

CHAPTER 6

R&D Gap Report Stimulates
Both Investigation and Smear

An analysis of the statements of a DOD official gives rise to an unprecedented investigation by the R&D subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee and, in due course, produces for the author a particularly vicious smear in six hundred newspapers by the notorious columnist Joseph Alsop and a position on the Nixon administration's "enemies list."

The third highest official in the Defense Department, Dr. John S. Foster, the director of defense research and engineering (DDR&E), was repeatedly claiming that Soviet technological superiority was just a matter of time.

I was, by then, an expert at reading congressional testimony—this was, after all, how I had prepared my first book—and I burned the midnight oil and read everything he said. I focused on what *Science* magazine eventually called “contradictions and discrepancies in . . . public statements and on flaws in the methodology they [defense department analysts] used to analyze the supposed threat.”⁶⁴ Dr. Foster seemed to be lacking discipline.

I collected his statements in a fifty-page, heavily documented staff study entitled “Is There an R&D Gap?”⁶⁵ One of the themes of this study was that the “R&D gap” was as much a mirage as earlier “bomber gaps” and “missile gaps” had been, the reflection of wholly unrealistic projections of what the Soviets could do.⁶⁶ The report concluded that “this entire episode has been a classical numbers game featuring selective disclosure, questionable assumptions,

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exaggeratedly precise estimates, misleading language, and alarmist non-sequitur conclusions."

Trying to work behind the scenes, like a good staff man, I first circulated the report to key FAS members and persuaded four of our officials to review the document, to comment on it, and to let me put their names on the report as an "Ad Hoc Committee on Military R&D."⁶⁷ Our May 6 press conference produced a good deal of publicity—even a Herblock cartoon carrying the ironic caption "More Money! The Russians May Be Outspending Us." *The Washington Post* gave it ten inches.⁶⁸ UPI put our statement on the wire to all its newspapers, and even Walter Cronkite quoted our main charge.⁶⁹ Packing all of our charges into a single quotable sentence had worked well. (The limited capacity of the media has to be kept in mind at all times.) This publicity was unusual.

Science magazine, in an especially kind three-page survey, told the whole story and lauded us from beginning to end. The article began as follows: "In a well-documented presentation before Congress, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) has released a good deal of steam from the Defense Department's latest drive to inflate its budget on the basis of a threat from the Soviet Union." And it concluded by saying, "Whatever the final effect, in dollars and cents, of their actions, the FAS is offering Congress something they have lacked for many years: expert, independent testimony on the question of how much weaponry is really enough."⁷⁰ (This was not, in fact, the first time the FAS had testified before Congress. Indeed, in 1971, as a reward for my enterprise in persuading the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee to permit outside groups before his committee, I seem to have become the first witness representing such a group in American history.)^[71]

All of this coverage induced the previously lethargic R&D subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee to hold a public hearing on May 19.

I left my name off the paper, even though I had had little help in preparing it. But when the arrival of one of the witnesses was scut-

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ted because of a canceled flight, I surfaced and filled in, with George Rathjens, in testifying. I also produced another five pages, overnight, pointing out that Chairman John C. Stennis and Senator Peter H. Dominick had long ago asked Foster for an unclassified report documenting his charges but had never received it. But I did not sign this either.⁷²

The reader may find my staying in the background surprising. In fact, however, I saw myself as a mahout for senior FAS officials. The people I was organizing were somehow “larger”; they were former government officials with credentials. I served as staff, writing documents for their signatures, much as staff members do for senators.

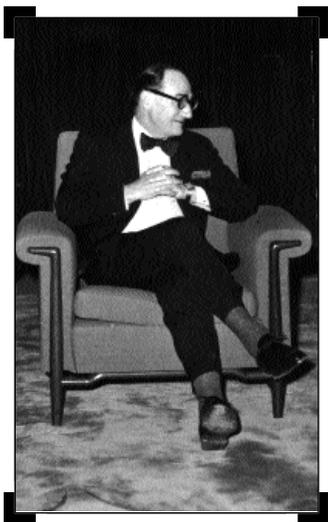
I also feared professional jealousy from my colleagues, even though they were often good friends or longtime acquaintances. I needed their advice and experience, and their credentials were essential. If I got “above myself”—or got too much press—they might be less willing to pitch in. And if the organization became known, as some had suggested, as “Jeremy with a few phone calls,” our effectiveness would decline.

From another point of view, also, I felt that I was more important to the effort than any one of them. I feared our opponents might come to think so, too. And if they managed to hit the central command post (me) with a well-aimed smear, it could be lethal to the organization.

As it turned out, however, this happened anyway, thanks to the great success of the hearing. As one observer put it, “some light has been let into a shuttered room in the Pentagon.” It was widely covered,⁷³ and was referred to eventually in *Time* magazine.⁷⁴ But the result was, perhaps inevitably, an effort to destroy my effectiveness.

The late columnist Joseph Alsop, then an influential denizen of Washington politics, was known for his dark visions of secret enemy plots. On May 26, 1971, he published a syndicated column in six hundred newspapers charging that the FAS had prepared a “bitter personal attack” on Foster, that I was the federation’s “chief mover and shaker,” and that I was out to “get” John Foster. A lot of

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*Joseph Alsop in China*

people, he said, wanted Foster "out of the way" because he was almost always right in his assessments of Soviet defense developments. He added, "There is every reason to believe that Dr. Stone completely shares the views of his father, I. F. Stone. And I. F. Stone has not departed a quarter of an inch from the Soviet line on any foreign or defense-policy question in the last two decades."

In sum, it was a charge of treason—trying to help the enemy get rid of an American obstacle. The charge was supported by guilt-by-family-association. And the charges against my father were a smear of his views. Even for Alsop, this was a remarkably low blow. True,

I. F. Stone, a radical journalist, was far to the left of Joseph Alsop. But in 1956, after his visit to the Soviet Union, he had written the following passage—in italics—in his famous newsletter, *I. F. Stone's Weekly*: "*This is not a good society and it is not led by honest men.*"⁷⁵

And this was just the tip of an iceberg of other writings that did not follow the Soviet line at all—writings celebrated for their independence of mind. In fact, I. F. Stone was so celebrated for his work

*I. F. Stone at work*

that upon his death, he received a half dozen op-eds and editorials in *The Washington Post* praising his work—a hell of a lot more than did Alsop when he died. And they were much warmer, from colleagues who knew him for decades. Other papers reacted the same way.^[76]

As for me, Alsop was suggesting, without any evidence, that I "completely" shared my father's

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views. He knew nothing about me whatsoever. His characterization was thrice in error. His column called me “exceedingly left-wing” when I was a mere liberal. It called me a “political scientist” when, in fact, I was trained as a mathematician. It called me a Princeton graduate even though I was a product of Swarthmore College and Stanford University.

It was an interesting experience, being smeared. I learned of the existence of the article in advance from an aunt, Judy Stone, who worked on *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Picking up an advance copy at *The Washington Post* at midday, I asked them not to run it. (It turned out that *The Los Angeles Times*, home of Alsop’s L.A. Times Syndicate, had refrained from printing the column because the editors considered it “unverifiable.”) The *Post* was unwilling to hold back but ran it on May 26. And it later refused, to my amazement, to let me include in my complaining letter to the *Post* the simple fact that the L.A. Times Syndicate had refused to run the piece.

I asked Scoville to defend me. That night, at his home, nervously looking over his shoulder, I saw that he planned to say, “Stone needs no defense,” and to go on to discussing substance! I promptly took the assignment back and started to rally support myself. The next day, May 27, the *Post* printed my reply and a defense of my integrity signed by Bethe, Goldberger, Halperin, Meselson, Scoville, Victor Weiskopf, and Herbert F. York. Only George Kistiakowsky declined to rebuke Alsop, telling me, “One should never get into a pissing contest with a skunk.”

The executive editor of the *Post*, Benjamin C. Bradlee, wrote a column that appeared the same day my letter was printed; Bradlee’s piece was entitled “The Columnists’ Inflated Rhetoric.” He cited examples of rhetoric from the columns of Alsop and the team of Evans and Novak, including the smear—but he failed to mention me.

I was still sore and considered suing for libel. But *The New York Times* legal office provided me with some free advice: The courts now required, for “public figures” like me, “an almost prohibitive amount of hard evidence of gross recklessness.”⁷⁷

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But two weeks later, Alsop was trying to smear me more effectively.^[78] He persisted in the charge of treason: "Dr. Jeremy Stone and a good many other misguided American scientists have formed a powerful lobby [FAS was twenty-six years old at that time] primarily aimed, so far as one can see, to subordinating American strategic policy to Soviet strategic policy."^[79]

In June 1973, it was revealed that President Nixon had an "enemies list" of approximately 150 people, 20 of whom were academics or scientists. I turned out to be on it—one of the most junior of a distinguished roster that included McGeorge Bundy; the president of Yale University, Kingman Brewster Jr.; the one-time presidential science adviser Jerome B. Wiesner; Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the historian and adviser to President Kennedy; the economist Walter Heller; the president of Harvard University, Derek Bok; and Polaroid's Edwin Land. I have always assumed that it was Alsop's attacks that persuaded the Nixon administration that I was such a bad person that I should be included on this list.

From all this I learned that columnists were, like federal judges, powers unto themselves. They could distort and smear, and most editors would somehow fail to notice.

I also learned that the smears sat around, for long periods, in dark corners of the minds of those who wanted to believe them. And they could cause you to lose a friend. But, in the end, it seems to have reduced my effectiveness only in parts of town where I had not, in any case, much effectiveness anyway. It confirmed my disinterest in working for the government. That, in the end, served me well. And it persuaded me that any real success would corroborate the aphorism that "no good deed goes unpunished."