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Reagan aides duck chance to tell truth

Contrasted with the heartburn the administration is causing its strongest supporters, the heartbreak of psoriasis pales into insignificance.

The scene: the White House press room this past Tuesday. The occasion: a background briefing by a gentleman from the National Security Council and a gentleman from the State Department. The subject: two as yet unratified treaties with the Soviets regarding nuclear testing.



The administration's position on these pacts is a sound one. It is that these treaties will not be ratified because there are "problems to be overcome and these deal essentially with verification." Hoping that these two officials are on a roll and are — at long last — prepared to publicly commit truth, I ask them about the 1980 Republican platform, the part pledging an end to the Carter administration's cover-up of Soviet violations of the SALT I and SALT II treaties. When would you anticipate the Reagan administration is going to end this Carter administration coverup, I ask?

Alas, the cover-up of the Carter cover-up continues. One official replies: "Well, I'm not prepared today to comment or give you a record sheet on what the Soviets may or may not have done with regard to SALT I and SALT II."

"In general, the Soviets have complied with their interpretation of SALT I and, to a large extent, SALT II. I don't think we want to get into that today."

Now, the weasel-words used in this response are incredible. This is precisely the kind of spineless double-talk which, had the Carter administration engaged in it (and it did), candidate Ronald Reagan would have ripped the hide off them (and he did).

Of course, from their point of view, the Soviets have complied with SALT I and II. But then from the Soviet point of view, everything they've done — from the seizure of power in 1917 through the Katyn Forest massacre, the placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba, the invasion of Afghanistan and the use of "yellow rain" to murder men, women and children — has been OK!

At the Tuesday briefing, one official says the administration's position is "firmly" and "unequivocally" that "whenever there is an apparent violation" it will make clear in "emphatic terms" its attitude about it. But what in the world does this gibberish mean?

"Whenever" there is an "apparent violation"? Are they kidding? The Soviets *already* have committed scores of SALT I and SALT II violations as former CIA analyst David Sullivan documents in detail in his excellent study "The Bitter Fruits of SALT: A Record of Soviet Duplicity" (Texas Policy Institute, 6250 Westpark, Suite 110, Houston, Texas 77057). Why aren't these violations being made public? What is the Reagan administration afraid of?

Although I sit in these administration briefings and listen to what is being said, it is still very difficult to actually believe I'm hearing what I hear. In a briefing on May 8, one of the briefers who spoke to us on Tuesday told a group of us that the president believes arms reductions can be achieved if, among other things, the Soviets demonstrate "good faith" and approach the subject in the "same spirit" as the United States does. When I asked the briefer if the Soviets have ever shown "good faith" in any of the previous arms talks with us, he replies: This "depends on the point of view."

"Good faith"? The "same spirit"? Why I doubt seriously that there are even Russian words for these concepts, much less actions to match them. In fact, the president, who our briefer says enters arms talks with "no illusions" about the Soviets, indeed has no illusions. In a public press conference he has denounced them as liars and cheats who will do anything to achieve their aims.

All of which raises the question: if Ronald Reagan really believes this, and I think he does, then why are his aides engaging in Orwellian doublespeak about Soviet "good faith" and a "spirit" that's like ours? This is not a rhetorical question. This is a question that cries out for an answer.

As for the Soviets, they have given us their "point of view" regarding "good faith" and their "spirit." It was V.I. Lenin who declared: "Promises are like pie crusts, made to be broken." And his student, Stalin, who learned his lessons all too well, observed: "Words have no relation to actions — otherwise what kind of diplomacy is it? Words are one thing, actions another. Good words are a mask for concealment of bad deeds. Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry-water or wooden iron."

These are the kinds of things we're now negotiating with in Geneva. Some "good faith." Some "spirit."