

THE CONTINUING CRISIS



• January is long gone, and February is now a dodo too, but something vast and inscrutable is at work. Over these two months the political ground has been shifting beneath our feet. The morbid preoccupations that have dominated our public discourse are losing their fascination. A growing sense of possibilities is in the air. Naturally the shanty intelligentsia of the left-wing faculties carry on wherever their roots run deep, but increasingly it is apparent to lively minds that these patheticos reside in a land where the events of the late 1960s endlessly replay themselves. For them it is always 1968; only the bags beneath their eyes continue to fill. Very few are aware that abroad in the land, even in the media, there is a growing sense that maybe Ronald Reagan and his friends are plausible, even benign.

• February was a bountiful month for the Zaccaro family. Mr. John Zaccaro and his lovely wife Geraldine Ferraro renewed their wedding vows, and despite Miss Ferraro's electoral rebuff in the fall elections, the family's oft-repeated desire to embark upon public service apparently cannot be thwarted. Mr. Zaccaro has been sentenced to 150 hours of it for his personal involvement in a real-estate con. Meanwhile on Capitol Hill where the House Ethics Committee recently found Congresswoman Ferraro guilty but innocent, moral colossuses such as Senator Howard Metzenbaum, the parking lot tycoon, found Attorney General-designate Edwin Meese innocent but guilty. They successfully blocked his confirmation until February 23, a Saturday when a lot of the senatorial fellows like to sleep in and wear water bottles on their fat pates.

• A letter carrier in Springfield, Oregon got into hot water for spraying dog repellent in the face of a menacing five-year-old boy. President Reagan decided to pass up a West German ceremony marking the Allied victory over Nazism. The Federal Election Commission demanded a refund from ex-Senator George McGovern's campaign upon discovering that this champion of the sponger had himself sponged a \$50,000 salary from his 1984 presidential campaign. And South

Korea suffered a double public relations disaster. First its soldiers mistook a dolphin for a North Korean spy and shot it. Then its security forces gave dissident South Korean Kim Dae Jung and a celebrity cast of American humanitarians the jolly-what-for as they deplaned at Seoul airport.

• Miss Sandy Pollack, a Communist Party USA stalwart who died in a plane crash over Cuba, was eulogized at Riverside Church in New York City, where the Rev. William Sloane Coffin relieved himself of such vapors as "Sandy did not believe in God, but God believed in Sandy." She was a life-long pest, a credulous dupe of such flummery as the class struggle, and one who doubtless would not have been pleased on February 20 when Chinese Communist party leader Mr. Hu Yaobang made bold to say in a published speech that his countrymen had "wasted twenty years" in "radical leftist nonsense." In London, admirers of the music of Edward Elgar were distraught when the *Times* printed a theretofore unknown picture of the deceased composer's lost love, Miss Helen Jesse Weaver. Miss Weaver looks like a female guard at a Nazi concentration camp, and if, as is rumored, the

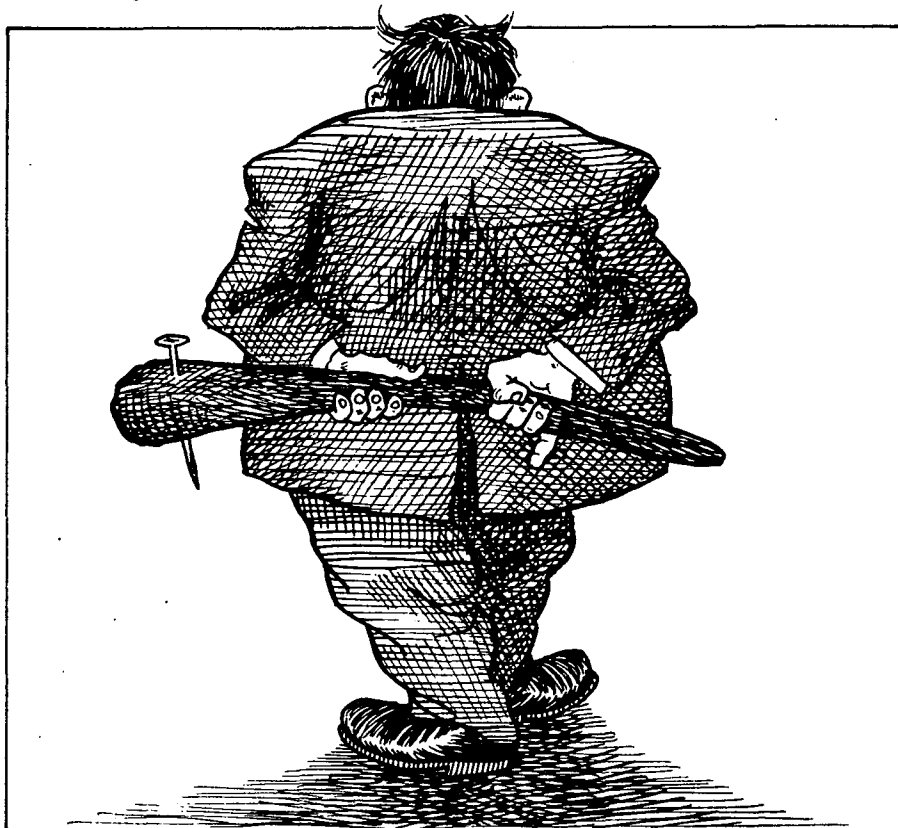
thirteenth variation of Mr. Elgar's *Enigma Variations* was inspired by her, it might quite properly be titled the *Emetic Variation*.

• General Vernon A. Walters will replace Mrs. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick as our chief delegate to the United Nations. The General received the bad news stoically. Moscow newspapers report that the crew of a Soviet commercial jet saw a "star-like UFO" and apparently fired not a shot. The conspicuity of the Sesame Street mentality has spread even to the criminal community. A thirteen-year-old would-be ganef was foiled in his attempt to rob a Buffalo, New York bank when a teller found the boy's holdup note unintelligible. The dunce had scribbled it on a smile button. Mere weeks after the Pope's visit to Peru, peasants in a remote province of the country burned a witch. Imagine what they would have done had they laid hands on a Unitarian minister! In Freehold, New Jersey, an investigation is underway to determine whether Police Chief Joseph McCarthy did indeed order a pliant funeral home director to open a grave so that he could retrieve his hat, and there is still more good news from the Soviet Union. To starving Ethiopia the

Soviets have decided to send experts in aerobic exercise whose powers to feed the starving cannot be any more futile than those of Dr. Marx.

• Dr. Norman L. Wilson, a psychiatrist who has scrutinized the record of the man arrested late in January for strolling uninvited through the White House, has recommended further psychiatric study. According to Dr. Wilson, the intruder, a Mr. Robert Latta of Colorado, "hears voices saying, 'You blew it,'" a message that surely echoes through the heads of others visiting the White House these days—for instance those Democratic congressmen that our suave President invites over. The authoritative *National Examiner* reports that Fort Worth, Texas is being terrorized by a giant earthworm that "swallows dogs, cats and other small animals." For gourmets the good news is that the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service has taken the snail darter off the endangered species list. Unfortunately we are going to have to stow our recipes for bumblebee bat, Micosukee gooseberry, and Beautiful shiner, all of which have been added to the list. Another candidate for the list is the American vagrant, which made a rare appearance in the public discourse this month when a *New York Times* reporter spied one while reporting the doleful news that Grand Central Terminal will no longer be open 24 hours a day for the homeless, so squalid and vicious has the place become. Vagrants have almost vanished from view, as have derelicts and bums since the morally upright focused their prodigious attention on "the homeless." Yet there in that sad *Times* story the word vagrant once again reappeared. Apparently a vagrant is a low-down type who creeps into the saintly midsts of huddled homeless, preys on pedestrians, and gives all the homeless a bad name. In Grand Central Terminal one actually fell on Mr. Patrick Brady, a commuter who "suffered head injuries and a partly severed finger." Vagrants also get very hungry.

• The American Conference of Catholic Bishops grows in distinction. On February 21 one of the conference's foremost foes of capitalism and nuclear



defense, Minnesota's archbishop John Roach, turned up nicely enameled in a Minnesota hoosegow after failing a blood-alcohol test. Oh, Archbishop Roach, what profligacy! Oh, degeneracy! "I acted imprudently and was guilty of some very serious bad judgment," the decidedly avoidupois prelate admitted to an assemblage at St. Thomas College in St. Paul. Oh, crapulence! Oh, immoderation! Archbishop Roach, who before being juggled had

been tipping at his summer home, headed the holy Conference when it confected its pish-posh on nuclear arms and began its outburst against the Yankee economy. Were ardent spirits influential in these essays into "serious bad judgment"? Our own Tom Bethell has reported in our January issue that after last year's confabulation on America's lewd capitalistic ways the black-clad dignitaries retired to Washington's Tiberio's to consume over

\$2,500 worth of plush victuals. Possibly it is time to replace *The American Spectator's* Find the Fattest Bishop contest with something like Pick the Most Plastered Prelate.

• The Democratic party named Mr. Paul Kirk, erstwhile aide to Senator Edward Kennedy, as chairman, and he duly promised to lead the party back into the American "mainstream." It will be a more arduous job than he anticipates. Just before his election the

Democratic National Committee's New Age marplots declared that henceforth in their bulls and sacred conventicles they will refer to the handicapped as the "differently-abled." And in Dallas, Texas, the Presbyterians are organizing a camorra that will change homosexuals into heterosexuals by "divine healing." If it works, a major New Age constituency may vanish before Mr. Kirk's very eyes.

—RET

CORRESPONDENCE

Defense Choices

Few are able to discuss our nation's military effectiveness with so serious an appreciation of the issue's importance as Eliot A. Cohen ("Strategies Money Can't Buy," *TAS*, February 1985). In pursuit of the same goal, I must however take issue with certain of his observations.

Mr. Cohen charges our armed forces with the failure to develop an "adequate, comparable arrangement" to the Soviets' deployment of medium-range bombers as part of their long-range naval aviation forces. Yet a "comparable arrangement" does exist, and it is more than adequate. The United States deploys thirteen carrier battle groups, which—together with the strike aircraft and the "Harpoon" and "Tomahawk" missiles—have the capacity to strike almost anywhere in the world, with minimum notice, and to remain constantly in range for extended periods of time. This efficient use of American technological power is only one example of the flexibility and strength of our defense system.

Seminal to Mr. Cohen's larger argument, however, is his characterization of the successful Grenada mission as marred by communications problems among units of different armed services. Such criticism is reminiscent of the armchair critiques that have followed all successful military operations throughout history. Even such an overwhelming victory as the Battle of Midway, which represented the turning point in the war in the Pacific, was criticized after the fact for disorganization and a lack of coordination in the attacks on the second day. This is not to belittle such critiques. They are essential to informing the conduct of future operations. But to the extent that they reflect or encourage the wishful thought that military operations should be problem-free, they can only promote a harmful oversimplification of the risks that military success requires.

A good example of such wishful thinking is Mr. Cohen's suggestion that

the ultimate solution to defense problems is the creation of a "tiny corps" of strategic experts, led by a "single, powerful chief of defense," from within the military. While not articulating just how such a system would accomplish his goals, Mr. Cohen argues that the single Chief of Defense and his elite staff would solve both operational problems—like those he finds in Grenada—and the search for a "real" national strategy.

Entirely absent from such a proposal is any acknowledgment of the role of civilian leaders, who are charged with making the final decisions on national strategy, defense resources, and operations. Also absent is attention to a fact Mr. Cohen has elsewhere done much to illuminate: the complexity and range of America's global defense responsibilities.

Thus, for example, any successful, national strategy must reflect a diverse defense that can defeat an enemy from whatever quarter it threatens. Such a strategy is not the hypothetical product of a disinterested military genius whose final say-so would allow us to escape the consequences of our defense policy. It is the very real product of the deliberative, joint system we currently possess. That system recognizes the difference between general theorizing, best done at a distance, and true strategizing, best based on hard facts and intimate knowledge of our capabilities and readiness—knowledge rooted in the services, and their immediate concern with force maintenance and operational skill. Ours is also a system that reflects the final authority of our civilian leadership, and works to enhance the ability of the President and Secretary of Defense to make decisions and choices. Such authority must never be confused with the micro-management engaged in by junior systems-analysts in McNamara's day, an experience pointed out by Mr. Cohen with a distaste that I share. But surely so expert a writer on defense issues as he is

also appreciates the importance of civilians making the decisions on which democracy rests. That capability is as much at the heart of our national defense as it is our national welfare.

It goes without saying that in this less than perfect world, our Joint Chiefs of Staff system would be unique if not flawed. Compare its shortcomings, however, with the manifold dangers of a system that empowers a single military chief to provide the only advice our leaders receive as well as conduct operations—a power never yet possessed by an American officer. Or, consider the establishment of a new, Washington-based general staff, whose prime virtue, as expressed by a 1958 report of the House Armed Services Committee, is "the swift suppression, at each level of consideration, of alternative courses of action, so that the man at the top has only to approve or disapprove—but not to weigh alternatives." Such a system has virtues for tactical decision-making on the battlefield—but those virtues are precisely the qualities that make it, in the words of the HASC report, "a fundamentally fallible, and thus dangerous, instrument for determination of national policy."

True, in such a system, disagreements among Services *could* be suppressed—but with the loss of conflicting opinion would go the expert, high-level critiques of proposed strategies and weapons systems that have resulted. Compromises among services, Mr. Cohen's greatest bugaboo, *could* be replaced by the final decision of one Chief, trained in one service—but along with these compromises would be discarded any serious consideration of, and attention to, alternative views regarding potential gaps in our defense policy as a whole. Again, any "duplication" of defense systems *might* be prevented—but with the absence of such diversity vanishes a strategically useful defense against the measures an enemy would certainly employ against simplistic, single-track systems.

Ranged against these losses are the "gains" we would make: an intrusive general staff, second-guessing our operational commanders; the reduction of all senior military officers (save the Chief of Defense) to whistle-blowing dissenters; a civilian leadership whose function is to yea or nay decisions made by their ostensible adviser. Efficient it may be—but to what end?

Mr. Cohen's proposal adds new layers of bureaucracy, isolates politically responsible civilian authorities from the range of advice and information they need, and replaces operational expertise and field authority with savvy in office politics and a remote, intrusive staff. This will not solve problems in America's defense. It will add to them. More fruitful are efforts to enhance the voice and authority of the operational commanders; return control of vital functions to the accountable military departments while cutting away at the unscaled mountains of defense bureaucracy; and increase competition in defense procurement. Such efforts are underway in this administration. Equally important are the efforts of defense scholars, like Mr. Cohen, to raise to the level of public debate the very issues of priorities and force he believes our nation has failed to address. In this nation, citizens, and not only soldiers, will make the final choices about defense.

—Seth Cropsey
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of the Navy (Policy)
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Eliot A. Cohen replies:

I'm grateful for Mr. Cropsey's cordiality in disagreeing with my article. This is no small matter, for the contemporary defense debate suffers from thoroughly unnecessary and counterproductive acrimony. Nonetheless, I find that he has in some measure caricatured my views, and in other places simply resorted to chimerical arguments against any defense reform.

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