

Constance Xu

HST-415

I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System.

1. Questions that came to mind while listening to lecture were the following:
 - a. Do you think that if the military was able to push through their May-Johnson Act, would our society look different from what we have presently (i.e. Would the military have much more power?)?
 - b. Did allowing some information out stop an international arms race to create these atomic bombs or no?
2. To this day, there is still no adequate military defense against atomic weapons, just as the Acheson-Lilienthal report stated. The argument in the Acheson-Lilienthal reports states that we should have more international control over the use of atomic weapons because atomic warfare is going to become more common. During the time that the report was written, the United States had an advantage by having the most atomic weapons but it is evident that this advantage would disappear once atomic weapons become more common for other countries. This report was advocating for an “international agency to forestall and detect violations and evasions of international agreements not to use atomic weapons”. Essentially, there needs to be an international control on atomic weapons in order to keep the peace and no one just completely obliterates life on Earth. In fact, it states that every aspect of creating an atomic weapon (from getting the raw materials to assembling the weapon itself) should be regulated and needs some sort of control. It also says that inspection cannot be the only form of control. There is a concern with the amount of inspectors that would be needed and having to have everyone operate under good faith. The report underlines the United States’ strategic position with atomic bombs and how “when the plan is in full operation, no nation will be the legal owner of atomic weapons, of stockpiles of fissionable material or raw materials, or of the plants in which they can be produced”. Another aspect of this is the fact that America has knowledge on how to create atomic weapons and in the report, it is vital that America relinquishes control of it. This would come at the right time of course. I find it compelling today. I think it is interesting how it is framed and I am still unclear exactly how it works. I think the idea of international control over the atomic bombs could work but the idea that everyone would act on good faith is nearly impossible to achieve. I might just be cynical but I just do not think that in a group of 300 inspectors, every one of them will check entirely and be acting in good faith. I think that regardless of international control, there will always be countries breaking this and attempting to make one regardless. I like the idea of the spread of information because I think scientific knowledge should not be safeguarded or a secret.

3. I do not believe I saw anything fully unexpected in these headlines. I think it is interesting that the beginning papers had a huge focus on the control of atomic power, which comes to no surprise. In 1947, there were headlines regarding the hearings with Lilienthal and other scientists, which did surprise me. If I were a reader at the time, I think I would be a little worried because it seemed like nothing was set in stone and so there was a possibility that America could get nuked one day. Now, I am less concerned about the possibility of a nuclear war because of the way we deal with war now. One headline that stood out to me is the following: "Military or Civilian Control of Atomic Energy?". I am surprised that this was something that was up for debate because it seems obvious that the military should not be given that much power? I think that would be a huge threat to our democracy simply because there could be a military coup (something that I honestly think we have to consider in today's world with our American politics currently). Another interesting headline from the same report is "Can Air or Water Be Exploded?" which makes it seem like atomic weapons are easily created. This is interesting because there still seems to be a lot of widespread fear over these weapons and not a huge understanding of these weapons, probably in part to all the secrecy and how the government has not made information easily found. I think if I read this back then, I would be panicked and I think this a great fear tactic.