

# 2009

*h-diplo*

## H-Diplo Roundtable Review

[www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables)

Volume XI, No. 8 (2009)

7 December 2009

*Roundtable Editors:* Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

*Roundtable Web/Production Editor:* George Fujii

*Introduction by* Thomas Maddux

*Reviewers:* David Kaiser, Sean L. Malloy, Geoff Roberts

**Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko. *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War.***  
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 232 pp. ISBN: 978-0300110289 (cloth, \$27.00).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-8.pdf>

## Contents

---

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by David Kaiser, Naval War College .....	7
Review by Sean L. Malloy, University of California, Merced .....	12
Review by Geoffrey Roberts, University College Cork, Ireland .....	16
Author's Response by Campbell Craig, Aberystwyth University, and Sergey Radchenko, University of Nottingham, Ningbo campus, China .....	21

## Copyright © 2009 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

---

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

---

Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko have invited H-Diplo members to revisit the “dark and bloody ground” of the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945 and its relationship to the origins of the Cold War. A simple search on H-Diplo’s web page brings up 428 hits on “Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” and a quick scan brings back reviews, roundtables, and individual contributions from names familiar—Gar Alperovitz and Toshi Hasegawa—and some not so familiar and some better left in the archive extending back to 1993. One positive aspect of Craig and Radchenko’s study, as Sean Malloy points out, is that the authors are new to the old battlefield and its heated, sometimes polemical debates, but their “opinionated and analytical book” is “strikingly un-polemical” and “geared more toward opening debate than closing it.” (1)

The authors focus on the Soviet-American relationship with Craig evaluating U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union and the atomic bomb under Franklin D. Roosevelt and Radchenko covering the Soviet side from Joseph Stalin’s initially limited efforts on atomic energy to the successful use of Soviet espionage during WWII to obtain important information on the Manhattan Project. Craig revisits the controversies over Harry S. Truman’s use of the atomic bombs and Radchenko explores Stalin’s effort to expand the Soviet atomic project. Finally, they evaluate the unsuccessful Soviet-U.S. negotiations in 1945-46 to bring atomic energy under international control and reflect on the impact of the atomic bombs and the failure to reach an accord on control on the origins of the Cold War.

The reviewers appreciate how much ground Craig and Radchenko cover in less than 200 pages, their inclusion of the international control issue, and the new Soviet documents that Radchenko introduces in his chapters, although as the authors note, memoranda exchanged by Soviet officials in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation are not the same as having access to records directly linked to Stalin, a continuing illusive subject. The reviewers do disagree somewhat with the authors and each other on each of the major issues as indicated below:

- 1) Craig’s assessment of FDR’s diplomacy toward Stalin and the role of atomic bombs emphasizes Roosevelt’s interest in a new postwar world order of liberal capitalism that was open to Soviet participation, although Craig suggests that Stalin was highly unlikely to sign up. The role of atomic power as a bargaining chip with Stalin has been mentioned by many authors, but Craig puts more emphasis on it to the exclusion of FDR’s other chip, American economic assistance for postwar Soviet reconstruction. From Craig’s perspective, FDR used atomic power for leverage with Winston Churchill but, as Craig emphasizes, FDR excluded Stalin from participation in the bomb project and never discussed a strategy on the bomb with his advisers or with Stalin. (pp. 18-21, 30-32) Sean Malloy agrees with Craig on FDR’s reluctance to discuss the bomb with Stalin, but David Kaiser emphasizes a lack of evidence for FDR expecting fundamental change in the Soviet Union after the war. He concludes that the authors’ “idea that Roosevelt wanted to use the bomb to create a new world order is entirely speculation.” (3)

- 2) In evaluating the much discussed issue of whether or not Truman shifted significantly away from FDR's approach toward the Soviet Union and ending the war in the Pacific, the authors, as Malloy favorably notes, affirm the perspective that Truman gave little attention and importance to the possibility of having a new atomic weapon. (3) The first test of the atomic bomb at Alamogordo on July 16, according to Craig, prompted Truman to take a harder line on contested issues with Stalin at the Potsdam Conference and bolstered a reluctance to negotiate with Japan over Washington's unconditional surrender terms. Craig considers the atomic bombing of Hiroshima as the "final American strike of the Second World War" focused on ending Japanese resistance in combination with a Soviet entry into the war without risking a prolongation of the war, American casualties, and domestic criticism. (pp. 82-89) Kaiser, however, is more critical of the authors' assessment, noting that "they reason from inference" rather than evidence, a historiographical legacy that Kaiser traces to Gar Alperovitz. (2) Kaiser directs some of his criticism at Craig's conclusion that the second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki represented the "first strike in the Cold War." (p. 89) In an evaluation of Truman's possible calculations, Craig emphasizes Truman's desire to get a Japanese surrender before the Soviet Union entered the war in Manchuria and his push to get into the occupation of the Japanese home islands. "The best way to understand a decision is not to speculate about motivations," Kaiser suggests, "but to look at the process by which the decision was arrived at," which leads to an emphasis on the decision to bomb four targets as soon as the bombs were ready. Truman's intervention to stop this process, Kaiser notes, came after Tokyo announced "a willingness to surrender on terms very close to what the Americans were demanding, but very different indeed from what they would have agreed to before the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war." (4) <sup>1</sup>
- 3) In chapters two and four Radchenko evaluates Soviet plans on atomic energy during the war, the impact of Soviet intelligence on the Manhattan Project, and Stalin's response to the U.S. possession and use of atomic bombs. Kaiser and Geoffrey Roberts note the attention that Soviet officials devoted to the Manhattan Project but argue that Stalin approved only a limited project before Truman's use of the atomic bombs. Roberts does disagree with the authors' suggestion that Stalin hardened his stance on contested issues with the U.S. to undermine any pressure from Washington for concessions based on its new weapon, such as atomic diplomacy with Secretary of State James Byrnes figuratively carrying a-bombs in his hip-pockets as he entered a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in London in September 1945. (pp. 91, 87-98) Roberts suggests that "there is no direct evidence that the bomb played any such role in Stalin's calculations and plenty of evidence to suggest that other factors were the operative ones" such as disputes over Eastern Europe. Roberts also points out the absence of the atomic issue in Stalin's extensive correspondence with Molotov during the London meeting. (2)

---

<sup>1</sup> The most thorough study of the Japanese perspective on the end of the war and the Soviet and U.S. maneuverings to deal with Japan and the postwar situation in the Far East is Tsuyoshi Hasaegawa's *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan* (2005). The H-Diplo Roundtable on this book may be accessed via <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/>.

- 4) Craig and Radchenko continue their study through the issue of international control of atomic energy and conclude that an agreement faced a number of obstacles on both sides. Truman attempted to continue what he considered to be FDR's policy but he had, as the authors point out, "no kind of grand strategy to achieve its new liberal order: there was no plan to use the bomb systematically to coerce the Russians, no plan for a grand, world-carving postwar summit conference, no blueprint for American postwar action comparable to that put forward in the famous National Security Council document 68." (p. 111) Truman did take up the issue of international control of atomic energy as an important dimension of a new international order in the Acheson-Lillenthal plan to transfer U.S. knowledge and weapons to a new UN Atomic Energy Commission and the subsequent modification by Bernard Baruch. According to the authors, evidence of Soviet atomic espionage in September 1945 and February 1946 convinced Truman that cooperation with Moscow on control of atomic energy was impossible and politically too risky. (p. 113) <sup>2</sup> According to the authors, Stalin indicated interest in international control under the UN Security Council in order to test U.S. intentions on postwar cooperation as well as to obtain U.S. atomic secrets. However, they conclude that Moscow maneuvering to restrict the U.S. but not the Soviet Union, along with the impact on Truman of Soviet espionage, ensured that any meaningful accord was dead. (pp. 153-155, 159-160) Malloy and Kaiser agree with this assessment but Roberts is not convinced since he believes that Stalin gave less importance to the bomb than the authors suggest. The Gromyko plan put forward in June 1946 as an alternative to the Baruch Plan would require the U.S. to destroy its bombs at the start. "The Soviets sought an agreement that would deny the Americans their bomb in exchange for a commitment that they would not build one of their one," Roberts concludes, noting that Stalin might have considered this as more than a propaganda maneuver, since Moscow did yet have a bomb and the U.S. might give up its weapons. (3-4)
- 5) Craig and Radchenko agree with a perspective on the origins of the Cold War that emphasizes the obstacles to successful postwar cooperation and the likelihood of conflict over different designs for a new international order, legacies of past disagreements and conflicts before and during WWII, conflicting ideological perspectives, and conflicting perspectives on security issues. (pp. 162, 166) They do give more weight to the American design for a new international order than Stalin's Marxist-Leninist perspective and his blending of revolutionary and imperial interests as discussed in recent studies by Vladislav Zubok, Geoffrey Roberts, and Melvyn Leffler. <sup>3</sup> The authors emphasize the impact of the atomic bomb in moving

---

<sup>2</sup> The most recent assessment on Soviet espionage during WWII and the postwar period is John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev's *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (2009), the subject of a forthcoming H-Diplo roundtable. See also the roundtable on "Soviet Espionage in the United States during the Stalin Era," a special issue of the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11:3 (Summer 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See the H-Diplo roundtables on Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (2007); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (2007); and Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (2006) at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/>

the inevitable postwar conflicts into a Cold War, noting the critical impact of Stalin's decision to build a bomb, the "American discovery and public revelation of Soviet atomic espionage in 1945 and 1946" which undermined public support for cooperation and any sense in Washington that Stalin would give up much for international cooperation when he had already obtained critical information through espionage, (p. 167) and the "novel aspects of atomic weapons" that challenged security concerns and any new international order. Among the reviewers, Roberts expressed the most direct disagreement with this thesis, suggesting the atomic bomb did not have as severe an impact as they suggest, particularly in Stalin's views on the importance of the bomb, and that there was more room for an international accord on atomic energy than recognized by the authors.

### Participants:

**Campbell Craig** is Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth University, where he teaches Cold War and Nuclear History. He has a BA from Carleton College, an MA from the University of Chicago, and received his PhD in 1995 from Ohio University. His most recent book, co-authored with Fredrik Logevall, is *America's Cold War: the Politics of Insecurity* published by Belknap/Harvard University Press.

**Sergey Radchenko** is a Lecturer at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo campus, China. He received his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has published *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (2009) and a number of articles including "Mongolian Politics in the Shadow of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8:1 (Winter 2005-2006): 95-119. He is a review editor with H-Diplo.

**David Kaiser** is a Professor in the Strategy and Policy Department of the Naval War College. He is the author of numerous articles on international politics and of six books on both European diplomacy and American foreign policy, including *Politics and War: European Conflict from Philip II to Hitler*; *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War*; and most recently, *The Road to Dallas: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy*. He is now at work on a study of American entry into the Second World War.

**Sean L. Malloy** received a Ph.D. from Stanford University in 2002 and is Assistant Professor at the University of California, Merced. His publications include *Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb Against Japan* (2008); and "Four Days in May: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *The Asia Pacific Journal*, Vol. 14-2-09, April 4, 2009; "'The Rules of Civilized Warfare': Scientists, Soldiers, Civilians, and the American Debate Over Nuclear Targeting, 1940-1945." *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (June 2007), 475-512.; and "A 'Paper Tiger?' Nuclear Weapons, Atomic Diplomacy, and the Korean War," *New England Journal of History*, Vol. 60, Nos. 1-3, Fall 2003-Spring 2004, 227-252. He is currently working on a research project involving the internationalism of the Black Panther Party.

**Geoffrey Roberts** teaches History and International Relations at University College Cork, Ireland. His books include *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (2006); *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle That Changed History* (2002); *The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1945-1991* (1998); *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War* (1995); and *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (1989). Forthcoming are biographical studies of Molotov and Zhukov.

**T**he *Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* by Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko is really two very different books in one. Chapters 2, 4, and 6 draw upon Russian works from the last fifteen or twenty years to provide a brief and most illuminating account of Soviet responses to the Manhattan Project, the atomic bomb itself, and subsequent American proposals for the international control of atomic weapons. Chapters 1, 3, 5 and 7 discuss Franklin Roosevelt's plans for a postwar world order, Truman's decision to drop the bomb, the initial discoveries of Soviet atomic espionage in North America, and the preparation and presentation of American proposals for international control. The Soviet and American parts of the story differ widely in quality, in my opinion, and thus deserve to be discussed separately. Most remarkable, in my opinion, is the extent to which the fine treatment of Soviet policy seems rather decisively to undermine the rather tortuously constructed argument for American responsibility for the Cold War in the other half of the book, which uses an entirely different sort of historical method.

The Soviet sections of this work do not draw directly on primary documents but cite well-researched Russian works, including what appears to be a semi-official history of the Soviets' own atomic bomb project. They tell a most interesting story. Soviet scientists before the Second World War—like those of virtually every major industrial country—knew about the possibility of fission weapons, and wanted to pursue the idea but could not secure the resources to do so. After the Soviet Union and the United States both became involved in the war, Soviet espionage quickly discovered the existence of the Manhattan Project, initially with the help of the British diplomat Donald McLean. Soviet spies not only told Moscow that the Americans and the British were developing bombs, but provided the essence of the two basic designs upon which they were working and the methods with which they were trying to secure fissionable material. Stalin himself, who was apprised of all this information, believed that it posed a long-term threat to the Soviet Union, but until bombs actually went off at Almagorado, Hiroshima and Nagasaki he did not authorize the resources for a major project. At that point, everything changed, and the Soviets began a crash program to build their own bombs as soon as possible. Like British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin in 1946 and General de Gaulle after his return to power in 1958, who encountered the same dilemma, Stalin was far from certain of what purpose atomic bombs could actually serve in war, but he understood that great power status now required their possession.

More interestingly—and here the evidence is unequivocal—neither Stalin nor any other Soviet leader showed the slightest interest in the kind of international control that the United States decided to propose in 1946: the surrender of existing atomic weapons to a United Nations authority that would have full power to inspect any facilities suspected of making atomic weapons, and that would operate without the threat of a veto from permanent Security Council members like the USSR and the United States. Although the authors in my opinion do not give enough prominence to the role of the international class struggle in Stalin's thinking, they certainly recognize that he never even considered

surrendering Soviet national sovereignty on this or any other point. Soviet proposals for the control of atomic weapons—which called simply for their abolition—were designed mainly for propaganda purposes. In the most unlikely event that they had been accepted, they would have disarmed the US and Britain while the Soviet program continued in secret. US Secretary of War Henry Stimson had grasped the dangers of a nuclear arms race by mid-1945, and his fervent advocacy led to the development of American proposals for international control. They would have been difficult to implement in any case, but Stalin’s attitude meant that they could never go anywhere—and indeed, the Soviets rejected them in UN negotiations.

Given such a view of Soviet intentions and behavior—one that is much, much better documented than most of what the authors have to say about the United States—one might think that it would be difficult to ascribe much of the blame for the coming atomic arms race and the broader Cold War to Washington. Yet in large measures the chapters on American policy seem designed to show that American “atomic diplomacy” (to which they refer far more often than they actually try to define it) bore a significant responsibility for the estrangement of the wartime allies. And although they do not entirely endorse the thesis of Gar Alperovitz by any means, they use the same kind of methodology that he did more than forty years ago to try to make their case. Unable to find any evidence for many of their points, they seize upon off-hand remarks by policy makers, especially President Truman, to create a mystery which they then proceed to solve through speculation and inference. [see especially pp. 62-89.]

Timing is everything, in history and in life, and it seems unlikely that Gar Alperovitz—an economist, not a historian—could have exercised such an enormous influence over several generations of American academics if his highly speculative and very poorly sourced book had not appeared in 1965, as the Vietnam War was beginning in earnest and the Boom generation had just filled up the student bodies of American universities. The scholarly weaknesses of Alperovitz’s argument—as well as of other Cold War revisionists who followed him—were delineated at length by Robert James Maddox in 1973, but the new tendency to blame the United States for so many of the ills of the second half of the twentieth century was too far advanced for Maddox’s book, *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War*, to have much effect. What seems striking in light of Craig and Radchenko’s book, too, is Alperovitz’s methodological influence. Craig and Radchenko do not accept all his conclusions by any means, but, like him, they reason from inference, and make some claims that are just as unsupported and dubious as any of their revisionist predecessors and do not back them up with any direct evidence from contemporary sources. Alperovitz’s greatest legacy seems to be the practice of argument from inference, not evidence.

Thus, to begin with, on pp. 19-21, the authors refer to “The atomic diplomacy waged by Roosevelt against Stalin,” while admitting that FDR never conveyed anything to Stalin about the Manhattan project at all. What they are talking about, apparently, is *their own conjecture* that “Perhaps [Roosevelt] believed the atomic bomb would persuade the Russians to relent” and drop their opposition to a world order “based upon open markets and ... political and civil liberties,” which in turn would require the Soviet Union to ‘relinquish its social and economic system and take on the system of the United States.’”

The authors do not produce any evidence to support this fantastic claim. In fact, Roosevelt was on the contrary already trying to prepare the American people for some disappointments in Soviet-American relations by December of 1944. After both Soviet actions in Rumania and British intervention in Greece had shocked the American people, FDR in his State of the Union address warned against “perfectionism” in seeking American goals for the postwar world and spoke of inevitable disagreement among allies. There is not a shred of evidence that he expected fundamental changes within the Soviet Union. The authors state that a December 31, 1944 conversation between Roosevelt and Stimson “suggest[s] clearly that [FDR] had decided to make Soviet relaxation of its police-state methods and brutality in Poland the price of real atomic cooperation with the Americans,” (p. 28) but the two sources they cite do not support this statement. Their idea that Roosevelt wanted to use the bomb to create a new world order is entirely speculation, but by p. 63 it has become a fact.

Turning to the American decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan—the keystone of this as of so many other books—the authors are relatively cautious but frequently bow to revisionist dogma. They imply that an offer to allow Japan to retain the emperor might have led to Japan’s immediate surrender well before Hiroshima—an idea that has been decisively refuted by Barton Bernstein in 1995 and Richard B. Frank in 1999.<sup>1</sup> It is highly misleading to state, as they do (p. 76), that intercepted Japanese cables confirmed before Potsdam “the desire of the Emperor Hirohito to stop fighting if the unconditional terms were modified,” or (p. 83) that Truman “had received several reports from American code breakers that Japan was seeking a negotiated surrender.” The Japanese were indeed interested in *making peace* at that time with the help of the Soviet Union, but they wanted a peace which would leave them fully in possession not only of the home islands but also of their prewar empire, not a surrender leading to the occupation of the home islands, upon which the American government was sure to insist. The authors revive Alperovitz’s myth that Truman delayed the Potsdam meeting so as to wait for the Trinity atomic test, and approvingly echo Tsuyoshi Hasegawa’s argument that James Byrnes refused to modify the unconditional surrender demand so as to make it necessary for the US to drop atomic bombs in order to intimidate the Soviets. They admit that Hasegawa had no real evidence for this: his conclusion was “deductive” (p. 74). And they insist (p. 81) on calling Hiroshima and Nagasaki “the worst atrocities ever committed in the history of warfare,” basing this claim not on the number of civilians killed—which of course was less than the number killed by conventional bombing in Dresden or Tokyo—but on *how quickly* the victims died. Without going into what would be a rather macabre argument about this, one may remark that this seems a most debatable argument to make.

Having thus laid the groundwork, the authors then argue that while the first A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima to end the war, the second was dropped on Nagasaki three days later in order to “preclude a Soviet invasion of Manchuria and a joint Soviet occupation of Japan.” They base this conclusion on “counterfactual reasoning,” arguing that this is a good way “to determine which factor really lay behind a decision like this, when there is no

---

<sup>1</sup> See Barton Bernstein, “The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs* 74 (January-February 1995) and Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999).

conclusive evidence to solve the debate.” [p. 83.] In fact, however, this conclusion tends to undermine the method they propose.

I was trained rather differently: to believe that the best way to understand a decision is not to speculate about motivations, but to look at the process by which the decision was arrived at. And in this case that method shows clearly that there was no mystery about the bombing of Nagasaki at all—because there was no separate decision to bomb it. The official Atomic Energy Commission history (which the authors frequently quote, although not on this point) make it clear that Stimson, not Truman, gave the final approval to the military to proceed with the atomic bombing of Japan, specifying not one, but four targets to be bombed separately as soon as bombs became available. That was the decision that Stimson approved on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945, and which the Air Corps implemented on August 6 and August 9 at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We should note that that was how the United States had fought the whole war: military commanders had autonomously carried out even the largest and most critical operations, including D-Day, after the civilian leadership had authorized them. Truman halted the atomic attacks on August 10—because Japanese radio had announced an intention to surrender, provided that the Emperor retained his prerogatives. There is no mystery about Nagasaki: the United States dropped two bombs because its leaders had decided to drop as many as four while waiting for a Japanese response.

The authors actually recognize this essential fact (pp. 81-82), but unfortunately do not stop there. Instead, noting that Truman expressed some horror over the loss of life at Hiroshima, they postulate that he must have had some ulterior motive for not either canceling or delaying the bombing of Nagasaki. A decision, in other words, to drop as many as four atomic bombs at once to try to end the war is suddenly presumed to have been a decision to see if one such bomb would do the trick before dropping any more. Having thus transformed the Americans’ thought processes, they argue that Truman must have had a specific reason for not delaying the bombing of Nagasaki, and claim that it must have been in order to “preclude a Soviet invasion of Manchuria and joint Soviet occupation of Japan.” (p. 87) But there is no evidence that the Americans did not desire a Soviet invasion of Manchuria, and none that the atomic bombs had any relation to Truman’s refusal of a Soviet occupation zone. To support their argument, the authors also state that Truman’s halt to the atomic bombing did indeed come “before the Japanese surrender,” (p. 87) The halt did however take place as soon as the Japanese had expressed a willingness to surrender on terms very close to what the Americans were demanding, but very different indeed from what the Japanese would have agreed to before the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war.

The last two chapters of the book, dealing with the Acheson-Lilienthal report and the Baruch Plan, which embodied Stimson’s original proposals for the original control of atomic weapons, also show a curious ambivalence. On the one hand, the authors’ discussion of Soviet positions make it very clear that no real plan for international control could have been accepted; on the other, they accuse Truman and his advisors of not being serious about the plan either. They put some blame on J. Edgar Hoover for bringing accusations of Soviet espionage to Truman’s and the public’s attention—even though, of

course, the accusations were completely true. Sadly, the American plan to head off a nuclear arms race was premature and could not possibly succeed in the political world of 1945. (Today, one may note, things might be different in that regard.) That Stimson prevailed upon his colleagues to present such a plan is remarkable, and it was hardly their fault that it failed.

Like certain other issues in American history, the atomic bomb controversy seems to be too emotional to die down. Campbell Craig's earlier book, *Destroying the Village*, is a well-researched and persuasive account of the Eisenhower Administration's nuclear weapons policies. A similar approach to this topic would in my opinion have produced a very different kind of book. As it is, however, the Soviet chapters of the book confirm a remark that a colleague of mine made many years ago: that the opening of Russian archives would decisively undermine many of the tenets of the revisionist history of the Cold War. In this case, it seems to me, it has.

Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko offer a refreshing reexamination of the complicated role of the atomic bomb in linking the wartime diplomacy of the Grand Alliance to the ensuing Cold War and nuclear arms race. Like much of the best recent scholarship in these areas, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* works across national borders, acknowledging both implicitly and explicitly that the answers to the many controversial questions associated with this issue are not to be found exclusively within the borders (or archives) of the United States. At the same time, the authors are careful to disclaim any attempt at “international” history, preferring instead to emphasize the “parochial, inward nature of the two Cold War powers” by structuring the book as a series of chapters that alternate between Washington and Moscow (p. x). In that spirit, and in the interests of space and of staying within my own area of knowledge, this comment will focus largely on Craig and Radchenko’s treatment of the American side of the story prior to Hiroshima.

Before moving on to a more detailed analysis of the authors’ treatment of Roosevelt, Truman, and the bomb, I do want to offer a few words on the project as a whole. This is an opinionated and analytical book, but also strikingly un-polemical. In both tone and substance, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* is geared more towards opening debate than closing it, and that in itself is a welcome development. Craig and Radchenko do not claim to offer anything in the way of dramatic new evidence that would definitively settle the long and bitter academic debates over the use of the bomb against Japan and the origins of the Cold War. But while readers looking for a “smoking gun” (whether in the form of a mushroom cloud or otherwise) may be disappointed, this book greatly benefits from a common sense approach to the vast body of existing evidence and scholarship on these issues. Rather than pinning their analysis on a close reading of a handful of new documents in a lawyerly attempt to “close the case,” the authors take a broader prospective, offering a mature reconsideration of the U.S. decision to develop and use the bomb, the emerging Soviet-American rift, and the ensuing Cold War arms race.

Perhaps the best example of Craig and Radchenko’s approach to these controversial issues is their treatment of Soviet atomic espionage. Regular H-Diplo readers need no reminder that the question of who was a Soviet spy during the 1940s and 1950s is a topic that still arouses passionate scholarly and public debate – one given fresh fuel with the recent release of the research notebooks of former KGB officer Alexander Vassiliev. But while I greatly respect the scholars working within this field (included among whom are my former graduate school mentor Barton J. Bernstein and my current colleague Gregg Herken), the debate over whether individuals such as J. Robert Oppenheimer were Party members and/or Soviet spies often seems distressingly narrow and divorced from the larger issues that usually animate the study of diplomatic history. While Craig and Radchenko acknowledge the existing debate on these matters they wisely avoid obsessing over the identity of individual spies and instead focus on tracing the actual impact of atomic espionage on policy making in both Washington and Moscow. While their arguments on this score (particularly with respect to the impact on Truman’s attitude

toward international control) sometimes seem a bit strained, in insisting on firmly linking the story of Soviet espionage to the realm of policy the authors have performed a valuable service that will hopefully broaden our collective approach to this important issue.

With respect to both the evolution of U.S. nuclear policy and emerging tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, the authors give substantial weight to the role played by Franklin D. Roosevelt. In their analysis of FDR, Craig and Radchenko largely side with the Cold War revisionists. While duly noting the paranoid and brutal nature of Stalin's regime, they place greater emphasis on the sweeping, global agenda advanced by Roosevelt during the war. The postwar world order envisioned by FDR "would reflect American institutions and interests" (p. xv) including an "open door" for capitalist commerce that would "particularly benefit American companies seeking markets and resources in erstwhile European colonies" (p. 3). Though they suggest that this vision was ultimately "more idealistic and progressive. . . than is normally argued by revisionist historians" (p. xv), many such historians (including the dean of Cold War revisionism, William Appleman Williams) would surely concede that Roosevelt genuinely believed that remaking the world in the American image would be beneficial for all involved. In assessing responsibility for the origins of Cold War, the more interesting question involves not the goals sought by Roosevelt (which were undeniably ambitious), but rather the means he and his successors were willing to use to achieve them. In that respect, the way in which Roosevelt and Truman handled the atomic bomb is an important factor in reaching historical judgments about the origins of the Cold War.

In this account, the bomb (or at least the knowledge of the atomic secret) played an important role in FDR's wartime diplomacy from 1943 onward. Craig and Radchenko are by no means the first to argue that the story of "atomic diplomacy" did not begin with Harry S. Truman and the authors acknowledge a heavy debt to Martin J. Sherwin's *A World Destroyed* among other works. Like Sherwin, they point to Anglo-American wrangling over custody of the atomic secret as an early indication that American leaders were well aware of the potential utility of bomb as a diplomatic bargaining chip. The brief but significant dispute with Great Britain over the bomb in 1943-1944 should dispel any notion that Roosevelt and his inner circle (including Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and science advisors Vannevar Bush and James B. Conant) failed to grasp the diplomatic significance of the bomb or were naïve in its handling.

With respect to the Soviet Union, Craig and Radchenko assert that FDR "used the possibility of postwar international atomic cooperation as an incentive to persuade Stalin to accept self-determination in Eastern Europe and, by extension, an open world order" (p. 31). As I argue in *Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb Against Japan*, it seems fairly clear that Roosevelt and Stimson wanted to use the atomic secret in such a fashion. But American leaders were never able to figure out how to use this knowledge to even attempt to secure a *quid pro quo* from the Soviets prior to Hiroshima, in large part because they were so reluctant to formally disclose the project's existence. The authors acknowledge this complication, though at times I think they underplay the extent to which it rendered American wartime atomic diplomacy *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union fundamentally abortive.

In handling the transition from Roosevelt to Truman, the bloody end game of the Pacific war, the Potsdam Conference, and the final decisions that shaped the use of atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a single chapter, Craig and Radchenko offer an inevitably compressed treatment of these complicated and controversial issues. Rejecting key elements of the revisionist interpretation most famously advanced by Gar Alperovitz in *Atomic Diplomacy*, the authors argue that the new president's policy toward the Soviet Union did not break dramatically from that of his predecessor and that the bomb figured little if at all in Truman's foreign policy calculations prior to Potsdam. "Before the successful Trinity test in mid-July," they assert, "Truman did not rely in any coherent way upon the prospect of the atomic bomb in his diplomacy toward the Soviet Union and its leader, Stalin. . . . Truman was no atomic diplomat in the early days of his presidency" (pp. 73-74). This was not the result of naivety or altruism on Truman's part when it came to the Soviet Union. Rather, they suggest that the new president was understandably reluctant to either embark on dramatic new directions in foreign policy or rely on an untested weapon whose very existence he had been unaware of prior to taking office in April 1945. A similar uncertainty surrounded Truman's approach to the question of surrender terms for Japan (including a possible easing of unconditional surrender to allow for the postwar retention of the Japanese emperor) and the role of the bomb in ending the Pacific War, which remained unresolved on the eve of the Potsdam Conference. "Without a weapon in hand," Craig and Radchenko conclude, "Truman was unwilling to push his advisers to develop a systematic plan for using the bomb either in the war on Japan or as a diplomatic lever against the Soviet Union" (p. 70).

In general, I find the authors' treatment of the crucial period leading up to the Potsdam Conference persuasive. Their emphasis on the chronic irresolution of the many pressing issues related to the war in the Pacific and the future of atomic energy mirrors the conclusions I reached in my study of Secretary of War's Stimson's role in the process in *Atomic Tragedy*. Craig and Radchenko argue that it was news of the successful test of a uranium bomb in the New Mexico desert on 16 July 1945 that led Truman to finally resolve these questions in favor of a hard line towards both the Soviet Union and Japan (see particularly pp. 80-81). This was reflected in the Potsdam Declaration, which was issued without having solicited Stalin's signature or participation (which would have added weight to its threats) and failed to offer the Japanese any potential easing of unconditional surrender with respect to the postwar status of the Emperor. I think Craig and Radchenko may somewhat overstate the role of the Trinity test in this regard. As the authors acknowledge, a more creative and flexible American diplomacy at Potsdam would have required affirmative actions on Truman's part with respect to both Japan (by easing surrender terms) and relations with the Soviet Union (by approaching Stalin with a willingness to strike a deal on postwar international control). While I strongly believe that such an approach would have been preferable to the alternative, it was admittedly the more politically risky course and one far from guaranteed of success. To that extent, the significance of the Trinity test was likely to reinforce Truman's existing inclination follow the path of least resistance, relying on unilateral American possession and use of the bomb to both end the war and set the terms of the peace that followed.

This review has covered only a subset of issues raised by *The Atomic Bomb and the End of the Cold War*. I will gladly leave the many interesting questions relating to Stalin and Soviet policy in this period to those more versed in the sources and literature. For reasons of space, I have not touched here on Craig and Radchenko's treatment of the Truman administration's policy toward the bomb and international control after Hiroshima. I will say that their account of the pre-Hiroshima maneuvering on both the Soviet and American sides makes it quite clear that by August 1945 neither Truman nor Stalin was seriously interested in the international control of atomic energy. To that extent, the concluding chapters of this work, covering the abortive debate at the United Nations leading to the failure of the Baruch plan at the end of 1946, are somewhat anti-climactic. Nevertheless, this is a thoughtful, well-researched, and intelligently argued book and I look forward to a continuing discussion of these issues in the same civil and reasoned tones employed by its authors.

This book comes highly recommended. According to the endorsements on the back cover it is “a fascinating account of the origins of the cold war” and “provides strong evidence that the dangers inherent in the atomic bomb itself...played a pivotal, perhaps unavoidable role in creating the American-Soviet confrontation” (Robert A. Pape); “The complicated history of how the bomb influenced the start of the cold war has never been explored so well.” (Lloyd Gardner); “In a signal contribution...with original research and keen judgement, the authors...integrate multiple elements to give us a much fuller picture of this crucial topic” (Robert Jervis); and “An outstanding new interpretation of the origins of the Cold War...Its central thesis- that the atomic bomb made the Cold War inevitable – is sure to provoke considerable controversy.” (Geoffrey Roberts).

I don't propose to add to this well-deserved praise except to note that Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko demonstrate that a small book can pack a big punch and as much substance as weightier tomes. What I will do is challenge several of the book's key propositions.

As I understand it, the book's overall argument is that the atomic bomb made the cold war inevitable because the problems it posed accentuated the differences generated by the American and Soviet conceptions of the postwar order. While the Americans sought a version of liberal capitalist internationalism, the Soviets were interested in a traditional great power carve up of the postwar world. These conceptions clashed during and immediately after the war and added to the longstanding mistrust between the two sides. The bomb made this conflict situation a lot worse because while the Americans wanted to maintain their monopoly of the new weapon, the Soviets wanted to break it, and neither side was prepared to participate in a system for the international control of atomic weapons. The two authors also make the realist point that as long as sovereign states control military power, governments will always strive, if they can, to retain or acquire weapons deemed essential to security rather than entrust their countries' fate to militarily powerless international bodies.

It seems to me that to prove their argument Craig and Radchenko have to show (a) that the bomb had the wider ramifications they say it did and (b) that the establishment of international control of atomic weapons was indeed impossible because neither side wanted such an agreement.

Craig and Radchenko present a strong case but I am not convinced by it, at least as far as the Soviet side of the story is concerned. Throughout their treatment the two authors recognise that the bomb mattered more to the Americans than it did to the Soviets. During the war Stalin authorised a small-scale atomic research programme and the Soviets spied on the Manhattan Project, as they did on every American industrial-scientific project they could penetrate. But it was not until two weeks after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that Stalin authorised a large and intensive effort to produce a Soviet bomb. Even then, both publicly and privately Stalin downplayed the significance of the bomb as a

military weapon and as an instrument of diplomacy. Craig and Radchenko make the point that Stalin must have thought the bomb was of some importance otherwise he would not have authorised his own Manhattan Project. This is true; for prestige reasons alone Stalin would have wanted a Soviet bomb to match the Americans'. They also argue that Stalin's anxiety that the bomb might be more important than he said was betrayed by his decision immediately after Hiroshima to move forward the Soviet invasion of Manchuria from 11 to 9 August. The source of this particular argument is Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan*. Hasegawa tells a good story about how Truman raced to end the war with Japan before Stalin could enter it and Stalin raced to enter the war before Truman could end it. But, as I have attempted to show elsewhere, the timing of the Soviet declaration of war on Japan had nothing to do with Hiroshima. The start of the Soviet attack on the Japanese in Manchuria – 8/9 August – was the result of a report to Stalin from the Soviet commander in the Far East dated 3 August that his forces would be ready for action by 5 August and that for weather reasons the attack should not be delayed beyond 9/10 August.<sup>1</sup>

Another line of argument pursued by Craig and Radchenko is that while Stalin did not think the bomb of great military importance, at least in the short-term, he feared it would embolden American diplomacy and lead to a harder line in US foreign policy. These fears were realized in the form of the breakdown of the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London in September 1945. Stalin's response was a significant hardening of Soviet foreign policy in autumn 1945 as means to combat any suggestion that he could be intimidated by atomic blackmail. The problem with this argument is that there is no direct evidence that the bomb played any such role in Stalin's calculations and plenty of evidence to suggest that other factors were the operative ones. For example, it is clear that the CFM meeting broke down primarily because of disputes in relation to Soviet control of Eastern Europe. We also have available the details of an extensive correspondence between Stalin and Molotov during the council meeting, and there is no mention of the atomic issue. We can also conduct a little counterfactual thought experiment, similar to the one Craig and Radchenko conduct in relation to Truman's decision to authorise the A-bombing of Japan (which leads them to conclude that he bombed Hiroshima for military not political reasons): if the A-bomb had not existed would it have made any difference to the outcome of the CFM or to the course of Soviet foreign policy? The short answer to this question is no, because the ostensible differences between the two sides are sufficient to explain the clashes that occurred. There is no need to resort to the bomb as an additional explanatory factor. That is not to say that military-political calculations played no role in what was going on, but what concerned the Soviets at this time was not atomic weaponry but the massive conventional power of the United States and its continuing postwar deployment on a global scale. Significantly, the very first Soviet propaganda campaign of the postwar period revolved around demands for conventional as well as nuclear disarmament and the dismantlement of foreign military bases.

Craig and Radchenko seek to magnify the importance of the bomb to Stalin by emphasizing his doctrinal views on the inevitability of war and conflict. As they say, Stalin was

---

<sup>1</sup> See my H-Diplo post of 14 February 2006.

committed to the doctrine that because of economic contradictions inter-capitalist wars were inevitable as long as capitalism existed. He also believed that conflict between capitalism and communism was unavoidable and predicted another world war in 20 years time (although not necessarily an inter-systemic war). However, this is not the whole picture of Stalin's views. Stalin was as much a voluntarist as he was a determinist and believed that war – even in the capitalist world – was only inevitable if you allowed it to happen. Wars could be averted by the power of the forces of peace – an argument that became more pronounced in Soviet discourse as nuclear weapons developed and became more threatening. Stalin also believed in the possibility of prolonged peaceful coexistence between capitalism and socialism, including the long-term collaboration of the great powers for mutual benefit. That is why he sought a continuation of the Grand Alliance after World War II. These hopes were dashed by the outbreak of the cold war but not entirely abandoned by Stalin even then.<sup>2</sup> A more nuanced picture of Stalin's thinking on war, peace and communist-capitalist relations suggests, to me at least, that Stalin was more relaxed in his attitude toward the atomic threat than Craig and Radchenko seem to believe.

The weighing of the importance of the bomb to Stalin is critical to the assessment of Soviet proposals for the international control of atomic weapons. Craig and Radchenko are firmly convinced that Stalin was not interested in international control of atomic energy and only participated in postwar negotiations for propaganda purposes. I am not so sure. The logic of my position is this: since Stalin did not consider the bomb to be politically or militarily of such great importance he could agree to international control, provided the terms were right. Those terms were set out in the so-called Gromyko Plan of June 1946. This was the Soviet alternative to the Baruch Plan. The Baruch Plan proposed that atomic energy would be controlled by an international agency and when an adequate system of control had been established the US would give up its atomic weapons. Until then American would maintain their monopoly of the bomb. The Gromyko Plan proposed the immediate prohibition of atomic weapons, the destruction of existing stocks and the establishment of a system of sanctions to preclude states from building bombs in the future. In effect, the Soviets sought an agreement that would deny the Americans their bomb in exchange for a commitment that they would not build one of their own. Was this a serious proposal, in the sense of being well-intentioned? Would the Soviet have been prepared to halt their A-Bomb project if such an agreement materialized? Craig and Radchenko don't think so, primarily because they believe Stalin would not have given up the possibility of a Soviet bomb in any circumstances. Since we still know very little about Stalin's inner thinking and calculations, this is a reasonable speculation, particularly in view of the Soviet dictator's proven cynicism and caution. Stalin may well have reasoned that the safest option was to continue with the Soviet bomb project whilst at the same time getting as much propaganda value as he could out of the Baruch/Gromyko negotiations.

The counter-argument to the Craig-Radchenko hypothesis is that when the Gromyko Plan was formulated there was no certainty that the Soviet bomb project would succeed or that that it would not take a very long time to complete. It is not difficult to construct a realist

---

<sup>2</sup> I have pursued this argument in many publications, including *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (Yale University Press, 2006).

calculation that in those circumstances it made sense to secure an agreement to prohibit all nuclear weapons, including your own. That does not mean, of course, that Stalin and the Soviets believed it was likely that Americans would give up their nuclear weapons, merely that they did not preclude the possibility and would welcome it if they did, providing the system established to maintain the ban on building the bomb was robust enough to do the job without being too intrusive in relation to their domestic affairs. There is also the further point that the Gromyko Plan was the first of many Soviet proposals for nuclear disarmament. I'm not in a position to testify to the authenticity of all these proposals but I have studied those of the mid-1950s and my research in the Russian archives tells me that, at this time at least, they were serious and well-intentioned. Maybe the situation was different in Stalin's time, but maybe not. In their detailed study of what little archive documentation we have on the genesis of the Gromyko Plan, Craig and Radchenko are unable to identify a smoking gun of Soviet insincerity. For example, one of the documents they cite (not seen by me) is the first draft of the Soviet proposals that became the Gromyko Plan. The Soviet author of this internal document – Aleksei Roshchin of the International Organisations department – argued that the Soviet delegation to the UN Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) had to push the discussion about international control of atomic energy in the needed direction. That “direction” was a convention on the prohibition of atomic weapons followed by the exchange of scientific information. Craig and Radchenko put the following construction on this proposal: “If Washington agreed, it would have to unilaterally destroy its atomic stockpile and cease to manufacture new bombs, while the Soviet Union would be free to bring its own atomic program to a successful conclusion. In the likely scenario that the United States rejected this convention, the Soviet Union would still stand to benefit from propaganda against American atomic monopoly.” (p.138) The two authors may be right that this is the game the Soviets were playing but I doubt very much that Roshchin said anything remotely like this in the given document (it would have been way above his pay grade) and had he done so you can be sure Craig and Radchenko would have shared the knowledge with us in the form of a direct quote.

Three of the Soviet documents cited by Craig and Radchenko are in the public domain. These documents confirm that from the point of view of Soviet officialdom, if not Stalin, a rather straightforward game was being played in the negotiations about the international control of atomic energy. The first document is a purely descriptive memorandum from Gromyko to Molotov giving an account of the discussions at the AEC on 5 December 1946.<sup>3</sup> The second document, dated 6 December, is a memorandum by Gromyko giving his view on state of play in the AEC negotiations. Gromyko noted (i) that the Soviets should stick to the position that the UN Security Council should retain the right of veto in relation to nuclear questions; (ii) that Soviet agreement to the establishment of an international system of control and inspection had made it more difficult for the Americans to object to the Soviet proposal for a convention banning nuclear weapons; (iii) although the Americans were sticking to the position that the sharing of technical information would be a stage by stage process linked to the establishment of a control and inspection system, the force of their arguments for denying other states information was getting weaker all the

---

<sup>3</sup> *Sovetsko-Amerikanskie Otnosheniya, 1945-1948*, Moscow 2004 doc.153.

time; (iv) since American proposals to separate the international control of atomic energy from the Security Council had been rejected they would not feature in future discussions, at least in the short-term; and (v) while the Americans continued to emphasise the importance of an independent sanctions regime the Soviets could continue to insist that the Security Council should remain in control.<sup>4</sup> The third document – the most revealing – contains the directive to Gromyko on the Soviet policy stance. Dated 27 December, the directive reaffirmed the existing Soviet position that the priority was the signing of a convention prohibiting nuclear weapons and that the conclusion of such a convention should not be delayed by negotiations about the establishment of a system of control and inspection: “Of course, we are for control and for a convention on control but drafting and agreeing [on] such a complex convention must not delay the conclusion of a Convention on the prohibition of atomic [weapons] because without this it will be impossible to achieve a decisive turn toward the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.”<sup>5</sup> As Craig and Radchenko note, the directive then goes on to specify the tactics that Gromyko should employ in the forthcoming discussions, principally that he should not reject American proposals outright but agree to consider them point by point in order to make sure that the blame for eventual failure fell on the western side. It was all to no avail; the western states used their votes to ensure that the AEC report that went to the Security Council reflected their views, forcing the Soviets to veto it.

Craig and Radchenko conclude their treatment of the Gromyko Plan with the statement that “Soviet participation in the early efforts to control atomic energy was simply part of Stalin’s survival strategy until he, too, had the bomb.” (p.161) In this review I have questioned (a) whether Stalin thought the bomb important enough to necessitate such a ‘survival strategy’ and (b) whether the Soviet proposals on the international control of atomic energy were as disingenuous as Craig and Radchenko suppose. If I am right, the bomb was not the ineluctable force leading to the cold war that they think it was. Admittedly, it was a rather difficult issue to resolve. But like most of the problems and disputes that beset the Grand Alliance in the early postwar period it was not beyond resolution, providing the wartime allies were prepared to compromise and take risks for the sake of peace.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid doc.154.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid doc.157.

As is evident from the animated reviews of our book, the story of the atomic bomb and the role it played in the ending of World War Two and the commencement of the Cold War remains one of the most interesting and contentious features of modern historiography. It is not hard to figure out why. The atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whatever one thinks about its morality or the American objectives behind it, was a momentous event: a culminating demonstration of fantastic American power, of the total 'war without mercy' waged upon civilian targets as well as military ones, of the collapse of Imperial Japan. The failure of the United States and the Soviet Union to agree on international atomic control, however one explains it, signalled the onset of hostilities between the two nations and condemned the planet to decades of nuclear terror. We can all agree that the subject is worthy of the most careful and inquisitive analysis.

*The American side of the story*

The history of US policy with respect to the bomb between 1943 and 1946 is well known and has been exhaustively researched and studied. Nevertheless, some puzzles remain about the behaviour of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, ones which in our view have not been fully accounted for in previous works. One of the reasons that these puzzles continue to exist is because of the relative paucity of hard documentation on key matters. This is not surprising, given the top-secret nature of the atomic project, the lack of sustained policy debates about the bomb in the spring and summer of 1945, and the explosive political dangers that emerged once the scale of Soviet espionage became apparent. Our approach, therefore, was to try to formulate some deductive answers to these puzzles, to show logically how the bomb explains US behaviour when smoking-gun evidence is lacking.

Let us reiterate three central puzzles with respect to US foreign policy and the bomb during this three year period and briefly explain how we try to solve them. The first has to do with Roosevelt. The president clearly—no one disputes this—hoped that the United States could lead the world into a new order shaped by free trade, national self-determination, and collective security after the carnage of World War Two. During the last year of his life, however, it became obvious to him that Stalin had little interest in such goals, and that without Soviet acceptance of them FDR's hopes could not be fully realised. Yet FDR did little in late 1944 and early 1945 to try to secure Soviet cooperation, either by carrot or by stick. Why?

Books upon books have been written about this question. We suggest, however (following Martin Sherwin's crucial work) that *one* of the reasons FDR chose not to confront this problem directly is because he allowed himself to believe that the prospect of an American atomic bomb might lead Stalin to conclude that the United States was simply too formidable to oppose. By relying upon that easy solution, we argue, FDR found a way to avoid the extremely arduous and dangerous work that would have been required actually

to incorporate the USSR into an American-led new order. In other words, the prospect of the bomb encouraged Roosevelt, ailing and tired at the end of the war, to imagine that his new world order could still be achieved without war, and without offering impossible concessions to the Russians. Was this deluded? Of course. But to suggest that the bomb permitted FDR to avoid confronting reality is a long, long way from saying, as David Kaiser has us say, that Roosevelt 'wanted to use the bomb to create a new world order.' That is simply not what we argue.

Puzzle number two. Why, given the stated American objective of avoiding a November invasion, did the United States wait only three days before dropping the second bomb on Nagasaki; and why did it accept the Japanese demand that the emperor must stay when it had previously ruled that out, and when indeed it had been fighting for two and a half bloody years under the banner of unconditional surrender? Let us be clear: we argue, unequivocally, that the bombardment of Hiroshima can be best explained by the desire to end the war before an invasion became necessary. But once that happened, postponing the second bomb for a slightly longer duration, enough time for the Japanese to ascertain what actually happened at Hiroshima and for the peace faction in Tokyo to push aside the hard-core militarists and issue terms of surrender, would have done no damage to the goal of invasion avoidance. Kaiser's point, that the Department of War had already decided in late July to use all available bombs, is not an answer to this question. Truman was president. Had he wanted the military to delay for a few days, he could have ordered it.

We believe, that Truman's primary goal was to secure Japanese surrender in order to avoid an invasion. But we also believe, agreeing basically with Barton Bernstein, that he had a second goal, which was to secure a Japanese surrender *quickly*, if possible, so as to preclude Soviet participation in the war against Japan. That explains Truman's negative decision not to interfere with the existing military plans. More important, it also explains the sudden decision by the United States to accept the Japanese condition of retaining the emperor, when unconditional surrender had been official policy for more than two years. As Tsuyoshi Hasegawa has pointed out, maintaining unconditional surrender had been the central argument put forward by James Byrnes when he rejected various suggestions earlier that summer that there might be a way to avoid using the bomb.

Kaiser states that there is no evidence that the US did not want the Soviet Union to participate in the war against Japan. This is not right. There *is* such evidence: the decision to exclude the USSR from the Potsdam Declaration.<sup>1</sup> Truman, earlier at Potsdam, had made a point of securing Stalin's commitment to enter the war. Then, he received reports that Trinity had been a success. Then, American officials secretly drafted a new declaration threatening Japan with a rain of ruin, without involving the Soviets at all (they were in the same building), and excluding them from the list of signatories. Why, if Truman still wanted the USSR in the war, would he have possibly done that? Those who downplay the importance of the Potsdam declaration need to answer that question. Puzzle three. Why did the United States, though officially committed to international atomic control, fail vigorously to pursue it, and indeed put forward a proposal in the late spring of 1946 (the

---

<sup>1</sup> This was the topic of another rather heated H-Diplo debate in 2008.

Baruch Plan) that guaranteed its failure? Neither Kaiser nor Sean Malloy (in his more fair-minded review) address this section of our book at much length, so we will answer this more briefly. We understand perfectly well that Stalin was never interested in atomic control, despite Kaiser's protestations. Indeed, this is precisely the argument made in chapter six of the book under discussion. For that reason, the US is not the only nation to blame for its failure, as we state clearly in the conclusion. However, the question still stands, since the Truman administration was not privy to Stalin's intentions in 1946. One of the key answers, we argue, had to do less with Truman administration views of the Soviet Union or even of US foreign policy generally, and more to do with domestic politics. The revelations of atomic espionage terrified Truman, as J. Edgar Hoover perfectly well knew. There certainly were clear links between atomic spies and some government officials (do we ever say otherwise?), and this portended great danger for the Democratic party. That was bad enough, but it did not require Truman's acute political instincts to ascertain that if he went ahead and 'gave away' the bombs to the United Nations, while news reports came out simultaneously of a massive network of Russian atomic spying, he might as well have boarded the first train back to Independence.

Of course, historians use deductive reasoning and make circumstantial arguments all the time. Because of the striking lack of hard evidence (compare, sceptical reader, the available documentation on Truman's response to the espionage revelations to, that, say, of his response to the coal strike happening at about the same time), the enduring puzzles about US actions, and the sheer historical importance of the topic, we do so more forthrightly than perhaps is usual. Readers can decide for themselves whether these puzzles are as salient as we think they are and whether our attempt to solve them is convincing. But one last comment with respect to the American story is worth making. Kaiser suggests that the opening of the Russian archives will undermine the 'revisionist' history of the Cold War. To be sure, it will undermine those old New Left books in which the Soviet Union could do no wrong, in case anyone is still reading them. What, however, does our knowledge today about Soviet foreign policy tell us about what was happening in Washington at the cusp of the Cold War? Roosevelt, Truman, and their key advisors made their decisions in total ignorance of the policies Stalin was devising on the other side of the world. The Kremlin could have been secretly planning for immediate world domination, for an enthusiastic embrace of free-market capitalism, or for an invasion of Mars. None of that tells us anything about what American leaders were up to.

#### *The Soviet side of the story*

In his review, Sean L. Malloy focused primarily on the US side of the story. David Kaiser also mainly dealt with the book's conclusions as they pertain to Washington's policy-making, although he made a number of interesting points with regard to Soviet policies as well (detailed below). Geoffrey Roberts, by contrast, covered the Soviet side of the book, so this response will primarily address the points he raised in his review.

Roberts has written a fair and insightful critique of our line of argument with regard to Stalin's postwar strategy in general and his views on the importance of the atomic bomb in particular. Overall, we were pleased with the constructive tone of Roberts' critique. One of

the world's leading experts on Stalin, Roberts has done a superb job in challenging some of the authors' assumptions, thereby contributing to a very intellectually stimulating debate.

As Roberts rightly notes, a central tenet of the book is that "the atomic bomb made the cold war inevitable because the problems it posed accentuated the differences generated by the American and Soviet conceptions of the postwar order." He contends, however, that the bomb was by no means as important as we claim in the book, and, as far as the Soviet side of the story is concerned, other factors played a greater role in Stalin's increasingly uncompromising postwar policy vis-à-vis his erstwhile allies.

Roberts argues that Stalin was slow to recognize the significance of the bomb – this is true. But it is also easy to overstate the case. The Soviet atomic project did not become the State's priority No. 1 until after Hiroshima. However, it is also clear that between September 1942 (the official beginning of the Soviet bomb effort) and August 1945 the Soviet atomic project widened in scope and attracted increasing government attention – seen, most notably, in the decision to place the project in Lavrentii Beria's hands in December 1944. Supporting Beria's leading role, the Chemical Industry Commissar Mikhail Pervukhin had argued that "in order to catch up with the foreign [countries] we must make the development of the uranium problem into the task of first-rate State importance."

In the meantime, the Soviets expended tremendous efforts on atomic espionage during the war years. It is true that, as Roberts points out, the Soviets spied "on every American industrial-scientific project they could penetrate." But surely atomic technology was one of the key targets of Soviet espionage. Considerable evidence points to the Soviets' growing realization of the importance of the bomb, and indeed suggests that the shock of Hiroshima was less of a shock to Stalin than one is tempted to assume at first glance.

And yet, in our treatment of the crucial period in early August, when, following the US bombing of Hiroshima Stalin ordered Soviet entry into the war against Japan, we tend to side with authors like Tsuyoshi Hasegawa and David Holloway, who, despite some of their disagreements, nevertheless suggest that Stalin *did* revise the schedule of Soviet invasion by 48 hours in response to Hiroshima (see the exchange between David Holloway and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa on Hasegawa's book *Racing the Enemy*, published by H-Diplo in 2006 and Geoffrey Roberts' communication to H-Diplo dated February 13, 2006). Since that memorable exchange, no new evidence has come to light to prove either side incorrect. While in 2007 the Russian Presidential Archive supposedly declassified a new batch of materials on the Soviet decision-making with regard to the Pacific War, none of these documents are yet in the public domain. So, our book is probably not the last word on the subject. But we would cautiously support the view that would give more weight to Hiroshima in Stalin's thinking in early August than Roberts allows in his critique.

Roberts also disputes our conclusions to the effect that the bomb made Stalin more reluctant in his negotiations with the allies in the fall of 1945 (specifically with reference to Molotov's behavior at the CFM meeting in London in September-October 1945). He argues that "there is no direct evidence that the bomb played any such role in Stalin's calculations and plenty of evidence to suggest that other factors were the operative ones." Here we can

agree, in part, with Roberts' statement, for, indeed, there is no direct evidence. The subject of the US atomic monopoly, for example, was not raised at the CFM meetings, with the significant exception of the notable Byrnes/Molotov exchange on September 13 – one of the very few instances on record of overt atomic diplomacy. Also, Stalin did not refer to the bomb in his famous correspondence with Molotov, unearthed by the Russian historian Vladimir Pechatnov, even when he pointed to the US / British pressure (“The allies are pressing you to break your will...”).

Some things are better left unsaid. The bomb was a reality. The Americans knew it. Stalin and Molotov knew it. It is reasonable to suppose that Stalin's perception of the US (that the US was a bully determined to impose its will on the Soviet Union) was seriously influenced by the fact that the US had the bomb, while the USSR did not. For Stalin, the bomb mattered not as a weapon of war but as a weapon of political intimidation. Now, here we have to be careful, for Stalin never said that much (not on the available record). Keeping in mind Stalin's pronouncements, in public and private, to the effect that “bombs don't win wars” we also have to infer Stalin's real attitude from the massive scale of the Soviet A-bomb effort, and from his occasionally revealing comments, as when he told Igor Kurchatov that he wanted a simple weapon, like the first locomotive engine – perhaps not entirely usable but potently symbolic.

Returning to the question of the CFM, Roberts offers a counterfactual: “if the A-bomb had not existed would it have made any difference to the outcome of the CMF or to the course of Soviet foreign policy? The short answer to this question is no...” Perhaps a longer answer would be more suitable here. The CFM, Roberts contends, “broke down primarily because of disputes in relation to Soviet control of Eastern Europe,” i.e. presumably US-Soviet disagreements over, *inter alia*, Romania and Bulgaria. In reality the meeting adjourned because of Molotov's insistence on kicking out the French and the Chinese from the discussion of the peace treaties (triggered, as we know, by Stalin's instruction to remain steadfast in the face of the Allied pressure). But, supposing Stalin did not cable his instruction, it is likely that the issue of peace treaties with Romania and Bulgaria would have not been resolved in any case, because of well-known US opposition to the Soviet-installed governments in the two countries. So in a sense, Roberts is right.

At a deeper level, though, we have to keep in mind that Soviet perception of US hostility (consider Molotov's frequent references to the fact that the US desired unfriendly regimes on the Soviet periphery, that US policy had changed, and ultimately Stalin's instructions to Molotov to “display complete adamancy”) cannot be duly appreciated without taking into account Soviet awareness of the bomb. In the Soviet eyes, the US was a bully – the bomb proved it, and a bully had to be resisted, or else any appearance of weakness would only lead to more US pressure. Would Stalin still perceive the US as a bully in the absence of the atomic bomb? Sure, but not to the same extent. If he did not feel so unequal and inferior, he would have been in a position to adopt a more reasonable attitude and even make magnanimous gestures, as he earlier did with regard to Poland, for instance.

We would also disagree with Roberts' assessment that what really concerned Stalin was not so much the Americans' possession of the A-bomb, but the massive conventional power

of the United States. In reality, Stalin was fairly sceptical of the US conventional power. "The current military power of the United States," he argued on one occasion, "is not very great. For the time being, the Soviet camp therefore enjoys a distinct superiority." In his view, Americans were overly reliant on their navy and their air force: "The U.S. has a large navy; but their navy can not play the decisive role in a war. The U.S. has a modern air force, but theirs is a weak air force, weaker than ours."<sup>2</sup> All of that was said in 1951 but in fact Stalin's views did not change that much between 1945 and 1951, except that, perhaps, he became more concerned about a possible war with the United States. Earlier, in the immediate postwar years, he was very sceptical of the US willingness to fight another war. In fact, there is no evidence that Stalin's concerns about the US conventional power played any role in his postwar planning. As for Roberts' argument that the US "continuing postwar deployment on a global scale" contributed to Stalin's calculations, this is certainly the case, but only because it indicated US unwillingness to return to a more isolationist policy of the interwar years.

This brings us to consider a further point, perceptively put forward in Roberts' critique, namely, Stalin's views on war and peace. Roberts argues that "Stalin was as much as voluntarist as he was a determinist, and believed that war – even in the capitalist world – was only inevitable if you allowed it to happen." Roberts goes on to argue that Stalin "believed in the possibility of prolonged peaceful coexistence between capitalism and socialism." We would agree that this is the case, without prejudice to our argument that Stalin believed in the inevitability of the eventual conflict. War could be postponed, even for a long time, yes –but not averted. In fact, a consideration of Stalin's views in the final years of his life would lead us to believe that he was becoming increasingly apprehensive of US intentions, seeing war just around the corner. Certainly Stalin was not "relaxed" in any sense about the atomic threat, as Roberts believes.

This is probably the right place to address David Kaiser's point that we have not given enough prominence to the role of the international class struggle in Stalin's thinking. This is admittedly the case. *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* portrays Stalin as a cynical practitioner of realpolitik, a view that is by no means unique in the historiography but somewhat at variance with more ideologically-sensitive studies of Stalin's foreign policy (e.g. Zubok/Pleshakov). The main reason for this neglect is that a detailed consideration of Stalin's policy making led us to believe that class struggle had surprisingly little effect on specific decisions taken; the key issues on the ground were always security and control. Kaiser is probably correct, though, in the sense that Stalin's ideological predispositions coloured his perceptions of his needs, as well as US intentions, much as the A-bomb, too, coloured his perceptions (see above). So this is a valid point of criticism. We would disagree, however, with another point that Kaiser puts forward – namely, the notion that Stalin's culpability for the Cold War somehow exonerates the US from responsibility and proves that the traditionalists were right after all. The book shows that Soviet

---

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir O. Pechatnov (trans. by Vladislav Zubok), "The Allies are pressing on you to break your will...," Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 26 (Woodrow Wilson Center: Washington D.C., 1999).

responsibility for the Cold War does not equate the absence of US responsibility; both sides were responsible. As a Chinese saying goes, it takes two hands to clap.

Now, to Roberts' remarks about our treatment of Soviet attitude towards international atomic control. He takes issue with our cynical dismissal of Soviet pronouncements on the subject as blatant propaganda. Roberts makes a reservation here to the effect that ours' is a "reasonable speculation, particularly in view of the Soviet dictator's proven cynicism and caution," but then goes on to make a counter-argument that Stalin was actually serious about international control. We would argue against this interpretation of Stalin's view on the premise that any genuine system of international control would require inspection of Soviet facilities. The weight of the documentation of the Soviet atomic project (in particular, Soviet obsession with secrecy) suggests that Stalin could never agree to any such inspections under any pretext. The volume of Soviet investments in the project would also indicate that Stalin would never go back on the decision to build the bomb. Roberts suggests that Stalin may have had second thoughts because "there was no certainty that the Soviet bomb project would succeed or that it would not take a very long time to complete." This statement is more applicable to the earlier stages of the Soviet atomic project (1942-43), when Stalin set unrealizable deadlines for the Soviet physicists to prove whether the bomb was feasible. After Hiroshima Stalin had no doubt that the Soviet bomb would be built, and in fact, he once again set ambitious (and equally unrealizable) deadlines to do so sooner rather than later. Once again, reasons of international prestige played a role in Stalin's decision to push for the bomb, for even if the United States renounced atomic weapons and destroyed their stock, it would forever be the power that had built the bomb while the Soviet Union would remain second best. This was not a choice Stalin was willing to make. This is why the Soviet performance at the deliberations of the UNAEC in New York was nothing but a farce.

---

**Copyright © 2009 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.** H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

---