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# Facing the Apocalypse: Bomb Shelters and National Policy in Eisenhower's Second Term

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# Facing the Apocalypse: Bomb Shelters and National Policy in Eisenhower's Second Term

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the issues of civilian defense from a federal perspective during Eisenhower's second term, particularly focusing on the issue of bomb shelters during the period from 1956-1958. Despite widespread efforts to promote bomb shelters, or fallout shelters, during this period, no significant progress was made toward a federal program. By examining federal efforts such as the Holifield Committee, the Gaither Committee, Operation Alert, and the National Shelter Policy, this paper shows that efforts to set up shelter programs actually made the public and the Eisenhower administration less likely to trust such programs at all.

## **Keywords**

Eisenhower, bomb shelter, fallout shelter, civil defense

## **Disciplines**

American Politics | Defense and Security Studies | History | History of Science, Technology, and Medicine | Military and Veterans Studies | Military History | Political History | Science and Technology Policy | Social History | United States History

## **Comments**

History Senior Thesis

# Facing the Apocalypse: Bomb Shelters and National Policy in Eisenhower's Second Term

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HIST-412

Professor Birkner

30 April 2014

**Abstract:** This paper explores the issues of civilian defense from a federal perspective during Eisenhower's second term, particularly focusing on the issue of bomb shelters during the period from 1956-1958. Despite widespread efforts to promote bomb shelters, or fallout shelters, during this period, no significant progress was made toward a federal program. By examining federal efforts such as the Holifield Committee, the Gaither Committee, Operation Alert, and the National Shelter Policy, this paper shows that efforts to set up shelter programs actually made the public and the Eisenhower administration less likely to trust such programs at all.

I hereby affirm that I have upheld the highest standards of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the honor code.

The atom bomb changed the world. With new nuclear weapons, entire cities could be destroyed in an instant, millions of lives ended at once. President Harry S. Truman's decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki was controversial from the moment he made it, but what was perhaps even more worrisome than the existence of such a weapon, particularly to the American public, was who else might soon have this terrible power. The 1945 Gallup poll on the subject revealed that 65% of Americans did not think that the U.S. would be able to safeguard the knowledge of how to build and use nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup> In 1945, that meant only one thing: Americans were frightened that the Soviet Union, the country that was transforming from a U.S. ally into their sworn enemy, would soon have the bomb themselves, and use it against the United States. In fact, by 1950, most people in the U.S. thought that the Soviet Union already had atomic weapons, and would soon use them against the U.S.<sup>2</sup> To stay safe, Americans needed to learn how to survive a world where nuclear war was a distinct possibility every second of every day.

The new “Atomic Age” permeated every aspect of American life. U.S. scientists experimented with nuclear weapons in the southwest deserts, inspiring, among other things, Tom Lehrer’s satirical song “The Wild West is Where I Want to Be.” Popular media was filled with stories of Armageddon: movies like “Five” feature survivors of a nuclear apocalypse, while Ray Bradbury’s “There Will Come Soft Rains,” featured a lonely house, trying desperately to care for the family who had been burned away in an instant with the rest of their city. Magazines featured articles on nuclear attacks, including *Life* magazine’s 1950 article “How U.S. Cities Can Prepare

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<sup>1</sup> “Timeline of Polling History: Events that Shaped the United States, and the World,” *Gallup* <http://www.gallup.com/poll/9967/Timeline-Polling-History-Events-Shaped-United-States-World.aspx> Accessed March 30, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> George H. Gallup, “Atom Bombs: August 2, 1950,” *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1972-1977* Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1972), 929.

for Atomic War,” complete with a breathless account of the post-nuclear world. Everyone learned more everyday about the end of the world and how humankind would cause it to happen. Schoolchildren practiced drills in school and watched government-sponsored films like the “Duck and Cover” film featuring Bert the Turtle, where brave children going about their everyday tasks were ready to save their lives at a second’s notice.<sup>3</sup> It seemed as though one could never be sufficiently prepared for a nuclear attack, but one would surely be coming someday soon. To prepare the nation, civil defense turned from ducking ordinary bombs of World War II to ducking nuclear missiles in the Cold War.

The most iconic method of civil defense popularized in the 1950s, apart from the ‘duck and cover’ drills, is the fallout shelter: tiny concrete bunkers located in basements and backyards, filled with Spam and an old radio. Fallout shelters, however, were not the focus of civil defense for most of the 1950s. Civilian defense itself was a controversial topic, with proponents urging government officials to find better and safer plans and opponents denying the usefulness of the whole affair. In fact, shelter programs in particular were not generally taken seriously, and rarely had much backing behind them. Despite several important pushes for comprehensive fallout shelter plans during the Eisenhower era, particularly during his second term, no such efforts were ever seriously made.<sup>4</sup> Not only did proponents of bomb shelters fail to convince the President and the nation that such an effort was needed, their approach usually resulted in an overall drop of confidence in civil defense as a whole. Though advocates of bomb shelter policies effectively

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<sup>3</sup> Margot Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) 95; U.S. Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Duck and Cover: Bert the Turtle Civil Defense Film,” accessed via YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60> Accessed 4 April 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America*, Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked* (Oxford University Press, 2006), accessed via Kindle, hereafter *Bracing for Armageddon*; Kenneth Rose, *One Nation Underground: the Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), hereafter *One Nation Underground*. Henriksen largely focused on the popular culture ramifications of Cold War propaganda, particularly that which dealt with nuclear war, while Garrison and Rose focus on particular civilian defense initiatives and those who made and enforced them. See also Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 57.

convinced the U.S. that nuclear war and its fallout was a serious problem facing the country, they were unsuccessful in persuading most Americans that bomb shelters were a viable solution.

### **Truman, Eisenhower, and Civil Defense**

After the Soviets created their own atom bomb in 1949, President Truman decided to take action. The U.S. was no longer unequivocally the dominant military power, and the Soviet Union was hardly transparent about its weapons capabilities. The American people needed to be protected in the case of a Soviet nuclear attack, which seemed particularly likely during the Korean war, so Truman created the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) through the Civil Defense Act of 1950. At first, the FCDA promoted shelter as the primary defense of the average American, drawing on the experiences of victims at Hiroshima and Nagasaki for ideas. The task of the FCDA was not only to protect the American people through various programs and informative media, but to produce propaganda that would help get the American public involved in the ideological aspects of the Cold War. If the adults would not take civil defense seriously— and most of them would not— then the FCDA would educate schoolchildren and hope the message was relayed back home. Still, with limited funding and support, the FCDA could do little to promote its plan during the Truman administration.<sup>5</sup>

When the Eisenhower administration took office in 1953, the U.S. entered a new phase in the post-war era. Dwight Eisenhower projected a calm, soothing vision of America onto the country, and the population was happy with his leadership. The Korean War was quickly ended, and the country was not eager to get into another conflict. Instead of fighting communism through armies, navies, and battles, Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, opted for a new approach: the New Look. Rather than building up traditional military structures,

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<sup>5</sup> Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America*, 93-98; Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 35-36.

the Eisenhower administration cut down the standing army and built up the arsenal of weapons, particularly the new nuclear weapons. Dulles elaborated on this policy with his concept of “massive retaliation.” Under this plan, the U.S. would have so many powerful weapons to use on anyone who attacked the nation that no enemy would ever dare attack the U.S. He combined this idea with that of “brinkmanship,” pushing the country closer and closer to war in order to force the other side to withdraw their threat or surrender. The result was that nuclear weapons became vital to U.S. strategy in the entire Cold War. With this dependence on nuclear weapons came a greater awareness of their damaging effects and of the battle to keep the civilian population safe.<sup>6</sup>

The next development in nuclear technology to turn the world upside down was the hydrogen bomb, or H-bomb. Between the first test in 1952 and the more famous blast on Bikini Atoll in 1954, it was clear to scientists and eventually the general public that weaponry had changed forever. The first H-bomb destroyed in an instant an area large enough to encompass New York City. The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* published a world-perspective on the new H-bomb and its potential effects, trying to separate fact from fiction in all the wild stories scattered around the world. While the FCDA had shifted tactics during the Eisenhower administration to focus on evacuating cities, the development of hydrogen bombs rendered such plans useless. The atom bomb might have been deadly, but it was eminently more survivable than the hydrogen

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<sup>6</sup> Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America*, 91; Rose, 19 Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff* (New York: Black Bay Books, 2012), 15. Thomas discusses this extensively in his book *Ike's Bluff*, where he explores the real strategy Eisenhower had during the Cold War. For a further examination of Eisenhower's opposition to nuclear war while maintaining the appearance that he would, in fact, use nuclear weapons if necessary, see Campbell Craig, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For a different view on Eisenhower's relationship with nuclear power and the Cold War, see Ira Chernus, *Apocalypse Management* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

bomb. These facts became more widespread as Congressmen Chet Holifield began his 1956 campaign for civil defense.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Holifield Committee**

Certain politicians stood out for their interest in the impact of a nuclear war on the population. Congressman Chet Holifield, a Democrat from California, was a particularly outspoken proponent of civil designs protected civilian population defense measures in the chance of a nuclear attack. Having studied the effects of the latest nuclear weapons, Holifield was adamant that shelter programs be studied carefully and eventually implemented for the protection of the civilian population. A nuclear war, he felt, would be a total war: “all the people in [the] country are front-line soldiers” because “there is no front line, no back line, the whole world is a battlefield.”<sup>8</sup> Nuclear war did not differentiate between civilians and soldiers, between home and battlefield. If there was any possibility of a nuclear war, Holifield wanted the country to be prepared.

Holifield began a series of Congressional hearings in 1956 through his position as the chair of the Military Operations Subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations. The hearings displayed the impracticality of earlier evacuation plans, and focused on the impact of radiation on the general population, an issue explored further in a subcommittee on radiation in 1957.<sup>9</sup> Dee Garrison, in her examination of civil defense policies in the 1950s, describes these initial hearings thusly: “The 1956 Holifield hearings lasted six months and included 211 witnesses, whose testimony filled 3,145 pages. They comprised the most thorough

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<sup>7</sup> Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 127-128; Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 19-20, 64; “H-Bomb and World Opinion,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 10 (May 1954): 163-167  
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=4eafd047-516d-4806-b8bd-e6d421e65e37%40sessionmgr4005&vid=9&hid=4206> Accessed April 1, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> House Subcommittee No. 3 of the Committee on Armed Services, *Civil Defense— Fallout Shelter Program*, pt. 1, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., as quoted in Rose, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 28; Chet Holifield, “Congressional Hearings on Radioactive Fallout,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 14 (1958): 52.



investigation of civil defense ever undertaken.” Armed with the latest statistics on the impact of nuclear weapons and the resulting fallout, Holifield interrogated scientists, politicians, and bureaucrats about the specific plans in place and the likelihood of their success. The committee hearings revealed to the public how haphazard the FCDA plans were up until this point, particularly the ideas of the head of the FCDA, Val Peterson.<sup>10</sup>

The Congressman himself advocated for bomb shelters. In 1956, he proposed an \$8 billion shelter program, telling *The Washington Post and Times Herald* that “with the danger of radioactive fallout added to the blast and fire effects of an H-bomb attack, people must be able to get into shelters that are within a short distance from the center of [city is likely to be attacked].” Such a plan, he added would be “worthwhile... even if it costs \$100 per person” though he had reputable estimates that such a program could be built for only \$50 or \$60 per person.<sup>11</sup> To Holifield and his supporters, shelter programs meant billions of lives saved and thus the expense to the government and the taxpayers was well worth it. It was a practical plan, far more so than any of the plans the FCDA had accomplished, including their efforts to shelter programs in the past. As he told the *Washington Post and Times Herald* that October, “talk is big, but achievements are little... [The U.S. needs] a rather complete rewriting of the act which spells out the Federal responsibility for major financing and for the performance of civil defense duties.”<sup>12</sup> Federal action, rather than state or private efforts, would bring about a comprehensive shelter program that the U.S. needed.

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<sup>10</sup> Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 63; David L. Snead, *The Gaither Committee, Eisenhower, and the Cold War* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 44-46, hereafter *The Gaither Committee*.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas J. Foley, “Holifield Asks Fast Action on \$8-Billion Shelter Plans,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald* April 3, 1956.

[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/148776191/2FD1E7E0A5744DF5PQ/4?accountid=2694#](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/148776191/2FD1E7E0A5744DF5PQ/4?accountid=2694#)  
Accessed 8 April 2014.

<sup>12</sup> “Holifield Predicts Bills to Revamp Civil Defense,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald* October 11, 1956.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/148734669/37F1AB49B28A4B22PQ/1?accountid=2694> Accessed 8 April 2014.

Not everyone was as convinced as Holifield, however. Eisenhower had to at least make the appearance of listening to Holifield, as Laura McEnaney states, “even if only to say he had consulted with ‘Mr. Atomic Energy’ before rejecting the legislative proposal.”<sup>13</sup> His interest in what he termed the “lively argument that seems to be occupying the attention of so many in the United States concerning the effects of radio-active [sic] fallout” were mostly about balancing public anxiety and congressional pressure with his own list of priorities.<sup>14</sup> During the Holifield committee hearings, magazine editor Norman Cousins had asked Eisenhower about a potential meeting with three atomic scientists in Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress. Eisenhower assured Cousins that he had “frequently heard scientific dissertations dealing with every phase of the atomic question, and from diverse viewpoints” and that he was “energetically” working on programs to keep the country safe, as well as “working unceasingly” to bring about world peace and eliminate atomic danger entirely.<sup>15</sup> He certainly wanted to make the point that he was well-informed on these issues, whatever the general public might think. However, with regard to the hearings, Eisenhower’s focus was on the fallout from U.S. nuclear testing, rather than from an atomic war. Shelter programs like Holifield was proposing were not particularly relevant to the question of nuclear testing, and so Eisenhower did not take much notice of that part of the debate.<sup>16</sup>

The hearing themselves brought out quite a bit of evidence that bomb shelters were not a necessary or reliable endeavor. Some, such as Willard F. Libby, thought that the need for bomb shelters was overstated. Libby, who was most concerned with U.S. testing of nuclear weapons,

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<sup>13</sup> McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> Dwight Eisenhower to Norman Cousins, July 9, 1957  
<http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/pdfs/volume18/v18pt02ch04.pdf> Accessed April 20, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Dwight Eisenhower to Lewis Lichtenstein Strauss, July 2, 1957, Notes 1 and 2  
<http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/pdfs/volume17/v17pt10ch21.pdf> Accessed April 21, 2014.

claimed that the fallout was not hazardous to the general public. His estimates were backed to some degree by fellow witness Ralph Lapp, though Lapp gave more weight to the idea that a nuclear war was possible. Because prominent scientists in this field at the time had a vested interest in continuing nuclear testing, it was to their benefit to downplay any hazardous effects that nuclear fallout might have on the general population. As one of the main advantages of bomb shelters was protection from fallout that extended beyond the initial airstrike, the scientists' testimony had the effect of downplaying the usefulness of bomb shelters for civilian defense.<sup>17</sup>

More devastating to the cause was the testimony of the FCDA leader, Val Peterson and Major General Otto L. Nelson. Nelson spoke of bomb shelter programs as a desperate attempt to avoid facing the painful reality of nuclear war: it was "so difficult, complex and expensive that there is no practical or effective solution. However, this is not to be admitted publicly but instead an ineffective phantom program is to be set up with appropriate individuals and agencies to serve as scapegoats."<sup>18</sup> Peterson went further, pointing out that nuclear weapons were so powerful and damaging that there was no realistic solution when it came to public survival, though he claimed that civil defense efforts was not an "impossible situation." He told Holifield bluntly that "the man who said that label in shelters you could save 80% of lives in this country during a nuclear attack was talking pure moonshine."<sup>19</sup> These views were hardly inspiring affirmations of shelter

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<sup>17</sup>Richard G. Hewlett, *Atoms for Peace and War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 329-331; Garrison, 64. It is worth noting that Libby was not opposed to bomb shelters, and was advocating for them publically within a few years. However, he was still in favor of continued testing, and thought that fallout might soon become an "academic" question with new advances in nuclear technology. Harry Nelson, "Physicist Urges Bomb Shelters in All Homes," *Los Angeles Times* July 16, 1959

[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/167469193/BC332A5AB17A4B99PQ/1?accountid=2694#](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/167469193/BC332A5AB17A4B99PQ/1?accountid=2694#)

Accessed 8 April 2014

<sup>18</sup> Civil Defense for National Survival, 3:670; 4:1431-32, 1226, as quoted in Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Thompson, "Peterson Sees Chaos If H-Bomb Hits U.S." *The Washington Post and Times Herald* May 16, 1956 [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/148780230/5154501AD34D4CB5PQ/6?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/148780230/5154501AD34D4CB5PQ/6?accountid=2694) Accessed March 20, 2014; "Civil Defense Chief Hits Back at Critics of Program: Val Peterson Draws Reply By

programs, and did little to convince the public or the Eisenhower administration that they were a worthwhile investment. If even the head of the agency whose task was to promote civilian defense efforts thought that there was nothing to be done, it seemed hardly likely that anyone else would buy into the whole process.

The only real shelter plan promoted in the hearings themselves was that of the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory (NRDL), which had been working on a method of fallout protection since the end of World War II. The *Chicago Tribune* reported on the plan, quoting the officer in charge of the project, Captain Richard S. Mandelkorn. Scorning the previous evacuation plans, he claimed that “the fallout patterns from atomic weapons of the type we can expect even at this time, makes it likely that the only safe locations anywhere would be in shelters,” and that this should be the “highest priority.” Mandelkorn emphasized that the plan would have to be long-term: survivors would be able to emerge from shelters after a short period of time, but for the next year at least, their excursions above-ground would need to be brief and occupied with the lengthy process of decontaminating the area.<sup>20</sup> The plan was a far cry from Holifield’s original estimates, involving far more time and effort than the simple concrete shelters that the FCDA had promoted. While the NRDL plan was far more practical and thought-out than the average shelter plan, it only served to emphasize how radical and far-reaching such a

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Rep. Holifield,” *Los Angeles Times* September 3, 1956

[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/166991023/5154501AD34D4CB5PQ/11?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/166991023/5154501AD34D4CB5PQ/11?accountid=2694)

Accessed April 8, 2014. For further examples of Peterson’s cynical view of shelter program success, see Chalmers M. Roberts, “No one in the World Could Meet ‘The Situation,’ CD Head Says: No Hope for A-Bomb Areas, Peterson Says,” *Washington Post and Times Herald* July 22, 1956

[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/148743134/5154501AD34D4CB5PQ/13?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/148743134/5154501AD34D4CB5PQ/13?accountid=2694)

Accessed April 8, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> “Shelter Held Only Defense in Atom Attack,” *Chicago Tribune* June 23, 1957

[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/180154385/C4BD404EDF1541E0PQ/1?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/180154385/C4BD404EDF1541E0PQ/1?accountid=2694) Accessed 7 April 2014. See also “A-Bomb Shelter Plan Laid Before Congress,” *Los Angeles Times* February 6, 1957.

[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/167042488/C4BD404EDF1541E0PQ/5?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/167042488/C4BD404EDF1541E0PQ/5?accountid=2694) Accessed 1 April 2014.

plan would have to be in order to provide any realistic protection for society after a nuclear attack.

The Holifield hearings seemed to do the opposite of their intent, showing the public the hopelessness of civilian defense efforts instead of rallying public opinion to the cause. Garrison further emphasized the dilemma Holifield faced when the NRDL plan was revealed, stating that Holifield “could easily predict the average citizen’s response to a survival plan to spend much of life underground in a nation controlled by a hundred independent governments.” He had gone into the hearings hoping not to “contribute any further to the apathy and indifference and fatalism which are now so extant among the American people” on the subject of civilian defense, but instead his efforts seemed to only validate that feeling.<sup>21</sup> McEnaney did note that “Holifield revived popular discourse (and anxiety) about the bomb” and pushed Republicans in government to address the issue, lest they seem less sympathetic than Democrats to the American public. However, she acknowledges that the success of the committee was that it “[shined] the light on poorly conceived evacuation plans.”<sup>22</sup> If the best the committee could accomplish was to denigrate the current state of civil defense, that said quite little for its ability to stir up public support for bomb shelters.

Furthermore, the hearings seemed to make little difference in public opinion. The Gallup polls for 1956 indicate that the majority of Americans thought there would be another world war within their lifetimes, that the hydrogen bomb would be used to attack U.S. cities, and that their homes might well be wiped out. However, when asked whether they thought their “[families]

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<sup>21</sup> Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 65; Civil Defense for National Survival: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 7 parts (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956) as quoted in Garrison, 63. Garrison notes that in her interviews with Holifield, he claimed his purpose was to show the futility of shelter programs, which she felt was a retrospective justification for his earlier support. Garrison, 207, note 5. Given the overwhelming support he gave to the programs at the time, as seen in all quoted newspaper articles on the subject, as well as his extensive committee hearings, this seems an accurate assessment of his later interviews with Garrison.

<sup>22</sup> McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 57.

would be likely to live through an atomic war,” only 29% of Americans responded ‘yes.’<sup>23</sup> Civil defense proponents may have succeeded in convincing Americans that a nuclear war was both distinctly possible and highly dangerous, but they had clearly done a less than stellar job of inspiring confidence in their own solutions. Mrs. Alexander Stewart, representing the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in the hearings, gave insight into the public’s lack of support for bomb shelters: “It is for us, too, to recognize finally that civil defense, however conscientiously devised, is a cruel delusion, an expense of spirit in a waste of shame, and a relic of wars already passed into history.”<sup>24</sup> Though *Life* magazine and the *Saturday Evening Post* tried to excite public interest in bomb shelters, “a subject not willingly faced by most Americans,” the articles did indicate that the general population was uninterested and unimpressed by the dire prophesying of civil defense proponents.<sup>25</sup>

These fatalistic views were echoed in other publications, including the *Bulletin for the Atomic Scientist*. The “sometime missionary for civil defense,” Philip Wylie, abandoned the idea of shelter programs when the power of the hydrogen bomb was made more clear, as Holifield’s hearings documented. He wrote in 1957, “Where once I felt national apathy was dangerous, I now feel it would be common sense.” He elaborated, explaining that survival through underground colonies would be a temporary— and unlivable— reprieve from annihilation. Furthermore, by the time any such shelter program was built, the Soviets would no doubt have weapons powerful enough to render such plans useless.<sup>26</sup> Holifield and his like-minded

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<sup>23</sup> George H. Gallup, “July 16, 1956,” “July 18, 1956,” “December 19, 1956,” in *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1972-1977* Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1972), 929.

<sup>24</sup> *Civil Defense for National Survival*, Part 3, 2847, as quoted in Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 64; Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 208 note 25.

<sup>25</sup> “Scientific Blueprint for Atomic Survival,” *Life*, March 18, 1957, as quoted in Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America*, 102; Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America*, 102-103.

<sup>26</sup> Spencer R. Weart, “History of American Attitudes to Civil Defense,” in *Civil Defense A Choice of Disasters* ed. John Dowling and Evans M. Harrell (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1987), 20-21, hereafter “American

colleagues had done their job too well: they had succeeded in raising public awareness of the dangers of nuclear warfare, particularly with the latest weapons, and in doing so had undermined their plans for public safety. Few people who heard about the horrors of the newest nuclear weapons and the state of civilian defense could be enthusiastic about bomb shelter plans.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, in January 1957, the House Military Operations Subcommittee introduced H.R. 2125 in order to overhaul the entirety of civil defense, creating an entirely new department, the Department Of Civil Defense (DCD). The FCDA, not to be outdone, had submitted its own shelter plan to the Eisenhower administration at the end of 1956. Peterson had been convinced by the latest reports on the health consequences of fallout and the new Soviet ICBMs that shelter was the only option. Evacuation plans had been considered inadequate for some time by then, but the new weapons rendered them utterly useless: ICBMs meant a warning time of just fifteen minutes. There was no way that entire cities could be evacuated within that time frame. Naturally, Peterson was not content to merely promote shelter programs: by February 1959, he was once again promoting evacuation plans and implying that shelters were not enough.<sup>28</sup>

Holifield was enthusiastic, claiming that “a shelter program is the acid test of a national will to build an effective civil defense.” The plans were eagerly promoted by the National Association of State Civil Defense Directors, who, like Peterson and Holifield, felt the federal government should be more heavily involved in civil defense. Financially speaking, civil defense had to be a largely federal program, as states would not be able to fund elaborate shelter

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Attitudes,”; Philip Wylie, “Mr. Wylie’s Answer,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 13, no. 4 (April 1957): 146 <http://books.google.ca/books?id=iAkAAAAMBAJ&q=wylie#v=onepage&q&f=false> Accessed 4 April 2014

<sup>27</sup> Garrison also credits the presidential campaign of Adlai Stevenson and British research on radiation with increased public awareness of the devastating effects of nuclear fallout. Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 56-57; David F. Kruger, *This Is Only A Test: How Washington DC Prepared for Nuclear War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 136, hereafter *This is Only a Test*; “50% Toll Forecast If U.S. is Attacked: Peterson Testifies This Tally Would Stand Despite the Best Shelters Built,” *New York Times* February 19, 1957.

programs.<sup>29</sup> Congress, however, was less impressed. The House voted in February 1957 to cut funding to civil defense to one third of the requested budget, and less than half of the previous year's allotment. Shelter programs were not only unpromising, but potentially disastrous to public morale: they "might generate 'adverse psychological effects' among citizens, due to the fact that shelters represented 'ever-present evidence of personal danger.'"<sup>30</sup> Bomb shelters seemed unlikely to help in the case of a nuclear war and likely to paint the U.S. as a land of cowards ready to dive underground at a moment's notice. Members of Congress, including Representative Ed Edmondson of Oklahoma, expressed their disapproval of Peterson and the progress of the FCDA. *The New York Times* reported that Congress was particularly unhappy with Peterson's vague, contradictory views on civil defense and his denigration of shelter programs like the one he had just proposed.<sup>31</sup> Just as the Holifield hearings had done more to convince the general public that civil defense was useless, they had undermined Congressional confidence in the entire program.

### **The Gaither Committee**

Eisenhower himself was less than enthusiastic about the shelter program proposals in early 1957. Further complicating the administration's approach to civil defense were a series of events that autumn which created a great deal of anxiety and upset among the public. 1957

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<sup>29</sup> Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 45; "States Back Plan for Civil Defense: Greater U.S. Role Favored as Committee Endorses Changes in 1950 Act," *New York Times* March 3, 1957 [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/114066811/5DCD6E5A5F314665PQ/4?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/114066811/5DCD6E5A5F314665PQ/4?accountid=2694) Accessed April 1, 2014. This article provides an excellent overview of the proposed changes. See also "Holifield Hits Civil Defense for 'Unreality,'" *Los Angeles Times* July 16, 1957 [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/167133693/F1F3217F314A46FDPQ/1?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/167133693/F1F3217F314A46FDPQ/1?accountid=2694) Accessed April 3, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 58, Agenda, Civil Defense Advisory Council Meeting, 28-29 May 1957, as quoted in McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> E. W. Kenworthy, "Civil Defense Cuts By House Indicate Doubts on Program," *New York Times* March 24, 1957. House members cited in the *Times* article also expressed dismay at the FCDA's long-term promotion of evacuation plans as the only possible solution, particularly in light of the Holifield hearings.



brought Eisenhower the integration crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, continued legislative battles over the Civil Rights Act of 1957, Soviet tests of new ICBMs, and perhaps most importantly, the Soviet launches of Sputnik and Sputnik II. While all these events caused general tension, the latter two generated a tidal wave of public attention—in some quarters, even hysteria—on the Cold War battle for supremacy. A Soviet attack on the U.S. seemed distinctly possible in that climate, reinforcing all the civil defense propaganda of the previous decade, and even sparking rumors about Russia “firing death rays from the moon.”<sup>32</sup> Americans might have been apathetic before, but the advancement in Soviet technology and weaponry made nuclear war an even more present reality than all the test wars of the FCDA could accomplish.

Bowing to public concern and Congressional pressure, Eisenhower formed a committee to study the preparedness of the U.S. for nuclear attack: the Science Advisory Committee, more popularly known as the “Gaither Committee” after the first chairman, H. Rowan Gaither, Jr. Though the original task was comprised of four separate studies, the Gaither Committee “proved the most important, as it eventually incorporated the findings of the other three in reaching its final conclusions.”<sup>33</sup> The panel was comprised of experts in all relevant fields, including scientists, defense specialists, and military leaders. Throughout the study, the Gaither Committee consulted with businessmen, engineers, strategic thinkers, and experts in any field that became relevant through the course of investigation.

The committee was controversial: Senator Henry M. Jackson declared that “the bankruptcy of the present [National Security Committee] technique is dramatized by the

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<sup>32</sup> Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 78-79; “Russia Tests an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile,” *This Day in History* <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/russia-tests-an-intercontinental-ballistic-missile> Accessed 30 March 2014; Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 258; 256-259. For a further examination of Eisenhower and the Sputnik crisis, see Yanek Mieczkowski, *Eisenhower’s Sputnik Moment: the Race for Space and World Prestige* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Snead, *The Gaither Report*, 46-47. Gaither stepped down from his position as chair and was replaced by Robert Sprague and William Foster after a poor medical diagnosis, but the appellation remained. Gaither himself stayed on the panel in the advisory branch. For a complete list of panel members, see Snead, *The Gaither Report*, 47.

[Eisenhower] Administration's increasing reliance on "distinguished citizens committees," though Morton H. Halperin, writing in *World Politics* a few years later, defended the decision to use civilians who would supposedly be "unbiased."<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, the Gaither Committee was able to examine the best reports of the day on nuclear weapons, Soviet strategic capabilities, and civilian defense outside of classified information, like that of the CIA. This information was rather hyperbolic by nature: many of the top government officials and scientific laboratories at the time were certain that there was a 'missile gap' between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which made an attack by the Soviets appear far more likely than the reality. Statistics on weapons and defenses, moreover, had to be continually updated as new weaponry was invented. The Gaither Committee ordered technical studies specifically for their report, asking for the latest figures and shelter plans. Working in utter secrecy, the Committee slowly prepared the report to Eisenhower.<sup>35</sup>

The Gaither Committee presented its report, "Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age," on November 7, 1957. The report began by affirming the danger of Soviet expansionism, and classifying its research as "active and passive defense measures from two standpoints: their contribution to deterrence; and their protection to the civil population if war should come by accident or design." The biggest threat, from the Committee's perspective, was the rapid Soviet military advancement that had apparently taken place within the past few years. Accordingly, the

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<sup>34</sup> Henry M. Jackson, "To Forge a Strategy for Survival," *Public Administration Review* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1959): 161; Morton H. Halperin, "The Gaither Committee and the Policy Process," *World Politics* 13, no. 3 (April 1961), 361-362. Research on the Gaither Committee is fairly limited, not least because relevant documents surrounding the reports were not declassified until the 1990s. Snead, 4. However, the Gaither Report is considered significant enough to appear in most accounts of civil defense and nuclear weaponry during the Eisenhower era, such as *Ike's Bluff* and *One Nation, Underground*. Michael Krepon's article "The Mushroom Cloud that Wasn't: Why Inflating Threats Won't Reduce Them," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 3 (2009): 2-6 discusses the Committee in the context of Cold War strategy and modern efforts at civilian defense. For further information on the Gaither Committee members, see David Snead's book on the subject.

<sup>35</sup> Halperin, "The Gaither Committee and the Policy Process," 363-364; Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 104-105; 116-117; 121. Snead also cites an amusing poem titled "Ode to Eternity," written by committee member Albert Hill, which mocked Eisenhower's apparent preference to die in a nuclear war rather than spend any extra money. Hill to Sprague, September 28, 1957, as quoted in Snead, 117.

committee wanted to protect the U.S. from a Soviet or even Chinese military attack. Having examined the past and current plans for civil defense, the Gaither Report declared bluntly that “active defense programs now in being and being programmed for the future will not give adequate assurance of protection to the civilian population. The outlook for ‘passive defense’ programs was similarly dim.”<sup>36</sup>

Like Eisenhower himself, the Gaither Committee acknowledged that the best protection was the avoidance of nuclear war, and thus the stockpiling of nuclear weapons to continue the policy of massive retaliation. However, the Gaither Committee felt that the policy was only useful if the civilian population was adequately protected:

As long as the U.S. population is wide open to Soviet attack, both the Russians and our allies may believe that we shall feel increasing reluctance to employ SAC in any circumstance other than when the United States is directly attacked. To prevent such an impairment of our deterrent power and to ensure our survival.<sup>37</sup>

If the Soviets saw how vulnerable the U.S. civilian population was, they would not believe that the U.S. would in fact use nuclear weapons. The U.S. might use those weapons to retaliate against a Soviet missile strike, as the policy of massive retaliation indicated, but that would only be if the enemy fired first. Because entire cities filled with people would definitely perish in a nuclear war, the U.S. would not dare to fire the first shot. This, the Gaither Committee concluded, undermined the entire U.S. strategy in the Cold War. More importantly, it left the majority of Americans open to certain death within an instant.

To fix the flaw in U.S. military policy, as the Gaither Committee saw it, the U.S. needed to implement a shelter program. This would protect American citizens in the case of a nuclear

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<sup>36</sup> *U.S. Science Advisory Committee*, “Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age,” November 7, 1957 <https://ia601700.us.archive.org/22/items/deteviv00unit/deteviv00unit.pdf> Accessed 29 March 2014, 12; 15-16. Hereafter “Gaither Report.”

<sup>37</sup> “Gaither Report,” 18.

attack, give the country a fighting chance to rebuild, and prove to the Soviets that there was nothing preventing the U.S. from using nuclear weapons. Fallout shelters were the “only feasible protection,” the Committee was “unable to identify any other type of defense likely to save more lives for the same money in the event of a nuclear attack.” Given the newest weapons, the report acknowledged, those affected by the initial blast would not survive. Fallout shelters, therefore, were the only hope for survivors of the initial blast, as the radiation fallout would be the biggest danger to them for the foreseeable future. Deterrence was best, but “if [it] should fail. . . [these programs would] go far to ensure our survival as a nation.”<sup>38</sup>

The opinions in the Gaither Report were not precisely what President Eisenhower wished to hear. Eisenhower had never been particularly fond of civil defense efforts, and the hysteria over Sputnik and the missile gap flummoxed him, not the least because he had intelligence proving U.S. superiority over Soviet weapons and technology. Furthermore, Eisenhower was wary of the potential bias of the members of the Gaither Committee, who he saw as too closely tied to what he would later term the “military-industrial complex.” Not only did the Gaither Report “[mimic] the very proposals Eisenhower had convened it to scrutinize,” but the “overall conclusions charted a course of incremental militarization that did not sit well with Eisenhower.”<sup>39</sup> He had already been concerned with the growing budgets he received from military leaders, and resented that new weapons “were just so damned costly.”<sup>40</sup> The Gaither Committee had consulted with the military advisors and leaders in weapons industries who would benefit from increased funding for the U.S. military. Consequently, the Gaither Report reflected a certain bias that Eisenhower was not going to ignore.

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<sup>38</sup> “Gaither Report,” 19; 24.

<sup>39</sup> McEnaney, 58. McEnaney also describes Eisenhower as not “persuaded by such grandiose prose” as the Gaither Report, furthering the impression that Eisenhower considered the report more hyperbolic than was useful.

<sup>40</sup> Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 17:2255-6, as quoted in Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 282; Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 280-283.

Eisenhower also had practical concerns about the ramifications of the Gaither Report. Certainly, he did not want to invest \$22 billion on a fallout shelter program alone, a move which would end hope for a balanced budget. He noted at the time that just one billion dollars was “a stack of ten-dollar bills as high as the Washington Monument”—not the sort of amounts spent by a president who prized a balanced budget. Eisenhower acknowledged that he had asked the Gaither Committee to assume the occurrence of a nuclear war, while his view was that such a war was simply impossible. Both Snead and Thomas point out that for Eisenhower to accept most of the recommendations of the Gaither Report, he had to be convinced that his own firm beliefs on the likelihood of nuclear war, backed by intelligence the Committee had no access to, were incorrect.<sup>41</sup> Given his intelligence advantage over the Committee members and his own personal views on the subject of national security, Eisenhower was unlikely to accept the recommendations of the Gaither Report in full. The admission that bomb shelters were of no use given the latest technology and the secondary placement of shelter programs as a method of deterrence gave Eisenhower more reason to ignore the report.

Of course, Eisenhower had not intended to make the Gaither Report public knowledge, though he acknowledged that it would likely become such. By December, Committee members, politicians, and journalists who supported its conclusions had made the Gaither Report public knowledge, and the political uproar was only increasing in fervor. Eisenhower, to the public's eye, was aware that the U.S. was falling behind in the Cold War, and he was doing nothing about it. The president attempted to calm the country without revealing his secret sources of

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<sup>41</sup> Hewlett, *Atoms for Peace and War*, 465; Thomas, *Ike's Bluff*, 274; Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 129. Historians disagree on the influence of the Gaither Committee. Snead argues that Eisenhower genuinely struggled with the conclusions the report drew, and continued to rely on the report when considering his policies. He does, however, acknowledge that in his memoirs, Eisenhower was critical of the committee for its nearsighted approach to the situation. Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 186-187, 189. Rose, however, considered Eisenhower's formation of the Gaither Committee to be Eisenhower merely “[marking] time” and looking productive in the face of reports by Nelson Rockefeller and Herman Kahn. Rose, *One Nation, Underground*, 27-29.

intelligence. Evidence of this damage control can be seen in a letter to written before the official Gaither Report but after his informal briefing on the matter. Between the impending report and the Sputnik crises, Eisenhower felt it necessary to address the nation on national defense and Soviet technology advancements. In a letter to his favorite speechwriter, Arthur Larson, Eisenhower emphasized the need to outline his defense plan clearly, stating outright the generous budget of the military, the missile plan, and large body of leading scientists with whom he had been discussing military technology. He asked Larson to state with “complete conviction that the American people can meet every one of these threats.” He gave a speech with similar themes on November 13 of that year.<sup>42</sup> Eisenhower saw no sense in chasing after plans he felt were futile. The important thing was to prevent nuclear war in the first place and to keep the nation calm and strong. Giving the Gaither Report too much credence would only cause a public demand for the shelter programs that Eisenhower had no faith in.

Outside of the Eisenhower administration, perception of the Gaither Report was quite different. The possibility of a White House-sponsored shelter program stirred excitement in the press, particularly when contrasted with the examples from the FCDA. Articles criticized the censorship of the Gaither Report itself, worrying over the potential military secrets that the public ought to be informed of. However, the idea of shelter programs seemed to gain more traction as statements from prominent White House officials suggested the administration was changing its outlook: *The Washington Post and Times Herald* reported that “the Administration, which has never before come to grips with the shelter problem because of its tremendous cost and uncertain efficacy, reportedly is now considering such a program seriously.” The article went on to emphasize that shelter programs were merely a part of an overall military focus, and

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<sup>42</sup> Eisenhower to Arthur Larson, November 5, 1957 <http://eisenhower.press.jhu.edu/pdfs/volume18/v18pt03ch06.pdf> Accessed April 2, 2014; Eisenhower to Larson, November 5, 1957 notes 1-4; Eisenhower, “Our Future Security,” November 13, 1957, as quoted in Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 133-134; Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 132-134.

would be quite useless without the nuclear arsenal the U.S. had been building up.<sup>43</sup> Even in the frenzy of the post-Sputnik months, bomb shelters were never seen as a particularly important part of protecting America. The emphasis was always going to be on massive retaliation and a stocked nuclear arsenal, because that was a plausible threat. People were concerned with the arms race, not with a shelter race.

### **National Shelter Policy and Change in Civil Defense**

To appease public pressure while maintaining his military strategy, Eisenhower issued the “National Shelter Policy” in 1958. The policy itself meant little: Eisenhower merely endorsed the efforts of private, *individual* citizens to build shelters on their own. As McEnaney describes, “there would be no more discussion of public shelters, or even public-private collaboration, just talk of self-help and private retreat.”<sup>44</sup> The Eisenhower administration was quietly backing away from any real support for shelter programs. In an article for the *Washington Post and Times Herald*, writer Warren Unna refers to civil defense as “that unpleasant stepchild of Government which most people would just as soon not be reminded of.” He goes on to say that “those close to the Gaither Report now say its shelter recommendations are the ‘deadliest’ parts of the overall finding— at least as the Administration is concerned.” Once again, proponents of shelters had

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<sup>43</sup> “The Gaither Report,” *New York Times* December 26, 1957  
[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/114268313/4E69D98895564BA2PQ/2?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/114268313/4E69D98895564BA2PQ/2?accountid=2694) Accessed 1 April 2014; “The Gaither Report,” *Wall Street Journal* December 19, 1957  
[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/132309263/4E69D98895564BA2PQ/5?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/132309263/4E69D98895564BA2PQ/5?accountid=2694) Accessed 1 April 2014; “\$22 Billion for Shelter?” *Washington Post and Times Herald* December 24, 1959  
[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/148894176/4E69D98895564BA2PQ/3?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/148894176/4E69D98895564BA2PQ/3?accountid=2694) Accessed 1 April 2014.

<sup>44</sup> McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 58-59.

reversed their position, endorsing them as a nice idea at best, and impractical if not deadly burden at worst.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most supportive thing Eisenhower did for civil defense in the wake of the Gaither Report was his annual participation in Operation Alert. This annual event, run by the civil defense authorities of the day, was meant to be a proper drill on a nation-wide scale for a nuclear attack. Eisenhower had readily participated in earlier versions despite his own mistrust of shelters, joining the Executive branch in their assigned bunkers when given the alarm. The Operation Alerts were something of a farce: in the original, 1954 version, Congress had not bothered to leave when the drill sounded. This was not a new concept for shelter proponents, who had numerous stories of American towns ignoring air raid sirens for what turned out to be false alarms. The most interesting part of Operation Alert was the annual protest that accompanied it every year. Most of the drill was clearly fake, a “staged drama. . . complete with special costumes, siren sound effects, and set scripts enacted by the powerful and poor alike. If anything, as McEnaney noted, it emphasized the downsides of the federal shelters, where rich government officials were spirited off to safety while the masses were left to fight for survival. Such a production was difficult to take seriously, making it yet another example of a civil defense effort that did more harm to the cause than good. Getting to a shelter was supposed to be a matter of life and death, but efforts like Operation Alert made it into a bad stage play, complete with various mishaps.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Warren Unna, “Fallout Shelters: Civil Defense Getting Attention— But It’s Slight,” *Washington Post and Times Herald* May 23, 1958  
[http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/149093087/6F81F223A5014D84PQ/2?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/149093087/6F81F223A5014D84PQ/2?accountid=2694) Accessed April 3, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Kruger, *This is Only a Test*, 121; Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America*, 104; Garrison, 70; McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 147.



The 1957 version had once again had several flaws, which Eisenhower hoped would be fixed for 1958. It was hardly a smooth operation: city traffic clogged the ‘escape’ routes, people ignored their instructions and wandered away or rushed to get family members to safety. The whole affair was an illustration of Eisenhower’s criticism of Operation Alert procedures: that panic, chaos, and mob rule were far more dangerous to a post-apocalyptic American society than fallout radiation. Still, the process gave some legitimacy to the annual event. The *Los Angeles Times* featured a picture of Eisenhower walking into the shelter with two aides, ready to lead the government from the underground bunker. The idea behind Operation Alert, particularly for federal officials, was to reassure the country that the government would not fall in case of nuclear war, that business could go on as usual. The *Washington Post* noted the changes to the 1958 Operation Alert, which took place in multiple stages and featured a new system of civil defense administration.<sup>47</sup>

To Eisenhower, however, the idea behind Operation Alert was simply unrealistic. The government would not be going about its everyday duties after a nuclear war. In fact, when the Secretary of the Treasury asked Eisenhower how they would address monetary issues after the war, Eisenhower responded, “We’re not going to be worrying about the exchange rate. We’re going to be grubbing for worms.”<sup>48</sup> There would be no strong government addressing everyday affairs after a nuclear apocalypse, there would only be people trying desperately to survive in a

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<sup>47</sup> Kruger, *This is Only a Test*, 159-160; “Eisenhower Enters Shelter in Bomb Alert,” *Los Angeles Times* May 7, 1958 [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/167273093/C4BD404EDF1541E0PQ/3?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/167273093/C4BD404EDF1541E0PQ/3?accountid=2694) Accessed April 3, 2014. “Operation Alert Starts Quietly: Federal Phase of Exercise is Played Down Because of Middle East Crisis,” *New York Times* July 17, 1958 [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/114423755/C71CF5944D7245B9PQ/1?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/114423755/C71CF5944D7245B9PQ/1?accountid=2694) Accessed April 5, 2014. Reports by the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* note that the event went smoothly, but was of less national importance than the current Middle East crisis. “Mideast Crisis Curbs Operation Alert News,” *Washington Post and Times Herald* [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/149015502/C71CF5944D7245B9PQ/2?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/149015502/C71CF5944D7245B9PQ/2?accountid=2694) Accessed April 4, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> John Eisenhower, interview by Evan Thomas, as quoted in Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 320.

world where even the most basic necessities were scarce and difficult to get. A policy like bomb shelters, which would only give a faint hope of any sort of survival, and gave no hope to a prosperous and safe nation, was not a policy that Eisenhower considered a priority.

On July 1, 1958, Eisenhower combined the FCDA with the Office of Defense Mobilization into the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM), which further diminished civil defense efforts. Shelter programs were no longer a national effort, but instead an example of all-American rugged individualism. Sarah A. Lichtman, in her aptly-titled article “Do-It-Yourself Security,” emphasizes the focus on families in publications. One of the most famous pamphlets from the OCDM, the “Family Fallout Shelter,” illustrated the process of constructing a shelter built not for cities or towns but for a small family unit, with a suggested location right in the home. The article gave the same sort of endorsement for fallout shelters as in years past: it was the best of a few bad options left after a nuclear attack. Not only did the pamphlet emphasize that “fallout shelter is needed everywhere,” but only for those who are beyond the blast and the heat of the initial explosion— the millions of people closer will already be dead. It reassures the reader that the “Federal Government has a shelter policy based on the knowledge that most of those beyond the range of blast and heat will survive if they have adequate protection from fallout,” which would be cold comfort to those who read on about the incredible range of damage that nuclear weapons could cause.<sup>49</sup>

Other OCDM publications from the era had a similarly pessimistic tone. The guide “Ten for Survival,” produced in conjunction with a television series of the same name, started with the attention-grabbing section “Face These Facts.” The first fact to face was that those in or near big

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<sup>49</sup> Kruger, *This is Only a Test*, 163; Sarah A. Lichtman, “Do-It-Yourself Security,” *Journal Of Design History* 19, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 40-41; Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, “The Family Fallout Shelter,” 1959 <https://ia600301.us.archive.org/9/items/familyfalloutshe00unitrich/familyfalloutshe00unitrich.pdf> Accessed 30 March 2014.

cities would be annihilated instantly. The second was that one “is not safe merely because [they] live far away from likely targets.” The guide later noted that one would probably only have “split seconds” to save one’s life. For those faced with these publications, it would be hard to imagine that a simple concrete shelter was a task they needed to perform. Guides meant to inspire people to build shelters for the inevitable doomsday could just as easily cause people to give up hope of ever surviving a nuclear holocaust, especially with only the protection of a concrete cave in their basement.<sup>50</sup>

### **Into the Future: Civil Defense and the early 1960s**

Civil defense continued to be a pressing issue throughout the 1960s, but never achieved the status that Holifield, for example, hoped for. Holifield himself continued to fight for shelter programs throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, urging for some sort of action. He was helped in this cause by Nelson Rockefeller, who was elected as the Governor of New York in 1959. Rockefeller had been a longtime supporter of civil defense, and had orchestrated several committees and reports on nuclear warfare and Cold War Strategy in his position as adviser to Eisenhower. In 1960, he attempted to pass an enormous state-wide civilian defense effort for New York, heavily focused on the building of bomb shelters in all buildings and schools. Rockefeller’s efforts drove John F. Kennedy to further emphasize the importance of civilian defense, in large part because Kennedy needed to prevent Rockefeller from gaining politically on this issue. However, even Rockefeller admitted that fallout shelters were useless to those near the actual nuclear strike zone, and his plans relied on society needing a mere two weeks to make the

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<sup>50</sup> Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, “Ten for Survival,” 1960, accessed through author’s personal collection.

environment above ground safe.<sup>51</sup> This plan, therefore, had the same problem as all those beforehand: “denial of problems in the postwar environment, but also government recognition that no shelter could protect anyone in the target area from blast effects, caused many experts and common citizens to refuse to take civil defense seriously in the Kennedy Era.”<sup>52</sup>

During the Kennedy administration, civil defense and fallout shelters became quite popular for a short period. Kennedy, under pressure from Rockefeller and his U.S. Governors’ Committee on Civil Defense and other groups, heavily promoted civilian defense. He made a particularly stirring speech on the need for family bomb shelter during the Berlin crisis, when public interest in the subject was quite high, but as the situation slowly went back to normal, shelters were no longer given much attention.<sup>53</sup> The OCDM tried to promote the ideas of civilian defense and fallout shelters, but never quite managed to spark much public interest. The effects of fallout remained a common theme, including a short film titled “About Fallout.” They did produce studies on the practical aspects of fallout shelters, including sponsoring a long study on the effects of shelter life on the American public titled “Psychological and Social Adjustment in a Simulated Shelter.”<sup>54</sup> Despite shelter programs being seemingly discredited, there was little else for the OCDM to promote proper civil defense.

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<sup>51</sup> Snead, *The Gaither Committee*, 68; Weart, “American Attitudes,” 21; Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 106-109.

<sup>52</sup> Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> Weart, “American Attitudes,” 26-27; Chet Holifield, “Civil Defense,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 14 (April 1958): 130-134 <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=da79d5a8-e21e-4462-9b52-5e5899e94870%40sessionmgr4001&vid=2&hid=4206> Accessed March 30, 2014; “Holifield Demands Shelters Be Built: Warns U.S. Has No Plans for Survival,” *New York Times* April 7, 1958 [http://search.proquest.com/cv\\_1485734/docview/114589899/2FD1E7E0A5744DF5PQ/2?accountid=2694](http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/114589899/2FD1E7E0A5744DF5PQ/2?accountid=2694) Other groups promoting bomb shelters at this time included the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. Weart, “American Attitudes,” 26.

<sup>54</sup> Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, “Annual Report of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization,” 1959 <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/docs/HistoricalInterest/Office%20of%20Civil%20and%20Defense%20Mobilization%20-%201959%20-%20Annual%20Rep.pdf> Accessed March 30, 2014; Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, “About Fallout,” 1963 <https://archive.org/details/AboutFal1963> Accessed April 4, 2014; James W. Altman, *Psychological and Social Adjustment in a Simulated Shelter: A Research Report*, Reprinted by Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, 1961.

The idea of a nuclear apocalypse certainly did not die, however. Post-Armageddon fiction sold quite well as the U.S. entered the 1960s, particularly those that did not try to portray the world after nuclear war in any sort of realistic way. Several episodes of *The Twilight Zone* featured such a fate for the world, including “Time Enough at Last” (1959), “Third from the Sun” (1960), and, perhaps most relevant to the OCDM, “The Shelter” (1961), which featured a family with a model family fallout shelter dealing with panicking neighbors who ignored such advice. Shortly after “The Shelter” aired, Eisenhower himself declared that if he “were in a very fine shelter and my family is not there, I would just walk out. I would not want to face that kind of world.”<sup>55</sup> His views seemed in line with the general public: in 1961, only 7% of Americans had even “made any plans or given any thought to preparing [their homes] in case of a nuclear attack.”<sup>56</sup>

Civil defense proponents had a difficult task ahead of them. They needed to convince the public that there was real and present danger, and then that the solutions that civil defense offered were useful for everyday Americans. Most of the proponents of bomb shelters were more successful pursuing the first half of this task. Holifield did a great deal to educate the American public about the dangers of nuclear warfare, radiation fallout, and advancements in nuclear technology. The FCDA drilled into the minds of every citizen, including schoolchildren, that nuclear war was just around the corner, and one had to be ready for it at every second of every day. The Gaither Report took Eisenhower’s ideology, combined with incomplete intelligence, and brought it to a reasonable conclusion: that the U.S. was not prepared to deal with Soviet

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<sup>55</sup> Weart, “American Attitudes,” 18-19; Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America*, 213; Eisenhower, as quoted in Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove’s America*, 213.

<sup>56</sup> George H. Gallup, “October 29, 1961,” *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1972-1977* Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1972).

attack. Operation Alert attempted to get Americans to be ready for the potential impact of nuclear war.

Yet none of these groups truly accomplished the second half of the task. Their efforts were haphazard and convoluted, usually shedding light on the problems with the solutions more than their strong points. Holifield's hearings may have convinced the public and Eisenhower that evacuation was mostly useless, but they hardly made a convincing case that shelter programs were a viable plan. The FCDA, with its constant flip-flopping on defense methods and operatic drills, hardly inspired confidence in a terrified public. Even the Gaither Report, with its emphasis on the need for deterrence over all, ended up undermining their proposed solution. The only way to win a nuclear war, every source said, was not to have one in the first place. Civilian defense in the end was something of a joke: they had done such a good job of convincing the public that nuclear war meant the end of civilization and the U.S. as anyone knew it. There could be no defense from the end of the world, and nuclear war was precisely that.

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