

The Weather
Today—partly cloudy, becoming
clear and cold, high near 40 degrees.
Tomorrow, mainly hazy, low, 34 to
40. Wednesday, fair and cool to
pleasant. High, 45 degrees at 11:30 a.m.;
low, 37 at 12:30 a.m. For details see B2.

The Washington Post and Times Herald

Full-of-Pop Page
As fresh as all sections, the Street
Outdoors Page includes over 200
cutting news about your favorite see-
show fun-hunting, fishing, boating,
hiking. Turn to Page 115 on today's
Washington Post and Times Herald.

8th Year ... No. 15 ... Phone RE. 7-1234 ... WASHINGTON, D.C. ... FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1957 ... WTOP Radio (1500) TV (Ch. 9) ... FIVE CENTS

NATO Votes Missile Bases, Peace Try; Secret Report Sees U. S. in Grave Peril

Enormous Arms Outlay Is Held Vital to Survival

By Chalmers M. Roberts
Special to The Washington Post Co.
The still top-secret Gaither Report portrays a United States in the gravest danger in its history.
It blames the Nation moving in fright-
ening haste to the status of a second-
class power.
It shows an America exposed to an al-
most certain threat from the missile-
bearing Soviet Union.
It calls for a massive program of re-
armament as part of the fear of re-
turning to the status of a second-
class power which will bring new political
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"The still top-secret Gaither Report por-
trays a United States in the gravest dan-
ger in its history," wrote Chalmers M.
Roberts, chief diplomatic correspondent
of The Washington Post on Dec. 20,
1957. After many years, the study has
been declassified and Mr. Roberts com-
pares his story with the official version.

Arms Plans Will Parallel Bid to Reds

Paris Parley Ends
With Agreement on
Series of Actions
By Murray Sayle
Special to The Washington Post
PARIS, Dec. 19—Lead-
ers of the North Atlantic
Treaty Organization today
pledged to arm with new
force might against the
threat of Russian power
and to ...

Chalmers M. Roberts

Post 2/24/73

Fifteen Years Later:

Reflections on a Top Secret Report

"The public," wrote retired President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his 1965 book, "Waging Peace," "became bewildered and upset when word got out that a far from optimistic secret report had been made to me in the National Security Council." "A roughly accurate account" of that report, Ike added, "soon appeared in a local publication." The publication was The Washington Post; the date was Dec. 20, 1957, and I was the author. The document was known as the Gaither Report. Now, more than 15 years later the top secret report has been made public because the New York Times asked for it under terms of the Nixon administration's reclassification system put into effect in the wake of the Pentagon Papers case. Mr. Nixon's NSC refused the Times' request but the Interagency Classification Review Committee, headed by Ike's son John, overruled the NSC and declassified the report.

To read the 40-page document today, and to compare it with what I wrote and what Ike later wrote, is like dip-

ping into an old shoe box that holds the family photos and clippings. It revives old memories and stirs one to reflect on history.

The Gaither Committee was created by Ike in early 1957 to look into civil defense, but the members decided to canvass the larger spectrum of Soviet-American military relationships. The group's name came from H. Rowan Gaither Jr., the first chairman who had to drop out because of illness. It was completed under Robert C. Sprague and William C. Foster as co-chairmen. Foster later headed the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

What differentiated the Gaither Report from other such inquiries was what occurred while it was being written: the first Soviet ICBM test and then, six weeks later, Sputnik. The report went to Ike a month after Sputnik when the United States was in a state of public alarm over its defenses. The Gaither panel, however, had been privy to the most top secret data in the government files, had viewed the secret U-2 photos of the Soviet Union, had before it a CIA estimate that the

U.S.S.R. would overtake America before the U.S. could and had estimates of the expected Russian ICBM lead from which came the "missile gap" that John F. Kennedy would use so effectively against Richard M. Nixon in the 1960 campaign.

What did the Gaither Report say? It accepted the conclusion that "U.S.S.R. intentions are expansionist," that Moscow was building military power "beyond any concept of Soviet defense," that the "evidence clearly indicates an increasing threat which may become critical in 1959 or early 1960." In "case of a nuclear attack" there would be "little protection" afforded the population of the United States.

An appendix set up four time frames: from the moment of writing to 1959 or early 1960; from 1959-early 1960 to 1961-1962; 1961-1962 to 1970-1975, and, finally the period beginning in 1970-1975. In the gross the estimates were rather perceptive but on the critical matter of timing they gave the Soviets too much credit too soon. The panel guessed, in the initial time frame, that "the Soviets are probably

taking a calculated risk during this period and are shifting a large part of their national effort from manned bombers to long-range ballistic missiles" with the effect that "a surprise attack could determine the outcome of a clash between these two major powers." We now know that the Kremlin did take such a gamble but not until about the time of Nikita Khrushchev's ouster in 1964. Thus the "very critical period for the U.S." the panel foresaw for 1959-early 1960 to 1961-1962 did not occur, if it ever occurred, until the years after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. As to the final period in the study, starting in 1970-1975, the panel correctly assumed bigger and more accurate missiles on both sides that "might destroy approaching 100 per cent of the urban population . . ."

What did the Gaither Report recommend? It called for a massive increase in the then current \$38 billion defense budget of \$19 billion for "measures of highest value" over the next five years plus a second level of priority projects adding another \$25 billion in the same period. Two other contingent estimates brought the possible five-year total to over \$81 billion in added expenditures for defense, active and passive.

The report was full of alarm and worry, all based on what we now know were many bad estimates and extrapolations from the too meager intelligence available. The "next two years" were described as "critical" and it was added that "if we fail to act at once, the risk, in our opinion, will be unacceptable."

The U.S.S.R., it was estimated, "will

probably achieve a significant ICBM delivery capability with megaton warheads by 1959." Curiously, when Eisenhower disclosed much of the report in his book he wrote that among its "sobering observations" was the statement that the Soviet Union "could, by late 1959, possibly launch an attack against the United States with 100" ICBMs "carrying megaton nuclear warheads." The figure 100 appears nowhere in the report now released although all five other points Ike recounted are in the report.

My own story on page one of The Washington Post caught the flavor of the report though, in retrospect, the words I used were even more frighten-



As Herblock Saw It—Dec. 23, 1957

ing. The dollar figures I reported were close to those in the report. Ike wrote that there was a big argument over releasing the report and that Vice President Nixon commented that "most of the recommendations are already in the papers anyway." Ike also wrote of "the set of tables estimating the relative strength" of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. over "the next several years" but there is no such table in the report as now released.

What effect did the report have? Ike considered the report too alarmist and said it "could not be accepted as a master blueprint for action." He was thinking of not just "a single problem" but of "the totality of the national and international situation," including "keeping plans and costs within bounds." His reaction was the right

one. He did accelerate, as the report recommended, the Polaris submarine program and take steps to protect the SAC bombers. But he turned down the multi-billion dollar shelter program (Kennedy revived that, to his regret). Ike stepped up the ICBM program but he avoided the recommendation to create an ABM capability "at the earliest possible date." In short, Ike did not panic.

A remarkable point about the Gaither Report is the minimum attention paid to the political-diplomatic aspects of the problem. It never went beyond stating, in italics, that "this could be the best time to negotiate from strength, since the U.S. military position vis-a-vis Russia might never be as strong again." The panel, in an oblique reference to the then top secret U-2 flights over the Soviet Union, which had begun a year earlier, did "urge exploitation of all means presently at our disposal to obtain both strategic warning and hard intelligence, even if some risks have to be taken . . ."

Soon after the Gaither Report came the public Rockefeller Report on national security, put together by a panel with Henry Kissinger as the key staff man. This group did not have access to top secret data as did the Gaither group but it had some unofficial help from the latter. Its recommendations were similar and it called for adding \$3 billion a year to the defense budget "for the next several years," not including the cost of civil defense. On the eve of the 1960 Republican convention Gov. Rockefeller won Vice President Nixon's approval to include in the GOP platform the burden of the Rockefeller Panel report, much to Eisenhower's anger and disgust. That only added to the "missile gap" rhetoric by the Democrats.

In retrospect, the Gaither Report demonstrates once more the dangers of drawing hard and fast conclusions about the Soviet Union from fragmentary intelligence. It led to an acceleration of the arms race, first moderately by Eisenhower and then massively by Kennedy, with only nominal attention to efforts to negotiate with Moscow on limitations. And it was all done as secretly as the government could manage. My own reporting on the Gaither Report added to the "missile gap" frame of mind. The only exculpation for that is that it reflected what the "best and the brightest" of those days thought were the facts of life.