Guest Column/Michael Katz

Weapons freeze can cap nuclear insanity

First in a two-part series

The last several months have seen the first widespread intelligentsia mobilization in the face of the imminent peril of nuclear war, and the necessity and possibility of disarmament. For part of this development we can, paradoxically, thank the Reagan Administration. Initiating an unprecedented peacetime arms buildup, and talking insanely of winnable, limited nuclear wars, they have made it clear that they are thinking the unthinkable — and have forced many people to turn their thoughts for the first time to that unpleasant subject. Important too has been the example of the resurgent anti-nuclear movement in Europe, where hundreds of thousands of interested hosts for U.S. medium-range missiles have taken to the streets in recent months to protest the basing plan which they rightly regard as suicidal. But most important, perhaps, has been the simple realization of our own power to do something to end, and ultimately reverse, the arms race — rather than continuing to be paralyzed by the awesome fear that it generates. Concerned Americans are coalescing around two concrete proposals for pulling ourselves away from the brink of holocaust. The first calls for an immediate, verifiable freeze on all production, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons by both the US and the USSR; the second calls for the US to pledge no first use of nuclear arms. If the merit, scope and stabilizing potential of these proposals are not apparent at first face, perhaps the concern which Secretary of State Haig felt compelled to denounce will provide sufficient indication for those who still are not convinced, consider each proposal with General Haig's corresponding criticisms.

The proposal for a nuclear weapons freeze has demonstrated massive and snowballing grass-roots support, winning referendum nationwide, including votes of most of Vermont's 1982 town meetings. It is now before Congress, as Senate Joint Resolution 163, with the sponsor's amendment for support of the entire Mansfield-Albright disarmament design.

On April 6th Gen. Haig, speaking for the Administration, asserted that a nuclear freeze would "perpetuate an unstable and unequal nuclear balance, reward a decade of unilateral Soviet buildup ... (and) remove all Soviet incentive to engage in meaningful arms control designed to cut armaments." The first problem with this analysis is Gen. Haig's allegation of "a decade of unilateral Soviet buildup" to an "unequal nuclear balance." Until this appointment as Secretary of State, Gen. Haig was president of United Technologies, Inc., which is currently the nation's largest arms contractor. Many other members of this Administration have come through a similar revolving door from military industries to which they plan to someday return, and thus have equally large stakes in the perpetuation of an arms race. They, too, have spoken of alleged Soviet incentive to engage in strategic arms.

Most rational and unbiased observers, that is, those without such intimate ties to military contractors, however, see the US and the Soviets as being in rough parity — with each ahead in some weapons categories and behind in others, but about equal overall. The Soviets, for example, have more missiles than the US, but the US has more nuclear warheads to deliver; additionally, US arms are generally regarded as technically more dependable, and less vulnerable since a much higher percentage of them are mounted on submarines.

The immediate point is that the freeze resolution currently before Congress seeks to perpetuate nothing other than the human race and a livable world. It is an incentive to engage in meaningful arms control," the bill specifies:

"Proceeding from this freeze, the United States and the Soviet Union should pursue major, mutual and verifiable reductions in nuclear warheads, residue and other delivery systems through annual percentages or equally effective means in a manner that ensures stability."

Thus the resolution itself acknowledges that a freeze alone is "not enough." (As some critics have argued) and affirms that the freeze is in itself intended only to cap the madness of further nuclear stockpiling while serving as an immediate springboard to disarmament.

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