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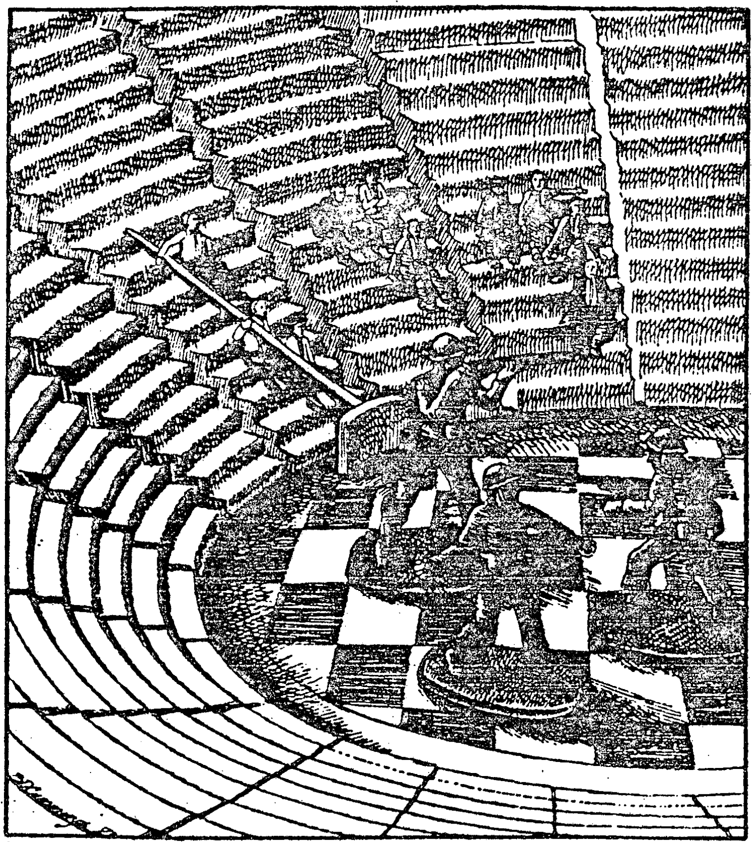

BARBARA CUMMINGS / for the Times

When Cold Warriors Meet to Talk Peace

By Jack Burby

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Harvard University plans to show the world how to avoid nuclear war, a mission so extravagant as to be arrogant anywhere except here at Harvard.

It does not take a Yale graduate, for example, to ask the obvious first question: What do these people, slouching toward Harvard Square with their Topsiders and book bags, know about nuclear war?

If Harvard means to you bricks and ivy and open-air jugglers and string quartets performing in the square after dark, your answer is short: Not much.

There is a better answer inside the John F. Kennedy School of Government, a short walk toward the Charles River from the square, where some of the best teachers at Harvard have been quietly laying a foundation for the extravagant mission with something called the Executive Program in National and International Security.

Most of these teachers have worked in government—in arms control or non-proliferation, as economic or legal advisers, and as top managers. Program director Douglas M. Johnston Jr., for example, spent 10 years in nuclear submarines. Some still divide their time between Harvard classrooms and Washington war rooms, their minds so cluttered with classified information that they often have to stop talking halfway through a sentence.

For the past five summers, the faculty has spent two crowded weeks at blackboards in small amphitheaters lectur[illegible] to and sparring, in the Socratic sense, with admirals and generals and their civilian counterparts in the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, Congress and a range of other federal agencies.

They are the heart of a unique program that lifts cold warriors out of their world of weapons systems and spy satellites and coaxes them into a second look at the rest of the world and at the stereotypes on which decisions too often depend.

Prof. Joseph S. Nye Jr. started one morning class by suggesting that former President Jimmy Carter invented human rights as a cornerstone of American foreign policy. Right? There was no dissent. "By a vote of 300-1," said Nye, "Congress cut off trade with Russia in 1903 because of the immigration policies that covered Jews during the pogroms." The silence around the carpeted amphitheater was broken only by the sound of minds bending.

Nye did not stop there. The lesson was not that there are surprises in history but that national character is a crucial factor in shaping foreign policy. Why did Congress act as it did in 1903?

"We don't like people sticking sticks in other peoples' eyes," said an Army general. "As in Guatemala?" Nye teased. "As in Guatemala," said the general. "You're onto something," said Nye. "For good or bad, we are a moralistic people."

How moralistic? How do you balance morality against other more tangible interests—women's rights, for example, about which this nation feels strongly, in dealing with oil-rich Saudi Arabia, where women have no rights? No tidy conclusions, just something to think about.

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Later, the class spent 90 minutes wrestling with two questions posed by political scientist Stanley Hoffmann: Is there any room for ethics in international relations? If so, what kind of ethics?

Prof. Michael Nacht argued that Americans are not as good at thinking regionally as they are at thinking head-to-head with the Soviet Union. To cure that, the class was divided, half invited to look at a problem through Israeli eyes, the other half to think like Palestinians.

Ernest R. May, historian and former dean of Harvard College, lured his class into one trap after another to demonstrate the dangers of misinterpreting history as a base for making decisions or, worse, selecting from history only the facts that fit your case.

Economist Francis M. Bator gave a positively Shakespearean performance of the dismal science for an audience not given to thinking about the workings of the system to whose protection they devote their lives. Archibald Cox, a legend, and Arthur R. Miller, a Socratic cobra, both of the Harvard Law School, showed the other side of journalism to security-conscious people, most of whom arrived thinking that newspapers are at best irresponsible and at worst subversive.

The program is more boot camp than summer school. A crimson loose-leaf binder, three inches thick, holds required reading that begins at the end of nine-hour days of classes and guest lecturers and might end sometime before midnight.

But the students—one-third of them with the rank of general or admiral, a sprinkling of journalists, executives of corporations in defense work, intelligence analysts, all with work piling up on desks at home—buckled down like freshmen.

By the final session it was clear that the Washington contingent, which included a general who draws the five-year defense plan for the Marine Corps, another who commands an army, a U.S. senator, Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), were giving as much as they were getting. As historian May emphasized often, the program is a two-way street.

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For its part, the faculty was probing the minds of people whom the defense and diplomatic establishments see, by and large, as comers, people with the potential to be chief of naval operations, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the top civil servants in their agencies.

What the faculty seemed to find was a group that already knew enough to look both ways before it crossed a street, that needed only reminders to look beyond crises to the future for opportunities for long-term victories in return for short-term draws.

Prof. Albert Carnesale, who, along with Graham T. Allison, dean of the Kennedy school, Nye, May and others will conduct Harvard's search for nuclear peace, had a message for the class after it had tiptoed through a hypothetical case looking for a way to save the anti-ballistic missile treaty with the Soviets. "There's a lesson here on stereotypes. When our regular students are cast in this case as generals, they say, 'Great! Burn up the treaty and let's go.'"

What the class got in return was a demonstration by the faculty of the brand of intense detachment that the nation will need to think rather than feel its way through global shocks like the destruction by the Soviets of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 that, in the end, ripped the academic curtain that Harvard had tried to drape around the class of 1983.

The Harvard program has been criticized as a merger of elites in education and government who are more interested in managing tensions than in reducing them.

The missiles of August made it rather plain that, critics or no, the program has its priorities right. Managing tensions by building better barriers against accidental use of weapons, shaping arms-control proposals to squeeze out all incentives to be the first to launch missiles and improving communications are, for now and as far ahead as you can see, the names of the game. Topsiders and book bags or not, the Kennedy School program has laid a foundation for just such an effort, easily the most important study of our time--how, indeed, to avoid nuclear war.

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