

## New Study Reveals FDR Opposition to Bombing Auschwitz

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### [The Iconoclast](#)



Aerial Photo of Auschwitz Main Camp, April 1944

January 27th marks the 67th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp by advancing Russian Forces during WWII. They found 7,000 bedraggled survivors of the systematic murder of more than 1.4 million European Jews at the death factory. Among the witnesses to the Nazi 'final solution' were camp inmates, future Nobel laureate, Elie Wiesel and Italian author, the late Primo Levi. Just days prior to the arrival of liberating Russian forces, 60,000 of the death factory's inmates were marched off by their Nazi SS guards. Less than a quarter of these death march survivors were freed by US and British forces. Only the surrender of German forces on May 7th, 1945 ended the Hitlerian genocidal madness that destroyed Six Million European Jewish men, woman and children.

A new two year study by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC reveals the opposition by WWII American President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) to bombing the Auschwitz Birkenau death complex in Southern Poland in the summer of 1944. The findings of the latest USHMM study on wartime

allied and Jewish Zionist leaders over the decision not to bomb Auschwitz were the subject of an EnerPub article, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Sin of Omission: Auschwitz" by former US diplomat, Martin Barillas. Barillas noted the contrast with Britain's wartime leader, Sir Winston Churchill:

Churchill appeared interested in a military strike against the camps. He told Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that Hitler's war against the Jews was "probably the greatest and most horrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world," adding, "Get everything out of the Air Force you can, and invoke me, if necessary." In July 1944 Churchill was told that U.S. bomber pilots could do the job best, but that it would be "costly and hazardous."

We wrote of the controversy over whether the US Army Air Forces could have bombed the Auschwitz Birkenau complex in a May 2009 NER article: "The Auschwitz and Iran Bombing Controversies: Are There Parallels?" The evidence from that third party analysis demonstrated the feasibility of bombing Auschwitz early in the summer of 1944. Several sorties spread over three weeks would have destroyed the killing machinery, representing a minor diversion of resources in the allied air campaign in central Europe. According to Professor David S. Wyman that might have spared 150,000 of the more than 430,000 Hungarian Jews who were murdered over a three month period from May to July.

Wartime Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy figured prominently in Roosevelt's thinking. Note what we said in our NER article about his role and the ironic Budapest bombing in July 1944 that proved both FDR and McCloy wrong about the proposed Auschwitz bombing campaign:

Washington officials, especially Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy considered such requests as "impossible" and "risky," given the air war commitments in the European Theater of Operations. Later McCloy put the onus on FDR for making the decision not to bomb Auschwitz.

McCloy was quoted by Miller as saying:

"bombing the camp would involve a diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations."

A Mission to Auschwitz would be an Eighth Air Force operation, a highly risky round trip flight unescorted of approximately 2000 miles over enemy territory.

In contrast to McCloy's misleading statements, the reality was we could have done that and more. The resources involved-aircraft sorties, bomb ordnance and air crew losses were a finite fraction of overall air war capabilities of both the 8th and 15th USAAFs. Moreover, if the bombing campaign had begun in June 1944, for example, the weather and meager fighter aircraft and flak gun threats were most favorable to such a mission that could have destroyed the killing machinery at Auschwitz

Birkenau.

The fact was that bombing Budapest on July 2nd by the heavy bombers of the 15th USAAF and intercepts by Hungarian intelligence of Jewish Agency requests from Geneva for bombing Auschwitz brought the death transports to a halt sparing the remainder of Hungary's besieged Jews - approximately 300,000 - until Swedish businessman, diplomat and hero Raoul Wallenberg arrived with the aid of the U.S. War Refugee Board and Joint Distribution Committee funds to put many Jews in Budapest in 'safe houses' until the Russians arrived in early 1945.

The EnerPub Barillas article details some of the revelations about FDR's and McCloy's roles in the Auschwitz bombing decision drawn from the USHMM study.

Here are some excerpts:

The reputation of President Franklin Roosevelt has been dealt a serious blow following the release of a study by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In numerous speeches, articles, and conferences over the years, former officials of the Roosevelt administration and supporters have claimed that David Ben-Gurion, who would become the founder of the modern state of Israel following its liberation in 1948, opposed bombing the Auschwitz death camp in occupied Poland out of fear that innocents would be killed. Roosevelt's supporters have made the claim to deflect criticism of FDR for the rejection of requests to bomb the death camp.

A newly-completed two-year study by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, however, has concluded that Ben-Gurion opposed bombing the Auschwitz prisoner camp only for a period of several weeks when he believed it was a labor camp, reversing himself when its purpose as a death camp became clear to him. Thereafter, he supported bombing. Ben-Gurion's associates in Europe and the United States then repeatedly pressed Allied officials to bomb the camp.

[. . .]

"There is now broad agreement among Holocaust historians regarding the question of David Ben-Gurion's position on bombing Auschwitz," said Dr. Rafael Medoff, director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, which had been urging the museum to study the subject in depth. "Roosevelt's apologists can no longer use Ben-Gurion to whitewash the Roosevelt administration's refusal to bomb Auschwitz." The Wyman Institute has issued a study of its own, "America's Failure to Bomb Auschwitz: A New Consensus Among Historians," which will be made available this week on the Institute's web site, [www.WymanInstitute.org](http://www.WymanInstitute.org).

In Washington, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., was heartsick over what he was discovering about the murder of the Jews of Europe. He was FDR's closest friend in the administration and a non-observant Jew. Morgenthau did not want to jeopardize his friendship with FDR and thus refrained from asking the president's

intervention into what he considered specifically Jewish matters. FDR's attitude towards Jews and Catholics reflected his elite upbringing of the time. Once the world war began, FDR privately said to Morgenthau and Leo Crowley, a Catholic appointed to government, "You know this is a Protestant country, and the Catholics and Jews are here under sufferance." He bluntly told them it was "up to you" to "go along with anything I want."

The thought of the extermination camps haunted Morgenthau. When Secretary of War Henry Stimson told Morgenthau that his plan was too harsh on the Germans, Morgenthau replied that it was "not nearly as bad" as sending people "to gas chambers."

Doing something about the gas chambers had to go through channels, so he directed an aide to explore whether bombing Auschwitz and/or the rail lines might save lives. The matter was referred to Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, who had so exasperated Morgenthau by refusing to let the U.S. military help save Jewish refugees that Morgenthau had privately denounced McCloy as an "oppressor of the Jews," a charge McCloy vehemently denied. McCloy viewed any bombing of Auschwitz as a violation of FDR's demand that the U.S. military be used only for direct efforts to win the war. McCloy refused to bomb Auschwitz. For decades after the war, McCloy was excoriated for his refusal to bomb Auschwitz just as he always and vehemently insisted that he had never discussed the matter with FDR. McCloy was so respected after the war that he was known as the 'chairman' of The Establishment.

New information may now make FDR culpable of the omission, however. In 1986, three years before his death, McCloy had a taped private conversation with Morgenthau's son Henry III. The 91-year-old McCloy told the junior Morgenthau that he of course had raised the issue with FDR. He said, "I remember talking one time with Mr. Roosevelt about it, and he was irate. He said, 'Why, the idea! They'll only move it down the road a little way.' One can take FDR's meaning that the Nazis would have built other death camps and continue the killing." McCloy recollected that FDR "made it very clear" to him that bombing Auschwitz "wouldn't have done any good." Moreover, Roosevelt said that bombing Auschwitz would be "provocative" to the Nazis and he wouldn't "have anything to do" with the idea. FDR warned Morgenthau that Americans would be accused of "bombing these innocent people" at Auschwitz, adding, "We'll be accused of participating in this horrible business!"

McCloy also told Morgenthau's son Henry, "I didn't want to bomb Auschwitz... It seemed to be a bunch of fanatic Jews who seemed to think that if you didn't bomb, it was an indication of lack of venom against Hitler. Whereas, the president had the idea that that would be more provocative and ineffective. And he took a very strong stand." So, based on McCloy's account, FDR make his decision about Auschwitz after little or no consultation with his key advisers. This raises questions. Did McCloy cover up FDR's decision to avoid bombing Auschwitz out of misplaced loyalty? Did

McCloy in his ninth decade decide to share the blame for the Auschwitz omission with the grinning patrician lion Roosevelt, having tired of being labeled the sole culprit? Was it any coincidence that it was the son of Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, who had indicted McCloy as an enemy of the Jews, who was to receive this confession?

In our NER article on the Auschwitz bombing controversy, we noted this comment from Israeli PM Netanyahu during a 1998 visit to Auschwitz:

All that was needed was to bomb the train tracks. The Allies bombed the targets nearby. The pilots only had to nudge their crosshairs.

You think they didn't know? They knew. They didn't bomb because at the time the Jews didn't have a state, nor the political force to protect themselves.

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