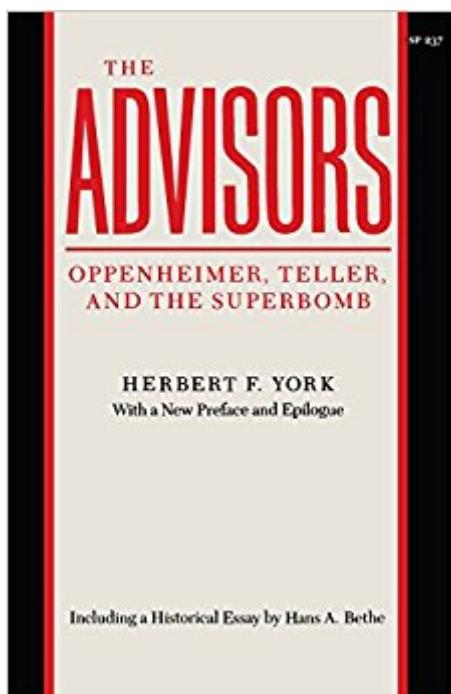


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The Advisors: Oppenheimer, Teller, And The Superbomb (Stanford Nuclear Age Series)



Synopsis

First published in 1976, *The Advisors* is an absorbing look at the technical, strategic, and human aspects of the great debate that led to the decision to build the first hydrogen bomb. Based on the author's own participation in Project Superbomb, on interviews with other participants, and on declassified documents, this book explains the complete background to this major acceleration of the nuclear arms race. For this reissue, the author has written a new Preface and Epilogue. The reissue also includes a recently declassified essay by Hans A. Bethe discussing the history of the H-bomb project from his unique vantage point as Director of the Theoretical Division at Los Alamos. He has revised the essay specifically for inclusion in this book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"York clearly writes with an insider's knowledge . . . telling a gripping story about a major event." Isis "York is uniquely qualified to analyze and to assess this historical decision." Physics Today "An important book, disclosing for the first time what went on behind the scenes. . . . An appendix contains the text, written in 1949 but only declassified in 1974, of the report of the General Advisory Committee to the Atomic Energy Commission, advising against a high-priority program to develop the bomb. . . . It is by itself worth the price of the book. It is a historical document of rare quality, brief, factual, and eloquent." Science

In this well-referenced, short book former Livermore Lab Director and Presidential advisor, Herb

York, presents the key comments of Dr. Oppenheimer and others opposed to developing the hydrogen bomb. Like many things that happen in the hodge-podge of democracy... the policy emerged after a few commissioned group meetings, very little public input, and a process swayed by events, anxieties, and ambitions. Compared to the fission bomb... the elements of the hydrogen stage of the thermonuclear weapon were cheap and readily available. The scale of the thermonuclear explosion became unlimited - 5000 times the yield of the original fission weapons. Oppenheimer and others were clear that this would remove the ability to target a military installation separate from a surrounding civilian populace. Herb York spent decades - with his modest and humorous style - opposing the further development of the nuclear arms race... after helping lead what he described as the scientific "intoxication" of the 1950's when seventy different models of nuclear weapons were designed and tested. York helped in the Clinton Administration to secure the zero-yield Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by confirming that further nuclear weapons explosions were not needed to prove that the US nuclear weapons "still worked." A simpler warhead design was not needed because of the high reliability of all the nuclear warheads that ever entered the nuclear arsenal. As Stephen Younger enters the leadership of the nuclear weapons laboratories at Sandia National Labs with a plan to design and build a new smaller, more usable, nuclear warhead with new missiles to deliver it... all those concerned about the continuing risk of nuclear annihilation would do well to read the story Herb York tells... and wish he was still with us to advise caution and restraint.

Dr. York's fascinating history of the H-bomb decision stands the test of time well. It is a telling lesson of mistakes made in a U.S. decision pushed by overly conservative decisionmaking, much of it tied up with the decision to strip Oppenheimer of his security clearance. The best part of the book--which is especially useful for teaching--is his careful counterfactual history of what might have happened had we not deployed the H-bomb and instead tried to control it. He shows convincingly that boosted fission weapons would have been more than adequate to meet any possible Soviet threat--should arms control efforts have failed. Instead, they weren't even tried, and the arms race continued out of control until the late 1980s. York's book is worth reading by anyone interested in politics of the nuclear age.

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