

Force — counterforce

New weapons technology

Brian Snyder of the *Imprint*, the student newspaper at the University of Waterloo, talked with noted world affairs analyst Richard J. Barnet about the world arms race. Barnet, from the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington, says this race must end or the human race will face almost certain disaster.

Imprint: Do you think we're living in a particularly dangerous era in world history now in the 1980's?

Barnet: I do think it's a time of unique danger because of the new technology—the quick reaction counterforce weapons which make both sides nervous and increase the danger of pre-emptive war: one side or the other goes first to prevent the other.

Along with this is a crisis of political development in which the world is becoming increasingly unmanageable by either superpower; it's become balkanized.

Imprint: You quoted Einstein as saying that the power of the atom has changed everything but our way of thinking. Could you expand on this?

Barnet: Yes. He saw this immediately, the minute that the atom had been smashed and used in warfare. War had now become completely transformed as a political institution. The notion by von Clausewitz that war was a continuation of politics by other means, ceased to be true.

In fact it was already true before the atomic bomb, in World War I. In World War II, every country but the United States was on the verge of disaster. The fruits of victory and the fruits of defeat were fairly indistinguishable, and the proof of this is that the nations that are now doing best, forty years later are the defeated axis powers. This is simply a consequence of the interdependence of war now, that it's impossible for one's own self interest to keep another nation down, and for that reason you can't divide the world in the way that you once could.

Despite that reality, we still have a legacy of ten thousand years of human history where it did make a difference if I had more bows and arrows than you did, or if I even had more tanks than you did. It makes no difference once a certain level of nuclear armaments in the world has been reached, that I have more; because the whole idea of war has exploded to the point where a relatively small number of weapons can do all the damage that can possibly be done.

But we don't think that way; we still tend to talk in numbers—am I number one or am I number two; can I be superior?—those are vestiges from the past which we haven't been able to get rid of; but we'll have to get rid of them if we're going to have any true security.

The notion that our security system has got to depend on a new kind of trust, is also a new idea. It's not true that it's a question of trust versus no trust, because we already trust the Russians. We're trusting Brezhnev not to have an attack of arteriosclerosis that turns him into a madman: that there are checks and balances with the four or five other people in the Kremlin that would stop him from doing something crazy if he did.

We are trusting the submarine commanders, both theirs and ours. Our Trident submarines will shortly be able to hit 475 separate targets, with the power of eleven Hiroshima bombs each. We say the President is in control—well he's in legal control but he's not in physical control. If that commander wants to shoot those missiles, he can do it, and the Russians have people like that too.

We are trusting human beings to perform on a 24 hour basis; to perform with a super-human competence and freedom from error.

I think the question, "can you trust the Russians?", is an illegitimate question. The real question is, "What are you trusting them to do?"

Imprint: You've talked of the critical need for an immediate freeze on building nuclear weapons by the Superpowers. Why is such a freeze necessary and how do you perceive this freeze ever being implemented by the U.S. and the Soviet Union?

Barnet: I think the most dangerous weapons are not the ones already built but the ones about to be built. The reason for that is that while the ones already in existence can kill you just as easily as the ones we're going to build, it's the intentions that the new weapons convey which make them dangerous.

Imprint: Aren't U.S. concerns about increasing its military and armament forces justified, in light of the many recent examples of Soviet expansionism throughout the world such as Afghanistan, Angola, Kampuchea, etc.?

Barnet: Well, I think one has to look at each of these situations as a local situation with its own dynamics, and its relationship to the U.S. and the Soviet Union, just as I think one has to look at the situations where the United States has expanded.



Clearly in the last five years, the Soviet Union has severely detracted in its influence rather than expanded.

If one takes a look at what has happened in the relationship between the U.S. and China, if one looks at the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Middle East, if one looks at the ejection of the Soviet Union from Egypt, from Somalia, from the Sudan, it's a very mixed pattern.

There is nothing in this pattern that suggests a concerted plan. Also there is nothing in the U.S. rearming itself which would affect the situation.

What I would say is that these evidences of expansion are perhaps the best evidence of the bankruptcy of the present national security policy. It isn't the fact that we didn't have the nuclear weaponry to totally destroy the Soviet Union right now, that we weren't in Afghanistan. It was the judgement, a correct one, that there was no particular point in blowing up the world over that invasion, deplorable as it was. I think the explanation of it was a Soviet act of desperation, and indeed an evidence of great Soviet weakness, that feeling the situation on the border required such an aggressive move.

How do you deal with that? Well, I think you deal with that by doing what the U.S. could have done more effectively had it not taken such an inflated view of it. The way in which one deals with aggression is by diplomatic isolation, and by creating legal and economic restraints which make it very difficult to do it again.

The U.S. had a chance to isolate the Soviet Union more than it did and it failed because it asked allies to do things which were fundamentally against their interests. It was not in the interests of the allies in Europe to cut off trade with the Soviet Union in that situation, and to have asked them to do it and not get a response was to court tension in the alliance.

Imprint: You stated that the U.S. Vice-Presidential Candidate George Bush's statement that the U.S. can win a nuclear war, was "absolutely irresponsible nonsense." Could you explain why you believe this?

Barnet: Because the facts of nuclear weapons are well known—that a single nuclear weapon falling on a major metropolitan centre would cause enormous casualties, not even mentioning the secondary effects, the poisoning of the air, the water, the soil.

The dean of the school of public health at Harvard has recently got into the whole matter of the total inadequacy of health care facilities in the event of a disaster of that proportion and he concludes that there is no way in the world that you could solve the public health problems.

It is totally unrealistic to talk about nuclear attacks and recovery without understanding what the real facts are with respect to the limitations of the public health facilities that are available.

We do not know what the real effects of our nuclear weapons are because, fortunately, none of this caliber have been used. The one thing that we can be sure of is that in every instance we have consistently underestimated the effects of nuclear radiation whether in the peacetime area or in weapons tests. That's why we've had so many casualties in the nuclear tests, because we have simply underestimated the effects. And then one has to talk about the psychological and economic effects—the total dislocation.

The notion that after a war, one does a body count and if a few million more survive in one country or another, that they have "won", is totally to distort the meaning of words, and it is irresponsible because it suggests that there is a continuity between nuclear war and conventional wars of the past, in which the United States has had a rather uniquely successful experience, coming out of the second World War—that this continuity exists, when in fact it doesn't.

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