

Trinity Bomb Test — Risking Doomsday They Lit the Match Anyway

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The U.S. scientists who tested the first atomic bomb, July 16, 1945, took the ultimate gamble of setting the atmosphere on fire and destroying all life on Earth.

When Robert Oppenheimer, the civilian head of the program, informed his boss, the Nobel Prize winning physicist Arthur Compton, about the test's apocalyptic risk, Compton was appalled. According to Toby Ord in *The Precipice* (2020), Compton decided, "Unless they came up with a firm and reliable conclusion that our atomic bombs could not explode the air or the sea, those bombs must never be made." In his memoir *Atomic Quest* (1956) Compton recalled thinking, "Better to accept the slavery of the Nazis than to run a chance of drawing the final curtain on mankind!"

Gen. Leslie Groves, the military boss of the mission, also officially forbade the test unless the global risk was declared to be zero. Enrico Fermi, known as the "architect of the atomic bomb," worked furiously on the computations and found atmospheric ignition "unlikely," but, according to *The Precipice*, ominously "worried whether there were undiscovered phenomena that, under the novel conditions of extreme heat [50-million degrees Celsius], might lead to unexpected disaster."

Even after the renowned physicist Hans Bethe concluded that the danger was "a remote possibility" and relentless, ongoing calculations failed to eliminate the doomsday peril, Compton and Groves somehow reversed themselves, okayed the detonation. Ultimately, Oppenheimer's secretly commissioned study of the threat was unable to rule out the risk of causing mass extinction, and the "destroyer of worlds" lit the match anyway.

How could such spectacular recklessness have been accepted, reconciled with ethical conduct? I don't believe it could. The malicious arrogance of deliberately placing all living things in jeopardy exceeds the power of language to even describe it. Gargantuan megalomania, immeasurable callousness, colossal pomposity? Words fall short.

The day of the test, Fermi privately put the chances of global ruination at "about ten percent," and, according to Daniel Ellsberg in *The Doomsday Machine* (2017), Gen. Groves, rather than halting the test, drafted a press release "in case the explosion was larger than expected and destroyed Oppenheimer and the other observers."

The President of Harvard University, James Conant, observed the test in person and thought the flash was far longer and brighter than expected. He wrote the next day, "My [first thought] was that something had gone wrong and that the thermal nuclear transformation of the atmosphere, once discussed as a possibility and jokingly referred to a few minutes earlier, had actually occurred." Multiple personal accounts of the nighttime blast note that Fermi winkingly offered to take bets at fixed odds on the risk of atomic cataclysm.

Since then, extreme secrecy, euphemism, and official lying have concealed or sanitized the catastrophic reality of nuclear explosions. President Truman's August 6, 1945 public announcement falsely described Hiroshima as "a military base," chosen in order "to avoid the killing of civilians." Today's PR nonsense about "low-yield," or "theater nuclear weapons," that are "designed to limit collateral damage" are mere variations of Truman's calculated deceit.

Concern for victims of nuclear attacks has never curtailed or limited the design of nuclear weapons. How else explain Trident missile warheads (20 on just one submarine, with 14 such submarines roaming the oceans, each 475 kiloton warhead up to 31 times the force of the Hiroshima bomb (15 kilotons, just one carried on one airplane), or the "neutron bomb" made to kill living things but leave inanimate objects intact, or the U.S.'s driving of a global arms race which is on course to burn through 2-trillion in tax dollars completely rebuilding our nuclear weapons complex?

If concern for human survival existed inside the nuclear weapons complex, the Bomb would already have been abolished, because it's axiomatic that nuclear attacks can produce only massacres via their uncontrollable, indiscriminate, shattering blast overpressure, hurricane-force winds, firestorms, and radiation burns, poisoning, diseases. To see for yourself, watch Greg Mitchell's short film, "Atomic Cover-Up," at PBS.org.

Don't be fooled this August when the old canard is repeated for the 80th time that the U.S. atomic bombings of cities "saved lives." No mass destruction ever did that. ####



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