

A General as Arms Control Chief: Opera Buffa or Brilliant Stroke?

In what must be one of the most ironic moves of his Administration, President Carter, who often has spoken almost religiously about the need for arms control, has announced the nomination of a retired lieutenant general in the Army, George M. Seignious II, to be the new director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) and the man who will shepherd the new arms agreement with the Soviets through Congress next year.

People in government are still "reeling from the shock" of the announcement, as one Capitol Hill observer put it.

Shortly after the 20 October announcement, it became known that the general, who is president of The Citadel and for the last year has served as the at-large delegate to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in Geneva, was a member of a prominent conservative organization, the Coalition for Peace through Strength of the American Security Council (ASC), which is on record as opposing the SALT II accords. Seignious' membership greatly alarmed arms control proponents, who thought they saw in the supposedly "moderate" Seignious a "closet hawk" and thus a potential fox in the chicken coop.

Seignious promptly resigned from the group, but in doing so alienated the conservatives. His resignation letter claimed he had not known of the group's anti-SALT stance when he joined and called the group "not responsible" and its SALT position "distorted"—statements that doubtless did not please the 175 members of Congress who are also ASC members. Officials of the ASC publicly suggested that Seignious might be a turncoat who was changing his views on SALT in order to get the arms control job.

All this would have the ring of some opera buffa were it not that the appointment comes at a critical moment in the President's preparations to sell the new SALT accord to the country and to Congress. The White House has long been watching SALT advocates and foes take up their battle positions for what promises to be a pitched fight. White House officials say that Carter's every move having to do with the treaty—whether the final touches on the negotiations with

the Soviets or the Seignious nomination—has been calculated to minimize conservative criticism.

Thus it was convenient that Paul Warnke, Carter's first ACDA director and a well-known arms control advocate, chose to step down in September. During his 20-month tenure in the double post of ACDA director and chief SALT negotiator, Warnke has also been a lightning rod for conservative criticism; his departure is widely believed to ease Carter's problems in selling the new treaty to Congress. Warnke is reported to have favored his deputy SALT negotiator, Ralph Earle, to succeed him in both jobs. But although the President promoted Earle for the role of new chief negotiator, Earle was passed over for the ACDA job. Nonetheless Warnke, who helped bring in Seignious as the at-large delegate, is strongly supportive of the Seignious nomination.

The White House evidently wanted someone with conservative credentials to avoid a rerun of the harrowing criticism it took with the Warnke nomination 2 years ago. Both Lieutenant General Andrew Goodpaster, who runs West Point, and Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, former aide to Henry Kissinger, were asked if they would consider the job if it were offered. Both declined. Goodpaster may have been the one to suggest Seignious' name, but others were also considered, including former Brookings scholar Henry Owen.

By the time the White House got to Seignious, it seemed in a hurry. Seignious received a vague invitation to lunch with National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski—whom he did not know—on Thursday, 12 October. After lunch, presidential aide Hamilton Jordan joined them, and Seignious was asked if he would consider the ACDA job, if it were offered. Surprised, Seignious asked for time to think about it; on Monday he said he was interested; on Wednesday he met with President Carter; and on Friday Carter telephoned him at The Citadel and offered him the job, which he accepted. The White House announced the nomination the same day, making a lapsed time of a week and a half between the initial overture and the formal announcement.

But if naming a general was meant to defuse conservative criticism, it certainly flopped. Paul Nitze, the former Navy secretary who has become the spearhead of the opposition to SALT, says he was not consulted by the White House and he would have preferred Ralph Earle to have gotten the job. Richard Perle, Senator Henry Jackson's (D-Wash.) aide and a key critic of Warnke, says of Seignious, "He's Warnke's guy. That's the decisive fact about him." And Senator Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.), another influential SALT opponent and a friend and Citadel classmate of Seignious's, remains unreconstructed. Asked if it was true that the White House had sought his advice on the Seignious appointment, Hollings snorted, "That's the first I ever heard about White House consultation." Hollings says his opposition to SALT remains unchanged, despite the appointment of his friend.

Nor are the liberals happy. The Federation of American Scientists is trying to amend the law so active or newly retired military officers cannot be named head of ACDA. The *New York Times* suggested someone of greater distinction, such as Republican Elliot L. Richardson, or outgoing Senators Clifford Case or Edward Brooke. And, echoing Washington gossip that the entire gambit is a trial balloon, the *Times* suggested that Seignious serve as an interim director while the Administration finds someone better. In any event, Seignious cannot be confirmed in the job until January or February, after the Senate reconvenes; by making a recess appointment, Carter enabled the general to begin work on 4 December.

And at the arms control agency itself, the many committed arms controllers whom Warnke brought in are nervously awaiting their new chief. The ACDA bureaucrats bear no ill will toward Seignious himself, who made a good impression during his brief stint as the at-large SALT delegate. But they fear that in terms of a long-term commitment to arms control and advocacy of ACDA's viewpoint in interagency struggles, Seignious will not hold a candle to Warnke. Some are rather cynical about the White House's apparent desertion of the adamant pro-arms control stands Carter took as a candidate; one official summarized the appointment as "Rafshoonian,"—a reference to the President's media and image adviser Gerald Rafshoon.

Who is Seignious? "A man of integrity, decency and virtue," says one negotiator. "A military man of stature," says another official. "There really is an extra dimension to him. He's a prince of a

man," says a friend. Friends often praise his integrity but rarely his intellectual acumen. "He's no Paul Warnke intellectually or Harold Brown scientifically but then few people are," says one official. "George is absolutely honest," says a friend who has known him many years. "If he says he's going to punch you in the nose, he'll punch you in the nose."

In person, Seignious makes an impression as the totally correct, upstanding, military officer. If the brilliant, thorny Paul Warnke's stock in trade was argument, Seignious' stock in trade is patriotism.

Seignious has had a highly successful military career. He comes from Kingstree, South Carolina, where his other relatives still live. He has said he never considered attending any college other than The Citadel, in Charleston. Both his sons have gone there too.

He graduated in 1942, served in Europe in World War II, and has risen steadily since. In 1969 he became commander of the third division in Germany. In 1970 he became commander in chief in Berlin. Military friends say that Seignious could have made army chief of staff if he had stayed to earn a fourth star, but he retired in 1974 to spend more time with his family and to return to Charleston as president of The Citadel.

The South's military traditions figure in Seignious' speeches. Rarely does he mention world issues, the Army's problems, or arms control. Instead, he talks about excellence, integrity, God, the founding fathers, and the new "Southern renaissance." In one speech he put in a plug for the "abused" Confederacy. "His eyes occasionally mist when he speaks to cadets about home, country, and patriotism," wrote the *Kansas City Times* in 1977.

Seignious has had considerable diplomatic experience for a military officer. He headed a 1967 secret study to outline ways to begin negotiations with the Vietnamese. In 1968 he was sent to the Paris Vietnam peace talks. In 1971 he went to the Berlin quadripartite negotiations. He succeeded Harold Brown as the at-large delegate to SALT. His stints in the Pentagon have included several with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and several policy jobs in the office of international security affairs.

With his military background, it is not surprising that Seignious seems ill at ease with the jargon of arms control. Every so often, he declares in conversation, "I will never support unilateral disarmament." But otherwise, he seems uncomfortable with the array of concepts between "unilateral disarmament"

(which arms controllers usually use in the context of total U.S. disarmament) and the many other methods of restraint that have occasioned so much study and negotiations for nearly 20 years. Seignious declined to discuss ACDA's list of non-SALT arms control initiatives—such as the comprehensive nuclear test ban negotiations—in an interview at the Citadel.

Instead, Seignious seems to be coming to arms control from very much a military perspective. He describes how, the weekend before accepting Brzezinski's overture, he studied ACDA's founding legislation line by line with his friend General Goodpaster, to see if it was compatible with the belief "in a strong national defense" which he supported during his 32 years on active duty. He decided that it was compatible and, with added reassurance from reading President Carter's Winston-Salem and Annapolis speeches on U.S.-Soviet relations, he decided to let himself be considered for the job.

If the arms control bureaucrats fear that Seignious is some sort of Trojan horse in their midst, they are wrong as far as SALT goes. Seignious has not seen that much of SALT I firsthand. He attended the nearly continuous negotiations for only about 8 weeks, in part due to a leg operation earlier this year. But he is fully convinced of the merits of a SALT II accord, if the final negotiations can be concluded satisfactorily, and invokes God and country to make the point.

"There is a window open now in our relations with the Soviet Union that technology will get ahead of us. If we don't put some ceilings on the strategic systems we have, in the next five years or so we will have lost an opportunity to continue the strategic balance and avoid strategic risk."

But "SALT II is not going to say no more expenditures for strategic weapons." Some "modernization" of strategic forces will be necessary. This will cost money, although not as much money as would have to be spent without a new SALT accord.

Does this mean Seignious thinks the country will need a new basing mode for its force of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles—such as the trench system or field of new missile silos? "Probably yes, in the long pull."

Seignious' job as ACDA director will be to help sell the SALT agreement to Congress. But like many other high-ranking military officers, he has had few dealings with Congress. Aside from Senator Hollings and some other members of the South Carolina delegation, he does

not know members on a personal basis. So he will not have a reservoir of friendships to draw on during the SALT debate, which promises to be one of the most grueling congressional fights of the Carter Administration.

Seignious' only experience as a witness under fire was in 1971 and 1972, when he was in charge of the Pentagon's military sales programs at the time that the Nixon Administration was seeking to vastly expand them. To implement the Nixon doctrine of withdrawing U.S. troops from overseas, the Administration made a huge \$2.2 billion request—\$700 million more than the year before. Previously, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which had asked why arms were being sold to so many countries and did not like the answers, had cut off foreign military aid. In all this controversy, Seignious was a workmanlike witness and staunch defender of Administration policy.

Today, Seignious has ideas about the direction he would like to see ACDA take. He is critical of the agency for being on the fringes of national security policy-making. "My primary aim would be to establish a level of credibility in the Washington scene about the contributions that the arms control agency can make to the country and concurrently to national security." ACDA has "made a great many points but it's lost a lot more than it has won. I will have to determine what programs in the agency should be strengthened so that it can be more integrated into national security planning."

What fate awaits the general in charge of arms control? Senate staffers say they sense concern, but so far no active opposition to the nomination. How Seignious' confirmation goes will depend in large measure on what he does and what facts emerge about him in the next weeks. And he seems to have realized that he has, as you might say, an image problem.

Seignious seems to think that he can reconcile the principles of arms control with the "strong national defense" he has favored during his 32 years of military service. But when it comes down to specifics, this may be impossible. Faced with recommending that the President cancel the B-1 bomber, or some similar major cutback, Seignious may find it just too inconsistent with "a strong national defense" to recommend a cut. On the other hand, he might acquire credibility as an arms control advocate in the current, conservative Washington atmosphere. Says one friend, "He may just read the ACDA legislation line by line and consider it his duty to do absolutely everything it says."—DEBORAH SHAPLEY