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Paul Nitze, Cold War Arms Expert, Dies at 97

By Marilyn Berger

Paul H. Nitze, an expert on military power and strategic arms whose roles as negotiator, diplomat and Washington insider spanned the era from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan and helped shape America's cold war relationship with the Soviet Union, died Tuesday night at his home in Washington. He was 97.

The cause was pneumonia, his wife, Elisabeth Scott Porter, said. From the beginning of the nuclear age, whether in government or out, Mr. Nitze urged successive American presidents to take measures against what he saw as the Soviet drive to overwhelm the United States through the force of arms. Yet he may be best remembered for his conciliatory role in efforts to achieve two major arms agreements with the Soviet Union.

In one, he was successful in negotiating an agreement that would eliminate intermediate-range missiles from Europe. In the other, he hoped to cap his long career with a so-called "grand compromise" in 1988 that would have severely circumscribed work on President Reagan's cherished Strategic Defense Initiative in exchange for deep cuts in the nuclear arsenals of both superpowers. His efforts foundered when the negotiators ran out of time as the Reagan administration came to an end.

In a now legendary moment of the cold war, Mr. Nitze undertook a bold, but unsuccessful personal effort to achieve an earlier arms agreement with the Russians. In 1982, acting on his own and superseding his instructions, Mr. Nitze took a walk with his Soviet counterpart in the Jura Mountains, where he tried to strike a bargain on a package dealing with intermediate-range missiles in Europe.

In that episode, which became known as the "walk in the woods," Mr. Nitze tried to cut through the bureaucratic tangle but was thwarted when both Moscow and Washington repudiated the agreement.

Mr. Nitze refused an appointment in the first Bush administration as ambassador-at-large emeritus saying that such a post would leave him with no clear responsibilities. He retired to an office at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University — a school that was named for him in 1989 — where he continued to write articles in a continuing attempt to influence policy.

With that, his long career in government came to an end, a career that began in 1940 with a telegram that said, "Be in Washington Monday, Forrestal." The summons from James V. Forrestal, then a special assistant at the White House, lured Mr. Nitze from the lucrative confines of Wall Street to the first of many assignments in government that involved him in the supply of the Allies for the war effort, a survey of the impact of the bombing in Europe and in Japan after the atomic raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the feeding of the hungry of war-ravaged Europe, the creation of the Marshall Plan and crises in Iran and Berlin. In the aftermath of World War II, Mr. Nitze became part of that remarkable group of public servants — George F. Kennan, Charles E. Bohlen, Robert A. Lovett, John J. McCloy — that coalesced around Dean Acheson to develop foreign political and military policy as the United States took its place as a major world power.

He was a senior State Department official in the Truman administration, secretary of the Navy in the Kennedy administration and deputy secretary of defense in the Johnson administration. By the time he became one of the chief negotiators on strategic weapons, Mr. Nitze had accumulated more experience in the field of national security affairs than anyone of his time, to the point that his critics began to think he believed he had a monopoly on understanding the political uses of nuclear weapons.

Ever since 1950, when as head of the policy planning staff of the State Department he was principal author of a study on the Soviet threat, Mr. Nitze took a dark view of Soviet intentions, seeing in the Kremlin a drive for world hegemony.

That study — known as N.S.C.-68 — which conceived of deterrence in military rather than diplomatic terms — warned against sole reliance on the nuclear deterrent and urged a buildup of conventional forces. Its precepts became a cornerstone of American policy. In succeeding years, when the American nuclear monopoly was broken, Mr. Nitze warned regularly that the Soviet Union was trying to achieve preponderant nuclear strength as a tool of blackmail, or, in the worst case, to win an all-out war.

Later, when Mr. Nitze took his walk in the woods near Geneva to work out an arms deal, he confounded his critics, who considered him too hard-line because of his pessimistic views of the Russians.

A man of intimidating intellect, Mr. Nitze could be warm and affectionate or cerebral and brittle. He was a formidable bureaucrat with a brilliant mind and a persuasive pen. Out of government — as he was during the Carter administration — he was an equally effective critic, as he showed in the late 1970's as the mastermind of the opposition to the second strategic arms limitation agreement. He used complicated charts and computer printouts to warn that the treaty would lock the United States into permanent strategic inferiority. Despite this vigorous

opposition, once Mr. Nitze was back in government he urged President Reagan to comply with the terms of the treaty even though it was never ratified.

There were, among his colleagues, those who said Mr. Nitze was so embittered at being excluded from the Carter administration that he could not assess the treaty dispassionately. He had too often been passed over for the major jobs, always on tap but never on top, as his old neighbor, James Reston, once wrote.

He always seemed too conservative for the liberal administrations and too liberal for the conservative ones. In an interview in which he looked back at his long career in government, Mr. Nitze acknowledged that it was one of his life's major disappointments that he had never been appointed to a cabinet position — as secretary of state or defense or as head of the Central Intelligence Agency. "I sometimes think I would have liked to be secretary of agriculture," he said with a rueful chuckle.

While his considerable expertise was in the field of political-military affairs, his little joke was not far off the mark. For years, in addition to homes in Washington, Northeast Harbor, Me., and Aspen, Colo., he maintained a 1,920-acre working farm in Maryland on the banks of the Potomac, where he kept pigs and cattle and grew corn. It was here that he rode horses and sailed along the Potomac and practiced the piano, in a lifelong endeavor to understand, as one friend said, why Bach sounds like Bach. "Whatever he did," another friend said, "it had to be first rate."

For all that good life, Mr. Nitze — with a full head of white hair and still athletic and trim in his later years, well-educated, intelligent and wealthy — remained a confirmed pessimist, having been deeply affected by seeing first-hand the outbreak of two world wars.

Paul Henry Nitze was born on Jan. 16, 1907, in Amherst, Mass., where his father, one of the world's leading philologists, was a professor of Romance languages. The Nitze family did not live on a professor's salary, however. Mr. Nitze explained that "both my grandparents did very well." As a child, there were summers in Europe, mainly in Germany, and the family was in the Tyrol in 1914 when World War I broke out.

Mr. Nitze spent much of his boyhood in Chicago. His father taught at the university and he attended experimental schools before going on to Hotchkiss and Harvard. Generally a good student, he said: "I distinguished myself by getting the lowest mark ever given at Harvard, a zero, in a course on the history of economic thought. The most beautiful girl suggested that I go down to Newport for the weekend on the day of the final exam."

The zero left no permanent economic scar, for Nitze got rich on Wall Street despite the Depression, first at Dillon Read Inc. and then in his own firm, Paul H.

Nitze Inc. He made one fortune from a company he started with other investors known as the U.S. Vitamin and Pharmaceutical Company.

The initial investment was \$100,000. It was sold to Revlon in the 1950's for \$100 million. Another fortune came from real estate investments in Aspen. In 1932, he married Phyllis Pratt, whose grandfather was a founder of the Standard Oil Company of New York and the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Mrs. Nitze died in 1987.

In 1993, he married Elisabeth Porter. She survives him, as do his four children: Heidi and Peter, both of New York; William, of Washington, and Anina Nitze Moriarty, of Boston; a stepdaughter, Erin Porter, of Salt Spring Island, British Columbia; 11 grandchildren, 3 step-grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

Earlier this year, in one of his last public appearances, Mr. Nitze was present, in Maine, at the christening of a Navy destroyer bearing his name, only the eighth time the Navy has named a warship for a living person.

As the 1940 telegram recalls, Mr. Nitze was summoned to Washington by Mr. Forrestal, who had been president of Dillon Read, where Mr. Nitze was a vice president, before going to the White House to work for President Roosevelt.

Mr. Nitze, who had seen Hitler during one of his visits to Germany, opposed United States entry into the war. But he quickly became active in the American war effort. He helped draft the Selective Service Act and, in 1942, became chief of the Metals and Minerals Branch of the Board of Economic Warfare.

Subsequently he became director of foreign procurement and development for the foreign economic administration. He was vice chairman of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey — a study that years later caused him to question United States bombing strategy in Vietnam. After the war, he headed the billion-dollar global relief program.

In 1950, during the Truman administration, he succeeded George F. Kennan as head of the State Department's policy planning staff. It was then that Mr. Nitze started making his mark as a political-military strategist whose dark view of the Soviets surpassed those of Mr. Kennan and Mr. Bohlen, the nation's leading experts on the Soviet Union. Mr. Kennan found the language of N.S.C.-68 to be dangerously melodramatic and unhelpful.

Seven years later, although out of favor during the Eisenhower administration, Mr. Nitze was appointed to the presidential committee headed by H. Rowan Gaither that called for nationwide fallout shelters and warned of a "missile gap" that eventually proved to be illusory.

Mr. Nitze was a Democrat who changed parties to protest President Franklin D. Roosevelt's effort to pack the Supreme Court. He returned to the fold at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration. Squeezed out of office because of his close association with Mr. Acheson and discouraged at being on the outside, Mr. Nitze went back to his farm and, at the suggestion of his wife, who wanted to take his mind off his troubles, entered a horse race at the Charles County fair. When he won, he acknowledged, at least to himself, his longing for recognition.

In an oral history he made for the Air Force, he said he remembered thinking, "I had done a lot of really worthwhile things in the United States government and really never gotten any credit — and here I had a really public triumph."

President Kennedy offered Mr. Nitze several jobs and gave him 30 seconds to decide which one he wanted. He chose deputy defense secretary, but did not get the post until seven years later. In the intervening years, he was an assistant secretary in the Pentagon and then secretary of the Navy.

When President Nixon appointed Mr. Nitze to the United States delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the Soviet Union, he played an important role in negotiating the A.B.M. treaty, but he resigned in 1974, charging that the "depressing reality of the traumatic events" connected with Watergate was making the administration too anxious to cut a deal with the Soviets.

As an early supporter of Jimmy Carter, Mr. Nitze expected he would finally get a major appointment and was bitterly disappointed when he was passed over yet again. His views were too hawkish for the liberal foreign policy that President Carter wanted to pursue. Mr. Nitze mounted a spirited — some called it venomous — opposition to the confirmation of one of his old colleagues, Paul C. Warnke, as Mr. Carter's strategic arms negotiator, incurring the wrath of old friends who labeled him an ideologue.

When Mr. Warnke was confirmed and the Carter administration achieved a second strategic arms limitation treaty, Mr. Nitze became its most vocal and effective critic, the intellectual guru for the Committee on the Present Danger in its campaign against the agreement. It was never ratified. Mr. Carter did not submit it for ratification after Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, and Mr. Reagan wanted to renegotiate the whole thing.

Mr. Nitze's hard line on the Soviets found greater resonance with President Reagan, who put him in charge of the United States delegation to the intermediate-range nuclear forces talks. His mandate was to negotiate the so-called zero-zero option by which the United States would forgo future American deployment of new missiles in Europe if the Soviet Union would remove the missiles it had aimed at Western Europe.

The two sides were far apart when Mr. Nitze went on that now famous walk in the woods to draw the Soviets into a package deal. When the proposal was rejected on both sides, Mr. Nitze, instead of being reprimanded, was appointed, in 1984, special adviser to the president on arms control matters. A few years later, the Soviet Union, which had originally rejected the zero-zero option, accepted a more comprehensive arrangement, the so-called "double zero" agreement that limited all medium-range missiles in Europe and shorter-range missiles as well. That agreement was signed on Dec. 8, 1987.

In November 1985, Mr. Reagan awarded Mr. Nitze the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Yet, that same year Mr. Nitze once again seemed to be going out on his own to raise serious questions about Mr. Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. While insisting that he favored "Star Wars," he laid down such stringent terms for its acceptability — that it be "cost effective at the margin," that is, that the cost of the defense system not exceed the cost to the Soviet Union of adding units of offensive weapons or countermeasures to overwhelm that defense — that he seemed to be torpedoing it from the start, in effect handing useful arguments to its opponents.

At the same time, he was seeking to make a deal that would limit the elaborate new defense system in exchange for cuts in offensive weapons, a two-pronged ploy that once again provided evidence of his cunning and skill as a bureaucrat, and summed up a lifetime of survival in Washington.

"Some people say there are two policies in the executive branch," he said one day as he sat in his office on the seventh floor of the State Department, just before his 79th birthday in January 1986. "One is mine and the other is the president's, which is marginally so. Some of the things I've said are different from what the president has said, but all the things I have said have been approved by the president."