

Abstract

American Restraint: Postwar Nuclear Policies of the Truman Administration

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Why did the Truman Administration maintain restrictive nuclear policies even when America enjoyed nuclear superiority under which it was almost free of nuclear retaliation from other countries? It is partly because of conditions surrounding the Administration such as the shortage of American nuclear weapons or domestic and international political situations concerning nuclear weapons. On the other hand, it should be noted that the Administration consistently tried hard to avoid using nuclear weapons even when these restrictions were considerably alleviated. In addition to these objective factors, there seem to be strong psychological restraints of President Truman himself and his advisers. Having used atomic bombs against Japan in wartime, they came to have a strong sense of horror and abhorrence toward nuclear weapons. Also, they shared a grass-roots national belief of America having never started a war and feared that actual use of nuclear weapons would threaten the core value behind their belief. Moreover, they had a persistent doubt about the posture of the military toward the bombs. Those ideational factors eventually led to their prudent nuclear policies even when there was strong urge for use of nuclear weapons.

Kokusai Anzenhosho [Journal of International Security] Vol. 33, No. 2 (September 2005), pp. 87-108.

