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Breaking the Deadlock Over Missile Inspection

NEGOTIATION for arms control has foundered on the rock of inspection for the last two decades.

On the major issues, U.S. policy has demanded the prior working out of meticulous cautions against cheating as a precondition for negotiations on the substance of arms limitations. The Soviets have equally consistently labelled inspection as intolerable spying by the capitalist-imperialist aggressors.

Neither side is now likely to reveal any flexibility of its viewpoint until its potential value as a preliminary bargaining point has been wrung dry.

THE FIRST proposals for internationalization of atomic energy, the Baruch plan of 1946, would have abjured all national nuclear weaponry. In a disarmed world, a one-bomb power would be supreme, and it is obvious that such a scheme would demand the most penetrating inspection. Of course, it failed. Even the fear of global incineration could not yet unify the world.

Over the years, the growth of armaments and the maturation of the nuclear stalemate have changed the context enormously. No one today dares dream of total disarmament. Nor should we, when we ponder how much evil remains in men's hearts, including our own.

The arms race, nevertheless, is a demon with a life of its own, well on its way to draining the blood, the industrial productivity, the creative intelligence and the will to live of the whole species. No matter how irrational our motive, it must come to an end at some point of sheer exhaustion: why wait for the bitter end to recruit some vestige of social intelligence and fight to control it?

AT THIS stage of world armaments, the era of overkill, inspection must not be analyzed with the stereotypes of 1946. A few dozen bombs, more or less, even ratios of two or ten, no longer give any nation reliable invulnerability from retaliation — invulnerability with which it could blackmail other nuclear nations. More missiles can change the odds, but in this era what manner of American President or Soviet Premier would behave with less restraint because he predicted that 20 per cent of his cities would survive rather than 10?

This plateau in the arms balance is both peril and opportunity. Significant efforts to run faster will have to be ever more exhausting; on the other hand, we no longer require an unachievable level of surveillance to keep the other side from concealing an overwhelming secret reserve.

The inspection dogma has nevertheless become rigified as a cryptic and diversionary end in itself. The closed society of the Soviet dictatorship is an inherent threat to world freedom: enforced inspection would clearly help pry it open. But, together with the one-sided security advantages of a closed society, this is precisely why the Soviets must resist inspection — external pressure will not speed their own pace for the re-emergence of individual liberty.

AS A BASIS of arms control, inspection must have a narrower purpose — mutual reassurance about each other's capacities and intentions for unpunished aggression. Any rigidly prearranged system that could conceivably be acceptable to either side would be a constant invitation to evasion and to the usual cycle of anxieties about this happening. If every conceivable future contingency must be considered for the treaty, it never will be concluded, and we would be better off without formal negotiations, which impede tacit bargaining.

Let us then separate the issues. If we can find common ground with the Soviet Union on the substance of arms limitations — for example, the scale of missile-defense (more accurately, missile-thinning) systems — let us declare our intentions for mutual benefit. The treaty should then also provide for regular consultation on the needs and means of mutual reassurance, which may change rapidly and unpredictably. At such times, we may then say in the light of our own information from informants, satellites, interception and other customary resources of advanced nations: "We are worried that you are violating the agreement. We leave it to you to decide how to convince us to the contrary. Otherwise, we must abrogate the agreement in self-defense."

THIS SYSTEM will, of course, provoke many feints and bluffs — as does any other, including advertised escalation. We will of course have to learn better than we now try to understand what the other side really thinks of us. Too often today we take for granted a perfect understanding by other nations of the consistency and benevolence of our motives that we can rarely justify for ourselves.

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