

Will...

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About four hours after Nicholson was murdered, the president, breakfasting with journalists, was asked about Soviet violations of arms-control agreements — violations his administration has documented. He spoke about "language problems" and "ambiguity" leading the Soviets to a different but equally sincere "understanding" of what the agreement requires. He spoke of finding "ways where he can by deed prove what our intentions are." The Soviets are in the 68th year of a murder rampage and the problem is a misunderstanding. If we can just prove our benign intentions...

In 1982 a French officer operating under the 1947 agreement that covered Nicholson's activities was killed when his car was run off the road by East German forces. British officers operating under the agreements have been involved in suspicious "accidents." Six days after Nicholson was shot — the day he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, within sight of the office where Secretary of State Shultz met with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin —

those two men discussed having discussions to prevent such "episodes." It was "murder" one day, an "episode" the next at a State Department dissolving in pleasure because the Soviets have agreed to cooperate with us.

Will the murder interrupt, even momentarily, the talks whereby we get the Soviets to agree to allow U.S. taxpayers to subsidize, with credits, the sale of high-technology to the Soviet war machine? No. So mesmerized is the administration by the arms-control "process," it is too paralyzed to respond even to murder, lest a response jeopardize that "process."

Historians may conclude that it was during this administration that the United States conclusively lost the Cold War. By "lost" I mean forfeited the last chances to embody in action correct thinking about the Soviet threat. This severe judgment is justified in spite of the fact — actually, because of the fact — that this administration is wiser than its recent predecessors and probably wiser than its successors will be. It is the wisest the nation has had in a generation. Measured that way, it is

commendable. Measured against the task, it is unsatisfactory.

This conclusion is compelled by things done and left undone, from the failure to use the weapon of enforced default against the Polish regime's debt, to the current squandering of energy on the charade of arms control. The debacle of policy toward Poland demonstrated the degree to which a conservative administration, especially, is incapable of subordinating commerce to geopolitics. The Carteresque elevation of arms control to the rank of centerpiece in U.S.-Soviet relations demonstrates the degree to which democracies allow their wishes to control their thoughts.

One week after Nicholson bled to death, the president described the death as "cold-blooded murder." There has not been even a Soviet apology. Has the president asked for one? If not, why not? If he has asked, what price will he make the Soviets pay for refusing — for compounding cold-blooded murder with ostentatious disdain for the murder officer's commander in chief?

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