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AVOIDING ANOTHER BIG BANG

(or How We Won the Cold War)

In the 15 billion years (more or less) since the big bang that started our universe, mankind is a very late-comer into the overall scheme of things, but unlike predecessor creatures we have learned how to destroy ourselves completely. We may not be able to shake the planet from its axis but we can poison the entire atmosphere with lethal radioactivity. The United States could do it today, as could the Soviet Union, and maybe others.

It is truly a blessing that no nuclear weapons bave been used against an adversary since the two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in 1945. It is also one of history's most remarkable chapters, played out in a bipolar world of opposing superpowers with both sides committed to military superiority.

While national policy makers on both sides were debating how best to win the race for superiority, the scientists continued developing bigger and better weapons. Eventually, the debate began to focus on how to deter - not win - a nuclear war, for clearly there would be no winners in such a war.

Our national effort to avoid what I call "Another Big Bang" costs us annually almost 400 billion dollars in money well spent. When I came into the field 45 years ago, each of the three military services was given approximately 5 billion dollars. The current budget ~~That~~ represents a substantial increase but in retrospect the world is better off because our country was willing to spend whatever it took to win the race.

Early in my career I had occasion to work with a man named Herman Kahn, whose lectures on weapons technology and military strategy were absolutely brilliant. In one of his presentations Kahn paused and, as an aside, said "actually, we could defeat the Russians if we simply double our defense spending, because they would collapse trying to keep up with us."

Maybe that is what happened!

Although my generation usually considers World War II the defining event of our lives, we have in fact been shaped or influenced more, I think, by the prospect of nuclear holocaust in the years since the war.

I have spent most of my adult life at Lynchburg College, but for a period of 15 years I was a Federal employee dealing largely with national security affairs. In unpacking some shipping boxes recently I discovered anew some of the relics of my Cold War adventures which I would like to share with you. This doesn't tell the whole story, but it will give you a glimpse from where I saw it.

My entry into this field came during my first year out of college when I was a very junior research analyst in the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress (then known as the Legislative Reference Service). I had just completed a compilation of abstracts of current books and articles on the subject of national defense when the Korean War broke out. The print of abstracts was dated June 1950.

All of a sudden my specialty became a hot item and my professional prospects were much improved. For the next dozen years

I was involved in research and investigations dealing with national security affairs, with the exception of a residency at Harvard University for my doctoral studies, which were not totally unrelated.

Through a series of fortuitous events I received a Littauer Fellowship to study at what is now known as the Kennedy School of Government. With my wife Betty's fulltime employment and the stipend of this fellowship we were able to complete our program in two years.

When we returned to Washington in the spring of 1953 the Cold War was heating up and defense expenditures were rapidly expanding. The Congress was becoming involved in a wide range of activities relating to national security and various committees of the Congress were drawing increasingly on the resources of the Congressional Research Service.

In the course of consulting with staff members of the Military Operations Subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations I prepared a number of position papers for the Subcommittee staff and eventually I came to know the chairman, Congressman R. Walter Riehlman, whose friendship would last a lifetime.

On detail from the Library of Congress, I had the privilege of assisting the Subcommittee's extensive study of U.S. military research and development programs, which had been the focus of much of my graduate studies. This was a lucky break for me because it tied in nicely with my doctoral dissertation.

We completed the hearings and submitted our report to the Congress in August of 1954, but it took me two more years to

finish my dissertation, which was entitled "Science and Defense; Military Research and Development in the United States."

This was an exciting time is the scientific community. We were moving away from some spectacular scientific achievements of World War II, most notably the atomic bomb produced by the Manhattan Project, and into a future beyond anyone's imagination. We learned about the possibility of developing missiles capable of spanning the oceans, and indeed the Atlas ICBM was soon in production. We even heard rumors of the possibility of developing counter missiles (Anti-ICBMs), but it would be many years before that possibility became a reality.

In our Subcommittee report we noted that "the entire art of warfare has been completely transformed ---through the application of science and technology to weapons and their uses." (House Report No. 2618, 83d Congress, 2d Session 1954, p.1) We cited a strong conviction on the part of the Subcommittee "that the superiority of our military preparedness program might be dangerously jeopardized" if we failed to utilize fully our civilian scientific resources.

The following year, with a change in party control of the House of Representatives, the Military Operations Subcommittee became known as the Holifield Subcommittee with Congressman Chet Holifield succeeding Congressman Riehlman as chairman. I was still on assignment from the Library of Congress and was invited to continue in that capacity, but the main thrust of the Subcommittee's work changed. Very shortly I was asked to organize a comprehensive investigation into the status of civil defense programs in the United States.

I think I was tapped for this assignment because I had written the first report on this subject published by the Library of Congress in the form of a Public Affairs Bulletin (Bulletin No. 92, February 1951).

In any event, for the next four years I worked with this subcommittee essentially fulltime on a number of far-reaching investigations. We conducted ~~extensive~~ comprehensive hearings and issued several reports on matters relating to civil defense. Our first civil defense report was dramatically entitled "Civil Defense for National Survival" (House Report No. 2946, 84th Congress, 2d Session, July 27, 1956). Later reports were more specific in their titles.

Our first set of hearings was extensive to say the least. From January through June of 1956 we received testimony in eight major cities. We printed the hearing record in seven separate volumes.

In the winter of 1956-57 the Military Operations Subcommittee, still chaired by Chet Holifield, undertook a series of small investigations into U.S. military supply management programs. As these inquiries progressed, several subcommittee members expressed an interest in learning more about supply management programs of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. That organization's role was then gaining prominence in President Eisenhower's overall program to deter Soviet expansion in Europe.

The Subcommittee's interest in this subject eventually led to the second most exciting experience of my professional career. During that spring and summer it was my job to prepare for a series of hearings on U.S. military aid and supply programs in Western Europe. Later the assignment was broadened to include a look at civil defense programs in the Scandinavian countries, with a possible side trip into the Soviet Union.

The whole enterprise was a fascinating prospect, but the Soviet trip would be unprecedented in that no Congressional unit had visited the Soviet Union since the onset of the Cold War. (Was this the first stirrings of "detante"?)

A very cautious State Department, which was handling our dealings with the various U.S. embassies in Europe, encouraged us to continue planning for the Soviet trip but not to count on it.

As the time for our departure neared, we learned of a parallel trip being planned by a subcommittee on the Senate side. Our subcommittee members were disappointed when the Senate group beat us to the punch and attracted national headlines two weeks ahead of us.

Our trip into the Soviet Union came at the end of our scheduled itinerary, which included visits to military bases in England, France and Germany and meetings with Danish, Norwegian and Swedish officials associated with civil defense programs. We parked our U.S. Air Force Constellation in Stockholm, Sweden, and proceeded to Moscow on a scheduled commercial SAS flight. While the Russians were willing to allow U.S. Congressmen to come into their country they were not about to let us fly in on a military aircraft!

To this point, our trip had gone pretty much as planned. At each stop we visited with local dignitaries. At the end of each session I would churn out a press release for members of the committee to send home. The only sour note came when the Senate Committee <u>safely</u> exited the Soviet Union and proceeded back to the States with some degree of fanfare.

Then, while our subcommittee was preparing to depart from Stockholm on the final leg into Moscow, the Russians treated the world to a memorable Octover Surprise with the launching of the Sputnik orbital rocket-ship! The Soviets were first into space!

The wire services and radio networks were all over us in Stockholm. Every news organization wanted to know what we knew about the Soviet space program. With our rivals from the Senate Committee safely back home, the members of our subcommittee could finally bask in the glow of a national lime light. We became the "first Congressional committee to visit the Soviet Union after the launching of Sputnik."

In the Soviet Union we learned almost nothing about Sputnik, except that its launching appeared to energize the Russian people. We were somewhat amused that individual Russians we talked with cited this feat as proof that Russia had indeed invented the telephone and the radio.

We were saddened to see the still lingering evidence of the devastation suffered by the Russians in World War II. Stalingrad looked like a rebuilt small village, and the cities we visited other than Moscow had unpaved streets and crude plumbing, or none at all.

The people of Moscow seemed to have enormous energy. At dawn and at dusk the sidewalks were crowded with what seemed like a civilian army marching briskly to and from their work places. And during day-light hours the four-abreast line of people waiting to visit the tombs of Lenin and Stalin extended at least a mile, as far as we could see. Stalin's body was still there, although it was removed later for burial inside the Kremlin walls.

Our Intourist guides were affable and efficient. They sang with us "Old McDonald" and "Don't Fence Me In," tunes picked up from American G.I.'s in World War II. (I must say, the guides knew more verses than we did!)

Interestingly, the guides had no explanation for the blank space on their walls next to the picture of Lenin. Kruschev's denunciation of Stalin appeared to be taken in stride. I do recall one of the guides simply saying, "We were misled."

After ten days in the Soviet Union, the members of our subcommittee were anxious to get back to the States and find out what was happening in their home districts as well as to report on their timely odyssey. Thus, we cut out the Italian part of our schedule and came home after a brief stop-over in Geneva. We came out of Moscow on a Finair flight to Helsinki, where our wonderful U.S. aircraft and crew were waiting. We almost burst into cheers when we spotted our military escort officer, who had remained with the air crew while we were in the Soviet Union. (He was an Air Force major named Harper whom we dubbed "J.W." in honor of that well known brand of spirits.)

The euphoria of our trip quickly evaporated when our subcommittee members learned that the American people were more interested in what we could do to catch up with the Russian space program than with the mundane programs we had been studying in Europe.

Staff vacations, already postponed from August until November, were simply cancelled. Immediately we began to investigate "missiles" and "space."

Although we received a little static from the House Armed Services Committee, our chairman succeeded in retaining jurisdiction in the subject field. This was before Congress established a standing committee on Space and Technology.

By the middle of the winter we had completed our report entitled "United States Military Aid and Supply Programs in Western Europe" (House Report No. 1371, 85th Congress, 2d Session, February 20, 1958), but it took us a year and a half to complete the subcommittee's report on "Civil Defense in Western Europe and the Soviet Union" (House Report No. 300, 86th Congress, 1st Session, April 27, 1959).

Our jump into the missile program gave us an opportunity to review and evaluate the findings and recommendations of our Subcommittee's 1954 report on military research and development programs. We found that many of our concerns had been satisfied and that there was indeed a new sense of urgency in the pursuit of promising research opportunities. Recommendations for organizational changes in the Department of Defense generally had been well received but I am not sure we can say just how much impact, if any, our Subcommittee had on the structure and process. The whole organization had grown enormously complex.

The new missile programs were exciting to learn about. We found each of the military services racing to build their own version of America's Sputnik. We visited missile research and production facilities around the country. We examined the various management and production systems, held extensive hearings in Washington, and in September 1959 we issued our own report on "Organization and Management of Missile Programs' (House Report No. 1121, 86th Congress, 1st Session).

While we were writing up our report on missiles, the chairman of our subcommittee arranged for me to be loaned to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy to organize a set of hearings dealing with the receiving end of a nuclear attack. This assignment culminated in the issuance of a report in August of 1959 entitled "Biological and Environmental Effects of Nuclear War" (U.S. Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, 86th Congress, 1st Session).

This flexibility in my assignments was possible because Mr. Holifield was also a subcommittee chairman (and later chairman) of the Joint House-Senate Committee on Atomic Energy. That unique body was the only joint committee of the Congress ever granted both legislative and oversight responsibilities.

After a short stint back on the House subcommittee staff, I spent another year as a professional staff member of the Joint Committee, where we held hearings and issued reports on peaceful applications of atomic energy and radiation protection standards.

Several months after President Kennedy's inauguration I left the Joint Committee staff to become Director of Emergency Plans and Readiness in the Executive Office of the President, in which capacity, for the first time I had to face the issues of national survival with an executive responsibility.

During my three years in this assignment we experienced what many consider our most serious Cold War confrontation when we discovered the Russians were in the process of placing nuclear missiles in Cuba. President Kennedy's handling of that crisis may well have been the turning point in the long history of the Cold War. It was by far the most exciting moment in my career.

The most surprising thing about that encounter was our perceived need not to overreact. My job, as it happened, was to instruct the Executive branch agencies of the government not to do anything that would indicate we were planning to attack the other side. (None of our emergency plans were to be implemented.)

Soon after President Kennedy was assassinated, I moved out of national security affairs and into the presidency of Lynchburg College.

After almost twenty years in that office, I was reintroduced to the field as a Congressional staff consultant on national security affairs. A six-month stint in this assignment gave me a snapshot of military preparedness far beyond my wildest dreams in terms of U.S. forces deployed here and around the world. More weapons were on the drawing board and several billions of dollars were being directed toward the star-wars program called the "Strategic Defense Initiative."

Clearly by the mid-1980's the race was over, and we had won the Cold War. The events of subsequent years simply reflected the Soviet's inability to keep pace.

Finally, when the Soviets were unable to hold onto their last conquest, the victims in Afghanistan, we saw the beginning of a withdrawal of Soviet forces everywhere, culminating this past year in a complete redeployment inside their own borders. It is remarkable that hardly a shot has been fired since their troops got out of Afghanistan.

Now, we still have big-time national security problems that are not going to go away anytime soon. But the prospect of "Another Big Bang" has at least been greatly diminished. So far, so good.

In this paper I have mentioned a few of the individuals who impacted my professional career, notably the two congressional subcommittee chairmen I had the privilege of working closely with, Chet Holifield and Walter Riehlman, one a Democrat the other a Republican. These two men extended life-long friendships to me and Betty, for which we will always be grateful. There were a number of others I came to know, some more famous some less. If time permits, maybe we can talk about a few.