

The Priority of National Survival

K U R T G L A S E R

Survival and Peace in the Nuclear Age, by Laurence W. Beilenson, *Chicago: Regnery-Gateway, Inc., 1980. 169 pp. \$10.95.*

NATIONAL DEFENSE emerged as a major issue in the 1980 political campaign. Many who had hitherto championed so-called "sufficiency," letting the U.S.S.R. out-arm the United States, shifted to the position that they rather than their opponents were best qualified to repair admitted deficiencies. Only "dove" think tanks such as the Center for Defense Information and non-conformist presidential candidates continued to assert that the United States was already doing enough (or too much) to counter the Soviet military buildup.

Yet the debate both during and since the campaign has been limited mainly to questions of budgets and hardware: whether to build the MX and whether to reactivate weapons systems shelved by the Carter Administration such as the B-1 bomber, the long-range cruise missile, and the neutron bomb. Major-party candidates tended to avoid questioning the basic framework of American defense policies. They had reason to fear that radical proposals might provoke irrational public reactions and propaganda by opponents designed to exploit potential panic, after the pattern of the little daisy picker and the mushroom cloud used against Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964. It did not seem politically expedient to say that the United States should retreat from overextended military commitments or that we should prepare for a likely nuclear collision.

Precisely these fundamental issues are

addressed by Laurence W. Beilenson in his concise and nontechnical *Survival and Peace in the Nuclear Age*. He bases his considerations on the sometimes forgotten proposition that the main task of American defense policy is to defend the United States. Mr. Beilenson rejects as foolhardy the assumption that mutual deterrence will stave off nuclear war indefinitely, and the policy based thereon, Mutual Assured Destruction, or MAD. In past history all available weapons have been used sooner or later, and there is no reason to suppose future history will be different. Nor is the U.S.S.R.-China rift a reliable state of affairs: reconciliation could come suddenly, like the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939. The Kremlin, in any case, does not believe in MAD or in offering the U.S.S.R. civilian population as hostages. For some years the Soviet government has conducted a massive civil defense program combining evacuation and shelter in place; it hopes to reduce casualties from an all-out nuclear exchange to a small percentage of the population. Similar protection for the U.S. population, Beilenson indicates, could be achieved for a cost of between \$50 and \$100 billion—not tremendous in relation to total government costs.

Not only the Soviets but also the Swiss, the Swedes, and the Chinese have massive civil defense programs. We should, Beilenson shows, waste no time in doing likewise, if only to deter the U.S.S.R. from an adventurous first strike. Not only that: the means for effective anti-ballistic defenses are at hand, and a large proportion of incoming Soviet missiles could be neutralized far from their targets. This will require de-

nouncing the 1972 anti-ABM treaty, which fortunately has a six-months' cancellation clause. (It may be added parenthetically that the U.S.S.R. may already have violated the treaty, since one of its new anti-aircraft missiles is reported to be deployable in an ABM mode.)

Our present policy of limiting nuclear "defense" to the ability to deliver a lethal second strike is, Beilenson contends, unnecessarily dangerous, especially as the Soviets are known to be experimenting with charged particle beams that can destroy incoming missiles above the atmosphere. Only energetic nuclear defense, both passive and active, will assure the survival of the 100 to 160 million Americans "programmed" as casualties in most nuclear war scenarios.

Arguments against ratification of SALT II begin with a historical survey showing what might well be called the guaranteed unreliability of political treaties. This survey summarizes the highlights of an earlier book, *The Treaty Trap* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1969), in which Beilenson shows the risks of any policy that relies for national security on the promises of other nations. In the present book he demonstrates the inadequacy of the "national means of verification" upon which SALT depends and, indeed, of military intelligence in general. Contrary to popular belief, the expenditures needed to catch up with the U.S.S.R.'s nuclear weaponry would not add more than marginally to the total Federal budget.

The lesson of Vietnam, Beilenson feels, is that the American people will not support a protracted war that does not demonstrably serve vital United States interests. We need not necessarily agree with him that vital interest was lacking to understand that the Johnson Administration deliberately neglected to inform the public—for fear of "arousing a martial spirit," as Undersecretary of State Rostow put it at a St. Louis meeting attended by this reviewer—and that we fought the engagement without a coherent strategic objective. Our alliances are highly unbalanced, with the United States shoulder-

ing most of the costs and the allies reaping the benefits. The Japanese, for instance, spend less than one percent of their GNP for defense and refuse to permit nuclear weapons on their soil. United States defense costs are about five percent of GNP; they were more in the recent past and are again rising in response to perceived needs. The United States has been paying and continues to pay about 60 percent of the costs of NATO. While economic and military aid were needed in the first decade, America's European allies are amply capable of paying for their own defense, as indicated by the strength of their currencies against the dollar.

Beilenson criticizes the "forward strategy" of keeping large numbers of U.S. troops in Germany on the grounds that it constitutes refighting World War II and that it does not protect the United States. The concomitant theory of "flexible graduated response" assumes that the Soviets will start any attack on Western Europe with a conventional avalanche of tanks and that they will not escalate to nuclear weapons except as the Western Powers do so. Logic suggests that the contrary assumption is far more probable. Knowing that NATO cannot contain a Soviet conventional thrust, the U.S.S.R. will almost inevitably accompany any land invasion of Western Europe with a first strike against American ICBM's, thus blunting the U.S. striking force before it can be launched. Carrying Beilenson's reasoning a step further, one could argue that knowledge of the logic of a Soviet first strike would create an almost irresistible temptation for American statesmen to preempt that blow with their own counterforce first strike, should a crisis in East-West relations suggest an impending Soviet-led invasion. Thus the "forward strategy," unless supported by men and weapons adequate to repel an invasion without nuclear devices, must have a destabilizing effect on nuclear strategy.

In a section on "Bringing the Boys Back Home" Beilenson proposes withdrawing American forces from Europe over a period of five years. In exchange the

United States would offer its European allies, including West Germany, the technical and logistic assistance to create (or, in the cases of Great Britain and of France, to strengthen) their own nuclear arms. Strengthening of European conventional forces to replace the departing Americans would also be in order, but the probability must be faced that any conflict of the U.S.S.R. and Western Europe will be nuclear. The most important effect of the change will be that the United States will no longer constitute the Kremlin's only significant nuclear target, while Soviet planners must henceforth consider the certainty rather than an uncertain possibility of a nuclear response to attack.

Similar considerations apply to Japan, South Korea, and the Republic of China, all of which are demographically and economically capable of defending themselves. For Japan and the ROC the United States should provide nuclear technology and hardware. The Republic of China would receive what is needed to deter any communist attack on Taiwan, including sophisticated conventional weapons. For all these cases denunciation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty is necessary. That should be no great loss, since the treaty has proved wholly ineffective and a number of protonuclear powers are nonsignatories in any event.

The final chapters of *Survival and Peace in the Nuclear Age* deal with subversion,

both as developed by Lenin into a strategic weapon and as it might be used by the United States and our allies to weaken and disintegrate communist systems. In a technical world even dictatorships cannot avoid educating large classes of intellectuals; educated people and even the activists among semi-educated workers tend to demand freedom and reject arbitrary authority. Thus a totalitarian dictatorship has a propensity to self-destruct: a propensity which the United States should foster with an eye to eventual anti-communist revolution. Overt aid to dissident movements would, of course, constitute a disavowal of détente, a policy that Beilenson rejects as a communist ploy to disarm the West psychologically.

Laurence W. Beilenson has injected some new ideas into the foreign-policy debate. While some of his proposals may be unpalatable to Americans used to seeing their country play a decisive role in world politics, others—such as the need for civil defense and nuclear superiority (to compensate for the unlikelihood of a U.S. first strike)—entail such manifest common sense that politicians could safely adopt them. In the end, it is hard to quarrel with Beilenson's basic premise that American defense policies should be shaped under the absolute priority of defending the United States. Perhaps, as the heat of electoral politics cools, some of his thoughts will find their way into a nonpartisan consensus.