“T"he poor president of the United States who is responsible for the defense of this country," Vice President Nelson Rockefeller lamented at a National Security Council meeting in December 1976, as he struggled to get his mind around the capacious nature of U.S. national security commitments (Document 120). Those assembled were attempting to devise a coherent vision of a grand strategy for the United States to bequeath to their successors. The problem of defining ‘national security’ bedeviled their efforts, as it hangs over the title of this FRUS collection. Even narrowing the issue to questions of defense does not help a great deal. As the editor, M. Todd Bennett, points out, many of the major subjects of defense policy during the mid-1970s have their own volumes, including Vietnam (X), SALT II (XXXIII), NATO (XLI), the Soviet Union (XV and XVI), and the People’s Republic of China (XVIII).1

In this compelling and important collection, Bennett focuses on the operations of the deep national security state, mainly the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Intelligence Community (IC). The first three chapters are chronological, dealing with the United States’ defense posture as U.S. national security organs struggled with the polarizing consequences of President Richard Nixon’s fall and Gerald Ford’s brief presidency. It is impossible to do justice to the wide range of issues covered in this section, but scholars of chemical and biological weapons, civil defense, nuclear strategy, naval shipbuilding, and war-reserve management will find many key documents here. The second part of the volume deals with three notable incidents in intelligence history, including the Team B experiment in competitive intelligence assessment, as well as two

less well-known events: the Ford administration’s discovery that the Soviet Union had penetrated the United States’ intercity telephone network, and the CIA’s half-successful effort to raise a sunken Soviet submarine from the bottom of the Pacific with the aid of reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes.

If the mid-1970s was a grim time for many Americans, it was a particularly unpleasant period to be a member of the national security apparatus. Nixon, increasingly consumed by Watergate, appears infrequently in this volume. However, when he does, he exemplifies the unedifying situation that members of the military faced during this period. “Wear your uniforms when you are out – tell your people to,” Nixon urged the Joint Chiefs in December 1973, as the net closed around him. “The character flaw in the elite is they are ashamed of our country... You must confront them, try to show them what should be our real values” (Document 28). But what standard-bearer should the military rally around? The choice was doubly unpalatable: between an increasingly discredited president who used the armed services as a shield and the imperatives of national security to cover up his own illegal activities, and the growing proportion of the American public that, partly as a result of Nixon’s repeated invocations, denigrated the traditional values of loyalty, duty, patriotism and sacrifice that the military stood for.

A pervasive sense of crisis runs through the documents. As executive authority cratered, Congress took a hacksaw to the DoD budget. “If we cut our defense budget, [Soviet General Secretary Leonid] Brezhnev is likely to roll over me,” Nixon pleaded with members of the Senate Appropriations Committee (Document 7). Yet defense spending dropped precipitously as a share of federal spending, from 34.3% in 1972 to 23.8% in 1977. Nixon and Ford stepped away from the professions of military superiority over the Soviet Union that had marked Lyndon Johnson’s years in office and started talking of America as “second to none” in defense (Documents 28 & 41). Despite these semantic games designed to project an image of relative optimism, both Nixon and Ford continued to be preoccupied with a possible loss of faith in the credibility of American global security guarantees. Nixon underlined his fundamental preoccupation to the short-lived defense secretary, Elliott Richardson: “enough was not enough – unless it was as much as the other guy had.” (Document 1).

The question of how “much... the other guy had” was becoming increasingly complex, as Volume XXXV shows in great depth in its coverage of the infamous Team B episode of 1975-6. At the instigation of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), experts, headed by Harvard Sovietologist Richard Pipes and advised by Foy Kohler, Paul Nitze, and Paul Wolfowitz, were invited by the Ford administration to present “an alternative view” of Soviet strategic capabilities and intentions to that represented by the U.S. Intelligence Community (Document 171). With the arrival of rough parity in the number of intercontinental nuclear delivery vehicles between the two superpowers, which had been frozen for five years in the 1972 Interim Agreement

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on Offensive Forces, the focus on Soviet strategic intentions and capabilities inevitably shifted towards qualitative improvements in weapons systems. These included areas such as the accuracy of Soviet multiple warheads (multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, or MIRVs), the ability of the USSR to track and destroy U.S. ballistic missile submarines, and Soviet air defense capabilities (Document 155). Such qualitative features, analysts admitted, were far harder to measure than counting the holes bored in the ground to accommodate nuclear missiles silos (Document 141). Compounding this problem was the fact that intelligence analysts were attempting to project a decade ahead on the basis of this limited evidence (Document 155).

The position hammered out within the IC and represented in National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) was that while Kremlin moves may have betrayed “an opportunistic desire to... achieve a margin of superiority,” the Soviets could not “reduce damage to themselves to acceptable levels by a first strike against U.S. strategic forces” – in short, they could not escape from the situation of mutual assured destruction (MAD) that trapped both superpowers (Document 141). PFIAB, by contrast, viewed this judgment as “paying insufficient tribute... to Soviet achievements” and requested that the Director of Central Intelligence reassess the NIE’s conclusions (Document 144).

At the root of this divergence was a fundamental and irreconcilable difference of opinion on the value of nuclear superiority.3 While the NIEs continued to maintain that MAD made any Soviet strike on the United States senseless, PFIAB and Team B pushed the thesis that Soviet superiority would give the Kremlin greater confidence in crises and might even tempt it to strike first. If this were not abstract enough, the NIEs implied that such arguments could in themselves undermine deterrence because the “psychological edge” that the Soviets could enjoy in a confrontation would be dependent on whether “those involved focus on the basic strategic relationship or on appearances” (Document 149). In other words, inferiority in the number of MIRVs would not be a problem as long as U.S. policymakers did not believe it was; dissenters were undermining deterrence by shifting policymakers’ attention away from MAD.

The documentation arrayed here confirms much of what Anne Hessing Cahn discovered sixteen years ago in her book Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA, though FOIA requests and personal interviews – in particular the slightly partial nature of her book’s title.4 The Team B exercise was not simply a case of the right going for the IC, but instead a particularly nasty family feud within the Republican Party, in which all of the principal participants considered themselves conservatives of one sort or another. Team B accused the CIA of a series of “methodological” shortcomings in its assessments, including “mirror imaging” by trying to squeeze Soviet doctrine into American strategic concepts such as MAD, and giving in to “political pressures and considerations,” in


4 Anne Hessing Cahn, Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA (University Park, PA, 1998).
particular the perceived need to help maintain U.S.-Soviet détente by playing down advances in Soviet strategic weaponry (Document 174, attachment). Despite his initial enthusiasm for the exercise, Director of Central Intelligence George H.W. Bush was not fan of its results, submitting a lengthy defense of the methodology underpinning the NIEs to Ford in the waning months of his presidency (Document 174). The President himself described the leaking of the exercise’s findings to the press in late 1976 as “unforgivable” (Document 172). However, once out, Team B’s conclusions took on a life of their own and added to the pressure on a crumbling trans-administration détente policy.

Team B came at a particularly sensitive time, as Ford endured growing criticism from his own party regarding perceived weaknesses on defense. “I am fed up with people in Congress and around the country accusing me of being a soft liner,” Ford complained to Kissinger in August 1975 (Document 55). As Ronald Reagan’s challenge for the Republican presidential nomination gathered momentum in early 1976, with its criticism of détente for lulling the United States into failing behind on defense, the administration’s ire naturally began to settle on the insurgent from California. “I think the line to take is that Reagan doesn’t know what he’s talking about and he’s irresponsible,” Secretary of State Henry Kissinger advised Ford (Document 75). The problem for the President was that there was no clear consensus in favor of ramping up the defense budget, either. “If you move to the right,” Kissinger told Ford, “the liberals will kill you in the election for sabotaging détente” (Document 59). “It is very easy to say ‘let’s turn the switch on and get it right,’ but where are we going to get the money?” Ford asked rhetorically after Jimmy Carter won the election (Document 120). The administration tried hard to raise defense spending in the FY 76 and FY 77 budgets, but faced such resistance in the former case that Ford threatened to veto the latter if Congress cut too much out of his request (Document 74).

Indeed, at the same time as the national security state was under assault from the right for being insufficiently hawkish, it was also buffeted from the opposite direction. Liberals claimed that the administration’s national security policy paid insufficient attention to human rights in the service of containment in the Third World. Things came to a head over the 1976 International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act, in particular arms sales, the provisioning of military assistance programs (MAPs), and military assistance advisory groups (MAAGs) to developing-world dictatorships. Ford vetoed the original bill that gave Congress the ability to reject arms sales by concurrent resolution, but accepted a compromise that ended most MAPs and MAAGs, compelled the executive to show why provision of arms to ‘gross’ human rights violators was in the supreme national security interests of the United States in each individual instance, and required the State Department to submit a ‘full and complete’ human rights report on each security assistance recipient. Congress could demand follow-up reports, on pain of aid termination if they were not forthcoming in thirty days. Historians who are convinced that the Ford administration found human rights anathema will find little to disabuse them in Volume XXXV. Detention without charge in Latin America was “an old custom down there,” Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Harry Shlaudeman joked in one of Kissinger’s meetings, to laughter
from the rest of the group (Document 90). To news that human rights advocates were pushing for “specifics” on foreign aid recipients “country by country,” Kissinger’s response was succinct: “Not while I’m here” (Document 64). He was still there when the 1976 act passed and he had to lump it.5

The desire to open up U.S. national security organs to greater outside scrutiny also left its mark on the two lesserknown intelligence incidents related in this volume. The fear of discovery hangs over the documents on Soviet interception of city-to-city telephone services, a feat possible with “rather simple and commercially available equipment” (Document 175). Every effort was made to ensure that this oversight was corrected, but without letting the cat out of the bag. Officials worried that revelations regarding the vulnerabilities could lead to a “strong, public anti-Soviet reaction” that might further endanger détente and Ford shelved the idea of including a section on information security in the State of the Union, instead opting for a more low-key and longer-term effort to strengthen communications security across the government and private sectors (Document 181).

The final, and perhaps the most bizarre episode of the collection is the attempt by the CIA to raise a Soviet Golf II ballistic missile submarine from the seabed with the aid of a huge purpose-built barge complete with deep-sea lifting equipment. The submarine had gone down in the Pacific in 1968. It appears the main prize for the IC was the submarine’s cryptographic equipment rather than its military hardware, which was already out of date (Document 188). In order to raise the boat, it enlisted the assistance of Howard Hughes’s Hughes Global Tool Company and Hughes Global Marine, Inc. as cover to build and operate the lifting ship and barge. The Hughes Glomar Explorer, the companies claimed, would be used for deep-sea mining. The CIA judged that Hughes’s image would strengthen the operation’s cover, since he was well known as a “pioneering entrepreneur... [who] habitually operates in secrecy... his personal eccentricities are such that news media reporting and speculation about his activities frequently range from the truth to utter fiction” (Document 186).

Unfortunately Hughes’s lifestyle appears to have been more of a hindrance than help. It became known publicly that Hughes was actively seeking a role as a CIA “‘front’... in an attempt,” according to the NSC, “to erect a shield to protect him from government regulatory and investigative agencies” – a development that would obviously not sit well with the American people at a time of heightened unease about CIA misdeeds (Document 187, attachment). In the end, the project was called off after one half-successful attempt to lift the wreck. A burglary at Hughes’s Los Angeles office – at least one CIA officer suspected it was “an inside job” (Document 200) – led to a flurry of activity to retrieve documents relating to the operation, which may or may not have been stolen by the unsuspecting thieves. In the ensuing attempts to recover the papers, local law enforcement leaked the story to journalists (Document 196). Now the

operation was public knowledge, it looked as though the Soviets were preparing to ram the returning *Hughes Glomar Explorer*, and the White House abandoned the project.

What did all this political wrangling and intelligence intrigue amount to strategically? In the waning months of his presidency, Ford ordered a review of American national security strategy. “Our national defense strategy has not been reviewed comprehensively since 1969,” National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft told the president, despite the fundamental changes in the international landscape, including détente, the U.S.-China rapprochement, the diffusion of power outside the major Cold War participants, and the deteriorating economic situation (Document 101).

Yet while other aspects of American power may have been undergoing significant change in the mid-1970s, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the military establishment continued much as it had before – albeit with smaller budgets and a somewhat greater preoccupation with human rights. The uncertainties remained the same and were on full display at the NSC meeting convened to discuss the draft National Security Decision Memorandum on defense strategy. Did military spending bolster or undermine economic growth? Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was clear that it boosted the economy, but nobody else seemed quite sure. What did “military advantage” over the Soviet Union really mean, Kissinger asked? The definitions were at the end of the booklet, somebody answered. “I still don’t know,” Kissinger responded (Document 120).

Despite, or perhaps because of, these perennial uncertainties, the fundamental thrust of U.S. military strategy also remained constant. After arguing for a while about various aspects of the review, Kissinger provided the most cogent definition of what the U.S. posture should be: “we should have a strategy to augment our strategic forces, plus what is needed for a worldwide capability” to deter a Soviet conventional attack, “plus we have the special problem of Europe, since it has a more explicitly nuclear threshold” (Document 120). It is hard to disagree with Director of the Bureau of the Budget James T. Lynn’s observation that he did not “see a lot of changes from the overall strategies vice [sic] what we determined in the study in 1969” (Document 120). A lot of things may have changed in the world since Nixon first took office, but the basic tenets on which the American military posture rested were not among them. Perhaps this, in the eyes of those sitting around that table, feeling buffeted by the domestic upheaval of the 1970s, was one of their greatest achievements.

As numerous reviewers have noted in the past, it is extremely hard to criticize such a profound achievement as the *FRUS* series. In particular, the *FRUS* volumes are an invaluable resource for foreign scholars of United States, who often lack the time or the means to consult the U.S.-based archival record for extended periods. It is hard to

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underestimate the number of non-American students who are drawn to archival research in U.S. foreign relations by their first encounters with the richness of *FRUS*.

There is, however, one interesting omission. As well as assaults from conservatives, the IC was undergoing thorough criticism from liberals, most notably at the hands of the Church Committee. This topic is hardly touched on in this volume. Consequently the collection on intelligence, in contrast to the coverage of defense issues, feels a little lopsided. Perhaps a *FRUS* volume entirely dedicated to the operations of the Intelligence Community would be one way to redress this imbalance. This is not to detract from a collection that provides a most compelling insight into national security decision-making at the highest levels in one of the most fraught periods of U.S. postwar history. Any study of the primary sources on this topic must start with this volume.

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