From time to time THE LAUCKS FOUNDATION calls attention to published material that might contribute toward clarification or understanding of critical issues affecting world peace. The accompanying reprints constitute Mailing No. 9.

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May 1, 1980

OMISSION:

In our Mailing No. 7, source for the article by Paul Johnson, entitled THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF TERRORISM, was inadvertently omitted. This statement was published in booklet form by the Jonathan Institute, 12 Harav Berlin Street, Jerusalem, Israel.

The statements in the present Mailing No. 9, by George Will and Senator Henry Jackson, were delivered at the Jerusalem Conference on International Terrorism, convened by the Jonathan Institute July 2-5, 1979. They were later published by the Institute in a booklet entitled TERRORISM AND THE MEDIA: ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY.

GEORGE WILL is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist whose articles appear in *Newsweek, The Washington Post* and more than 300 other newspapers in the United States. His book, *The Pursuit of Happiness and Other Sobering Thoughts,* was published recently to great acclaim.

THE JOURNALIST'S ROLE

The democracies are suffering from a failure of intelligence in the form of moral disarmament. This is a product of bad sociology and bad philosophy feeding on each other. From the false idea that extreme actions must have obvious causes in the social environment, it is but a short intellectual stagger to the equally false idea that such acts are justified. This is not an occasion for dissecting this argument. Suffice it to say that, for those interested in fighting terrorism, the salient truth is this: The direct causes of terrorism are terrorists, and the indirect causes are regimes that actively support or passively tolerate terrorism.

But perhaps the principal obstacle to effective action against terrorism is confusion in the minds of the democratic societies that are the targets of terrorism. In these societies, intelligence is being bewitched by language. Terrorists are *not* generally "desperate men." Many are, in fact, children of privilege. They are perhaps privileged psychopaths, but they are privileged nonetheless. Terrorism, we should not flinch from noting, can be fun. "The act of terrorism," wrote Malraux in *Man's Fate,* "is very often a potent instrument of self-expression, rather than just a means toward some political end."

Terrorist acts are not "senseless." Terrorism is (in the argot of the day) "cost-effective." Or, to borrow the language of the stock exchange, terrorism is "highly leveraged." This is, in part, because of instant and mass communication. Many years ago, a Chinese thinker

said, "Kill one, frighten 10,000." A modern student of terrorism has rightly said that in the television age, the axiom might be, "Kill one, frighten 10 million." It also is true that terrorism is "efficient" in the sense that sporadic terrorism can make necessary the constant deployment of enormous amounts of defensive material and energies. Furthermore, terrorism is efficient because one of its aims is to spread anxiety, and modern societies, which are especially susceptible to disruptions, are especially vulnerable to anxieties.

The fact that terrorism is efficient may account for the fact that terrorism is less vigorously rationalized than it used to be. Prior to the middle of the 20th century, terrorism was heavily ideological. It needed rationalizing ideas because there was little "justifying" evidence of its practicality. Today, with literate publics living in "wired nations," print and broadcast journalism change the terrorist's environment; terrorists still carry baggage, but their ideological efforts are perfunctory. Terrorism is obviously "justified" by its magnified effects. The media are the magnifiers.

Calculating the Public Interest

Perhaps the primary reason for the inadequate response of the democracies to terrorism is this: the democracies have not cleared their minds of cant about "social reforms" to "eliminate the social causes" of "senseless acts" by "desperate men." This clearing will take time. But it is not enough for the democracies (in Arthur Koestler's words) to "play for time and pray for time." The clock is ticking; the democracies should be acting. They know, or should know, that actions can be effective.

The idea that seems to underlie some media coverage of terrorism is this: Politics is a kind of physics, a field of force. Journalists should maintain a physicist's detachment, a sophistication too languid for moral judgments. Terrorism is thus parasitic off the media.

It may be that one reason terrorists can so effectively use the media is the systematic, almost philosophic, proud and even militant irresponsibility of the media. Does not the journalism profession now pride itself on refusing to calculate the social consequences of what it prints or broadcasts? Journalism suffers from, among other things, a "Watergate paradigm." Too many journalists are inclined to think that the role of journalists in Watergate (or, more precisely, the

central role that journalists are mistakenly supposed to have played in the Watergate drama) defines the normal and proper relationship between journalists and authorities. Journalists too often accept the idea that they are and should be, always, in an "adversary" relationship with government. So they need not calculate the consequences their coverage may have on the public interest. Calculating the public interest is, they reason, the adversary's business. Their business is to publish and broadcast without let or hindrance. Like all simple dogmas, this one has the charm of sparing those who accept it the unpleasant burden of thinking, of weighing difficult cases. But surely it is time that journalists think long and hard about the relationship that must exist between "the public's right to know" and "the public's need to know." As regards terrorism, the crucial question is: Does the public need to know everything, immediately? The task is to make journalism less useful to terrorists.

CONFERENCE SUMMARY STATEMENT

Read by Senator Henry Jackson
at the closing session, July 5, 1979

The Jerusalem Conference on International Terrorism defines terrorism as "the deliberate, systematic murder, maiming and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear in order to gain political ends."

The majority view of the Conference is that terrorism is a serious and growing threat to the people of all states which live under the rule of law; that it is no longer a national problem, but a global one; that it cannot be contained, let alone eliminated, except by concerted international action; and that the case for such action is overwhelming and urgent. At the same time such action should not jeopardize fundamental civil liberties.

There was profound concern at the accumulating volume of evidence that terrorists now have access to ample funds, modern weapons, regular training programs, ever-available sanctuaries and other support services provided by sovereign states belonging to the Soviet and Arab blocs.

The evidence is now sufficient to justify use of the phrase "Terrorist International" to describe the many and growing links between separate terrorist organizations, their use of communal services and their systematic exchange of information, resources and techniques.

While there is still debate over the extent to which the Soviet government, either directly or through its allies and satellites exercises central control over certain terrorist organizations, the view of the majority is that Soviet bloc weapons, training, finance, protective services and diplomatic assistance now constitute an important element in the scale and success of terrorism. Whatever the ideological or nationalist aspirations of individual terrorist groups, they have a common interest, which they share with the Soviet Union, in destroying the fabric of democratic, lawful societies all over the world.

Many believe that the response of the democracies to the threat posed by international terrorism has been hesitant and inadequate.

The civilized world is learning — but it is learning too slowly. Many participants believe the time has come for the leading democratic nations to convene a conference of all states which respect the principles of democracy and the rule of law, with a view to formulating concerted measures against the terrorist forces and their backers. It is suggested such action should include the following:

(1) A unanimous condemnation of terrorism without qualification or reserve.

(2) Enforcement of an international convention against terrorism, for which the European Convention on Terrorism would serve as a working model, and which would cover the definition of terrorism as an international crime, the denial of political status for criminals so defined, common procedures for extradition, appropriate penalties, and the exchange of evidence.

(3) A complementary agreement to take concerted measures, including diplomatic, economic and other sanctions, against states which aid terrorists by supplying them with money and arms, according them facilities for training and propaganda, and granting them refuge.

(4) An undertaking to adopt legislation for the effective enforcement of The Hague, Tokyo and Montreal Conventions dealing with air piracy and related crimes.

(5) Agreement to take all necessary, proper and legal measures for the effective exchange of information on terrorist activities.

(6) An energetic and continuing effort to alert public opinion to the dangers of terrorism to civil liberties and to the rights of individuals in a free society and the need for effective measures to combat it.

The majority view of the participants in the Jerusalem Conference on International Terrorism believes that the above measures represent the minimum necessary to defend the democratic and lawful states from the threat which faces them, and it calls on governments and peoples throughout the civilized world to unite behind this program.

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GROUNDS FOR SUSPICION

A SADNESS sometimes approaching despair characterizes many of the personal communications—correspondence between friends—that one happens to see in the present. It is the somber withdrawal of individual decency from the profile of ugly behavior, at home as well as abroad. Greed has become a form of economic righteousness while self-interest is now an ethical principle. Such is also the picture given by journalistic accounts of today's happenings, and the statistical reports of man's inhumanity to man suggest that we are spectators of cold-blooded rivalry between competitors in excess. The portrait of society sketched ten years ago by John Schaar in his essay, "Reflections on Authority" (*New American Review* No. 8, January, 1970), needs no revision:

> We hear of riots and rebellions, demonstrations and assassinations. Heads of states in many modern countries cannot safely go among the citizenry. Dignified ceremonies are raucously interrupted by riotous crowds chanting obscenities at the officials. Policemen have been transformed from protectors into pigs. A lot of young people are trying drugs and a lot of older people are buying guns. A few months ago a man entered the employment security building in Olympia, Washington, and tried to murder a computer. He failed, however, because 1401's brains were protected by bulletproof steel plate. Some developers recently announced plans for a "maximum security subdivision" in Maryland at a minimum cost of $200,000 per house. The subdivision will be ringed by a steel fence and patrolled by armed guards, the shrubbery will hide electronic detectors, and visitors will be checked through a blockhouse. In 1968, American governmental units hired 26,000 additional policemen, an increase of 7 per cent over 1967. 1968 was the second year in a row during which police employment rose more steeply than any other kind of public employment.

After this sampling of the common life, Prof. Schaar says: "It is the thesis of this essay that legitimate authority is declining in the modern states; that in a real sense, 'law and order' *is* the basic political question of our day." His comment reflects the way more and more people are now behaving. The nations which are supposed to provide their people with "law and order" are equally bad or worse in their behavior. Speaking of the public temper which began with the cold war of the 1950s, Henry Steele Commager (in the *Christian Science Monitor* for Jan. 2) recounts some of its effects:

> It is futile now to allocate responsibility for the disasters that followed: the expansion of the cold war from Europe to Asia; the Korean war, whose heritage is still with us; the collapse of the much-touted Alliance for Progress; the entanglement of the United States in the internal affairs of Southeast Asia; and the greatest tragedy in our history since slavery, the Vietnam war, a tragedy that (unlike slavery) we deliberately embraced. These interventions set a pattern that was shortly reproduced in every quarter of the globe.
>
> The United States, assuming that God and history had imposed upon it an obligation to preserve peace and freedom everywhere, intervened in Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Greece, Iran, and perhaps a dozen other nations in Africa and Asia. Sometimes it was done overtly; for the most part, covertly. . . .
>
> U.S. intervention led to a vast growth of the military; to the burgeoning of the Central Intelligence Agency in 60 countries; to the emergence, for the first time, of the principle that it cost more to be at peace than to be at war; to the militarization of the economy, of society, and of politics, of science and of learning; to the creation of what was most feared by the Founding Fathers—the "security state."

This is the sort of thing that was happening while we—or most of us—were going about our personal business during the past twenty-five years. The selective eye of the historian is needed for mirroring what we the people have actually done. Prof. Commager continues:

> Chickens finally came home to roost. We had created the atomic weapon and we are, so far, the only nation to detonate it in anger; we discovered that we had opened a Pandora's box of atomic weapons. Soon the Soviets had the atom bomb—soon half a dozen nations had it—and now we are threatened by its proliferation throughout the globe. We had ousted a Mossadeq from the throne in Iran and now we have an Ayatollah Khomeini to deal with.
>
> We overthrew Salvador Allende in Chile and now are confronted with an intransigent totalitarian government that makes a mockery of our campaign for human rights; we launched a Bay of Pigs assault against Castro and are shocked that he should turn to the Soviets for support.
>
> We built up the largest and most expensive military establishment in history but discover that it is incapable of providing security against the threats presented by the modern world. Instead it has a ruinous impact on our economy.
>
> We constitute 6 per cent of the population of the globe but use 40 per cent of its oil, and are unable to cope with an "energy" problem that is largely of our own making. We have allowed money and special interests to corrupt politics at every level, and are astonished to discover that the majority of our people have no faith in the efficacy of political processes.

What has happened to Americans, and to their country? Prof. Schaar, in the thirty-seven pages of his essay, develops the diagnosis that a breakdown of authority is the underlying cause of the increasing social disintegration.

What is authority? It is a source which has the right to say what is right, and what is wrong. Fundamentally, authority is based on trust. Brute power is the only substitute for trust, and may be needed at the margins of even a fairly good society, but when force becomes the major resource of government the affairs of that society are conducted at a sub-human level and its structure is on the verge of collapse.

Prof. Schaar finds that authority begins with the origin of a society:

> A nation has a unique birth and is also a continuous rebirth. And birth requires a father or author, the one who, whether mythologically or actually, brought the original laws and customs, thereby making a people a people. ("Law" means limit or boundary. In Greek, the words for "law," "boundary line," and "shepherd" had the same root.) The founder of a people is usually either a god or a messenger and mediator between gods and men: the creative moment in the birth of a nation is the birth of a religion. . . . Even the enlightened American Founding Fathers saw the Constitution as a partial embodiment of that higher order called the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God. . . .
>
> No one needs to be told that these ancient patterns of thought no longer prevail. The old moralities of custom and religion are husks and shells. With the growth of the special modern form of individual self-consciousness as consciousness of separation, men lose sight of the dependence of the group upon morality and of the dependence of morality upon the group.

In separation, without the bond of unity with our fellows, "Each man becomes his own author and oracle, his own boundary setter and truth maker." In older times, the authority which stood above both citizen and ruler was a principle to which both were answerable—a principle embodying justice and right. But today—

> The ego recognizes no source of truth and morality external to itself. . . . We have no mainstream political or moral teaching that tells men they must remain bound to each other even one step beyond the point where those bonds are a drag and a burden on one's personal desires. Americans have always been dedicated to "getting ahead"; and getting ahead has always meant leaving others behind. Surely a large part of the zealous repression of radical protest in America yesterday and today has its roots in the fact that millions of men who are apparently "insiders" know how vulnerable the system is because they know how ambiguous their own attachments to it are. The slightest moral challenge exposes the fragile foundations of legitimacy in the modern state.

In an analysis of modern political theory Prof. Schaar shows that government now obtains its legitimacy solely from the capacity to "service" the desires of the people, not from its conformity to over-arching moral law. Despite rhetorical claims to support morality and freedom, modern governments stand or fall by their usefulness to what are conceived to be private and public *interests*. But, looked at carefully, their performance in even this weakens year by year:

> The government must now defend national security and enlarge the GNP. But it is increasingly clear that the nation-state can no longer guarantee the first at all, and that in the modern states the second has been accomplished to the point where it threatens the irreversible degradation of the environment and the species.
>
> We have finally made the engine that can smash all engines, the power that can destroy all power. Security today, bought at the price of billions, means that We shall have fifteen minutes' warning that They intend to annihilate us. The most powerful state today cannot provide security, but only revenge. . . .
>
> The case with abundance comes out about the same way. . . . Societies have always been, in part, organizations for the production of the nutrients of life, but modern civilizations are dominated as no others have ever been by the law of production. . . . Modern production obscures the sun, pollutes the air, and chews up great forests. It drinks whole lakes and rivers or transmutes them into abominations . . . The civilization of production periodically destroys men by heaps and piles in war, and it daily mangles the spirits of others in meaningless labor. . . . The modern state, then, insofar as it is provider and guarantor of increase, and insofar as its success in this task is a source of legitimacy, has succeeded too well: its success has become a threat to survival. The masses have not yet heard this message, though some hints have begun to penetrate the thicket of propaganda and inherited ideas.

So it is that there is creeping psychological depression abroad in the land. How else explain the sudden rush to antiquated forms of fundamentalist religion, and nervous alliances with new sects and cults by the sophisticated? To what can we look for guidance? Is there no "authority" beyond the industrial catering service of modern government? Education is certainly not a source of hope. One recalls that Clark Kerr, once head of the enormous complex of institutions dispensing higher learning in California, defined the multiversity as "a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money." No moral authority there.

Prof. Schaar puts the present mood in sociopolitical terms:

> Many of the sons are no longer sure they want the legacy of the fathers. Among young people, the peer group increasingly takes priority as the agency of socialization, and the values it sponsors are new and hostile to those of the adult world. Many people are seeking ways to live in the system without belonging to it: their hearts are elsewhere. Others, convinced that the organized system will not in the long run permit the escape into private liberty, or feeling that such an escape is ignoble, are acting politically to transform the system. In the eyes of large and growing numbers of people, the social and political landscape of America, the most advanced of the advanced states, is no green and gentle place, where men may long abide. Rather that landscape is a scene of wracked shapes and desert spaces: what we mainly see are the eroded forms of once-authoritative institutions and ideas; what we mainly hear are the hollow winds of once-compelling ideologies and the unnerving gusts of new moods and slogans; and what we mainly feel in our hearts is the granite consolidation of the technological and bureaucratic order, which may bring physical comfort and great collective power, or sterility, but not political liberty and moral autonomy. All the modern states, with the United States in the vanguard, are well advanced toward a crisis of legitimacy.

How is all this to be understood? Schaar suggests that a failure of leadership plays a part. It seems certain that there are very few among the privileged and qualified who set an example to the rest. But leadership itself is not well understood and our impoverished educational institutions are no place to send candidates of apparent promise. We have two modest suggestions: one, to emulate, so far as we can, each one in his own way, the labors that Socrates undertook in behalf of his fellow citizens of

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GROUNDS FOR SUSPICION

(Continued)

Athens (we have just come across a good account of what he set out to do, in the current *American Scholar*); the other, a proposal found in a thoughtful letter by a nun (in *The Ecologist* for last November-December). Since the latter is brief, we quote from it first. The correspondent, Sister Angelina, is commenting on the dismissal by an earlier writer of the importance of the religious scale of values in Amish and Hutterite communities. What is religious and what is not is, he maintained, only a matter of definition, asking: "Could it not be possible that profit-making itself is the religion of materialism?" Sister Angelina replied:

> It is scarcely disputable that the race for material goods is a religion-substitute; but that leaves unsolved the problem of what substitute the secular stable economy can find for both religion and money-grubbing. Mere contentedness to live in peace with one's neighbors is a pleasant idea on paper, but it ignores the actual dynamics of human psychology.
>
> The late Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy pointed out in many of his works that all traditional pre-industrial societies had or have a complex metaphysical doctrine of their various crafts (including agriculture). Each is seen not only as a means of producing material necessities, but as a paradigm of the cosmogonic act; and consequently also as a meditative path. An individual's craft was a vocation in the true sense; an inseparable part of his or her own being.
>
> The loss of this traditional approach to the crafts is the root cause of all "industrialism," since it is only when the inner meaning of craft has been forgotten that its whole essence can be sacrificed to methods which merely increase its external productive efficiency. . . . I am convinced that a return to a vocational society in the traditional sense is the only workable long-term solution to the psychological and spiritual problems of a post-industrial economy.

Apart from concession to the present-day vocabulary—after all, the "economy" is a subordinate element in a good society—this seems about as fundamental as could be. The way we think about what we do every day accomplishes the shaping of human character. To see it as a paradigm of "a cosmogonic act" is to relate ourselves once more to the wide world of nature and to find a deep and transcendental meaning in what has been called "natural law." One may recognize the beginnings of this restoration in the ecological thinking and practice now going on. The metaphysics may come later, developing quite naturally—with some help from ancient sources—in the course of time.

Political methods accomplish little or nothing so long as the sources of social inspiration in philosophy and philosophical religion are ignored. Politics is entirely derivative in its moral authority. Plato saw this and retired from politics at an early age, turning to the example of Socrates as foundation of a philosophic therapy for the ills of his times. In his *American Scholar* article, Kenneth Seeskin tells how Socrates proceeded:

> At his trial, Socrates shocked the jurors by proclaiming his ignorance. Unlike his predecessors from Asia Minor or southern Italy, he could not justify his life by taking pride in what he had contributed to the sum total of human knowledge, since, by his own admission, he had contributed nothing. His only justification was to compare himself to a gadfly. The city of Athens was like a large horse given to laziness; it was Socrates' job to rouse it from time to time by stinging it into activity. Hence the first great philosopher in the West was known primarily as a troublemaker and a busybody.
>
> Socrates can be viewed as a hero only to the extent that one distinguishes the goals of the philosopher from those of the scientist. The scientist hopes to arrive at conclusions so well established that they become part of the body of accepted beliefs which, from that point on, can be taken for granted. Socrates' mission was just the opposite: to cast suspicion on accepted beliefs and replace the certainty of established fact with the troublesome insecurity of philosophical doubt. . . .
>
> Philosophy tends to thrive during periods of intellectual disorder and heterodoxy. It is no accident, therefore, that many philosophers have rejected straight expository prose as a medium of expression and have chosen aphorisms, autobiographies, dialogues, plays, myths, meditations, or dialectical arguments instead. . . .
>
> In a sense the citizens of Athens were right: the philosopher is a criminal. If the scientist adds to our knowledge of the world, the philosopher, by casting doubt on the foundations which support that knowledge and pointing the way to radically new alternatives, takes away from it. To the charge that what he is doing is scandalous the philosopher has no defense. Thus each time a new discipline severs its connections with philosophy in order to seek definitive answers to its questions, the true philosopher rejoices—here is someone else he can rob of certainty.

This seems fair enough, save for the fact that Plato and Socrates were never without high certainties of another order—certainties neglected by both the scientists and ordinary folk of our time. It is these which now need attention, along with the disillusionments that are coming, with or without Socratic provocation and accompaniment.

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MAX LERNER

Are we caught up in an impossible dream?

NEW YORK CITY — Before the presidential campaign goes much further, we ought to stop and ask ourselves what we want of our presidents, what burdens we place on them, why we are disillusioned when they don't come through.

It is one man's thesis that the presidency itself — hard and crazy as it is — doesn't have to be an impossible job. Presidents would be healthier, happier, and more effective, and would live longer, if neither we nor they demanded so much of them.

Haynes Johnson, in a new book — "In the Absence of Power" (Viking) — does a survey of Jimmy Carter's conduct of the presidential office, and comes up with a bleak appraisal. There won't be many to challenge it. I've tried to keep up with my journalistic colleagues from day to day, and most of them sound so depressed about America and the world that I expect them any moment to break down and give up the ghost.

I suggest that the commentators and the people are part of the problem, as are most of the college professors who hold forth as social scientists. They are caught up in an impossible dream, in which Jimmy Carter is also caught up — that a president can know everything, be everywhere, foresee everything, do everything, mend everything, solve everything. Which in turn is part of another dream — that the government can and must do all these things, with the pesident functioning as its most visible "leader" symbol.

Take Jimmy Carter. He is earnest, hard-working, intelligent. He tries desperately hard. Nor has he done measurably worse than most of his predecessors.

Where he has been ineffective has been in tackling big problems — inflation, energy — by government regulatory action, in handling Congress, and in trying to organize public opinion in defiance of Congress. What he has done best has been either by moving toward the deregulation of industries (airlines, banking) or by his personal skill as mediator, as witness the Camp David accords.

This says something about the larger problem of the presidency. From Ulysses Grant to William McKinley, the prevailing conservative doctrine was a severe and self-defeating laissez-faire that left the big fish to eat the little fish while preaching the merits of social Darwinism and the survival of the fittest. Good presidents like Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were those who dared risk the power of government to challenge this. But our own time has swung the other way, and the prevailing liberal doctrine is to load everything on the state. No president has successfully challenged it — certainly not Jimmy Carter.

Thus, the earlier presidential failures lay in not doing enough, the later ones in trying to do too much. The fact is that few presidents can rise higher than the thinking of their time, which is supposed to be the business of the professors, writers and philosophers. Our failed presidents are the victims of that thinking.

James Barber argues in "The Pulse of Politics" that we should judge presidents by how much they know. Certainly Jimmy Carter was both ignorant and innocent when he started, and — judging by his current gaffes — Ronald Reagan is pretty ignorant, even if not innocent. Yet the man who knew most about the government — Lyndon Johnson — suffered one of the most disastrous failures.

Does this dispose of the whole presidential "leadership" idea? Not necessarily. Leadership is a compound of vision, direction, decision, dialogue with the people. In our own time, both Roosevelts had it, even uncharismatic Harry Truman had it, and John Kennedy was developing it by the time of his death.

I am tempted to apply to the presidency the insight of Gen. Kutuzov, in Tolstoy's "War and Peace" — that no general knows what is really happening on the sprawling field of battle, but he has to give his officers and men the confidence that comes from feeling that he does know.

If a president understands this, if he gives direction not only to the government but to the voluntary energies of the people, if he has respect for the social organism and gives it an awareness both of its limits and what it can accomplish, then the presidency won't be a killing job, and the impossible dream may become a possible one.

Canada's startling question all but ignored

ANALYSIS

By James Reston
N.Y. Times News Service

WASHINGTON — The governor general of Canada asked a startling question this week, but Washington was so preoccupied with events, or nonevents, in Iran, Afghanistan and the political struggles between Sadat and Begin, that his question was scarcely noticed.

"Will Canada still exist as a country at the end of this decade," Governor General Edward Schreyer asked at the opening session of Parliament in Ottawa, "or will it have broken up by the tensions of our past and recent history." Canada, O Canada!, say it ain't so.

To most people around here, this is a silly question — sort of like asking whether the Atlantic will be an ocean at the end of the 1980s, but the fact that it could even be asked in Ottawa and ignored in Washington has to mean something more than Levesque rhymes with Quebec.

For one thing, it means that Washington tends to focus on distant disasters and sort of forgets about its neighbors. By now, we recognize every hair in the ayatollah's beard. We publish the remarks of President Bani-Sadr and Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh in Tehran, as if they made sense, and have even learned to pronounce their names. But Rene Levesque sets May 20 as the date of a referendum in Canada on whether to give his government a mandate to negotiate independence and equal partnership with the rest of Canada, and it gets almost as much attention in the American press as the Mexican president's forthcoming visit to Cuba (which incidentally is not unimportant).

Nobody should suppose that the Quebec referendum does not have the attention of the highest officials of the Carter administration. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance is going to Ottawa next week to meet the members of the new government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and no doubt he will mention in private and in passing that something seems to be coming up in Quebec, but this is clearly none of our official business.

However, there is nothing in the U.S. or Canadian constitutions that forbids anybody from making one or two observations about the governor general's question, or even from sending a few affectionate remarks to our friends above the Canadian border.

First, the good news. There is unmistakable evidence down here that the spring is creeping north. The temperature was over 70 yesterday in Washington and will be almost 80 today. This promises to bring out the dogwood blossoms on the slopes of the Blue Ridge by Wednesday, and according to various agencies of the U.S. government, this recklessly beautiful natural invasion will eventually reach Canada.

Second, while we don't want to interfere, it's a little hard down here to be indifferent to the governor general's question, even if Trudeau put him up to it. Canada wasn't indifferent when Mr. Lincoln insisted that he would preserve the Union of the United States even at the risk of War Between the States.

Third, without being cheeky about it, the unity of Canada is, in a way, "our business." A careful check of the world map, which nobody around here seems to look at much these days, tends to show that Canada is nearer to the United States geographically than Iran or even Afghanistan.

Canada is our strategic shield, lying between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is our most important trading partner, and maybe even more important, if we ever get around to defending our common civilization, instead of dividing over the hot-pursuit of tuna fish along the U.S.-Canadian border, it is our dearest friend.

In these parts, one must be careful about Canadian politics. It's not that we have anything against Rene Levesque in the United States, or his notion of a Canadian commonwealth of independent states. We fiddled with that idea at Philadelphia in the 18th century, and for almost 200 years, from Jefferson and Madison to George Wallace — which is quite a distance — we experimented with the doctrine of states' rights. It was not a spectacular success.

Lately, we also have been experimenting with a couple of other crazy ideas: (1) that we can commit our allies to policies that are useful to our presidential politics without consulting them in advance, and then condemning them for refusing to follow us; and (2) that we can get our prisoners safely out of Tehran, 10,000 miles from home, by threatening that we will withdraw the trade and embassies of the West, thereby leaving the hostages to the tender mercies and protecion of the Soviet Union.

(Incidentally, the Soviet Union now has a "friendship mission" in Tehran, and is building up its military contingents along the Soviet-Iranian border.)

Obviously, the United States has to deal with the threat to its strategic interests around the major source of oil in the Middle East, and pay attention to the tragic difference between Israel and the Arab states, but as the governor general's question in Ottawa indicates, there are also some other fundamental and neglected problems nearer home.

There is no great crisis in Canada. Actually, Levesque in Quebec has done us all a favor by dramatizing the dangers of division in Canada and in the rest of the hemisphere, and making us pay attention to the things that unite us closer home.

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