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THE STRANGE CAREER OF PAUL NITZE

"How is it that an American arms control negotiator can take a talk in the woods near Geneva with his Soviet counterpart, work out an understanding that violates his instructions, be rebuked by the White House and then lobby half the world to change the Administration's strategy -- all without being dismissed and, in the end, even convincing the Administration to give him new maneuverability?"

That was the question asked in an "analysis" piece in the New York Times about Paul H. Nitze, the 76-year old Democrat whom President Reagan appointed head of the U.S. delegation to the Geneva talks on limiting intermediate-range nuclear forces. According to the senior Times reporter, Nitze is a "master of the bureaucracy, skillful manipulator of the news media and intimate of the New York financial community ... smart, devious, charming, tough and fiercely determined to get his way."

The New York Times profile on Nitze fulsomely praised him for the way he sabotaged the Reagan arms-control policy by getting the media to support Nitze's view rather than Reagan's. While purporting to capsulize Nitze's life since 1947, the Times chose to print only all the news that fits, instead of "all the news that's fit to print."

Paul H. Nitze was a New York investment banker who developed the original strategy for U.S. unilateral disarmament in the face of the growing Soviet nuclear threat. As chairman of a section of the National Council of Churches' Fifth World Order Study Conference, assembled in Cleveland, Nov. 18-21, 1958, he produced a report called "The Power Struggle and Security in a Nuclear-Space Age."

Nitze's report said, "Since we as Christians could not ourselves press the button for such destruction, we must declare our conviction that we cannot support the concept of nuclear retaliation." Rejecting "nuclear retaliation" means telling the Soviets in advance that, if they hit us, we will not hit back. That's a clear invitation to the aggressor to go ahead and press the button -- a shocking step toward national suicide.

The Nitze report pinned our hope for peace on nuclear disarmament brought about by U.S. unilateral initiatives with the Soviets following our example. The fatal fallacy of

this argument is proved by the fact that, since Nitze first promoted this argument, the United States has made many unilateral initiatives, but there is not a single verified instance of the Soviets' following suit.

Two years later, Nitze carried his unilateral disarmament message to one of the most important gatherings of military strategists every assembled. At a National Strategy Seminar at Asilomar, California on April 29, 1960, Paul Hilken Nitze proposed that the United States scrap all "Class A" or counterforce-capable strategic weapons and retain only systems capable of retaliation.

Nitze then added "(3) that we multilateralize the command of our retaliatory systems by making SAC [the U.S. Strategic Air Command] a NATO command, and (4) that we inform the United Nations that NATO will turn over ultimate power of decision on the use of these systems to the General Assembly of the United Nations." Giving the Soviet- and Third World-controlled UN a veto over our weapons would ensure that the United States would never make any actual use of its retaliatory strategic force.

Nitze's plan to reduce U.S. nuclear strength was so drastic that it would enable the Soviets to pass us quickly in the strategic arms race. Why in the world would any American want to do such a thing to the United States?

Nitze presented his rationale by means of an analogy. He said, "In a poker game with several players, what is the most dangerous hand? Not the worst hand, but the second best hand. With the second best hand, one is tempted to follow up the betting, but if one does, one gets clobbered." In other words, Nitze's plan to scrap our counterforce weapons and make our retaliatory weapons unusable was designed to make us so very much weaker than the Soviets that they would never feel the "need" to attack us.

In 1963, Kennedy's Defense Secretary Robert Strange McNamara brought Nitze into the Pentagon as Secretary of the Navy, and subsequently promoted him to Deputy Secretary of Defense. As one of the Pentagon's key policymakers, he helped implement McNamara's program of scrapping all our medium and intermediate-range strategic missiles, three-fourths of our multi-megaton ICBMs, and nearly 2,000 strategic bombers, while the Russians scrapped nothing at all.

It's a mystery why a man like Nitze wants to weaken the United States. But it's an even bigger mystery how he wormed his way into the Reagan Administration.