

## CHAPTER 2

### THE US AIR FORCE AND ARMS CONTROL: THE EARLY YEARS

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This chapter addresses arms control and the US Air Force prior to 1953. I use “air force” as a generic term to describe that branch of the U.S. Army that in 1947 became an independent service. For the most part, the historical evolution of the Air Force—first an aeronautical division of the War Department’s Signal Corps in 1907, then the aviation section in 1914, then (briefly) a division of military aeronautics in 1918, then the Army Air Service in 1918, then the Army Air Corps in 1926 and Army Air Forces in 1941—is of significant interest to students of modern air power who want to understand military organization and bureaucratic politics. It is less relevant to the arms control story.

As for arms control, I begin the discussion with the Hague Conference of 1899. By that time, the use of non-dirigible balloons for military purposes was over a century old and the world was on the verge of a new age in military aviation. Count Zeppelin conducted his first flight of a powered dirigible in 1900, followed three years later by the first flight of a manned, heavier-than-air aircraft at Kitty Hawk by the Wright brothers. The 1899 Hague Conference represented the first attempt to bring air power under arms control. It thus is an appropriate place to begin this story.

#### ARMS CONTROL AND AIR POWER BEFORE WORLD WAR II

In August 1898, the Russian foreign minister on orders of Tsar Nicholas II issued a circular note proposing an international conference to address a host of issues on the state of international relations, pending arms races, potential reductions in armaments, and the laws of war. One of the topics specifically mentioned in the note was a possible prohibition on “the discharge of any kind of projectiles or explosives from balloons or by similar means.”<sup>1</sup> The United States agreed to attend the meeting. An American delegation appointed by President McKinley included five members: three civilians and two uniformed military officers. Captain Alfred T. Mahan represented the US Navy (one of the major issues to be addressed at the Hague was whether and, if so, how to extend the laws of land warfare to maritime operations). Army Captain Brian Crozier, an ordnance specialist, represented the US Army.

The American delegation went under instructions that stipulated inter alia that nothing agreed at the Hague should unduly restrain “the inventive genius of our people in the direction of devising means of defense.”<sup>2</sup> Captain Crozier brokered the deal at the First Hague Conference that allowed agreement on the question of rules governing bombardment from the air. When the discussions in committee deadlocked on whether to seek a permanent ban on aerial bombardment, Crozier proposed a five-year prohibition, arguing that the balloon bombing of the day, which was indiscriminate and ineffective, should be prohibited, but that future technologies might make bombing more discriminate and thus more militarily effective.<sup>3</sup> The five-year restriction was adopted by the full conference in plenary session and confirmed in Washington. A separate committee at the Hague adopted rules governing warfare which, while primarily aimed at other forms of combat, had relevance to air war, e.g., prohibiting bombardment of undefended towns, requiring advance warning of bombardment, and the like.

By the time the Second Hague Conference convened in 1907, a race in aerial armaments was well underway. The United States and Britain favored an extension of the five-year prohibition but were unable to carry the day. The arms race intensified as Germany stepped up Zeppelin production and France produced heavier-than-air combat aircraft. In 1911, an airplane was used for the first time in combat (by Italy in Libya in the war with Turkey) to drop bombs from the air. When World War I broke out, there was a spurt of development in military aviation. Although strategic bombardment remained peripheral to the central conduct of the war, it did take place and in the immediate aftermath of World War I, this new form of warfare appeared to a number of strategists to offer a means for avoiding the carnage of stalemated trench combat, to bring any future such confrontation to conclusion. Martin Middlebrook, the respected British historian of air warfare, captures the mood of the times nicely:

Let us draw up a list of the main points that emerged from that first use of the bomber aircraft; they were all to be seen again in the Second World War: the vulnerability of civilians when airmen attempted to bomb industrial targets in poor bomb-aiming conditions; the effect on civilian morale and the apparent conclusion that this would quickly break under sufficiently heavy attack; the belief that concentration on one particular type of industry would cause a more widespread industrial collapse; the myth of the self-defending daylight-bomber formation and the inevitable turning to less efficient bombing by night; the

controversy over when a city was a legitimate target; the increasing diversions of manpower from the fighting fronts by both attackers and defenders; and the dreams of whole fleets of bombers that must prove decisive. For those who looked ahead to the use of the bomber in the next war, all the signs were there in the one just ended.<sup>4</sup>

World War I was tremendously destructive and was followed by a host of postwar efforts to control war and preparations for war. One of the major issues raised in this regard was the question of how to protect civilians. During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson was explicit: “I desire no sort of participation by the Air Service of the United States in a plan . . . which has as its object promiscuous bombing upon industry, commerce, or populations in enemy countries disassociated from obvious military needs to be served by such action.”<sup>5</sup> This policy was reinforced by Wilson’s Secretary of War, Newton Baker and was reflected in Army instructions. World War I ended before early plans to build an American force capable of strategic air attack on German manufacturing proceeded to the point of political scrutiny.

After World War I, the international community undertook a number of new initiatives—e.g., enforced disarmament of Germany, a new League of Nations, various international covenants—designed to prevent a recurrence of modern world war. Related to these efforts was a renewed interest in inhibiting, limiting, and controlling the use of air power in war. Early Air Force leaders were sensitive to those activities. For instance, Billy Mitchell, commenting on talks underway at the Hague, called attention to the fact that the international community might adopt rules limiting attacks on manufacturing areas in the rear—rules that Mitchell opposed.<sup>6</sup> Ronald Schaffer in his impressive study, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II*, argues that the Air Force doctrine developing in the 1920s and 1930s at the Air Corps Tactical School was attentive to, although not dominated by, the issue of civilian casualties. American Air Force leaders were careful not to be seen as pushing the permissible boundaries for aerial bombardment set by their civilian leaders and public opinion. A strategic bombardment doctrine of attacking the enemy’s war-supporting economy instead of focusing directly on civilian morale was preferred both on strategic and political grounds.<sup>7</sup>

At the Washington Conference of 1922, largely remembered as an effort at naval arms control, there was a subcommittee on air power that grappled with the question of limits on aerial bombardment. Then, and in subsequent international conferences culminating in the World Disarmament Conference of 1932-1933, a number of important issues began to achieve

something akin to consensus in the world community. There was recognition, for instance, that military aviation could not be limited unless civilian aviation (that could quickly convert to military uses) also was controlled. At the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, the British—sensitive to their new vulnerabilities—tried unsuccessfully to prohibit strategic aerial bombardment (distinguishing “tactical” from “strategic” emerged as a contentious issue). The French proposed that all “strategic” aircraft, civilian and military, should be placed under control of the League of Nations, with nations allowed to retain only short-range “tactical” aircraft in their national air forces. One subcommittee of the World Disarmament Conference addressed elaborate proposals for limiting construction programs, payloads, and operational ranges of aircraft.<sup>8</sup> Most of these discussions became moot after October 1933 when Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and from the disarmament talks in Geneva. The US Air Force was, at best, far removed from these debates.

To summarize, the situation before World War II was one in which a new technology—military aviation—matured rapidly. It posed the dilemma that while strategic bombardment might shorten wars and thus help avoid the seemingly endless slaughter of World War I, it also could increase civilian suffering in the short run. The arms control agenda for military aviation prior to World War II thus foreshadowed the debate on the atomic bomb.

### **THE ROAD TO THE BARUCH PLAN**

Whatever political limits US Air Force leaders might have anticipated on strategic air war prior to World War II, what they in fact encountered once war erupted was a political leadership supporting—and often demanding escalation of—strategic air warfare.<sup>9</sup> And notwithstanding earlier international efforts to bring strategic bombing under the laws of war, it was generally accepted that this had taken place only in the most general fashion. At the Nuremberg trials in 1946, when the senior German air leaders—Herman Goring and Albert Kesselring—were brought to trial, the indictment included no charge of unlawful aerial bombardment (they were tried for their role in helping prepare for and executing a war of aggression, and for other war crimes such as illegally executing prisoners of war).<sup>10</sup>

The direction that arms control would take in the immediate postwar years concerned the newly developed atomic bomb, and there, two aspects of the World War II experience are germane to the present discussion of the Air Force role. First, the head of the Army Air Forces, while remaining subordinate to the Chief of Staff of the Army, was elevated to roughly equal

status for purposes of advising the President on matters of policy and strategy in the newly created Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). By the time the Air Force gained independence in 1947, it thus already was established that the Air Force chief would have a co-equal voice with the other service chiefs on matters of arms control. Second, the newly developed atomic bomb was so large that the only realistic means of delivery was by the very heaviest bombers available to the American armed forces (at the time, the newly developed B-29), which gave the Air Force a special interest in matters regarding nuclear weapons.

During the war, the crash program to develop the atomic bomb (which went under the cover name of the Manhattan Project) was highly secretive and heavily compartmented. Only a handful of Air Force leaders were read into many of its compartments. General Hap Arnold himself, the head of the Air Force, was not fully apprised of the project until the summer of 1943 when he received a request from the Army officer in charge of the Manhattan Project, Major General Leslie Groves, for assistance in testing the ballistics of the bomb.<sup>11</sup> There were very cursory, informal discussions during the war on what type of arms control might be appropriate for the postwar period. Air Force leaders do not appear to have been party to these discussions.<sup>12</sup>

The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945—an event that removed some of the veil of secrecy from the project.<sup>13</sup> A second bomb of a different design was dropped on Nagasaki three days later. The Japanese finally communicated intent to surrender and hostilities effectively ceased on 14 August (the formal surrender would take place a little over two weeks later in Tokyo bay). On 18 August, General George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, proposed—and the JCS agreed—to have their senior subcommittee, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (composed of three-star members) begin to analyze the impact of the atomic bomb on postwar military matters. Pending at the time was a massive reorganization of the US armed forces. It also was unclear how quickly and to what extent the armed force would demobilize, and what funds would be available for defense activities after the war.

There already were elaborate planning exercises going on in the service staffs (including the Air Staff) on these postwar matters, but the extreme secrecy surrounding the Manhattan Project had ensured that virtually all such planning proceeded with no knowledge of the prospect of nuclear weapons.<sup>14</sup> To make up for lost time, on 14 September 1945, the Air Force convened a board for the purpose of “determining at the earliest practicable date the effect of the atomic bomb on the size, organization, composition and employment of the post-war Air Forces.”<sup>15</sup> The extreme secrecy that

still surrounded the bomb limited the pool of individuals that could conduct the study to a very few, very senior officers. The board was chaired by General Carl A. (Tooe) Spaatz, who had just returned to Washington from commanding the strategic air forces in the Pacific, one specialized unit of which had secretly deployed and delivered the atomic bomb. His two colleagues on the board were Lieutenant General Hoyt S. Vandenberg and Major General Lauris Norstad, the two senior planning officers on the Air Staff.<sup>16</sup> Colonel W. P. Fisher—who had been General Arnold’s personal representative to Leslie Groves on matters like target selection for the first bomb—was the recorder. This arguably was the most senior study group in Air Force history.

The Spaatz board carried out its work in highest secrecy, meeting in continuous session for the next five and a half weeks. It delivered a final report (only three copies of which were made) on 23 October 1945. More will be said of the Spaatz report in a moment. First, however, for purposes of this paper it is necessary to recognize parallel events that affected the decision-making process in the Truman Administration on arms control.

In his address to the nation on 9 August 1945, reporting on the Potsdam Conference that had just concluded, Truman discussed what he called “the tragic significance” of the atomic bomb. The bomb, he said, “is too dangerous to be loose in a lawless world. That is why Great Britain and the United States, who have the secret of its production, do not intend to reveal the secret until means have been found to control the bomb so as to protect ourselves and the rest of the world from the danger of total destruction.”<sup>17</sup> A process already was underway to develop a policy to translate these words into an action plan. Two days later, Secretary of War Henry Stimson sent the President a memorandum recommending a new approach to Russia on the a-bomb. Truman’s senior advisers were at odds with one another on this issue, and their differences—coupled with unfortunate leaks to the press—delayed development of a policy. On 2 October 1945, the London foreign ministers’ meeting ended with no agreement with Russia on how to proceed with the postwar European settlement. The issue of the newly discovered nuclear bomb was in the background of every discussion.

Recognizing that something needed to be done quickly about the bomb, a summit meeting in Washington between the three wartime collaborators in its development—the United States, Britain, and Canada—was hastily scheduled. On 17 October, roughly one month before this summit meeting was to begin, Admiral Leahy—the President’s chief of staff for national security matters and the de facto chairman of the JCS—conveyed to the JCS the President’s desire that they advise him on the issue. The JCS advice was delivered to Truman on 23 October 1945, the same day that the Spaatz

report was completed. Thus, the senior Air Force leaders simultaneously were considering what position to take on the strategic significance of the bomb and on arms control at the same time. One finds in this synergism the logic of the earliest Air Force position on nuclear arms control.

The Spaatz report, informed by the knowledge of the truly laboratory-like nature of the early atomic bombs that made them unsuited for sustained military operations, looked at both the opportunities and the threats posed by nuclear weapons. It made the sober assumption that the atomic bomb would be developed by other nations, presumably earlier than later, and also assumed that other nations would develop aircraft and other delivery means comparable to those of the United States.<sup>18</sup> While the bomb offered the U.S. an “additional” weapon (Spaatz also would call it a “complementary” weapon in a speech before to a group of aircraft manufacturers on 20 September 1945), it did not alter the basic concept of strategic air offensive, nor did it warrant a material change in the near-term conception of the employment, size, organization, and composition of the Air Force. As for threats, however, atomic bombs in enemy hands would pose a severe defense challenge. A successful attack with atomic bombs on vital areas in the U.S. might critically affect the outcome of the war.<sup>19</sup>

These conclusions were reached at the same time that the JCS were being asked to advise the President on what position he should take on the bomb at the coming three-power summit. The JCS referred the matter to the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC) and a draft letter was prepared for JCS consideration. The initial draft narrowly addressed the question asked of the JCS, namely, what policy to adopt in regard to secrecy in the matter of the atomic bomb. The JSSC considered three alternatives: (1) to make available to all nations, with or without agreements as to its use, information concerning atomic energy and the atomic bomb; (2) to entrust the control of the atomic bomb to the Security Council of the United Nations; and (3) in so far as practicable and for as long as possible, to withhold the secrets of the atomic bomb from all other nations. The JSSC recommended a letter based solely on the third alternative.<sup>20</sup>

Somebody took the unusual step of furnishing a copy of the draft JCS paper to the Assistant Secretary of War for Air, Robert A. Lovett. The official JCS history for the period notes, “This is an unusual incident since civilian Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries of Military Departments do not normally see JCS papers.”<sup>21</sup> Lovett recommended that the JCS broaden their advice to indicate their support for a major effort to place the atomic bomb under arms control. The JCS, including the Air Force, agreed and the letter was redrafted so that, while it recommended that the U.S. not disarm unilaterally or prematurely disclose restricted information on atomic

weapons, the Chiefs were strongly on record that they regarded “it as of great military importance that further steps of a political nature should be promptly and vigorously pressed during the probably limited period of American monopoly, in an effort to forestall a possible race in atomic weapons and to prevent the exposure of the United States to a form of attack against which present defenses are inadequate.”<sup>22</sup>

Was it General Marshall that first consulted with Lovett on this matter? Was it Arnold or someone close to Arnold? Both Marshall and Arnold had close, constructive relations with the assistant secretary, based on strong bonds of mutual trust and respect that developed during the war. They most certainly already were discussing the bomb’s implications with Lovett. It is not surprising, given the views contained in the Spaatz report, that the senior Air Force leadership would support a renewed effort at political controls. The atomic bomb at the time was not seen as a near-term replacement for other weapons for the conduct of strategic warfare, and in the hands of an enemy power, it posed extremely difficult challenges to air defenses. That the bomb later would come to play such an important role in American defense policy was less a matter of strategic choice in the early postwar years, and more a function of the limited defense budgets, the expanding security commitments, and the need to offset Soviet conventional power.<sup>23</sup> But that lay in the future. First came the effort to control atomic bombs.

### **THE BARUCH PLAN**

Wartime secrecy and the pressures of bringing World War II to a satisfactory conclusion conspired to prevent serious planning during the final months of the war to develop a post-war policy for the bomb. Secretary of War Stimson, who nominally had responsibility for such matters, met with President Truman on 3 September 1945 to initially broach the subject, then followed up with a memorandum (11 September) and another short meeting (12 September). Truman circulated Stimson’s memorandum to his cabinet officers and asked Stimson to address the issue in a full cabinet meeting on 21 September, Stimson’s final day in office. As discussed earlier in this paper, that meeting ended inconclusively and a leak to the press led Truman not to call another large meeting to discuss the matter. There is no record that JCS views were solicited during this time on the arms control questions relating to the bomb.<sup>24</sup>

Stimson had recommended a coordinated US-British approach to the Russians, in order to achieve consensus on how to handle the bomb before going to the United Nations. At the Washington summit, however, Truman, Attlee, and King rejected this approach in favor of bringing the matter up

directly at the United Nations prior to reaching detailed agreement with the Russians. Stalin did not object and the issue thus was placed on the agenda for the first session of the United Nations that convened at a temporary location in London in January 1946. The US had opted to seek political controls on nuclear energy in a multilateral forum. It now needed a specific proposal.

One hour before he departed for the London UN meeting, Secretary of State James Byrnes asked his deputy, Dean Acheson, to convene a small group to develop a plan for controlling the atomic bomb—a group formally known as the Secretary of State’s Committee. Acheson’s associates in this matter were Vannevar Bush (the president of Carnegie Institute who had overseen all defense research and development during the war); James B. Conant (now president of Harvard and one of Bush’s wartime deputies); John J. McCloy (Stimson’s wartime assistant secretary); and General Leslie Groves (still head of the Manhattan Project). Herbert Marks, Acheson’s deputy, arranged for a board of consultants chaired by David Lilienthal (then head of the Tennessee Valley Authority). Lilienthal’s group included J. Robert Oppenheimer (wartime director of Los Alamos who now was at the University of California at Berkeley). Oppenheimer was the principal author of the arms control plan.<sup>25</sup>

When the question was raised at the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) on 24 January 1946 as to how the arms control proposal would be coordinated with the JCS, the answer was that for the time being General Groves would serve as liaison.<sup>26</sup> That appeared to be a satisfactory arrangement. The Acheson-Lilienthal group conducted an intensive 11-week study, toward the end of which they met over several long weekends at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington DC to compose their consensus report. The report was delivered to Secretary Byrnes on 17 March 1946.

Notwithstanding Groves’s membership in the drafting group, neither the JCS nor the military staffs appear to have received regular updates on the work of the Acheson-Lilienthal effort. This is understandable given their other priorities at the time and the extreme secrecy still surrounding the a-bomb.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say, however, that the Chiefs were totally removed from what was going on. On 2 December 1945, General Eisenhower was informed that Senator Brien McMahon, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Atomic Energy, planned to hold hearings in the near future on the relationship between the a-bomb and defense planning. Eisenhower requested that the JSSC should review and update the ongoing JCS 1477 series of studies begun in August 1945 to assess the impact of the bomb on the military, with three alternative futures in mind: (1) one that banned the

use of atomic energy for military purposes; (2) one that set up a nuclear arms control regime regulated by the United Nations; and (3) one in which there was an unrestrained nuclear arms race. The JCS agreed and the JSSC began work on an urgent basis. JCS 1477/10, the final version of the study, finally was approved by the Chiefs on 31 March 1946.<sup>28</sup>

Senator McMahon introduced his legislation for domestic control of atomic energy on 20 December 1945. He was convinced by Secretary of State Byrnes to defer his hearings on the a-bomb's relation to defense planning and the question of international control, pending completion of the Acheson-Lilienthal study. In early January 1946, Groves sent Eisenhower a long memorandum on the subject, which Eisenhower circulated to the other Chiefs. At the same time, subcommittees of the JCS were working on draft guidance for contingency planning (one contingency being confrontation with Russia), and on guidance to the JCS representatives to the Military Staff Committee (MSC)—a body established by the UN Charter to assist the Security Council in enforcement and arms control activities. The Air Force was involved in all these activities (in fact, its representative on the MSC—General George Kenney—was the ranking American military member of that body). The JCS guidance to their representatives on the MSC (JCS 1567/26) gave them broad latitude on how to proceed. The Chiefs approved this guidance on 24 January 1946 and sent it to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee for information, as well as to the MSC. The essence of the JCS position on arms control at the time was captured in two paragraphs of the paper:

No realistic system of inspection and control is as yet apparent which will ensure against the production of atomic bombs for military use in a nation that possesses such capability. However, in view of the certain alternative that failure of international relations and control will result in an atomic armament race, every effort must continue to be made to develop and establish such a system.

Atomic weapons can be most effectively used against highly developed nations having centralized industries. The United States is such a nation. Consequently it is to the interest of the United States to assume active leadership in establishing international means to control atomic weapons. So long as the United States is the sole nation actually having atomic bombs and is furthest advanced in the field of atomic energy, it holds a preeminent position for the exercise of such leadership. This preeminence will wane

with the passage of time. Therefore all possible action should be taken under United States leadership before other nations develop their own atomic weapons.<sup>29</sup>

The Acheson-Lilienthal report went to the President on 21 March 1945. Acheson was not aware prior to delivery of the report to Secretary Byrnes on 17 March, that Byrnes and Truman had selected Bernard Baruch to head the delegation that would present the US proposal. The White House announced on 18 March that Baruch's name had been sent to the Senate. Baruch began assembling a team of advisers that including Major General Thomas F. Farrell, Groves's deputy. Eventually, Groves also would be assigned to Baruch as his senior military technical adviser.

For the next two months, an intense interagency struggle ensued between Baruch and Acheson on the details of the American proposal. Baruch insisted, and Truman agreed, that Baruch would have latitude in developing the American proposal, using the Acheson-Lilienthal report as a starting point. By late May, Baruch had come to the conclusion that the basic approach proposed by Acheson—an international authority with positive developmental functions—was sound, and agreed that while an inspection system was necessary as part of a step-by-step approach to arms control, no inspection system could guarantee compliance. But Baruch was disturbed that the plan did not spell out what would happen in the case of cheating.

The military found itself in the middle of this debate. Meanwhile, Air Force leadership and organization was changing. On 1 March 1946, Arnold finally had retired, to be replaced by General Spaatz. Three weeks later, Spaatz announced a major reorganization of the Air Force (still the Army Air Corps since the military reorganization legislation still was being worked). Part of the reorganization entailed the creation of Strategic Air Command (SAC). General Kenney was dual-hatted for the moment as the first commander of SAC and as senior Air Force representative to the MSC. One gets a sense of the priorities of the time from the fact that until late 1946 Kenney elected to give most of his attention to his UN duties, letting his deputy run SAC.

On 15 April 1946, Baruch met with the Army and Army Air Force leaders. Generals Eisenhower, Groves, Spaatz, and others were present. A memorandum for the record of the meeting was prepared by Lieutenant General John E. Hull, Assistant Chief of Staff for the Operations Division on the Army General Staff. Hull's memo indicated that there was agreement at the meeting that the plan Baruch was considering (basically the Acheson-Lilienthal report with adjustments) was sound, that the crux of the matter was whether or not the Russians would accept inspection and control

on an international basis, and that the U.S. should not stop producing atomic weapons until accord actually was reached.<sup>30</sup> It is unclear whether the issue of sanctions was discussed at this time. A memo prepared for Hull prior to the meeting by Brigadier General G. A. Lincoln, the influential chief of the Strategy and Policy Group on the Army Staff, was skeptical whether the Russians ever would accept any such system.<sup>31</sup> Eisenhower appears to still have been more optimistic than his staff on the possibility of cooperation with the Russians.<sup>32</sup> Spaatz appears to have shared his staff's skepticism.

By late May, Baruch realized he needed to finish preparation of the proposal since the mid-June meeting of the UNAEC was fast approaching. On 24 May, Baruch sent identical letters to nine senior U.S. military officers including each member of the JCS, asking them broad questions about how compliance with the treaty might be ensured and specific questions about whether the plan should allow for automatic punishment in event of violation of the treaty.<sup>33</sup> Eisenhower, about to depart Washington for a tour of military facilities in the Pacific, suggested to Baruch that he should ask the JCS for a formal recommendation, and suggested at the same time to the JCS that they task the Joint Staff to begin drafting a joint reply. Spaatz and his colleagues agreed, and the Air Staff began working with the Joint Staff on a draft.<sup>34</sup> On 7 June 1946, however, the JCS learned that President Truman had just approved instructions to Baruch, including authorizing him to propose that the veto be suspended in the Security Council on matters involving allegations of violations of a treaty for control of atomic weapons. This was at the heart of the sanctions issue, and in light of the presidential decision already having been made, the JCS opted to have each member respond directly to Baruch with personal views instead of composing a joint reply.

Spaatz agreed with Eisenhower and Nimitz on most of the fundamentals of the U.S. proposal. He disagreed on penalties, however. Spaatz believed that the control agreement should provide for immediate, effective multilateral action in the case of violations. He reportedly felt that the control system was unlikely to succeed and that America would have to develop a deterrent as the best insurance against failure of control.<sup>35</sup>

### **AFTER THE BARUCH PLAN**

What next happened is well known. On 14 June, Baruch presented the US proposal for control of atomic weapons. The Russians responded with a counter-proposal that called for immediate prohibitions on the bomb and dismantling of the American nuclear stockpile, to be followed by working out the details of a control regime. A stalemate ensued as the Cold War

unfolded. Some scholars reviewing this period have suggested that the Chiefs were categorically opposed to arms control.<sup>36</sup> The record does not support this conclusion. While the Chiefs had varying views on whether a plan could be negotiated with the Soviets, they supported the Baruch plan as the technically best alternative and were on record wanting negotiations to succeed. They were being asked, in a much less formal setting than would later be available, to provide advice on what we today would call the military sufficiency of the proposal, and on how to respond to militarily significant cheating. Their advice in hindsight appears sound. The Air Force, notwithstanding the fact that it still technically was part of the Army, had a co-equal voice in the development of the advice. And the chief Air Force spokesman, General Spaatz, was the chief author of the Air Force report which a year earlier had highlighted the dangers of the bomb for future US security.

When the Air Force officially became a separate service on 18 September 1947 when the National Security Act took effect, Spaatz ceased being Commanding General of the Army Air Forces and formally became Chief of Staff of the US Air Force. He retired seven months later, and General Hoyt Vandenberg succeeded him. General Vandenberg was especially well positioned to assess the unfolding Soviet threat since he had served as an early head of the newly created Central Intelligence Group—a forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency that would be created by the same legislation that gave the Air Force its separate service status.

Arms control discussions continued in the UNAEC and in the United Nations Commission for Conventional Armaments (UNCCA) that was created by the Security Council in February 1947, but they no longer were conducted on the basis of anticipating real results. By the autumn of 1948, Bernard Brodie—a respected analyst of the times (who for a brief period would serve as a special assistant to the Air Force Chief of Staff)—expressed the views of many when he wrote in *Foreign Affairs*:

The impact of the atomic bomb on United States policy has thus far been evidenced most clearly in the almost frantic effort to secure the adoption of a system of international control of atomic energy. . . . Two years of work by the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission have resulted in some illumination of the problem but almost no progress toward a solution. . . . [W]here does that leave us? It leaves us, for one thing, with the unwanted bomb still in our hands, and, so far as we know, still exclusively in our hands. It leaves us also under the compulsion to go on building more bombs and better ones if

possible. We must continue our search for a workable and secure international control system by any corridor which reflects even a glimmer of hope of success, but we must also begin to consider somewhat more earnestly and responsibly than we have thus far what it will mean for the nation to adjust to an atomic age devoid of international controls.<sup>37</sup>

And adjust the United States did. In early 1949 the West created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and in the fall of 1949, the Soviet Union tested a nuclear bomb, shortly before the Chinese Communist Party won the Chinese civil war. In 1950, the Korean War erupted. The massive nuclear armaments race that the JCS had anticipated if arms control failed was underway, and nuclear deterrence was rapidly moving to the center of American defense policy. This dominated Air Force planning, even during the Korean War.

While the United States did not cease arms control discussions in the United Nations, the Air Force was not deeply involved in such activities for the remainder of the time under discussion in this chapter. The Air Force Chief, like the other Chiefs, would be apprised of developments on matters such as NSC 112—principles for arms control approved by Truman in July 1951—but he was not a major player in its development.<sup>38</sup> During this time, senior Air Force officers, active duty and retired, shared a basic skepticism widespread in Washington that the Soviets would be willing to engage in serious discussions, or that they would open their closed society to inspections.

In the autumn of 1951, the UN created a single disarmament commission as a successor to the UNAEC and the UNCCA. In the aftermath of this event, and to review existing U.S. arms control policy, J. Robert Oppenheimer was asked to convene a panel to assess the prospects for arms control. The panel's report was delivered to the White House in January 1953, in the waning days of the Truman Administration. It laid out in detail the case why the prospects for arms control with a Soviet Union governed by a leader such as Stalin were unfavorable.<sup>39</sup> That was a view shared by the Air Force.

### **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.**

This paper has not attempted to reconstruct the details of how the Air Staff helped the Air Force Chief of Staff on arms control matters prior to 1953—a task that may be impossible to reconstruct, given the passage of time, the informal way of doing business for much of the period under

discussion, the freshness of the activity, and the extreme secrecy that surrounded the a-bomb in the early years. It always is difficult to reconstruct the workings of a large body like the Air Staff, all the more so in nuclear matters for the period in question.

Still, there is enough of a documentary record to establish that the senior Air Force leadership was involved at a high level on arms control matters and took positions largely supportive of the early effort—positions that can be explicated in modern terms such as military sufficiency and safeguards against militarily significant violations of potential treaties. There is no reason to believe that the JCS, corporately or individually, wanted the Baruch plan to fail. They, like many other American officials at the time, were uncertain about the future. They agreed that the central thrust of the Acheson-Lilienthal proposal and the Baruch plan offered the technically best alternative to a limited arms race. They cautioned that the US should be prepared for either outcome, at the same time that they tried to work political arrangements that protected the West. That is the central story of the early Air Force involvement in arms control.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian circular note proposing the Hague Peace Conference is reprinted in James Brown Scott, ed., *Instructions to the American Delegates to the Hague Peace Conferences and Their Official Reports* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1916), 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Crozier's intervention in Commission I at the 1899 Hague Conference is discussed in Tami Davis Biddle, "Air Power," a chapter in Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman, eds., *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 141.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg* (London: Allan Lane, 1980 [new imprint, London: Cassell, 2000]), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell's lengthy paragraph on possible restrictions on aerial warfare can be found in his 128-page "Notes on the Multi-motored Bombardment Group, Day and Night"—a paper which otherwise addresses operational matters. General Laurence Kuter, himself an early student and instructor at the Air Tactical School, recalls that these notes in essence constituted Air Force doctrine until the late 1920s. I rely for this account on Kuter's unpublished paper, apparently written in 1943 or 1944 when Kuter was Assistant Chief of the Air Staff for Plans and Combat Operations, entitled "Air Power—The American Concept (Notes On Which a Series of Articles

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Might Be Prepared).” This paper can be found in Box 2 of the Kuter Papers in the Special Collections Division, USAF Academy Library.

<sup>7</sup> Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment*, 26-37. Also see David R. Metts, *Master of Airpower: General Carl A. Spaatz* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988), pp. 57-8 and Walton S. Moody, *Building a Strategic Air Force* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1995), 16.

<sup>8</sup> See Donald Cameron Watt, “Restraints on War in the Air Before 1945,” a chapter in Michael Howard, ed., *Restraints on War: Studies in the Limitation of Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 57-77, and Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987), 33-4.

<sup>9</sup> This is discussed in detail in F. M. Sallagar, *The Road to Total War: Escalation in World War II* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, April 1969). Also see Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants, and Their War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> See Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 324-29.

<sup>11</sup> Moody, *Building a Strategic Air Force*, 7. Arnold already appears to have a general knowledge of the program, probably learned directly from his immediate superior, General George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army and Groves’ boss.

<sup>12</sup> The best account of the limited arms control deliberations during the war can be found in chapter three of McGeorge Bundy’s book, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> A statement had been crafted at Potsdam, for public release in Washington upon word that the first bomb had been dropped. Announcement of the bomb was expected to produce a torrent of requests for information. With this in mind, a detailed report prepared by the physicist, Henry DeWolf Smyth, was to be made publicly available. This report was intended to establish a boundary between what could be said publicly and what would remain highly classified. The Smyth report has been reprinted in the Stanford Nuclear Age Series as Henry DeWolf Smyth, *Atomic Energy for Military Purposes* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> See Perry M. Smith, *The Air Force Plans for Peace, 1943-1945* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Copies of the tasking memo and the report can be found at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress in the Papers of Carl Andrew Spaatz, Series I, Box 22.

<sup>16</sup> In October 1945, Vandenberg was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, Commitments, and Requirements. Norstad was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans.

<sup>17</sup> President Truman’s 9 August 1946 address to the nation is included as an appendix in U.S. Department of State, *The International Control of Atomic Energy: Growth of a Policy* (Washington: Government Printing Office, n.d.), 106-08.

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<sup>18</sup> Although the Spaatz report did not estimate how long it would take a state like the Soviet Union to acquire nuclear weapons, there is circumstantial evidence that the Air Force leaders favored the earlier vice later estimates then circulating in Washington. In October 1946, when Norstad briefed President Truman on military reorganization matters, he told the President that planning was premised on the belief that the Soviets could develop the bomb as early as 1949 although they probably could not produce nuclear weapons in significant numbers before 1951. I base this on a copy of briefing notes entitled "Presentation Given to the President by Major General Lauris Norstad on 29 October 1946," that can be found in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, The Papers of Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Box 63.

<sup>19</sup> Spaatz report, op. cit. The report recommended that a senior officer "of the caliber of Major General Curtis E. LeMay" should be assigned to a newly created position on the Air Staff, to direct future research and development related to atomic energy. Typed at the bottom of the report was Arnold's response: "I approve this report without qualification, and I strongly emphasize that the national interest demands relentless efforts, operationally and technically, in research and development, especially as they relate to future air weapons." By this time, Arnold had commissioned Theodore von Kármán to conduct a broad study of future technologies for the Air Force. In December 1945, on behalf of the Scientific Advisory Group that he chaired, von Kármán submitted the report entitled *Toward New Horizons* to Arnold.

<sup>20</sup> I base this account on a declassified memorandum, subject "Military Policy as to Secrecy Requirements for the Atomic Bomb (J.C.S. 1471/2)," 22 October 1945. This paper can be found at The National Archives in the Records of the JCS, Central Decimal File 1948-50, Box 222, CCS 471.6 (8-15-45) Sec. 1.

<sup>21</sup> James F. Schnabel, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume I, 1945-1947* (Washington: Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 1979), 259 fn.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum for the President from the JCS, 23 October 1945. The copy of the memorandum I am working with comes from the Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President's Secretary's Files, Box 199.

<sup>23</sup> See Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., and Steven L. Rearden, *The Origins of U.S. Nuclear Strategy, 1945-1953* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Schnabel, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vol. I, 1945-1947*, 256 fn.

<sup>25</sup> See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969), 149-56, and Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, Jr., *The New World: A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission, Vol I, 1939-1946* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962 [new imprint, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990]), 531-54.

<sup>26</sup> US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter referred to as FRUS), 1946, Vol. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), 737.

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<sup>27</sup> In his memoirs, Groves recalls the late 1945 and early 1946 period in the following terms: “I was receiving little if any guidance from the Executive Branch [in running the Manhattan Project], since both the Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff, having only recently come into the atomic picture, felt that my background enabled me to make the necessary decisions better than they could.... When I first started to explain the atomic program to Mr. Patterson[who replaced Stimson as Secretary of War] and General Eisenhower [who replaced Marshall as Chief of Staff of the Army], they said that they did not want me to give them any secret information if I could help it, particularly about the production rates and the number of bombs on hand. As General Eisenhower put it, ‘...In a project such as this, where knowledge is held to such a few people, it makes it particularly difficult.’” Leslie M. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project* (New York: Harper, 1962, reprinted by Da Capo Press, 1983), 380.

<sup>28</sup> See Louis Galambos, ed., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Vol. VII* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 761-62 fn.

<sup>29</sup> JCS 1567/26, “Guidance as to the Military Implications of a United Nations Commission on Atomic Energy,” 12 January 1946. I am using copy no. 23 of this JCS document that can be found in The National Archives II, Modern Military Records, Records of the JCS, Central Decimal File, 1946-47, Box 092, CCS 092 (4-14-45) Sec. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Galambos, *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Vol. VII*, 1078 fn.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum for General Hull from Brigadier General G. A. Lincoln, 11 Apr 1946. I am using the file copy of this memorandum that can be found at The National Archives II, Modern Military Records, RG 319/152: Army Plans and Operations Division, 1946-1948, War Department Decimal 388.3: Disarmament and Limitation of Armaments. I am grateful to Captain Ed Kaplan of the History Department at the U.S. Air Force Academy for calling this memorandum to my attention.

<sup>32</sup> Galambos, *Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Vol. VII*, 1106 fn.

<sup>33</sup> I am using a copy of Baruch’s letter that can be found in The Papers of Bernard M. Baruch, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Box 52.

<sup>34</sup> Galambos, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Vol. VII*, 1093-94 fn.

<sup>35</sup> See Galambos, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Vol. VII*, 1128 fn, and Hewlett and Anderson, *The New World*, 575.

<sup>36</sup> See Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 287-88.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard Brodie, “The Atom Bomb as Policy Maker,” *Foreign Affairs*, 27:1 (October 1948), 17-18.

<sup>38</sup> The text of NSC 112 can be found in FRUS, 1951, Vol. I, 477-97.

<sup>39</sup> The text of the Oppenheimer report can be found in FRUS, 1952-1954, Vol. II, 1056-91.