

SIX ARMS CONTROL MYTHS

George Breslauer

Whatever may come of President Reagan's arms control proposals in the Geneva negotiations over the coming weeks, the short history of nuclear arms limitation talks has taught us one clear lesson: Headline-grabbing proposals, such as Reagan's (or Carter's initial SALT II initiative), have little to do with the ultimate success or failure of the arms control process.

What is far more significant to the long-term prospects for arms control is how the U.S. negotiators relate to a series of hard-line myths about Soviet intentions and capabilities which have helped propel the arms race forward in recent years. Until the grip of these myths on the American psyche is reduced, meaningful arms control is not likely to be reached. What are these myths, and in what sense are they wrong?

• *You cannot trust the Soviet Union to honor treaties.*

In fact, the experience with SALT I suggests the opposite. Soviet violations were minor and did not exceed U.S. violations. Moreover, those bilateral violations were smoothed over and worked out through negotiations.

• *The Soviets engaged in a huge military build-up during the 1970s, taking advantage of the SALT process to overtake us.*

Whatever the Soviets did, they violated no treaty or formal understanding with the United States. More importantly, they did not do all that much. They kept up their previous pace of incremental defense budgeting at a time when the United States was reducing its previous pace. This reduced the relative gap in strategic capability between the two superpowers, stimulating U.S. fears that its previous margin of superiority had disappeared. Indeed it had, but that is not the same as saying that the Soviets now enjoy strategic superiority. (They do not.) We seem to forget that many things undertaken by the Soviets during the 1970s, such as modernization of strategic forces, also were undertaken by the United States and NATO. We also forget that we far exceeded the Soviets in numbers of warheads deployed during the 1970s. The Soviets did build up their strategic forces during the 1970s, and they did reduce the gap, but not nearly to the extent implied by this hard-line myth.

• *The Soviets believe nuclear war can be fought and won; they do not subscribe to U.S. conceptions of deterrence based on Mutual Assured Destruction.*

This may be the most pernicious of the six myths. It is based upon selective quotation from Soviet military doctrine or from statements by Soviet military commanders seeking bigger budgets. In fact, Soviet military doctrine basically argues that the best defense is a good offense. Anyone daring to attack the homeland must be assured in advance of his own destruction. This is far from affirming the ability of the Soviet Union to survive a nuclear war with acceptable damage. Furthermore, when we examine the content of Soviet politicians' statements to each other, we find them continually reaffirming the notion that neither side would survive a nuclear war with acceptable levels of damage. Though the phraseology is different, Soviet conceptions of deterrence are not all that different from MAD.

• *The Soviets will only negotiate seriously from a position of potential inferiority; we need to devel-*

op bargaining chips that will induce them to sober up.

This claim has a surface plausibility to it, for we know that Soviet motivation for serious negotiating during SALT I was strongly influenced by their fear of U.S. MIRV, Trident submarine and ABM programs. But the conclusion is misplaced. MIRV and Trident were not headed off by SALT I, yet the Soviet nonetheless negotiated seriously. ABM was perceived to be in the mutual interest of both countries to restrain.

Then there is the problem of the fate of bargaining chips. Once developed, it is rare that they are bargained away. Are we really creating bargaining chips, or just creating another spiral in the arms race? Finally, the real issue is whether we will settle for parity, or are actually seeking to restore the old margin of strategic superiority. The six myths outlined here suggest a state of mind that seeks superiority and fears parity. If those are the terms we effectively place before the Soviets, it is not likely that they will be eager to negotiate.

• *If we do not build up our strategic forces, the Soviets will use their strategic superiority to face us down in Third World crises.*

This claim is mystifying and illogical, but must be taken seriously, for it is widely believed in Washington. First of all, note that it presumes a current condition of Soviet strategic superiority, which is not the case. Secondly, it is the kind of statement that is true only if we make it true. We create for the Soviets an image of will or nerve in given crises; we can do that with or without a margin of superiority in strategic forces, for each side can, in any case, wipe out the other several times over. There is nothing in Soviet literature on the use of force in international relations to suggest that they believe a margin of strategic superiority, one that is far short of first-strike capability, will allow them to face us down in the Third World. U.S. analysts sometimes point to the Cuban missile crisis, claiming that Khrushchev backed down because of U.S. strategic superiority at the time. There is not a shred of evidence to support this. Far more likely, Khrushchev backed down due to a fear of nuclear war—of mutual destruction—and due to U.S. conventional military superiority in the Caribbean.

• *We must build up our strategic forces because of the imminent "window of vulnerability," which will tempt the Soviets to launch a first strike.*

This myth simply is preposterous. Even if the Soviets had the ability to destroy U.S. land missiles before they got off the ground, nobody claims the Soviets have, or will have, the ability to simultaneously destroy our Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles and our Strategic Air Command bombers, either of which could destroy the Soviet Union as a functioning society. Moreover, the whole notion of vulnerability on this issue defies logic. Even if the Soviets had the ability to destroy our strategic capability on land, sea and in the air—an ability they never will have—how would they know they had it? This is not something that can be tested. The level of uncertainty about the capabilities and reliability of the technologies involved is so high, and the risks involved in miscalculation so high (i.e., suicide), that only the most demented madman would contemplate the effort to exploit a so-called "window of vulnerability." Soviet leaders are tough, expansionist and, at the moment, frightened; but they are not madmen. Indeed, the final irony associated with this myth is that, if they actually were demented, no measure of U.S. arms build-up would suffice to deter them, anyway.

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Apple Pie

Polar bears in northern Canada have found supermarket trashbins an excellent source of food, so much so that some stores have taken to playing loud recordings of threatening bear calls to drive off the animals.

American colleges may turn to demand-side economics to solve their financial problems. Under a program being considered by Indiana University, students enrolled in the most popular majors, such as engineering or biology, would pay more than those majoring in less popular fields such as English and the humanities. Indiana University vice president Kenneth Gros-Louis says it's just an idea, but could become a reality if the school can find a way to guarantee financial aid so students aren't frozen out of a major because of money. But Michael Berrier of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities says that no matter how hard the schools try to be fair, free market education will discriminate against poor students.

A Columbia, Connecticut, man has filed suit to force the government to reveal its plans for the official funeral of Richard Nixon. Ronald Ouellette says his action stems from a "long-time interest in Watergate," as well as a belief that taxpayers shouldn't pick up the tab when Nixon goes to his final reward. Ouellette says he only wants to find out what the government has in mind, but he won't rule out of a suit to prevent public money from being spent on Nixon's funeral.

A British jeweller rented a couple of South American tarantulas for ten bucks to patrol his recent jewelry exhibit. He's happy with their work, saved about 800 dollars a month for armed guards and said the tarantulas required only a daily supply of mealworms. He would hire the creature again: "Crooks hate things like dogs and spiders."

Teachers at the University of Missouri are trying to write a big 10-4 to a new student practice: cheating with CB radios. Assistant economics professor Donald Schilling says a colleague monitoring the airwaves overheard test answers being beamed into his classroom. He says he's "somewhat flattered" by the ruse, because it means he's been able to foil more primitive methods.

PLEASE
TELL US WHEN
YOU MOVE

We are told by the press with a consistency that not even William Buckley would attempt to emulate, that Ronald Reagan is a nice guy. It has always struck me that his behavior, not atypical of Republicans of the magnate ilk, is more akin to schizophrenia than it is to niceness. The problem, and danger, of people like Reagan is that not only do love and charity begin at home, they stay there. The result is a kind of eyeball morality. If you are face to face with a person, you behave according to one set of values; if that person, however, merely is part of an aggregate (welfare mothers, for example, or miners down your company's shafts) it is quite another matter. I have no doubt that the president would weep if he were in personal proximity to human suffering. He might write out a check to the sufferer and not even take it off his income tax. But if the sufferer is only a number hidden in a memo or a budget, business once again becomes business.

Some of the most disreputable deeds of American industry were carried out by entrepreneurs who were considered pillars of their church and community, not to mention the Grand Old Party. They insulated themselves from the pain of those they employed, fired, maimed or polluted, while seeming to those close to them paragons of conscience and virtue. Reagan is out of the same mold, with the same perverted inability to take responsibility for the secondary and tertiary results of his actions. It is at best immaturity and at worst a sickness. It is, in any case, not very nice.

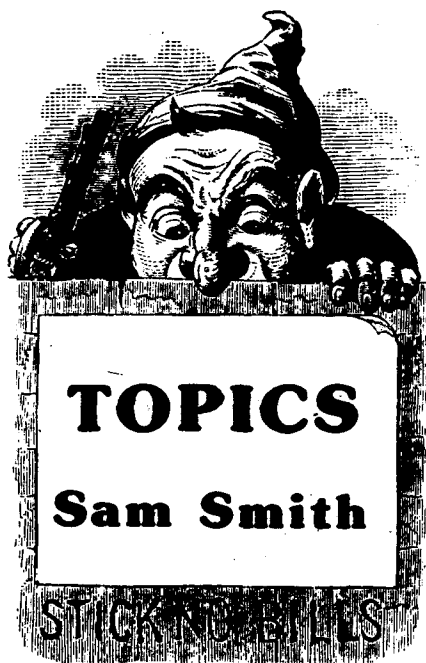
Now that twenty-five top Pentagon officials have taken lie detector tests to prove that they have not been telling tales out of school to the Washington press corps, I hope the Reagan administration will follow this bold initiative with weekly blood and urine tests of all cabinet and sub-cabinet officers to detect quaalude consumption, alcohol levels and possible steroid usage. One can't be too careful these days.

The ADA annual litmus test is not without its faults but it'll give you some sense of things to know that the liberal rating of the Senate as a whole dropped from 46 percent in 1980 to 40 percent in 1981. Of the 18 newcomers (including 16 Republicans), 14 got ratings of 25% or less. The good guys, according to ADA, were Ted Kennedy and Carl Levin with 100%; and Dale Bumpers, Gary Hart, Patrick Leahy, Claiborne Pell, Paul Sarbanes and Paul Tsongas with 95%.

Walter Lyons, a water resources official in Pennsylvania, has uncovered another extraordinary facet of Benjamin Franklin. It seems when Franklin wrote his will, he established a special trust fund to help young artisans. After 200 years, the money was to be used to provide "clean water" for the citizens of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Lyon says that Franklin showed astonishing foresight -- realizing that federal funds for urban wastewater treatment facilities would end in 1990.

In answer to your question, no I haven't seen Absence of Malice yet. I intend to, if only to be better prepared for my daily encounters with others. In the meantime, the talk I have heard suggests a principle which I would recommend to my colleagues in the trade, to wit: the parameters of good sense are not defined by the First Amendment.

While I continue to oppose a return to the draft, I must admit that the behavior of Alexander Haig does present a fairly strong case against a volunteer army. For example, in Brussels last month, a British journalist asked Haig whether there was a double standard in American foreign policy given that the US was attacking the Polish government for martial law while not criticizing military rule in Turkey and other pro-western nations. The question brought a reaction to Haig's face that would have taken George C. Scott sixty-seven run-throughs to get right. Haig's eyes turned to ice, his cheekbones crackled, the skin tightened, and he responded, "Isn't it time that our western critics stop their double standard and isn't it time to give greater



weight to the precious freedoms and values with all their failings and stop this masochistic tearing down of our values? The question itself reflects a double standard that boggles my mind." Not since that memorable day when the secretary thought he was acting president of the US have I seen him quite so worked up, although even in his more tranquilized moments I can't help but get the impression that my television screen is an inadequate cage and that at any moment the General will leap screaming out at me, knocking over the blender, frightening the children, and startling the cat into a mad dash for safety in the basement.

The British journalist's question was, of course, a sound one, and one that requires an answer. The public hysterics over Poland have not been eased by the press reaction. At times like these, it would be nice if at least one of our major journals considered the possibility that the Polish military may have actually prevented the Soviet invasion of Poland. It's not a pleasant thought because it suggests how cruel and capricious is the world in which we live, but it is probable that a number of Latin American democrats would view the actions of the Polish regime so far as remarkably restrained in comparison to the behavior of military governments in their own country. At this point, according to Rule 17.5 of the journalist's code, I am meant to state that I do not condone the Polish military's takeover. But that is precisely not the point. The point is that we spend far too much time condoning and not condoning and not enough time away from the rhetoric trying to find out what really is going on and how, if we don't like it, we can prevent it from getting worse. This is quite another thing, as any professional diplomat will tell you, than comforting ourselves with paroxysms of righteous indignation.

Charlie Hart of Gadsden, Alabama, is a man of many virtues, one of which is that he reads books I should have read and sends me quotes from them. A case in point is Harvey Fergusson's 1923 novel about Washington life called Capitol Hill. A few excerpts:

• "I've seen times when I was so drunk I liked Washington and believed in my immortal soul."

• "His expression was one of humorous, defiant irritation -- the look of a man who just holds bitterness at bay, who has seen despair and decided to laugh at it."

• "The good newspaperman is one who thinks no thought of his own, but takes up another's idea as blotting paper take up ink."

Sometime back, I ran a full page of excerpts from the Freeport (Maine) News police blotter. I had hoped to make this an occasional feature, but the Freeport News came upon hard times and in the midst of its struggle there apparently wasn't room for a police log. Now, buoyed by an enterprising volunteer staff, the paper is fatter and the beloved feature has returned. A few recent crime notes:

• December 22 -- A suspicious vehicle

was reported on Route 125; the driver heard the call on his scanner and informed police he was only looking for his lost Pekinese.

• Dec. 23 -- Police picked up a stray cat that kept returning to a South Freeport residence; however the determined feline escaped custody. Police responded to a call at a local pub and removed a man who was pinching female customers on the rear; the unruly fellow was advised not to return. Police broke up a fight between three people at a party, restored peace and sent the revelers on their way.

Dec. 27 -- Two ducks were hit and killed by a car on Route 1 near Pleasant Street; the carcasses were given to a resident to fix for lunch.

Going back to Rule 17.5 again, I can't condone violence as a means of achieving one's end either, but do feel some notice should be accorded to the 61-year-old man who walked into the headquarters of the Federal Reserve system with two guns and a package he claimed contained dynamite, as well as a determination to improve the nation's economy. According to the Washington Post, "Detectives said the man told them he wanted to take board members hostage to focus media attention on the board's responsibility for high interest rates and the nation's economic difficulties." While his method was unjustifiably extreme, he at least showed, for a terrorist, a rare understanding of how the American economy really works.

Those concerned about the trend towards preventive detention might wish to note that, according to US News & World Report, twenty of the first 22 persons denied release under the Nebraska no-bail amendment were subsequently acquitted. As Bruce Beaudin of the DC pretrial-release agency says, "Judges can't predict dangerousness with any degree of certainty. To eliminate all crime on bail, we'd have to jail thousands of people who won't commit a crime in order to those who will."

The following comes on aging carbon copy paper without attribution. The author should clearly be credited, but the only thing I can tell you is that, despite what it sounds like, it is not a report by David Stockman on orchestra cost-cutting:

"For considerably periods the four oboe players had nothing to do; the numbers should be reduced and the work spread more evenly over the whole of the concert, thus eliminating peaks of activity. All the twelve first violins were playing identical notes; this seems unnecessary duplication. The staff of this section should be drastically cut -- if a large volume of sound is required, it could be obtained by means of electronic amplifier apparatus. Much effort was absorbed in the playing of demi-semi-quavers; this seems an excessive refinement. It is recommended that all notes should be rounded up to the nearest semi-quaver. If this were done it would be possible to use trainees and lower-grade operatives more extensively. There seems to be too much repetition of some musical passages. Scores should be drastically pruned. No useful purpose is served by repeating on the horns a passage which has already been handled by the strings. It is estimated that if all the redundant passages were eliminated the whole concert time of two hours could be reduced to twenty minutes, and there would be no need for an interval."

"The conductor agrees generally with these recommendations, but expresses the opinion that there might be some fall-off in box-office receipts. In such an unlikely event it would then be possible to close sections of the auditorium entirely, with a consequential saving of overhead expenses -- lighting, attendants, etc."

I can't let the Roosevelt Centennial go by without noting the proposal of Bryce Nelson of the LA Times that FDR be memorialized by the replanting of the shelterbelt trees -- those 222 million trees that were placed in the ground between the Dakotas and the Texas panhandle in the thirties and early forties to protect prairie farmland. Over the years, many of the shelterbelt trees have been either taken for granted or neglected