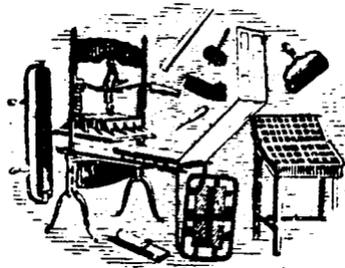


# THE PRESS

## Bob Alperin



Assume a Soviet ICBM strike against US missile silos would be as accurate (within 300 ft.) as the CIA says. Enough Minutemen would remain to devastate the USSR according to J. Edward Anderson. Now director of the University of Minnesota's Industrial Engineering Division, he invented and developed missile guidance systems capable of mid-course correction and related things. Differences in the earth's gravitational field render rehearsals in the USSR and USA inadequate for attaining the accuracy to eliminate the other power's retaliatory ability. Many North Pole tests and corrections are needed, but neither power has run such tests.

Anderson doubts all missiles would work, reminding us of the times that dignitaries gathered for test firings and saw failures. *The Observer* (London) reported his paper which seems so relevant to the local "vulnerability" debate.

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The AFL-CIO offered alternatives to the Reagan budget but the *Washington Post* eyed only an income tax proposal to finance defense spending and the body's more questioning approach to defense funds. *Boston Globe* readers learned of other revenue plans and of a call for federal investment in job training and to renew deteriorating sewers, highways, bridges, mass transit, and railroads. (The *New York Times* was more precise on the tax suggestions, less so on the spending side.)

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Since Citicorp never told stockholders or investors that its top managers had "honesty and integrity" it wasn't legally bound to disclose violations of such norms. Thus the Securities and Exchange Commission overruled its staff's proposed civil action against Citicorp. The *New York Times* reported this imaginative logic.

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Richard Cohen had an excellent column on the lack of public indignation about lying by public officials. Vice President Bush's claim that he never used the term "voodoo economics" campaigning against Reagan prompted NBC to show a film of Bush speaking of "voodoo economic policy." Wasn't it worth more than passing mention in the *Post*? The TV column had it.

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The *Post* has given very considerable space to charges of communist use of "yellow rain" (biological toxins)

in Asia. A panelist at the 1982 American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting said evidence was inconclusive and contradictory, and that all samples offered in evidence had been so low in concentration as to be well within naturally occurring levels of the chemical. A scientist with the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency agreed evidence on Soviet chemical weapon use was not hard but denied the charges were made to justify a US buildup of such weapons.

Readers of the *Miami Herald* learned of those views. The *Post* reported the panel but ignored those points. (Months earlier it had printed some scientists' doubts about the charges.)

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Polish commercial fishing continues off the US, Reagan's sanctions notwithstanding. It's legal because of a research connection with the Woods Hole Laboratory. The *Boston Globe* said two factory ships are expected to catch and process between nine and 12 million lbs. of mackerel, which may double last year's US commercial catch.

In reporting the regional effects of Coast Guard budget cuts, the *Globe* noted in passing deep cuts in two enforcement operations: 90% of its Pacific drug enforcement and 60% of its monitoring of the 200-mile fishing limit in the Atlantic were dropped.

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When the French Communist Party had its first Congress in three years, the *New York Times* provided incisive coverage. Although a part of the Socialist-led government the party insists that no wages or benefits be cut in return for a reduction of the work week from 40 to 39 hours. The *Post* ignored the meeting until its end. Then two column inches told of the re-election of its leader and endorsement of his "pro-Soviet stance on world issues." The same day "French Businessmen Find Socialists' Program Taxing" appeared. The 24" feature was the first of two articles.

(The *Post* gave 4" to a strong attack on the USSR by the Spanish Communist chief. It was datelined Paris.)

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When a federal judge banned shipments of nuclear wastes through densely populated areas if prohibited by local law, the *Post* gave the nationally-significant story scant attention. It had ignored New York's filing the suit, the temporary injunction, and its extension. (Reader Jay Levy points out that a lengthy Montgomery County council hearing on a bill regulating the transport of nuclear waste received no *Post* coverage.)

Early in February the AP revealed that one-third of the nation's nuclear plants were closed. It named them, briefly noting their problem. Ten others were shut for scheduled refueling and/or maintenance. Restarts for several were delayed by unanticipated problems. The *Atlantic City Press* ran the story, the *Washington Post* didn't.

The *New York Times* continued coverage of the Ginna accident. The director of New York State's Radiological Sciences Institute charged that federal and utility officials gave him wrong information on wind direction, causing the search for contamination to look in the wrong areas. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission shared his suspicions of some of the plant's meteorological equipment. A preliminary NRC staff study said the chain of events raised the possibility of other combinations of failures that could be more serious, scenarios probably not anticipated by current emergency procedures. The *Post* skipped both stories.

When the NRC cited Pacific Gas & Electric for "material false statements" relating to Diablo Canyon, the *Post* made it the last and shortest "Around the Nation" item. The false statement a la *Post*: Pacific told the NRC a consultant report was "an entirely independent piece of work." In the *New York Times* you read that the consultant gave a draft to the utility which suggested changes. The utility's reply that it "misunderstood" NRC instructions, headlined the "Around the Nation" item, receiving more space than the NRC charge. Five days later the NRC said Pacific built several earthquake safety features using data two years out of date. The *Times* ran the story the *Post* didn't.

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The flap over US trainers in El Salvador carrying M-16s had a generally-ignored aspect. Shortly after issuing a statement conceding the act was against rules, the Pentagon tried to recover it from newsmen (*Houston Post*). CBS explained: in between, Reagan had found the act "understandable."

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Federal Election Commission figures for the '80 election showed Republicans outspent Democrats 5-1 but you didn't read it in the *Post*, whose story concentrated entirely on the increased spending of political action committees. (The *Los Angeles Times* reported Republicans now have a mailing list of over a million established donors. The Democrats have 100,000—triple the 1980 figure!)

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The *Miami Herald* reported that a White House option paper during the Spring, 1981, Syrian missile crisis proposed the US declare war on Syria. The State Department seriously discussed sending US planes to destroy the missiles. Giving Israel the go-ahead sign was another option. Many, particularly foreign service professionals, were much concerned at the mere discussion of such options.

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Stowaways have no right to leave ship or have a deportation hearing. But the Immigration service, fearful of renewed street violence in Miami, makes an exception for Cubans (*Herald*).

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*Post* headline: "Caribbean Welcomes U.S. Aid Plan; Soviets, Cubans Assail It." Old maps show Cuba in the Caribbean, but never mind that. Besides Cuba, the article noted but six nations' reactions. Effusive praise came from the main cash beneficiaries: El Salvador, Jamaica, Costa Rica. Mexico was "reserved" and Panama was encouraged but warned military aid can't solve the region's problems. Nicaragua's ambassador to the US found the plan "a good step" and wanted his land included. At least initially that interesting response received little media attention or follow-up.

Going beyond rephrasing Reagan's remarks, the *Miami Herald* gave details on the plan's proposed implementation and possible effects. For example, the smaller eastern island nations need improved infrastructure (roads, ports, communications) to attract export-producing companies. The plan offers few funds. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* offered a wide round-up of response including Washington-based groups (the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and the church-financed Washington Office on Latin America) often critical of US policy.

Ignored by the *Post* were the proposal's impact on Puerto Rico with its 22% unemployment and facing much lost revenue if the New Federalism were imple-

### Weather Report

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mented. Three weeks before Reagan's speech, Gov. Carlos Romero Barcelo told the AP he feared some investors would flee and potential ones would go elsewhere. The lures: free trade and tax incentives added to an absence of US minimum wage and pollution laws. The *Herald* used the story, which also noted the importance of the rum excise tax rebate for the island's revenue. The *Herald* did a separate story on the proposals and Puerto Rico. The administration assured Puerto Rico's non-voting congressional delegate that the proposed tax incentives wouldn't be as favorable as those his island has. Puerto Rican rum would face competition from duty-free rum but the excise taxes would be rebated to Puerto Rico.

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*Post* coverage of Latin America is vastly improved over a year ago. Areas that are not current "hot" spots are covered, a feature increasingly true of *Post* foreign coverage. But serious deficiencies persist. The matter of arms for the Salvadoran rebels is reported almost solely in terms of Haig's charges, which as the media usually remind us, are unsubstantiated. A generally informative *Post* story on the guerrillas waited until paragraph 29 to note they denied receiving arms from Cuba and Nicaragua. It omitted their explanation of how arms were obtained; the *Atlantic City Press* didn't. Kidnap ransoms raised \$40 million. Government troops sell US-made M-16s on the local black market, a major weapons source, for about \$2400. Other weapons are captured. The *Dallas Morning News* reported a top guerrilla commander's claim that the international market is drying up and that his forces went into some battles short of ammunition, lacked guns for all who want them. The *Boston Globe* described guerrilla weapons as light: "automatic rifles, grenades, a few recoilless rifles, and lots of dynamite."

The *March Gazette* flayed the *Post's* reporting neither the Nicaraguan requests to the US for information as to how weapons were shipped through their country, nor their offer of joint border patrols with Honduras. This reporting void persists.

*Miami Herald* articles have addressed other widely-found news gaps. One explained the French strategy of military aid to Nicaragua to provide that country with an alternative to dependency on the Soviet bloc or the West. Another *Herald* piece discussed the Cuban role in Nicaragua. Besides 1500-2000 military advisers, there were a similar number of teachers, 1,000 health and hospital workers, and 500 agronomists, construction workers, and various technicians. (Western diplomats made the estimates.) Cuban relations with the local people were described as "spotty, but generally good." If the Cubans are doing things of benefit to many Nicaraguans, it would seem that US rhetoric and policy on Cuba would be counter-productive. Indeed, the *Post* reported that US anti-Sandinista talk is viewed by Nicaraguan moderates as unifying the country behind the target of the barbs.

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The *Post* did fine stories on conflict in South Africa's ruling National Party, a possible crackdown on black trade unions, and the death in jail of a white doctor working for a black union. But what the *Post* called "an unprecedented display of militancy and unity,"—a nationwide work stoppage called by black unions to protest the death, rated but three paragraphs on page 52.

The *March Gazette* told of a South African Commission that recommended a council to register journalists with power to remove them for unprofessional conduct. My report, like those I used, neglected the context: previously the government had introduced and withdrawn harsher press laws; they've used other laws to close black papers and ban black journalists; and SA Commission reports don't always become law.

Proposed laws, public criticism, and private suggestions are tactics to induce media self-censorship lest tough laws be passed. The *Observer* told of senior officials of the security forces meeting with editors and giving guidelines for covering national security matters—to protect morale and to not give the foe propaganda. An example of irresponsibility: reporting the opposition leader's parliamentary speech which noted "weakness and friction" in the government.

Aspects of the report that U.S. media ignored appeared in *SA Digest*, a government weekly. Prime Minister Botha promised parliamentary debate and consultation with the press. The government wouldn't decide unilaterally if media legislation is needed, or its contents. The commission said the government obstructed the media, named two cabinet members who had "unnecessary intolerance" towards the press, and said politicians' "insensitive utterances" on human relations matters were "often more damaging than reporting." It asked legal review for banning and detentions and more autonomy

for the SA Broadcasting Corporation. (Botha rejected any SABC restructuring.) The *Post* has yet to cover the report.

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The *Post* reviewed "Let Poland Be Poland" as a TV show. The *New York Times* reported some overseas responses to the US-government backed show. A pro-government Spanish paper wondered why Turkey's Prime Minister appeared: his country too is under martial law. Also unrelated here: the European actions against Turkey's human rights violations and its then-recent trade pact with the USSR.

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Reporting on Poland continues to be virtually monolithic in what is considered appropriate to report and in interpretation. Conservative demands for a tougher line are the main dissent. The *Times* (London), not the *Post*, reported the AFL-CIO's call for restrictions against US allies, whose trade with the Soviets "would mitigate the impact of our actions." Absent are views such as E.P. Thompson's in *The Times*, that Polish freedom can best prosper under conditions of detente, and that Solidarity should have made common cause with the West's peace movement rather than friendship with its cold warriors.

The *Times* presented a detailed report on the Vatican's Polish analysis. They favored an independent-from-Washington European analysis, considered Jaruzelski a possible Tito, and thought it "vital" that economic aid to Poland not be withheld. They considered that the general may have acted on his own initiative. Even if there were Soviet prompting, the repression was not comparable with an invasion's consequences.

Two pre-martial law Solidarity stories touch topics ignored by US media. The *Times* told in detail how women in leadership posts prior to the union's legalization were forced out. Anna Walentynowicz went from heroine and Gdansk council member to the kitchen. A London *Observer* article on the Polish right found an "intolerant...chauvinism" of the Confederation for Independent Poland (KPN) in several Solidarity headquarters. Anti-Jewish appeals were "a weapon freely used against KOR members."

The US media report such tactics when directed against Solidarity. A *Post* commentator complained Jaruzelski hadn't publicly denounced anti-Semitism. (He had privately let it be known it wasn't to be tolerated.) The media fail to place the matter within the context of Polish history or ask the Polish church to denounce anti-Jewish appeals. (In the immediate pre-World War II period, Poland passed much anti-Jewish legislation and was the scene of physical violence against the group. Celia Heller's *On the Edge of Destruction* provides details.)

In an historical footnote (not in the *Post*) over 1000 Poles in Austria sought to become South African immigrants and that country's officials sought to recruit those with technical skills. Polish seamen jumped ship to seek refuge in South Africa.

The diversity of attitudes, actions, and goals among Poles in and out of government is not reflected in most US media coverage. Such information is needed for wise policy and its public support. (See the February *Gazette* for previous analysis of Polish coverage.)

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## NOTES FROM THE REAL WORLD

IN CASE OF ATTACK, GO DIRECTLY TO YOUR HOT TUB: Marin County, California, has decided that planning for World War Three just isn't worth it. Instead of developing an evacuation plan for a nuclear war, as the federal government requested, the county is mailing each resident a grisly account of when and how 80 percent of them will die if a bomb lands across the bay on San Francisco. The report, prepared by the county health department, was described by its author as a "depressing and frightening document," but one that reflects the pitfalls in the government's civil defense plans. Included in the booklet will be the supervisors's conclusion that the only way to survive a nuclear war is to make sure it doesn't happen.

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MINORITY BUSINESSES SINKING: A report commissioned, but not released, by the Commerce Department says minority businesses could be extinct by the end of this decade. Minority owned businesses, the report says, now account for less than one percent of the nation's sales, and that figure is likely to drop with the current recession. The report was prepared by James H. Lowry and Associates.

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PENTAGON DEFENDS AGAINST ITS OWN TOYS: Defense contractors are busy these days developing new American weapons to combat old American weapons. The Pentagon is finding that its open-handed arms sales policy has, in some cases, backfired, as countries purchase advanced American arms and then turn against the United States. One reason the US didn't blockade Iran during the hostage crisis, for instance, was the presence of more than two hundred sophisticated anti-ship missiles purchased by the Shah. Iran, along with more than twenty other countries, also has advanced missiles effective against US planes. With the Reagan administration stepping up its arms sales abroad, one military electronics expert at the TRW Corporation says, "The problem can't do anything but get worse."

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IT WAS THE MEDIA'S FAULT: Retired Army general William Westmoreland says the only way the US can win wars in the future is to control the news media. The former US commander in Vietnam says the media—especially television—was to blame for creating an atmosphere of public discontent which crippled the military's ability to win. "Vietnam was the first war fought without censorship," he says, "and without censorship things can get terribly confused in the public mind."

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