



# True "Spirit of Geneva"

"This may be the last time to really address these issues with any prospect of success." So warned U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz in a press conference on the Geneva Arms Talks which opened in March. The words were deliberately chosen to evoke the lateness of the hour, the widespread sense that never has global nuclear war been so close, and to use that menace to pin hopes on the "goodwill" and "rationality" of the American and Soviet leaders as the best and last means to avert the impending confrontation.

Yet even as the bombast flowed from Geneva there was little pretence that such arms talks had ever succeeded in actually controlling the arms buildup. There were no glowing tributes to SALT I and II; and indeed, throughout the Western press it was common to see cartoons about negotiations going on over the years while the warheads kept steadily mounting on each side. There have been over six thousand arms control talks since World War 2, numerous agreements, from the ban on underground testing to the

AntiBallistic Missile Treaty to Salt I and II. What have they accomplished? The limiting of a few obsolete weapons which were already scheduled for retirement. The forbidding of a few weapons which neither side intended to deploy in the first place (such as those conceived for the ocean floor). During Salt I and II, the number of missiles in the Soviet arsenal expanded from 2500 to 7000; the number in the U.S. arsenal from 5700 to 9000. The record for warheads is worse. Need it be pointed out that neither power has ever bargained away a major weapons system which it considered vital to its interests?

But in the "spirit of Geneva," the very arms talks that have failed to ever control arms, or even to slow the accelerating pace of arms buildup, have been urged as all the more reason to have hope *this time around*, as if maybe this time, faced with the danger accompanying decades of arms buildup and the extreme tension of the last few years, finally the leaders of the two blocs might just come to their senses and

talk seriously.

## It Isn't Just That They Don't Work

The problem is that they *are* talking seriously—and what they say demonstrates that these arms talks will work *in the same sense that all the previous six thousand plus have worked*. For indeed they *have* worked for the imperialists. They have worked not to disarm, but to institutionalise the arms talks as an integral accompaniment to their military buildup. To expect anything else is like waiting for a shark to become a vegetarian. Driven by their unquenchable thirst to accumulate more and more capital, pushing up continually and ever more forcefully against other national capitals driven by the same compulsion, they have built up their own arsenals to defend and extend their share of the plunder. Now, three decades after the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, the U.S. and Soviet blocs are at the point where each stands as the barrier the other must confront and defeat on the field of arms in order to resolve the crisis gripping their own empire.

Arms talks are an arena in which they confront each other in this intensifying rivalry, and this rivalry in turn prompts, dominates and conditions every proposal they make. Referring to the failures of the previous thousands of rounds of talks, each will ultimately admit that yes, they have indeed failed—but then each will hold the other side exclusively responsible for the failure.



Meanwhile, they poke and jab at each other, testing the resolve of their opponent behind each new arms programme, analysing, looking for weaknesses to exploit and strengths to defend against. Today, the preparations for the talks in Geneva indicate not only that neither has any intention of emerging with any real agreement on arms reductions, but that these talks in particular manifest and are a component part of the dangerously accelerating preparations for war.

The U.S. demonstrated arms control logic magnificently in February, when they shamelessly announced that the latest shipment of cruise missiles was on its way to W. Europe, so as to "strengthen the negotiating position of the U.S. in order to achieve real arms reductions." Domestically, too, Reagan rallied support for the MX missile with the same reasoning. As U.S. Defense Secretary Weinberger explained, "cutting the MX would reduce our ability to achieve arms reductions and take away Soviet incentives to agree to reductions." The liberal Democrats in the U.S. followed suit, announcing their support for funding of the 21 MX missiles up for near-term deployment, and the U.S. Senate on March 19 appropriated \$1.5 billion for the current fiscal year alone to carry this out. Five Democrat and five Republican congressman went to Geneva together as a demonstration of united support for the U.S. position.

Naturally this build-arms-to-control-arms logic operates internationally too. Belgium, long the subject of U.S. and NATO prodding for dragging its heels on a decision to carry through deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles on its own soil, finally made the decision to deploy the week the arms talks began. The government explained that if they failed to deploy, the Soviets would consider it a weakness to be exploited at the talks. They added that if they didn't carry their share of the burden of Western European defense, then Belgium couldn't expect its share of the "benefits of NATO"—and what is this but a reference to the spoils of empire?

The Soviets were quick to denounce all this as seriously destructive of the arms control process—as if they were strangers to the use of this kind of gangster diplomacy. In early winter the Soviets completed the deployment of another group of 36 of their SS-20 missiles on the frontiers of W. Europe, capable of obliterating every major population centre and military base on the continent. It gave W. German Foreign Minister Genscher a little something extra to think about when, on the eve of Geneva, Gromyko informed him that if W. Germany aided the U.S. in Star Wars research the Soviets would consider it an "accomplice" in the violation of the ABM treaty and thus of international law. Everyone knows how the Soviets feel about such violations—

witness the fate of the Korean 007 airliner that was in Soviet air space. The Soviets made a similar point of information to the Scandinavian countries, when, after a series of purported Soviet nuclear sub penetrations of local territorial waters, it sent a cruise missile whizzing over Scandinavia, "by accident"—and promptly followed this up with an offer to negotiate a "nuclear free zone in the Baltic area." The Soviets call this "peace diplomacy"—and plan to continue this at Geneva.

A number of observers have commented on the possibility that the talks will break down, pointing not only to all this manoeuvring and counter-manoevring before the talks, but also to the negotiating stances at the talks themselves. The Soviets have repeatedly hammered home that, as Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko put it, only "the cancellation of Star Wars will open the way for negotiations" on existing nuclear forces. Reagan in turn has made it equally clear that Star Wars is not up for negotiation, and that only "deep reductions" in land-based ICBM's (where the U.S. considers that the Soviets have a lead) will open the way for real agreement. U.S. Admiral Bobby Inman, appearing on American television, was reportedly smiling when he said, "I'd say discussions might proceed for at least five years down the line before agreements are possible."

In fact, the overall positions of the two powers on the range of nuclear arms issues have not changed since the Soviets left the bargaining table over a year ago, when NATO began deployment of the Cruise and Pershing II missiles in W. Europe. What brought both powers back to the bargaining table now was not at all some major breakthrough in their bargaining positions and the consequent possibility of a real agreement. Neither expects this and each has already launched major campaigns blaming the other for the expected "failure" of the talks.

What is revealed here is that it is not the absence of a possibility of real progress in arms controls talks that leads to their breakdown—for that does not and has not existed.

Nor does a resumption of talks mean that the contradictions between them are being mitigated. They talk to *carry on* rivalry, not to end it. And each seeks to do this in such a way as to ensure that such matters, particularly war, are the affairs of their own statesmen and not at all the province of the masses of people, particularly of their own bloc. As the Soviets put it, referring to a coming session of the Multi-Force Balanced Reduction Talks going on in Vienna, "The coming conference is only a ruse of the United States to reassure American public opinion and the European allies." The Americans have similarly attacked the USSR for coming back to the Geneva talks only in order to use them to heighten U.S.-W. European differences and "de-stabilise" Europe, as they accuse the Soviets of having done just prior to the Cruise and Pershing deployment.

Both are right. Even the agreement to renew the talks exemplified the real "spirit of Geneva," as each seized the chance to slash at the other. The U.S. portrayed the Soviets as slinking back with their tail between their legs, forced to recognise that they were "exposed" by having abandoned the talks before. One of the U.S.'s arms control men, Richard Perle, snidely remarked, "We accept their capitulation graciously." The Soviets' return was attributed by the U.S. principally to their fear of Star Wars, the U.S.' anti-missile system proposed for deep space. As the American *Time* magazine bragged, "The Soviets fear American technology as if it were black magic." The remark reflected a new strain in arms talk propaganda—portraying the rival as weak and defeatable, the kind of image one projects in order to embolden one's allies and unleash one's social base for war preparations. It is a reflection of the on-going shift in the politics of "peace through strength"—from strength... to *prevent* war to strength...to *win* war.

### Star Wars

The centrepiece of the U.S.' "peace through strength" program in Geneva is Star Wars. Also billed as the Strategic Defense Initiative in

U.S. double talk, it calls for over \$30 billion just for a five-year research program on a system of laser beams, particle beams, and rockets to be linked with huge computers so as to enable them to shoot down enemy missiles. Reagan has graciously blurted that the intention is to render nuclear missiles "obsolete and impotent"—the Soviets had no difficulty understanding that this meant *their* nuclear missiles. Reagan has responded that when the system is complete, he would of course share this perfect defense with the Russians, thus making both imperialist blocs invulnerable so as to make possible his dream of abolishing nuclear missiles throughout the world. Of course. In Geneva, one can *say* almost anything.

In fact, Star Wars is a weapon for carrying out a "first-strike"—an integral part of a decisive all-out attack by offensive nuclear weapons aimed at decapitating the nerve centres of the Soviet government, disabling and destroying their missile force, and emerging from the counter-attack in a position of definite superiority. As the U.S. Congressional Office of Technology Assessment observed in its report on Star Wars, "It is frequently noted that Ballistic Missile Defense ends up being a better investment for the side that strikes first than for the side that retaliates....The side striking first uses its full arsenal in an organised penetration of the other side's defense; the retaliating side can only use its surviving arsenal in a possible disorganised 'ragged retaliation' against a forewarned and fully prepared defense."

It is in this light that the declared intention of Reagan to utilise a Star Wars system to defend the entire U.S. and its allies and not simply missile emplacements acquires particular importance. If the purpose of Star Wars were to *deter* an enemy first strike, then the defense would be around missile emplacements to assure their survivability and thus a consequent retaliatory capability. If the purpose instead is to try to win by using a first strike, then what would be the point of defending the sites of missiles which would already have been launched? As Edward

Teller, father of the U.S. H-bomb and a prime mover behind Star Wars, sums up: Star Wars, in conjunction with other U.S. systems, "would commence a period of assured survival on terms favourable to the Western alliance."

A number of arguments have been raised which miss the real aim of Star Wars. Some have argued that it is simply a new phase of the arms race that is intended to wreak special havoc on the Soviet economy, since it pits strengths of the West bloc economies (particularly high information technology) against a known Soviet weakness. On this point, U.S. Defense Secretary Weinberger delivered a philosophical insight worth contemplating: "Weapons are not put into a museum to look at—they are to use."

There are many reasons why Star Wars is particularly attractive to the U.S. imperialists, but in the final analysis they are undertaking it in order to wage the world war which the system of imperialism compels them to wage against the rival imperialist bloc—to win it, and to set about reconstructing a world order with them once again atop the heap, however radioactive and ravaged it may be. It is a mad vision, but it is one which they—and their Soviet rivals—are driven to adopt. In view

of the pearls of peace talk now dripping from their lips in Geneva, one appreciates the more forthright statement of policy made by Weinberger last year: "The U.S. must possess the means to impose termination of a major war on terms favourable to the United States and our allies even if nuclear weapons are used."

The Soviets' official response to Star Wars leading up to Geneva was delivered by spokesman Georgi Arbatov: "If you start to build Star Wars, we will be obliged to build new nuclear weapons, and more of them, which can penetrate your shield." Gromyko added that the possibility of nuclear war would not be an exaggeration if the arms race were allowed to spread to space.

Though initially critical of Star Wars, in the weeks just before Geneva the major Western partners all fell into line behind Reagan (with French Foreign Minister Raymond Dumas, originally one of the more critical, purring at Star Wars' "element of seduction"). The need for Western solidarity in the face of "the enemy" at Geneva certainly played a role in this show of unity, for the contradictions the Soviets have pointed to are quite real. Yet this agreement also reflects hope for the strengthening of the bloc overall by the enhancement of the U.S.'

ability to successfully carry out a first strike. It is also worth noting that the U.S. has commented on the advantage of a weapon system that need not be stationed on anyone's "native land" and how this makes it less likely to provoke domestic opposition. This is a pointed challenge to the anti-war movements of the West bloc, and also gives one pause—since Star Wars is supposed to be an instrument for world peace, designed to abolish nuclear weapons completely, why so much worry about it becoming an object of mass protest?

Such is the "spirit of Geneva"—where every strength of the opposing power is portrayed as justification for one's own arming, and where every such move towards war is portrayed as strengthening the peace. It is testimony to the accelerating moves towards war that at one and the same time the most fantastic illusions of peace are promoted—Reagan has become "a passionate believer" in the abolition of nuclear arms, and Gorbachev is hailed as holding out new hopes for cooperation—while the most deadly preparations for war are carried on. As Lenin observed, the closer they get to war, the higher is the volume and the pitch of demagoguery about disarmament and the imperialists' "desire" for peace. ■

