

# Good News in What Might Have Been

By BERNARD LOWN and CONN NUGENT

The news from Reykjavik was good.

Amid all the talk of collapse and failure, keep in mind that the leaders of the two nations capable of extinguishing life on this planet were on the verge of an agreement that would have precluded that capability.

Yes, there remains one massive disagreement—on space weapons—that puts the whole package on hold.

But only one. We ought to be grateful that the area of discord can be so tightly focused.

We'll learn precise details in the next few days. But it appears that the following agreements would have been made were it not for the "Star Wars" issue:

- Reduction of one half of all long-range nuclear systems in five years; complete elimination of these systems in 10 years. This would mean the dismantling of 20,000 warheads with the explosive power of about 800,000 Hiroshima bombs.

- Immediate elimination of all but 100 medium-range missiles on each side, a reduction of over 85%.

- Limits on nuclear testing and new negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Commentators friendly to President Reagan have said that these steps represent enormous concessions by the Soviets. And they do. We can attest to that.

American and European physicians have worked with Soviet colleagues for five years now in alerting the people and government of the Soviet Union to some central truths: that a nuclear war would be unsurvivable, and that the national security interest of the Soviet Union cannot be gained at the expense of the security of the United States.

The changes, among both leaders and ordinary citizens, have been remarkable to observe. Cynics may scoff at Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev's embrace of Einstein's call for "a new way of thinking in

the Nuclear Age." But the breadth and depth of the near-miss measures at Reykjavik indicate that Soviets—and Americans too—are awake to the fact that concessions serve self-interest. Nuclear war is an accident waiting to happen. The search for advantage is illusory.

So the issue is clearly drawn. Two self-declared abolitionists who say they are ready to agree on a mutual path to a shared goal part company on a single question.

One says that abolition requires that space be demilitarized and ballistic defense confined to laboratory research.

The other says that before there can be abolition, there must be a decade of research, development and full-scale testing in order to come up with a vast array of space weapons, which he says would be limited solely to defense.

Since it is our President who seeks the innovation, the responsibility falls on all

Americans to decide whether he has met the burden of proof.

We should conduct a great national debate—not only in Congress but in our schools and at our town meetings. Just what is the Strategic Defense Initiative? What can it be expected to do? Whose interests might it protect and whose might it threaten? What will it really cost?

And, in the end, we must answer the final questions: What is the best way to protect our people from Soviet missiles? By drastically reducing the number of those missiles or by trying to shoot down far larger numbers from the sky?

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