

# Reagan, Gorbachev playing poker

Q. What do television and press commentators mean when they say that conservatives are especially concerned with what President Reagan has done? I mean, why especially "conservatives"?

A. Because conservatives are generally understood to be those who are more or less irreversibly skeptical about Soviet intentions.

Q. How does skepticism about Soviet intentions bear on the events of the last week?

A. Well, it was conservatives who walked out with the impression that the Soviet Union was pushing Reagan around. I mean, he said there would be no swap, but, I mean, conservatives are from Missouri, and when 24 hours was all that separated Daniloff's release from Zakharov's release, conservatives think of that as a swap.

Q. But what do conservatives think were the motives of the Soviet Union in the first place? Granted, Daniloff wasn't a spy, and granted Gorbachev went out on a limb, publicly rejecting Reagan's assurances that Daniloff wasn't a spy. Why are conservatives sore about what then happened?

A. Because it seemed plain that Gorbachev wanted a quickie summit meeting, and wanted to give the world the impression that he, not Reagan, was running the international chessboard.

Q. OK, OK, so the Soviet Union is running as it always has, so you don't get dyspeptic about evidence of yet more political patronage in Boston, Mass., but what is it about the Iceland summit that makes the conservatives sound as though Munich-Yalta-Potsdam were about to happen?

A. The New York Times summarized conservative concern pretty neatly in its rundown by Bernard Gwertzman on Sunday: "Mr. Reagan seemed aware of the perception in conservative circles that he had become a convert to detente."

Q. It may seem to you like a primitive question, but what is wrong with detente?

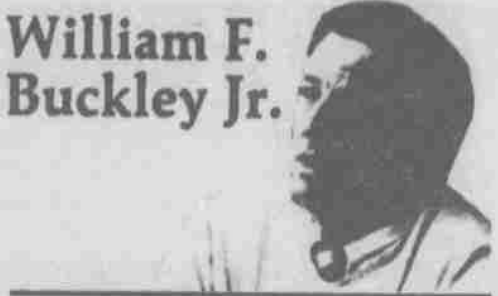
A. Detente presupposes that the Soviet Union's appetite to rule the world has diminished, and conservatives see no evidence of this, either in Soviet foreign policy or strategic planning.

Q. Well, are you saying that conservatives have lost their confidence in their evil-empire, anti-communist leader?

A. Yup. Many have. Now what's in-

teresting is that some think that that withdrawal of confidence is premature.

Q. Why premature?  
A. Because some conservatives have reason to believe that Reagan is moving in on the Soviet Union, taking special advantage of Soviet weaknesses it does not pay him publicly to advertise.



Q. What ARE you talking about?  
A. Reagan may be calculating that there are forces moving within the Soviet Union that even Gorbachev can't control, and that these are crying out for relief from exorbitant demands by the military.

Q. Ho hum. We have been hearing about this for 20 years.

A. Yes, but what is different this time around is SDI. The Strategic Defense Initiative, the space shield program, Star Wars, whatever you want to call it, sounded the death knell — some people close to Reagan think — for the Soviet plan to overwhelm the West. So it may be that Reagan is

approaching the Iceland summit with the knowledge that he really has the cards.

Q. How do you define "the cards"?

A. The cards, in this situation, means simply this, that Reagan may be in a position to tell Gorbachev not anything Gorbachev doesn't already know, but to tell Gorbachev that Reagan knows that Gorbachev knows that our space shield technology is advancing at a rate that will make it impossible for the Soviet Union to threaten us more directly every month — a great difference from the relative increase in Soviet power over the past decade. He can show his four aces, and then dictate, with appropriate deference to Soviet face, the terms of Soviet strategic retreat.

Q. Are you suggesting that we are looking forward to something that amounts to Soviet disarmament?

A. No. I am suggesting that Reagan thinks he has a shot at letting routine nuclear retrenchment occupy the public eye but that the important thing that will emerge from it all is a) full speed ahead for SDI; and b) the consolidation of U.S. political opinion in favor of SDI.

Q. Do you believe that?  
A. Did you ever see a dream walking?

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Buckley is the founder of National Review magazine.

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