

News and Comment

Civil Defense: Debate Flares Again As Two Partisans Share Platform On Behavioral Science Role

Does anyone still care about civil defense?

Since public opinion and concern about national security affairs tend to commute between apathy and hysteria, with no stops in between, the answer at this point appears to be an overwhelming No, at least as far as the general populace is concerned. For the bulk of the sometime agitated citizenry, civil defense is now one of those remote, not very intense, questions, such as, Is there a Mafia? and Are we really running out of water? Nevertheless, while hardly anyone talks about civil defense, the fact is that a great deal is being done about it slowly but surely across the American landscape. And some people have been talking about it—most notably last week in Washington, where two of the most articulate partisans in the civil defense debate shared a public platform and, apparently excited by the sight of a foe with whom each had previously skirmished only on paper, went at the matter with spirit and acerbity.

The participants were Adam Yarmolinsky, special assistant to the Secretary of Defense, and Arthur I. Waskow, a member of the senior staff of the Peace Research Institute (PRI), a nonprofit organization formed 2 years ago to promote research on arms control and disarmament and associated problems.

The occasion for their meeting was the 40th annual meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association. Yarmolinsky, a brilliant and sharp-tongued attorney, was centrally involved in formulating the present civil defense program before a separate civil defense organization was formed in the Pentagon. Waskow, a 29-year-old scholar who has published widely on defense problems, is the author of the *Limits of Defense*, a well-received work on strategic doctrines; he is also author of *The Shelter-Centered Society*, a PRI

study which concluded that the existence of a civil defense program may have adverse effects on this country's ability to negotiate with the Soviet Union. The report, based on the deliberations of nine well-known social scientists, describes itself as a "series of questions to American public and leaderships," but it points out that the "specifics of the problems are only occasionally posed in question form." After this warning, the report frequently slips into flat assertion, rather than plain inquiry, and even a careful reader could be excused for concluding that *The Shelter-Centered Society* is offering answers rather than asking questions. (For example: "On the basis of available social-science knowledge and research data," it was concluded "that once entered upon, a shelter program will prove extremely difficult to limit or reverse . . . It was the unanimous judgment of the scholars that a pro-disarmament reaction [to civil defense] is extremely unlikely." And "for almost all of the people, the scholars agreed, civil defense and disarmament are what is known in social psychology as 'dissonant'—that is, civil defense fits into a view of the world in which negotiation has failed and war is looming, while disarmament fits into a view of the world in which negotiation seems possible and war seems avoidable.")

It was assertions of this type that Yarmolinsky savagely assailed as "pseudo-science," sidestepping any pretense at polite treatment and taking the report and Waskow to task by name, in an address, "Science and Pseudo-Science in the Shelter Debate."

"I can't imagine, and the report does not attempt to tell us," Yarmolinsky stated, "on what basis 'available social science knowledge' teaches us that to 'almost all the people' civil defense and disarmament are 'dissonant'. Do 'almost all the people' drive recklessly because they are insured? Or if they have seat belts? Do 'almost all the people' oppose American support for the UN or the Peace Corps because we are

also at the same time putting emphasis on military defense? The report does not tell us the 'available social science knowledge' on which this peculiar view is based. Quite the contrary," Yarmolinsky continued, "it goes on to assert that 'even the small group of disarmament enthusiasts might wane and weaken under the impact of the physical existence of shelters'. In other words, this 'dissonance' is so compelling that even those sophisticated enough to be actively concerned about the arms race might be swept up by it. Can such assertions, lacking even detailed argument, never mind any pretense of evidence, be seriously called 'scientific'? Yet that is the kind of thing we are presented with in the name of 'available social science knowledge and research data.'

"It seems to me," Yarmolinsky concluded, "that what has happened here is that Mr. Waskow and the eminent social scientists who endorsed his report as a valid summary of their discussion, have merely disguised their opposition to the civil defense program behind a flimsy facade of pseudo-science."

Pseudo-scientist is not a title to which anyone aspires, and Waskow appeared to be nettled by Yarmolinsky's remarks. In addition, he was faced by an allegation from the floor to the effect that his report on the Shelter-Centered Society did not accurately reflect the views of the social scientists who participated in the PRI conference. Waskow angrily denounced this assertion, pointing out that each participant had endorsed the report prior to publication. He added, "I resent the implications" of the charge.

Then, addressing himself to Yarmolinsky's prepared remarks, he fell back on the contention that the Shelter-Centered Society sought to do nothing but raise educated questions. The report, he said, "does not take a position as to whether there should be a civil defense program. . . . The hypothesis that the scholars brought together was that people would respond to the actual dissonance [between civil defense and negotiations with the Soviet Union] by feeling enormous hostility to anyone who made them think of the possibility of sudden death . . . If they reacted this way, they were extremely unlikely to react to the possibility of negotiations and disarmament. . . . It is possible that . . . a program might be able to dissolve the dissonance. If it is

"Now what has often disturbed me in the debate over civil defense has been the frequency with which people, purporting to speak in the name of objective science, have put forth statements which suggest in the strongest possible way that their authors must be either incompetent as scientists, or, at least on this matter, have been unable to distinguish between science and propaganda. . . . You probably remember the remark from Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* that 'If that is the law, then your law, sir, is an ass.' I must say that some of the purportedly objective scientific statements I have seen about civil defense tempt me to retort that if that is science, then your science, sir, is an ass."—*From an address, "Science and Pseudo-Science in the Shelter Debate," by Adam Yarmolinsky.*

not possible, then we ought to know, perhaps we ought to try to find out. . . . We are confronted with the possibility that unprecedented results may result from an unprecedented act, a situation in which data out of the past may not be adequately transferrable to the future."

Yarmolinsky retorted, "I am struck by Mr. Waskow's assertion that all the Shelter-Centered Society is a hypothesis. This is like [Robert] Welch [head of the John Birch Society] saying that 'Eisenhower is a Communist but other hypotheses are possible.'"

"What I am complaining about," Yarmolinsky continued, "is a basic abandonment of a rational attitude toward a world that is not terribly rational. 'Dissonance' is a scare word, but it is not a word we can afford to be scared of in a scary world. . . . Social scientists particularly have to deal in situations in which any sensible person would throw up his hands and go home. We can't afford to throw up our hands and go home—because there isn't any place to go. We have to face up to the problems of civil defense, we have to face up to the problems of arms control and disarmament. We have to build weapons which are fearful even to think about while we negotiate with people whom we really do not understand about issues which in-

volve the continuation of the world as we know it.

"This is a terribly difficult business and it is getting more difficult all the time, and it makes the behavioral sciences more important all the time. The only plea I'm going to make to you is that if you are going to perform the function to which you dedicate yourself, the profession which you are pursuing, you've got to be rigorous in your thinking."

Waskow again took his stand on the need for research but supported this view with the assertion that "most people would feel that if shelters are built it is because the Soviets are about to bomb us . . ." and, that, as a consequence, support for disarmament would wane. The Shelter-Centered Society merely concluded, he said, "that it would be very dangerous to have done it [built a civil defense system] without preparing for [adverse consequences] and every attempt should be made to find out before we do it, because having done it without taking into account the warnings of social scientists can only, can possibly, lead to disaster. This is all we were trying to say in the Shelter-Centered Society."

Meanwhile, outside the conference hall, civil defense is moving along a lot faster than most people realize, though not quite as fast as the administration says it would like. More than 100 million shelter spaces—each with a minimum of 10 square feet per person and a radiation protection factor of at least 40—have been located in existing buildings across the nation. Two million have been marked and stocked with water, biscuits, and first-aid supplies for a 2-week stay; provisions have been bought for another 18 million spaces. In addition, under civil defense auspices, first-aid training has been given to 200,000 persons.

The progress of the program turns out to be considerably short of the timetable that civil defense officials were speaking of last summer, but the achievements rebut fairly widespread feeling that civil defense has come and gone as an administration goal.

Just where it goes from here is something that Congress will soon take up. Last year, the administration asked for \$460 million to help finance community shelters in public buildings. The request went aground on the opposition of Representative Albert Thomas, Democrat of Texas, a long-standing civil defense opponent who

If a group of recognized social scientists report that the civil defense program "may blow up American democracy, then say that we'd better do research on whatever can be done, then there is a crucial question as to what one does with their report. Does one reject it because one is committed to a civil defense program already and call it pseudo-science, or does one take it seriously? . . . I think these are crucial questions. . . . We don't want to find ourselves in a position of finding a civil defense program" that has unanticipated and adverse effects on public support for disarmament. . . . "All I beg is that research be done on hypotheses" that civil defense may have harmful effects.—*Arthur Waskow, of the Peace Research Institute, commenting on the administration's civil defense program.*

chairs the appropriations subcommittee that passes on civil defense money requests. Thomas, however, did approve \$113 million out of a \$235 million request for the marking and stocking program and for general administrative activities. As usual, he remains silent on whether his affection for civil defense has undergone any transformation, but the administration is hopeful that Thomas will permit civil defense to creep slowly over the countryside, even if he will not allow a heavily funded effort.

The overall civil defense request this year is for \$300 million, including \$175 million for the community shelter program. One hopeful sign, from the administration's point of view is that Representative Carl Vinson, Democrat of Georgia, has given assurances that his House Armed Services Committee will hold hearings this year on the legislation needed for the community shelter program. Last year, Vinson simply did not get around to scheduling the hearings, and, as a result, Thomas could fall back on the technicality that his subcommittee could not appropriate funds for a program that had not yet been enacted into law. The remainder of the civil defense effort comes under existing legislation, and all it needs in order to go ahead is money.—D. S. GREENBERG