The Man Who Knows Tells of: The Decision to Use The Atomic Bomb

BY Henry L. Stimson

IN RECENT years there has been much comment about the decision to use atomic bombs in attacks on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a participant in this decision, I believe it is my duty to set the record straight. The decision was made by our Government in recent years, and it is entirely proper that it should be widely known. The evidence is now in the public record and can be examined by any independent reader interested in the matter. It is the evidence which led up to the attack on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. All the facts are in the public record as far as I am concerned.

In the history of this country there were three events in which I was involved. The first was during the war in Europe, when I was Secretary of War. I was in charge of the committee that decided to use the atomic bomb. The second was when I was Secretary of State, responsible for the decision to attack Japan. The third was when I was Secretary of War in World War II, when the decision to attack Japan was made. In all three events, the decision was made by the President of the United States.

In these events, what follows is an account of the decisions made in the above-mentioned cases, as I recall them. The facts as I recall them are the facts as I found them in the records and in my clear recollection.

Plans and Preparations

Henry L. Stimson

A-Bombs Dropped on Japan All U. S. Had

Former Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson disclosed yesterday that the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945, were the only two that were successfully employed. Stimson also disclosed in an article in Harper's Magazine that military leaders were convinced that the bomb would be of little value, but major fighting would not end before the latter part of 1946 at the earliest with an unadjusted cost of over one million casualties to American forces alone.

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The unprecedented achievement of atomic fission had occurred in Germany in 1938, and it was known that the Germans had continued their experiments. The field was relatively new and the doors were open ahead of us, and it was vital that they should not be the first to bring atomic power to a new stage of development. The first to develop the weapon, we should have a new great instrument that our enemies would be in awe of and we would be ahead of them. From 1941 to 1945, did ever I hear it suggested by the President, the Secretary of War, or any of the experts involved in our work, that atomic energy should not be used in the war. All of us, of course, undersecretaries of war, military and civilian, knew that the doors of such a devastating weapon: President Roosevelt parlayed the knowledge of the existence of the new weapon with Russia, and in the end convinced them that it should be used.

The atomic bomb was not dropped at any time during the war. But we must do better than that. We have no choice. The decision to drop the atomic bomb was the decision to drop the first atomic bomb. This was to be done at the Alamogordo Reservation in New Mexico. It was thus time for detailed consideration of the potentialities of the atomic bomb. The word was not developed into a reality.

The extraordinary story of the successful development of the atomic bomb has been well told elsewhere. As time went on, it became clear that the weapon would not be available in time for action. The atomic bomb was a weapon of the future. It was not to be used in this war. It was successfully ended by the use of what are now called conventional weapons. The war was won by the combination of our nuclear war effort at hand. By the nature of atomic chain reactions, it was impossible to stop with certainty that a nuclear war would be stopped. In a full-scale experiment; nevertheless it was considered exceedingly unlikely that we would be able to stop the chain reaction within the first 100 megatons of the atomic bomb. This was to be done at the Alamogordo Reservation in New Mexico. It was thus time for detailed consideration of the potentialities of the atomic bomb. The word was not developed into a reality.