

One Day of the Pike Committee

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CONSIDER ONE OF the more recent, not untypical, days of the House intelligence committee. It had invited just one witness, former Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Elmo Zumwalt. No other witness, either from inside or outside the administration, has yet been called to respond, one way or the other, to what the admiral had to say about intelligence and strategic arms limitation, though the House inquiry is but days away from its close. This is so, despite the fact that the committee had invited Adm. Zumwalt for a very specific purpose: to attack Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. As the admiral himself acknowledged, the committee came to him because of an article he wrote last August entitled "Soviets Cheat and We Turn Our Backs." His prepared testimony was replete with the details—interesting stuff, too—of the bureaucratic wars fought over the SALT talks. He went on to charge that Mr. Kissinger had "colluded" with the Russians to conceal their SALT "violations" from, among others, President Ford. Committee chairman Otis Pike (D-N.Y.) responded that the charges were grave and the subject matter complex. There was some questioning and the hearing ended.

Of Adm. Zumwalt, not much need be said. He is an old adversary of the Secretary of State; one can sympathize with his frustrations in dealing with such a wily practitioner of the bureaucratic arts. Adm. Zumwalt is, as well, chasing after the Democratic nomination for Senator in Virginia; he has the difficult problem of positioning himself to the right of the incumbent, Sen. Harry Byrd (Ind.-Va.). Beyond that, the admiral is providing dismaying evidence of the quality of perception of strategic matters at the Joint Chiefs level. He

did not seem to know, for instance, that it was not a violation of the SALT I agreement, but rather of a *unilateral* understanding which the United States stated in regard to that agreement, that the Russians replaced some SS-11 intercontinental missiles with more powerful SS-19s. Former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, by calmly but completely undercutting the heart of the Zumwalt testimony the following day, furnished that particular corrective—to another committee of Congress. Mr. Schlesinger, we observe, does not see eye to eye with Mr. Kissinger on SALT. But he flatly rejected Admiral Zumwalt's thesis, all the same.

But what of Mr. Pike, who invites a witness to do a hatchet job on an administration official, who sits by while the witness levels charges which add up to nothing short of treason, who observes that the charges are grave and the subject complex, and who then closes the hearing and passes on quickly to other affairs. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated performance. The House committee, though it got a late start by no fault of Mr. Pike, could have made a useful contribution by selecting a few problems or study areas and focusing on them in depth. Instead it is skipping from headline to headline, giving its staff scant opportunity to relate whatever it is doing to the committee's public hearings, converting potentially useful challenges to excessive Executive secrecy into wasteful confrontations of strong-willed men, leaving a trail which leads not to institutional reforms but to more argument and bitterness. It is hard to imagine how the findings and conclusions which may come out of such a performance can contribute to these urgently needed reforms.