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April 15, 1983

Humanizing the Soviets

By David McReynolds (Reprinted by permission)

To "humanize" the Soviets does not mean I shall write only nice things about them. On the contrary, I shall write critical things about them—and ourselves. It is very natural for human beings to make their opponents into "total enemies"—it makes it much easier to kill them. It is hard to kill friends, easy to kill strangers. hard to believe that friends would betray us, easy to believe a stranger will do so.

We are as guilty of this "totalization" of feeling as anyone else. If Reagan thinks the KGB sends the orders to us—and it seems he really does believe this—then he belongs to the same collection of fools that includes the KGB itself, which thinks that the CIA is organizing the peace movement in the Soviet Bloc. But watch!—already, in writing about the need to humanize the enemy, I am terming Reagan a fool, and like most of us I am on the road to turning a man I disagree with into a "thing." You see how easy for us to act as if Reagan and all his co-workers were indifferent to human rights, lacking in decency? And isn't it easier for us to believe that the guerrillas in El Salvador are all brave and act from the highest motives, and to believe that *everyone* in the government is brutal?

Pacifists know better—we just keep forgetting, and that makes us, also, human. The problem of humanity is that all people are a mix of good and bad. I won't get into a theological argument over whether there might not exist people who are "totally evil" or "totally good"—perhaps there are, but they are rare, and I doubt they exist. During World War II A.J. Muste rose in a Quaker meeting and said, "If I can't love Hitler I can't love anyone." Was he a fool? No, he was trying to bear the terrible burden of love. Muste was a man who had been through the revolutionary Marxist movement, one of our most important American radicals during the depression. He was not naive. He had no illusions about Hitler. He was not "soft on Nazism."

What he was saying was the hard reality: if it is love which we believe in, it has no convenient limits. There is *no one* we can hate. *Things*, yes. Systems, institutions, yes. But not people. Racism, sexism, capitalism, prisons, poverty—all can be hated. But not people. Not Reagan. Not Andropov. Not even Hitler.

Pacifists not only oppose a great deal in our own society, but there is much in the Soviet system we also oppose. Certainly we oppose the concept of Leninism, of the central authority of a single political Party over the lives of a whole nation. In some ways WRL folks are "dissenters without a home," for there is no nation which meets our standards. (Nor, I think, will there ever be—it is our sense of the utopian vision which draws us forward—and makes us not quite easy with *any* society today.)

Therefore when I write about "humanizing the Soviets" I do not mean to suggest we have no disagreements with them. But I do suggest those disagreements must have a human dimension. I think back to the small personal exchange that took place when I landed in Moscow on the way back from Hanoi in 1971. At that time I smoked, and Russian cigarettes were terrible. However Vietnamese cigarettes were much worse and when I got off the plane in Moscow and found the Soviet tour-guide assigned to me I forgot all my political disagreements with the Soviet system and said, "Could I have a Russian cigarette?" "Here," he said, "take my pack." And then I said, "Would you like these Vietnamese cigarettes?" And he laughed and I could see he had tried them before. He thanked me and said no thanks. For a moment our "addiction" had lifted us over political boundaries.

Some years earlier the Soviets had sent across one of their groups of peace workers, and they were primarily interested, as usual, in talking with the more "established" peace groups—not with little radical groups such as ours. But Igal Roodenko and I were determined the Russians would see a part of Manhattan they would not otherwise see, and we met them at their hotel and took them on a guide of the East Village by night, the slums and bars. They were very cautious, and drank very little. But again, there was that tentative human exchange. One of the group—Olga Tuganova—walked with me just a little ahead of the other three Russians, who lagged behind with Igal. I jokingly said to Olga, "Perhaps the others are afraid you'll defect if we get too far ahead," and she laughed. Later we exchanged letters about our differing views of art—abstract and socialist realist (and when I got my CIA file I found it contained those private letters about art!).

The job of pacifists is not to pretend disagreements do not exist, but to reach out to the human beings behind those disagreements. There are political prisoners in the Soviet Union (and in China, and South Africa, and South Korea, etc., etc.). We are false in our love of humanity if we are silent on the issue of Sakharov. But we betray the values of humanity for which Sakharov himself has risked so much if we see *all* of the Soviet system as evil. It is made up of men and women seeking, for the most part, to do the best they can, not only for themselves but for their people.

An American religious leader has said that if the worship of God dies out in the Soviet Union the reason will not be the the power of the Communist Party, but rather the willingness of the American government to drop nuclear weapons, killing tens of millions of devout Soviet Christians.

I am irritated at those sectors of the American peace movement which are afraid to speak of disagreements we have with the Soviets for fear it will stir up anti-Soviet feeling. Our job is to speak the truth and keep the disagreements in perspective. Which means humility. Soviet action in Afghanistan needs to be opposed—but we need also to keep in mind the vastly bloodier American actions in Vietnam. None of us was willing to drop a bomb on the White House during that long criminal adventure. How can we be party to plans to drop nuclear weapons all over the Soviet Union?

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Journal of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS)
Volume 36, No. 2 February 1983 (Reprinted by permission)

A MARTIAN VIEW OF A HUMAN QUARREL

If a Martian sociologist came to Earth and reviewed the U.S.-Soviet arms race, now one-third of a century old, what would he find most surprising? It might well be the startling fact that a majority of the ruling political bodies of the two sides have never visited the country of the other.

He would see no physical or legal barrier to their doing so. Substantial number of lesser folk would, in fact, be seen traveling back and forth from the Western side, sportsmen, scientists, tourists, etc., and a not inconsiderable number of Soviet citizens of lower rank.

On the Soviet side, he would see the most intense curiosity about the West in general, and the U.S. in particular. On the U.S. side, he would see Senators giving speech after speech about Soviet intentions and the Soviet threat. After the speeches, they would proceed to vote the most enormous expenditures for "defense." And the Soviet leadership would be overheard doing the same. Why, he would wonder, have only about 40% of the U.S. Senate and only about 30% of the Soviet Politburo taken the trouble to see firsthand the source of their anxiety?

He might begin to study the psychological, bureaucratic and political obstacles to these visits—and their benefits with regard to ending the arms race and moderating the quarrel. In the end, incredible though it may seem, he might find in this quiet, little-noticed statistic a key to the dilemma. He might begin to understand why President Ronald Reagan did not go to Leonid Brezhnev's funeral, despite the urgings of his Secretary of State. And why Yuri Andropov—who is intensely interested in the West and speaks English—has never been here. Whatever else he learned, he would begin to realize that the U.S.-Soviet quarrel is a very human quarrel; Martians would not have gotten themselves into this fix.

An episode in 1969 reveals the depth of the problem. A new United States Senator of liberal inclination happens to pass through the Soviet Union on a world tour. Seized with the absurdity of his colleagues not having the first-hand impressions of Russia he has just gained, he promptly introduces a relevant bill in the U.S. Senate. It proposes sending, on short trips of their choice, not only those Senators who had never been to Russia, but also Congressmen, Governors and the Mayors of leading cities. For the price of one-fifth of a missile, he observed, the political ruling elites could replace their stereotypes with some vivid and up-to-date impressions.

Hearings are held. Such men of experience and learning in Russian affairs as former Ambassadors Harriman and Kennan testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (Harriman calls the effect on American officials "useful" and the effect of having Soviet officials come here in return "extremely desirable.") Information is provided to assure the Committee that such visits are entirely healthy. Indeed, information is presented to show that the normal reaction of Americans to Russia has been, perhaps, to "trust them less but fear them less too"—a conclusion guaranteed, if anything would, to produce universal political support.

More than 75% of the public officials involved respond favorably in a poll and only 5% are opposed. Izvestia carries an article reporting favorably on the bill. The Committee approves the bill. Predictably, the right wing in American politics begins attacking it as "junketing." (Since Moscow has no night clubs worthy of the name, and is not renowned for either its cuisine or climate, it was quite unclear why any junket-minded Congressmen would seek it out.) On the floor of the Senate, a U.S. Senator who had taken on the assignment of defending the (Nixon) Administration's positions attacks the bill unexpectedly and harshly. The new Senator is startled. But a respected Democratic majority leader speeds to the Senate floor and, when the dust settles, the bill has passed by a vote of 38-32. So far so good.

In the House of Representatives, however, something goes wrong. Invisible pressures are applied to prevent a hearing on the bill; the Department of State, in delphic terms, announces that, if Congressmen really want to go, State would be happy to oblige but the bill is unnecessary. State would take matters in hand if only this bill were killed. In the end the bill is killed and, predictably, in the end, nothing is done by the State Department. (Bilateral cultural exchange agreements with the Soviet Union normally include the provision that each side will facilitate visits by legislators and public officials of the other but this doesn't, of course, catalyze them.)

Four years pass and, in 1974, the then-President Nixon has himself traveled not only to Moscow but to Peking. A catalyst for the original bill thereupon wrote the President's National Security Advisor asking, in effect, now that the President has visited our Communist adversaries, why not "let my people go?" A week later, traveling to work, he hears on his car radio an interview in which Henry A. Kissinger is intoning: "We are all in favor of having scientists, sportsmen, tourists, artists and other non-political persons travel to the Soviet Union." In short, the political persons were still to be given no encouragement.

What can our Martian sociologist learn from this? His investigation would reveal bureaucratic political and human reasons. On the Western side,

- Presidents and National Security Advisers did not want the Congressmen to complicate, somehow, their management of foreign affairs by getting any more involved in it, or knowledgeable about it, than necessary; as far as they were concerned, it just meant more opinions, more coordination, more unexpected conclusions.
- Senators and Congressmen were, indeed, afraid of the charges of junketing. It turns out that the most popular report that was then being put out by Congressional

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Quarterly to subscribing newspapers, each year, was its report on Congressional travel. Local newspapers were taking this report, looking for the name of their Congressmen and highlighting, for local interest, where he had gone and at what expense. Pandering to local cynicism about their Congressmen's desire to travel, these reports could turn off enough voters to influence elections. This was one reason why 28 Senators voted against an otherwise seemingly innocuous bill. It was a potential time bomb in a future election with some demagoguing opponent asking them to explain "why?"

• In general, a very human approach to enemies was to break off or restrict communication with them for a variety of reasons. As his human psychiatrist counterpart, Jerome Frank, wrote in *Sanity and Survival in the Nuclear Age:*

> "Since an enemy is untrustworthy, if we let him communicate with us, he may trick us, learn things about us that we do not want him to know, or reveal some good features that might undermine our will to resist him. Any increase in communication is therefore resisted by both parties. For example, in 1959, the Senate Internal Security Committee vigorously objected to Soviet-American cultural exchanges: 'Soviet hoaxers are playing us...for suckers'; 'This is a poisonous propaganda offensive which, if successful, could well be a prelude to sudden military attack.' At virtually the same time the Chairman of the USSR State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries accused the United States and other Western countries of regarding the exchange program as a 'Trojan Horse' whose stomach could be filled with anti-Soviet material."

What, the Martian might wonder, would have been the effects if the visits had taken place? Here the evidence is clear and consistent. And, in retrospect, at least to a sociologist, the consistency is not surprising. The two societies are sufficiently different that the only slightly varying political and social perspectives of foreign observers from a specific country are irrelevant to their conclusions. He would find first that:

• Americans of liberal and left inclinations are typically turned off, disillusioned, or discouraged to see the intellectual suffocation of Russian life. Western observers feel themselves "in a profoundly different and strange civilization," as one U.S. Ambassador put it.

• At the same time, observers from those political circles most concerned about Russian strength have seen, immediately, both the internal weaknesses and the fear of war which so dramatically characterize that civilization. No one returns from Russia thinking the Russians are "ten feet tall."

For example, in 1839, DeCustine's reaction was simple. He said he went to Russia "to find arguments against representative government and came back a partisan of constitutions." His deep understanding of the differences between Western and Russian civilization was summed up in his statement: "I do not blame the Russians for being what they are, I blame them for pretending to be what we are."

In 1937, the French sympathizer with the Soviet revolution, Andre Gide, returned to observe that "Three years ago I declared my admiration, my love for the USSR." But he returned complaining that "in the USSR, everybody knows beforehand, once and for all, that on any and every subject there can be only one opinion..."

In 1948, a Soviet bureaucrat with whom John Steinbeck had to deal was quoted as saying:

"We are very tired of people who come here and are violently pro-Russian and who go back to the United States and become violently anti-Russian. We have had considerable experience with that kind."

In 1970, a journalist couple, Delia and Ferdinand Kuhn, wrote: "Looking back on our journey, we were more troubled by the closed secretive nature of Soviet society than anything else we saw or heard."

Of course, by looking among those who, in the 20s and 30s, were most devoted to the Soviet revolution and/or most unwilling to say in public what they felt (and often said later) one can cull statements that suggest the Russian intourist structure somehow "took people in." Thus a recent book "Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978" derides statements made in communist states by the far left. In fact, these observers were often deeply affected also, as their later statements and positions often revealed. But, of course, political officials are not, in any case, "political pilgrims." Their specialty, as politicians, is sizing people up and, normally, they are far more reliable in their person-to-person impressions than they are in interpreting written material.

But even with intellectuals, a key summary of the effect of Soviet-American academic exchanges by Robert F. Byrnes found that the academics returned "more critical of the Soviet system than when they arrived" but their views were "less abstract and doctrinaire" and "more realistic and humanistic" than they would have been. One of the principal consequences of the exchange programs, it was concluded, had been "the humanizing of Western observers, who had been paralyzed by great slogans and written generalities."

And what of Russian strength? In 1964, Isaac Dov Levine concluded his book "I Rediscover Russia" by saying: "So, as I bade farewell to Russia and to her anguished, gifted people who for fifty years have known nothing but grief and privation, my mind went back to Khruschev's portentious boast that Communism would bury us. That boast, against the realities of the poverty-stricken land, seemed like a grim piece of buffoonery."

In 1976, Robert Kaiser reviewed his three years in Moscow as foreign correspondent at the *Washington Post* and concluded that the Russians are "less formidable than we have imagined, more vulnerable and more nervous. Their ambitions, I think, are less grand than even their own words suggest." After summarizing their inability to compete technologically and economically, Kaiser says:

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"And this is the country which has frightened us for nearly 60 years, which convinced us to invest billions in an arms race without end, which established itself as the second super-power and a threat to peace in the minds of several generations of western statement. That this has been possible, given their egregious weaknesses, is a great tribute to the men who have ruled the Soviet Union. But it is also a tribute to our own foolishness....In other words, we have given the Russians more than their due credit for military prowess, and ignored their failings in economic and technological development, social organization and the rest. We have defined strength and power in purely military terms—the terms most favorable to the Soviet Union—and then exaggerated Soviet power."

But these were journalists. What about the Senators? Not long after the Soviet Union opened up to tourists, Senator John Stennis of Mississippi went in 1958 and reported:

"Frankly, I was not prepared for what I saw."

He doubted that "Russia now plans a direct military attack upon us" and talked of "old Russia" being slow, backward and inefficient but shifting to the New Russia.

Senator William Roth saw weakness and concluded, in 1974, that:

"If the current economic condition of the Soviet Union is any indication, communism is a highly inefficient economic system."

Senator Sam Nunn saw the fear of war in 1978:

"It is difficult for Americans to grasp the terrifying slaughter and suffering that befell the Soviets during World War II which left a permanent and indelible scar on the Russian psyche."

It may not be true of Martians but it is true of humans that they have trouble seeing things from the other person's perspective unless they step into the other fellow's shoes in some way. Western observers often comment on the effect of a visit to Moscow in doing just that. And more experienced visitors may even learn to "put on a Russian hat" and see things, in a limited fashion, as the Russians might. Stephen Rosenfeld concluded in "Report from Red Square" that:

"Americans speak of a Soviet wish to 'expand the sway of communism around the world' as though there were no American wish to extend the sway of democracy....If one believes that only the United States or only the Soviet Union has the right to promote its values and interests abroad, then it is a simple matter to condemn efforts by the other country to extend its sway."

Sometimes such visits put Soviet military measures in some perspective. It is easy, after all, to announce blandly that the Soviet military buildup is far greater than is justified by its defensive needs—until one stands on Russian territory, surrounded by countries which wish it ill, and experiences that sense of military vulnerability and friendlessness which is the Russian experience.

And, perhaps as important, visitors see the extent of Soviet internal problems and the very low standard of living. Until the occasion arises to focus on it, perhaps on an arriving plane, many American politicians will not be conscious of the fact that there are many different ethnic and linguistic groups in Russia still imperfectly assimilated; that the ethnic Russians feel besieged by Asiatic birthrates (in their own country); that cars per capita are 50 years behind our own; that outhouses are the way of life in rural areas, and so on. Only then do they begin to realize why Russian visitors here refuse to believe that Watts in Los Angeles is being shown them as an example of a poor area ("Blacks driving cars! Slum dwellers living in individual houses!")

Once, testifying before a Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a Senator asked me rhetorically and with some asperity: "And have we ever attacked the Soviet Union?" The point was clear—why should they fear us? He was startled at the response. Indeed, we *had* attacked the Soviet Union and they remembered it so clearly that they had a museum in Moscow devoted to showing young Soviet citizens how badly the West in general, and the U.S. in particular, had wanted to "strangle Bolshevism in its cradle." The Senator, like most Americans, had completely forgotten, or more likely never learned, that an Allied Expeditionary Force had invaded Russia in 1917 as part of an effort to keep Russia in World War I. The Russians had not forgotten.

There is also a human side to meeting of which, of course, diplomats are well aware. Yuri Andropov is said to have interrupted an ideological argument with an Austrian diplomat by saying:

"Look, I am a Communist. You represent the opposite world view, but that does not prevent us from understanding each other on a human level."

And Leonid Brezhnev is said to have advised the Politburo, after meeting Zbigniew Brzezinski, that "Brzezinski is not such a bad guy, after all." These human attitudes toward separating personalities from politics and the tendencies for humans to find unexpected respect or appreciation upon personal meetings are too universal to require emphasis. But with regard to the U.S.-Soviet arms race, they do appear to have been forgotten.

The Extent of Senators' Travel to Russia

If our Martian sociologist turned to "counting," he would see the following revealing statistics about Senatorial travel. During the last quarter century of arms race, after Russia was open to travel in 1956, there have been about 95 Senatorial visits or an average of four a year. (During this period, the Senate has had 284 different members.) But, because of fear of travel without colleagues, more than half of these visits (57 of them) arose out of 8 group visits that averaged seven Senators each. Typically, they were going to interparliamentary conferences in Moscow or somewhere in that direction (e.g., New Delhi).

Our Martian would see that leading Presidential candidates from the Senate *would* normally feel it incumbent upon themselves to be photographed touring Moscow at four-year intervals. Senator Hubert Humphrey visited twice, as did Senator Edward Kennedy, Senator Edmund Muskie, and Senator Walter Mondale. Moscow is on the campaign trail.

But if one subtracts visits by political aspirants, SALT II treaty investigations, and interparliamentary union visits, there were only about 25 Senators in the last 25 years who took the trouble just to go and look around. And, of course, the group visits are much more controlled, and lend themselves much less to getting a feel for how the →

Soviet Union operates. During this period perhaps 30 to 60 Senators would go to Western Europe each year. Usually more travel to the Caribbean or the Far East than to the Soviet Union. And in the 8 years after China opened up, there were 57 Senatorial visits to the People's Republic of China.

As to which Senators go, there is a bias in favor of liberal rather than conservative Senators. In 1977, the Federation analyzed the voting records of the 40 Senators who had been to the Soviet Union at that time, and who were still in the Senate. Using votes on such issues as the B-1 bomber, the confirmation of Paul C. Warnke as SALT negotiator, and the Jackson resolution on missile parity, we concluded that:

> 55% of the 33 Senators voting dovishly all of the time had visited the Soviet Union;
>
> 40% of the 44 Senators with intermediate voting records had done so;
>
> but only 22% of those 23 who voted hawkishly all of the time had visited the Soviet Union.

In effect, those most concerned about the Soviet threat are the least inclined to investigate it. Sometimes they are the most absurdly ill-informed as well. One famous conservative Southern Senator told a colleague in 1979 that of course he could not travel to the Soviet Union because he was so well known to be anti-Communist that they would put him in jail!

What Is To Be Done?

Most politicians elected to the Senate, much less the House of Representatives, have never traveled much and, usually, not to such an out-of-the-way place as the Soviet Union. Accordingly, they need encouragement. It needs also to be a constant stream of encouragement because, unless the problem is dealt with on a continuing basis, the percentage of politicians who have traveled to the Soviet Union will stay low simply because of electoral turnover. Some suggestions are:

- Editorial writers, in local newspapers, need to commit themselves publicly, in suitable editorials, in favor of visits to all adversaries with nuclear weapons pointed at us (or some such formula). This will help free the local Congressmen from fear of subsequent political attack.
- Congressional Quarterly has got to stop doing these summaries on Congressional travel.
- Groups interested in ending the arms race, or in sensible foreign policy more generally, have got to lobby their representatives to travel. The presumption has got to be changed from one of "travel to the Soviet Union is a waste of money" to one of "a failure to travel to such an important country is a confession of self-imposed ignorance." Talk shows should talk the issue up.
- In an ideal world, there should be resolutions in the Congress endorsing such travel and even, if it were possible, funding it.
- The Russians should reiterate their long-standing position on the receiving of Western parliamentarians. But as Senator George D. Aiken put it in 1970, "My goodness, Russia has been asking for this for the past 15 years. They have been begging us to go over there."
- Special conferences of parliamentarians and political officials, first organized in one country and then in the other, might get political officials together and in each other's country in a trip away that could be collectively justified.
- Indeed, organizations might be constructed to facilitate travel contacts between the two sides much as the American Council on Germany facilitates such contacts between Germany and America. There is no doubt where we need contacts more.

On the Soviet Side

The ruling Soviet Politburo has 12 full members currently and about 13 candidate and secretariat members. Of these, only four Politburo full members (Gromyko, Kunayev, Shcherbitskiy and Tikhonov) have been here (30%) and, in total, only eight of the 25 (32%). Andropov has been to Eastern Europe, North Korea and North Vietnam. But the nearest to the West that he has come is Yugoslavia.

These and other Soviet officials are even more cautious about travel to adversary countries than U.S. officials. In interpreting these statistics, remember that Soviet Politburo members are typically in high office for long periods and that the Russian desire to see the West is at least ten times stronger than the desire of Westerners to see the Soviet Union. And yet they don't come.

Our Martian sociologist would wonder whether:

- they fear that some kind of (inspired?) incident might occur that could be used against them by their colleagues and hurt their career;
- their mere presence in the West may, subsequently, make them seem less reliable to their colleagues, as if they had become potential "moles." (One is reminded of the refusal of mother birds to accept back into the nest babies which, on falling out of the nest, have become impregnated with human smells.);
- they consider it unpatriotic to give in to the notion of traveling to the West as when the late Mikhael Suslov asked Svetlana Stalin why she wanted to travel to India; his own family was "too patriotic" to travel abroad;
- their leadership within the Politburo is not any more anxious to let its members, and other officials, secure a basis for new political ideas than are American presidents;
- in such travels, everything has to be carefully arranged, and it isn't easy to arrange.

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On the positive side, the Martian would see that, for most of the time, the Soviet side is engaged in a peace offensive. It is they who protest, at all meetings, that they want peace and better relations. (It is the Western statesmen who constantly profess skepticism.) And with this in mind, it should be possible to arrange ways and means in which Soviet statesmen accept invitations to the West.

One approach the Martian might come up with, consistent with human and political logic, is for the United States to insist that, for example, one Politburo member or candidate member visit the United States for each four Senators who visit the Soviet Union. Then Senators could claim that their trips were busily prying Soviet leaders into the light of Western day. Some insistence on reciprocity would, perhaps, make everyone happy. Nothing for nothing is a human approach even if humans want the trips anyway.

What effect would it have on the Politburo? One might venture to predict that exposure to America would lead them to like us better and fear us more. For one thing the freedom we represent is, after all, when seen up close, attractive the world round; it represents, in fact the great revolutionary force which Soviet communism would like to be but is not. And, at the same time, face-to-face contact with the extent and depth of American wealth and technology can hardly fail but give the Soviet leaders pause.

In any case, with lower-level Soviet officials, we do have some information. A book-length analysis by Morton Schwartz on the perceptions of Soviet americanologists suggests a number of favorable conclusions. These "America watchers" have grown in their "tolerance of ambiguity" with ever greater familiarity with the American scene and have learned that White House policy is, "in some measure, open to influence." They have developed, moreover, "a particularly acute appreciation of the advantages which a relaxed international atmosphere holds for Soviet diplomacy."

Moreover, as one researcher in human psychology (Franklin Griffiths) concluded, "the more perceptive an individual's stated view of the adversary, the less hostile his apparent feelings toward it, the more he was inclined to urge policies of conflict limitation and agreement"; so knowledge has a tranquilizing effect.

Times Are Changing

On both sides, times are changing and new attitudes are emerging. In 1978, Senator Sam Nunn came back from a meeting to Moscow and said:

> "I believe that meetings between leaders of the executive and legislative branches of our countries on a regular basis can help both nations understand each other better. I hope that these meetings can be expanded to include direct, informal conversations between top military officials and top intelligence officials (sic) of the U.S. and USSR."

Now the top intelligence official of the Soviet Union has secured its top political office and he may well feel the same way—with these reports of his strong interest in Western culture, and for other reasons.

Letting some fresh air into the U.S.-Soviet quarrel may not cure all that afflicts it. But the history of that quarrel and the grotesque excesses of the arms race suggest that without new perspectives, nothing can be fixed.

—Jeremy J. Stone

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MANAS

VOLUME XXXV, No. 5 Thirty Cents FEBRUARY 3, 1982

LEVELS OF DECISION

TIME was—say, fifty or sixty years ago—when reading the morning news from around the world was something like a journalistic travelogue. You learned what was going on in distant places as a matter of human interest, but without any need to know. Much, even, of what happened in America didn't seem to touch our lives. You read the paper the way you read the *National Geographic* or the *Literary Digest*, and except at election time you were not called upon to do anything about what went on. Of course, if a war threatened, there would be a draft and some economic privation, with a lot of money to be made by a few, but for most of us there was nothing to be done except what we had to, to get the war over with. People were mainly busy with their own affairs, accumulating security and affluence, buying better homes and bigger cars, perhaps absorbing a little culture on the side.

It's different now. Practically everything that happens has an ominous side. What the industrious Japanese are doing *so well* seems to have intimidated the automotive geniuses in Detroit; their daring is gone and there is and will be a lot of unemployment around the country from cut-backs in production. Now the ups and downs in the interest rate are beginning to get the sort of attention that mothers give to an ailing child's thermometer readings, while wars in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are reported as if they were going on in America's backyard. Area specialists explain their idea of how we will be affected by who wins, and there are pages and pages of analysis by Washington columnists who seem to know the names of all those people and what they stand for in relation to "our interests."

Putting it briefly, you could say that today what the nations do is getting to be what *we* do—a view we're not used to at all. And it all happens over our heads or behind our backs. Years ago we put people in charge who claimed that they understood how to run the country and went back to our important affairs. We let them alone unless they did something terrible, or could be blamed for making a disgraceful mess. On the whole, we accepted their explanations for what they did. They spoke and still speak a language we don't really understand—a "big picture" language developed by managerial types and politicians which the rest of us don't use except when pretending to know what it means—a language which makes no real connection between our own decisions and what the country is made to do.

Take the question of war—preparation for war, since questions (except for pacifists) all stop when a war begins—they stop, that is, unless the war drags on as the Vietnam War did, until enough people demand that it be ended. Last November we read in the papers that the English, the Germans, and the Italians had been aroused to gigantic public demonstrations against the plans of the American government to make Europe a nuclear battlefield. The news story (we read it in *Los Angeles Times* for Nov. 1) inevitably gets complicated. The European anti-nuclear drive, an American diplomat was quoted as saying, "has not yet peaked."

The argument turns on various nuclear weapons:

> One of the leaders in the anti-nuclear weapons movement, historian Edward P. Thompson, who represents a group called European Nuclear Disarmament, said in an interview:
>
> "The groundswell of opposition to American nuclear missiles makes it clear that we are going to be successful in stopping the deployment of Pershing-2 missiles and cruise missiles here. There's no way they're going to be positioned in Britain."

The *Times* writer, wanting to clarify for readers the meaning of this claim, provided background:

> At issue is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's [NATO's] 1979 decision to deploy 572 Pershing-2 missiles and cruise missiles in Britain, West Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands as a counter to 250 Soviet SS-20 missiles positioned in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe and targeted on European cities.
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> Under heavy pressure from European members, NATO combined its decision to deploy the new [U.S.] missiles with a call for negotiations with the Soviet Union aimed at reducing missile forces on both sides. The feeling was that if such talks succeeded there would be no need to go ahead with stationing of NATO's new missiles. . . .
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> In order for the United States and NATO to cancel deployment of the new missiles, a senior U.S. official said recently, the Soviet Union would have to reciprocate by "totally disbanding" its force of SS-20s as well as removing 350 older missiles targetable on Western Europe.

Many of the anti-nuclear groups want all nuclear weapons removed from the continent. E. P. Thompson said: "We've got to keep nuclear weapons out of Europe, but the question is, once we get them out of Europe, what happens next? The military will want to put the weapons out at sea or some place else. That's the big problem with these nuclear weapons."

Newspaper stories of this sort are getting longer and

longer because the "facts" are so obscure. How many of us know what an SS-20 is? Or what the Pershings are supposed to be "good" for? Next year there will be different letters and numbers identifying added or more mobile fire power. A person would have to make a career out of grasping these matters, in order to enter the discussion, and then he would find other careerists voicing very different opinions. An SS-20, according to McGeorge Bundy, who ought to know (he was security advisor to two presidents, Kennedy and Johnson), is "a modern, sophisticated, mobile missile that can reach all of Western Europe and the Middle East and much of Asia." Mr. Bundy thinks we don't need our new missiles, considering the over-kill of the nuclear arsenal already on hand. In an article in the *Manchester Guardian* for Nov. 1, he said:

> With a single important exception, there is nothing the 572 new American warheads can do that cannot be done as well by other systems we already have or plan to have. Nor does the location of the weapons make any difference from the American standpoint. Whether they are based in West Germany, or at sea, or in Nebraska, there will always be the same awful magnitude in any presidential decision to use these weapons against anyone, and in particular against the Soviet Union, whose leaders know as well as we do whose command would send them, and where to direct the reply.
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> There is indeed one thing some of the new missiles can do that no other weapon can do, but it is something we should not want to be able to do. The Pershing-2 missiles—there are 10 in the plan—can reach the Soviet Union from West Germany in five minutes, thus producing a new possibility of a super-sudden first strike—even on Moscow itself. That is too fast. We would not like it if a Soviet forward deployment of submarines should create a similar standing threat to Washington.

Meanwhile, a *Washington Post* writer in the *Guardian* (same date) pointed out that American leaders need to recognize that the enormous demonstrations in four capitals of Europe must now be taken as seriously as if they were made in California or New York. While American diplomats claim that the new U.S. missiles are meant to counterbalance Soviet nuclear weapons already in place, the great crowds that marched in Europe at the end of October "were moving to a deeper logic." They were protesting the loss of their sovereignty to another power that controls the use of these weapons. This loss makes them "constitutents" of our government, but constituents without power or vote.

It is sometimes argued that the Americans plan for a "*limited* nuclear war" in Europe. "Limited" may seem an encouraging word, but when you consider what a nuclear explosion of any dimension involves, it loses its reassuring appeal. A *Los Angeles Times* story, again on Nov. 1, predicted the effect of a one-megaton bomb dropped on Los Angeles—900,000 dead, 1.3 million severely injured. The conferring experts quoted said that since medical facilities are concentrated in cities, 80 per cent of the medical personnel would be casualties, making medical care nonexistent. Drugs would be destroyed along with their manufacturers, and raging infections would spread. Concerning the possibility of a "limited" nuclear war, a former naval strategic planner said that the idea is obviously unrealistic. The leaders of one nation, he explained, would be unable to communicate with the leaders of another because of equipment failure or destruction due to electromagnetic impulses from the blast of the bombs. Judd Marmor, former president of the American Psychiatric Association, said that the most ironic thing about the arms race is that it is tied to "patriotism." More arms, the public is told, will protect our way of life, "but you can't," he said, "have a way of life if you're dead."

Broader comment on "limited nuclear war" came from Desmond Ball, identified as an expert on the interplay between weapons technology and nuclear strategy, in an article (Nov. 4) in the *Christian Science Monitor*. He calls the idea "nonsense" in an Adelphi paper for the International Institute for Strategic Studies. In no way, he says, can nuclear war be controlled. The *Monitor* printed this summary of Ball's elaborately supported contentions:

> 1. The US nuclear command and control system (like the Soviet system) is an uncoordinated hodgepodge that is unsuited to conduct, moderate, or end nuclear war.
>
> 2. The command and control system is inherently vulnerable to jamming, spoofing (sending spurious signals), or destruction, and no amount of hardening of facilities can alter this fact.
>
> 3. It would in any case take two to keep a nuclear war limited, and Soviet military doctrine has shown no interest in such a concept.
>
> 4. The likelihood that the US could keep a nuclear war limited is therefore remote.

This sort of thing—and the arguments on the other side—is what we read, over and over again, until we begin to feel that press reports, too, are "an uncoordinated hodgepodge," and that being an "informed citizen" has become a practical impossibility. Meantime war has been made to seem more likely than peace. A Boston columnist (Ellen Goodman) reported in the *Manchester Guardian* for last Oct. 25 that 68 per cent of Americans, according to a poll, expect war; they don't want it, but they expect it, and so, the columnist says, "a potential peace constituency is trapped by a self-fulfilling belief in its powerlessness."

Musing comment by another American writer, Stephen S. Rosenfeld, in the *Guardian* is to the effect that the anti-nuclear movement in America, while small in comparison to the aroused campaigners in Europe, is likely to grow in response to the aggressive plans of the present government. The people, Rosenfeld says, are increasingly upset, although they are also "numbed by a consciousness that the whole issue seems so hard for officials, let alone citizens, to get a handle on." Rosenfeld continues, finally making a distinction that seems crucial:

> I note, for instance, that the current *Newsweek* has a poll asking people for their views on nuclear war. What the numbers mean is anybody's guess, but it is indicative that nuclear nerves are now open and raw enough to be considered worthy of callibration.
>
> Many of us are touched more by private measurements. Last summer, for instance, there was Yale Sociologist Kai Erikson's *New York Times* review of a new Japanese study of the effects of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. After a careful recital of the findings, Erikson suddenly asked, "What kind of mood does a fundamentally decent people have to be in . . . before it is willing to annihilate as many

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as a quarter of a million human beings for the sake of making a (political) point?"

That is a question we can all understand. You don't have to know anything about an SS-20 or a Pershing 2 in order to brood about its implications. You are able to reach a conclusion and may take a stand. Rosenfeld's comment ends:

> Many citizens are concerned most with the actual human results of a nuclear bombing. But politicians, with most strategists, often end up focusing on political scenarios. The first group finds the political people lacking in the elemental respect for human life which alone qualifies them to exercise their great power. The second group finds the others perversely unwilling to cope with the political and strategic choices flowing relentlessly from mutual Soviet-American possession of the bomb.

A question that needs asking is whether the people in the first group—to which, it is fair to say, most of us belong—have the obligation to try to master the elaborate calculus of the destroying power of nuclear weapons and to go in for the problematic guessing about what the "other side" will do in response to what we decide. It may be conventional to say that of course everyone should *try* to understand the terms of those endless debates about "defense," but the fact is that most or many of us *can't*, and are beginning to think it's not worth a try.

One trouble is that if you enter into such arguments, you have the obligation to inform yourself, both technically and psychologically, as thoroughly as you can; but then you are bound to encounter some *real* expert who will *always* pull rank on you. When this happens all you can do is look for support from another authority. You'll never really know, and it becomes fair to ask, Does anybody? *Can* anybody?

Just having opinions on such matters comes fairly close to taking protean cards in an incomprehensible game, with rules which are privately guessed at by the players. When you take cards you are supposed to play, and this, even if only symbolic participation, becomes a fraudulent charade when you see how decisions are actually made. Yet taking cards amounts to approval of the game. You are agreeing that it has to be played.

But if, on the other hand, you see that "elemental respect for human life" is lacking in the people who are really playing that game, how can you even take cards?

Since 1945, when the first atomic bombs were exploded over Japan, this kind of questioning has been creeping up on us. Sooner or later it will have to be faced and a decision made. As phrased by Kai Erikson, it is a moral decision, which it has been, with growing intensity, since 1945. But now the decision has a practical dimension also. These two levels of decision, when they come together, lead to action. What, when first proposed, is branded as "extremism" is finally recognized as common sense. The handful of pacifists and conscientious objectors who opposed and would not take part in the first world war were certainly regarded as extremists. These naïve people were unable to understand the hard-headed logic of Admiral Mahan, who had declared: "The province of force in human affairs is to give moral ideas time to take root."

But now more and more people are beginning to see the point of Albert Einstein's bequest of warning: "The splitting of the atom has changed everything save man's mode of thinking . . . thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe. . . ."

Change in thinking begins with a gradual withdrawal from the familiar patterns of belief or acceptance that are associated with the policy of drift—going on as we are now. Faith in the experts who lack "elemental respect for human life" diminishes from day to day until nothing is left but the shell of conformity. Meanwhile the impacts of worldwide malevolence and increased reliance on weaponry become more frequent day by day. Moral issues may remain in the background, but they do not go away, while practical considerations demand attention to the possibility of far-reaching change. Tiny increments of another outlook are slowly accumulating, making more visible the pattern of catastrophe toward which our society is moving—drifting.

But who knows what positive steps should be taken? There are lots of people who list things to do—good things, so far as we can see—but the great majority will not be prepared for their inconvenience and cost: we see that too. Then there is also the accumulating fear, which blocks innovation. A "realist" must admit these things, yet will go on with his wondering. Perhaps the best conclusion he can come to is: there are some things we *must not do*—or stop doing immediately. We must stop no matter what other people say or do. We must stop doing the things that make other people do things equally bad or worse. That is the practical reason for stopping, but the primary reason is that they are *wrong*—lacking in elemental respect for human life.

Inch by inch, let us hope, this attitude is developing in the world. Surely it is behind the British movement for unilateral disarmament, now getting so strong. The practical-minded critics call the British unilateralists dreamers, but, dream for dream, which would you choose: the dream of a world with less fear in it, or the dream whose promise rests entirely upon the threat of annihilation, and whose continuity depends on increasing the deadliness of the threat?

Military men are sometimes the most effective critics of the arms race. In an address in the 1950s, General of the Army Omar N. Bradley said that we have been seeking to stave off the ultimate threat of total disaster and destruction "by devising arms which would be both ultimate and disastrous." He continued:

> This irony can probably be compounded a few more years, or perhaps even a few decades. Missiles will bring anti-missiles, and anti-missiles will bring anti-anti-missiles. But inevitably, this whole electronic house of cards will reach a point where it can be constructed no higher.
>
> At that point we shall have come to the peak of this whole incredible dilemma into which the world is shoving itself. And when that time comes there will be little we can do other than to settle down uneasily, smother our fears, and attempt to live in a thickening shadow of death. (*Progressive*, January, 1958.)

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Well, we may be at that point now, or just around the corner from it. What, one might ask, is included in the "little we can do" besides adjusting our expectations to the "thickening shadow of death"? One thing that is possible for us all—to make a start—is to stop taking seriously the endless debates about "the political and strategic choices flowing relentlessly from mutual Soviet-American possession of the bomb." The argument never changes. It accomplishes nothing except to make us see that it is senseless. A first step, then, would be to stop reading what these people say. It numbs our minds and dulls our feelings.

We have been studying lately a paper by Robert Engler, "The Warfare Society," first published in 1962. It shows that the underlying realities of our military thinking and policy have not changed in the least. It gets us nowhere except into trouble. Quoting a House Committee report made in 1960, Engler points out that there is "a steady flow of retired high-level military personnel into defense contractor employment." Thus has developed, he goes on, what President Eisenhower (in 1961) described as an "immense military-industrial complex" whose "total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the federal government." It is an influence that touches all our lives through the newspapers and other reading material as well as in other ways.

We can all reject that influence. We can fill our minds with other themes, and determine to find news with meaning that at least isn't anti-human, and focus on that.