

# Myths at the summit

**S**ummits, as I said on Sunday, breed their own kind of giddy euphoria. They also have a useful catalytic effect in highlighting some of our most cherished myths. Some old favorites:

- Misunderstanding breeds war—if we only understood each other, international tensions would disappear. A favorite of kindly people who think that inviting Russians into their homes will prove we westerners have no hostile intent.

That's nice. Except that Hitler's Germany understood France and Poland very, very well. The Nazis struck at these nations' weakest points precisely because of their excellent knowledge of the Polish and French mentalities and defences.

Where we have seen true misunderstanding is in the erroneous assessment of an opponent's military ability, as when the Japanese underestimated U.S. power in World War II.

- The spread of the free market system and western culture in the Soviet Union will eliminate hostile intent on the part of the USSR. After all, people who listen to rock concerts or who talk to us about their babies can't really be a threat, can they? Call this the Dr. Spock/Van Cliburn school of tension release.

Remember back when the Kaiser's Germany shared the same glorious western culture as France and also the same economic system? The 1.4 million French and German soldiers who fell at Verdun knew the words to the same songs.

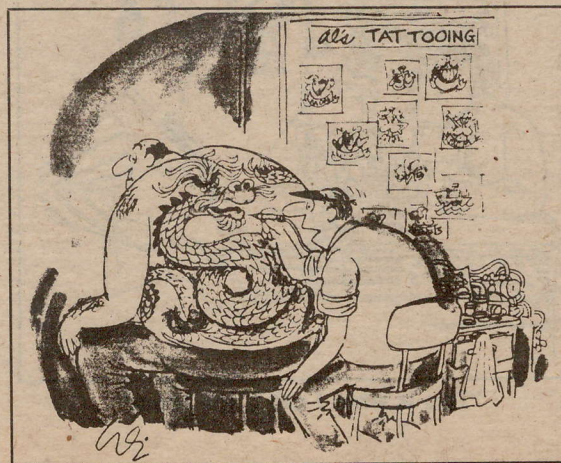
Pre-war Poland, as is often forgotten, was a semi-fascist dictatorship. Even so, Poland was attacked by fascist Germany and the Soviet Union. Capitalist Germany invaded capitalist Belgium in 1940. In the 1960s, communist China fought border clashes with the communist USSR.

- Arms produce wars. This chimera is one of the most deeply cherished beliefs among left-wing churchmen, professors with soup stains on their ties and frumpy female agitators in round glasses and bandanas.

There has been no war for the past 42 years between the world's most heavily armed super-powers—in spite of ample and often highly provocative opportunities.

Few people are even aware that the U.S. and

## Punch



"Smoking or non-smoking?"

## ERIC MARGOLIS



USSR have been conducting secret border talks over the Barents Sea for the past five years. Most nations fight over borders; but the U.S. and USSR chat away like old maids. The superpower nuclear arsenal has prevented, not encouraged, war.

Think, by contrast, of poorly armed Biafra or Mozambique where millions have died. Or the 1948 Indo-Pakistani slaughter—where more millions were murdered by fire, knives, rocks and spears. Arms don't make wars, people do.

Rule No. 1 in international relations: Don't pick fights with heavily armed, muscular nations.

- Humanity is threatened by nuclear arms. Well, yes, in theory. But history shows something quite different. So far, nuclear arms have caused about 400,000 casualties. Conventional arms, wielded by people who understood each other very well and who all liked Mozart, killed 9 million soldiers in World War I and 15 million in World War II.

The total number of deaths from 20th century wars and revolutions amounts to about 35 million soldiers and civilians. But what's truly incredible is the number of civilians killed in peacetime by their own governments. Let's do some addition.

Lenin's Red Terror and Stalin's Terror: 30 million or more. Hitler's death camps: Some 8 million, including 6 million Jews. Mao's collectivization of Chinese agriculture and the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward: Somewhere around 45 million deaths (a process lauded by our CBC as "social reform").

Here we have a total of 83 million dead who were not killed in war but murdered in cold blood by shooting, gas or starvation. In other words, more than twice as many people in our century have been killed by their own totalitarian governments as in wars. And add to these huge numbers another 4 million killed in places like Algeria, Indonesia, East Timor, Burundi and Laos.

Of course, the drum beaters on the left hardly ever mention this vast calculus of death. Instead, you get CBC's *The Journal*, for instance, talking this week about the "10 million (American) jobs that depend on the U.S. war machine" or referring to the U.S. as "the biggest nuclear gunslinger on the globe." Get rid of the U.S. capitalist military-industrial complex, our CBC informs us, and the danger of war will evaporate.

It seems glasnost has not yet come to the CBC.

The point is, concern for human rights and the decency of governments is of far more importance than arms control. CBC newscasters may snicker and sneer over Ronald Reagan's "evil empire" remark, but the balance sheet of murdered people speaks for itself.

True, Gorbachev's Russia is no longer Stalin's dark land. But we must never forget that totalitarian regimes and lust for territory, not misunderstanding or arms, are what have brought death and ruin in our calamitous century.