

To what extent did the US possession of the world's only nuclear arsenal influence troop withdrawal terms from Chinese territory as discussed with the Soviet Union in the Moscow

Conference of 1945?

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A: Plan of Investigation

The post-World War II era was a time of tension between the leading superpowers, United States and the USSR. Decisions such as troop withdrawal conditions from Chinese territory were made under the duress of imbalanced powers, specifically the US nuclear arsenal. Therefore, the task is to understand the extent to which Byrnes used the nuclear arsenal as leverage during discussion at the Moscow Conference of 1945.

The approach of this paper will use the historical method of evaluating the effect of nuclear weapons on diplomatic discussions. United States and Soviet top-level documents, such as transcripts of cabinet members' talks regarding nuclear war and presidential security briefings concerning global nuclear threat will be analyzed in order to evaluate the importance of the possession of nuclear warheads. Foreign policy of these two nations will be evaluated with respect to other major world events in order to appreciate the tensions on the world stage. In addition, government responses to Chinese requests will be analyzed to determine the strength of external factors of troop withdrawal terms. The scope of this investigation will deal with the tensions between the clashing foreign policy of two powerful nations in the midst of world tensions, but also with the influence that individual diplomats have in making global decisions.

B: Summary of Evidence

Importance of Possession of Nuclear Warheads

- Byrnes previously linked the usage of nuclear warheads to keeping the Soviets out of fighting in Japan (Paterson 228)
- During the meeting, Molotov, acting as the Soviet diplomat, requested to move the item of “atomic energy” to the end of the agenda for the meeting. (Byrnes, *Speaking* 111)

- The Soviets joined in sponsoring the creation of an Atomic Energy Commission (Byrnes, *Speaking* 111)
- The Soviets have known since the Potsdam conference in July of the American nuclear warheads, but Stalin revealed to his cabinet his belief that they would be ineffective and not have a significant role. (Molotov 55)
- Byrnes offered the Soviet Union an atomic role which would play out over many years based on his own belief of continuing the American atomic monopoly for years to come. (Wallace 52)
- Byrnes brought one of the leading scientists within the nuclear program to the talk and agreed to allow Soviets a greater access to atomic research in return for cooperation. (Robertson 451)
- The results of negotiations concluded in an impasse as regarding to which UN agency would end up controlling the Atomic Energy Commission. (Robertson 453)
- No discussion was held about the scientific or technical matters in regards to the atomic bomb at the conference, and Byrnes revealed that there was a general indifference from the Soviets towards the bomb. (Byrnes *Report* 7)
- Byrnes's purpose to bring up the bomb was to provide the United States more "breathing space" to maneuver policies. (Robertson 413)

Diplomatic Tensions and Mistakes

- Byrnes was seen by government officials and cabinet members to often go into diplomatic negotiations with no clear or fixed plan. (Wallace 60)

- Byrnes had full power over US foreign policy by the time he became the Secretary of State, and spoke with the authority of the president on atomic bomb related issues. (Alperovitz 36)
- Byrnes believed that the bomb would be important leverage that would allow America to impose their terms on the USSR. (Alperovitz 214)
- Byrnes believed that the bomb was needed in order to make the Soviets respect America. (Alperovitz 583)
- Byrnes also “looked to the newly developed atomic bomb as the way of keeping the Russians out” and keeping them under control. (Paterson 226)
- Molotov was considerably independent of the Soviet Government throughout the discussions and negotiations at Moscow. (Molotov 67)
- Byrnes did not keep Truman informed about his diplomatic goals and pursued a different atomic policy than the one he promised Truman. (Chace *Sharing* 138)
- Byrnes intended to get the Soviets to release a statement regarding Chinese policy by the end of the conference. (Wallace 58)
- Byrnes later admits that many of his actions in this conference were driven by necessity, not conviction of what to do. (Bernstein 39)
- The United States was under diplomatic stress after the abrupt ending of the war, but Byrnes took an opposing stance on the issue. (Munro-Leighton 459)

Weakness due to War

- Soviet troops withdrew from Manchuria at the request of the Chinese government. (Byrnes *Report* 8)

- American forces planned on departing China as soon as Japanese troops were disarmed. (Byrnes *Report* 5)
- The Soviets were engaging in conflicts in the Middle East (Chace *Year Zero* 68)
- The United States was becoming entangled into armed conflict in Turkey and other key regions of the Middle East in June of 1945. (Leffler 809)
- Molotov proposes a simultaneous withdrawal of both Soviet and American troops from China, but Byrnes opposes. (Wallace 67)

C: Evaluation of Sources

Speaking Frankly is an autobiography of James F. Byrnes, the leading American diplomat for US-Soviet relationships. Written in 1947, in the midst of the Cold War and shortly after Byrnes' tenure as the Secretary of State, this book is Byrnes' magnum opus. Byrnes' purpose is to create his own legacy by relating direct scenes and meetings where US foreign policy was actively determined. Because Byrnes' thoughts directly translated into American foreign diplomacy decisions, the origins of this autobiography allow for examination of the expected outcomes of his atomic bomb arguments on the conference discussions. This is valuable because by contrasting Byrnes' optimistic outlook of the weapon with its dismal results in the conference, the task can be more fully answered. In addition, because Byrnes' purpose was to establish his legacy to well-read historians of his time, Byrnes includes his own analysis of the effectiveness of arguments made at Moscow. This is valuable because Byrnes is privy to exclusive information within the meeting in regards to Molotov's reaction to the bomb that no other source is able to provide.

However, because the origin of this autobiography is the midst of the Cold War, Byrnes' was limited by the political tensions of the time. Speaking as a semi-official United States representative, he could neither provoke nor pander the Soviet Union, which is a limitation because our task is also to understand the Russian response. In addition, because Byrnes' purpose was to create a positive legacy, he only included details that portray a master diplomat. This is a limitation because it resulted in an omission of preconference discussions with the president that would have harmed his reputation, but would have better answered the task.

“Sharing the Atom Bomb” is an article written by James Chace, the managing editor of Foreign Affairs and the most widely read foreign affairs historian of the late 20th century. This article's origin is in 1996, after the conclusion of the Cold War, which is valuable because Chace is able to use declassified information such as presidential memos to support his thesis against Byrnes' effectiveness at Moscow. His purpose in writing this article is to propose a new thesis for understanding Byrnes' role at the Moscow conference. Using a postmodern approach, Chace criticizes Byrnes' decisions at Moscow, arguing that Byrnes was foolish in taking a domestic approach to an international problem. This purpose is valuable to this task, which seeks to understand how Byrnes used the nuclear arsenal as leverage.

Because this article originates after the conclusion of the Cold War, Chace was likely influenced by post Moscow events when developing this thesis. This is a limitation for this investigation, which seeks to understand the effect of the atom bomb only during the Moscow Conference of 1945. Also, because the purpose of the article is to advance a new thesis for atomic foreign policy, Chace may have fallen into the selectivity trap by ignoring the pressure that the atomic bomb placed on Moscow foreign policies. His purpose is therefore another limitation to comprehending the Russian response at the Moscow Conference.

D: Analysis

Although nuclear missiles were a major issue during the Cold War, the early understanding of nuclear missiles limited its effectiveness. Throughout the Moscow Conference, the Soviet diplomats made it clear to Byrnes that the bomb was not considered a serious issue and that using it as leverage would have little effect on the talks. Molotov, acting as the USSR diplomat, starts the meeting by moving the issue of atomic energy to the end of the meeting, which shows his disdain for the issue and implying that the Soviet Union would not be intimidated by this new weapon. This carefully calculated move reflected the Russian culture of refusing to “bow down” to a greater power without first testing it. As the Soviets understood the extent of the bomb’s power since August, they were assured that the US could not immediately launch large scale nuclear warfare. As a result, Stalin and Molotov did not respond to Secretary of State Byrnes’s comments challenging Soviet safety. David Robertson argues that the move was made to ease tensions, not to show the USSR’s disdain for the bomb. He claims that this treaty would be reversible in the future, stating that “the obvious result was to be the Soviet Union's rejection of the proposal in UN debate” (Robertson 453). However, his argument does not consider Molotov’s notes before the meeting, which reflected how the Soviet government had considered the bomb as being insignificant at the time.

While the Soviets minimized the effect of the nuclear warheads, Secretary of State Byrnes was entirely focused on it. Because of his belief that the bomb would give America sufficient leverage to conduct all kinds of diplomatic action, he came into the conference with great power and spoke authoritatively on every issue. However, this course of action was foolish. He used domestic tactics in foreign relations, resulting in diplomatic failure as Molotov responded coolly to his provocations, diminishing the apparent power of the bomb. Additionally,

because Byrnes did not consider the opinions of other cabinet members, he led the US into an unpleasant relationship regarding atomic supremacy. This resulted in a divided opinion within US government that reduced the effectiveness the bomb.

Finally, both the USSR and the United States were fatigued from World War II and accepted most withdrawal conditions proposed by China, thus reducing the effectiveness of nuclear weapons as leverage on the issue. As China continued to have internal and external conflicts, both the USSR and the US opted to take a hands-off approach, agreeing to remove troops as soon as Japanese troops were disarmed. This agreement, between the US and China as well as between the USSR and China was a result of preexisting diplomatic tensions. In an effort to continue peaceful negotiations and to become eventual allies, the United States decided to leave China, revealing a more diplomatic reason for the withdrawals. This refutes the belief that the US applied coercive method to get withdrawal terms.

E. Conclusion

The US Possession of the world's only nuclear arsenal influenced the conditions of withdrawal terms to change foreign treaties by a very small extent, as the disregard that the Soviet Union had to a superior weapon of war, the misguidance of United States diplomat Byrnes as to the importance of the nuclear warhead, and the weakness of both countries due to World War II had larger impacts on the terms and conditions of troop withdrawal. Although tensions would gradually build up in the coming year, atomic warfare still seemed to be distant on the horizon and far from diplomatic minds at the conclusion of World War II. Therefore, troop withdrawal terms from Chinese territory was influenced by American nuclear warheads to a very small extent.

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