

## **AEC and control of nuclear weapons**

The Atomic Energy Commission took control of the atomic energy project known originally as the Manhattan Project on January 1, 1947. This shift from the military control to civilian government control was a major shift in power, yet did not initially impact the former Manhattan Project sites.

The transition while defined as January 1, 1947, was in fact, much more protracted. Almost immediately upon being made public knowledge that there was such a huge and powerful technology, debate about its control ensued. It could be said that the spies such as Claus Fuchs and others were attempting to prevent any one nation from having a monopoly on such great force.

In the United States, government officials, scientists and private citizens all held opinions and often expressed them forcefully. While everyone was proud to have stopped the killing by winning the war, no one was ready to allow nuclear weapons to exist without attempting to control them to the greatest extent possible.

The Soviet Union was not about to allow anything to derail the work being done there to create their own nuclear weapon. While arguing in the United Nations for no nuclear weapons, they were in fact building their own.

A general advisory committee was established in the United States to provide scientific advice to the commission. From 1947 to 1952, the committee was headed by J. Robert Oppenheimer, the chief scientist of the Manhattan Project.

The commission's most controversial advice was that the United States should continue to expand its atomic bomb arsenal rather than develop hydrogen bombs, which the committee deemed to be too destructive to have any purely military purpose. At the time, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was president from 1953 to 1961, was in favor of the development of the hydrogen bomb, since some other countries already possessed the technology to manufacture atomic bombs.

On that subject, their advice was ignored. Lilienthal resigned in protest in 1950 and was replaced by Gordon Dean, an original commissioner. He was appointed by President Harry S. Truman as one of the original Commissioners of the AEC in May 1949.

One of the most significant decisions made during Dean's chairmanship was that to transfer atomic bombs to the Air Force. This ended the exclusive control of atomic weapons by civilian government. The military was once again in control of the actual weapons. President Truman called Chairman Dean to his office on April 6, 1951 to explain the situation.

What he described was the build up of Chinese and Soviet forces near the border and coast of Korea. The fear was that the United States was about to be driven completely out of Korea. President Truman needed the atomic bombs ready to be used if needed to prevent that from happening.

So, the impending war caused the president to reclaim for the military the control of nuclear weapons. The AEC retained the responsibility to design and build them, but the military now had atomic bombs and were going to deploy them. Chairman Dean held out for some involvement of the civilian government in any decisions to actually use the atomic bomb.

During Dean's chairmanship, the nuclear facilities was industrialized and expanded. The hydrogen bomb was created and detonated during his time as chairman. The first hydrogen bomb was exploded on November 1, 1952 and was named "Mike" or "Ivy Mike" as it was exploded during "Operation Ivy."

Dean was chairman of the AEC when Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory was created in 1952. The Cold War was growing more and more significant and influencing decisions regarding the nuclear weapons complex. Expansion was the rule and building more and better nuclear weapons was the aim of the AEC. Their focus was intent upon superiority over the Soviets.

Next we will look at Lewis Strauss and Robert Oppenheimer and the impact of the AEC on Oak Ridge.