Because Ideas Have Consequences

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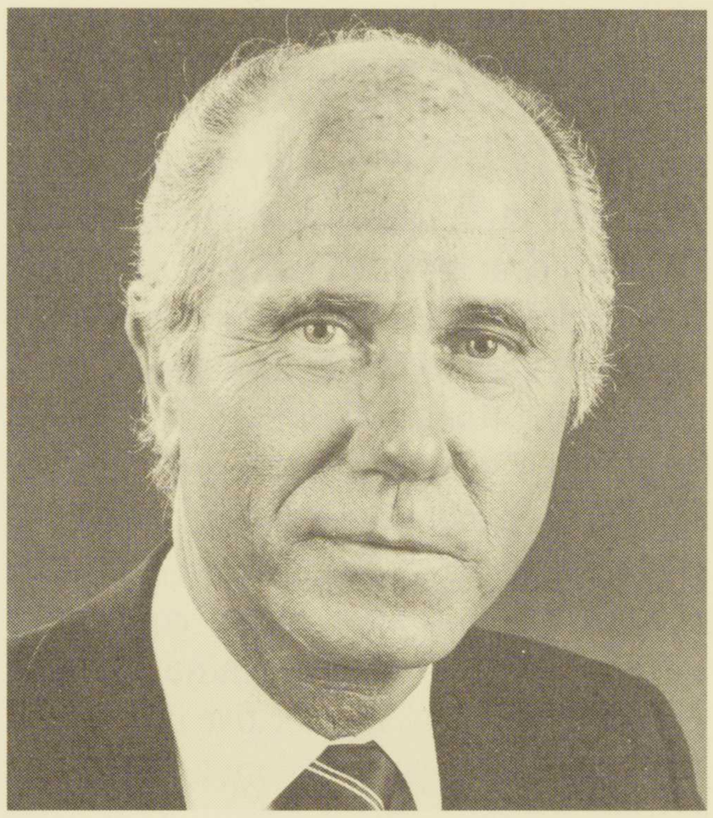
"Can Democracy Defend Itself?"

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