

GOVERNMENT SECRECY AND CENSORSHIP

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From its beginning, the Federation of American Scientists has been immersed in policies and issues regarding government secrecy and censorship. By the time World War II broke out, the fission process had been observed, followed by detection of the neutron, and recognition of induced uranium fission. In the early 1940s, some scientists in the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and Germany realized the potential for nuclear weapons.

The three atomic bombs detonated in the summer of 1945 were created and assembled at secret U.S. government sites by a mixed pedigree of scientists, engineers, and military officers. The decision to drop two of them on Japanese cities was determined by military and political events then occurring, particularly in the final year of World War II.

Our Soviet wartime ally, excluded from the American, British, and Canadian nuclear coalition, used its own espionage network to remain informed. Well-placed sympathizers and spies conveyed many essential details of nuclear-explosive development. Through this network, Stalin learned of the Manhattan Project and the Trinity test. As the German invaders began to retreat from Soviet borders, he established his own secret nuclear development project. Stalin also turned shortcomings of American secrecy to his political advantage, notably his entering the war against Japan at the very last minute in order to ensure a voice in the final post-war territorial settlement.

These cited events are detailed in a pair of well-documented volumes, *Nuclear Shadowboxing: Contemporary Threats from Cold War Weaponry (2004-2005)*, resulting from a post-Cold-War collaboration of four coauthors: a former Soviet weapons scientist, an nuclear-engineer emigre who had served in the Soviet Navy, a Canadian-born nuclear physicist, and myself. It is replete with references and documentation. Excerpts can be accessed on Google Books. Later I adapted and updated much of that material into a more readable, less academic trilogy of books, *Nuclear Insights: The Cold War Legacy (2009)*, available on Amazon.

A memoir now in draft stage, *Cold War Brinkmanship: Nuclear Arms and Civil Rights*, recalls my experiences with information control and government secrecy. The draft includes a detailed history of the Cold War from an activist's viewpoint.

Immediately after the war, American policymakers made a profound miscalculation that the United States would have an enduring nuclear monopoly (safeguarded by secrecy). But, in response to the atomic bombing of Japan, the Soviets accelerated their own program to make a nuclear weapon, getting their first reactor in operation before the end of 1946. Despite Western efforts to control materials, information, and scientists, the Soviets succeeded with testing their own nuclear-explosive device in 1949, an achievement that profoundly influenced the ensuing Cold War.

By the 1950s, the Cold War became a prominent factor that quickly led to the Korean War, the first space travel by humans, construction of radiation-fallout shelters, and deployment of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Britain, France, and China became members of the “nuclear club,” and both the USSR and the United States tested thermonuclear weapons. Air, missile, and undersea launch platforms for launching nuclear weapons came under development, and some began deployment. By the early 1960s, the long Vietnam War had begun.

Although the United Nations attempted to develop a policy for international control of nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union and the United States couldn't reach an agreement. This was but one factor in what turned out to be a Cold War ratcheting, largely between the two superpowers. Citizens everywhere saw nuclear fission both as a massive threat and as a source of useful energy. In the 1960s, the weapons states carried out numerous nuclear-explosive tests and the total number of nuclear weapons grew rapidly. Atmospheric testing generated radioactive fallout, contributing to a public debate about nuclear arsenals. The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Paradoxically, this confrontation caused the Soviet Union to build more missiles, while also creating pressure in both the United States and the Soviet Union for international control of nuclear weapons. The United States began harnessing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and nuclear-power plant construction began worldwide.

Concurrently, considerable domestic and international public opposition evolved against nuclear-arsenal expansion. Discomforted by lawful dissent, the U.S. government often resorted to information management and domestic spying. Human rights in the West were frequently disregarded in the name of national security. In the USSR, essentially all dissent was quashed by heavy-handed dictatorial methods.

Proxy wars began to break out around the globe, as well as prolonged government psychological campaigns, propaganda dissemination, and espionage. The Cold War gradually became a chronic, largely East-West conflict. With political hostility characterized by threats, propaganda, and other measures, it was pursued primarily through economic pressure, political actions, propaganda exercises, extra-legal acts, and proxy wars (often waged through surrogate nations and client states). Some events led to an increasing role for government secrecy, censorship, and surveillance.

The United States, while proceeding with a robust nuclear-weapons testing and improvement program, simultaneously embarked on peaceful applications of nuclear energy, such as civilian power and medical radioisotopes. Proposals (Atoms for Peace) were made for sharing and controlling the international development of non-military applications of nuclear

fission. These proposals had been influenced by a secret June 1945 report conveyed to President Roosevelt: The Franck Report, written in part by Eugene Rabinowitch, later the founding editor of the journal that became known as *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, conveyed a plea against dropping the atomic bomb on Japan; it also warned of a possible post-war arms race and a destructive nuclear war. Just one month after the atomic bombings of Japan, a secret (“classified”) U.S. planning document was formulated, embodying a nuclear first-use policy if war broke out with the Soviet Union. Secrecy provided a curtain for sustaining an arms race: hidden behind that veil were deliberate fear-generating government tactics. Overly trusting publics were unaware of the implications (and even the existence) of fateful decisions.

In a classified 1948 document (NSC-20), the United States overhyped the perceived Soviet threat to security as both “dangerous and immediate.” A nuclear-warfare policy was recommended for dealing with the Soviet Union and with the potential spread of communism. The U.S. Strategic Air Command designated major Soviet urban-industrial concentrations as nuclear-bomb targets. Had such attacks happened, that could have largely foreclosed political settlement because Moscow and many other cities would have been obliterated. And, conversely, the United States might have been “decapitated” by nuclear retaliation, losing its leadership and a substantial number of inhabitants.

Now, among the less-tangible Cold War remnants are excessive secrecy and surveillance. Those policies and practices were once deemed necessary in controlling dangerous information, especially on how to make nuclear weapons.



“It Takes Lots of Courage.” *York Gazette and Daily*, September, 20 1962.
Source: SCARC Holdings, Oregon State University Libraries.

However, carefree strategies of nuclear brinkmanship were also concealed by censorship. And domestic spying was not uncommon — against those outside of, or opposed to, government policies.

A major challenge for security in our new millennium is to lessen the still-present danger of deliberate, accidental, or unauthorized use of nuclear explosives. Even now, although East-West belligerency is over, the quantitative and qualitative nuclear-arms race has not entirely died out; nor are arsenals being drawn down at a pace consistent with the newfound security that came with the end of superpower confrontation. Many alarming and frightening situations have occurred.

FAS SPEAKS OUT

Early in the Cold War, scientific organizations were divided on the potential benefits of civil defense and emergency planning. Choosing to promote arms control rather than war planning, the Federation of American Scientists, along with its chapters throughout the United States, began to speak out against the frantic and illusory appeal of civil defense in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Under the leadership of Argonne physicist David R. Inglis (later chairman of the national organization), the Chicago FAS chapter articulated the limitations of civil defense. The Argonne group engaged in detailed analysis of a public discussion of advance preparations and emergency responses in the event of nuclear war.

In our westernmost state, home of the Seattle FAS Chapter, a legislative committee was looking for communists. The following information, found in an FBI file released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), shows that at least one state government had its own investigative committee, which acted in coordination with Congress:

In connection with his testimony before the Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, State of Washington, on July 20, 1948, Dr. J.B. Mathews, former Research Director for the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives [HUAC], submitted a list of “COMMUNIST Front Organizations,” which included the FEDERATION OF ATOMIC SCIENTISTS.

MCCARTHYISM: BLACKLISTING

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy became the leading anti-communist crusader of the late 1940s and early 1950s; he made the U.S. Senate a forum for charges similar to those being levied in the House. Senator McCarthy’s campaign against communist “subversion” ruined many careers and contributed substantially to the anti-communist hysteria of the time. His tactics gave rise to the abiding and derogative term “McCarthyism.”

In 1950, McCarthy specifically denounced FAS as being “heavily infiltrated with communist fellow-travelers.” McCarthy received information directly from J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI. One of Hoover’s agents later admitted that: “We were the ones who made the McCarthy hearings possible. We fed McCarthy all the material he was using.” Here’s one explanation for this controversial period:

With the war going badly in Korea and communist advances in Eastern Europe and in China, the American public was genuinely frightened about the possibilities of internal subversion....

[In the House of Representatives], fearing communist infiltration, HUAC sought the return of nuclear research to military control, but in a classic turf battle, the Atomic Energy Commission attempted to protect the civil rights of its scientific staff. During this period, anonymous panels remained arbitrary and capricious, in one case denying clearance because of membership in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. It also became difficult to hold international scientific meetings, because many foreign invitees were denied visas, and passports for overseas travel by Americans were withheld. The FAS Los Angeles Chapter became involved in these controversies.

A common tactic used by investigators was to cut a deal by pressuring a suspect to inform on others: if the suspect did not give names, he or she would be thrown in jail or branded as seditious, and could not find work at all.

Government surveillance extended from the federal to the local level. Simply joining an organization was enough to trigger a seemingly ominous information entry in government dossiers. For example, using FOIA, I found that my being a member of FAS caused the FBI to add that piece of information to the (once-secret) file they kept on me.

Among those speaking out against McCarthyism were I.F. Stone, a journalist, who published a weekly journal, and his son, Jeremy J. Stone (a PhD mathematician), who headed FAS from 1970-2000.



*Leslie R. Groves and J. Robert Oppenheimer, 1940s.
Source: SCARC Holdings,
Oregon State University Libraries.*

UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES

Even before the end of World War II, the government's fear of communist spying spread into many sectors of public life. American communists were distrusted as possible "subversives." In June 1945, the FBI arrested six people associated with *Amerasia* (a journal about Asian affairs), accusing them of espionage on behalf of the Chinese communists. Two of the six were convicted of unauthorized possession of documents.

In 1947, when pressed by HUAC, President Truman imposed a Loyalty Order on all federal employees and ordered FBI security checks, including applicants for AEC fellowships. In 1950 an FBI investigation of Albert Einstein was opened, to find out whether he might be a communist or Soviet agent.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, the wartime scientific head of the Manhattan Project, is often called the "father of the atomic bomb" for his wartime role. But he provoked the ire of many politicians with his outspoken opinions, and his security clearance was revoked after a much-publicized hearing in 1954.

As early as 1947, the Justice Department considered prosecuting Leo Szilard for violating the outdated 1799 Logan Act, which “prohibited private citizens’ correspondence with a foreign government [the Soviet Union] on a subject of dispute between it and the United States.” Ironically, Szilard was — perhaps more than anyone — responsible for getting America to develop the atomic bomb that expedited Japan’s capitulation and gave the United States immense military superiority over the Soviet Union after World War II. Upon being threatened by the Justice Department, Szilard made an appeal to scientific societies, where he invoked “the principle of the lesser evil,” reminding them how German scientists gradually caved to Hitler’s purge of Jews.

Intensive HUAC focus was on Hollywood, perceived as a shaper of public thought, but other targets were government workers, college professors, artists, musicians, gays, and Jews. During 1947, HUAC victimized the “Hollywood Ten,” a group of screenwriters and directors. Targets were asked to “take the pledge”: “Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?” Many who refused on principle were blacklisted by movie producers.

ATOMIC SCIENTISTS (OF CHICAGO)

On 1 November 1945, the loosely organized Federation of Atomic Scientists in Chicago had become the Federation of American Scientists. That same year, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists was established by scientists, engineers, and other professionals of the Manhattan Project who feared the horrible effects of these new weapons and devoted themselves to warning the public about the consequences. Those early activists also worried about military secrecy, dreading that leaders without the full and knowledgeable consent of their citizens might draw their countries into increasingly dangerous confrontations.

The early history of FAS was described by its first Chairperson, Willy Higinbotham, thanks to his daughter, Julie Schletter. [Please see the Spring 2015 issue of the *Public Interest Report* for in-depth coverage, available on fas.org.]

Alamogordo. Having witnessed the first nuclear test at Alamogordo, Higinbotham decided to help prevent a nuclear arms race.

Almost everyone in Los Alamos was involved in constructing the weapon or designing and installing measurement instruments for the test, with his group ... involved in the latter. Because of a last-minute call from Oppie [Scientific Director J. Robert Oppenheimer], Higinbotham was invited to the test site. He reports only remembering Edward Teller as one of the others in “our select group.”



Screenshot from the documentary film, *Legacy of the Hollywood Blacklist* (1987), consisting of protestors opposing the 1950 jailing of the Hollywood Ten.

It was clear that the bomb worked as predicted.... Now I had to face the existence of nuclear weapons. It was a paralyzing realization.... All I could think of was that the Soviet Union would surely develop nuclear weapons and might blow us off the map. [A] bomb, such as the one I had seen, would wipe out any city.

The best defense against bombers in Europe had been to shoot down ten percent of the attackers. I came to believe that attacking the US with nuclear weapons would not make sense even to an evil man like Stalin. (In my mind) at least the US did not seem to be threatened.

Protests by Scientists. Higinbotham wrote about his experience at Los Alamos in organizing scientists in favor of international control of atomic energy:

When General Groves said that we could keep the secret for 15 years, and Congressmen told scientists to design a defense, we held a big meeting and started to draft a [protest] statement for the public.

Strangely, I don't remember many discussions of the implications of nuclear weapons at Los Alamos before the end of the war.... Scientists at Oak Ridge and Chicago were organizing and we began to hear from them.

The first large meeting was attended by about sixty people on August 20th [1945]. All agreed that we should form an organization and the question of whether it should consider scientists' welfare as well as the social implications of nuclear energy, was discussed. Recommendations for the future of this project and of atomic power are being made. Before the next meeting had been held, it was clear to everyone that the international control of atomic energy was the vital issue and should be the only issue with which the organization was concerned.

The meeting on August 30th was attended by about five hundred individuals. They overwhelmingly approved a motion:

We hereby form an organization of scientists, called temporarily, the Association of Los Alamos Scientists (ALAS). The object of this organization is to promote the attainment and use of scientific and technological advances in the best interests of humanity. We recognize that scientists, by virtue of their special knowledge, have, in certain spheres, special social responsibilities beyond their obligations as individual citizens. Except for Edward Teller, we all agreed that the message was that (1) there is no secret (scientists anywhere could figure out how to make atomic weapons now that we had demonstrated that they are possible). In addition, (2) there is no defense that can prevent great devastation by atomic weapons, and (3) we must have "world control."

FAS Goals. Willy was elected the first chairman of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) in January 1946. Five questions immediately became the center of FAS attention: What would the atomic bomb do in the event of another war? What defense would be possible? How long would it take for any other country to produce an atomic bomb?

What would be the effect of an atomic arms race on science and technology? Assuming that international control of the bomb is agreed upon, is such control technically feasible?

Dave Inglis. The nominal leader of our Argonne lunchtime discussion group had been recruited for the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, to help build the first atomic bomb. After the war, Dave joined Argonne as a theorist in the Physics Division. He became an advocate of nuclear disarmament because of the growing concern about the ongoing spread of atomic weapons around the world. In the late 1950s, he became chairperson of FAS, and pleaded in public and on Capitol Hill for a controlled worldwide ban of nuclear weapons.

The Chicago FAS chapter migrated to suburban Argonne as its members commuted when nuclear-reactor activities originally at the University of Chicago started to expand and flourish at the new laboratory site. One of the first prominent issues that the Argonne scientists discussed and vocalized was the proposed siting of anti-ballistic missile installations near cities, like in the Chicago suburbs where some of the members lived.

Because the Argonne group consisted of physicists who had worked in the Manhattan Project, as well others who shared concern about nuclear weapons being exploded over or near cities, members were able to present and explain those messages to the public. The Argonne group was heavily involved in defeat of that U.S. government ABM siting plan.