Senators Assail '76 C.I.A. Estimate of Soviet Power

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 16—The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has criticized the Central Intelligence Agency and, implicitly, the Ford Administration for the handling of a controversial effort to analyze Soviet strategic capabilities and aims in 1976.

In a report issued today, the 17-member panel said the attempt to estimate Soviet capabilities through "competitive analysis" by separate teams—one from inside the United States intelligence community and the other made up of outside specialists—had been compromised by press leaks and by one-sidedness.

The estimate caused some controversy after it was reported on Dec. 26, 1976, in The New York Times that both teams had concluded that the Soviet Union was striving for strategic superiority over the United States.

There were allegations at the time, also alluded to in the committee report, that members of the so-called B team of outside specialists had deliberately conveyed information about the competitive analysis to the press to undermine the arguments of the A team of intelligence regulars.

Today's report noted that the competition was undertaken at the request of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which was disturbed about what it believed to be optimistic intelligence estimates of Soviet strategic strength. The board was abolished last year by President Carter.

While praising the contribution of the team of outside specialists as "most rewarding" on technical questions, the Senate panel, following a year of study, said competition on estimating Soviet strategic aims was "more controversial and less conclusive" than relying on a single estimate.

The panel also asserted that the B team, headed by Prof. Richard Pipes, head of Harvard University's Russian Research Center, "reflected the views of only one segment of the spectrum," namely a conservative approach toward the Soviet Union.

Three Senators Dissent

The committee criticized the intelligence community, particularly the C.I.A., for basing its so-called national intelligence estimates of the Soviet Union's military power "narrowly" on "hardware questions" of weaponry. Instead, it said the agency should address "the wider framework of other dynamic world forces, many of which are essentially the creatures of neither U.S. nor Soviet initiative or control."

The committee report was issued with dissents from three senators.

Senator Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado, charged that "the use of selected outside experts was little more than a camouflage for a political effort to force the national intelligence estimate to take a more bleak view of the Soviet strategic threat."

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, said the B team notion of a Soviet drive for superiority in strategic arms "has gone from heresy to respectability, if not orthodoxy" in "what might be called official Washington."

And Senator Malcolm Wallop, Republican of Wyoming, accused the committee majority of attempting "to denigrate the B team" by conveying the impression that the group of evaluators assembled by the C.I.A. contained many different points of view while the outsiders constituted "a narrow band of zealots."