

Nuke reduction plan best Bush idea yet

Once you sift through the frequently garbled syntax and the hyperbolic rhetoric, some of the State of the Union address actually makes sense.

Sure, the quick-fix economic plans are still up for debate, and no one is quite sure what Bush really wants to do about health care, but his proposal for deep slashes in nuclear arms was clear.

If Bush has his way and Boris Yeltsin agrees, the nuclear stockpiles of both countries will shrink to a size not seen since the early days of the Cold War. Yeltsin's plan is a little more ambitious — 2,000 to 2,500 long-range missiles apiece — but it is heartening to see even a little change on the part of the White House gunslinger.

Bush's plan halts production of the B-2 bomber at 20 planes, or 55 less than originally planned. In addition, the MX multiple-warhead ballistic missile would be no more. No more orders for nuclear-tipped cruise missiles either. Partial dismantlement of submarine-based ICBMs. And so on.

Quite a laundry list, and one almost too good to believe.

The past year has been one of the most eventful in world history. The dismantling of the Soviet Union has effectively ended the Cold War. Bush, in his speech, proclaimed the Americans victors of that wildly expensive, 45-year simmering pressure cooker.

Victors perhaps. If economic devastation through bloated defense spending is a symptom of victory, then yes, the United States did come out on top. The United States is still the same country, and we do have an economy (something the former Soviet Union cannot claim), so in that regards, we did win.

A hollow victory, that is.

The runaway arms race crippled both countries. With the economy the way it is, and the Soviet Union no longer the "evil empire," the only logical course is to cut defense spending and slash nuclear stockpiles.

Bush's plan isn't a radical one. The United States and U.S.S.R. still retain arsenals large enough to waste the planet. The strategic triad of missiles, bombers and subs remains the same. The B-52s and B-1s may not stand on 24-hour alert, but they are still there.

It is wishful thinking to expect all nuclear weapons to be beaten into plowshares. So much power in such a small bomb makes for an attractive package — one that will always be around. But if the reforms go through, the doomsday clock will slip back another minute and we can all breathe a little bit easier.



George Bush



"HI, I'M BILL CLINTON — PLEASE! I MUST EXPLAIN MY SIDE OF THAT STORY!"

OPINION

Yeah, but how many for a Manson?

THE FINE PRINT

BY PAT MALACH

"It's offensive. It's obscene. It's outrageous." And it'll be in finer retail stores in May.

No, this isn't an ad slogan for a new 2 Live Crew album.

This is what Marlene A. Young, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based National Organization for Victim Assistance, had to say about a California publishing company's plan to market "True Crime" trading cards.

Eclipse Enterprises Inc. plans to print trading cards emblazoned with artist renderings of famous criminals and even a few law enforcement types. In all, 110 different cards will be printed. Half the cards will depict organized crime figures. Fifty-four of the cards will portray serial killers and mass murderers.

All of this, just when you thought society had gotten as sick as it possibly could.

When Desert Storm Pro Set cards surfaced, I thought (or hoped) perhaps the apocalypse was just around the corner. But alas, it didn't come, and I actually broke down and bought a pack. Now I'm the proud owner of Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad's card describing the pivotal role our "ally" played in the battle.

Funny, but I swear that just a couple of years ago he was one of those "cowardly terrorists." I guess this answers the question of what it takes to turn a terrorist into an American hero — one good war.

I should have realized that if Hafez could get a trading card, the opportunity was open to just about anyone.

But Charles Manson, Ted Bundy, Richard Speck, and the latest addition, Jeffrey Dahmer? (A little hint for those of you not up to date on your serial killers: Stay away from the gum that comes with the Dahmer card.)

There were several questions whirling around in my head, but the main one was was simply, why?

I called the Bay area and talked to Peggy Collier, one of two people who authored the text on the backs of the cards,

and she provided some answers.

"We mainly got the idea from the fact that during the '80s it was very busy decade for serial killers," Peggy said. "It was very timely, especially with the movie *Silence of the Lambs* coming out being based on Ed Gein."

Well, OK. People have become fascinated with sociopaths and have created a market for creepiness. But how did the authors decide just what qualified a person? Did they set a killing quota?

Well, no.

"They had been in the news a lot. So that was one of the qualifications," she said. "Another one of the qualifications was just that the case itself was interesting. Ramon Salcido will be in there. He killed his family. He went in there just simply because he's despicable. You get the creepy crawlies.

"And each case had to have something a little bit different in it," she said. "I guess variety would be (a consideration)."

So creativity is just as important as quantity. That will be good news to those aspiring killers who don't have the patience to extend their careers over many years like Ted Bundy or John Wayne Gacy Jr.

Yes, the whole concept of criminal trading cards is abhorrent. But Peggy tells us it's also popular.

"We've been getting a lot of orders," she said. "With the controversy that just sprung up the last week it's been crazy. The editor will be on *Sally Jessy Raphael* on the 11th of February and Maury Povich is doing a show probably (today) with one of the owners."

Heavy orders from whom?

"It's been the experience of the company that most of these specialty items are (bought by) adult collectors," Peggy said. "They're (purchased for) their collectors value."

Collectors value? Well, what is going to make the individual cards valuable? Charles Manson's got to be up there, right?

"I don't know what the hot

Has Eclipse ever considered rookie cards? You know, like mug shots from the first time the creeps were arrested for petty crimes.

cards are going to be," Peggy said. "If I were guessing, certainly Zodiac is fascinating. That's almost like a movie script.

"The Green River Killer is fascinating just because he hasn't been caught yet," she said. "He's suspected of killing three people in one day."

Which, in the sporting world, would be considered either a trey or a hat trick.

"He's gotta have some sort of value whoever he is," Peggy said.

Has Eclipse ever considered rookie cards? You know, like mug shots from the first time the creeps were arrested for petty crimes.

"We discussed that," Peggy said.

I was just kidding!

"So far it's really kind of hanging," she said.

No pun intended.

"You'd have to handle it right, and we haven't really figured out a way to handle it that's not really offensive," she said.

Not offensive??!

"We could have said he boiled their flesh and he had sex with the dead bodies and he kept the heads in the freezer," Peggy said. "We just skimmed over all that."

And don't think it's not appreciated.

So what's next for Eclipse? How about a set of Nazi War Criminal cards?

"That's a thought," Peggy said. "I hadn't thought of that before."

Sorry I brought it up.

Pat Malach is the Emerald Managing Editor.

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