

Introduction

JONATHAN SCHELL

Alan Cranston's life wedded idealism and practical accomplishment in a way that was perhaps unique in his time. As a four-term Senator from California, he pushed with relentless tenacity to help frame and strengthen the arms control treaties—the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks I and II, the Strategic Arms Reductions treaties, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. These decades of public service within the formal political system were bookended by periods, at the beginning and end of his career, of equally intense political activity outside the system. Cranston was a participant in the famous Dublin Conference convened in October 1945 by Grenville Clark, the distinguished lawyer and adviser to presidents (and lifelong hero to Cranston), to establish the United World Federalists association. Cranston became the president of the organization in 1949, and left the post in 1952. Soon, in a radical shift from global to local concerns, he became the President of the California Democratic Council, which labored, with considerable success, to break the hammerlock that the Republican Party had on elected office in California at the time. This work led, in 1958, to his election as State Controller of California and, in 1968, to his election to the Senate, where he served four terms. His former role as president of the World Federalists was a possible liability in his election campaigns, but, as he liked to point out, he was protected from political damage by the fact that one Ronald Reagan had also been a member.

Did Cranston jettison his youthful convictions, growing more conservative as he grew older, as so many do when they enter the political system? He did not. Rather, he became more patient, working to achieve gradually the aims that he once had hoped to achieve all at once in the late 1940s. At the same time, he was learning. That the bold aims remained intact became clear

in 1984 when, believing that the nuclear arms race was getting out of control in Ronald Reagan's first term, he made a brief bid for the presidency, running on a platform of nuclear disarmament. When that failed, he returned to his incremental work in the Senate. Then, after leaving the Senate in 1993, he returned to the nuclear dilemma, first as Chairman of the Gorbachev Foundation, and then as the President of the Global Security Institute, which he founded. It was in this period that he put together the Responsible Security Appeal, which calls for the abolition of nuclear arms, and was signed, at Cranston's urging, by such notable people as Paul Nitze, Gen. Charles Horner, and President Jimmy Carter. At an event launching the Appeal he said that although a nuclear arsenal "may have been necessary during the Cold War; it is not necessary forever. It is not acceptable forever. I say it is unworthy of our nation, unworthy of any nation; it is unworthy of civilization."

The riddle is how he managed to work on so many levels of political life at the same time, switching back and forth between them with the greatest ease. It was through his work on nuclear weapons in the last years of his life that I got to know him. One of the keys to his character was his modesty, which would have been notable in any human being but was simply astonishing in an elected politician. On his answering machine, he was "Alan," as he was to most who knew him. The human being not only had survived within the important official, it had grown and developed. Self-reference—not to speak of bluster or bragging—were at the zero level, as were all other forms of showmanship. Equally, there was zero variation in his manner toward the small and the great, the scruffy and the expensively suited. Sometimes I wondered how a four-term Senator could have managed this, and in the course of many days of travel and meetings together, I believed that I came to understand at least one reason. It certainly wasn't that he underrated himself, or failed to appreciate the scope of his ability or role. He had, for instance, a world-spanning rolodex and entree at every level of American and international life, and used these to the hilt in the cause. It was that his concentration, which was intense, was entirely on the work at hand. At every single meeting I attended with him, he made something happen, large or small. He passed along news, received news, asked for a further meeting, arranged one for someone else, won support for a project, or set a new proj-

ect in motion—a job for someone, a research organization, an appeal, a television program, a film. He moved as swiftly as he moved quietly. The work was hard, intellectually as well as practically, and there just was no time for wasted motion, blather, or nonsense. Ordinarily, he was silent most of the time at meetings. He kept so imperturbably still—a gaunt Buddha—that sometimes I thought, “Well, a man of his eminence doesn’t have to attend to every last word of every inconsequential meeting”—only to hear him speak up quietly at the end, summing up what had been said, making sense of it and offering suggestions, which usually formed the basis for what was done. Not for nothing had he been made Democratic Whip in the Senate.

What was true of his manner was true of his mind: it was, even in his eighties, fresh, resilient, receptive, reasonable, sensible, constructive, unburdened by conventional wisdom, unencrusted by habit, and crowned with what can only be called wisdom.

Alan Cranston died on New Year’s eve, 2000. “The Sovereignty Revolution,” complete but for a few details, lay on his desk. An outline for the introduction, in his characteristic block handwriting, was next to it. This essay, it seems to me, is the brilliant product of his singular evolution as a political man as well as a fresh, arresting, far-seeing synthesis of development of the security dilemmas in his lifetime. Though written before September 11, not one sentence of it is irrelevant to the post-September 11 world. Indeed, readers will be struck that right at the beginning of the essay he warns of a terrorist strike against the United States and specifically names Osama Bin Laden as its possible perpetrator and cites the first bombing of the World Trade Center as a precedent. At the center of the essay is the concept of sovereignty. Cranston had thought hard about this notion as president of the United World Federalists. From that point of view, of course, sovereignty, “widely and unwisely thought in our time to mean only *national* sovereignty with every nation supposedly supreme inside its own borders and acknowledging no master outside them” (in Cranston’s words), was *the* great obstacle to a peaceful world constructed on federal principles. Nearly everywhere, he still believed, sovereignty, worshipped almost as “a god,” is a focal point of strife, both between nations and within them, where it sets neighbor against neighbor. In the nuclear age, insistence upon the sovereign prerogative threatens the bio-

logical survival of nations and of the human species. Indeed, long before it was fashionable to do so, Cranston was traveling the country warning of the nexus of terrorism and nuclear weapons and the other weapons of mass destruction. In this essay, as in his speeches in the late 1990s, he quotes US Ambassador Robert Gallucci's warning that one day the United States might wake up to learn that terrorists had placed nuclear bombs in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, and were threatening to destroy these cities serially if the United States did not change its policies in the Middle East. Many Americans were shocked into awareness of these dangers by September 11. Cranston had woken himself up—and sought to awaken others—years before that terrible day. Had his advice been taken, it might never have occurred.

The thought of global terrorism was just one of the dangers, he believed, that demonstrated that the world of sovereign states was under challenge by global forces from without and splintering forces from within. His description of these forces, in a powerful *tour d'horizon*, requires few additions today. The idea of sovereignty, born in one age, had survived to prevent necessary action in another. It had lost most of its descriptive force and much of its prescriptive force. Many global corporations, he notes, have more attributes of sovereignty than many nation-states. As the title of the essay suggests, the transformation in question is not only one hoped for, it is one well under way. The question for him was whether the changes would occur consciously or blindly.

Cranston therefore wanted us merely to take charge of something that is happening anyway. In this respect, Cranston the elder differed from Cranston the young World Federalist. The World Federalists were revolutionaries, in the sense that they wished to lay siege to fundamental, immemorial, still-mighty structures of world politics and replace them wholesale with other structures. But in his later years, Cranston saw clearly that these structures were already badly eroded. So now he swam partly with, not wholly against, history's tide. At mid-century, the strength of states was little impaired; by century's end, they were weaker, and "immense disorder and worse can rise out of the weakness of nation-states if no workable way is found to solve global problems and to achieve global goals."

For guidance in the new situation, Cranston turned to an old source—the

Constitution of the United States—and a new one, the European Union. Sovereignty, the American founders held, was not the prerogative of a state but of the people. Political institutions were merely emanations of their inextinguishable power. It followed that the obstacle of sovereignty that stood in the way of federal plans—whether for the United States or for the world—could be surmounted. The people who created national governments could dip again into the reserves of their power and create international institutions. Nor did they have to make a choice between the two. The international institutions could co-exist with national ones, just as the American states co-existed with the federal government.

This much was consistent with the original principles of world federalism. The European Union added new lessons. For one thing, whereas the American constitution had been born, so to speak, in a big bang, the evolution of the EU was a study in incrementalism—a procedure more likely to be followed on the global level. For another, the EU is an association of full-fledged nations with histories going back as long as a thousand years—a state of affairs that resembles the plurality of nation-states in the world more than the comparatively homogenous collection of American states in the late eighteenth century.

In some respects, of course, the post-senatorial Cranston resembles the pre-senatorial one. The vision is still global. The habit of architectural thought is still present. But now, in a series of ingenious, deeply considered proposals, he wants to move gradually. These include proposals for gradually reforming the UN, adding strength to its institutions and infusing them with popular support that is the lifeblood of democratic politics. And he entertains the idea that it is no longer necessary to place mechanisms of global governance in just one location. Perhaps it will be found useful to create “a number of separate and distinct world institutions,” which “may emerge as people and nations grope their way to a better managed world.”

Like the life that lies behind it, “The Sovereignty Revolution” draws on a multitude of concepts and theories to create a new and richer coherence.

Jonathan Schell
December 2003