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**Nuclear Weapons
in Search of a Role
Evaluation of Recent American
Strategic Nuclear
and Arms Control Policy**

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For several years now, well before the Reagan administration came to power, American nuclear strategy and arms control policy has confused three possible uses of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons have been viewed (1) as instruments to deter an attack by threatening an adversary with unacceptable punishment, (2) as warfighting capabilities keyed to winning or prevailing in an armed conflict with another nation, even one possessing nuclear weapons, or (3) as a vehicle to neutralize an adversary's threat to use them for purposes of diplomatic coercion or blackmail or, as opportunities might arise, to employ them as bargaining levers. Confusion of these possible uses of nuclear weapons has introduced, wittingly or not, potentially dangerous instabilities in the nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The first part of this paper focuses on some of the principal features of recent American nuclear strategic and arms control policy to highlight the current confusion about the threat, use, and control of nuclear weapons. The second part suggests some of the dangerous and disconcerting actual and potential consequences of this confusion and what might be done about reducing the dissonance occasioned by competing objectives and about reinforcing the stability of the United States-Soviet stalemate for the benefit of both countries.

I Expanding the Nuclear Repertoire

Carter Administration and PD-59

As early as the Kennedy administration, American planners have seriously considered adopting a counterforce strategy aimed primarily, if deterrence should breakdown, at destroying the Soviet Union's nuclear forces and at bringing a nuclear war to a swift conclusion on terms favorable to the West ¹ Emphasis was placed on damage limitation through the destruction of the adversary's nuclear strike forces Priority targeting of the adversary's military capabilities, especially his nuclear forces, allegedly maximized incentives to spare American cities and maintained nuclear exchanges under tight, centralized political authority and control

Consistent with this warfighting mentality, the Kennedy administration embarked on a major expansion of American nuclear forces The Minuteman program was assigned a high priority, command and control systems were upgraded and expanded, and tactical nuclear weapons were deployed in Europe and Asia, and proposals to increase expenditures for conventional weapons were adopted as part of administration's flexible response strategy The West would control all rungs of the escalatory ladder NATO allies were discouraged from building national nuclear forces whose independent use during a crisis might undermine the controlled conduct of a nuclear exchange British access to American nuclear and submarine technology was granted on the expectation that London would earmark its nuclear forces to NATO and would join in constructing a NATO Multilateral Nuclear Force

(MLF) Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara directly attacked De Gaulle's France for refusing to join the MLF and for having decided to construct a force de frappe outside the NATO framework and beyond allied power to influence or control. McNamara characterized the French force as dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence and lacking in credibility as a deterrent.²

This first major attempt to develop a truly counterforce strategy and posture collapsed almost as soon as it had been mounted. However many strategic nuclear forces the United States may have been able to deploy, they could not prevent, according to Pentagon estimates, a devastating Soviet nuclear attack on the United States. As this harsh truth set in, emphasis shifted gradually in declaratory statements from a counterforce to a countervalue strategy. Official policy embraced the notion of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). It would be enough to deter the Soviet Union from attacking the United States or its allies, if sufficient American nuclear forces could survive a Soviet first strike and still visit unacceptable damage on the Soviet Union. This level of damage was defined as two-thirds of the economic base and 25-30 percent of the Soviet population.

If American nuclear planners were prepared to accept assured destruction as official doctrine, they were unwilling to accept minimum levels of nuclear capabilities to meet a MAD test. While American official pronouncements stressed MAD, American nuclear strike capabilities grew in number and destructive power during the 1960s to well above the levels needed to meet MAD standards. Targeting plans centered first on military installations in case of a nuclear war. Attacks on Soviet cities were to

be spared as long as possible. According to one published report, only seven percent of the destructive nuclear capability of the United States was aimed directly at cities.³ The targeting plan for the Soviet Union -- the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) -- was keyed more to a counterforce than to a countervalue posture. MAD was preferred as a declaratory policy, partly to quiet critics fearful that the U S might launch a first strike and partly to dampen the enthusiasm of armed force advocates, particularly in the Air Force, who had seized on counterforce as a club to beat the administration into accepting even higher nuclear requirements than those already underwriting MAD. American operational nuclear capabilities were too large for MAD yet too small for a genuine counterforce or warfighting posture. It was MAD-plus.

As Soviet nuclear capabilities reached parity with those of the United States, pressures began to mount for a re-examination of American nuclear might and its relation to the SIOP. In ratifying SALT I, the Senate accepted the qualifying amendment of Senator Henry Jackson that henceforth the president and his negotiators not limit the U S to levels of intercontinental strategic forces inferior to the limits provided for the Soviet Union.⁴ For Jackson, parity included not only launchers, but throw weight where the Soviet Union held almost a two and a half to one advantage over the United States (approximately 5 million kilograms for the Soviet Union to 2 million kilograms for the United States). The issues at stake were not only those of military security but also national status, prestige, and bargaining leverage in reaching arms accords with the Soviet Union and in defining the detente process.

Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger reportedly pressed the

throw-weight issue within the Nixon administration Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was less sensitive to these military concerns than to the difficulties of reaching a political accord with the Soviet Union in a nuclear domain that had been implicitly conceded to the Soviet Union Technological limitations and traditional interest in rocket and artillery forces had led Soviet strategists to concentrate Russia's strategic nuclear power in heavy missiles By the middle 1970s approximately 70-75 percent of its warheads were positioned on ground-launched ICBMs Soviet negotiators also claimed that Russian heavy missiles were compensation for the U S lead in submarine and submarine-launch technology, long-range bombers, and MIRVing as well as NATO forward based systems and British and French nuclear forces ⁵ Secretary of State Henry Kissinger rested his case for arms control on the notion of offsetting asymmetries Both sides could have different but no less lethal assured destructive capabilities

Schlesinger's concerns were at once narrower and broader than Kissinger's narrower because they necessarily focused on the issue of using nuclear weapons if deterrence broke down, broader, because nuclear weapons were viewed as an arm of diplomacy and as a critical determinant of perceived bargaining power or leverage at the disposal of the two superpowers Schlesinger, like Jackson and others, was bothered by the ostensibly meager and unpalatable menu of options offered by MAD In the wake of a Soviet attack or in the midst of a major crisis, like the Cuban missile controversy, the President was faced with the stark choice of initiating a nuclear war or capitulation if his bluff were called The Defense Secretary was arguing for a greater selection of options, incorporating the possibility of destroying hard and soft military targets

or economic production centers, while initially exempting Soviet cities from almost certain destruction

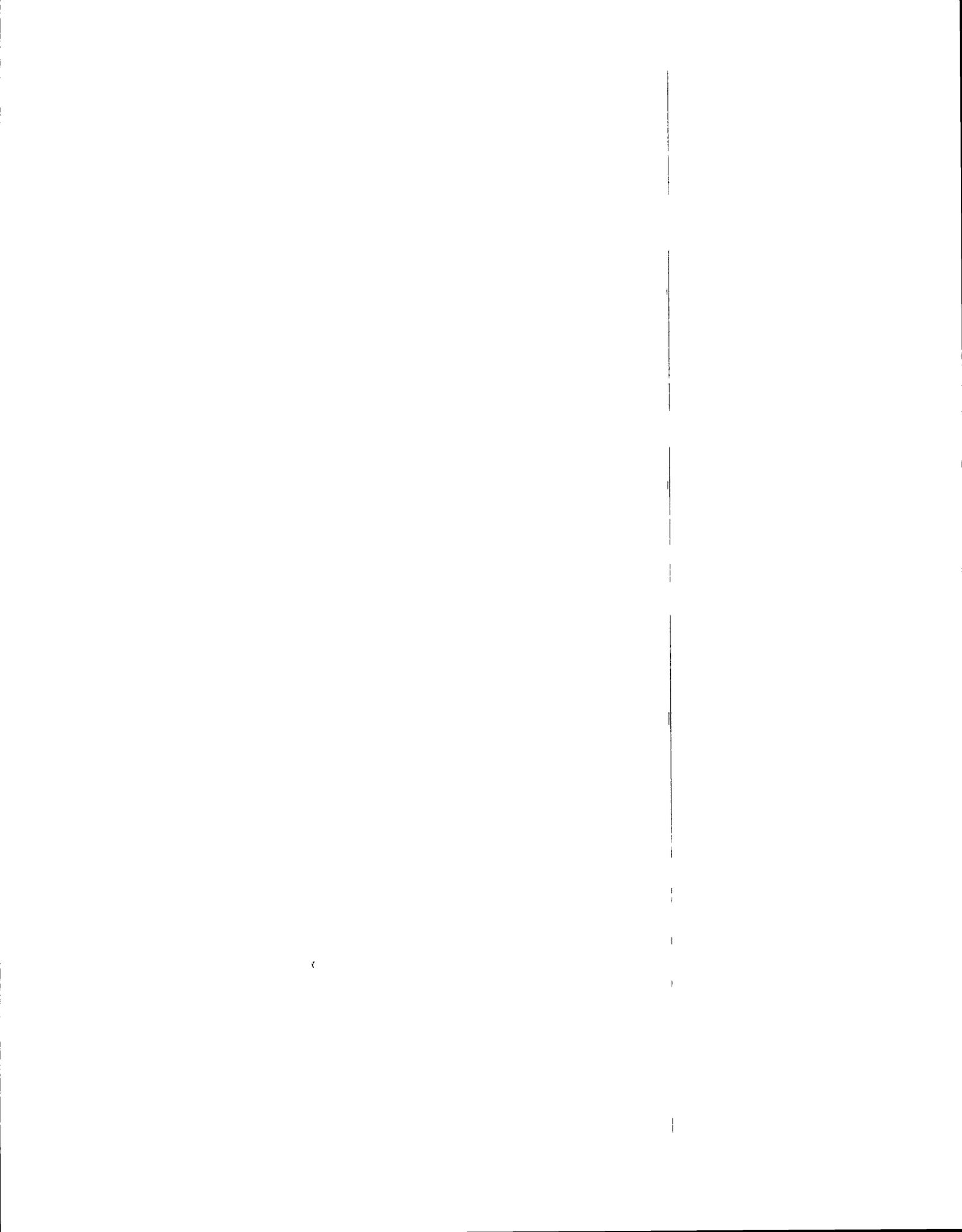
Soviet expansion of its nuclear forces, consistent with the letter but not spirit of SALT I and the era of detente, reinforced Schlesinger's sense of urgency. By the middle 1970s the Soviet Union had dulled some of the edge of the American technological progress in MIRVed launchers, warhead yield, and accuracy. With the development of the SS-18 and SS-19, Moscow also threatened to widen the already yawning gap in throw weight between the superpowers. The Soviet Union appeared heading toward a counter force capability, especially threatening to American land-based systems. Soviet insistence on nuclear warfighting capabilities as a standard feature of Soviet doctrine provided no comfort for American planners.⁶ SALT I and the interim accords on offensive systems, including the 1974 Vladivostok agreement, seemingly afforded no effective brake on accelerating Soviet nuclear power.

Soviet nuclear forces not only limited further the options available to a president but also threatened to destroy key parts of the U S triad. The choice facing the United States seemed clear, either it had to convince the Soviet Union to arrest its modernization program and dismantle its heavy missiles or it had to match this effort to regain what was perceived as lost parity at a critical rung of the escalatory ladder. The MX was designated as the American champion to counter the Soviet challenge or to become a bargaining counter in arms control negotiations with the Soviets. At this juncture in the U S -Soviet competition the MX assumed, in official circles, more the role of providing a return to essential equivalence than of furnishing the United States with winning warfighting capabilities that

would ensure escalation dominance and, if deterrence should fail, a favorable nuclear exchange for the west ⁷ Whereas Kissinger trusted in MAD-plus, defined by the offsetting asymmetries characterizing the superpower nuclear arsenals, to preserve a stable deterrent and to nurture the prospects of a fragile detente, Schlesinger insisted on a more rigorous standard for deterrence, including selective nuclear options other than cities

Going further, Schlesinger contended that anything less than an expansion of American strategic arms or a contraction of Soviet heavy weight missiles exposed the United States and its allies to political blackmail For Kissinger, American nuclear policy and arms control served detente, for Schlesinger it was the other way around

The issues of the debate were blurred somewhat because the SIOP was never simply MAD, with no options available to a President beyond mutual annihilation, nor did its designers ever claim that its implementation would win a nuclear war Until the 1970s the SIOP quietly served MAD -- and then some -- furnishing a wider spectrum of choices than Schlesinger was willing to concede The SIOP itself, however, could obviously not substitute for a new missile system like the MX to offset Soviet nuclear advances As the relationship between targeting options and nuclear capabilities sharpened in public and bureaucratic debates, it was inevitable that the SIOP would be increasingly viewed as a mechanism that had to be fine-tuned to respond to new possibilities of limited nuclear war, to guide efforts to close perceived Soviet superiority in selected, but critical, rungs of the escalatory ladder, to preclude political blackmail, and to induce the Soviet Union, as in Cuba, to do American



bidding

The Carter administration's management of nuclear strategic and arms control policy deepened the confusion surrounding the appropriate uses of nuclear weapons as a deterrent, as warfighting, or as compellence. The mission of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to Moscow in March 1977, shortly after President Carter's inauguration, failed to achieve a quick breakthrough in SALT negotiations. The President's Comprehensive Proposal envisioned deep cuts in Soviet SS-18 capabilities in exchange for a commitment to drop the MX program. The proposal was poorly conceived and hastily drafted. However well intentioned, it rested on a flawed conception of what could be reasonably expected from negotiations with Moscow over nuclear weapons in areas where the Soviet Union enjoyed an advantage and where any diminution of its lead through arms control agreements essentially required the Soviets to trade strength for weakness.

The Carter plan also reflected a surface grasp of the deep cross-currents within the American security and arms control community running counter to the President's desire for genuine, if ill-considered, arms control and arms reductions. The President was caught between two unmovable objects. On the one hand, there was an intransigent Soviet leadership, confused and perplexed by the sudden shift in American negotiating stance but no less adamant about conceding any of its hard-won advantages under SALT I. On the other, the President confronted his erstwhile supporters, like Senator Jackson, who demanded deep cuts in Russian heavy missiles to remedy the perceived concessions granted under SALT I. These were perceived to have permitted a Soviet breakout whereby

Moscow could increase its throw-weight and warhead capabilities without technically violating the accord. For those pressing for concessions, the Vance mission was a dual test of wills -- both the Soviet leadership and the President were being challenged. It was no longer a question of preserving MAD or even MAD-plus. It was one of regaining lost strategic ground and of bolstering the perception of a renewed American strength and the need for ascendancy as a precondition for bargaining with the Soviet Union on SALT issues and on the entire range of differences separating the two countries. President Carter only dimly understood his adversaries at home and abroad. Secretary of State Dean Rusk has been widely quoted as saying that during the Cuban missile crisis, we were eyeball-to-eyeball, and the other guy blinked.⁸ President Carter blinked twice -- when the Vance mission was unceremoniously dispatched home from Moscow and when the President turned toward a compromise solution for SALT and appeared to domestic opponents as having capitulated to Soviet demands.⁹

After so inauspicious a start, it was difficult to focus administration attention on maintaining superpower strategic stability -- not warfighting or diplomatic coercion -- as the principal object of arms control talks. The administration revealed a crippling and confused attitude about what is wanted and how it proposed to convince the Russians to accept arms cuts and to rally domestic support behind SALT II. It added to its perception of weakness and vacillation in successive decisions affecting American strategic and theatre nuclear forces. The President's cancellation of deployment of the enhanced radiation weapon or neutron bomb provoked a serious crisis in confidence between Bonn and Washington.¹⁰ The willingness of the Carter administration seemingly to

insulate the European theatre from strategic arms talks deepened German and European fears that, in light of growing U S -Soviet parity, Washington was unravelling its commitments to the defense of Europe and reducing its support of vital European security interests Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's address to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London in the fall of 1977 signalled a concern that the American nuclear deterrent might be de-coupled from Europe Bonn expressed reservations about the limits in SALT II on cruise missile deployments in Europe, its silence on the SS-20 threat, and its convenient adoption of a range-rule for the Backfire bomber that classified it as a non-strategic bomber and, hence, outside the purview of the superpower talks The cancellation of the B-1 bomber, however justified, projected the image of an administration bent on reaching an arms control accord with the Soviet Union without having bargained for something in return The successive shocks of the Iranian crisis, administration temporizings over reports of an enhanced Russian military contingent in Cuba, and the Soviet invasion of Afganistan sealed the fate of SALT II, compelling President Carter to withdraw the treaty from the Senate

Even if these unfortunate events had not occurred, the SALT II treaty had been seriously eroded as an arms control device SALT was hostage to the strategic nuclear modernization program proposed by the armed forces, including the MX, Trident, the Stealth bomber (with C-4 and D-5 warheads), cruise missiles, and to some extent for intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe The MX was the critical link between an arms accord and a SIOP capable of launching, if need be, a disarming or, at least, damaging limiting attack against Soviet long-range missiles At the close of the

Carter years, it had assumed an elaborate form involving 200 long-range missiles which were to be secretly transported around race-tracks comprising 4600 possible points from which a missile could be fired. The MX passed from the tenuous status of a bargaining chip, first proposed by Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, to that of a key part of the American strategic triad. The MX possessed characteristics which suited it for limited nuclear war. It was time-urgent, fast-firing, accurate, penetrable, survivable, quickly reprogrammable, and responsive to command and control. JCS support for SALT hinged on the MX. It supposedly resolved the contradictions between the SIOP, based on MAD-plus and now necessarily extended to cover expanding Soviet nuclear power,¹¹ and expectations raised by proponents of arms control and arms reductions. The Carter MX would have added 200 MX launchers and 2000 warheads to the American arsenal. Since the Carter race-track scheme did not solve the problem of vulnerability, opponents had reason to charge that the MX was designed as a first-strike weapon. Alternatively, if it were to be only used as a deterrent, it was potentially dangerous, for it was more a target than a deterrent and would have to be used early--and very likely precipitately--to preclude its destruction.

The strategic debate and consensus in the United States tilted several more degrees toward warfighting and coercive diplomacy with the announced signing but not publication of Presidential Directive 59. PD-59 signalled a change in the American targeting plan.¹² Although signed by the President on July 25, 1980, in the midst of the presidential election campaign, an intensive review of the American nuclear employment policy had begun at least two years earlier. PD-59 built on Secretary of Defense

James Schlesinger's announced doctrine of limited nuclear options which was crystallized in 1974 in National Security Decision Memorandum 242 PD-59, however, departed in two significant ways from previous thinking First, the President authorized American strategic nuclear forces to give greater priority to Soviet ICBM and military and political leadership sites, including relocation centers Second, the military was directed to develop a capability to fight an extended nuclear war which might last several months rather than a few hours or days ¹³ Nuclear forces were to endure a Soviet first-strike and repeated nuclear salvos and to be sufficiently flexible to respond selectively at the behest of responsible military and political officials to the exigences of the nuclear conflict As nuclear forces were modernized, new and more powerful C³I systems, capable of surviving repeated nuclear attacks, were also to be installed to ensure a controlled nuclear exchange

Secretary of Defense Harold Brown accented the deterrent thrust of PD-59's significant shift in targeting priorities and in force requirements This is not a first strike strategy, Brown affirmed In addressing the contingency of a breakdown in deterrence, necessitating the use of nuclear war to stop an aggression, PD-59 was supposed to make nuclear less likely because the Soviet leadership [could] have no illusions about what such a war would mean for Soviet state power and for Soviet society ¹⁴ Brown's countervailing strategy was designed to blunt any Soviet incentive to use nuclear weapons or to threaten them for political gain We cannot afford the risk that the Soviet leadership might entertain the illusion that nuclear war could be an option--or threat a means of coercion--for them ¹⁵ Brown and his supporters emphasized the

paternity of PD-59 tracing back its evolutionary origins, as Brown remarked, to Secretaries McNamara and Schlesinger, to name only two of my predecessors who have been most identified with development of our nuclear doctrine 16

Explanations and amplifications of the meaning of PD-59 reinforced, rather than quieted, concerns about its first-strike and warfighting orientation. As long as PD-59's MAD roots were exposed and as long as it was linked to arms control proposals that appeared to temper, if not tame, the first-strike characteristics of the MX system, there was a thin thread of plausibility to the Carter administration's defense of PD-59 as an enhancement of deterrence understood as a reinforcement of MAD-plus. The case weakened when the MX was placed within the context of the Carter administration's nuclear modernization program, including the Trident submarine (armed with increasingly accurate C-4 and eventually silo-busting D-5 missiles), the Stealth bomber, and strengthened C³I systems. Together these forces, when deployed, constituted an attack force potentially capable of launching a disarming first-strike.

Soviet strategists, not surprisingly, viewed PD-59 simply as a device to upset superpower parity, to abandon MAD in favor of warfighting, and to use nuclear weapons for political blackmail. General Mikhail Milshtein summarized the Soviet case against PD-59

Some people in the United States began to hope that by improving the accuracy of its strategic systems and building new missiles like the MX and Trident-2, the United States could somehow upset the present balance of forces in its favor, breaking the existing parity with the Soviet Union and finally achieving real superiority in strategic offensive forces

Of course, this is an illusion the Soviet Union will never permit parity to be upset. But nevertheless this encouraged thoughts that the new Minuteman warheads, the Trident submarine system, the projected MX missiles, and so on, could be used as instruments of threat short of mutual assured destruction, for foreign policy ends.

What is new now, it seems to me, is that the possibility of waging nuclear war has been accepted on the very highest levels of the American government. The acceptability of nuclear war (sic) and the possibility of victory in such a war ¹⁷

Milshstein's criticisms were echoed by domestic critics ¹⁸. Once SALT II had become a dead issue, defending a countervailing strategy as a deterrent posture aimed solely at preventing the Soviet Union from winning a nuclear war or using nuclear weapons as bargaining levers lost some of its force. Proponents increasingly stressed the Soviet threat, the need for escalation dominance in case of hostilities, (not just equivalence or parity), and selective nuclear targeting ¹⁹. Like capitalists in the Marxist-Leninist scheme who prepare the way for Socialism, so Carter advocates of countervailing strategy prepared the ground for the Reagan administration's expansion of American strategic capabilities and, paradoxically, an arms control position, reminiscent of the Carter administration's failed March 1977 demarche, that insisted on unprecedented cuts in Soviet nuclear forces. What new nuclear weapons might not achieve--nuclear superiority and maximal political and psychic leverage--then arms control negotiations were expected to compensate for real or perceived weaknesses and disparities in the American posture. The adversary would either face certain defeat in a confrontation with the United States or he would have to capitulate in an arms accord or be spent into submission.

The Reagan Nuclear Regime

This review of the post-SALT period stresses the continuity of evolving American strategic doctrine, nuclear capabilities, and arms control policy rather than the differences and the departures. The trend has been toward assigning more and more complex roles to nuclear weapons. For purposes of this argument it is not necessary to show that the Reagan administration has fully and unequivocally adopted a warfighting and coercive diplomatic stance. Even if it would have wished to fully abandon MAD and SALT, it is hindered by technological and strategic realities and by an intransigent Congress which has placed sharp limits on MX development and insisted on progress in START. All that need be demonstrated is to show that the Reagan administration has reinforced and even accelerated the trend toward accepting nuclear weapons as warfighting and coercive instruments. In harmony with this view, it can also be shown that the Reagan administration has attempted to set arms control negotiation targets which would enhance the quest for superiority either through Soviet acceptance of the American nuclear modernization program or a substantial, if not total, dismantling of some of the Soviet Union's most modern nuclear systems.

In announcing his five-point, \$222 billion proposal for strategic modernization, President Reagan spoke of a window of vulnerability that had to be closed.²⁰ In March 1982 and again a year later, the President pointed out that on balance the Soviet Union does have a definite margin of superiority.²¹ His advisors pointed to the superiority of Soviet throw-weight, destructive megatonnage, and MIRVed heavy missiles as well as

a dominant, European theater advantage with the deployment of the Backfire bomber and, more significantly, of SS-20 missiles armed with three nuclear warheads ²² ACDA Head Eugene Rostow publicly identified the principal sources of administration concern. In general terms, the most threatening features of this [Soviet] buildup have been the massive increase in hard-target-kill-capable intercontinental ballistic missile ICBM reentry vehicles, the growth in the destructive potential of Soviet strategic forces as a whole, the deployment of mobile, highly-accurate, and MIRVed long-range theater nuclear forces, and the continued development of their already extensive strategic air defenses. As a result, two legs of our strategic triad are now threatened ²³

Before negotiations about arms control could be undertaken, a broad-based modernization program had first to be set in motion to re-establish what was perceived as American inferiority and to re-assert American nuclear ascendancy. Otherwise, as Rostow and others suggested, such a situation [inferiority] is a recipe for nuclear blackmail ²⁴ The Soviet lead was supposed to be translatable into coercive power through perceptions of U S weakness ²⁵ Secretary Alexander Haig went further and linked the growth of Soviet military power to Moscow's interventionism abroad and its promotion of violent change around the globe ²⁶ The Secretary of State called for approval of the MX. The question is not whether we want to build a system with the unique capabilities embodied in the MX, but whether we can maintain an adequate deterrent without it ²⁷ Deterrence required the MX's fast-reaction, hard-kill features. An increase in American strategic power was needed to blunt the exploitation by the Soviet Union of its military power. We have learned, said the

Secretary of State, "that Soviet-American agreements, even in strategic arms control, will not survive Soviet threats to the overall military balance or Soviet encroachment upon our strategic interests in critical regions of the world Linkage is not a theory, it is a fact of life that we overlook at our peril "28

The Reagan proposals of October 1981 featured a five-point plan for strategic modernization (1) upgrading and expansion of C³I systems, (2) a bomber program comprised of 100 B-1 aircraft, increased R and D for Stealth, B-2 modification to carry cruise missiles, and production of over 3,000 cruise missiles to be deployed on B-52 Gs, (3) a sea-based program comprising construction of the seven Trident submarines to be built at an annual rate of one each year between 1981-1987, development of the more accurate D-5 or Trident II missile (scheduled for entry into service by 1989), and deployment of several hundred nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles, (4) development and deployment of at least 100 MX, each armed with 10 warheads, and (5) the modernization of North American air defenses and R and D for ASAT systems 29

The accent on accurate, time-urgent nuclear striking power belied the Administration`s interest in deterring the Soviet Union by putting "at risk those things -- including their military capabilities -- which they value most "30 The Secretary of Defense presented a comprehensive rationale for this first installment on the administration`s strategic modernization program

Should deterrence fail and strategic nuclear war with the USSR occur, the United States must prevail and be able to force the Soviet Union to seek earliest termination of hostilities on terms favorable to the United States

The United States must have plans that assure US strategic nuclear forces can render ineffective the total Soviet military and political power structure and forces that will maintain, throughout a protracted conflict period and afterward, the capability to inflict very high levels of damage against the industrial/economic base of the Soviet Union so that they have a strong incentive to seek conflict termination short of an all-out attack on our cities and economic assets

US strategic nuclear forces and their command and communication links should be capable of supporting controlled nuclear counter-attacks over a protracted period while maintaining a reserve of nuclear forces sufficient for trans- and post-attack protection and coercion ³¹

This sketch of the employment plan for nuclear weapons re-affirms PD-59's primary focus on Soviet military and power structure and, secondly, on the Soviet Union's industrial and economic base. The high priority given to C³I systems is consistent with this scenario of a protracted nuclear exchange requiring survival command and control links to dispatch residual nuclear forces to remaining Soviet targets, as commanders presumably work their way down the SIOP hit list according to prescribed procedures

Where the extra funds for C³I are to be spent is also of interest. There are six key links in the strategic C³I system. These include (1) sensing devices to detect and assess attacks, (2) command centers to evaluate sensor data, (3) political authorities responsible for authorizing appropriate responses, (4) command posts where deliberations and decisions are taken, (5) a communication network which connects the preceding four components, and (6) intelligence facilities to make damage assessments and to identify remaining targets to be destroyed

Priority has been assigned to the sensor and to the military command structure components of the C³I system. Warning satellites and ground-based radars designed to improve Soviet missile attack estimates will be deployed along with mobile processing centers and additional PAVE PAWS surveillance radars to improve coverage of Soviet submarine activity to the southeast and southwest of the United States. While funds are earmarked for the deployment of E-48 airborne command posts to serve political leaders within the National Command Authority, the bulk of the funding for the command component of the C³I system will be devoted to strengthening military operations, as Secretary Weinberger suggested, in the trans- and post- attack protection and coercion phases.³³ EC-135 airborne command posts serving military commanders will be hardened against nuclear effects and equipped with improved low frequency communications, linked to upgraded satellites, capable of reaching the Trident and Poseidon nuclear fleet. Inter-communications among the attack elements of the nuclear triad will also be strengthened. This enlarged, hardened, reliable, and efficient network is intended, within a decade, to service an enhanced nuclear war capability initiated under the Carter administration and accelerated and expanded under the Reagan regime.

Viewed against this decade-long modernization process, fueled and motored by notions of warfighting and coercive diplomacy under the guise of enhanced deterrence, it is not surprising that at some point attention would be given to the strategic defense component of American nuclear forces -- the ABM treaty and powerful opposition groups within the United States to such a re-evaluation to the contrary notwithstanding. President Reagan's October 1981 strategic modernization proposals, including funds

for air defenses and ASAT system, foreshadowed the President's March 23, 1983 announcement of a \$26 billion Strategic Defense Initiative SDI follows quite logically from the President's earlier modernization proposals and is consistent with what has unfolded in evolving American strategic thinking since the Schlesinger doctrine was first made public a decade before The layered-defense outlined in Congressional testimony envisions a program to develop new surveillance, target acquisitions and tracking components, directed and kinetic energy weapons, and battle management and support systems for a multi-tiered ABM system It would be designed to detect and kill missiles and warheads through the boost, post-boost, mid-course, or terminal phases of flight Both long-range and shorter-range defense systems would be developed to protect against submarine and air-launched missiles aimed at the United States and its allies ³⁴

SDI was presented as a two-edge word one dull and blunted, the other sharp and cutting I clearly recognize that defensive systems have limitations and raise certain problems and ambiguities, observed President Reagan If paired with offensive systems, they can be viewed as fostering an aggressive policy, and no one wants that The blunt edge of the sword was cast in different rhetorical terms, the SDI was portrayed as a challenge to the American scientific community to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete ³⁵ Which side of the sword will be used--to blunt an arms race or to start a new phase of the current offensive arms competition--remains to be seen The Soviet reaction was swift and not unexpected General Secretary Yuri Andropov saw

only the sharp and, in his words, seamy side of the initiative

In fact the strategic defensive forces of the United States will continue to be developed and upgraded at full tilt and along quite a definite line at that, namely that of acquiring a first nuclear strike capability Under these conditions the intentions to secure itself the possibility of destroying with the help of the ABM defenses the corresponding strategic systems of the other side is a bid to disarm the Soviet Union ³⁶

Until the forced compromises with Congress on the MX and arms control in 1983 and 1984,³⁷ the Reagan administration's approach to START and INF arms control negotiations has been essential as one with its determination to enhance American offensive strike forces in Europe and in the strategic reserve as well as the nation's nuclear defensive posture Both would be achieved either through unilateral development and deployment of these systems or through tough bargaining and concessions reached by using these systems as bargaining levers Rejecting the nuclear freeze proposal, the President posed a rhetorical question to underscore his opposition to a freeze Why should the Soviets negotiate if they've already achieved a freeze in a position of advantage to them? ³⁸ Arms control could follow only after the strategic balance had been rectified to favor American security interests Secretary of State Alexander Haig set out the principle that arms control efforts will be instruments of, not a replacement for, a coherent national and allied security policy ³⁹ ACDA Director Eugene Rostow downgraded the importance of necessarily reading arms control agreements with the Soviet Union Arms control agreements are by no means 'the political centerpiece or the crucial barometer' of Soviet-American relations ⁴⁰ Indeed, according to Rostow,

reflecting a view shared by President Reagan's principal arms control advisors, the SALT period permitted a Soviet breakout. Not only did we accept greater threats to our forces, but we agreed to ceilings and definitions that would permit the Soviets greater capabilities against us than now exist. We settled for superficial limitations while the threat grew by leaps and bounds.⁴¹

In the negotiations over intermediary nuclear forces (INF), the Reagan administration adopted a purist zero-zero negotiating stance. The proposed emplacement of 572 Pershing II (108) and Tomahawk cruise (464) missiles would be deployed unless the Soviet Union dismantled its SS-20 missiles. This unbending posture was retained throughout the bargaining process. In his March 23 address President Reagan justified the American position, characterizing the unrelenting Soviet modernization as a bid for superiority. The Soviets are still adding an average of three new warheads a week and now have 1300. We still have none. So far, it seems that the Soviet definitions of parity is a box score of 1,300 to nothing in their favor.⁴²

Based on published reports, the Reagan administration has been unwilling to settle for anything less than no loaf rather than a half in pursuing its zero-zero proposal. No less fixedly, the Soviet Union was determined to keep all of its SS-20s. The compromise attempted by Paul Nitze, the American negotiator and his Soviet counterpart, Yuli Kvitzinsky, was rejected by both governments.⁴³ The bases for the American rejection are of interest. The Nitze accord was faulted for equating American cruise missiles (75 to be retained with 300 warheads) with Soviet SS-20s (75 to be left in Europe with 225 warheads, equal roughly to targets presented by

NATO's principal military command and operational installations) President Reagan had repeatedly underlined his preference for fast flyers (Pershing IIs) over slow flyers (cruise missiles). Other officials alternatively objected that the ceilings abandoned America's Asian and NATO allies, specifically West Germany, or released the Europeans from their obligations to accept deployment, including the Pershing IIs. Japan and China were cited to have a legitimate complaint that the Nitzze-Kvitsinsky understanding shifted the Soviet European threat to Asia in its failure to set global ceilings. The American negotiating position, no less than the tough stance assumed by Moscow, appeared aimed more at European opinion and governmental resolve than at the military threat posed by each side's actual or anticipated intermediary nuclear forces. However genuine or feigned Soviet concerns about the Pershing II may have been, the larger stake for political leaders on both sides was the minds, hearts, and will of the West Europeans. Neither superpower blinked during the talks, nor were the President and his principal advisors--Nitzze excepted--willing to acknowledge the winks signalled by the Europeans, especially those emancipating from a vacillating Bonn, to reach a compromise with Moscow. Coercive diplomacy had become multilateralized, aimed at adversaries and allies alike.

The Reagan administration's START proposal paralleled its INF position.⁴⁴ Deep cuts in missile launchers (850 ICBMs and SLBMs), throw weight limits approximating American levels, and a ceiling on warheads of 5000, with a sub-ceiling of 2500 for ground-launched missiles, was finally adopted. Limits were also to be set for bombers, including the Soviet Backfire. These Phase I objectives were to be achieved before Phase II

would turn to cruise missile limitations. Not surprisingly, the Soviet Union was expected to concede its advantage in heavy missiles or face continued expansion and modernization of American strategic forces. In principle, there was nothing particularly unique about such a balanced bargaining posture. Since U S -Soviet arms control talks began in the late 1960s, American negotiators had insisted on bargaining chips like the ABM to induce Soviet concessions. What was different was the discernibly more focused and unwavering determination of the Reagan administration to achieve a real as well as a perceived position of superiority at levels of nuclear preparedness and bargaining leverage in its confrontation with Soviet leaders. The drive toward superiority had the psychic, if doubtful political, advantage of being pursued, as one commentator has suggested, independent of the will and desire of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ Two, not one, arms control games were being played. Toward allied and American public opinion, the announced game was zero-zero in INF and START. Toward the Soviet Union the real game was zero-sum.

II Limiting the Role of Nuclear Weapons

What not to do in modernizing nuclear forces and in arms talks is easier to identify than what might be done to free the superpowers from the arms race in which both are pitted at present. Both make too much of nuclear weapons. Promoting them for larger roles in the superpower struggle for which they are ill-cast -- warfighting and coercion -- reveals a flawed understanding of the critical yet necessarily circumscribed, part that they can play in stabilizing the superpower stalemate while allowing the actors to play for time to improve relations

Creating more scenarios for them than they are able to stage successfully presses them into service beyond their measure. It risks deluding the protagonists into believing that they are adapted to their needs when their untoward and thoughtless use may well run at cross purposes to the aims of each antagonist.

Nor is it reasonable to advertize nuclear weapons for warfighting and for coercion as enhancements of deterrence. Pursuing a warfighting strategy is, as sketched below, potentially self-defeating. If deterrence is renamed warfighting, the adversaries risk consigning themselves to Clausewitz' classical case of pure war in which each opponent seeks to dominate completely the will of the other, undiluted by any other consideration. The resulting downward spiral of armed or threatened hostilities, unchecked by political purpose, uninformed by moral design, and driven by unbridled fervor, is fundamentally unstable and winds its way inevitably to a fatal clash. Deterrence viewed as a bargaining club, always at the ready to defend ever widening national and allied political and security interests debases its value while enlarging the opportunities for an unwanted nuclear clash as both superpowers mistake their deadly quarrel as a search for honor in a straw.

No one knows whether a nuclear war between essentially two equally matched superpowers can be kept limited but the prospects of maintaining control do not appear bright. Civilian and military targets are not easily distinguished despite the greater accuracy and calibrated striking power of today's missiles and warheads. Many of the missile fields and military bases of both superpower adversaries are located near major population centers. What blast and thermal damage fail to destroy will be soon

lethally exposed to deadly radioactive clouds. Once the conflict has begun, it stretches the imagination to believe that a natural resting point, within Schelling's meaning of the term, can be found to stop the exchanges between two committed opponents possessed of thousands of nuclear warheads -- and still counting -- which have been long dedicated to destroy the adversary's principal targets of military and civilian opportunity. Once the initial nuclear exchanges have been made, neither adversary has much incentive to trust the other to stop firing. To arrest the conflagration, the cooperation of each adversary is required, yet the devastation created by the war will have eroded the basis for mutual trust on which a termination of hostilities is predicated. With command and control facilities destroyed or inoperative, there is the likelihood that the adversaries will lose control over their own nuclear forces. One Trident submarine is scheduled to house up to 192 warheads capable of single-handedly delivering more firepower than very likely all of the munitions used since World War II. Given equally determined, implacable, and resourceful opponents, equipped to destroy each other several times over, the conclusion is hard to resist that both sides will remain in the foreseeable future at a MAD-plus stand-off.

Preparations for warfighting are costly and risky, and they threaten to provoke the very conflict each superpower seeks to avoid. Destabilizing arms races are stimulated -- like the one in which the peoples of both countries are currently engaged. In an atmosphere of crisis, opportunities for accidental, inadvertent, and unintended warfare are multiplied. The superpowers, having progressively lost control over their competition, are correspondingly more susceptible to be catalyzed or catapulted into

conflict by third parties. The line between nuclear and conventional warfare begins to blur as both are treated as extensions of the other. False confidence is raised that a limited nuclear war is tolerable and possibly winnable. Smaller hostilities, especially those involving commitments that have been identified with the deterrence posture of one or the other or both of the superpowers, assume high stakes and risk escalation beyond the merit of the interests at issue. Incentives for pre-emptive and preventive warfare increase, in such an emotional and stress setting, the superpowers, led by fallible humans relying on error-prone systems, may well be overtaken by a pre-venge psychosis bent on seeking revenge for a strike yet to be launched but imminently expected.

The case against deterrence posing as warfighting can be set against the claims of partisans who repair to nuclear weapons to gain a superior bargaining position over an opponent. Armed nuclear adversaries nullify each other's efforts to score an advantage at the negotiating table. The INF talks turned as much on a struggle of will between Washington and Moscow to impose preferred solutions on each other and on the West European states as it did on the military issues raised by the SS-20s and the planned deployment of NATO missiles. The negotiating struggle became de-coupled psychologically from the dispute over weapons. The Pershing II and cruise missiles covered targets already included in the SIOP. No matter, either, that American troops and their dependents, not to mention thousands of other Americans in Western Europe, were hostages to American intent to defend Europe.

Seeking Uncommon Sense

A logical starting point from where to return to the now old but tried notion of deterrence as unacceptable punishment of an aggressor who might attack American vital interests is to recognize the obvious. The robust nuclear destructive capacity of both superpowers. MAD-plus mutually prevails and shows no signs of dissipating even though both powers might seek an unattainable position of superiority. The second point, the inverse of the first, is that arms control negotiations cannot be expected to secure a superiority already precluded on military and technological grounds. If one examines the common features of arms accords between the superpowers, one sees that they largely served the very limited, but highly useful, role as a legitimating mechanism through which each opponent accepted, implicitly if reluctantly, the nuclear levels and modernization plans covered by the agreements of his counterpart. These accords succeeded when the superpowers pursued the goals of balance and equivalence while apprised of the maddening but inevitable asymmetries of the inventories possessed by each side. The SALT I and II treaties were cooperative efforts to define rules for modernization, R and D, and verification procedures. Since either side can destroy the other, each has earned in a perverse sense what the French would term a droit de regard to pass and approve on the kill potential of the other. That droit de regard can be assumed unilaterally with all the attendant uncertainties that are prompted by a strategy bent on imposing one adversary's will on the other whether he cooperates or not in his submission. Or, that right can be exercised mutually and cooperatively by the contestants while their earnest

struggle continues

It is also clear, given a history of real or imagined grievances between the superpowers and the sure and unsettling march of scientific discovery and technological advances, that the arms control process -- if not arms control accords -- is forever. While each accord must be taken as a serious exchange of confidences and good will, it would be wrong to believe that any one accord by itself can be a reliable reed to lean upon in developing a workable security system. There is a continuing need for superpower negotiations over the rules of their competition and for a periodic codification, streamlining, and revision of them. Such a conception of the arms control process is admittedly modest when compared to the claims implicitly made by what Leon Wieselter calls the war and peace parties.⁴⁶

Buying time through negotiations is also related to buying time in a crisis by designing and deploying weapons which are not prone to time urgent use. Land-based missiles should be replaced. The MX and Pershing II are lightning rods for enemy missiles. So also are the Soviet Union's heavy missile systems. Commanders and policy makers should not be placed in a situation requiring a quick and potentially precipitate decision to use or lose their weapons.

The ratio of launchers to warheads, and not the reverse, should be stressed in START negotiations. The build down concept should not be pushed to such a logical absurdity that arms points are narrowed while warheads are proportionately increased. Such postures invite disarming attacks. In any event, only invulnerable or hard-to-track and attack systems, like the proposed, Midgetman missile, should be contemplated.

Priority targeting of the SIOP should be seriously reviewed. If deterrence fails, it makes no sense to destroy, as the prime target, the Soviet political leadership. How can a war be terminated if one has no one with whom to negotiate? If invulnerable systems can be deployed, nuclear targeting might well begin with soft military targets and, at first, be confined to demonstrations after the fashion of across the bow proposals that have been previously advanced. It also does not stretch the imagination too far, if both sides have comfortable margins of invulnerable nuclear striking power, to exchange information about the primary targets that might initially be hit to build confidence that if the nuclear threshold is crossed, perhaps unwittingly, then the negotiated standard operating procedure for the SIOP on each side might well be to destroy a pre-designated target or set of targets to assert the will and determination of the aggrieved party to carry the struggle up the escalatory ladder. This proposal is no more implausible and potentially far less destructive than the scenario proposed by Secretary of Defense Weinberger, quoted earlier, which envisions repeated nuclear exchanges over a protracted period in which nuclear weapons are treated as bargaining counters.

Finally, wherever possible, missions earmarked for nuclear weapons should be re-assigned to conventional weapons. Ironically, the major portion of the Reagan administration's spending on defense has been for conventional forces.⁴⁷ The administration's ambitious nuclear arms program has obscured the progress made in modernizing conventional forces. It has the worst of two worlds: it draws fire from the Soviet Union and domestic critics worried about the first-strike and warfighting proclivities of the

Reagan program while the President receives little or no notice for the contribution he has made to stability by giving high priority to conventional forces. Only 15 percent of the defense budget is earmarked for strategic nuclear forces, an appreciably lower figure than, for example, France. American nuclear capabilities are bigger than life while conventional forces are smaller and weaker than they deserve in the image that they project.

Conclusion

There is little point and potentially much mischief in confusing the roles that nuclear weapons can and cannot play. As a punishment for aggression they have served well, if uncomfortably, as instruments of national and allied security. They have undoubtedly discouraged the Soviet Union from contemplating an attack on the United States or its allies. To enlist deterrence in a quest for superiority undermines the useful service that it has performed since World War II and has the potentially pernicious effect of de-stabilizing the hard-won stability that has been achieved.

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Notes

- 1 See William W Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy (New York Harper and Row, 1964) where the Kennedy Administration's thinking about counterforce is discussed at length,
- 2 Ibid , pp 117 ff
- 3 Jeffrey Richelson, PD-59, NSOD-13 and the Reagan Strategic Modernization Program, The Journal of Strategic Studies, VI, No 2 (June 1983), p 128
- 4 Quoted in Strobe Talbott, Deadly Gambit (Washington Knopf, 1984), p 216
- 5 Ibid , pp 211-213, 219, and 279
- 6 Lawrence Freedman, The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (London IISS, 1983), pp 257-272
- 7 Ibid , 393-394
- 8 Quoted in Talbott, p 207
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- 10 The military concerns raised by the Carter administration in German planning circles are briefly reviewed in Alex A Vardamis, German-American Military Fissures, Foreign Policy, No 34 (Spring 1979), 86-106, also see George A Glass, The United States and West Germany Cracks in the Security Foundation? Orbis, XXIII, No 3 (Fall 1979), 535-548
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- 12 Secretary of Defense Harold Brown's brief comments on PD-59 are found in Survival, XXII, No 6 (November/December 1980), pp 267-269
- 13 Richelson, p 125
- 14 Brown, p 269
- 15 Ibid
- 16 Ibid

- 17 Interview with Lt General Mikhail Milshtein, Survival XXII, No 6 (November/December, 1980), p 271
- 18 See, for example, Louis Rene Beres, Tilting toward Thanatos America's 'Countervailing' Nuclear Strategy, World Politics, XXXIV, No 1 (1981), 25-46 For a useful overview, consult Warner R Schilling, U S Strategic Nuclear Concepts in the 1970s The Search for Sufficiently Equivalent Countervailing Parity, International Security VI, No 2 (Fall 1981), pp 49-79
- 19 Walter Slocombe, The Countervailing Strategy, International Security, V, No 4 (Spring 1981), 18-27
- 20 Text of President Reagan's October 2, 1981 announcement of his strategic modernization program, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1981, p 23-E
- 21 Quoted in Talbott, p 7 The March 1983 re-statement may be found in U S , Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Realism, Strength, and Negotiation Key Foreign Policy Statements of the Reagan Administration (Washington, D C , 1984), p 41
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- 34 The President's SDI proposal appears at the conclusion of his speech on national security policy delivered in a televised address on March 23, 1983 See Department of State, Foreign Policy Statements of the Reagan

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