

RELIGION AND...

A Possible World Without War

Who has a peace platform for the 1980s? Not, it would seem, the Democrats, who are largely responsible for the last four years of benign but spastic reaction to events. Nor the Republicans with their monothematic campaign for more military spending. (Military weakness may invite war, but more than military strength is needed to secure peace.) Fortunately, political parties and candidates are not the only actors on the current scene. There is, for example, the World Without War Council, a citizens organization with a long record of clear thinking and advocacy. Its Issues Center has proposed a "peace platform" that deserves close attention during this year's presidential campaign.

"Peace, Security, and the 1980 Election" is remarkable for combining sobriety of analysis with purposeful imagination. Shunning utopianism, it states: "Our immediate goal cannot be harmony. We live in a world of conflict. We can hope to achieve a world in which conflicts are conducted and resolved without the organized mass violence of war." That achievement, the authors believe, requires a new U.S. strategy based upon "peace initiatives" that employ both carrot and stick. By peace initiatives they mean "a non-military action undertaken independently but designed to induce reciprocation from others and advance us toward the [desired] goals." Admittedly, the idea of peace initiatives is not entirely new, but the WWW people have given it fresh definition and specificity.

"In considering peace initiatives, it is important to select those acts which offer the best prospect for inducing others to reciprocate. The inducement may be that of good example—since they have changed their policy, so can we. It may be that the course offers mutual advantages, opening possibilities which before were closed. It may also be coercive—the failure to reciprocate will entail a loss of prestige, influence or resources."

The five long-range goals of the strategy are unexceptionable, perhaps even obvious: mediating regional and national crises, gaining arms control and disarmament, strengthening international institutions, building a sense of world community, and sustaining world economic development. The freshness is in the specifics. It is proposed, for example, that the U.S. take the initiative in establishing regional mediation teams to deal with conflicts in places such as Cambodia, Namibia, Chad, and El Salvador. After discussing the composition and tasks of such teams, the authors acknowledge that they might not be accepted by belligerents in, for instances, Afghanistan and Cambodia. In that case, "regional teams should establish themselves in adjacent countries [to] monitor the conflict, build communications to the belligerents, and publicize, through regional and global organizations, their availability for ending the conflict without war."

On arms control and disarmament the document is pro-SALT, but with no illusions about that process actually reducing arms. It therefore endorses an idea that has already been floated by senators as different as Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Mark Hatfield: "The Senate should ratify SALT II without amendments, but add this understanding: the U.S. will consider the protocol which calls on the parties 'to agree upon significant and substantial reduction' as integral to the Treaty. Accordingly, the U.S. will not consider itself bound by the Treaty after two years if such reductions have not been negotiated within that time."

Another initiative creating a climate for disarmament would involve U.S. acceptance for one year of an international accounting system to measure military expenditure, with an offer to continue the system if the Soviets permit a similar inspection. This, in combination with other steps, could lead to a 5 to 10 per cent reduction of forces or of military budgets which, if reciprocated and verified by the above accounting systems, could lead to a second 5 to 10 per cent reduction, and so on.

Toward the goal of "strengthening world community" the authors add a new twist to the proposal that the U.S. ratify the two U.N. Covenants on Human Rights and the Conventions on Genocide and Racial Discrimination (with reservations needed to protect our Bill of Rights): "Following ratification the U.S. should ask that a Soviet team investigate racial discrimination in the United States while an American team investigates religious discrimination in the Soviet Union, with each country agreeing that the reports, along with governmental and non-governmental responses, be published in major national news media."

These are just a few of the peace initiatives proposed. Some seem more promising and substantive than others, and a few would require that countries be open to international inspection and accountability in a way that the Soviet Union, at least, would likely find unacceptable. But even then the U.S. initiatives would have the not inconsiderable advantage of putting such countries on the defensive.

The document is not optimistic about the likelihood of positive change in the Soviet leadership, but it does suggest ways of enhancing whatever chances there are for such change. Equally important, the authors would move our domestic debate away from stale liberal-conservative battles over military spending. People who disagree on defense needs and on Soviet global intentions might be able to embrace the idea of peace initiatives that involve no "unacceptable danger to our own political community." Were that to happen, this presidential campaign might yet provide an intimation of a more coherent U.S. foreign policy, replacing the current choice between nervous improvisation and bellicosity.

(For a copy of "Peace, Security, and the 1980 Elections" send one dollar to World Without War Issues Center, 67 E. Madison, Suite 417, Chicago, Illinois 60603.)

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