



Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005)

Roundtable Editor: **Thomas Maddux**, CSU Northridge

Roundtable Participants:

Michael D. Gordin, Gar Alperovitz, Richard Frank, Barton Bernstein, David Holloway

Response to Barton Bernstein: Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, UC Santa Barbara

Barton Bernstein is the world's renowned authority on the atomic bomb issue whose knowledge of every conceivable piece of literature and archival evidence is unparalleled and whose trenchant criticism of scholarship on this issue has been well known. Therefore, I consider it to be a great honor to receive recognition from him that my book represents a "truly impressive accomplishment."

But one cannot write a book without expecting substantial criticisms from Bernstein. My book is no exception. In fact, he challenges my fundamental arguments that Truman and Stalin engaged in fierce "racing" in the endgame of the Pacific War and that Truman issued the Potsdam Proclamation, with the full expectation that this ultimatum would be rejected by the Japanese, to justify the dropping of the atomic bombs.

Bernstein disagrees with my interpretation of the Potsdam Proclamation. He argues that any reasonable reading of the Magic diplomatic intercepts in July and August would have convinced Truman and, for that matter, any other American policy makers that Japan was not near surrender, that the Japanese were hopelessly divided, and that revising the unconditional surrender demand would have emboldened the hard-liners within the Japanese government to fight the war to the end, thus prolonging the war. He further argues that even after Alamogordo Truman considered Soviet entry into the war "militarily desirable" and that Truman "had not acted to block or impede Soviet entry." He fundamentally disagrees with my interpretation on "racing" between Truman and Stalin, since my argument that "Truman believed the bomb would be a decisive weapon speedily ending the war, before mid-August and before Soviet entry" is "incorrect, contrary to evidence."

I. Truman and Magic Intercepts

Bernstein's argument about the Potsdam Proclamation has striking similarities to Richard Frank's argument. Both contend that the judgment of Truman and Byrnes to remove the passage promising the maintenance of "a constitutional monarchy under the current dynasty" from Paragraph 12 of Stimson's draft was based on their reading of the Magic diplomatic intercepts.

Strangely, Bernstein cites merely the Togo-Sato exchange after issuance of the Potsdam Proclamation to prove that Truman and other policy makers concluded that Japan was not near surrender, and therefore, that any modification of unconditional surrender might embolden the Japanese hard-liners. But the decision to remove the passage in question had been made long before the specific Togo-Sato exchange cited by Bernstein. This particular exchange, therefore, cannot be taken as decisive evidence to explain Truman's and Byrnes' motivation behind the removal of this passage. It might be possible to argue that Togo's August 2 telegram to Sato proves that even after the issuance of the Potsdam Proclamation the Japanese government was hopelessly divided, and hence there was no reason for Truman to undo the decision to drop the bomb. But even this argument is undermined by Togo's specific reference to the Japanese government's "disposition" to make the Potsdam terms the "basis for negotiations." Bernstein defends Truman's decision not to explore this "disposition," presumably because Truman had no confidence in Japan's accepting these terms or because he was not interested in a negotiated settlement. This seems to indicate that unless the Japanese government offered unconditional acceptance of the Potsdam terms, Truman would have had no interest in reversing the decision to drop the bomb. In other words, Truman was not really interested in Japan's answer short of unconditional surrender once the Potsdam Proclamation was issued, as I argue in my book.

Two levels of analysis are needed to assess the meaning of the Magic intercepts. First, we must examine to what extent the picture that was depicted by the Magic intercepts corresponded to reality. Here, as I argue in my book, the world according to Magic did not necessarily correspond exactly to the more complex Japanese domestic situation. If it is inaccurate to conclude, as revisionist historians do, that the promise of the maintenance of the emperor system would have immediately led to Japan's acceptance of surrender, it is equally inaccurate to conclude, as Bernstein and Frank do, that such promise could not possibly have been rejected and that it would have emboldened the militarists and thus prolong the war. After the emperor's involvement in the decision to seek Moscow's mediation to terminate the war in July, the power balance between the war party and the peace party was subtly shifting in favor of the latter, and there was little doubt that the promise for the maintenance of "a constitutional monarchy under the current dynasty" would have emboldened the peace party. In fact, the peace party's strategy was to send Prince Konoe to Moscow without attaching any terms and to have the emperor impose the terms agreed upon in Moscow on the war party. Togo's reluctance to spell out the terms was not merely dictated by the hopeless political division, as Bernstein concludes, but also by his conscious strategy to circumvent the war party's opposition. Furthermore, Konoe's minimal condition that his advisers recommended was limited only to the preservation of the imperial house. Far from Bernstein's (and Frank's) assertion that the Japanese would most definitely have rejected the terms, even if they included that promise, one cannot easily dismiss a possibility that they might eventually have accepted surrender with the assurance of the preservation of "a constitutional monarchy under the current dynasty," although surely this formula would have encountered the war party's persistent resistance. There is little doubt, however, that this formula would have strengthened the peace party.

Of course, Japanese reality was one thing, and how the American policy makers interpreted Japanese political reality to be is another matter. It is therefore possible to argue that Truman and Byrnes had no choice but to construct their decision on the depiction of Japanese reality presented by Magic intercepts. So, the second question is: Did Truman and Byrnes decide to remove the passage promising the maintenance of a constitutional monarchy from Stimson's draft, based on their judgment that revising unconditional surrender would embolden the hard-liners in Japan? Two problems arise if one answers this question affirmatively. First, not everyone drew the conclusion that Bernstein and Frank draw from Magic. In fact, Stimson, McCloy, and Forrestal came to the opposite conclusion, primarily from Togo's July 12 dispatch to Sato, that the inclusion of this promise would encourage the peace party to seek the early termination of the war. There was no unanimity among the American policy makers as to how to read Magic.

But more importantly, there is no evidence to indicate that Truman and Byrnes made their decision on the basis of the Magic intercepts alone. If that were the case, there was absolutely nothing to prevent Truman and Byrnes from explaining the reason for their decision to Stimson. But when Stimson met Truman on July 16, Byrnes on July 17, and Truman on July 24, neither Truman nor Byrnes explained to Stimson that their reading of the Magic intercepts depicted a completely different picture from that presented by Stimson. Especially, his July 24 meeting was important in view of the intercepted Togo's July 21 dispatch to Sato, which I discussed at length in the previous post. This is what Stimson wrote in his diary:

"I then spoke of the importance which I attributed to the reassurance of the Japanese on the continuance of their dynasty, and I had felt that the insertion of that in the formal warning was important and might be the thing that would make or mar their acceptance. I hoped that the President would watch carefully so that the Japanese might be reassured verbally through diplomatic channels if it was found that they were hanging fire on that one point. He said that he had that in mind, and that he would take care of it." [1]

If Truman had carefully analyzed the Magic intercepts and concluded that the inclusion of this promise would embolden the military hard liners, why didn't he say so? Byrnes did refer to Togo's July 21 telegram, but as I already stated in my previous post in my response to Frank, this telegram did not play a decisive role in their decision, since the decision to remove the passage in question from Stimson's draft had been already made previous to their receiving this telegram.

II. Soviet Factor

One common approach shared by Bernstein and Frank is to put the Potsdam Proclamation merely in U.S.-Japanese relations, but to ignore the Soviet factor. If one compares Stimson's original draft with the final text of the Potsdam Proclamation, one notices two important changes. The first was the deletion of the passage that promised the maintenance of a constitutional monarchy. The second was deletion of the passages

that dealt with the Soviet Union and the deletion of the USSR from the title of the Proclamation. I argue in my book that all three factors—the Soviet entry into the war, unconditional surrender, and the atomic bomb—were closely related.

Bernstein's argument about the Soviet factor is subtle. He accepts that Byrnes was "clearly eager to end the war without Soviet entry into the war." But Bernstein makes a distinction between Byrnes and Truman. For Truman, "a Japanese surrender without Soviet entry would have been attractive," but he did not attempt to exclude the Soviet Union. "He had not acted to block or impede Soviet entry," since he knew that the Soviet entry into the war would accrue benefits to the United States.

As Bernstein himself admits, Truman had little he could do to "stop or speed up Soviet entry into the war." Truman had no control over Soviet actions with regard to its entry into the war. If so, it makes little sense to argue whether "he acted to block or impede Soviet entry." Truman's action with regard to the Soviet Union, however, was not as benign as Bernstein depicts here. If Soviet entry into the war accrued certain benefits to the United States, he certainly did not do anything to "speed up" its entry into the war. At his first Stalin-Truman meeting on July 17, Truman did not solicit Stalin's consent to enter the war. Despite Harry Hopkins' pledge that the issue of a joint ultimatum against Japan would be placed on the agenda at the Potsdam Conference, Truman consciously excluded Stalin from deliberations of the ultimatum, and deleted any reference to the Soviet Union from the final text of the Proclamation. Byrnes distributed the text of the Proclamation to the press before he sent it to the Soviet delegation, and when Stalin asked Truman to invite him to append his signature to the Potsdam Proclamation, Truman refused that request. Of course, he took no action to "block or impede Soviet entry," because he had no means to do so. But he did everything else to dissociate the United States from Soviet entry into the war.

Stimson wrote on July 23:

"[I] told him that I had sent for further more definite information as to the time of operation [of the atomic bomb] from Harrison. He told me that he had the warning message [Potsdam Proclamation] which we prepared on his desk, and had accepted our most recent change in it, and that he proposed to shoot it out as soon as he heard the definite day of the operation. We had a brief discussion about Stalin's recent expansions and he confirmed what I have heard. But he told me that the United States was standing firm and he was apparently relying greatly upon the information as to S-1 [A-bomb project].

After lunch and a short rest I received Generals Marshall and Arnold, and had in McCloy and Bundy at the conference. The President had told me at a meeting in the morning that he was very anxious to know whether Marshall felt that we needed the Russians in the war or whether we could get along without them, and that was one of the subjects we talked over."

[2]

On the following day Stimson told Truman that he could infer from the conference with Marshall that "the Russians were not needed." Stimson then showed the president the most recent report from Harrison about "the dates of the operations." Stimson wrote:

"He said that was just what he wanted, that he was highly delighted and that it gave him his cue for his warning. He said he had just sent his warning to Chiang Kai-shek to see if he would join in it, and as soon as that was cleared by Chiang he, Truman, would release the warning and that would fit right in time with the program we had received from Harrison." [3]

Stimson's diary quoted above makes it abundantly clear that in Truman's mind the issues of Soviet entry into the war, the deletion of the passage concerning a constitutional monarchy, and the atomic bomb were closely connected. When Forrestal told Byrnes that Truman had said "his principal objective at Potsdam would be to get Russia in the war," Byrnes responded that "it was most probable that the President's view had changed; certain that was not now my view." [4]

Truman's effort to exclude the Soviet Union must be understood in tandem with Stalin's anxiousness with which he wished to be invited to sign the Potsdam Proclamation. To append his signature to the Potsdam ultimatum was to justify the Soviet violation of the Neutrality Pact with Japan. Stalin had already received Hopkins' assurance that the issue of joint ultimatum would be placed on the agenda of the Potsdam Conference. Stalin came to Potsdam with a Soviet version of the Potsdam Proclamation, which, like Truman's Potsdam Proclamation, included the demand for unconditional surrender. Truman's refusal to invite him to append Stalin's signature to the Potsdam Proclamation convinced Stalin that Truman was determined to force Japan's surrender before Soviet entry into the war. As I stated in the previous post in response to Holloway's comments, I believe that Stalin, prompted by Truman's refusal, attempted to move up the date of attack by one to two days.

The Soviet declaration of war that Molotov handed to Sato on August 8 (Moscow time) stated that the Soviet government decided to enter the war against Japan, since Japan had rejected the Potsdam Proclamation, which the Soviet government had joined with the invitation of the Allies, an obvious lie that Stalin concocted to justify the violation of the Neutrality Pact. When the news of the Soviet entry into the war reached Washington, Truman hastily held a news conference and read a brief statement that the Soviets entered the war. Byrnes also issued a statement in which he explained that the Soviet government had the legal right to enter the war on the basis of the Moscow Declaration of 1943 and the United Nations' Charter, but this statement pointedly implied that the Soviet government did not join the Potsdam Proclamation. Truman's news conference and Byrnes' statement betrayed the profound disappointment felt by the American leaders at the Soviet entry into the war.

Bernstein does not see any “racing” between Truman and Stalin. But if one carefully examines contemporary documents both from the American and the Soviet sides, one clearly see the fierce “racing” between the two leaders.

III. The Atomic Bomb as a Decisive Weapon

Bernstein criticizes my understanding of the atomic bomb as “fundamentally wrong,” since no policy makers had the expectations that one or two atomic bombs alone would be sufficient to force Japan’s surrender. Frank (in *Downfall*), Gordin (in his forthcoming book), and Holloway (in the forthcoming article) all agree with Bernstein.

In order to make this argument, Bernstein urges us not to take too literally “scattered, rather hyperbolic” words by Truman and others that state their expectations that the atomic bombs would be sufficient to force Japan’s surrender, but to rely on Truman’s actions as more reliable indicators. I find this historical method rather dubious.

As I argue in my book, I agree that both Stimson and Marshall did not believe that the atomic bombings would be sufficient to force Japan’s surrender. Incidentally, that was the fundamental reason why Marshall considered Soviet entry into the war an essential ingredient in the recipe for Japan’s surrender. I do not find Bernstein’s evidence disputing my contention convincing, however. And there is strong evidence to indicate that Truman and Byrnes actually believed that the atomic bombings would end the war quickly either before Soviet entry into the war, and if not before, shortly thereafter to minimize Soviet expansion.

To prove that Truman did not believe that the atomic bombs would be decisive in forcing Japan’s surrender, Bernstein argues that the president did not issue any order from Potsdam for demobilization and economic reconversion “to get ready quickly for an imminent peace.” But any prudent leader, in the midst of war, would not rush to the economic reconversion, until the war became finally over, since the final date of surrender was still unclear. Similarly, the Harrison-Patterson conversation and Krug’s view on weapons production are not necessarily convincing evidence to prove that Truman and all policymakers did not consider that surrender was imminent. To borrow Bernstein’s own metaphor of a doctor and a dying patient, even if one may know that death is imminent, one does not usually jump to organize the details of the funeral before the patient dies.

Forrestal’s memo to the President that suggested an alternative candidate for the position of commander for the forthcoming invasion of Japan’s homeland is likewise not necessarily a convincing piece of evidence that Forrestal believed that the war would last until November 1, the date of Operation Olympic. In my view, this letter should be understood in the context of the Navy-Army rivalry. Already at the July 23 meeting, Marshall explained to Stimson about the difficulty “to get along with MacArthur.” He explained: “Marshall has been spending most of his time in conferences in smoothing down the Navy. [5] As late as August 30, the Navy and the Army quarreled over who

was going to occupy Okinawa. This is what Admiral Cooke told General Hull on August 30:

“Well, there’s a question about transferring command of Okinawa to MacArthur for Olympic. We didn’t think it was necessary to transfer that command, but we went along with you and everybody, whether they agreed with it or not, carried it out. Now, there’s an order that they should adhere and it has been deliberately changed, and there was no reason for it. Nimitz can occupy it..And it was an agreed decision, and we just feel here that any time that MacArthur decides to change things without reference to Joint Chief of Staff and it’s upheld, we might as well turn in our suits as Joint Chief of Staff.” [6]

Looking at Forrestal’s August 8 letter to Truman in this light, it is possible to argue that what the Navy Secretary was concerned about was the position that MacArthur held as the commander of Operation Olympic. The letter does not indicate whether Forrestal really believed that the war would last as long as November 1.

Frank cites Joseph Grew’s memorandum to Byrnes on August 7 as evidence indicating that Grew saw Japan not close to peace “on terms acceptable to the U.S.” But on another memorandum sent to Byrnes on the same day (August 7), Grew stated that “the end of the Pacific War might come suddenly and unexpectedly,” and recommended the names of political advisers to be attached to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, anticipating the impending end of the war.[7]

Walter Brown, Byrnes’ trusted aide, wrote in the July 18 entry of his diary: “JFB [Byrnes] had hoped Russian declaration of war against Japan would come out [of] this conference. No[w] he thinks[s] United States and United Kingdom will have to issue [a] joint statement giving Japans two weeks to surrender or fac[e] destruction. (Secret weapon will be ready by [t]hat time.)” Further he wrote on July 24: “JFB still hoping for time, believing after atomic bomb Japan will surrender and Russia will not get in to much on the kill, thereby being in a position to press for claims against China.” [8] Forrestal wrote: “Byrnes said he was most anxious to get the Japanese affairs over with before the Russians got in with particular reference to Dairen and Port Arthur.”[9]

One might say that those statements only refer to Byrnes, not Truman. But Byrnes was at the time the closest adviser to Truman. Furthermore, there are pieces of evidence to indicate that Truman believed in the effectiveness of the atomic bomb that might end the war before the Soviet entry into the war. Stimson’s diary I quoted above shows that on July 23 Truman instructed Stimson to have a conference with Marshall to find out whether the Russians were needed to end the war. This instruction was given to Stimson after Truman requested “more definite information as to the time of operation from Harrison.” The implication is quite clear: Truman wished to know whether Marshall considered it possible to end the war with the atomic bombs but without the Soviets. Although Marshall’s answer on the effectiveness of the atomic bomb was ambiguous, Stimson reported to Truman, inaccurately in my view, about Marshall’s “feeling that the

Russians were not needed.” [10] It seems possible to deduce from all this that Truman was hopeful, if not absolutely certain, to be able to end the war with the atomic bombs before the Soviets entered the war around August 15.

Truman received the news about the atomic bombing on Hiroshima on the USS Augusta, off the coast of Newfoundland, on the way back from Potsdam to Washington. All the eyewitnesses were unanimous about what they saw: Truman was jubilant about this news. Unable to contain his excitement, he jumped to his feet. Why was he so excited and jubilant? Unless one subscribes to the speculation that Truman was excited about the news of the mass killing of the Japanese—an unlikely case, in my view-- it is reasonable to assume that he was excited about the possibility of the early termination of the war, possibly, before the Soviets joined the war, and he was above all excited about the fact that the “timetable” that he and Byrnes had mapped out worked exactly as they had planned. After Truman read the statement about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, a young sailor sitting beside him said: “I guess I’ll get home sooner now.” [11] There is no doubt that Truman shared the same feeling. Truman did not tell this sailor: “No, son, the war will go on a little longer.”

In my view Bernstein overstates his case that all the American policymakers were unanimous in their skepticism that the atomic bombs would end the war. This is certainly true to Marshall and Stimson, but whether Grew, Forrestal, and McCloy shared that skepticism is not conclusively proven. Most importantly, there is ample contemporary evidence to show that Byrnes and Truman expected the atomic bombs to be effective in inducing Japan’s surrender before the Soviet entry into the war.

V. Conclusion

I disagree with Bernstein’s criticisms of the three fundamental issues—the relationship between the Magic intercepts and Truman/Byrnes’s decision to delete the passage promising the maintenance of a constitutional monarchy, Truman’s view on the role of Soviet entry into the war, and American policymakers’ perception of the effectiveness of the atomic bombs. Thinking about the comments made by Bernstein and Frank, who view the issue involving the Potsdam Proclamation narrowly in terms of U.S.-Japanese relations, I am more convinced of the need to broaden the scope of our inquiry by bringing the Soviet factor to center stage.

This roundtable discussion has served as a useful forum for elevating our research on the ending of the Pacific War to a higher level. The comments made by all the contributors have made me go back to the sources and reevaluate them. As a result, I have revised my interpretations on a number of issues. Bernstein’s acknowledgement of my “fair-mindedness” and “generous dealings with scholars who agree substantially or disagree substantially” is a fitting tribute to this extremely useful roundtable discussion. I am glad to be a part of this spirited, but civilized discourse on one of the most contentious and important issues in the 20th century.

H-Diplo Roundtable- *Racing the Enemy Roundtable*, Author's Reply to Bernstein
[Hasegawa]

Notes:

- [1] Stimson Diary, July 25, 1945, Sterling Library, Yale University.
- [2] Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945.
- [3] Stimson Diary, July 24, 1945.
- [4] Walter Mills, ed., *Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 78.
- [5] Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945.
- [6] Telephone conversation, General Hull and Admiral Cooke, 0855, 30 August 1945, OPD, Exec. File #17, Item #35a, Folder #1, Telephone Conversations 6 Aug-25 Aug, 45, RG 165, National Archives.
- [7] Grew to Byrnes, August 7, 1945, Letters of Joseph Grew, 1945, Grew Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- [8] Walter Brown Diary, July 18, July 24, 1945, Folder 602, Folder 54(1), James Byrnes Papers, Clemson University.
- [9] Mills, ed., *Forrestal Diaries*, p. 78.
- [10] Stimson Diary, July 23, July 24, 1945.
- [11] "Off the Atlantic Coast, Monday, August 6," Papers of Charles G. Rose, Harry S. Truman Library

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