Brent Scowcroft, John Deutch and R. James Woolsey

'Verify but Survive'

In his novel "God Knows," Joseph Heller gives his King David the gift of foresight and sets him musing about the decision of his son, Solomon, to cut the baby in half. A disgusted David informs the reader that the oft-hailed decision was no stratagem to find the baby's real mother, but rather the doltish Solomon's real idea of an appropriate compromise.

So, too, with arms control these days. The Reagan administration recently proposed a compromise of sorts at the Moscow summit on the subject of mobile ICBMs. This latest notion—to limit the deployment of mobile ICBMs to some number of small 25-square-kilometer areas—is Solomonic only in Heller's sense. It is in any case the most recent manifestation of eight years of near-total administration confusion about ICBM survivability. Ever since the 1980 campaign, the world has stood by in bewilderment while the administration has, in a seemingly random pattern, requested funding for both survivable and nonsurvivable ICBM deployments, while at the same time proposing arms control bans on the survivable ones.

In the latest installment of this saga, the administration proposed to the Soviets to limit mobiles to the small areas. What this would do is allow arms control to make vulnerable to surprise attack both the small mobile ICBM *and* the administration's current favorite ICBM mode—the MX missile placed on railroad trains that are parked during peacetime in a few garrisons (essentially roundhouses). All in the name of verifiability.

It can, of course, be argued that agreeing to keep mobile ICBMs in a set of relatively small areas helps make an agreement verifiable. But to pursue verifiability to such an extreme is to forget what it is you're trying to accomplish.

The objective of arms control is not perfect verifiability, any more than the objective of criminal law is perfect enforcement. You can have perfect law enforcement by prohibiting only a handful of acts about which evidence is easily obtained, whether or not such acts are harmful to society. Similarly you can have a perfectly verifiable arms agreement by deploying only a handful of easily countable but perfectly vulnerable systems.

If the United States had a survivable mobile ICBM, the Soviets would need so much throw-weight to attack it (it would require a massive barrage attack) that any cheating they could do by covertly deploying mobile ICBMs themselves would be strategically insignificant. Of course, the political importance of such cheating would remain, because verifiability is *one* consideration in negotiating arms control agreements. But the president needs a new proverb, one designed to highlight the principal requirement of preserving the country's strategic deterrent. Let's try "Verify but survive."

The basing method favored by the Air Force for the small mobile ICBM was to park the hardened mobile launchers next to Minuteman silos in the northern states. This mode of deployment might be compatible with the 25-square-kilometer proposal at Moscow, but it would leave the small mobile ICBMs vulnerable to some potentially rather straightforward Soviet efforts to put them at risk—e.g., depressing the trajectories of Soviet submarine-launched missiles, thus enabling them to catch the northern-deployed mobile ICBMs before they could get far enough from their known parking spots.

What the Moscow proposal does is to negate the advantages of a much better scheme: basing small mobile ICBMs in hardened launchers on the large southwestern military bases and letting the launchers, from a single logistics facility, move about on the roads of the base. This latter is clearly the most survivable way to base mobile ICBMs.

The administration decision at Moscow to, in effect, deny southwestern basing for mobile ICBMs is a decision that—in the name of verifiability and Air Force logistics preferences—makes any future small mobile ICBM considerably less survivable.

The Moscow proposal makes even less acceptable the administration's decision to rely on having hours of advance notice ("strategic warning") or on a quick decision to launch based on early sensor data alone ("launch-on-warning") for survivability of the MX in its proposed rail garrison "mobile" basing. By removing even the slight possibility that the MX trains could deploy routinely onto the nation's rail system, the administration proposes to agree to mortgage the ICBM force to Soviet willingness to ensure ample warning of an attack.

ICBM survivability is increasingly important for the United States because Soviet submarine-launched missile improvements threaten to put at risk, simultaneously, both our bombers and our ICBMs. This is particularly true because of the smaller number of targets in the United States that the Soviets would need to attack after START-encouraged reductions of U.S. ICBM silos. This would mean that, under such a START agreement, the only survivable U.S. strategic system would be the ballistic missiles located on the Trident submarines at sea, plus any submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles that START may permit.

A survivable small mobile ICBM would avoid making us put our strategic eggs in so few survivable baskets. If we do end up with all our strategic warheads that are survivable against a surprise attack being located in, say, a dozen Trident submarines at sea, then the administration's small-area proposal, if ultimately adopted, would move this nation toward accepting a posture of being prepared to launch all our ICBMs on warning alone. Thus we would both increase the risk of accidental war and forgo the possibility of solving the ICBM survivability problem for the foreseeable future.

By moving a major share of the U.S. strategic forces toward being launched on warning, the Reagan administration's confusion about survivability is consequently moving the world toward greater risk and instability. This is not the purpose of either strategic modernization or arms control.

Brent Scowcroft was national security adviser, 1975-77. John Deutch was undersecretary of energy, 1977-79. R. James Woolsey was undersecretary of the Navy, 1977-79.

BY SUSAN HARLAN