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# Szilard Petition, July 17, 1945

In a petition dated July 17, 1945, Leo Szilard and 69 co-signers at the Manhattan Project "Metallurgical Laboratory" at the University of Chicago urged President Harry S. Truman to consider his moral responsibilities, and not merely expediency, in deciding whether to use the atomic bomb.

This is an image of Szilard's historic petition, scanned from a copy of the original in the U.S. National Archives. The remainder of the 70 signatures appeared on additional pages, which are not included here. A [text version](#) of the petition, including the names of all signers, is also available.

To view this image properly, your monitor must support at least 800 x 600 resolution.

This page was placed on the World-Wide Web July 17, 1995, to commemorate the petition's 50th anniversary.

**SECRET**

July 17, 1945

## A PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Discoveries of which the people of the United States are not aware may affect the welfare of this nation in the near future. The liberation of atomic power which has been achieved places atomic bombs in the hands of the Army. It places in your hands, as Commander-in-Chief, the fateful decision whether or not to sanction the use of such bombs in the present phase of the war against Japan.

We, the undersigned scientists, have been working in the field of atomic power. Until recently we have had to fear that the United States might be attacked by atomic bombs during this war and that her only defense might lie in a counterattack by the same means. Today, with the defeat of Germany, this danger is averted and we feel impelled to say what follows:

The war has to be brought speedily to a successful conclusion and attacks by atomic bombs may very well be an effective method of warfare. We feel, however, that such attacks on Japan could not be justified, at least not unless the terms which will be imposed after the war on Japan were made public in detail and Japan were given an opportunity to surrender.

If such public announcement gave assurance to the Japanese that they could look forward to a life devoted to peaceful pursuits in their homeland and if Japan still refused to surrender our nation might then, in certain circumstances, find itself forced to resort to the use of atomic bombs. Such a step, however, ought not to be made at any time without seriously considering the moral responsibilities which are involved.

The development of atomic power will provide the nations with new means of destruction. The atomic bombs at our disposal represent only the first step in this direction, and there is almost no limit to the destructive power which will become available in the course of their future development. Thus a nation which sets the precedent

direction, and there is almost no limit to the devastation possible in the course of their future development. Thus a nation which sets the precedent of using these newly liberated forces of nature for purposes of destruction may have to bear the responsibility of opening the door to an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale.

If after this war a situation is allowed to develop in the world which permits rival powers to be in uncontrolled possession of these new means of destruction, the cities of the United States as well as the cities of other nations will be in continuous danger of sudden annihilation. All the resources of the United States, moral and material, may have to be mobilized to prevent the advent of such a world situation. Its prevention is at present the solemn responsibility of the United States--singled out by virtue of her lead in the field of atomic power.

The added material strength which this lead gives to the United States brings with it the obligation of restraint and if we were to violate this obligation our moral position would be weakened in the eyes of the world and in our own eyes. It would then be more difficult for us to live up to our responsibility of bringing the unloosed forces of destruction under control.

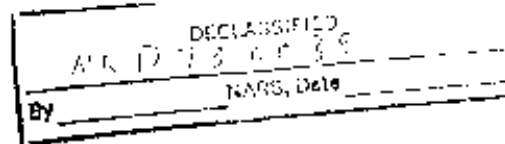
In view of the foregoing, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition: first, that you exercise your power as Commander-in-Chief, to rule that the United States shall not resort to the use of atomic bombs in this war unless the terms which will be imposed upon Japan have been made public in detail and Japan knowing these terms has refused to surrender; second, that in such an event the question whether or not to use atomic bombs be decided by you in the light of the considerations presented in this petition as well as all the other moral responsibilities which are involved.

R. Schapp  
D. Mulliken

E. P. Wigzell  
George S. Monck  
Leo Szilard

J. G. Wilson  
W. H. Zachariasen  
Francis R. Shonka  
John A. Simpson  
Walter Bartley  
John R. Howes

Frank Fort



Leo Szilard Home Page - World-Wide Web - <http://www.peak.org/~danneng/szilard.html>

Source: U.S. National Archives, Record Group 77, Records of the Chief of Engineers, Manhattan Engineer District, Harrison-Bundy File, folder #76.

\* UP to [Leo Szilard Home Page](http://www.peak.org/~danneng/szilard.html)

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# A PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

**Source:** U.S. National Archives, Record Group 77, Records of the Chief of Engineers, Manhattan Engineer District, Harrison-Bundy File, folder #76.

**On July 17, 1945, Leo Szilard and 69 co-signers at the Manhattan Project "Metallurgical Laboratory" in Chicago petitioned the President of the United States.**

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In view of the foregoing, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition: first, that you exercise your power as Commander-in-Chief, to rule that the United States shall not resort to the use of atomic bombs in this war unless the terms which will be imposed upon Japan have been made public in detail and Japan knowing these terms has refused to surrender; second, that in such an event the question whether or not to use atomic bombs be decided by you in light of the considerations presented in this petition as well as all the other moral responsibilities which are involved.

### **Leo Szilard and 69 co-signers**

Signers listed in alphabetical order, with position identifications added:

1. DAVID S. ANTHONY, Associate Chemist
2. LARNED B. ASPREY, Junior Chemist, S.E.D.
3. WALTER BARTKY, Assistant Director
4. AUSTIN M. BRUES, Director, Biology Division
5. MARY BURKE, Research Assistant
6. ALBERT CAHN, JR., Junior Physicist
7. GEORGE R. CARLSON, Research Assistant-Physics
8. KENNETH STEWART COLE, Principal Bio-Physicist
9. ETHALINE HARTGE CORTELYOU, Junior Chemist
10. JOHN CRAWFORD, Physicist
11. MARY M. DAILEY, Research Assistant
12. MIRIAM P. FINKEL, Associate Biologist
13. FRANK G. FOOTE, Metallurgist

14. HORACE OWEN FRANCE, Associate Biologist
15. MARK S. FRED, Research Associate-Chemistry
16. SHERMAN FRIED, Chemist
17. FRANCIS LEE FRIEDMAN, Physicist
18. MELVIN S. FRIEDMAN, Associate Chemist
19. MILDRED C. GINSBERG, Computer
20. NORMAN GOLDSTEIN, Junior Physicist
21. SHEFFIELD GORDON, Associate Chemist
22. WALTER J. GRUNDHAUSER, Research Assistant
23. CHARLES W. HAGEN, Research Assistant
24. DAVID B. HALL, position not identified
25. DAVID L. HILL, Associate Physicist, Argonne
26. JOHN PERRY HOWE, JR., Associate Division Director, Chemistry
27. EARL K. HYDE, Associate Chemist
28. JASPER B. JEFFRIES, Junior Physicist, Junior Chemist
29. WILLIAM KARUSH, Associate Physicist
30. TRUMAN P. KOHMAN, Chemist-Research
31. HERBERT E. KUBITSCHKEK, Junior Physicist
32. ALEXANDER LANGSDORF, JR., Research Associate
33. RALPH E. LAPP, Assistant to Division Director
34. LAWRENCE B. MAGNUSSON, Junior Chemist
35. ROBERT JOSEPH MAURER, Physicist
36. NORMAN FREDERICK MODINE, Research Assistant
37. GEORGE S. MONK, Physicist
38. ROBERT JAMES MOON, Physicist
39. MARIETTA CATHERINE MOORE, Technician
40. ROBERT SANDERSON MULLIKEN, Coordinator of Information
41. J. J. NICKSON, [Medical Doctor, Biology Division]
42. WILLIAM PENROD NORRIS, Associate Biochemist
43. PAUL RADELL O'CONNOR, Junior Chemist
44. LEO ARTHUR OHLINGER, Senior Engineer
45. ALFRED PFANSTIEHL, Junior Physicist
46. ROBERT LEROY PLATZMAN, Chemist
47. C. LADD PROSSER, Biologist
48. ROBERT LAMBURN PURBRICK, Junior Physicist
49. WILFRED RALL, Research Assistant-Physics
50. MARGARET H. RAND, Research Assistant, Health Section
51. WILLIAM RUBINSON, Chemist
52. B. ROSWELL RUSSELL, position not identified
53. GEORGE ALAN SACHER, Associate Biologist
54. FRANCIS R. SHONKA, Physicist
54. ERIC L. SIMMONS, Associate Biologist, Health Group
56. JOHN A. SIMPSON, JR., Physicist

57. ELLIS P. STEINBERG, Junior Chemist
58. D. C. STEWART, S/SGT S.E.D.
59. GEORGE SVIHLA, position not identified [Health Group]
60. MARGUERITE N. SWIFT, Associate Physiologist, Health Group
61. LEO SZILARD, Chief Physicist
62. RALPH E. TELFORD, position not identified
63. JOSEPH D. TERESI, Associate Chemist
64. ALBERT WATTENBERG, Physicist
65. KATHERINE WAY, Research Assistant
66. EDGAR FRANCIS WESTRUM, JR., Chemist
67. EUGENE PAUL WIGNER, Physicist
68. ERNEST J. WILKINS, JR., Associate Physicist
69. HOYLANDE YOUNG, Senior Chemist
70. WILLIAM F. H. ZACHARIASEN, Consultant

Source note: The position identifications for the signers are based on two undated lists, both titled "July 17, 1945," in the same file as the petition in the National Archives. From internal evidence, one probably was prepared in late 1945 and the other in late 1946. Signers were categorized as either "Important" or "Not Important," and dates of termination from project employment were listed in many cases. It is reasonable to conclude that the lists were prepared and used for the purpose of administrative retaliation against the petition signers.

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[Gene Dannen / gene@dannen.com](http://www.dannen.com/decision/45-07-17.html)