

# Control dilemma:

## Reagan's

White House junta rejecting diplomacy in favor of secret adventures that gave arms control diplomacy its final impetus. William Casey, John Poindexter, Oliver North, Robert MacFarlane—that whole team of “American heroes”—succeeded, through deceit, law breaking and colossal bad judgment, where the opposition had failed. They focused public attention on Reagan’s utter failure to achieve tangible foreign policy results in six years.

The search began for at least one foreign policy success to rinse away the bitter taste of scandal and failure. With the assistance of Nancy Reagan, the White House was infused with new moderation.

The path was obvious and time-honored. Like Nixon before him, Reagan threw conservative ideology to the winds and fell back on the immense popularity he could win from the public desire for disarmament, knowing that an arms reduction treaty negotiated by a conservative, anti-communist president is protected from the kind of attack Reagan himself had launched against SALT II. Like Nixon, Reagan knew he could count on his conservative credentials to neutralize arms control opponents.

Gorbachov, too, recognized the moment. Within 48 hours of the release of the critical Tower Commission Report, he announced his final concession. De-linking INF from Star Wars, Gorbachov offered to accept the zero option unconditionally.

Those who recognized that the zero option had been a public relations ploy and not a proposal recoiled. Former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft backedpedaled: “It is true that the U.S. first proposed the zero option in 1981. But having made that error, basically on the grounds that the Soviets would never accept it, is no justification for persisting in it when its realization seems possible.” He urged Reagan to drop his own proposal. But this would have compounded the appearance of disarray in Reagan’s already shaky administration.

**Reason to cheer?** Reagan chose arms control and an INF treaty was negotiated. The most vigorous presidential opponent of arms control in postwar U.S. history is signing an arms control treaty. Are there grounds for celebration?

Many arms control supporters are cynical about the treaty, saying not only that it makes little difference in the overall picture, but also that just 3 percent of the total nuclear warheads will be destroyed. This view is too narrow, however. It ignores both the structure of the nuclear arsenals and the force of such a treaty at this moment in history.

Consider the following implications of the treaty:

• **It is the first turnaround in the arms race.** Prior treaties only put limits on the arms race. Although those limitations have had a

positive effect, this treaty will mean the public dismantling of almost 1,000 missiles and almost 2,000 warheads—the first large-scale destruction of nuclear weapons. It will be seen around the world on television and is a concrete example of the meaning of arms control.

• **It will eliminate Pershing II missiles.**

They are widely regarded as the most dangerous of all. Launched from Germany by buttons in Washington, they would strike the Soviet heartland in less than 10 minutes. Called “decapitation” weapons, they are designed to blow up underground Soviet command headquarters. They would be the spearhead of any first strike, and their removal means a real “stand-down” in the arms race.

• **It has created arms-control momentum.**

The greatest cause for hope in this treaty lies in the tremendous momentum it will give the arms control process. Some worry that the INF treaty will defuse the disarmament movement, as the partial test ban treaty did in 1963. But this is not what treaty opponents fear. Lawrence Eagleburger, former undersecretary of state for political affairs, recently grouched that the real danger in the treaty is that a precedent is set that every president, no matter how conservative, must negotiate arms control treaties. Journalist George Will laments that “arms control agreements whet thirsts they are supposed to slake. The INF agreement will energize the forces pushing for denuclearization of Europe.” He regrets that “Reagan’s recent rhetoric has contributed to the stigmatization of nuclear weapons.” Eagleburger and Will are right. The treaty will strengthen peace forces, not weaken them.

If the INF treaty is adopted, what lies ahead? The crucial next treaty would mandate a 50 percent reduction in strategic weapons but it is deadlocked on the Star Wars issue. To grasp the significance of the deadlock one must be clear about the pivotal role of the ABM treaty signed in 1972.

As president, Nixon contemplated carrying out a proposal he had earlier made as vice president: to use nuclear weapons against Vietnam. But he didn’t, recognizing that the U.S. was itself vulnerable to retaliation. His change of thinking is enshrined in seven major arms control treaties he signed, including the cornerstone of them all—the ABM treaty. There each side pledged not to seek a defense against nuclear missiles. With no defense against retaliation, the weapons cannot be used aggressive-

ly. The aggressor is open to a nuclear response. Foregoing defense, in the topsy-turvy world of nuclear strategy, means foregoing offense. Thus the ABM treaty represented a mutual guarantee against first use.

This greatly alarmed the right wing, which initiated a counterattack. The agenda? To stop the “mad momentum of arms control,” said former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Richard Perle, justifying his sobriquet “The Prince of Darkness.” Beginning in 1976 with the “Team-B” report and the formation of the Committee on the Present Danger, picking up steam with Carter’s inability to get SALT II ratified by the Senate, and culminating in the Reagan presidency, this movement came terrifyingly close to its goals. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was its alternative to arms control. The space shield was depicted by Reagan as providing more security than shaky treaties signed by untrustworthy Russians. SALT II’s numerical limits were violated by the Reagan administration and the groundwork laid for abrogating ABM as well.

**The Soviet option:** Now ABM and SDI hang on opposite sides of the balance. If the U.S. builds a space shield, the Soviets might try to construct their own shield. But the U.S. lead in technology would make this difficult and perhaps impossible. Moreover, that effort could prove trying to a Soviet economy that demands greater domestic spending. The cheaper and more certain response is for the Soviets to build more missiles. If a U.S. space shield could stop 75 percent of the Soviet missiles, the Soviets could simply quadruple their missiles to maintain the same absolute deterrent capacity. The last thing the Soviets would do if we build Star Wars is agree to reduce the number of ICBMs they can muster.

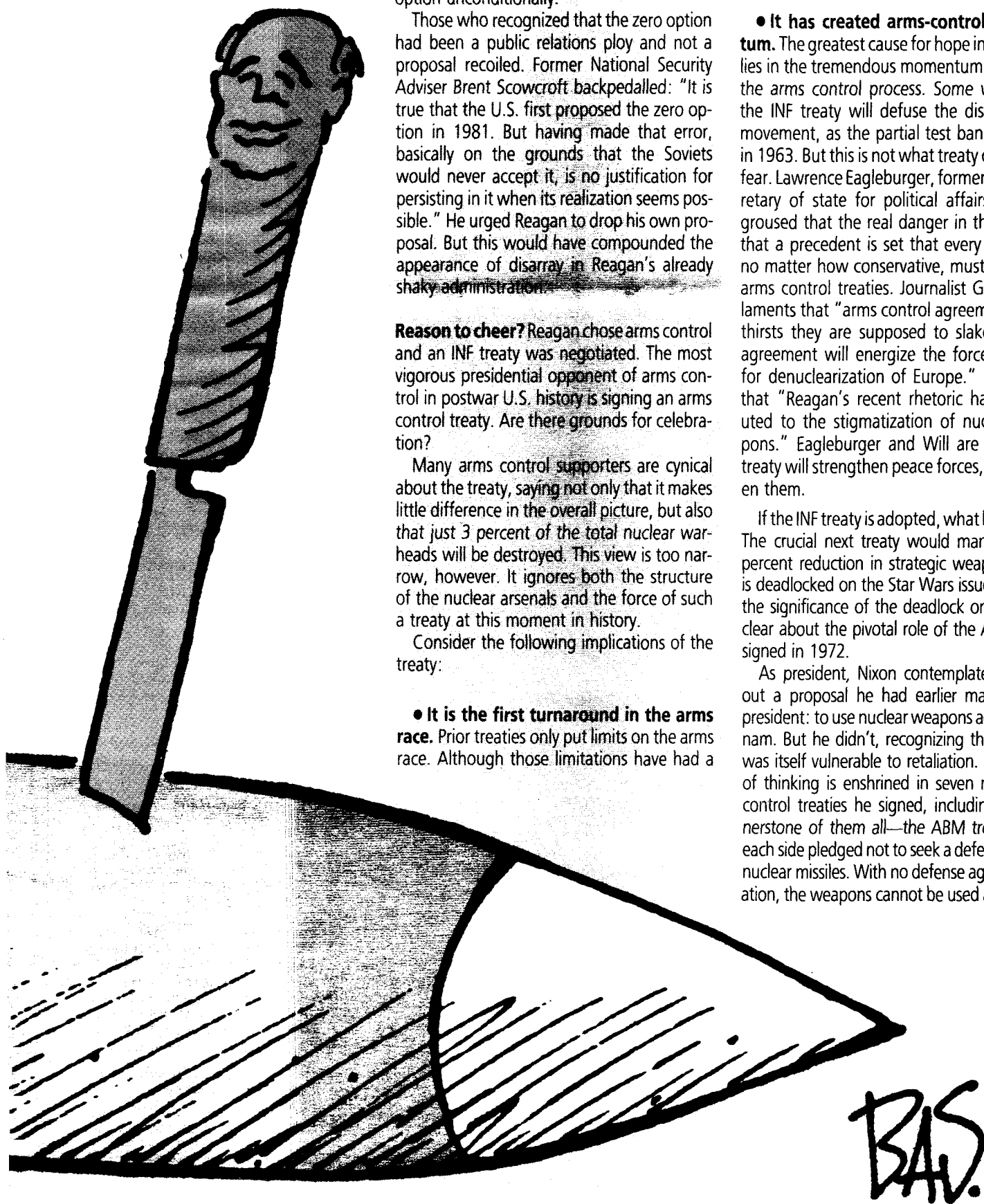
Thus chances seem remote for a treaty on strategic weapons during Reagan’s term. Reagan has never wavered on Star Wars and powerful interest groups continue to defend it. Yet chances for an INF treaty seemed equally remote during most of the past seven years.

Star Wars is already in trouble. In April the American Physical Society authoritatively declared its skepticism regarding the plan, and congressional support is flagging. And Reagan will retire without the early deployment.

With the president’s policies in the Persian Gulf and Central America in a state of confusion, the brightest point of his foreign policy, ironically, is in the improving U.S.-Soviet relations. In signing INF, Reagan has chosen arms control and his own popularity over the anti-Soviet, anti-arms control rhetoric that was the *raison d’etat* of his early administration. The INF treaty will polish up Reagan’s tarnished image; his place in history would be guaranteed by a follow-up treaty cutting strategic weapons by 50 percent.

But each arms control victory for Reagan is a defeat for Reaganism. It’s Reagan’s choice. □

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## The Washington legacy: participatory democracy

Harold Washington changed the face of Chicago. His death two weeks ago left the city in a state of uncertainty—both about what he had accomplished and about what would happen next. But the events that followed immediately left little doubt that Chicago would never be the same as it had been before he became mayor.

Washington had a long struggle to win control of Chicago's government. In his first three years, a hostile majority in the city council frustrated him at almost every turn. It took two court-ordered special aldermanic elections to give Washington a council majority in 1986. His re-election in 1987 confirmed his control, but he had barely a year in which to implement his program for the city. In that time, especially considering the terrible budget constraints imposed by drastic cuts in federal aid to cities during the Reagan years, Washington accomplished a lot (see pages 6-7). Yet his legacy is much less in the reforms he managed to put into effect than in the changes he helped make in the political life of what was once one of the most corrupt and boss-ridden of American cities.

Washington's genius lay in his ability to be both a principled and practical politician. He knew what it was possible for him to do and what compromises had to be made with the powers that be. He came into office as an outstanding individual—a skilled and progressive legislator who was drafted by his community to run for mayor—but not as the leader of a left movement. The coalition he led was diverse in its politics, though overwhelmingly black in its ethnicity. Political reality made it necessary to accommodate Chicago's corporate establishment, with which he worked out a *modus vivendi*. It also forced him to accept the corrupt black aldermen already in office, who he kept in line with threats of running his own candidates in their wards. In short, he lived in the real world of politics and played the game masterfully.

But he also had a dream. He believed deeply in democracy, which

to him meant open government and popular participation. And he had a strong commitment to working people, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. In the immediate aftermath of his death popular participation was his most obvious legacy.

Without Washington, the black coalition fell apart even before he was officially pronounced dead, as the most avaricious of the old-line black aldermen joined with the most rapacious of the whites on the city council to give the mayoralty—for the time being—to Ald. Eugene Sawyer. But a funny thing happened on the way to the sell-out. Chicago's black community paid the greatest possible tribute to Harold Washington—in an unprecedented series of demonstrations, it showed that it had become a self-consciously political force.

In a 12-hour-long demonstration at city hall on the night the council chose Sawyer, thousands of people—media estimates varied from 4,000 to upwards of 10,000—showed self-confidence, good humor and a determination to protect what had been won under Washington. And even though this crowd was 75-80 percent black, it showed few signs of racial hostility—even to the white aldermen who were conspiring to defeat its will. In the end, of course, the protesters lost the immediate battle—just barely. But they made it clear that the old days of what Ald. Dorothy Tillman called "plantation politics" were over, and that what had begun as an almost purely racial campaign had now become a battle along political lines that have begun to transcend race.

Five years ago, when Washington was first elected mayor, he had the support of a small number of whites and about half of Chicago's Hispanic voters, but his coalition on the council was essentially black. In the aftermath of his death there is a new council division, which can be seen as reform vs. corruption or as left vs. right. The left is still predominantly black, but for the first time it now has solid Hispanic support—and it appears to have a surprising degree of white participation.

Chicago always was an unusual political city. If it weren't, a man like Harold Washington could not have been elected mayor. And now it appears to be a city in transition, one with a unique degree of citizen activity and an opportunity for a genuinely left popular politics. This is what Washington lived for.