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# Bomb-Shelter Bill Does Foreign Policy

After all this time, Bill Bradley is still an anti-Cold Warrior. **BY TOM DONNELLY AND KAREN WRIGHT**

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**T**O YOUNG BILL BRADLEY, the world could be a very scary place. “I remember when I was about 9 or 10 years old I designed my own bomb shelter,” he recalled at the opening of his foreign policy performance piece at Tufts University last week. “In that bomb shelter I identified where I was going to put my cot, where I was going to put my favorite books and where I was going to put my basketball.”

It is a poignant picture of a child anxious at the unfathomable prospect of annihilation. Bill’s bomb shelter must have seemed an island of safety and security amid a world so full of potential horror.

This is a story he has told before. In the summer of 1992, for example, he gave this version in a major Senate speech outlining his ideas for future relations with post-Soviet Russia: “I remember as a 12-year-old drawing the design of my own bomb shelter with specific places for my cot, my books, my favorite foods, and my basketball. In 1962, I can remember going to bed during the Cuban missile crisis not knowing whether I would be alive in the morning. For 45 years, the prospect of nuclear war haunted our collective imagination.”

For a man who boasts that he has “been thinking and writing and speaking about foreign policy for more than 20 years,” Bradley seems not to have moved beyond his atomic-age equivalent of a boy’s tree house. While the Bradley record is as maddeningly vague as his current Zen-

like candidacy—at Tufts he chose to forgo a formal speech and answer students’ questions: “Without further ado, let’s talk foreign policy!”—there is a consistent pattern amid musings, frettings, and worries. There may not be a Bradley Doctrine, but there are certainly Bradley Instincts.

The two strongest instincts are Fear and Loathing: fear of action in a complex world and loathing of American geopolitical power. Everywhere he looks, Bomb Shelter Bill sees a confusing and dangerous world, where the risks of action, especially military action, are truly paralyzing. It is his belief, expressed at Tufts and repeatedly during his Senate years, that America has neither “the resources nor the wisdom” to lead the world. It is always better to defer decisions and to seek consultation through collective institutions, to foist upon others the power and responsibilities that naturally fall to the sole superpower.

Lacking confidence in the durability of American principles and power, Bradley believes the United States must avoid what might be called the Margarine Effect: “I think that the United States can get spread thin over a wide territory in the world.” This has been a consistent theme through his days in the Senate, where, on the great foreign policy and security issues—defense spending, how to handle post-Soviet Russia, the Gulf War, American involvement in the Balkans, and the extent and purpose of American power more broadly—Bradley has seen a world too big for America to manage or to lead.

In a “globalized” world too “inter-connected” for simple geopolitical

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leadership, Bradley constantly calls for “new thinking.” But in fact, it is Bradley who is mired in the past, in the Cold War, retaining the outlook of an unreconstructed arms controller. To Bradley, weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, are dangerous in themselves, no matter if they are possessed by the United States or our enemies.

At Tufts, he equated strategic stability with the prevention of “a new and deadly arms race around the world,” and called for proceeding directly to a new round of strategic arms talks with Russia, even though the levels he described would call into question America’s ability to deter other nations—from Iraq and Iran to North Korea and China.

Not surprisingly, Bradley places little faith in the value of U.S. military strength; American armed forces are excessively large and expensive anachronisms. Despite the fact that the Pentagon is unable to meet the full range of missions on its plate, Bradley, alone among major candidates, opposes increases in defense spending.

In his view, even Clinton administration defense reviews “really only tinkered at the margins,” even as they have cut forces by a third and defense spending by almost 40 percent, all the while increasing missions. A Bradley administration would “reassess America’s total defense needs in light of the generally improving balances of forces between the United States, its allies and other partners on the one hand, and potential threats to our interests on the other.”

There is perhaps no better example of the Bradley Cold War mentality than his opposition to missile defenses. He argues that “threats to America’s security . . . include runaway deficits and the erosion of civil society as well as North Korea’s nuclear program.” Sophisticated weaponry—the B-2 bomber, for example—has always struck him as “unnecessarily expensive and technologically ambitious.”

To Bradley, the great threats of the post-Soviet era are the “transnational” threats—terrorism, proliferation, environmental degradation, and so



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on. Still, none of these troubles would warrant American leadership or action outside of the United Nations or other multilateral frameworks. Not even the threat of unleashed ethnic and racial strife—a threat Bradley has emphasized repeatedly over the past decade—is enough to motivate American military action.

In 1995, as the question of the Dayton Accords and the deployment of ground forces to Bosnia came before the Senate, Bradley could only lament that “virtually no one, from the beginning, championed pluralism.” In his speech, Bradley cited history’s coldest realist, Germany’s Otto von Bismarck: “I have long believed that Bosnia

itself is not a strategic interest of the United States,” argued Bradley, agreeing with the Iron Chancellor that “the Balkans were ‘not worth the loss of one Pomeranian grenadier.’”

Nor has Bradley fared much better in understanding the relationship of larger powers since the end of the Cold War. He made news at Tufts with an attack on Vice President Gore, charging that the United States “missed a real opportunity” in its policies toward Russia by emphasizing economic issues over arms control—meaning American arms control, because Russia can no longer afford to maintain its rotting nuclear arsenal. But to Bradley, U.S. strategic superiority is to be feared, not welcomed.

The one part of Bill Bradley’s record that cements forever his stance in the McGovernite tradition is his opposition to the Gulf War. Bradley’s speech on whether to use force against Iraq reminds one that the overwhelming majority of Senate Democrats utterly failed the challenge of the moment.

In Bradley’s speech, all the superstitions of left-isolationism are on display: fear of American action, the certainty that any course is better than war, that the United Nations or some international organization or multilateral solution is required, and so on. Like the boy in the bomb shelter, Bradley felt the United States should forever remain in a “defensive, deterrent posture,” hoping that economic sanctions would bring Saddam Hussein to heel.

Confronting Saddam’s apparent intransigence, Bradley, as always, found solace in the “He-Kept-Us-Out-of-War” version of Woodrow Wilson, who waited three years before taking the United States into World War I. In the Gulf, Bradley foresaw the potential ruination of the post-Cold War multilateral order he dreamed of. Operation Desert Storm, he predicted, would “cost thousands of American lives, billions of additional taxpayer dollars, and endanger our long-term vital interests” in the Gulf. “Even victory,” Bradley omi-

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nously warned, “has a high price.”

That price might well include destabilizing Saddam’s regime, Bradley worried; we would be “spilling American blood to make the region safe for Iranian and Syrian domination.” Even worse, the United States “would have to fill the power vacuum ourselves, with a military presence in the region for the indefinite future.” Perhaps worst of all, Americans would be unloved on the Arab street; U.S. troops would become the “infidel occupier,” making the “United States the main enemy of millions of Arabs for generations.”

Bradley wanted to give Saddam until October 1, 1991, to withdraw from Kuwait, “although October 1 would not be an automatic deadline.” After that would come further consultations with Congress and additional authorization from the U.N. In place of military action, Bradley favored continued sanctions, in which he had tremendous faith.

Indeed, he argued, “if Hitler’s earliest aggression . . . or Japan’s earliest aggression . . . or Mussolini’s earliest aggression had been met with . . . international military preparations and strong economic reprisals,” then the “Allies might never have had to face the awful choice of war or appeasement. That is the lesson of the 1930s.” Well, maybe it isn’t, since both Italy and Japan were hit with sanctions, and the American embargo on oil shipments to Japan helped to provoke the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The view from Bill Bradley’s bomb shelter hasn’t changed much through the years. His attempts at “new thinking” reflect the frozen prejudices of Cold War arms controllers. His fear at having to face “the awful choice of war” and his antipathy to the exercise of American power are deeply rooted. So deeply rooted that, in his debate with Al Gore, Bradley nominated Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, and Mikhail Gorbachev as his heroes—three leaders characterized by their moral vanity and political failures. If that’s the kind of international leader Bill Bradley wants to be, maybe we should all build bomb shelters. ♦