what was the point of using such a catastrophic weapon? It is also documented from an intercepted message that Emperor Hirohito wanted to reach out to the allies to stop the war as early as July 12, 1945.¹⁹ President Truman was notified of all this information and in his private journals; he referred to this as the “telegram from (the) Jap Emperor asking for peace.”²⁰ Now it is clear that the President knew that Hirohito wanted peace but still decided to drop the bomb. Hirohito was simply looking to find a way to surrender without more suffering for his people. His challenge was to break the news to the Army Group who like so many other Japanese soldiers, would rather die than surrender.²¹ The fact that Truman ignored this gesture, even if it was just an intercepted message is baffling because one would think he would not want to drop the atomic bomb and kill innocent people. The Emperor desperately wanted to surrender also because he thought he would receive mercy and be able to keep his title as divine leader of Japan.²² As German war trials were beginning, the thought of the Emperor’s divine title being taken away from him and even being executed had to be somewhat of a concern. It is clear, however, that Japan was somewhat willing to negotiate with the Allies before the thought of a Soviet invasion was even possible. The message was originally intended for Stalin because the Emperor thought the Russians might be easier to negotiate with if the Japanese gave up territory in Asia.²³ As we will learn, the influence of the

¹⁸ Alperovitz, 6.

¹⁹ Alperovitz, 7.

²⁰ Harry S. Truman, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, edited by Robert H. Ferrell (New York, 1982) 53.

²¹ Alperovitz, 6.

²² Alperovitz, 7.

²³ “Why Did Japan Surrender?” *The Boston Globe*, 7 August 2011, Section K.

Soviet Union might have been very significant in the decision to drop the bomb because of their declaration of war 5 days before the Japanese surrender.

In President Truman's dealings with Joseph Stalin at the Potsdam Conference in July of 1945, it was clear that he knew about the USSR's plan to enter the war in the Pacific and Japan's desire to surrender. At this point, Truman did not know that the atomic bomb would work so the next best option was to ask the Soviet Union for help. Truman's journal on July 18, 1945 reads "Discussed Manhattan. Told Stalin about it. Stalin had told P.M of telegram from Jap Emperor asking for peace. Stalin also read his answer to me. It was satisfactory. Believe the Japs will fold before Russian comes in. I am sure they will when Manhattan appears over their homeland. I shall inform about it at an opportune time."²⁴ It is clear that Truman was confident that the Japanese would surrender before the Soviet Union even felt compelled to declare war. Also, Truman knew of the successful test of the atomic bomb in New Mexico and already appears determined to use it. At this point it looked like it did not matter what happened in the next month or so. Truman was going to use the bomb and the USSR's entry into the war or the Japanese pending surrender were insignificant to him. Again, why drop the bomb if the Japanese will surrender? Many historians also theorize that just the shock of a Soviet invasion might have forced the Japanese to surrender.

Stalin told Truman he would enter the war against Japan and this seemed like reason enough not to drop the bomb, but yet, the tragic event still occurred. He also had officially promised to enter the war against Japan three months after the defeat of Germany, which was a

²⁴ Harry S. Truman, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, edited by Robert H. Ferrell (New York, 1982) 53.

target date of August 8th.²⁵ As we know, however, the Japanese military strength was dwindling rapidly and American planners believed just the shock of a Soviet invasion might force the Japanese to officially surrender. Even at the beginning of the war the Japanese leaders knew that it would be impossible to successfully battle the Soviets as well as the Americans and the British at the same time. If Japan's military leaders acknowledged this in 1941, there was certainly no hope for a successful defense in the summer of 1945. Truman also has made it clear that his main reason for even attending the Potsdam Conference was to make sure that Stalin and the Soviet Union were going to enter the war against Japan.²⁶ Even though Truman thought the bomb would be made by then, he wanted to make sure that the Soviet Union was willing. Obviously, if Russia entered the war, then many American lives could also be saved. From Truman's lost journals we can also tell he knew that once the Soviet Union entered the war, the Japanese wouldn't stand a chance: "Fini Japs when that comes about."²⁷ From this quotation it is clear that Truman was confident in immediate victory once the Soviet Union decided to enter the war. History books remember that the war ended due to the atomic bombs over Japan, and the mushroom cloud has long been the lasting image of the war, but the Japanese did not know of the bomb's existence and thus were solely concerned with a possible invasion of their homeland.

In reaction to the first Atomic Bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945, the Japanese leadership simply reacted with urgency and not panic. The next day on August 7th the Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo sent a coded message to the Japanese ambassador in Moscow

²⁵ Alperovitz, 8.

²⁶ Alperovitz, 9.

²⁷ Truman, "Off the Record", (ed.) Ferrell, 53. in Gar Alperovitz, "Historians Reassess: Did we Need to Drop the Bomb?" Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) "Hiroshima's Shadow," (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998) 9.

with another request for mediation and negotiation for a possible end to the war.²⁸ There was no answer but on August 9th the USSR declared war on Japan and attacked Manchuria. Now there were many new problems for Japan, including the thought that an occupying Soviet force in Japan would never allow an Imperial system in Japan to continue.²⁹ The most viable option at this point was to surrender to the United States and not the Red Army. On August 9th the Japanese Supreme Council met to discuss the option to surrender when the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki dropped.³⁰ The official surrender came on August 14th, five more days later. It is very possible that the Japanese leadership wasn't too concerned with the loss of civilian life. At Okinawa alone, about 80,000 Japanese civilians were killed. Also, civilians on Kyushu were instructed to sharpen bamboo sticks and meet the Americans at the beaches if an attack was coming.³¹ From this information it seems as though when pinned against the wall Japan would use everything at their disposal to defend their homeland and keep fighting, even if it meant sacrificing civilians. After the dropping of the bombs the odds just seemed too much for the Japanese due to the oncoming Soviet invasion in addition to the immense cruelty of the atomic bombs.

Even though the atomic bombs that were dropped over Nagasaki and Hiroshima were catastrophic and cruel, Japan had seen cruel bombs earlier in the incendiary bombs. In March of 1945 Americans dropped hundreds of incendiary bombs on Tokyo and many say that more died from these fireballs than those at Hiroshima.³² Obviously, Tokyo was much more populated than the 350,000 people who lived in and around Hiroshima. Furthermore, over 60 other cities

²⁸ "Why Did Japan Surrender?" *The Boston Globe*, 7 August 2011, Section K.

²⁹ "Why Did Japan Surrender?" *The Boston Globe*, 7 August 2011, Section K.

³⁰ "Why Did Japan Surrender?" *The Boston Globe*, 7 August 2011, Section K.

³¹ "Why Did Japan Surrender?" *The Boston Globe*, 7 August 2011, Section K.

³² "Why Did Japan Surrender?" *The Boston Globe*, 7 August 2011, Section K.

were completely destroyed by the time of August 1945. Japan's homeland had definitely been devastated as a result of the war, so the devastation of the atomic bombs is not the sole reason that they did not surrender. The country had experienced a lot more devastation than the American public realized, and if Japan didn't surrender after 60 cities and Tokyo were bombed, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not going to be the only reasons to surrender. This is just another factor that many people do not realize when analyzing the end of the war. The mushroom cloud will always be the lasting image of 1945 and the end of the war, but it is not the reason that Japan formally surrendered to the United States 11 days later. It was a combination of factors including the oncoming Red Army and the desire to keep the Empire as much intact as possible including the placement of the Emperor as the divine leader.

One of the lesser known and alternative theories as to why Truman decided to drop the Atomic bombs was simply revenge on Japan. The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and killed thousands of innocent people, and they had committed atrocities such as the Bataan Death march. When Truman's announcement became public, many new outlets across the country cheered the decision and applauded the bomb's ability to swiftly end the war.³³ That is the reaction that one would expect in the United States. It had been five long years of war in which thousands had been killed overseas. When the papers, news outlets, and the public found out that Truman had apparently ended the war with one bomb, the public felt that they were in debt to this man. For example, the Washington Post declared that the bomb was justified: "a struggle to the death commits all combatants to inflicting a maximum amount of destruction on the enemy within the shortest amount of time."³⁴ The paper further said that it was "unreservedly

³³ Lifton and Mitchell, 24

³⁴ Lifton and Mitchell, 24.

glad that science put this new weapon at our disposal before the end of the war.”³⁵ Many of these same reactions spread across the country pretty quickly. Although no images of the ground were available, people saw the images of the mushroom cloud above Hiroshima and the pilots of the Enola Gay stated that they hit their target directly.³⁶ Immediately after the war a poll was taken nationwide and only five percent objected to using the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Fifty-four percent backed Truman’s decision and an astounding 23 percent were disappointed that more bombs didn’t drop before Japan had the chance to even surrender.³⁷ This information tells us that four times as many members of the public were in favor of dropping more bombs than those who didn’t back Truman’s decision to drop any. Even though there were no more bombs available at the time it seems as though the public were in favor of punishing Japan for what they had put America through. The war had brought so much joy to people that not many thought to question the military’s morality.

After the war it was outrageous for members of the public to raise questions about the dropping of the atomic bombs. “To raise questions about Hiroshima is to raise doubts; it seems to some, about the moral integrity of the country and its leaders.”³⁸ Americans did not know what these bombs did to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki due to the secrecy, suppression, and distortion of the American military and government. The reluctance of the American public to believe that we committed an atrocity could have also been a factor. The Japanese at first did not even know how to handle the “ghost parade that was occurring in and around Hiroshima.”³⁹ The “ghost parade” referenced the thousands of people still alive who were doomed to die due to

³⁵ Lifton and Mitchell, 24.

³⁶ Lifton and Mitchell, 24.

³⁷ Lifton and Mitchell, 24.

³⁸ Alperovitz, 19.

³⁹ Lifton and Mitchell, 40

radiation sickness. Many relief workers went into the city without any idea what was happening, and immediately got sick. At first, this sickness was small but it quickly spread and killed many. A Tokyo news service soon reported that the city might be inhabitable for 70 years due to the damage.⁴⁰ As the death toll among the initial survivors skyrocketed in the following weeks, American military leaders first thought it was just a ploy to win over support or sympathy.⁴¹ This might have been the response relayed to the public but in reality the military was working hard to decipher whether the areas would really be dangerous especially for an American occupation force. Even though war-time censorship had officially been ended on August 15th, any documentation or images regarding the bombings on Hiroshima or Nagasaki were strictly forbidden.⁴² The United States was doing public relations work to make sure the harmful effects of the bomb stay hidden as long as possible.

This effort was somewhat thwarted when an Australian newsman named Wilfred Burchett was able to report on some of his experience witnessing the area around Hiroshima just four weeks after the bombing. When Burchett arrived and as he reported, he was constantly watched and told exactly where to go. At one point Burchett witnessed fish in one of the rivers turning their stomachs upwards and then dying a few seconds after. When Burchett approached an American official with this news, the official simply said that Burchett had obviously succumbed to Japanese Propaganda.⁴³ Hiroshima was mandated as an out of bounds area for journalists and every reporter was subject to checkups at the hospital during their stay. When Burchett learned that his white corpuscle count was down, hospital officials attributed it to a

⁴⁰ Lifton and Mitchell, 40.

⁴¹ Lifton and Mitchell, 42.

⁴² Lifton and Mitchell, 47.

⁴³ William Burchett, *"The First Nuclear War,"* Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) *"Hiroshima's Shadow"* (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998) 69.

knee infection even though Burchett later learned that a knee infection would have increased the number of white corpuscle numbers.⁴⁴ Furthermore, when the checkup was done with Burchett found that all the pictures from his camera had been erased and was no longer allowed to report. Even so the only reports that men were getting were carefully edited and American monitored interviews. The typical response by a Japanese citizen was “we were defeated but we hope the Americans will be as good winners as we were losers.”⁴⁵ Even though Burchett was unable to recover his photographs he did make the ground breaking report that shocked the public worldwide.

Burchett got around the American authorities and eventually made it to Hiroshima station, where he was able to observe the catastrophic effects of the bomb. Burchett took out his typewriter amidst the rubble and ash and began to write: “In Hiroshima, thirty days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly- people who were uninjured in the cataclysm from an unknown something which I can only describe as the atomic plague.”⁴⁶ Burchett went on to describe the haunting feeling that was felt because of the smell, and the complete emptiness of Hiroshima. Before this report on September 5th, no one had any idea of this “plague” and there was basically zero viable information coming out of Hiroshima. The story was picked up by thousands of news outlets worldwide and the “atomic plague” soon became one of the most discussed topics in the world. After the story hit, General Douglas MacArthur even ordered all reporters out of Tokyo.⁴⁷ The United States military and censoring effort was ready to counter as well.

⁴⁴ Burchett, 69.

⁴⁵ Burchett, 69

⁴⁶ Burchett, 74.

⁴⁷ Lifton and Mitchell, 50

After Burchett's story hit newspapers worldwide the U.S military went to work on crisis control. On the same day the story hit on September 5th, Secretary of State James Byrnes released a report of hundreds of atrocities committed by the Japanese.⁴⁸ Included in these stories were accounts of American soldiers being decapitated, eaten, and buried alive. Times Magazine even observed the timing of the report as something "not missed by many readers."⁴⁹ It was obvious what James Byrnes and the American government was trying to accomplish here. They were blatantly trying to justify the circumstances and the decision to drop the atomic bombs by pointing the finger at Japanese atrocities. Washington had a plan to counter the stories coming out of Hiroshima and this was just one of the tactics displayed. Events in Japan were not the only occurrences that had to be censored, as tragedies occurred on United States soil as well.

One of the more revealing events encircling the dangers of radiation was the risk of workers in America coming down with radiation sickness. On September 21st, 1945 a worker on the bomb project since 1943 named Harry Daghlian died suddenly in an "industrial accident."⁵⁰ The report was suspicious because it was reported five days after the death and there was no description as to how the "industrial accident" occurred. It was years later that it was actually revealed that he was actually a physicist who was responsible for handling mass amounts of plutonium and observing chain reactions. The accident was actually Daghlian dropping a 13 pound tungsten brick on top of an enclosed structure containing already critical plutonium.⁵¹ After the incident, he felt sick and the symptoms all pointed to radiation sickness. The military hid the real nature of his death twenty days later after the accident because they wanted to make more bombs and were frightened how the public would react if they heard the real dangers of

⁴⁸ Lifton and Mitchell, 51.

⁴⁹ Lifton and Mitchell, 51.

⁵⁰ Lifton and Mitchell, 63.

⁵¹ Lifton and Mitchell, 62.

radiation and nuclear fission. The official policy in the coming decades was a suppression of the effects of radiation. This secrecy would have a cost for the thousands of residents, soldiers, and scientists who were unknowingly exposed to the radiation from test sites.

General MacArthur even censored the news outlets in Japan. As discussed above he made all news outlets submit their stories to a censorship board and all newspapers were banned from revealing they were being censored.⁵² This made sure that readers had no idea whether they were receiving the real story or not. For the next four years news outlets in Japan were censored and books as well. Before 1949 the atomic bomb and its effects were not discussed by major media outlets or in print. In four years of censorship only four books and one poem were published mentioning the bombings over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁵³ The only reason stories from people like Burchett were released is because the Japanese helped him get to the bomb epicenter because they wanted him to see what “his people” had done to the Japanese and the city.⁵⁴ Unfortunately for the American military one of these books entitled “Hiroshima” by John Hersey became incredibly popular in the United States and blew the lid off any censorship effort. This incredible work will be discussed in the next chapter. From all of these findings, it is clear that the American military didn’t want anyone talking about the radiation from the atomic bombs, including the victims.

In this chapter plenty of evidence has been presented disregarding Truman’s simple explanation that the bomb was dropped to save allied casualties. Truman knew he wanted to drop the bomb well before he even learned that the Soviet Union was going to join the war in early August. If this was to impress the Soviet Union or to show the world the power of the

⁵² Lifton and Mitchell, 56.

⁵³ Lifton and Mitchell. 56.

⁵⁴ Burchett, 73.

United States military, we may never officially know. It is clear though that saving allied lives was not the only motivation and Truman claiming the bombs had saved half a million lives is also ridiculous and a much exaggerated number. We also learned that it's possible that the dropping of the bombs might not have even really motivated Japan to surrender. It is more likely that they surrendered because of the Soviet declaration of war and invasion of Manchuria on August 8th. Furthermore, after the bombings we know that there was jubilation in America due to the end of the war and then a cover up by the military and government concerning the effects of the bomb and the "atomic plague." Overall, Americans dealings with the atomic bomb were all unnecessary because the USSR's invasion of Manchuria could have shocked Japan into surrendering. The whole cover up and censorship would not even have been needed if Truman did not decide to drop these cruel bombs on the civilians of Japan.

Chapter 2: Stimson, Truman, and John Hersey

In the last chapter many different topics were discussed including why Harry Truman decided to drop the atomic bombs, the feelings in America after the bombs were dropped, the

military cover up of the real physical effects of the bomb, and perhaps some flaws in Truman's logic that was presented to the public. One of the arguments offered was that Truman's true intentions were to use the bomb the moment he learned that the bomb had been successfully tested in New Mexico. In this chapter, Harry Truman's life and feelings over the decision will be much closer examined. Did he ever have any doubt? Did one of the most decisive military decisions of all time ever get to him or make him feel remorseful? These are all subjects that will be explored in this chapter. Additionally, in the last chapter I touched on the initial discovery of radiation sickness and how this bomb was obviously different from an incendiary bomb or any other explosive ever created. When it first struck no one knew what was happening and why people were dying weeks and months after August 6th. When John Hersey's article first appeared in the New Yorker it sent shockwaves across the United States. It was a truly eye opening account that let Americans see the terror that the atomic bombs unleashed on thousands of seemingly innocent people. This article was very significant because it finally presented radiation sickness to the public and humanized the Japanese people that were affected by these cruel bombs. In reaction to this article Henry Stimson and Harry Truman wrote articles defending the decision to drop the bomb. It was unprecedented for politicians to react to a magazine article but that just speaks to the influence the Hersey article had on the public's perception. We will look at both of their reactions and how their explanations compare with the reasons we stated in the first chapter. Overall, 1946 to 1950 was an important time in America as it refers to perceptions of the atomic bombs.

First, it is important to relay how the American public was feeling before the Hersey article came out on August 31, 1946. As I discussed in the first chapter, the American public

avored the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁵⁵ After the bombs, 85% of Americans approved of the bombings while just 10% disapproved and 5% had no opinion on the matter.⁵⁶ This was not too surprising, however, because it is expected that Americans would be ecstatic about the war just being over. It did not matter how it got accomplished, but the fact that all the men were coming home to their families and that there was peace on Earth for now, made so many Americans approve of the bombing. Directly after the war, it would be difficult for Americans to differentiate the question of “do you approve of the bombs” or “do you approve the fact that the war is over?” It is for this reason that these numbers are not surprising, and there is another factor to consider.

The American perception of the Japanese during the war was that they were barbaric and cruel fighters that committed numerous atrocities. The memories of Pearl Harbor were still fresh in the public’s mind, and those painful memories would not soon be forgotten. Due to this perception, Americans justified the constant incendiary bombing and again at first did not have much remorse about dropping the atomic bombs. Also, almost a year after the bombs had been dropped, Americans had learned very little about the negative effects that the bomb had on the public due to radiation.⁵⁷ With the release of John Hersey’s “Hiroshima” on August 31, 1946, everything changed.

The Hersey article was one of the first pieces of work released that gave Americans a chance to see the complete devastation and terror that these bombs unleashed on seemingly innocent victims. This issue of the New Yorker was visibly different from other issues because

⁵⁵ Michael J. Yavenditti, “John Hersey and the American Conscience” Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) “Hiroshima’s Shadow” (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 288.

⁵⁶ Yavenditti, 288.

⁵⁷ Yavenditti, 289.

there was no “talk of the town segment,” or any cartoons.⁵⁸ The entire issue was solely dedicated to a 68 page long article by a 31 year old war correspondent named John Hersey. This article was supremely unique because rather than describing the destruction of the landscape and buildings, this piece looked at the pain felt by people who fell victim to these catastrophic bombs. People reading these accounts could also identify with the people being described in a way they could not before the article.⁵⁹ This quote by Yavenditti shows exactly the effect this article had on the American public: “For perhaps the first time since Pearl Harbor, thousands of Americans confronted Japanese who were ordinary human beings and who manifested few of the stereotyped Japanese warrior traits of fanaticism and sadism.”⁶⁰ It was an unprecedented task to think of these Japanese sadists as ordinary human beings.

John Hersey does a good job at the beginning of the article describing the innocent and hardworking nature of one of the Japanese citizens he followed. “Miss Sasaki, who was about twenty, had to cook breakfast for her father, a brother, a sister, and herself, and since the hospital, because of the war, was unable to provide food to prepare a whole day’s meals for her mother and the baby, in time for her father, who worked in a factory making rubber earplugs for artillery crews.”⁶¹ Describing a family like this and the hard work they put in just to get by did a very convincing job of humanizing them and making them relatable. They certainly did not seem like harsh savages from this account. This article made the entire public relate to these people and visualize the same things happening to a city in America. This instantly made the question if we should have dropped the bomb a heated debate in the United States.

⁵⁸ Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: 50 years of Denial* (New York: GP Putnam & Sons, 1995), 86.

⁵⁹ Yavenditti, 292.

⁶⁰ Yavenditti, 292.

⁶¹ John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 15.

This article also gave Americans a chance to truly visualize what happened on the day the bomb hit and the days after. It covered the initial fire storm, the lack of medical services, the confusion and surprise of the cities inhabitants, and the intense fear that came with this attack. The instances of the article that described the sheer terror were moving and disturbing. “The eyebrows of some were burned off and skin hung from their faces and hands. Others, because of pain, held their arms up as if carrying something in both hands. Some were vomiting as they walked.”⁶² The book also describes even more terrible things such as hollow eye sockets, puss covered wounds, and skin freely peeling off peoples bodies. It was truly a horrific read and one would need a strong stomach to get through it all. In addition to all the gruesome details, Hersey added various examples of heroism, sacrifice, and ultimately survival.

One of the most powerful messages sent from this article in the New Yorker was the realization that this could happen to an American city if more of these bombs would be developed. The dread and fear of facing a weapon like this started many debates in the United States and in the coming decades. This dread was not fully realized in 1946 because it was clear that the United States was the only country to possess this weapon. In fact, at the time there were no other bombs in existence because Truman had used the only two that were ready for detonation. The government did however want the world and the public to think that they possessed many bombs and they could be used at any time. In any fashion, Americans were convinced through Hersey that this sort of bombing was more destructive than any other weapon in the history of mankind.

Raids on the centers of certain populations were considered routine in the eyes of the American public, but Hersey’s “Hiroshima” forced Americans to realize that this was the new

⁶² Hersey, 29.

war horror. One of the most terrifying aspects of these bombs was that it could come without any warning. In “Hiroshima,” Hersey describes that most citizens had no idea such an attack was coming, and all they thought they saw that morning was a few reconnaissance planes.⁶³ The confusion when this bomb hit was overwhelming because no one had any indication that one plane could cause this amount of devastation. Even though there was a rumor going around the city that the Americans were planning something special for the city, no one could have anticipated something as horrific as what the citizens of Hiroshima endured on August 6th.⁶⁴ In this case, there was no warning and no chance for a majority of the city to seek shelter. Even if they had that chance, it probably would not have helped as thousands died trapped under poorly constructed Japanese buildings. The bombing changed warfare because the common visuals from the war were hundreds of planes causing mass destruction, but now warfare had the capability to destroy cities with just one or two planes. It was a complete and utter shock to the American people. This bomb changed everything and the article by Hersey was supremely popular and is one of the few works in history that required a reaction from government leaders.

It is without a doubt that John Hersey’s “Hiroshima” was one of the most popular magazine articles of the 20th century. From the moment it hit the newsstands on August 31, 1946 it was an immediate sensation and newsstands sold out almost immediately. Even the major of Princeton, New Jersey asked every citizen to pick up a copy.⁶⁵ The ABC network read the entire work four nights in a row because the demand was so high for the article.⁶⁶ The New York Times famously declared that any American that “permitted himself to make jokes about atom bombs, or who has come to regard them as just one sensational development that can now be

⁶³ Yavenditti, 292.

⁶⁴ Yavenditti, 292.

⁶⁵ Lifton and Mitchell, 86.

⁶⁶ Lifton and Mitchell, 87.

accepted as part of civilization...ought to read Mr. Hersey.”⁶⁷ This message by the New York Times explicitly tried to reach the people who did not know the truth behind the destructive power of the atomic bombs. Furthermore, most people who read it were moved and began to doubt the government’s reasoning when they decided to use the bomb. It was in this sense that this article held its power. The quick spread and popularity of the article almost required a response from higher government, but there were also many that questioned Hersey’s intentions in writing “Hiroshima.”

Even though the Hersey article was tremendously popular many readers in the American public lashed out and claimed that “Hiroshima” was just a propaganda tool used to make Americans feel bad about the use of the bombs. Critics thought that this sort of sentiment might cause the disarmament of the United States if the hype over the article continuously increased. Many claimed that this was the kind of movement that would decrease American defenses, and then would lead to less homeland security.⁶⁸ Some even claimed that disarmament was the reason the United States started off so poorly at the beginning of the war. On top of these claims some critics also simply stated that war is terrible and the atomic bomb was just another example. Some thought that these particular bombs equaled the horror and complete terror that constantly surrounds the state of war. In the last chapter it was discussed that the United States military tried to make the atomic bomb feel more justified by releasing a list of numerous atrocities committed by the Japanese. For some members of the American public, this tactic worked because some felt that since the Japanese were barbarians and were so ruthless during the war, they deserved this sort of treatment.⁶⁹ This reaction is not surprising because over the

⁶⁷ Lifton and Mitchell, 88.

⁶⁸ Yavenditti, 295.

⁶⁹ Yavenditti, 295.

last four years the American public constantly received the message that the Japanese were brutal beasts that would do anything to kill Americans and citizens alike.

Overall, how it is possible to justify the mass killing of innocent civilians that had practically no involvement except for the very few who worked in military factories? For many, the deliberate act of killing civilians was a subject that concerned many Americans after the Hersey article appeared.⁷⁰ The argument in this sense is can the military ever justify sacrificing an innocent civilian in favor of saving an armed member of the military? Is that moral? “No human life is so sacred that it ought to be spared at the cost of destroying by positive, deliberate act another human being who is not culpably accountable as unjust aggressor or as sentenced criminal.”⁷¹ This is a very logical argument that has not truly been touched on in the debate. The general debate always seems to surround the cruelty of the bomb due to the radiation and the mass terror and pain it brings to so many. To my knowledge, the conflict has rarely been about whether which life is more valuable, the lives of soldiers who would die invading mainland Japan or the citizens who died at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I think this is a crucial issue that must be examined.

At a quick glance there is no debate because citizens should never be harmed when a soldier can instead be put into harm’s way. A soldier is supposed to enter conflict to protect civilians and to protect them at all costs. Some think that a citizen should never be involved in war no matter the circumstance because it is an unwritten law among belligerents. “Promiscuous attack upon armed and unarmed alike-upon men, women and children, upon great concentrations of ordinary human beings who in overwhelming majority are objectively convictable of no

⁷⁰ Edgar R. Smothers, S.J., “An Opinion on Hiroshima” Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) “Hiroshima’s Shadow” (Stony Creek , CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 308.

⁷¹ Smothers, 308.

belligerent status-is, with that same tradition, to be rejected, whatever may be the alternative.”⁷²

This is a very convincing argument that Truman, Stimson, and other leaders decided to bypass in favor of a swift and decisive end to the war.

Soon after the release of John Hersey’s “Hiroshima,” the men in charge of the United States government felt that it was necessary to justify their decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The two men who were most responsible for the decision to drop the bombs were the Secretary of War Henry Stimson and President Harry Truman. The first public statement released to the public following the release of the John Hersey article was Henry Stimson’s essay entitled “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” which was released in February 1947.⁷³ We will never know if it was released at Truman’s request or not, but nonetheless the former Secretary of War attempted to reassure all Americans that the decision to use the bomb was justified and not made easily. It is truly amazing that a single newspaper article could incite this reaction from higher government but John Hersey’s “Hiroshima” was and remains today one of the most influential and groundbreaking essays in American military history. For all its efforts, Hiroshima was not even the number one bestseller in 1946 as the honor went to “The Egg and I,” a comedy about life on an Oregon farm.⁷⁴ Thus, it is difficult to say how significant “Hiroshima” was to the American public.

The origins of Stimson’s article entitled “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb” started with the urgent request by James Conant.⁷⁵ This man was one of the people who got the Manhattan Project on its feet, and he was very concerned with the public’s reaction to the Hersey

⁷² Smothers, 308.

⁷³ Yavenditti, 296.

⁷⁴ Paul Boyer, “Victory for What? - The Voice of the Minority.” Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) “Hiroshima’s Shadow” (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 239.

⁷⁵ Lifton and Mitchell, 94.

article after its release. In a letter to Stimson's special assistant Harvey Bundy, he expressed his concern for a repeat of criticism after this war just as there was after World War I because many thought the United States wrongly entered that conflict.⁷⁶ Conant's simple request was that Henry Stimson write an article "clarifying what actually happened with regard to the decision to use the bomb against the Japanese," as to not have a distortion in history for future generations.⁷⁷ Obviously, Conant did not want the history books to say that the United States government made a quick and rash decision that killed thousands of innocent lives just so that a few American soldiers did not have to die. Forgetting what the reasons were behind the motivation for this article, the fact that men like James Conant were urging Stimson and Truman meant that the Hersey article had reached the highest level of government.

Henry Stimson's article "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb" clearly clarified the government's motivation and obligation to use the atomic bombs in August 1945. In the beginning of the article Stimson thoroughly reviews how the bomb was planned and manufactured through the Manhattan Project. He stated that both he and Franklin D. Roosevelt were well aware of the dangers associated with constructing a weapon with such destructive power, but it was war and they must unlock all the possible doors to victory.⁷⁸ When President Roosevelt passed away Stimson filled Truman in on all the details associated with the bomb's construction. Stimson and Truman also organized an Interim Committee that advised the President on all decisions associated with the use of the atomic bombs.⁷⁹ Responsibilities of this committee also included the drafting of statements following the dropping of the bombs, the

⁷⁶ Lifton and Mitchell, 94.

⁷⁷ Lifton and Mitchell, 94.

⁷⁸ Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) "Hiroshima's Shadow" (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 198.

⁷⁹ Stimson, 201.

containment and control of atomic energy worldwide, and domestic control of atomic energy.⁸⁰ One of the committee's most significant contributions to the decision to use the bomb was that on June 1st 1945 they declared that the bombs should be used as soon as possible on Japan without prior warning.⁸¹ The committee and Stimson claimed that the alternatives would be less productive in bringing a swift end to the war.

The primary reason for dropping the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, according to Stimson, was that there was indication that Japan would fight to the very last man. This information motivated the United States government to find an alternative to invading Japan. Invading Japan's homeland would be disastrous according to Stimson. "In such an event the Allies would be faced with the enormous task of destroying an armed force of five million men and five thousand suicide aircraft, belonging to a race which had already amply demonstrated its ability to fight literally to the death."⁸² As I explained in the last chapter, Stimson and Truman claimed that an invasion of the homeland of Japan would result in over a million deaths and the war would be estimated to last until 1946 or later. In a memorandum written by Stimson for President Truman, he outlined the current military situation in the war against Japan, and highlighted that an alternative to this invasion would be most necessary. Some of the advantages at the time were that Japan had no allies, their navy was basically destroyed, the allies had air superiority, and great moral superiority being that the United States was the victim of Japan's initial sneak attack at Pearl Harbor.⁸³

⁸⁰ Stimson, 201.

⁸¹ Stimson, 201.

⁸² Stimson, 203.

⁸³ Stimson, 205.

One of Stimson's most interesting messages in this memorandum was that he discussed the general attitude of the Japanese population. He believed that the country was not full of military fanatics, and if the Japanese could be convinced that the war was over, then maybe it could come to an end without a full out invasion.⁸⁴ It was in this context that Stimson suggested a warning to Japan for full demilitarization or else. This warning was issued on July 26th and came to be known as the Potsdam Ultimatum, since it occurred after the Potsdam Conference.⁸⁵ The Japanese promptly rejected the Ultimatum, warranting it "unworthy of public notice."⁸⁶ The decision was then made for the atomic bomb to be used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6th and 9th, respectively.

In this article by Stimson, he attempts to convey his compassion for the Japanese people by stating he rejected the proposal to also bomb Kyoto. "Although it was a target of considerable military importance, it had been the ancient capital of Japan and was a shrine of Japanese art and culture."⁸⁷ One of the purposes of writing this article in the eyes of Stimson, Conant, and Truman was to make the American public feel as though their government had felt compassion and had not been reckless in this huge decision. It is very possible that Stimson added details like these to try and convey that to the public. However, the ultimate justification for the use of such a weapon was the fact that it ended the most horrible war in human history.

Stimson claims that ending this war as quickly as possible and with the least amount of casualties was his sole mission. When addressing the bomb's critics at the end of his article, he explains that war is death and it is inevitable. "The face of war is the face of death; death is an

⁸⁴ Stimson, 206.

⁸⁵ Stimson, 208.

⁸⁶ Stimson, 208.

⁸⁷ Stimson, 208.

inevitable part of every order that a wartime leader gives...But this deliberate, premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent choice...It stopped the fire raids, and the strangling blockage; it ended the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies.”⁸⁸ Henry Stimson accomplished his objective in writing this article. He did his best to justify the slaughter of a hundred thousand Japanese, most of them civilians. At the time, this was the best way to do that. The most common message that is mentioned many times is the concept that they had no other choice. Also, Harry Truman’s input on the matter is rarely discussed and perhaps this occurred at his request. Even though President Truman stated he had no regrets after the bomb was dropped initially, is it possible for one not to feel remorse or pain after making a decision of this worldwide magnitude? It is definitely clear that there was some anxiety later on in his life even though he initially stated he made the right decision.

After the bombs were dropped in August 1945 Truman remained firm in his and the government’s decision. In some off the record comments with a reporter soon after the bombings Truman declared that “when you have to deal with a beast, you have to treat him like a beast.”⁸⁹ Also, after Robert Oppenheimer publically stated that it was a “known sin” for him to take a part in the construction of the bomb, Truman said that confession was just another example of a “crybaby scientist.”⁹⁰ This statement is interesting because it was first Oppenheimer that put Truman in the position to use the bomb. In these two quotations it is very clear that Truman initially had no remorse or at least very little for the Japanese or anyone who felt that the government made the wrong decision.

⁸⁸ Stimson, 210.

⁸⁹ Robert L. Messer, “New Evidence on Truman’s Decision,” Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) “Hiroshima’s Shadow” (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 92.

⁹⁰ Messer, 92.

Truman was one of the most burdened by this decision and it showed in the rest of his Presidency as well. Following the death of President Roosevelt, Truman often doubted his power and his own ability to make adequate decisions. “His frequent expressions of self- doubt, together with his unprepossessing appearance, greatly troubled some of his advisors. At one point General Marshall even specifically warned him that he must, as commander in chief, be careful not to appear weak.”⁹¹ If his ability to make decisions was questioned before the bombs were dropped, it is predictable that he would doubt those decisions. Being the President after one of the best Presidents in the history of the United States brought certain pressures and this included the ability to make a tough decision that was ultimately in the best interest of the country and world peace. In short, if he did not truly have confidence before the decision, it would be easy to see Truman struggling with it after. However, immediately after the decision Truman did his best to defend the decision and convey that it was a necessary one to end the war.

There are many people nationwide that believed Harry Truman took such a harsh stance because he was protecting himself from his true feelings over his decision. Just as many Americans attempted to do before the release of John Hersey’s “Hiroshima,” it is very possible that Truman was numbing himself and ignoring the moral questions associated with the atomic bombs.⁹² There is a point to be made that the ability to make this decision coincides with the same ability to separate oneself from the horrific human consequences that came with it. If Truman had fully come to grips with the devastation and suffering he had unleashed, then living out his days in confidence over the decision would become very difficult. When Truman actually saw images of the destruction in Hiroshima, he started to face the fact that Hiroshima was not just a military base.

⁹¹ Lifton and Mitchell, 200.

⁹² Lifton and Michell, 169.

After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki it is clear that Harry Truman felt guilty over the decision for most of his life. In 1948, Truman acknowledged the devastation and the gravity of such a decision on his own conscience. “That was the most terrible decision that any man in the history of the world had to make...I never want to have to do that again my friends.”⁹³ It is obvious that after being shown photos of the destruction and the lives extinguished by a single bomb, Truman was affected.

Despite the controversy in Truman’s own mind, he had to make one of the toughest decisions that a leader will have to make. He and the American government, in one way or another, slaughtered thousands with just two simple orders. In the 20th century no United States President has come out and publically opposed the bombing due to the possible damage it could do to the government’s credibility. The overall defense of the government is that the bombing was done with much remorse but was ultimately necessary in securing a quick resolution to the most terrible war in history. Over the next 20 years or so Truman distorted the numbers in his head to make it clear that he had saved thousands if not millions of lives. In 1955 he claimed he had saved a half million American lives, while in 1959 “millions of lives,” and in 1963, 125,000 American lives and an equal amount of Japanese “youngsters.”⁹⁴ In this chapter many topics have been discussed such as reports on how many lives the bomb actually saved, but throughout the 20th century it was just commonly accepted that the bombings saved upwards of 500,000 lives, but that was far from the case.

The debate and controversy surrounding the decision to drop the bomb is one of the most heated and relevant in the history of the country. In the 21st century, nuclear technology and

⁹³ Lifton and Mitchell, 188.

⁹⁴ J. Samuel Walker, “Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan,” (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 103.

weapons of mass destruction are at the forefront of the human mind because of the mass devastation and terror it could cause. It is interesting to wonder if the only reason another one has not been used yet is because the world has seen the terror that can be unleashed when they were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Is it possible that Truman's decision to drop the bombs has further cautioned future leaders to think twice about making the same decision? This is definitely a question to consider as new technologies are produced in the 50's and 60's. Furthermore, the tension between Soviet Russia and the United States grew to a very high level, and atomic bombs became the focus and largest dilemma for both nations. One of the center questions that needs to be answered is what did the bombings accomplish? Was it just the end of the war or was something else achieved?

This chapter has explored the impact of the Hersey article and the reactions from the highest level of United States government. These were all examples of short term impacts of the dropping of the most terrifying weapon created in human history. As we move out of the two or three years after the war we will see how the bombs impacted the start of the Cold war, and the spread of this deadly technology. One of the most relieving aspects in the time right after the war for Americans was that the United States was the sole possessor of this type of bomb. In the 50's this thought changed immediately as the Soviets acquired the technology. The terror of a possible nuclear war would soon set in.

Chapter 3: The Origins of the Cold War, the Hydrogen Bomb and the Cuban Missile Crisis

After the war ended, it was very clear who the two superpowers of the world were: the United States and the Soviet Union. Almost immediately after the war there was tension between the two nations over how the war ended and how the future would turn out for both nations. Stalin was most certainly jealous over the American's crown experiment that resulted in the invention of the most powerful weapon ever created. This tension and ultimately fear turned the late 40's and 50's into an arm race and the eventual development of the hydrogen bomb as well. Furthermore, when many scientists of the original Manhattan project noticed the urgent

desire by both nations to produce massive amounts of atomic weaponry, they surprisingly objected to it, because they thought it would lead to the end of mankind. The ultimate scare of the 20th century was, however, the Cuban Missile Crisis. Since many declassified documents have recently been released, citizens in both nations can get a better sense of actually how close we were to a nuclear war. This 1962 standoff between Soviet and American forces is famous for just this, and was handled very well by both President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev. If these two leaders did not show the restraint to make the order to push the button, we very well could have seen another war break out in 1962.

First, it is important to investigate the origins of the Cold War and how this tension led to this near disaster in 1962. It is interesting to argue that the mere presence of the atomic bomb in the world between 1945 and 1991 was the most responsible tool for peace.⁹⁵ “When we think of the diplomatic history of that era, the bomb features as a blunt, fearsome tool: a brutal means of ending the Second World War, and then of deterring war between the United States and Soviet Union.”⁹⁶ It is for these reasons that fear might have been the most influential feeling in the mid to late 20th century. The Hiroshima article by John Hersey and all the other publications released describing radiation sickness and its horrible effects, spoke volumes to the entire world. It is foolish to think that Soviet and American leaders were also not distinctly affected by these gruesome images and stories. No one wanted to be the one responsible for unleashing that kind of horror upon the world and its innocent civilians. It would completely make sense for the nations of the world to come together after the war to make sure that another world war is prevented, and the atomic bombs be regulated. Another world war with the use of atomic

⁹⁵ Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), IX.

⁹⁶ Craig and Radchenko, IX.

weaponry could certainly doom the world.⁹⁷ Instead, the two most powerful nations of the world went in opposite directions and the tension grew with every month after the war.

One can argue that the United States was primarily responsible for the beginning of the Cold War due to its aspirations in the latter half of the war to establish a new world order based on American interests. Roosevelt and Truman had this attitude because the United States was superior to the feuding European nations who had devastated the world's population by unleashing two deadly world wars.⁹⁸ These two men, however, soon learned that the Soviet Union did not want to play by the Americans rules and so the confrontation between the two nations began.⁹⁹ It is also worth mentioning that in 1946 American's believed they to have a monopoly on the Atomic bomb, which at the time was true. This power over the world could have had an influence on international policy making and their intentions to lead the world into the second half of the twentieth century.

The American view of themselves as the dominant nation of the world infuriated Stalin to a point where he felt compelled to build the atomic bomb. Stalin believed that the United States would use the atomic bomb as a tool to simply make U.S foreign policy more assertive.¹⁰⁰ He was most disgusted with the fact that the Americans thought they could use the bomb as a ploy to make the Soviet Union feel under them. Nonetheless, the fact that the Americans had the bomb and the Russian's did not angered Stalin and created the image that the Soviet Union was not the most dominant nation in the world. It is important to note that Stalin did not think the United States would use the bomb against the USSR at the time. This was a big risk but Stalin stood by

⁹⁷ Craig and Radchenko, IX.

⁹⁸ Craig and Radchenko, XV.

⁹⁹ Craig and Radchenko, XV.

¹⁰⁰ Craig and Radchenko, XXIV.

it. After the victory in the war, the Soviets no longer wanted to be labeled as the technologically backward society of the world.¹⁰¹ The label as inferior to European nations and the U.S was a brutal reminder of Russian past and Stalin was determined to erase it. This was obviously not the only factor that motivated the Soviet Union to build the bomb, but definitely contributed to the resistance to cooperate with Western Europe and the United States.

Even though Stalin was determined to build the bomb to equal the technological playing field, he at first did not think it was a weapon that could be used in standard warfare. Furthermore, Stalin thought that another world war or a war between east and west was not a threat for some time.¹⁰² He did, however, believe that another war was inevitable, just not in the foreseeable future. He saw it this way because both armies were not completely capable of war at the time and no one wanted to dive back into war after the most deadly war of all time. Also, Stalin only saw the bomb as a weapon of fear, and he thought they had no real military significance. “Atomic bombs are meant to frighten those with weak nerves, but they cannot decide the outcome of war, since atomic bombs are quite insufficient for that.”¹⁰³ It is interesting that Stalin made these comments, given that he wanted to build a bomb very badly after he found out that the Americans had one. The official reason for his need to have a bomb was mostly political. The fact that the United States had the bomb and the Soviets did not weakened Stalin’s position in politics and negotiations.¹⁰⁴ At this point in history, it was perceived that the balance of power in the world was based on who had the atomic bomb and who did not.

¹⁰¹ Craig and Radchenko, XXIII.

¹⁰² Craig and Radchenko, 96.

¹⁰³ Craig and Radchenko, 96.

¹⁰⁴ Craig and Radchenko, 97.

Even though the Americans apparently had the advantage in international affairs due to the bomb and allies in Western Europe, Stalin and the Soviets attempted to project as much power as they could in Europe and Asia. Again, Stalin was resolute in his dealing with the west because he seriously doubted that anyone would want to or be capable of another conflict so soon after World War II.¹⁰⁵ In the months after the war had ended, Stalin and Soviet Foreign minister Molotov continued to not be frightened by U.S intimidation tactics. At one point in London, U.S Secretary of State James Byrnes even openly threatened Molotov with an atomic bomb, but Molotov considered it an empty threat.¹⁰⁶ It seemed as though the two powers grew more resentful towards each other as each day passed following the end of the war. The United States attempts to control international policy failed because Stalin and the Soviets were not going to be intimidated even if they were directly confronted with an atomic bomb. As the days pressed on, the scientists who created the bomb and knew its power grew very concerned with this ever growing conflict.

The scientists who built the bomb and knew of its power not only were witnesses to its ability to kill, but also its ability to destroy mankind.¹⁰⁷ One of Robert Oppenheimer's most serious concerns was preventing the spread of the weapon. He desperately wanted international control and he felt responsible for the thousands of deaths caused by the two atomic bombs. In November 1945, he met with Truman and stated famously, "Mr. President, I have blood on my hands."¹⁰⁸ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Truman assured Oppenheimer that the

¹⁰⁵ Craig and Radchenko, 98.

¹⁰⁶ Craig and Radchenko, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: 50 years of Denial* (New York: GP Putnam & Sons, 1995), 245.

¹⁰⁸ Lifton and Mitchell, 168.

appropriate steps were being taken to internationally regulate the bomb and later referred to him as a “crybaby scientist.”¹⁰⁹

Many scientists started to ponder the possibility of an apocalyptic end to the world due to these bombs, before the majority of the world even knew they existed. In their minds, the symbol of the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima was not an image of victory, but a source of knowledge that had terrible potential.¹¹⁰ This knowledge of responsibility for many of these men gave them overwhelming feelings of guilt. Some scientists after the war were walking the streets of Chicago and could not help but look up and “vividly imagining the sky suddenly lit by a giant fireball, the steel skeletons of skyscrapers bending into grotesque shapes and their masonry raining into the streets below, until a great cloud of dust rose and settled over the crumbling city.”¹¹¹ These images haunted many of these scientists because they knew if the Soviets built the bomb, this could very well happen in their lifetimes. The thought of the atomic bomb being used against the United States was a thought that drove the fear of the Cold War. Many American scientists could not bear the thought of something so terrible happening due to their own creation. Many of the scientists who were involved campaigned for arms control and a nuclear test ban to prevent the weapon from ever being used again.¹¹² Obviously, most of these plans were unsuccessful, but it is worth mentioning that the most educated and experienced men in the world when it came to nuclear energy were the most active in preventing its spread. Phillip Morrison even referred to Hiroshima as a “crime and a sin,” not because it ended the war, but because it was “the first event of a future that’s intolerable.”¹¹³ It was clear that the majority

¹⁰⁹ Lifton and Mitchell, 168.

¹¹⁰ Lifton and Mitchell, 245.

¹¹¹ Lifton and Mitchell, 249.

¹¹² Lifton and Mitchell, 249.

¹¹³ Lifton and Mitchell, 251.

of these scientists were consumed by the thought a nuclear war ending the civilized war as they knew it, and then they all would have more than just blood on their hands.

American scientists even tried to reach Soviet scientists to warn them of the dangers associated with building the bomb. Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, Irving Langmuir, and Harold Urey sent a letter to the leader of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, but the letter was immediately reported to Molotov.¹¹⁴ The American scientists were preaching the message of “One World or None.”¹¹⁵ Unfortunately for the American efforts, the Soviet scientists could not undertake independent projects and were tied to the wishes of Molotov, and ultimately Joseph Stalin. The drive for cooperation between the two nations was a lost cause from the start due to Stalin’s determination to create an equal playing field in international relations, and the United States resolve to be the single dominant power in the world.

The ultimate cause of the start of the Cold War was in fact the two superpowers’ decision to refuse international cooperation. This tension between the two superpowers was partly caused due to Stalin’s ever harshening stance on international policies. For the majority of Russian history, it was tradition to conduct “power politics” and never back down to any foreign power.¹¹⁶ Stalin also followed another Russian tradition of being distrustful of international diplomacy.¹¹⁷ Russians had never been very trustful of the west, and these thoughts were justified even more when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. Russian statesmen had long been convinced that western diplomacy was designed to fool and embarrass Russia. Also, those historical feelings were part of the Marxist-Leninist view that the Soviet

¹¹⁴ Craig and Radchenko, 147.

¹¹⁵ Craig and Radchenko, 147.

¹¹⁶ Craig and Radchenko, 165.

¹¹⁷ Craig and Radchenko, 165.

Union was the lone socialist power in the world, and the capitalist west would always be on a mission to destroy them.¹¹⁸ The point is that the Soviet Union in 1945 was probably one of the most resistant nations to international diplomacy in human history. Overall, the conflict between the two states was inevitable due to the two nation's unwillingness to cooperate with each other. This was a terrible moment in history for those who thought the Second World War would be the war to end all wars.¹¹⁹ Instead of disarmament and peace, the Cold War and a new nuclear race had begun.

After the war, the highest priority for the Soviets was building an atomic bomb. It is clear that nothing could have persuaded Stalin to stop research and construction of nuclear weapons. As mentioned before, he never wanted to be in the weaker technological position from a military standpoint. On September 23rd, 1949 Harry Truman announced the explosion of Joe I, the first Soviet atomic bomb.¹²⁰ The realization that the Soviets had a bomb was obviously a concern, and Truman's monopoly on atomic energy was officially over. Many American officials, including Truman, did not expect the Soviets to have this success so quickly, and the next fear was that the Soviets could not be that far away from building a hydrogen bomb.¹²¹ The consensus in the American government was that the only way to ensure American security was to green light an all-out effort to build the hydrogen bomb.¹²² In October 1949, the United States officially approved a plan to expand the production of plutonium and uranium.¹²³ At this point in history nuclear supremacy was the most important part of diplomacy.

¹¹⁸ Craig and Radchenko, 165.

¹¹⁹ Craig and Radchenko, 166.

¹²⁰ Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1986.), 767.

¹²¹ Rhodes, 767.

¹²² Rhodes, 767.

¹²³ Rhodes, 767.

There are some including David McCullough who suspected that this decision by Truman was just as difficult as the one he made in August 1945, and many did not see the hydrogen bomb as a weapon that could approve homeland security. Truman left no written accounts behind about the decision to approve the H-bomb so it is difficult to assess how much he struggled with it, but we do know that others in government were conflicted. The General Advisory Committee for the Atomic Energy Commission was made up of prominent scientists including Robert Oppenheimer, and they recommended building atomic bombs that could actually be used in battle instead of the construction of hydrogen bombs.¹²⁴ These bombs would much less powerful than a super bomb. Building these smaller bombs meant using small amounts of tritium to promote the efficiency of these bombs.

The committee recommended using these smaller bombs because they wanted the United States resist the inclination to research a super bomb. One of the arguments made was that the bomb could only be used for mass destruction.¹²⁵ The hydrogen bomb would have no military use, and required tons of tritium, which was expensive to make. The second reason was that it would not approve national security.¹²⁶ The arguments by the committee made it a point that this bomb would solely be a weapon of genocide and would not benefit humanity in any way. They simply considered it an “evil weapon in any light.”¹²⁷ This decision can be considered one of the most important in nuclear history due to what followed.

This decision to build the hydrogen bomb was considered so significant because “it carried military destructiveness into the realm of an infinite end.”¹²⁸ This new research was also

¹²⁴ Rhodes, 768.

¹²⁵ Rhodes, 769.

¹²⁶ Rhodes, 769.

¹²⁷ Rhodes, 769.

¹²⁸ Lifton and Mitchell, 174.

alarming because there was no limit to how large a hydrogen bomb could be, unlike atomic bombs. Also, it is interesting to consider the public perception of Truman if he did not further this research. Would people think he doubted his original decision to drop the bomb? Backing out of atomic research could have hinted that Truman did not approve of dealing with atomic weaponry. The United States also thought this was the only way to maintain their perceived dominant stance in the world. The view was that being without this technology left us vulnerable to the Soviets. Overall, a Soviet H-bomb would be an intolerable situation for the government.¹²⁹ The debate was now focused on whether the future of civilization would be determined by the outcome of the Cold War and the rise of more super weapons.

At this point in history, the world was hell bent on creating weapons that could be used for mass death and destruction. The most gifted and intelligent men on the planet were dedicating their working lives to make these bombs that no one ever wanted to see unleashed. Wasting economies and priceless resources was probably one of the worst decisions of the 20th century because building these weapons did not bring any more control or any less fear to the world. “That nuclear weapons proliferate and the superpowers exhaust their economies attempting to outmaneuver each other to unattainable dominance demonstrates how irrationally tenacious is our hold on traditional forms of control.”¹³⁰ In the 50’s the only “form of control” was draining as much effort, money, and manpower into the further development of super weapons. This development also changed how warfare would be conducted in the future.

In the 50’s the conflict between science and government expanded due to that the bomb rendered every country nearly defenseless. The scientific discovery completely changed military

¹²⁹ Rhodes, 767.

¹³⁰ Rhodes, 787.

conflict and the dangers of entering a war with another superpower. Richard Rhodes put it best in simply stating “the thickest shields, from fighter aircraft to Star Wars, could be penetrated by merely by multiplying weapons, decoys and delivery systems.”¹³¹ Military strength and pushing other nations around no longer worked. The only defense against the nuclear armed world would be strictly political.¹³² Negotiation, delegation, and an open world with cooperating nations would be the most efficient way to keep peace. The nations that did not cooperate would then sink into an arms race, and unfortunately the Cold War was just that. We will see during the Cuban Missile Crisis that political negotiation and mutual reluctance for a nuclear conflict probably saved the world.

The Cuban Missile Crisis put the world on the brink of nuclear war, and many do not know how close the Soviet Union and the United States were to all-out war. The origins of this conflict start with the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. In May of 1962, Nikita Khrushchev was looking for a way to counter the United States lead in development of strategic missiles in Turkey and he wanted to protect Cuba from another invasion.¹³³ Khrushchev and the Soviets gained Fidel Castro’s permission to secretly start building missile silos and installations on the island of Cuba.¹³⁴ Eventually on October 15th, United States recon photos spotted the missile installations and what followed was a week of threats, exchanges, and tension felt by the entire world. As we will see, there were many exchanges between John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev that assured a peaceful ending to a conflict very close to American shores.

¹³¹ Rhodes, 783.

¹³² Rhodes, 783.

¹³³ Library of Congress Archive, *Revelations from the Russian Archive Cold War: Cuban Missile Crisis*.
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/colc.html> (July 22, 2010)

¹³⁴ <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/colc.html>

One of the first things considered by the United States government was what the consequences would be if their military invaded Cuba. Furthermore, they had to consider why the Soviet Union was doing this. In a CIA Special Intelligence Estimate done on October 20th, 1962, five days after the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba, the CIA theorized why the Soviets had put missiles on the island. “A major Soviet objective in their military buildup in Cuba is to demonstrate that the world balance of forces has shifted so far in their favor that the US can no longer prevent the advance of Soviet offensive power even in its own hemisphere.”¹³⁵ The perception by the CIA five days into the conflict was that this was a random unprovoked move of aggression by the Soviet Union to scare the United States and show their power not only in Europe, but in the western hemisphere as well.

The CIA also came to the conclusion that the Soviets intentions were to use the missiles. A public withdrawal of that kind of firepower was certain to upset Fidel Castro and make the Soviets look weak in the western hemisphere.¹³⁶ Therefore, the CIA concluded that the Soviets would either end up using these weapons, or if they were not confronted they would keep increasing presence on Cuba and in the western hemisphere.¹³⁷ The United States also had to consider the effects of not confronting the Soviets very soon. The CIA was very concerned that a lack of authority over the area could mean lost United States influence and control over many Latin American countries.¹³⁸ One of the last things the United States government wanted was to look strong armed by the Soviets, and leave the possibility open for more communist regimes to

¹³⁵ The National Security Archive, *CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate “Major Consequences of Certain U.S. Courses of Action on Cuba.”* http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf (October 20th, 1962)

¹³⁶ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

¹³⁷ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

¹³⁸ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

arise in Latin America. There were many different options that the CIA suggested that were thought not to provoke a nuclear response.

One of the first options considered was just a warning to Castro and the Soviets. A general warning to Khrushchev was not predicted to stop the deployment, but instead it was likely to begin negotiations between the two nations that could perhaps stop a military conflict.¹³⁹ The one concern that the CIA had with this option is that negotiations with either Castro or Khrushchev could simply give the Soviets more time to build up more weaponry. Also, any warning would eliminate the possibility of surprise if an American attack was necessary.¹⁴⁰ One of the next options considered was a blockade of Cuba so that the Soviets could not ship any more arms to Cuba. The risk in doing this was that if the Soviets attempted to bring shipments to Cuba, there was always the possibility of a violent standoff that could culminate in war.¹⁴¹ This option was not seen by the CIA to accomplish much but delay and make negotiations a possibility.

The last and most grave option was an all-out attack on the island of Cuba. This strategy was most certainly going to provoke a response from the Soviets because they would not expect it and definitely would be alarmed. Also, no response from the USSR would make them look weak and that would not be tolerated by men like Nikita Khrushchev. There was also the possibility, however, that even if the Soviet Union did leave Cuba in light of an American attack, and they could attack after that from another unknown location.¹⁴² It is worth noting that the

¹³⁹ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

¹⁴⁰ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

¹⁴¹ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

¹⁴² http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621020cia.pdf

CIA was speculating on all of the possible outcomes, if the United States chose to unleash any of these options.

In an October 21st meeting with President John F. Kennedy, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara made it clear that a military attack on Cuba was possible within a weeks' time.¹⁴³ The mobilization of these troops would begin during President Kennedy's national speech to the public the next day, and transportation vehicles would be ready for the invasion within one or two days.¹⁴⁴ General Sweeney also outlined how the military installations and Soviet missile silos would be taken out by aircraft. From this document we can see that the American government was making every preparation to take out the Soviets by force. One of the concerns, however, with this attack was that General Sweeney was not completely sure that he could locate and destroy all of the missiles. This would leave the United States vulnerable to any missile silos or installations that they did not destroy. The results of this meeting were that the President said the military should be ready to unleash the attack. Kennedy asked the Attorney General for his opinion and his one concern was that this would be a Pearl Harbor like attack, and thus responses from the Soviets would be unpredictable.¹⁴⁵ These men were right to think that retaliation could be coming because that was the most likely scenario.

Fidel Castro made it clear in a letter to Khrushchev that if the Americans attack, the Soviets should retaliate in the most brutal fashion. In the beginning of the article which was written on October 26th, Castro tells the Russian Premier that he thinks an American attack is

¹⁴³ The National Security Archive, *Notes on October 21, 1962 meeting with the President*, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621021mcnam.pdf (October 21, 1962)

¹⁴⁴ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621021mcnam.pdf

¹⁴⁵ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621021mcnam.pdf

imminent in the next 24 to 48 hours.¹⁴⁶ From the Cuban perspective, he says that they will do everything in their power to resist and confront the enemy. As for the purpose of the letter, Castro blatantly does not think there should be any debate on what to do from the Soviet side if the U.S attacked. “I tell you this because I believe that the Imperialists aggressiveness is extremely dangerous and if they actually carry out the brutal act of invading Cuba in violation of international law and morality, that would be the moment to eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear legitimate defense, however harsh and terrible the solution would be, for there is no other.”¹⁴⁷ From this passage and the language used by Castro we can see that he would have no moral restraints from using the most terrible weapons created to counter an American attack of Cuba. As we will see, the world is very lucky that Khrushchev was slightly more hesitant than Castro to unleash that sort of terror on the world.

In a letter responding to Castro on October 28th, Khrushchev assured the Prime Minister that he and Kennedy are working towards an agreement that will make sure Cuba is not invaded by the U.S again.¹⁴⁸ He also requested that Castro show patience and firmness in the midst of this crisis, until an agreement can be made. Nonetheless, these correspondences showed that Castro was in fact the one that was more inclined to go to war than Khrushchev. Again, it seems that the only men who were confident that they could find a peaceful resolution were Khrushchev and Kennedy. Many on the American side also favored an invasion of Cuba.

Throughout the process of going over different scenarios with top military and government officials, President John F. Kennedy remained dedicated to negotiations and the

¹⁴⁶ The National Security Archive, *Prime Ministers Fidel Castro's letter to Premier Khrushchev*, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/docs.htm (October 26, 1962)

¹⁴⁷ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/docs.htm

¹⁴⁸ The National Security Archive, *USSR letter from Chairman Khrushchev to Prime Minister Castro*, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621028khrlet.pdf, (October 28th, 1962)

hope for peace, even when many of his officials wanted to attack Cuba. Top officials and the CIA thought that either an air strike followed by invasions would be the best action while some thought a military effort built around a blockade and reconnaissance was also feasible.¹⁴⁹ A political approach was all but eliminated but the President suggested to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that they wait for the Russian response and not do anything too hastily.¹⁵⁰ Kennedy was one of the only ones who wanted to act with restraint before making a decision that affect the future of humanity and the lives of millions. In fact, the President was told by intelligence that if the United States waited to strike, then the Soviets would have time to hide the missiles.¹⁵¹ The President decided to continue negotiations instead of green lighting an air strike. He even addressed the Chief of Staff General Earle Miller by saying “I know that you are your colleagues are unhappy with the decision, but I trust that you will support me in this decision.”¹⁵² This was said on October 20th so the conflict would not come to an end for another week, yet the President was clear in his resolve to continue negotiating.

In this conflict, it was ultimately the negotiating resolve of both Khrushchev and Kennedy that led to further peace. On October 26th, 1962 Khrushchev sent a letter to Kennedy that assured the United States that the Soviets would dismantle all missile installations in Cuba if they simply assured that they would never invade Cuba.¹⁵³ Kennedy decided to accept this proposal even though negotiations continued including concerns over the Soviet light bombers in

¹⁴⁹ National Security Archive, *Notes Taken from Transcripts of Meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis*,
http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621000%20Notes%20Taken%20from%20Transcripts.pdf,
(October- November 1962)

¹⁵⁰ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621000%20Notes%20Taken%20from%20Transcripts.pdf,

¹⁵¹ http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621000%20Notes%20Taken%20from%20Transcripts.pdf,

¹⁵² http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621000%20Notes%20Taken%20from%20Transcripts.pdf,

¹⁵³ Library of Congress Archive, *Revelations from the Russian Archive Cold War: Cuban Missile Crisis*.
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/colc.html> (July 22, 2010)

Cuba and the American missile installations in Turkey. Even today as we have access to all of these documents, it is amazing how close we actually were to a nuclear war.

One of the most telling documents of the Cuban Missile Crisis was a Soviet order to their men in Cuba giving them full authority to fire a nuclear weapon if they felt threatened in any way. This order was sent on September 8th, 1962 by Malinovsky and Zahkorov to the leaders in Cuba stating “you are permitted to make your own decision and to use the nuclear means of the Luna IL-28 or FKR-1 as instruments of local warfare for the destruction of the enemy on land and along the coast in order to achieve the complete destruction of the invaders of the Cuban territory and to defend the Republic of Cuba.”¹⁵⁴ This is a very shocking order because it was sent more than a month before the Americans even knew that Soviet missiles were being built in Cuba. Overall, it shows that if we actually sent an air strike to Cuba or invaded, it is very likely that these men would have launched nuclear weapons against the United States and a nuclear war would have started.

Even though it was a close call, the conclusion to the Cuban Missile Crisis can definitely be seen as a victory for peace and prevention of nuclear conflict. After the majority of the conflict was over on October 29th, 1962, political assistant Arthur Schlesinger wrote a memorandum to the President summing up the conflict and theorizing what it meant for the future.¹⁵⁵ In this memorandum, Schlesinger rationalizes how war was prevented and what it can mean for the future. One of his main points is that firmness in dealing with the threat worked

¹⁵⁴ National Security Archive, *Memorandum from Malinovsky and Zahkarov Informing of Decision to Provide IL-28's and Luna Missiles and of the Pre Delegation of Launch Authority to Pliyev*, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/620908%20Memorandum%20from%20Malinovsky.pdf (September 8, 1962)

¹⁵⁵ National Security Archive, *Memorandum to the President, Post Mortem on Cuba*, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621029mortem.pdf (October 29, 1962)

well and that route will definitely have to be taken in the future.¹⁵⁶ Also, the Soviets will now expect any other intrusion into the western hemisphere with the same stern and firm reaction. Finally, he hoped that the Cuban Missile Crisis marked an end to a struggle by both powers to overturn world power, and maybe it could start a drive for further peace in the world. “The Cuban Crisis, we hope, marked an end and a beginning, an end to the violent adventures designed to overturn the equilibrium of world power, and a beginning of fresh initiatives for peace, including a new attack on nuclear testing, disarmament, overseas bases, and on world social and economic problems.”¹⁵⁷ An overwhelming majority of the world probably hoped the same as Mr. Schlesinger.

The increased focus on nuclear testing and the eventual standoff between the two most powerful nations in the world were both immense moments in nuclear history. The continued development of atomic energy was largely motivated by the desire for both nations to be the dominant force in the world, and it grew into the birth of the hydrogen bomb. Then, the Soviet Union and the United States had come dangerously close to starting a nuclear war, but the resolve of two leaders probably saved the world. It was a very vital time and the world had survived without another catastrophe.

Chapter 4: The Ripple Effects of Hiroshima and the Atomic Bomb in modern times

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, there seemed to be less tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. Since 1962, there has never been a threat as severe and close as that crisis, but the influence of the atomic bomb is still very much present in modern society. As we know

¹⁵⁶ http://www.qwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621029mortem.pdf

¹⁵⁷ http://www.qwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/19621029mortem.pdf

today, the technology of weapons of mass destruction has spread too many corners of the globe and many new nations now have the capability to conduct a nuclear attack. In the United States, the original debate over Truman's decision to drop the bomb still has had a lasting impact proven by the Smithsonian controversy. When the Smithsonian National Space Museum put up an exhibit on the bombings, a controversy erupted when the Japanese were portrayed as innocents. Obviously, raising questions about the decision was still very controversial in 1995. The presence of radiation and its hazards is an important ripple effect left by Hiroshima. The Chernobyl disaster proves that nuclear radiation is incredibly dangerous and that the bomb is not the only way nuclear energy can be harmful. In today's world the nuclear bomb is present in many parts of American culture including movies, literature, art, television, and video games. In most of these cultural depictions of the bomb, it is seen as a weapon that has the ability to end the world. This means that the use of nuclear weapons can mean the apocalypse, for not just humans, but for all life on earth. Whether true or not, that realization is a key part to the legacy left by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Immediately after the Cuban Missile Crisis, there seemed to be less tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1963, President Kennedy gave a speech at American University, where he urged Americans to reexamine Cold War stereotypes.¹⁵⁸ Kennedy also called for a strategy for peace, which was shown in two additional ways. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, the international hotline between Moscow and Washington D.C was implemented.¹⁵⁹ This meant that there was now a direct telephone line between the Kremlin and the White House. Kennedy's most influential words, however, came here: "For in the final

¹⁵⁸ The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, *Cuban Missile Crisis*. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Cuban-Missile-Crisis.aspx> (February, 2012)

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Cuban-Missile-Crisis.aspx>

analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."¹⁶⁰ This quotation truly shows that Kennedy portrayed he was going to do everything he could to prevent another nuclear standoff, and any possibility of a nuclear war. As it goes, the tension between these two superpowers really did seem to be lower, but the threat of a nuclear bomb was always present. Later on in the later part of the 20th century, it was still a topic worthy of discussion by evidence of the Smithsonian controversy.

The memory of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has remained a controversial topic, even after the Cold War. This controversy showed itself in 1995 when the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum attempted to put up an exhibit on the atomic bombings of Japan. The exhibit entitled "Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War," was centered on a restored version of the original Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the bomb over Hiroshima.¹⁶¹ The museum simply attempted to show the history of one of the most significant decisions in the history of warfare on its 50th anniversary, but unfortunately the exhibit sparked all kinds of controversy. A typical description by a critic of the exhibit came from the *Washington Post's* Eugene Meyer who claimed that the exhibit was an "anti- nuke morality play in which Americans were portrayed as ruthless racists hell bent on revenge for Pearl Harbor, with the Japanese as innocent, even noble victims fighting to defend their unique culture from Western Imperialism."¹⁶² Many critics thought that if children saw the exhibit, they would no longer think of their grandfathers as heroes, but as bloodthirsty, racist,

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Cuban-Missile-Crisis.aspx>

¹⁶¹ Mike Wallace, "The Battle of the Enola Gay," Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) "Hiroshima's Shadow" (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 317.

¹⁶² Wallace, 317.

and even criminals.¹⁶³ Obviously, many veterans were not happy with this possibility because one would think that America would be celebrating the 50 year anniversary of the war. Many veterans viewed this as the exact opposite of that. Unfortunately, much of the problems with the script of the exhibit were that it could easily be misrepresented.

The authors of the exhibit did not attempt this controversy upon them, but some of the script in the exhibit could have been improved. One of the most famous lines from the exhibit script read: “For most Americans, this war was fundamentally different than the one waged against Germany and Italy- it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western Imperialism.”¹⁶⁴ It is easy to see how many people were outraged including the *Washington Post*’s Eugene Meyer. This sentence clearly makes it out to seem that the United States had it out for the Japanese, and they had done nothing to deserve this onslaught of Western Imperialism. It is also worth mentioning that these sentences were not completely untrue, but they were so easy to misinterpret and to take as offensive.¹⁶⁵ The truth was that the war on Japan was not unprovoked due to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Recently, declassified documents on the Bataan Death March hardly made the Japanese seem like innocent victims during the war.¹⁶⁶ Despite the true intentions of these words to celebrate the end of the war, many critics continued to see the exhibit as a way of providing sympathy for the Japanese. Overall, raising questions over the decision to drop the bomb was ultimately the act that wouldn’t be tolerated.

¹⁶³ Wallace, 317.

¹⁶⁴ Wallace, 318.

¹⁶⁵ Wallace, 318.

¹⁶⁶ Wallace, 318.

Since the bomb was dropped the official justification was that it was used to save a million lives and to shorten the war. What infuriated so many about this exhibit was that it raised questions over that decision by making the Japanese look like innocent victims.¹⁶⁷ In hindsight most of the people killed in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were civilians, so this is partly true. This sentiment still would not be tolerated even fifty years after the war ended. Ultimately, almost 50 years after John Hersey's article and all the questions, the government and war veterans had to deal with the same controversies due to this exhibit. This exhibit adequately presented the complexities that came along with the decision to drop the bomb and all the controversies behind it. Was this a war crime? Was dropping the bomb motivated by racism? Was it revenge for Pearl Harbor? The only justifications for the decision that the American public had heard, was the information given to them by Harry Truman and the rest of the government.

Another one of the reasons that this exhibit brought so much controversy was the myth that the Americans were the heroes of the war, and we would never commit the crimes that the Nazis or the Japanese did during the war. In other words, the veterans and critics of the Smithsonian were aiming to use the exhibit to celebrate the triumph of the Americans in the war and further the myth that Americans are the heroes of the world.¹⁶⁸ This is a disappointing realization because even though the script in the exhibit had some obvious problems, it could have been used to reflect on the convergence of victory with triumph. Part of the purpose of this

¹⁶⁷ Wallace, 319.

¹⁶⁸ John W. Dower, "Unconditional Surrender at the Smithsonian" Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) "Hiroshima's Shadow" (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 339.

exhibit was recognizing that ending the most deadly war of all time came at a cost of many lives due to the atomic bomb.¹⁶⁹

Overall, the collective memory of World War II to the American public was that it was the U.S.A's finest hour and we fought the "model war."¹⁷⁰ The U.S.A was instrumental in defeating both the Nazis and the Japanese, both deemed as evil. Sherwin puts it best by stating "in Europe we defeated a nation of fascist maniacs who were infected with racial madness and hell bent on dominating the continent. In Asia, we destroyed a power crazed military machine that had bombed, raped, and plundered Koreans, Chinese, and Southeast Asians, in addition to attacking, without a declaration of war, the U.S Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor."¹⁷¹ This is the mindset that most Americans had fifty years after the war. We were the moral ones who put an end to much of the world's tyranny and horror. Also, in addition to defeating them, we also fed them, helped rebuild their countries, and provided the building blocks to democracy.¹⁷² From the collective memory of Americans, we stood for good and humanity and fought what many thought to be the model war. Considering any other possibility was unthinkable for the majority of the American public who thought that their fathers and grandfathers had done everything for the sake of justice and good.

The critics of the exhibit demanded drastic changes that would have included descriptions of the Japanese atrocities and the removal of every word or document that was critical of the atomic bombs.¹⁷³ Organizations like the American Legion and the Air Force Association also wanted the statement "to this day, controversy has raged about whether dropping this weapon on

¹⁶⁹ Dower, 339.

¹⁷⁰ Martin J. Sherwin, "Memory, Myth, and History," Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifshultz, (eds.) "Hiroshima's Shadow" (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, 1998), 344.

¹⁷¹ Sherwin, 344.

¹⁷² Sherwin, 344.

¹⁷³ Sherwin, 350.

Japan was necessary to end the war quickly,” be completely removed.¹⁷⁴ Obviously, these organizations and some others wanted there to be zero controversy surrounding the dropping of the bomb. Many of the Smithsonian officials felt barraged by all of these requests, and were unaware that the exhibit would bring so much controversy. The curators and the staff of the museum, however, read the script for a second time and saw some justification for some misunderstandings.¹⁷⁵ The Museum put out one revision, and then another, but both attempts were met with more criticism and more demands for revisions.¹⁷⁶ Eighty one Congress people even sent letters demanding further changes to the exhibit.¹⁷⁷ The Smithsonian was now facing hearings in the Congress and the Senate, threats to the Museum’s budget and the looming loss of funding if the exhibit continued to be shown. Finally, on January 30, 1995 the exhibit was officially taken down forever.

The Smithsonian Controversy showed that even fifty years after the war had ended, there was definitely still a sensitivity to the decision, and no one wanted to be reminded of the controversy that had festered in the late 40’s. Veterans of the war and many government officials still clearly did not want any questioning of the United States morality during the war because it had been planted in our minds that we fought for humanity and the right thing. We defeated the tyrannical and racist forces of the world and we did it the correct way, without any fault against us. This controversy was eye opening because one would think that fifty years later Americans could open themselves up to the debate, but that was definitely not the case. In addition to the Smithsonian there have been many other more serious incidents that have opened

¹⁷⁴ Sherwin, 350.

¹⁷⁵ Wallace, 324.

¹⁷⁶ Wallace, 324.

¹⁷⁷ Wallace, 327.

the public's eyes to the danger of nuclear war and research. One particular event in the Ukraine opened up the world's eyes to the dangers of nuclear research.

The Chernobyl accident in 1986 is the only nuclear accident in the history of commercial nuclear power where people died directly due to radiation.¹⁷⁸ The direct result of this accident was the deaths of 30 people and many more deaths that may or may not have been caused to the disaster. At a nuclear power plant in the northeastern Ukraine, a steam explosion occurred at a releasing at least five percent of the radioactive reactor core into the atmosphere.¹⁷⁹ Two workers died that day because of radiation sickness and 28 more died in the following weeks.¹⁸⁰ Many people attribute the disaster to poor design of the plant and faulty handling by the workers, but nonetheless it is a very important incident because it showed people that atomic research could kill without the form of a bomb. The fallout from this catastrophe was said to be the equivalent to the damage from an atomic bomb as well.

Soviet administrators scrambled to figure out what directly caused the problem because the accident caused millions of people around the world uncertain about their health and the safety of nuclear research. In a sense, there was no way administrators could be sure that another or many other like this one could not occur all over the world.¹⁸¹ The mistakes that led to the accident were just simple routine errors that definitely could occur again. The worry was that there was no definitive way to prevent this from happening again. Even though plenty of the radiation dispersed in the atmosphere, experts agreed that the damage of the accident would

¹⁷⁸ The World Nuclear Association, "Chernobyl Accident, 1986." <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/inf07.html> (September 2011)

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/inf07.html>

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/inf07.html>

¹⁸¹ Spencer R. Weart, *Nuclear Fear* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 337.

equal the long term effects of a bomb dropped 20 years before.¹⁸² While the Soviets were struggling to deal with the real effects, another issue presented itself soon after the accident.

Overall, the fear that resulted after this disaster was immense and felt globally. Part of the reason for this was that immediately after the disaster some rogue newspaper decided to publish statements saying that the death toll was climbing into the thousands or more, due to the spread of deadly radiation.¹⁸³ This set off an explosion of fear all over the world. “Throughout Europe, even thousands of miles from the Ukraine, people doubted the safety of their food, mothers worried about whether they should let their children play outside, and temporary residents pulled up stakes to move farther away.”¹⁸⁴ It is amazing how bad press can impact so many lives because many of these people were in no danger at all, yet this disaster in the Ukraine had much of the world watching what they ate and where they went. Many European nations even played it safe and imposed restrictions on select food items.¹⁸⁵ It was clearly impossible for the public to sort out the real problems from the imaginary ones. It was very obvious, however, that wherever there was news of a nuclear accident, fear was very close behind.

The reality of the recovery and cleanup of this disaster was still one that involved thousands of people. Almost 200,000 people took part in the cleanup from all over the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁶ Many of these individuals were exposed to the radiation during the cleanup, but none more than the one thousand or so that were involved in the effort during the first day of the accident. Also, there was a massive resettlement due to the dangers of the radiation. Over

¹⁸² Weart, 337.

¹⁸³ Weart, 369.

¹⁸⁴ Weart, 369-370.

¹⁸⁵ Weart, 370.

¹⁸⁶ The World Nuclear Association, “Chernobyl Accident, 1986.” <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/inf07.html> (September 2011)

220,000 people were forced to resettle originally out of a 30 km radius exclusion zone.¹⁸⁷ Over time that zone was extended and in total covered over 4000 square kilometers. Since the disaster many animals have returned to the area, but high radiation levels remain.

The Chernobyl disaster is but one of the impacts that nuclear technology has had on this planet. The accident shows that one slight mistake by a few workers could have global consequences. Also, radiation in the atmosphere is not something that can simply be cleaned up and erased. One mistake could mean consequences for a very prolonged period of time. Many people around the world now believed that nuclear reactors posed a direct problem to the future of life on this planet. Nonetheless, the Chernobyl disaster was a groundbreaking moment in nuclear history because of the 30 fatalities and the future effects the accident had on the area. This was the first radiation related deaths that were not associated with the making of the bomb or the destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The world was now fully aware that atomic energy was just as destructive through radiation, than it was in the form of a bomb.

On top of the concerns over nuclear power plants, waste, and the possibility of more accidents, the spread of nuclear technology all over the world was another development that the world had to face in the 20th century. The nuclear proliferation was another factor that contributes to the constant fear that Americans and other democracies have. It only takes one nuclear weapon in the hands of the wrong people to start a nuclear war that could threaten all of humanity. During the Cold War, it is obvious that Americans were primarily concerned with the Soviets and rightly so, but in the 90's and into the 21st century there are many other hostile nations that have reportedly acquired the atomic bomb including Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Part of the fear that this comes with is the fact that Americans started this phenomenon with the

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/inf07.html>

Manhattan project. Even though the Cold War is over the threat of a nuclear attack remains very real for a majority of American citizens.

Recent events such as the emergence of terrorist networks and the concerns over North Korea and Iran prove that there will always be the threat of a nuclear attack. This danger of this has only increased due to the breakup of the Soviet Union and their loss of nuclear materials.¹⁸⁸ However, the spread of nuclear arsenals should not be blamed on outside sources. As explained in the last chapter, it was the Soviet Union and the United States in the late 40's that decided that the only way to be safe was to win the arms race and obtain nuclear supremacy. Today it is clear that no one wants a nuclear apocalypse, which should mean disarmament instead of further development of atomic weaponry. "When we admit that the weapons cannot be used, then we can discuss whether they can be eliminated, or reduced to a minimal number, perhaps fewer than one hundred, that would no longer threaten global destruction."¹⁸⁹ This is a problem we face today because it does not seem we are anywhere close to complete nuclear cooperation. Solving this problem would eliminate the possibility of the end of the world by nuclear means.

Unfortunately, Hiroshima signified more than just the end of World War II, it unofficially let the world know that technology could eventually destroy us.¹⁹⁰ We obviously did not know this in 1945, but in the 21st century it is a realization that we all have to face. Part of what we will encounter today is the psychological struggle to get the entire world to understand the risks of nuclear technology. One wrong move by one nation could end up causing a world conflict that brings about the end of the world.

¹⁸⁸ Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: 50 years of Denial* (New York: GP Putnam & Sons, 1995), 355.

¹⁸⁹ Lifton and Mitchell, 355.

¹⁹⁰ Lifton and Mitchell, 341.

Since we dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it has always seemed as though the power of these weapons has a certain power over us. The psychological battle under the threat and stress of war has been the most interesting characteristic of modern conflict since World War II. Again, this partly has to do with the fear that we associate with these devastating weapons. Ultimately though the mere presence of having these weapons has been the best war deterrent in existence. “We rely on them and flaunt them, but psychologically and politically they have imprisoned us. In exploding bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki we frightened no one more than ourselves. Ever since, we have struggled to overcome our own terror and re-establish lost security by means of embracing the objects of that terror and attaching ourselves to their ultimate power, their omnipotence.”¹⁹¹ We are prisoners to the atomic bomb’s power, and we act like we will use them, when in reality it is the last thing that the world wants. The destruction, pain, and longtime suffering that these bombs have caused in Japan has possibly scared the world into recreating that in the modern day. Over time there have been many threats to use the bomb, and that fear has continued even after the fall of the Soviet Union.¹⁹² One can even argue that the thought of the nuclear weapon is approaching the reputation of a protector and a destructor. In one sense they have the potential to destroy the world and kill millions, but they also arguably have prevented nations from starting large scale wars with each other. The psychological aspect of possessing these weapons protects us, but the threat of other nations building them up also represents the threat of a coming disaster.

This fear of a coming disaster has shown itself in our society during the Cold War when most people expected there to be a nuclear war. Polls have shown over the years that a majority of Americans would have approved the first use of a bomb in Korea in the 50’s and in Iraq in

¹⁹¹ Lifton and Mitchell, 302.

¹⁹² Lifton and Mitchell, 303.

1991.¹⁹³ Most Americans did not approve of use of the bomb in Vietnam, but that can definitely be attributed to most of the public did not see the war as necessary.¹⁹⁴ During those years of building up these nuclear arms, the public felt less safe about the possibility of a nuclear attack.¹⁹⁵ Some people created their own fears about what would happen in wake of a nuclear attack because many did not know the specific consequences. “Ordinary people, that is, experience their own post Hiroshima entrapment- mixtures of nuclearism and nuclear terror, of weapons advocacy and fearful anticipation of death and extinction.”¹⁹⁶ The most ordinary scenario was visions of mass death, fireballs, and dust. Part of the mystique of the bomb was that people only associated it with mass death, so every other expectation was shady. Overall, the age after 1945 to now can be declared an age of anxiety. It can be argued that the threat of a nuclear war has characterized human society since World War II due to the constant fear of an attack that could escalate into another world war. This time, however, the conflict could involve nuclear weapons and threaten the likelihood of human survival.

Even though the threat and focus of Americans on the atomic bomb is very visible in today’s political world, most modern politicians decide not to touch the subject. In 2011 a group of Hiroshima schoolchildren and citizens petitioned the White House for Barack Obama to visit Hiroshima.¹⁹⁷ From an American standpoint, many would assume this would just be an attempt for the Japanese to show a President what the Americans did to their city and people. In reality, these people in no way wanted an apology. The city of Hiroshima today is very in touch with

¹⁹³ Lifton and Mitchell, 305.

¹⁹⁴ Lifton and Mitchell, 305.

¹⁹⁵ Lifton and Mitchell, 305.

¹⁹⁶ Lifton and Mitchell, 306.

¹⁹⁷ “Avoiding Hiroshima,” *The Boston Globe*, 22 October 2011, Section H

their past and they do not put the blame on the United States for what happened.¹⁹⁸ They are well aware of Japanese militarism and wartime atrocities during the war. The primary goal of these citizens was to discuss how to stop the spread of nuclear weapons all over the world.¹⁹⁹ As one would expect, these people held extra motivation for ridding the world of these terrible weapons. President Obama never made the trip to Hiroshima, but it is interesting what that trip would have accomplished if he went. A gesture like this could send a message to the world saying that the United States is serious about nuclear arms containment.

The problem with a trip like this would be the possible backlash by Truman supporters and the same people who forced the Smithsonian Museum into a corner. There is almost no way a President could have the ability to visit Hiroshima without in some way admitting some regret associated with dropping the bomb.²⁰⁰ Doing this would bring the wrath of the thousands of war veterans and organizations that unequivocally support Truman's decision. This is a shame because a visit to Hiroshima by the most powerful man in the world could send shockwaves across the world and at the very least be a rallying cry for nations trying to stop the spread of nuclear arms to hostile nations such as Iran and North Korea. There are many people in the world that would see a visit to Hiroshima as the bold move the world has been waiting for.²⁰¹ Even though the nuclear technology is a sensitive subject in politics, it definitely has not been that way in popular culture.

The atomic bomb's legacy in American culture today can be seen in every form, and shows how visible this weapon is in today's society. Many of the most popular films in history

¹⁹⁸ "Avoiding Hiroshima," *The Boston Globe*, 22 October 2011, Section H

¹⁹⁹ "Avoiding Hiroshima," *The Boston Globe*, 22 October 2011, Section H

²⁰⁰ "Avoiding Hiroshima," *The Boston Globe*, 22 October 2011, Section H

²⁰¹ "Avoiding Hiroshima," *The Boston Globe*, 22 October 2011, Section H

have to do with the testing of nuclear weapons or a nuclear apocalypse. Most movies that have an apocalyptic plot are usually caused by a nuclear apocalypse or World War III. For example, the plot of “The Terminator” is that machines became self-aware and concluded that humans were so corrupt, that they needed to be destroyed. This was simply done by the launching of atomic bombs all over the world. Many of the James Bond movies have directly to do with Bond desperately trying to thwart an evil organizations plan to fire a nuclear weapon at a major city. The origin of Godzilla is the direct result of nuclear testing and mutations of lizards gone very wrong. The film industry obviously has had its fun with the atomic bomb and it is most commonly depicted as the easiest and quickest path to the end of humanity. Depictions of the atomic bomb have also been included in literature, art, music, and even videogames. The very popular “Call of Duty” series depicts the bomb as a tactical weapon that does much less damage than the actual weapon would. Overall, it is difficult to go long without hearing a reference to the atomic bomb in world politics or popular culture. This thesis has examined many different angles of the bombings and how they have affected culture, politics, and life in the United States since the end of World War II. From the decision to drop the bomb to popular culture today, nuclear energy and weaponry has definitely been one of the most important topics to be aware of in modern society.

In the first chapter, I discussed the reasoning behind the bomb and initial reactions coming from the American public. Harry Truman and the rest of the government attempted to make it clear that the bomb was dropped to save a million lives from death due to the probability of an invasion of the Japanese mainland. As expected the first reactions were positive because the war was over, but this reasoning was most definitely not completely warranted. There is no way that this was the only reason because the Japanese were going to surrender in wake of the

Soviet declaration of war. Today, the collective memory of the U.S and the rest of the world mostly believe that the war ended due to the bomb even though that is not the case.

The second chapter explored the Hersey article and the American reactions now that the public got a full look into the horrors of Hiroshima. The article by John Hersey opened the eyes of many Americans and required a response from higher government including Henry Stimson. This piece of work was vital because it humanized many of the victims and officially started the controversy in America over we took the proper action to end the war. Even though Truman at first remained firm in his decision, it is difficult to think that this decision never burdened him in anyway. The events directly after the war with the Hersey article and the government reaction guaranteed that this would be a controversial subject for some time.

Finally, on top of the difficulty in the United States, there was now the Soviet Union to worry about. In chapter three, both of these two superpowers refused to cooperate together and disarm and therefore there was now the threat of a nuclear conflict starting in 1949 with the detonation of the first Soviet bomb. The argument is that this was a great opportunity to ensure nuclear safety through cooperation, but instead both nations decided that the best course of action for national security was to out gun the other. Initial conflicts between these two superpowers came very close to a world war during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. If it were not for Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy a nuclear bomb may have well been launched that year. Even today the fear that exists in the world is immense and many think that it is only a matter of time before a bomb is launched and humans destroy themselves. This last chapter dealt a lot with that fear while considering other recent incidents such as the Smithsonian Controversy and the Chernobyl accident.

In researching American reactions and the overall impacts of the bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is clear that this is one of the most controversial issues in the world today. The issues and the controversy go way beyond the question of morality of dropping the bomb on two cities in Japan during the war. The five years after the bomb are arguably the most important in history due to the decisions the two superpowers of the world made to continue arming and not to cooperate with each other. The Cuban Missile Crisis also is the closest we have come to a full out nuclear war. It is unbelievable and frightening to think that we were just one mistake or air strike away from unleashing a world conflict on United States soil. In the last 30 years there have also been multiple incidents and controversies that have shown the true impacts of the nuclear bomb. The Chernobyl disaster still shows that the bomb is not the only part of nuclear research that can kill, and the Smithsonian controversy shows the conflict that still resides itself in many Americans. Today, the atomic bomb remains one of the most polarizing and fearful weapons ever created, and the future of this planet and human society may very well be shaped by how we deal with handling nuclear weaponry.

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