

United Nations Atomic Energy Commission stalls out

As noted earlier, an attempt was made to establish international controls for atomic energy through the United Nations. In November, 1945, at a meeting in Washington, DC, American, British and Canadian representatives agreed to approach the Soviets. Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes made the arrangements.

In a meeting in Moscow in December, 1945, agreement with the Soviets on an American proposal seemed to be forthcoming. However, the Soviets insisted on one stipulation. The United Nations Security Council should be the organization to which the envisioned commission on atomic energy would report.

While this seemed a small consideration, it was actually an action to assure Soviet control. Unlike the United Nations General Assembly where member countries tended to be more aligned with the United States, in the United Nations Security Council, the Soviet Union had veto power. This allowed them to effectively control any actions with which they disagreed.

On January 24, 1946, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 1 Session 1, *Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy*. This commission would be short-lived and would not result in the desired control of atomic energy.

In the wake of the disappointing results of the Moscow meeting, the United States began formulating its own strategy. Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson was asked to chair a committee of Vannevar Bush, General Leslie Groves, James Conant and John McCloy. Their charter was to develop policy on international control of this emerging new science of atomic energy.

This committee established a board of consultants to produce a report detailing the proposed policy on international control. This board was chaired by Tennessee Valley Authority Chairman David E. Lilienthal and included J. Robert Oppenheimer. It was Oppenheimer's idea to control the uranium mining and thus manage the distribution of the uranium ore in small quantities to countries for peaceful uses only.

The resulting *Acheson-Lilienthal Report* was accepted by Acheson, on March 16, 1946, with a formal title of, *Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy*. The primary method of control proposed in the report was the establishment of the Atomic Development Authority to own all fissile material.

The report noted that inspections and attempts to police operations were not good candidates for control. As an aside, the International Atomic Energy Agency uses these methods today! The *Acheson-Lilienthal Report* proposed strict control of the raw materials needed for atomic bombs as the best way for international control.

This report formed the basis for the United States efforts to influence the United Nations when Bernard Baruch was appointed by President Truman on March 17, 1946, as the United States' lead negotiator to the United Nations. Baruch added specific penalties as enforcement actions to the report. He specified that the enforcement actions would not be subject to Security Council veto.

Of course, this "Baruch Plan," presented to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission on June 14, 1946, was totally unacceptable to the Soviets. Andrei Gromyko countered with a proposal prohibiting the possession, production or use of nuclear weapons. The United States was the only nation with such weapons. So, the line was drawn and neither side would budge for the next six months.

All the while the United States continued producing uranium 235 and plutonium and manufacturing more atomic weapons. Y-12 and K-25 were running full tilt producing as much Uranium 235 as possible.

The Soviet Union also pushed ahead with its atomic energy research and development programs. While discussion within the United Nations continued regarding control of atomic energy, no progress was made toward reaching any compromise or agreement.

Within the United States variations on the Baruch position were debated, but no changes made. Baruch held to the original position as first presented to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission. The Soviet Union likewise held their position.

A key factor in the Soviet Union's ability to make progress on atomic energy was the information being provided by Klaus Emil Fuchs, a British spy (of German origin and nationalized British citizen). Fuchs began his career as a spy for the Soviet Union as early as 1942. He has been noted as being the most important spy in history because of the significance of the information he passed.

At the Potsdam Conference on July 17, 1945 Stalin reportedly responded to Truman's comment regarding the United States working toward a super weapon with the words, "I know." Fuchs was providing information to the Soviets well before the Trinity explosion on July 16, 1945.

Klaus Fuchs was working at Los Alamos when he delivered the plans for Fat Man, the plutonium bomb dropped on Nagasaki, to the Soviets. He had also worked for a short time at Oak Ridge before going to Los Alamos. There is no record of any information being passed while he was in Oak Ridge.

After pressure was applied, Fuchs confessed his espionage to the British in January, 1950, was arrested in early February, 1950 and two weeks later tried for violating Great Britain's Official Secrets Act. He was sentenced to 14 years in prison, the maximum allowed for the stated violation.

His trial lasted only an hour and a half. It was done quietly and without exposing any information about Great Britain's atomic weapons program being worked at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell.

At the time of his arrest Fuchs was an assistant director at Harwell! Yet, he was known to be a spy. However, the method used to trap him was the secret "Venona Intercepts" and could not be exposed as the source of the information.

Begun in February, 1943, "Venona" monitored Soviet diplomatic communications. By late 1946, the code had been broken and at least one communication about the United States atomic bomb program was decoded. Ultimately, all Soviet spies prosecuted were identified through this medium, including Klaus Fuchs.

Next we will see how the United States implemented our own Atomic Energy Commission and the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission continued stalled until it was finally adjourned indefinitely in 1949.