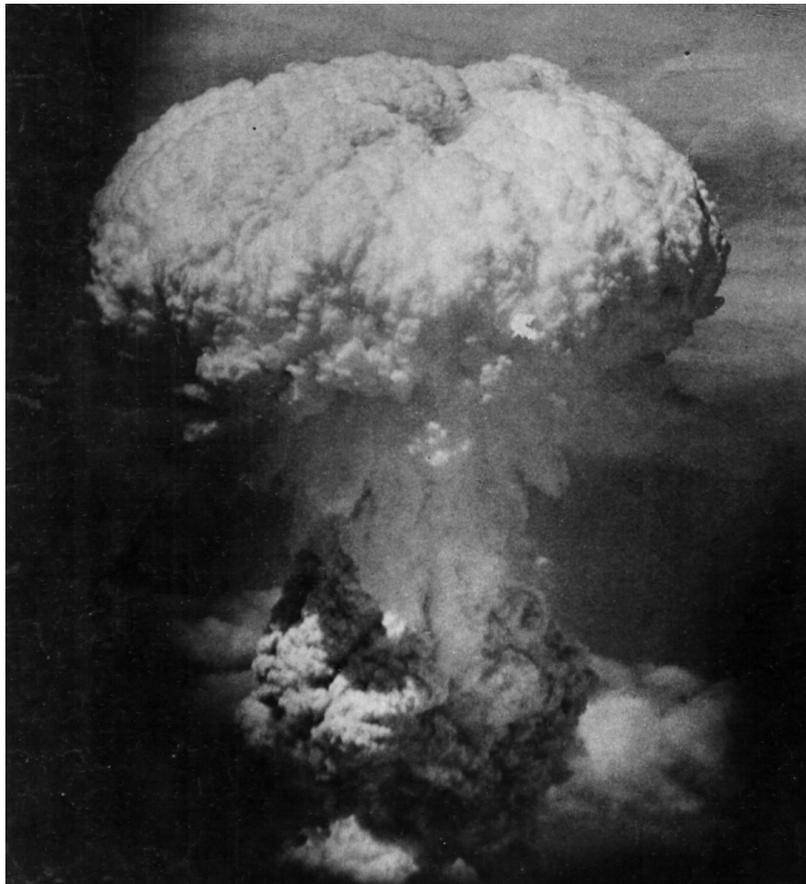
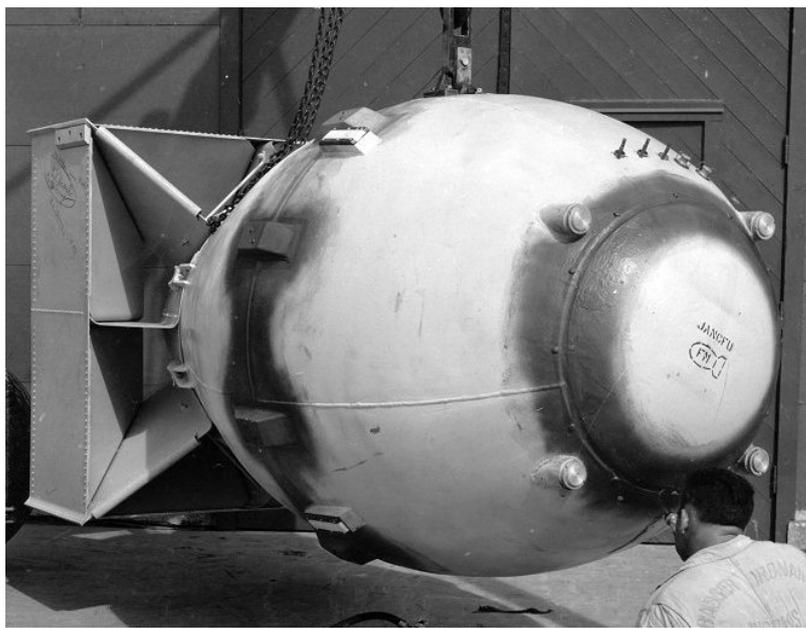


**Alex Wellerstein** @wellerstein *Fri Aug 09 12:11:29 +0000 2019*

Today is the 74th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki. Often overlooked, compared to Hiroshima, as merely the "second" atomic bomb, the Nagasaki attack is far more tricky, and important, in several ways. **THREAD**  
<https://t.co/UQYoz6ftzN>





First: Nagasaki wasn't, as many people know, the original target for the August 9th bombing. That was Kokura, a city somewhat to the north. Nagasaki wasn't even on the original target list — it was added to the final target order at the last minute, to replace Kyoto. <https://t.co/mcAqmPOpUJ>

~~TOP SECRET~~ THIS DOCUMENT CONSISTS OF 1

COPY NO. 1 OF 2 SERIES

TENTATIVE

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 11652, SEC. 3.3(a)

NARS 730039

By EPC NARS, Date 6-4-74

Draft of Directive by the Chief of Staff to General Spaatz, with copies for information to General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz.

*and Nagasaki*

1. The 509th Composite Group, 20th Air Force will deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945 on one of the targets: Hiroshima, Kokura and Niigata in the priority listed. To carry military and civilian scientific personnel from the War Department to observe and record the effects of the explosion of the bomb, additional aircraft will accompany the airplane carrying the bomb. The observing planes will stay several miles distant from the point of impact of the bomb.
2. Additional bombs will be delivered on the above targets as soon as made ready by the project staff. Further instructions will be issued concerning targets other than those listed above.
3. Dissemination of any and all information concerning the use of the weapon against Japan is reserved to the Secretary of War and the President of the United States. No communiques on the subject or releases of information will be issued by Commanders in the field without specific prior authority. Any news stories will be sent to the War Department for special clearance.

Kokura as a target had been much more carefully studied and vetted. It was a major military arsenal surrounded by workers' houses — the kind of "ideal target" for the atomic bomb (obviously military, but also does a lot of destruction) according to the criteria of its makers. <https://t.co/rV4IYebagN>

- (4) Kokura Arsenal - This is one of the largest arsenals in Japan and is surrounded by urban industrial structures. The arsenal is important for light ordnance, anti-aircraft and beach head defense materials. The dimensions of the arsenal are 4100' x 2000'. The dimensions are such that if the bomb were properly placed full advantage could be taken of the higher pressures immediately underneath the bomb for destroying the more solid structures and at the same time considerable blast damage could be done to more feeble structures further away. (Classified as an A Target)



Nagasaki, by contrast, had already been bombed several times (conventionally) in WWII (most recently on August 1, 1945), was geographically unfavorable to blast effects, and was a far lower priority target in general — so low it didn't originally make the cut at all.

Why didn't Kokura get bombed? The B-29 carrying the bomb was late getting there, because it got lost in a storm, and by the time it was there the target was obscured by smoke, steam, or clouds (it's not clear, even today, which is was).

<https://t.co/oTIQ7zCIHe>

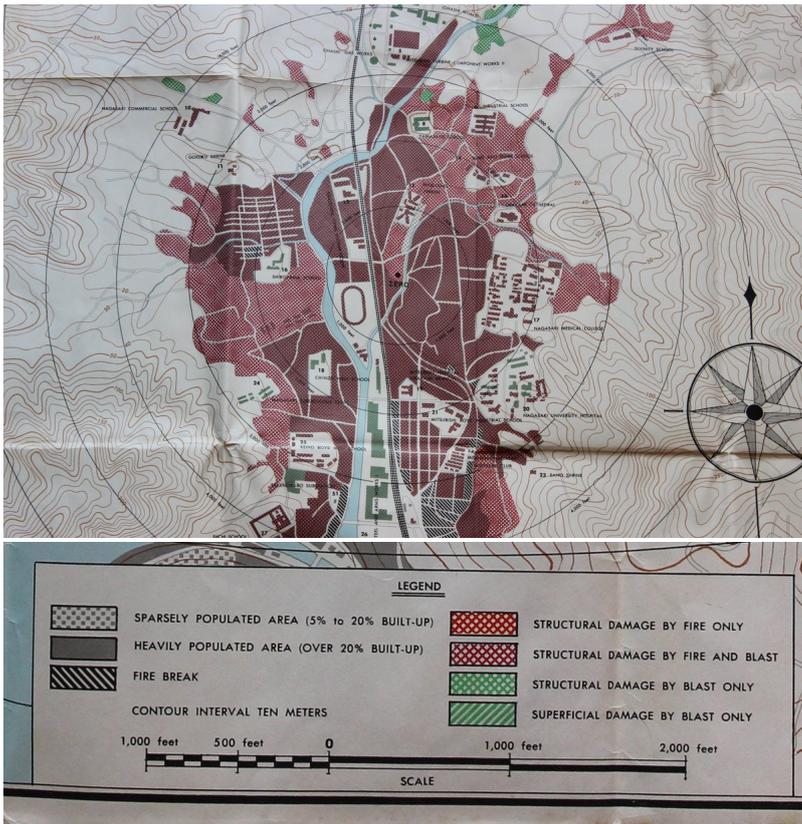
Failing to see the target visually — per their strike order — they went to the secondary target, Nagasaki. When they arrived there, they STILL couldn't see the target... but dropped it anyway. They missed the intended target by a significant amount.

(The bombardier claimed that a "hole in the clouds" opened up for him, allowing him to see the target, on the last run they made at it. Had he not dropped it, it would have had to be ditched. Luis Alvarez, the Nobel Prize physicist who helped assemble the bombs, never bought it.) <https://t.co/gm9TQ3rRxk>

## ALVAREZ

flew directly across the island instead. He would have to drop the bomb on the first pass in order to reach Okinawa, the closest base to Japan. The only—and unthinkable—alternative was to ditch it in the East China Sea.

Sweeney decided against orders to bomb if necessary by radar. Ostensibly a hole opened in the 80 percent cloud covered target in the last moments of the run. I've always taken this hole in the clouds with a grain of salt, since Behan, one of the best bombardiers in the Air Force, missed his target by two miles, a reasonable radar error in those days. Fat Man exploded above a narrower stretch of the ~~target~~. As a result, the bomb exploded over an entirely civilian area of north-western Nagasaki. The USAAF's own map of the damage makes it clear that the primary areas hit were filled with nothing but houses, schools, churches, and prisons. Ugh. <https://t.co/DXiXef2xrC>



On the fringes of the blast damage were two factories, at the north and south end of it. The Army later tried to claim that dropping it in between the two was intentional — it wasn't, this was an after-the-fact justification. The actual target was more to the south.

The Army covered up the fact that the Nagasaki mission went wrong in many ways — compared to Hiroshima, it was tactically full of mishaps. They also put out the idea that Nagasaki was a super important target, and not a low-priority one added in haste.

Anyway. Why even have a second bomb, only 3 days after the first? Most people don't realize that this entire schedule was set by the weather. Originally the plan was to have a week between the bombings, to give the Japanese time to react.

Forecasts of bad weather pushed the Hiroshima date forward, and similarly pushed Nagasaki back, removing that interval. As a result, the Japanese high command were only just getting hearing of the reality of Hiroshima (they sent scientists) when the 2nd bombing mission started.

The decision to drop the second bomb when it was dropped was not made by Truman, Stimson, or even Groves — it was made on the island of Tinian, by lower-level people. It was not part of a grand strategy, contrary to popular opinion.

<https://t.co/Ffx8eNmH5>

In fact, archival evidence points to Truman not knowing it was going to happen. He had seen the strike order that gave the Army incredible leeway in terms of using more bombs after the first. But at Potsdam, when he asked the "schedule,"

he was shown this telegram: <https://t.co/p4OFg9v1Cr>

E.O. 11652  
NND 730039  
By: ERC NARS. Date 6-4-74

23 July 1945.

TERMINAL

Number: WAR 37350

For Eyes Only Secretary of War reference VICTORY 238.

First one of tested type should be ready at Pacific base about 6 August. Second one ready about 24 August. Additional ones ready at accelerating rate from possibly three in September to we hope seven or more in December. The increased rate above three per month entails changes in design which Groves believes thoroughly sound. Groves sees OPPIE in Chicago tomorrow Tuesday for discussion as to future plans with respect to this. We will send further details after that Conference.

End

It says that the first bomb "of tested type" should be ready by 6 August, and the second one around 24 August. A big interval... if you don't realize that there was another bomb, the "untested type" that was dropped on Hiroshima.

Truman was pretty removed from the atomic bomb work. He also had a lot on his plate at Potsdam. He got totally fixated on the Trinity test, and I don't think he realized there were going to be two bombs ready in early August. All planning discussions were about the first use.

(Truman's personal role in the bomb decision, per General Groves, was "one of noninterference—basically, a decision not to upset the existing plans." He was told many of the plans, but it's not clear he totally understood them, or the details. Again, he had a lot on his plate.)

(The idea that Truman "decided" to use the bombs is an after-the-fact story that Truman and others liked to tell, to make the use of the bombs seem more deliberated over than it was. Many other people made decisions, but Truman himself participated in very few of them.)

Separately, most Japanese archival evidence shows that the Nagasaki bombing did not materially have an effect on the Japanese high command, either. They learned about it during a meeting they were having to discuss Hiroshima and the Soviet invasion.

This was the same meeting where they decided to put forward an offer of conditional surrender (which the US rejected). There isn't any evidence that the Nagasaki attack changed anyone's point of view in that room.

Absence of evidence is not absence of effect, but it clearly wasn't a crucial part of it. The idea that the Japanese didn't believe that the US had more atomic bombs is mostly untrue. If Nagasaki hadn't happened, it seems likely that little would have changed regarding surrender.

This is why many people who have studied it have found Nagasaki not that justifiable. Ted Telford, the chief US prosecutor at Nuremberg, concluded that had had "never heard a plausible justification of Nagasaki."

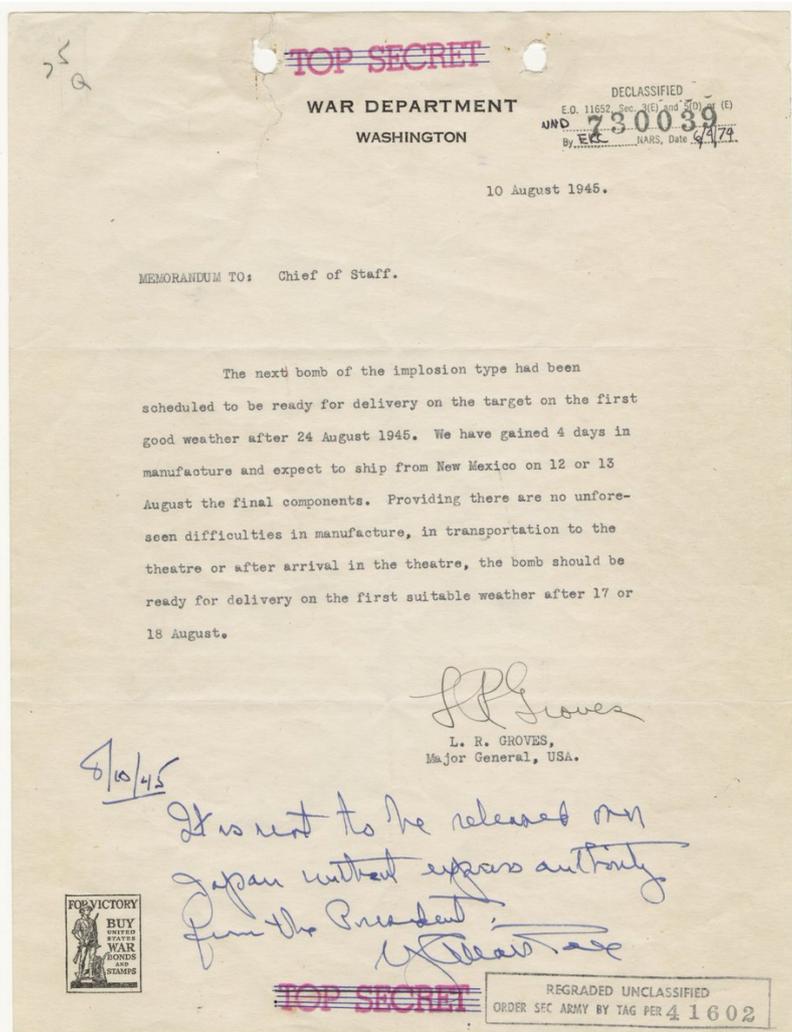
I think one can come up with "plausible justifications" for Hiroshima, even if they are debatable. Nagasaki is definitely a trickier moral issue, if your concern is with not slaughtering masses of civilians unnecessarily.

(If your argument is, "the Japanese [people] were evil and deserved it," then clearly the issue of plausible justification isn't an issue for you. I always get many replies to this effect.)

(I understand where they are coming from, especially from people who are from countries brutalized by the Japanese military. I don't think that justifies targeting children, as I've written on here before. But I understand it.)

Anyway, the most important consequence of Nagasaki, in my opinion, was that it greatly disturbed Truman. He had just gotten the casualty reports from Hiroshima and was already unnerved. He didn't know another bombing was going to happen so quickly. His attitude quickly soured.

The next day, he got a memo from General Groves saying they'd have another bomb ready in a week or so. Truman's reply was immediate: no further bombs were to be dropped without his express authority. He told his cabinet he couldn't bear to kill "all those kids." <https://t.co/NvthB4Ymvd>

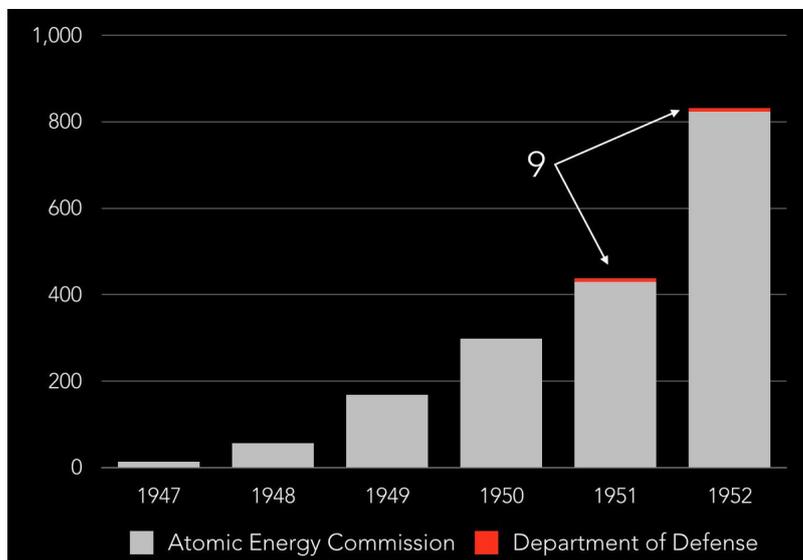


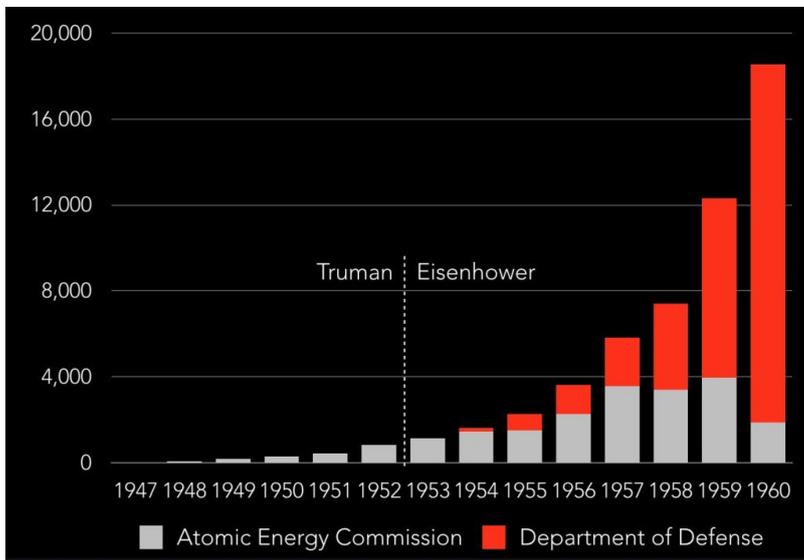
Friday, August 10, 1945 in the spring of 1944 about his agreement with Stalin

Truman said he had given orders to stop atomic bombing. He said the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible. He didn't like the idea of killing, as he said, "all those kids."

Truman's reclamation of authority, and insisting that all further nuclear use orders be routed through the President (and not the military), changed the nature of US nuclear weapons going forward. He reinforced this many times in his later presidency.

In fact, he outright refused to give the military "custody" over the bombs themselves — they didn't actually \*have\* the nukes that were being produced in the Cold War, they were kept by the civilian Atomic Energy Commission. (He eventually gave them 9. Eisenhower changed this.) <https://t.co/l7jqRFJC9c>



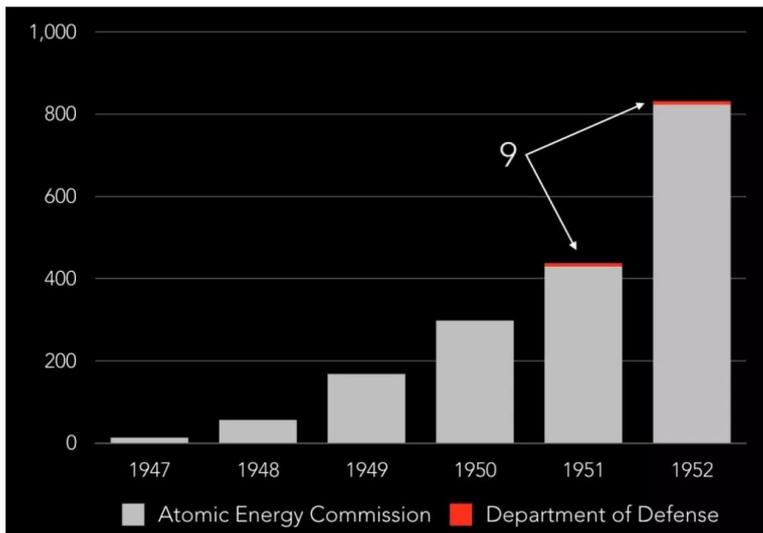


In his later presidency, Truman always feared what would happen if you gave the military access to nukes. He thought they did not understand, as he told a number of military and AEC figures in 1948, that they were not "military weapons," but "used to wipe out women and children." <https://t.co/pahh9pWrmX>

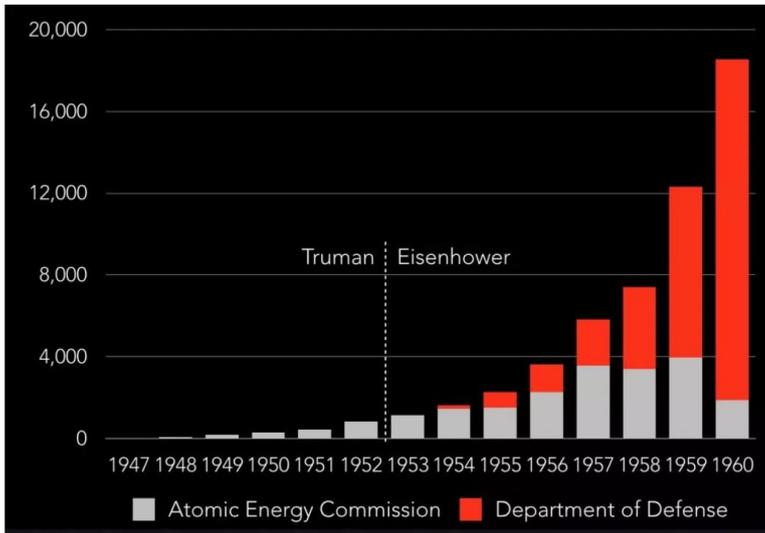
The President was giving this line of irrelevant talk a very fishy eye, at this point he said, poker-face, "I don't either. I don't think we ought to use this thing unless we absolutely have to. It is a terrible thing to order the use of something that" (here he looked down at his desk, rather reflectively) "that is so terribly destructive, destructive beyond anything we have ever had. You have got to understand that this isn't a military weapon." (I shall never forget this particular expression.) "It is used to wipe out women and children and unarmed people, and not for military uses. So we have got to treat this differently from rifles and cannon and ordinary things like that."

So for me, the ultimate importance of Nagasaki is not that it was the "second" bomb used in combat. It is that it was — so far — the **last** bomb used in combat. And if we're very lucky, and very wise, it might stay that way. /THREAD <https://t.co/T19Ls3fOm3>

(NB: I realize I left off the caption for those graphs! These are from a website on "The President and the Bomb," on the history and policy of Presidential use authority, that I plan to debut by the end of the month.) <https://t.co/ue7pFnFHZP>



US nuclear weapons custody under Truman, 1947-1952.<sup>8</sup>



US nuclear weapons custody under Truman and Eisenhower, 1947-1960. Note that the data for 1960 is approximate.<sup>19</sup>

19. Data for 1947-1959 is from L. Wainstein, et al., "The Evolution of U.S. Strategic Command and Control and Warning, 1945-1972," Institute for Defense Analysis Study S-467 (June 1975), on 34. Date from 1960 is extrapolated from the stockpile size at the time, and the following information from Roman 1998: "When Eisenhower left office in January 1961, the nuclear stockpile consisted of over 18,000 weapons with yields ranging from a kiloton to several megatons. The military possessed physical custody of 90 percent of the stockpile, with some unknown number in the hands of operational commanders." ↩

(For more background on the "custody" issue — in which the physical weapons were denied from the military in the early Cold War — see my writing here.) <https://t.co/BCv9Ed6F3D>

I have to run off to my own workshop now — where the Internet is unlikely to be working (sigh...) — so if you leave a lot of questions and/or angry disagreements, I won't see them until tomorrow. Just FYI! <https://t.co/uAAVX46VgC>