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“Can Democracy Defend Itself?”

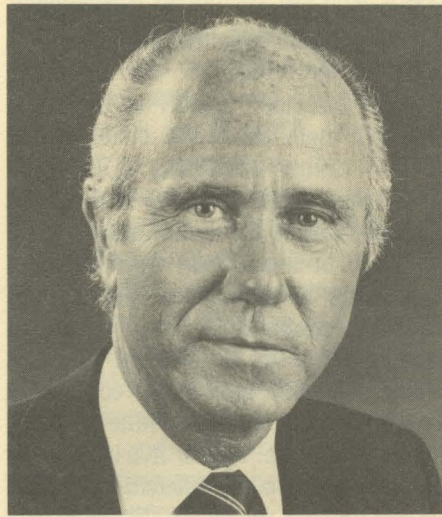
By Arnaud de Borchgrave

Editor's Preview: In this issue, Arnaud de Borchgrave, one of the world's most intrepid and well-known journalists, asks, “Can democracy defend itself?”

This presentation was originally delivered during the August 1987 Shavano Institute for National Leadership's seminar, “Can Democracy Preserve Our Freedom? Constitutional Government and the Politics of Self Interest” before an audience of 300 business, government, media and community leaders from around the country at the historic Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.

Douglas Edwards, the senior anchorman at CBS, has called censorship one of the greatest threats to democracy, but in his various pronouncements on this subject, he fails to mention the most pernicious form of censorship practiced by the media: censorship by omission. Stories of vital concern to national and international security are sometimes deliberately suppressed, ignored or buried on the inside pages of newspapers, for example, because they might change perceptions in a way that the self-appointed opinion molders of the dominant media culture would disapprove of. This is not an unsubstantiated charge; there are many well-known instances which are a matter of public record, and, of course, many which remain inside stories in the field of journalism. I can recite them from memory for at least an hour.

When I first joined this profession, right after World War II, I thought that if I were successful I might, with luck, get a ringside seat to history in the making. It never



crossed my mind that a journalist was supposed to make history. And that, sadly, is what the profession is intent upon. Journalists today are no longer spectators; they have become players in national politics and international relations, the game of nations. And how they report events has a very important impact on the course of world affairs. Characteristically, however, journalists are unwilling to admit how much influence they wield, displaying such reluctance that their attitude is reminiscent of Niccolo Machiavelli in the old tale which says that on his deathbed his confessor pleaded with him to at long last renounce the devil. According to the story, the Italian philosopher leaned forward and with his last breath said, “Please, Father, this is no time to be making enemies.”

The Peace Ploy

To listen to them, you would think that today's liberals believe there is only one truly evil system in the

world: South Africa. And they seem to suggest, moreover, that if only we were to treat the USSR, Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Angola and Ethiopia with a little respect, these countries would start behaving the way democracies behave. The members of the liberal community also choose not to recognize that the international peace movement is used as a mere ploy in the low-intensity, low-risk warfare practiced by our adversaries. In recent days with the Central American peace treaty proposals, this reality has been pointedly ignored.

I have covered 17 wars as a journalist and I fought in World War II for four years in the British Royal Navy. My first trip to the Soviet Union was while on convoy duty when I was 16 years old. Since then, I have been a peace activist, but not in the conventional sense, for I happen to be what used to be called a “hawk.” Why? Because the lesson of the past is that world peace was never more secure than when the United States was most powerful. Now, obviously, the Soviet leadership does not want war. Their goal is, quite simply, victory without war. Years ago, the Kremlin hit upon the brilliant strategy of using the slogan “peace” as if it were a weapon of war. What the Soviets counted upon was the West's gullible acceptance of the peace movement as a genuine impetus for reform.

Current negotiations could lead to the denuclearization of Western Europe we are told. But we keep forgetting that it is not nuclear weapons that killed two million Cambodians or one million Afghans, or turned one-third of Afghanistan's population into refugees, or killed 12 million people in the 145 major conflicts since the end of World War II. Some civil wars in Africa since then have killed as many as 250,000 people in a few days. A denuclearized Europe, in my judgment, would make war once again thinkable and leave the Soviet Union as the world's paramount military power. It is only the nuclear

deterrent that has given Europe the longest period of peace that it has known in its history — 42 consecutive years.

The Media and “The Closing of the American Mind”

The sum total of all the knowledge accumulated throughout recorded history is now doubling every 10 years or less. Yet extraordinarily few people seem to understand that one of the most significant events of our era is the often-successful seizure of popular cultural institutions — the press, radio, television, the theater and the film industry — by the Left. The battle is by no means decided, but its outcome will determine whether we succumb once and for all to the “totalitarian temptation,” in the words of French journalist Jean-Francois Revel, or whether we will continue to expand the frontiers of freedom and live as free people.

Sidney Hook’s latest book, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century*, documents how intellectuals have consistently taken the line of least resistance in this century. All the totalitarian regimes which have been led in my own lifetime by the likes of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung and Pol Pot were to a very large extent intellectual constructions designed, shaped and served by intellectuals. And the dominant liberal media community to which I have belonged for 41 years often blindly follows the pilot fish of the academic community.

A few months ago, *Insight*, the weekly magazine which I serve as Editor-in-Chief,

About the Author

As *Newsweek*’s chief foreign correspondent and a senior editor for 25 of his years there, Arnaud de Borchgrave covered most of the world’s major news events from 1950-1980. The recipient of numerous journalism awards, in 1980 he turned to fiction, co-authoring two international bestsellers with Robert Moss: *The Spike*, on the KGB and the western media, and *Monimbo*, a novel about Cuban-sponsored terrorism. Mr. de Borchgrave is a director of the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies and an adjunct fellow at American University as well as the editor-in-chief of *Insight Magazine* and the *Washington Times*.

featured a cover story on what we consider to be the book of the year. Simon and Schuster, the publisher, originally estimated that this book might sell five or six thousand copies, but it topped the bestseller list for months. The book is University of Chicago Professor Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*. His provocative thesis is that in the name of openness, American minds have actually become closed. Millions of readers want to

“Years ago, the Kremlin hit upon the brilliant strategy of using the slogan “peace” as if it were a weapon of war.”

know how and why this happened. Bloom suggests some serious answers, and one of them is the reason for my own continuing involvement in journalism. Our great open society tolerates an incredible “Johnny-one-note” quality in its media. Although there are 25,000 media outlets in this country including 1,700 daily newspapers, 4,000 television stations and approximately 10,000 radio stations, these are rarely in competition when it comes to differing viewpoints and they seem to exhibit an extraordinary lack of balance in their reportage. In any Western European capital one will find many contending newspapers, for example: nine in Paris, eleven in London, four or five in Brussels and so on. All espouse different views. And yet our nation’s capital, Washington, D.C., the center of the free world, was for some time a one-newspaper town until *The Washington Times* was established (and this was possible only with foreign backing).

Openness, as Professor Bloom points out, is no longer considered to be the means to exploring different answers to the great questions of our time but is, rather, an excuse not to answer them at all. We face this same problem particularly in the media. On American campuses, a new generation of teachers, many of them former anti-Vietnam war activists with, of course, academic tenure, do not seem to believe that the old books have anything to teach other than the values of the individual writers. They have worn their cynicism and their pseudo-moralistic liberalism on their sleeves ever since they were youths, and they never tire of conjuring up the illusion that the world is a gigantic stage for some sort of morality melodrama in which the United States is

invariably cast in the role of the villain on the wrong side of history. America, according to them, is the imperialist, the racist, the exploiter, the warmonger, and on it goes.

Openness as it was inculcated in this country in the ‘60s and ‘70s became synonymous with “doing your own thing.” Students were encouraged to repudiate everything that did not jibe with their own interests while at the same time

remaining “value-free.” This is the generation that is teaching, making movies, running TV news programs, editing newspapers and magazines. And these are the people who believe that they liberated the blacks, and women and the poor misunderstood Soviet Union. To lecture on the need for discipline; on the restraints liberty must impose on itself; on the need to defend democracy, with blood if necessary, against communist-sponsored wars of “national liberation”; to talk about family and country; all this is still condemned as right-wing and reactionary.

Our Weakening Foreign Policy Resolve

Adding and abetting these new and questionable leaders of our society are the old devices of semantic infiltration and historical revisionism. According to the latter, we drove the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam into Hanoi’s arms, just as we drove Castro into Moscow’s and Ortega into Cuba’s. This is an intentional distortion of events, but who can find an influential challenge to it in the media or the university? Such myths paralyze the intellect just as effectively as nerve gas, making it all too easy to sell out the Contra resistance in Nicaragua or to leak the nation’s most sensitive secrets, or to trash the CIA, or to give our adversaries the “benefit of the doubt” for the umpteenth time. These actions are just as popular today as they were ten, twenty, or thirty years ago.

The men in the Kremlin, who consider themselves to be in a permanent state of war with Western democracies, recognize, as they always have, that their principal

strategic objective is the seizure of our cultural institutions. *The Art of War*, a little book written 25 centuries ago by the Chinese philosopher of war, Sun Tsu, noted that the supreme goal in warfare is not to win 100 victories on 100 different battlefields, but to subdue the armies of one's enemies without ever having to fight them. In Central America some of our key congressmen who have invoked human rights considerations as a pretext for retreat and surrender are playing a role written, directed and produced by the Soviet Union as surely as if they were given the script to follow. And today we have video superstars whose loyalty is beyond question, but whose collective geopolitical I.Q. probably wouldn't break 100, busily stampeding public opinion into a very dangerous policy of appeasement and accommodation. By ditching the democratic resistance in Nicaragua and giving the Sandinistas the breathing spell they need to consolidate another Cuba in our own backyard, we are undeniably courting disaster and dealing a serious blow to our democracy's ability to defend itself.

The recently concluded Iran-Contra hearings produced 250 hours of testimony from 29 witnesses, a quarter-of-a-million pages of documents, 1,059 pages of official exhibits, many of them dealing with some of our most sensitive secrets, and yet most of our distinguished congressmen, with very few exceptions, still do not seem capable of coming to grips with the fundamental issue. The clear purpose of the Boland amendments was to scuttle the democratic resistance in Nicaragua and betray yet another set of pro-American, anti-communist friends. The clear respon-

sibility of President Reagan was, however, to thwart the Soviet-Cuban enterprise in Central America. It was Congress that drove the administration underground. As long as he was prevented from openly supplying the Nicaraguan freedom fighters, any president, in my judgment, would have been derelict had he not gone the extra mile, stretching the law to its limits, to head off what could still be a major geopolitical debacle for the United States in Central



America. And what do these Boland amendments really say? Well, the bottom line was that, from here on out, fighting the Sandinistas is prohibited by Congress. The Boland amendments, like several key amendments since 1975, reinforced, wittingly or unwittingly, the Brezhnev Doctrine that once a country goes communist, there is no turning back. Anti-communism is not only a crime punishable in the USSR, but now apparently in America as well. However, it is no crime to raise money for the Sandinistas; in fact, such fund-raising goes largely unreported in our media, and it is no crime to volunteer one's services for the Marxist forces in Nicaragua at the invitation of the ruling government.

If the United States cannot prevail, we will be handing the Soviet Union its principal strategic objective on a silver platter. The decoupling of the Western alliance, the

growing surge of neutralism in Europe, a rekindling of isolationism in the United States and our imminent descent upon denuclearization in Europe are all extremely dangerous developments.

The Iran-Contra hearings were only the most recent attack on the democratic process with a daily unveiling of the most sensitive information involving activities in which the U.S. had engaged. Often, the information was divulged without regard to the welfare of those who participated or offered aid in covert operations.

The Arias Plan for peace in Central America is another classic case of how vital national security interests have become subordinate to partisan domestic politics. The House of Representatives' irresponsible foray into the forbidden terrain of treaty-making portends a constitutional crisis of major proportions. The War Powers Act of 1973, like the Neutrality Act of the 1930s and a spate of congressional amendments over the last 12 years, have also seriously undermined America's role as the world's principal countervailing democratic power. In Congress, in the name of preventing future Vietnams, our politicians have enacted one resolution after another designed to erode the executive's authority in the exercise of its primary responsibility, which is national and international security. Congress has made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to conduct foreign policy in anything but a defensive and reactive manner. Specifically, Congress has voted down arms sales to foreign countries; proposed and, indeed, imposed arms-control negotiating positions which automatically weaken the administration's bargaining leverage; tied strings to foreign

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aid; curtailed and then sharply circumscribed covert intelligence operations; and so on and so on, gradually emasculating presidential authority in a flagrant fashion which the founding fathers surely never intended.

The Constitution of the United States provides for a strong executive, coupled with a strong system of accountability. But our 535 lawmakers, all with their hands on the foreign policy steering wheel, and a sprawling congressional bureaucracy of some 19,000 staffers, lobbyists, and assorted hangers-on, and whose perceptions are still largely derived from the dominant liberal media culture, are engaged in the kind of parliamentary games that brought France's Fourth Republic to its knees.

Meanwhile, the liberals are competing among themselves in order to lengthen the list of countries from which they feel we should withdraw. (Witness the reaction in Congress over the reflagging of ships in the Persian Gulf.)

Democracy's Vulnerability

Popular mythology is also contributing to a foreign policy gridlock. The liberal article of faith now seems to be that the principal foreign policy objectives for our country are avoiding another Vietnam and negotiating an arms control agreement with the Soviets. Well, nothing is easier than arms control agreements. They can be had, as Henry Kissinger reported when he came back from Moscow a few months ago, for the asking. But these agreements are absolutely meaningless. No amount of pious pleas for arms control and

quick fixes at summit meetings can alter, evade or attenuate the harsh political realities of our world. As Zbigniew Brzezinski remarked recently, if America were truly feared, not a single warship would have been necessary in the Persian Gulf; an American flag alone would have sufficed. Our capacity for effective deterrence has certainly been badly eroded.

There is a great deal of talk about *glasnost*, but although reforms may be under way in the Soviet bloc, this is no substitute for a strong foreign policy posture on the part of the U.S. I remember

when Jimmy Carter "buzzed" him on both cheeks.) Upon this occasion, I didn't have to wait a whole year to find out what was going on, because six months later I interrupted my Christmas vacation to cover the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

When we begin to equate the motives and objectives of the Soviet Union with those of the United States and even describe, as some of our media pundits do, American intentions as more threatening than Soviet intentions, we are in serious trouble. And when we begin to confuse the external principles of the American Revolu-

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feeling very enthusiastic as a young journalist about the spirit of Geneva — not in 1985, but 30 years before, in 1955. My ardor was quickly dampened because a year later I found myself in Hungary covering the Soviet invasion. In 1967, I covered the meetings between Prime Minister Kosygin and President Johnson, but a year later I found myself interrupting my honeymoon to cover the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1979 I covered the signing of Salt II in Vienna. Some of you may remember watching it on television. (Even Mr. Brezhnev seemed a little taken aback

tion with those of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship, the trouble worsens. Are most Americans still willing to fight and die to preserve our freedoms? Right now, our own Congress is reluctant to put up a few million dollars for people who are willing to fight and to die for principles that I think we should all share and cherish. We, like those freedom fighters, have been offered instead appeasement, accommodation and surrender on the installment plan. Inevitably, this is the fate that awaits democracies that take the line of least resistance. **A**



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