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LET'S ADMIT ARMS CONTROL IS A FAILURE

"Oh, but it will interfere with arms control!", cry the liberals at every event that might cast a cloud over the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in Geneva in November. But the real truth is that arms control is already a failure and we should admit it.

During the dozens of conferences over the last 20 years, in which our announced objective has been arms control, the military balance shifted from U.S. superiority to Soviet superiority. If arms control were a scientific experiment, it would long ago have been abandoned as a failure and, worse, as life-endangering to those who believe in it.

The SALT I Agreements of 1972 were our magnanimous offer on the altar called "arms control." The United States agreed to abandon the strategic nuclear superiority on which our national security had been based for the preceding 25 years, and we offered the Soviets the olive branch of nuclear parity.

But that didn't satisfy the Soviets. They went into SALT I negotiations with nuclear superiority as their goal, including a first-strike counterforce capability and a strong defensive system. They used "arms control" as a tactic to achieve that objective.

During the decade following SALT I, U.S. defense spending declined until it is only 5% of our Gross National Product. Soviet military spending, on the other hand, steadily increased to become 20% of the U.S.S.R.'s Gross National Product.

During this period the Soviet Union spent three times more on strategic nuclear forces than did the United States. That's why President Reagan, using electronic charts, told a nationwide television audience in 1981 that, "The truth of the matter is that the Soviet Union does have a definite margin of superiority -- enough so there is risk and there is what I have called a window of vulnerability."

Today the Soviets have four times more strategic nuclear delivery vehicles and warheads than when SALT negotiations began, and they are on the verge of major defensive capabilities. Three-fourths of the Soviet nuclear systems are less than five years old.

The United States now has 8,000 fewer nuclear weapons than when SALT began and we

have reduced our megatonnage at least threefold. Three-fourths of our weapons are more than 15 years old.

The Soviets agreed to enter into the SALT I negotiations and to sign the SALT I ABM Treaty in 1972 primarily to stop our ABM program which was then ready for deployment. The Soviets in 1972 were deeply engaged in a crash program to catch up with us in offensive nuclear weapons. They couldn't afford another crash program on ABM, so they used treaties instead of technology to catch up with us.

In 1962, the United States had nuclear superiority over the Soviets on the order of 8-to-1. It is obvious that the Soviets could not have achieved today's nuclear superiority over us without two concurrent movements: they built additional weapons at a rapid rate, and we dragged our feet.

Our foot dragging was done in the name of arms control. U.S. politicians sought the illusive goal of arms control much as the medieval knights sought the Holy Grail. Only those who pursued arms control were considered "pure" enough (pure, as in Sir Galahad) to receive respectful treatment from the media on foreign and defense issues.

It's clear to anyone who has the wit to see that the primary and perhaps sole reason why Gorbachev is going to Geneva is his attempt to stop the deployment (and even the research) of our anti-missile technology of the 1980s, namely, SDI. The Soviets are using arms control talks today to deny us the use of technologies which might give us the chance to offset their nuclear superiority and reduce their ability to checkmate us with nuclear blackmail.

Arms control treaties are always a bad deal for the United States: (a) they don't restrain the Soviets, who use ambiguous language and loopholes to continue building whatever they had already planned; (b) they do restrain us because our State Department binds us to the interpretion most advantageous to the Soviets, and (c) the Soviets (as President Reagan has formally reported) are in massive violation of the treaties.

We should be honest enough to admit that the objective of arms control cannot be reached by the routes we have traveled in the last 20 years. Our objective should not be arms control anyway; it should be American security and independence.