

The Freeze—Too Little, Too Late

Pentagon War Plans on Automatic

Fifth Estate Collective

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Recently, an anti-nuclear protester in Washington state, after seeing the nuclear freeze banners which he and his friends had spread across the tracks shredded by the oncoming train carrying nuclear warheads, was asked by a radio reporter what his feelings were.

As the train barreled along nearby blowing its whistle, he answered, "Fear, I guess, first; we could be shot by sentries for getting too close to the train. Also it's a humbling experience being so close to so much destruction."

What he didn't seem to notice was the proximity of that image of the locomotive hurtling down the tracks through those pliant banners, to the response from the capitalist state to widespread protest of nuclear weapons and war preparations. The train roars by, oblivious to its opponents, and snipers stand by prepared to meet with force any material threat to its reaching its destination.

And we should make no mistake about it: full speed ahead, the Pentagon is readying for war. Two significant developments are serving to confirm the worst nightmares about the madmen in Washington: 1) the planned U.S. deployment of first-strike missiles in Europe this summer is more and more certain, as negotiators stall for time so that the first weapons can be put into place; and 2) the "leak" to the press in late December of a Defense Department blueprint for "prevailing" through "a protracted conflict period," which argues that U.S. nuclear forces "must prevail and be able to force the Soviet Union to seek earliest termination of hostilities on terms favorable to the U.S."—simply stated, a strategy to fight and win a nuclear war. The former is the means by which technology is rendering possible the latter, a strategy which the military and the most reactionary sections of the U.S. ruling class have dreamed of implementing for years, ever since the Soviets achieved a relative parity with the U.S. in the 1960's.

Decide World Power

As Theodore Draper wrote in an open letter to Secretary of Defense Weinberger in November in response to earlier leaks of the document and Weinberger's subsequent "clarifications": "The search for nuclear superiority, the preparation for a protracted nuclear war, and the goal of prevailing in such a war, all fit together in behalf of a master plan that goes far beyond deterrence; it is the vision of an apocalyptic nuclear war to decide once and for all the issue of world power." (See the *New York Review of Books*, November 4, 1982.)

The plan, entitled "Fiscal 1984–1988 Defense Guidance," is a 136-page secret document outlining the \$1.55 trillion arms buildup to make such nuclear war-fighting capacity "an essential element of U.S. strategy," as well as to plan for turning any regional, conventional or naval conflict into a global and nuclear one, and to continue preparations to "project force" and "wage war effectively" from outer space.

Nowhere in the document does it allow for the possibility of accommodation or peaceful co-existence with the USSR. In fact, it even states that treaties will not be signed which inhibit the ability of the U.S. to develop

space-based weapons and contains such a list of proposed military hardware and weapons systems as to make the possibility of arms reduction negotiations seem like an absurd joke.

Any Soviet military expert who reads the language of the document—which calls for the manpower and equipment to fight the Russians on several fronts for an “indefinite period”—will only see this as preparation for war, and so they do. Responses to the aggressive militarism of the Pentagon from the Soviet military machine have themselves become increasingly shrill and aggressive. In March, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, chief of the Soviet armed forces general staff, stated that if the U.S. were to use the intermediate-range missiles it plans to deploy in Europe against the Soviet Union, the Russians would retaliate directly against the U.S. Other Soviet military officials have suggested that the Soviet Union could be forced to put its weapons on a “launch on warning” status if first strike Pershing II and cruise missiles are deployed in Europe. The Russians are well aware that the introduction of Pershing and cruise missiles goes far beyond a simple arithmetic increase in fire power; it escalates the drive towards war more dramatically than any other development in years. The Russians even stated in a recent Pravda article that they might deploy intermediate-range missiles somewhere near U.S. territory. This could either mean cruise missiles launched from ships at sea (the Soviets are presently frantically trying to catch up to the U.S. in development of cruise missiles), or even deploying SS-20's in Cuba, a development which would render E.P. Thompson's description of the deployment of first strike weapons in Europe as “a slow-motion ‘Cuban missile crisis’ in reverse” even more apt.

Nuclear War and Public Awareness

If the war preparations of the military establishment seem to be on automatic, what of the many recent successes of the nuclear freeze campaign and other disarmament efforts? On the level of creating a public awareness of the dangers of nuclear war, the freeze and other similar liberal efforts have been enormously successful. In a recent *Newsweek* poll, 64% of those interviewed supported a freeze.

In fact, the notion of a nuclear freeze has achieved such widespread popularity, that there has been a plethora of resolutions passed in state legislatures (including Michigan's) supporting various calls for “jobs with peace” and nuclear disarmament—all of these resolutions non-binding, for public consumption, of course. The mania has reached the U.S. House of Representatives, which passed a non-binding resolution (lauded by the thousands of middle-class freeze activists who had congregated there to lobby for a slightly stronger variation of it), which does not even demand an immediate freeze or in any way affect the appropriations for nuclear weapons and research or any Pentagon projects at all, but rather calls on U.S. negotiators to decide, along with their Soviet counterparts, “how and when” to achieve a freeze on testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons systems. At a rally in Washington, D.C., freeze supporters heard speeches from arms control bureaucrat Paul Warnke and former CIA director William Colby, and gave a rousing reception to presidential candidate Senator Alan Cranston of California, the only contender to accept an invitation to speak, leaving little doubt about the general direction of the nuclear freeze campaign. It is clear that despite the illusions of some activists working for the freeze who hope to nudge middle America towards a more radical opposition to the war machine with their all-American, squeaky-clean and respectable electoralism, it is simply the creature of the political system, and will be easily captured by the Democrats in 1984 and forgotten in the midst of the presidential elections.

In any case, the call for a nuclear freeze is not as simple and straightforward as its supporters would have us believe, but a rather complicated arms control proposal with a lot of interesting loopholes. When a couple of FE staff members attended a Michigan Freeze Conference in February in Detroit, we were told that a recent article by the “Joan of Arc” of the freeze movement, Randall Forsberg, “A Bilateral Nuclear-Weapon Freeze” (in the November 1982 *Scientific American*), expressed the viewpoint of the freeze campaign regarding the START talks and the “Zero Option” proposals made by the Reagan administration.

Apart from some interesting information which more or less devastates the Reagan position, the article also shows some enormous problems with the freeze proposal, arguing that since an immediate freeze “could lead after some years to a decline in the reliability and readiness of existing nuclear armaments,” the freeze should be defined “to allow the maintenance of existing nuclear forces until reductions can be agreed on with due deliberation.”

Meanwhile, the tritium modules that initiate the fusion reaction in thermonuclear explosives must be replaced every few years. "This implies that the freeze should allow the operation of tritium-component assembly facilities and the running of perhaps one military reactor to produce tritium." Forsberg also points out that replacement of nuclear submarines is excluded from the original freeze proposal written in 1980 since they have a limited life span of about 30 years. Also, replacement parts for the existing deployment systems will have to be manufactured in order to maintain bombers and missiles "for long periods."

Peace Movement IS Being Manipulated

All of this hedging reveals a lot about the freeze campaign that doesn't come out in all the "save the babies from frying" rigmarole of the bumper stickers and the brochures. And that is that the "peace movement" is being manipulated—not as Reagan and the Reader's Digest would have us believe, by the Soviets, but rather by Democratic politicians and by professional arms control experts like Warnke and Forsberg, who could conceivably become the arms control negotiators for a Democratic administration down the line.

All the qualifications made by the Forsberg article give an idea of what such negotiations would entail. They also reveal that the article is not written with people like ourselves in mind, but for military planners and arms control experts. The "broad appeal" among these sectors suggests a split in the U.S. ruling class—with the "hot dogs" presently in command and the "responsible" cold warriors trying to get their jobs back, genuinely worried about the thrust of much of the present "irresponsible" policy making.

The article and others like it do little or nothing to question the nature of the beast which has given rise to the nuclear terror—the defense of U.S. imperial interests abroad. Nor does it say anything about the proxy wars or the intervention by the U.S. against independent nationalist regimes such as Nicaragua or Angola; such wars are implicitly acceptable if not inevitable, and a lot of such massacres can go on in the thirty years it takes to use up and replace a nuclear sub!

But perhaps the ineffectual, domesticated character of the nuclear freeze is best illustrated by the fate of its referendum in Michigan. After a successful campaign to herd people into the voting booths to approve its ballot proposal, the freeze won handily last November and its message was sent off to the proper government officials in Washington. The response of the U.S. State Department was a form letter stating, "We appreciate your taking time to bring your comments to our attention," and then went on to restate the Reagan war position. As we said in our June 1982 issue, "All in all, the referendum would be little more than a meaningless gesture, since it is in no way binding on the military strategists who could ignore it altogether as if it had been lost in the mail." And so it was.

By the time the 1984 elections come around, some major peace proposal will be made, and perhaps a treaty signed. This will either be done by Reagan or some other Republican candidate, or by a newly elected Democrat who will ride into power on some variety of a "jobs with peace" platform. Perhaps Salt II will be signed; or some watered down version of a freeze, some compromise, or a temporary moratorium (already proposed by the freeze) will be proposed—very possibly a carefully worded version which is unacceptable to the Soviets, so that the U.S. can try to pass itself off as a serious seeker of peace.

Many people will issue a sigh of relief. Yes, little Johnny (and even Mary) will live to make it to college to study to be toxic waste disposal engineers, "Deterrence" will be reestablished as official policy. And, of course, the Soviets will be warned forcefully not to try any dirty tricks.

The Good Old Days of Vietnam

A slightly less cynical sounding version of this scenario is just what many of the freeze advocates would love to see. They would like to return to the "good old days" of nuclear deterrence in which MAD—mutually assured destruction—made all-out nuclear war unthinkable. The good old days, that is, of Vietnam, of Korea, of the Cuban

missile crisis, when the U.S. ruling class made constant threats, just as it is doing today, to use nuclear weapons whenever its interests were threatened.

Such “deterrence”—building nuclear weapons to make sure that the other side would never use its own weapons—was always a fraud. Nuclear weapons have been built to back up military action to defend U.S. global interests from the very beginning. The interests—the oil, the minerals, the labor, the sea lanes, and the markets—remain, and the bloody competition to control those interests remains. The world will not be safe until the imperial nation state is dispatched to the nether world.

“Deterrence,” a French arms control expert remarked, “is a state of mind.” And if we look at the deteriorating state of mind of the U.S. ruling class and its counterparts abroad, deteriorating along with its world built on false prosperity, easy markets and financial security, deteriorating along with the Empire, we can get a glimpse of what the future has to offer capitalism and what capitalism has to offer the future.

War is the health of the state—a mutual bloodletting to clear the way for new endeavors, a reorganization of markets, new formulas for domination. In this case, it will be a mutual suicide. But capitalist civilization is morally bankrupt, spiritually played out, utterly nihilistic. We should not underestimate the ability of its elites to blow themselves up—and us along with them—in a final paroxysm of despair and unprecedented destruction. For them, after all, it will be their moment of glory.

To desire peace is a noble sentiment to be sure. But a “peace campaign” which legitimizes the power of the state and mobilizes people behind one wing of it against another is either an impotent gesture or a subterfuge. Unless forms are created which can challenge that power and the capitalist social relations which buttress it, the trains will continue to roll, the marching orders will continue to be sent down. Ultimately, there can be no middle ground.

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