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Cruise missiles and the B-1

Harold Brown, the incoming Secretary of Defense, and President-elect Carter have said that any serious cutting into the nation's military budget under their administration will have to wait until next year. But the administration is going to be faced with some important choices in 1977 — choices that involve both money and our international policy, particularly vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

The first of these important choices will have to be made very quickly by Carter when he takes office. Congress and the Ford Administration have gotten a major new military system, the B-1 bomber, to the point of production. If the final go-ahead is given, the Air Force will soon begin receiving the first of 224 of the supersonic bombers at \$87 million apiece. Adding support equipment, the total bill is now estimated to top \$22 billion, and military experts have estimated that it will take a total of about \$90 billion to man, fuel and arm the planes over the 25 or so years they are expected to remain in service.

Opponents of the B-1 within the military establishment and in Congress have argued, unsuccessfully so far, that unmanned "cruise missiles" can achieve the same strategic objectives at a fraction of the cost — about \$5 billion for the missiles themselves.

Beyond their low cost, advantages attributed to the missiles include their ability to be launched from airplanes, ships, submarines or land. Preliminary versions have a range as great as 2000 miles — more than ample to cover the vast majority of Soviet industrial centers from Europe, for exam-

ple. Enormous strides in guidance technology make the missile accurate enough to hit a bridge at hundreds of miles — important if it were used with conventional explosives in the kind of non-nuclear war some military pundits now discuss in connection with a reported Soviet arms buildup in Europe.

But Carter has to consider the cruise missile in the context of his stated desire to advance disarmament talks with the Soviet Union. The cruise missile is, in some respects, a very nasty piece of goods. Because it is relatively cheap, mobile, accurate, easy to conceal and probably available in large numbers, it adds a new dimension to the difficulties of scaling back on military outlays. The Ford Administration argued that it was a poker chip to be used during the SALT disarmament talks in trade for a new Soviet plane — the Backfire. That might still be a consideration, but the Backfire, though a formidable plane, appears to be of only marginal importance even by American standards.

So the Carter Administration has a difficult set of tradeoffs to weigh. Should it save money by scrapping the B-1 in favor of the cruise missile? And should it risk escalation of international tensions by turning to an unmanned, mindless missile? Given the probable ease of manufacture, will a go-slow on the cruise missile be taken at face value by the Soviets?

The destructive power of both countries seems so enormous that the Carter Administration might just as well go ahead with its first objective. There is nothing wrong, given that capacity, with saving money.

The housing dilemma

Few would deny that access to decent, safe and sanitary housing is an American right and that there is an acute need for more housing at prices people can afford. In Massachusetts alone, for example, a 1974 study documented a need for almost 500,000 more low-income dwelling units. More graphic evidence lies before the eyes of anyone who examines any of our older urban neighborhoods. In Fall River, 82 percent of all the housing was built before 1939, in Boston 77 percent.

Nationally, one study showed, almost one-fourth of all American families are living in housing that is unsatisfactory either because of its cost, size, condition or location.

Housing needs cut across lines of color, class and age, subtly but unmistakably shaping the way we live, the kind of society we share. When the median cost of a single-family dwelling reaches \$50,000 — as it has in the United States — the dream of home ownership so universally fulfilled in white America for decades becomes unattainable.

But even if there is no intention of buying a home, families need suitable and affordable apartments. They are not easily found, and they are not being built in the numbers required to meet demonstrable needs.

Meanwhile, the opponents of assisted housing, always present, are now more deeply entrenched and armed not only with favorable Supreme Court rulings but environmental arguments as well. In addition, the costs of construction are becoming prohibitive. A \$40,000 apartment is commonplace.

The questions facing the new administration are troublesome. Should it encourage assisted-housing production once more by beefing up the new programs it will inherit from the Ford Administration — programs that rely on the use of tax shelters to attract investors and rent supple-

ments to assist the needy? Or should it seek to devise programs that will carry the Carter stamp, ones that might mix rent subsidies with more attractive inducements for developers? Or should it dispense with any special assistance to developers and concentrate solely on a system of rent supplements or certificates which would allow those in need of housing to shop around?

Whatever approach is taken will have undesirable side effects. Heavy production almost invariably brings shoddy administration and scandal such as that which racked the Nixon housing effort. A rent-supplement program can send rents skyrocketing when the housing market is tight. Social conflict seems inevitable when the Federal government tries to build projects outside central cities. Building within the central city too often creates fresh slums and concentrations of the poor.

Housing is one of those problems that can never be solved, only attacked. But if no grand strategy is practical, many small and sensible steps can be taken. The government can, as William White of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency suggests, push ahead with some of the Ford programs, which he believes are promising, while exploring ways to bring down production costs by encouraging technological developments. Prof. Bernard Friedan of the Joint Center for Urban Studies suggests that Carter strengthen and encourage state agencies, which have been remarkably scandal-free and effective, while pushing ahead with rental-assistance programs.

There is a clear need for neighborhood conservation programs such as those being tested in Boston neighborhoods and for cheaper and more effective ways to rehabilitate old housing.

And, as White pointed out, no matter what policy Federal officials eventually adopt, they should stick with it long enough to allow success and not drop it at the first whiff of trouble.

The Wakefield monster

Like its celebrated mentor in Loch Ness, the monster in a Wakefield, N.H., pond is proving hard to pin down.

Four days of speculation, inspection, tests and jabs at the pond have left the tiny town on the Maine border with little more than an argument over whether anything out of the ordinary ever happened at all.

Witnesses to the "alleged event," as newspapers are calling the activity, claim that on Monday a three-foot-wide hole appeared in the 18-inch-thick ice on a farm pond owned by Mr. and Mrs. William McCarthy. Ice around the hole melted, a flat, black object was seen nestled in the mud, more holes developed, and the Wakefield police were summoned.

Wild radioactivity levels were recorded at the site, security was thrown up, around the farm and the New Hampshire National Guard was ordered to search the suspect pond. Spectators at that operation reported Thursday that the guards-

men chopped out a big chunk of ice, raised the alleged object and dispatched it to Concord.

There Gov. Meldrim Thomson Jr., whose response to all of this has included ingeniously ordering the 1400-odd townspeople into silence, announced after the probe-and-remove mission that nothing had been found and that the alleged mystery was officially over.

But the McCarthy, who apparently do not fear the mighty gag order, maintained that something had clearly happened. "Ponds do not melt in the dead of winter," Mrs. McCarthy correctly observed the other day. "This is not Miami Beach."

Indeed it isn't. At week's end New Hampshire officials, who do not easily relax their vigilance against the unusual, had the pond under surveillance despite their unequivocal conclusion that there was nothing to guard. And the townspeople, tenacious themselves, continued to promote their version of the happenings. Bureaucracy, it turns out, cannot stand in the way of a good story.



CARTER MEETS THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Eric Boston

People are real, but 'The People' are not

MEG GREENFIELD

It's rather strange, this distinction Jimmy Carter keeps making between "people"—and everyone else. Who are "people," anyway? How do you get to be one? And what are you supposed to do if you're overqualified?

I write at a moment when Washington is getting ready for a so-called "People's Inaugural," and when the first results are coming in from Carter's appeal to people to write to him (at an address not surprisingly called "People—Carter-Mondale-Transition") with any advice they might have about how he can best stay one of them. There is talk of a toll-free "people's" hot line to the White House, of "people's" press conferences, of presidential forays to McDonald's. I think there are a couple of things to be noted about all this. One is that the impulse behind it is eminently understandable. The other is that the formulation itself—People versus Others—has its dangers, both as social policy and political guidance.

At a practical level, to be sure, much of what Carter does to meet this need is bound to be artificial and cosmetic. There is already grumbling about how Carter's mass-mailed Inaugural invitations are, by and large, merely invitations to stand in the street. And it is in the nature of the office he will hold that any hot lines, people's press conferences, drop-ins on McDonald's and the rest will have a large element of gimmickry to them. Nevertheless, it seems to me that even if all we are talking about here is a matter of image, it will be a good and useful thing for a President to try to reinforce the perception of himself as a leader who has not lost touch with or interest in the lives of those citizens he presumes to lead. The trouble will come if he falls victim to the mystique of a separate group of folks out there called the "people"—in short, if he comes to believe in the distinction.

I am talking here about the difference between "We, the people . . ." an honorable American founding idea, and "They, the people . . ."—a dangerous, manipulative political idea that has a way of causing nothing but trouble. At its most romantic and sinister

it is a prescription for ugly class warfare and a rationale for the mistreatment of various minorities. Under this construction, the "people" is not an inclusive term, but an exclusionary one. A kind of special authenticity, even a superior human value, is conferred on those who make the grade. They are also furnished with a king-size grievance. For the "people" in this sense are more or less defined as simple, put-upon, decent folk who are being pushed around by a variety of cultural elites that are—somehow—exercising illegitimate power.

Western and Eastern Europe, in our lifetimes, have seen how monstrously these notions can be exploited. And they also cast a dark shadow over earlier manifestations of American populism. I surely don't think that Carter will head down any of those unhappy roads. But I do think he invites difficulty and feeds a particular kind of social and political discontent precisely to the extent that he promotes this sentimental conception of who the "people" are and who they are not. As a rule of thumb, he might be well-advised to reject any definition of "people" that is not large enough to include, say, Cyrus Vance, Michael Blumenthal and Griffin Bell.

The average American, the common man, the little man, the forgotten American, the silent majority: there may be something condescending about the descriptions; but there is also something irredeemably snobbish about the claims that are regularly made by political people who cannot be regarded as either average, common, little, forgotten or silent to have a special understanding of what these Americans want. Indeed it has been fashionable in the upper reaches of Washington political society, ever since the term "Middle American" was invented, to lay claim to such an understanding—to talk knowingly about the six-pack set and to predict without qualification—but with much glee—what hideous, retrograde thing it can be expected to do next.

You would think someone would have noticed by now that these predictions were, by and large, awful. They did not take account of the complexity, variety, intelligence, decency or wit of the agglomeration of individuals known as the "people." They fell victim to a chic literary idea, the irony being that in the name of responding to the real (it is always pointed out that these things are real) stirrings of the populace, the political pitchmen found themselves dealing with a figment of their imagination. In the sense that Washington supposes and in the manner suggested by the Carter rhetoric, there really is, I think, no such thing as "the people."

But there are, of course, people. And there are differences between the way most of them live and what most of them do and the lifestyle of a President. And when a President can maintain some degree of familiarity with their lifestyle and some resemblance to them as plain folks . . . well, he will reassure and please them. But Jimmy Carter should remember that no one achieved this better and more naturally than his opponent, Gerald Ford, who won the hearts of the people for his very people-ness—and lost the election.

Surely, he lost it because voters had in mind something more important to them than anything that could be accomplished over a hot line or a hamburger with the President. They wanted someone who could deal with the economy, the energy crisis and the rest better than they could and better than President Ford could. That is just another way of saying that, surprising as it may seem, most people vote what they consider to be their interest, not their vanity or their recognition of themselves in a leader. I am working around to the heretical thought that, when you get right down to it, people are just like everyone else.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reforms only increase mayor's power

A portion of Mayor White's recent reorganization proposal deals with the schools. It is unfortunate, indeed, that in this area where much reform is needed and where the impact can be great the proposal is weak and lacks the character of true reform. . . .

Instead of serious school reform, the mayor has opted for political reorganization which will consolidate power in his office. . . . Evidence of the mayor's obvious attempt to increase his own power is found in the proposals for control of the school budget, which was passed by the Council, and appointment of the superintendent, which was not passed by the Council. Fiscal control effectively confers policy control. It obviously confers job control. One must wonder what a School Committee would do without fiscal or policy control. . . .

District representation brings with it the parochialism of the district. The district school committee member must, by definition, be concerned more with education in his/her district and less in others. It is this very concern for one's own district over others which prevents legislators elected from outside of Boston from voting for relief of Boston's economic problems.

Even if one were to accept that increased representation is a valuable political objective, it cannot compensate for the loss of power inherent in the reorganization proposals. Certain-

ly blacks and Latinos are more likely to be elected to the School Committee, but one must realistically question the impact they will have once elected if the mayor controls the system.

Even without the concerns noted above, on the face of it, it just does not seem reasonable to eliminate the most serious responsibilities of the body elected specifically to control the schools. Also, it must be remembered that School Committee members serve as agents of the state whose responsibility it is to carry out the state's obligation to educate its citizens. Why then should any power over the schools be transferred to a mayor or other local officials whose legal obligations do not include education. . . .

Real reform would deal with such issues as educational philosophy and methods, teacher evaluation and training, facilities, removal of Federal control of the schools, occupational education opportunities, and curriculum. True reform would give a superintendent the opportunity to serve as the educational leader of the school system. . . .

If accountability is the objective which has led to the proposed changes, it is more legitimately achieved through the electoral process than through the accumulation of power in one man's hands. . . .

ROBERT W. CONSALVO

Hyde Park

Helping hand

I am a physician from India. I arrived here in Boston late on a Saturday night. As a stranger at the airport, I was quite lost. Being in the United States for the first time, I was having a problem in dialing my friend's number and in seeking transportation to his place.

An old lady and a young man were watching my travails. Without a request from my side, he volunteered to take me along in his car and drop me at my relation's place.

In big cities, we are told, people are impersonal and aloof. But this nice gesture from those good Bostonians, whose names and addresses I do not know, proves otherwise.

DR. P. S. KISHORE

Boston

MBTA 'antiquated'

Cheers for K. F. Bowles and his letter, "Russians are way ahead in mass transit" (Globe, Jan. 10). The under-estimated has done a great deal of traveling, and has discovered that subway riding in Stockholm, Hamburg, Montreal, among other cities, is a real pleasure in comparison with our antiquated system and impolite personnel on the MBTA.

JOHN W. SEVERIN

Boston