

# STRATEGIC DEFENSE IN PERSPECTIVE: NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND AMERICAN GLOBALISM

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*President Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in March 1983 took everyone but his closest advisors by surprise. In response, critics have declared the program to be a radical break from American attitudes toward nuclear weapons — partly because of the suddenness of the President's announcement, and partly because it appears very different from the more traditional U.S. strategy based upon retaliatory deterrence. In this article John C. Springer argues that SDI is in fact part of a logical progression in American strategic thinking. After a short history of American attitudes toward war and the role of force in international relations, Mr. Springer takes a closer look at the evolution of nuclear strategy from this historical perspective. He concludes that no matter how much SDI may deviate from the strategy of deterrence, the idea of creating a defense against nuclear weapons is deeply rooted in American culture and history.*

Public interest in the United States about the political, military, and ethical issues raised by the existence of nuclear weapons has waxed and waned during the first four decades of the nuclear age. The sense of dread and panic of nuclear war, so evident in the 1950s and early 1960s, subsided in the latter part of the '60s. The easing of superpower tensions, the intensification of the war in Indochina, and the appearance of open domestic strife over racial, social, and generational differences, all combined to remove nuclear issues from the forefront of the public consciousness. Moreover, the early successes of the SALT process engendered a belief that the nuclear situation was under control, that sincere negotiations and equitable accords *could* ensure rational control over nuclear weapons. Yet as the SALT process ground to a halt in the late 1970s and both superpowers responded to perceived threats by accelerating the expansion of their nuclear forces, public fears of the arms race and nuclear war grew once again.

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As during the 1950s and 1960s, these fears were voiced in the political arena in the form of calls for negotiation aimed at the limitation and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. These calls, however, seem less realistic in 1986 than they did in earlier decades, for faith in negotiation as a solution to the threat of nuclear war was severely weakened by the apparent failure of the SALT process and the Carter administration's inability to ratify the SALT II treaty. Although the Reagan administration did respond to these public pressures with a series of arms control initiatives, more importantly it also responded with a radically new approach to managing the threat of nuclear war: the enforced obsolescence of nuclear weapons through the development of defenses against them.

The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), announced publicly by President Reagan on March 23, 1983, has created a furious debate on the pros and cons of strategic defense in the nuclear age. Thus far the debate has centered on issues of the feasibility and cost of different forms of strategic defense. In this respect the present situation is similar to the latter years of World War II, when questions regarding the atomic bomb were focused almost solely on its *technical* feasibility. Only after the success of nuclear power had been proven did intensive work begin on the larger strategic and political issues raised by this new technology. The potential problems of the strategic and political implications of the SDI are following a similar pattern today: technology first, strategy second.

But military strategy is not formulated in a vacuum; it is a response to the interaction of external threats and national interests and resources. In order to assess Reagan's proposal, then, we must trace the outlines of SDI's historical context and judge what its success would mean for international politics and likewise what it signifies for American approaches to national security. For even if the proponents of SDI are correct in stating that the program is feasible and a necessary response to Soviet efforts to develop a similar defensive system, the United States will still have to transform the new technologies into a coherent and comprehensive strategy which furthers national goals, rather than one which only provides a "defense" against "enemies." We must therefore broaden the debate over strategic defense into one over the United States' proper role in international affairs and how it should play that role.

## I. THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

In 1789, Americans formed their government according to theories of economic and political philosophy which were current in Europe at the time. The newly formed society had learned from the mistakes which Europe had made, and therefore spared itself the bitter experience of

religious and dynastic conflict. Thus the United States could benefit from the mistakes of Europe without having to pay the price for those mistakes. That the United States was historically fortunate was self-evident, but many Americans viewed the chance to build a new society not as the result of good fortune but of Providence. As Reinhold Niebuhr explains, the United States "came into existence with the sense of being a 'separated' nation, which God was using to make a new beginning for mankind."<sup>1</sup> Since God's favor was evidence of moral righteousness, America's special characteristics demonstrated its goodness, for it was inconceivable that God would select an unworthy nation as His instrument on earth. Thus it was understandable, if slightly presumptuous, for Americans to assume that their special advantages were conferred by God as part of the divine plan of human history.

Of course, Americans were not the first nation to see themselves as a chosen people. "All great nations have blasphemously identified their mission with a divine purpose," notes Hans J. Morgenthau.<sup>2</sup> But what made this myth different in America was that the nation's early history — specifically its relentless expansion westward — seemed to prove its legitimacy. Morgenthau explains:

the settlement of the better part of the continent . . . appeared essentially different from, and morally superior to, the imperialistic ventures with which the history of other nations was replete. Yet what permitted this uniqueness in American expansion was not so much political virtue as the contiguity of the sparsely settled object of conquest with the original territory of departure. Furthermore, the utter political, military and numerical inferiority of the Indian opponent tended to obscure the element of power, which was no less real though less obtrusive in our continental expansion than in the expansionist movements of other nations. Thus what actually was the fortuitous conjunction of two potent historical accidents could take on in the popular imagination the aspects of an inevitable natural development.<sup>3</sup>

The ease of American expansion, considered not to be the conquest of a modern state over primitive tribes, but rather the fulfillment of a divine plan, demonstrated American moral righteousness. This conviction was

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1. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 24.
  2. Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 7.
  3. Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 8.

ultimately transformed into a belief in American omnipotence. Hence, to cite Morgenthau once again, "given a righteous cause, one's ability to carry it to victory is easily assumed. We can achieve what we want, since what we want is only what is right."<sup>4</sup> History seemed to reinforce logic because nothing impeded the growth of American power.

The American mission grew and prospered, then, not for the mere sake of making the country's citizens happier, but so that American ideals might spread throughout the world. The most important of these ideals was individual freedom. But although championing freedom is a noble cause, the employment of a vague ideal as a literal and comprehensive description of a national purpose is inherently confusing — every government must still concern itself with self-interest as well as with the promotion of the ideal it represents. Nevertheless, it was not until the twentieth century — until the closing of the Western frontier — that the continued advancement of "freedom" became unachievable or undesirable.

For as long as the United States was active solely on the North American continent, where no powers curbed or seriously challenged its expansion, Americans were freed from the need to think or act selfishly, and could thus identify themselves completely with an ideal.<sup>5</sup> Unlike most other states, America did not have to make *Realpolitik* a prominent consideration in foreign policy decisions, but could remain innocent of power politics even while amassing an empire worthy of the most Machiavellian prince.

American views of war and peace were deeply influenced by this vision of the United States as the champion of freedom and the land of the chosen. Just as they preferred the banner of idealism to that of self-interest, so they preferred a theory of war based upon ethics to one based upon expediency. In describing the American theory of war Robert W. Tucker, for instance, concludes that war is not an acceptable tool of diplomacy and armed conflict is not an inevitable part of international relations since from the American perspective any legitimate differences between states can be solved peacefully. Under this basic concept, he states, force is justified when used to respond to aggression, but in this context it *is* an acceptable tool of diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> One rule rises above all

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

5. "The experience of acquiring wealth tends to obscure the limitations of means . . . The limited external objectives of an originally frugal nation were well within our expanding continental resources, so that as time went on we were not constrained by circumstances to think in terms of economy. . . . [Therefore,] in international affairs we took to utopianism." Louis J. Halle, *Civilization and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 65.

6. See Robert W. Tucker, *The Just War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960).

others: the non-use of force. As Paul Ramsey explains as well, the American approach "finds in the immediate circumstances in which force is resorted to . . . the justice or injustice of war. Other events . . . are ruled out as not of decisive importance."<sup>7</sup> Thus a state is not entitled to employ force to redress even just grievances, but the task of enforcing this rule *is* left to the states themselves, in other words to the victim(s) of aggression and to any states that care to join in the victim's defense.<sup>8</sup>

Yet by giving individual states the right and duty of law enforcement, the American theory of war also allows them to determine how to respond to aggression. By equating initiation of force with violation of the law, the American theory sanctions the use of force by the victim to *punish* as well as to restrain the aggressor. As Michael Walzer asserts, states "have not done enough . . . if they merely contain the aggression. . . . The rights of the member states must be vindicated . . . . [The defender is] entitled not only to repel the attack but also to punish it."<sup>9</sup> The purpose of this punishment is, in Tucker's words, "to exorcise aggression by following the same method employed in the repression of violence within domestic society."<sup>10</sup> This freedom to set one's own war aims is accompanied by a freedom to determine how to pursue those aims,<sup>11</sup> which in turn will depend upon the relative military strengths of the two combatants.

In removing constraints on states' war aims and means, the American theory of war paves the way for an expansion of both. Because "the purpose of those fighting against aggression must be just . . . by definition,"<sup>12</sup> the defender state need not concern itself with considerations of morality; military expediency thereby becomes paramount. Furthermore, because the *ultimate* goal is not merely defense but punishment of the aggressor and prevention of future attack, a defender state has a strong incentive to expand the war and carry it to the aggressor's homeland. In the words of George Kennan, "Democracy fights . . . to punish the power that was rash enough and hostile enough to provoke it — to teach that power a lesson it will not forget, to prevent the thing from happening again. Such a war must be carried to the bitter end."<sup>13</sup>

It must be stressed, however, that the apparent unconcern of the American theory of war with moral considerations is by no means due

7. Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 43.

8. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 59.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

10. Tucker, p. 29.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

13. Kennan, p. 65.

to a de-emphasis of the role of morality in international affairs. Morality is, in fact, central to the theory, for in repelling and punishing aggression, the defender upholds an ideal of the non-use of force; international law is seen as a formal expression of moral dictates.<sup>14</sup> Thus when law-enforcer confronts law-breaker the struggle is moral as well as legal. In fact, it is precisely because the defender enjoys a superior moral position that he is permitted so wide a range of actions.<sup>15</sup>

The American theory of war is also grounded in history. The depiction of war as a moral rather than a political struggle, for instance, reflects the preference for idealism over pragmatism; likewise the renunciation of force as a tool of diplomacy shows distaste for power politics. As George Kennan laments, "it is implausible that people should have positive aspirations . . . that they regard as . . . more important to them than the peacefulness and orderliness of international life."<sup>16</sup>

Yet this theory of war based on a uniquely American experience is inappropriate for other states. Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, stability in Europe was maintained through a balance of power system whose amoral pragmatism directly contradicted American idealism. American isolationism, in fact, was in part a reaction to this European fondness for power politics: "Why entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?" asked George Washington in his Farewell Address.<sup>17</sup>

But while the United States never compromised its idealism, neither did it sacrifice its hunger for power. Instead, Americans managed to convince themselves that as the bearers of the ideal of freedom they *could not be* and thus *were not* selfish. Not even the history of American expansion, replete with violations of respect for others' freedom, shattered this self-delusion. For two centuries the United States used force as a tool of, and often as a substitute for, diplomacy when dealing with the American Indians, ignoring the fact that the Indian wars themselves were illegal and unjust, not to mention immoral, by American criteria. The theory is therefore an American statement of how the world *should* work, not of how it invariably *does* work; it might be violated if circumstances so dictated. As Stanley Hoffman notes:

The United States is a nation impatient with, intolerant of, unadjusted and unaccustomed to basic conflicts of ends. . . .

14. Tucker, p. 11.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

16. Kennan, p. 96. Charles O. Lerche, Jr., writes that "Americans have seemed to assume that all international problems have a 'right' answer, discoverable by men." *Foreign Policy of the American People* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1958), p. 183.

17. Reprinted in Lawrence S. Kaplan, ed., *Recent American Foreign Policy: Conflicting Interpretations* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), p. 5.

When Americans are faced with a fundamental conflict of ends, their experience has been to resort to force . . . . In using force, they have sought . . . the elimination of the foe. . . . Violence plays the role of a great, cleansing purge. . . . Yet America . . . dislikes the very violence that is its spontaneous response. Americans believe that violence is evil . . . . So the only excuse for violence is provided by high principles, but these in turn release in full the passion for unbridled violence.<sup>18</sup>

The recurrent refusal of reality to conform to U.S. expectations is the key to understanding American views of war and peace. Ideally, war should never occur because peaceful resolution of disputes is always possible. Americans explain away any contradiction of this logic, such as the presence of irreconcilable differences between states, as proof of the pernicious effects of self-interest on international harmony — something which must be combatted at any cost. The willingness to do so explains why a nation so deeply and sincerely devoted to peace has experienced such a bloody history.

Paradoxically, the United States has ruthlessly pursued its idealistic goals, spurred on by its faith in its own omnipotence and in the incontestible righteousness of its purpose. Yet American diligence has not been fully rewarded; “the same strength which has extended our power beyond a continent has also interwoven our destiny with the destiny of many peoples and brought us into a vast web of history in which other wills . . . inevitably hinder or contradict what we fervently desire.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, Reinhold Niebuhr notes, the United States “is less potent to do what it wants in the hour of its greatest strength than it was in the days of its infancy.”<sup>20</sup> This unpleasant fact has never been accepted by Americans, for as Robert Heilbroner states, “While history has made a mockery of our plans, it has not weakened our confidence in our ability to shape our destiny as we wish. . . . We continue to tell ourselves, in the face of successive rebuffs, that what we need above all is a fresh sense of purpose, a fresh idea of what to do.”<sup>21</sup>

## II. THE EMERGENCE OF AMERICAN GLOBALISM

The search for a “fresh idea of what to do” is in fact the motivation underlying American attitudes toward nuclear weapons, from the days

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18. Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, Or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp. 181-83.

19. Niebuhr, p. 74.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

21. Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Future as History* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), p. 57.

of their glorification to today's efforts to neutralize them through strategic defense. To put it starkly, the United States embraced nuclear weapons in 1945 as the means by which it could make international affairs conform to its image of what they should be. The resounding failure of nuclear weapons to achieve this goal, along with intensifying ethical questions of American nuclear strategy, have led to a search for alternatives to nuclear weapons.

Before examining the role of nuclear weapons in American global strategy, though, we must first look more closely at the evolution of that strategy. American global strategy has been, for the most part, not a preconceived plan for the attainment of American objectives, but rather an attempt to cope with the existing international situation at the lowest possible cost. In other words, American global strategy has been reactive.<sup>22</sup> World War II intensified this trait. The mobilization effort to defeat Germany and Japan, for example, raised the American economy out of its depression and spurred an enormous increase in American military power, but not an accompanying change in military strategy. By the end of the war, not only Great Britain but all of Europe, as well as Japan and China, were exhausted, a situation which resulted in a power vacuum in much of the world. So in 1945 an unprecedentedly strong and confident United States looked out on an unprecedentedly weak and volatile world and asked, what now?

Logic dictated that American power flow outward to fill the vacuum, and that is precisely what happened. But the reasons behind this outward flow of American power are not clear. Claims that America acquired its empire accidentally or thoughtlessly cannot really be taken seriously: although World War II was indeed forced upon the United States, the subsequent demand for unconditional surrender, the occupation and political restructuring of Germany and Japan, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the formation of NATO, SEATO, CENTO, ANZUS, and the Rio Pact, were not. As Bernard Brodie states, some people "would put it that power confers upon the United States a large measure of responsibility, but responsibility is itself a matter of decision, hence of choice."<sup>23</sup> Of course most Americans, their leaders included, saw it differently: "We in this country, in this generation are — by destiny rather than choice — the watchmen on the walls of world freedom,"<sup>24</sup> announced John F. Kennedy, who also announced the United States' willingness to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship,

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22. See the article by Edward N. Luttwak in W. Scott Thompson, ed., *From Weakness to Strength* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1980), pp. 259-74.

23. Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1973), p. 347.

24. Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 3.

support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."<sup>25</sup>

For the most part, Americans accepted their burden, motivated largely by a vague fear of the Soviet Union. But fear alone should not define national interests and objectives. The Truman administration attempted to define American interests more clearly, but it falsely defined interests based on threats rather than threats based on interests. This inversion of the process of national security policy formulation has plagued every succeeding administration.

George Kennan's "long telegram" from Moscow was the source of the Truman administration's definition of American interests. Dispatched from Moscow on February 22, 1946, it provided an analysis of Soviet motivations and goals that American policymakers quickly accepted.<sup>26</sup> The overarching motivation driving the Soviet Union was, in Kennan's words, the "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity"<sup>27</sup> which could never be assuaged by the West, since Marxism provided Soviet leaders with "justification for their instinctive fear of [the] outside world"<sup>28</sup> and firmly rejected the possibility of long-term peaceful coexistence between capitalism and communism. Kennan's overall conclusion regarding Soviet goals was pessimistic:

We have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the U.S. there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the internal authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure.<sup>29</sup>

The Truman administration relied almost exclusively upon Kennan's analysis to plan American national security policy. Working from the presumption of unremitting Soviet hostility toward the United States, it found two ways to counter Soviet expansionism: the "perimeter" approach and the "strongpoint" approach.<sup>30</sup> The perimeter approach treated all

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25. Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 205.

26. Reprinted in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, *Containment: Documents in American Foreign Policy and Strategy 1945-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 50-63.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

30. The terms are used by Gaddis in *Strategies of Containment*, pp. 57. For examples of the perimeter and strongpoint approaches, see Etzold and Gaddis, *Containment: Documents in American Foreign Policy and Strategy 1945-1950*, Documents 4 and 5, respectively, pp. 64-83.

areas outside Soviet control as equally vital to American security and therefore equally worthy of American protection. The strongpoint approach set forth a hierarchy of American interests abroad, advocating concentration of American support on those areas deemed especially important to American security.

In the end the perimeter approach prevailed; it was easier to sell to the American people since it stressed a preference for idealism over self-interest as the guiding motive of foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the perimeter approach supported an idealistic foreign policy since it justified American support for non-communist states not because of their strategic assets, but because of their ideological commitment to "freedom" — in other words, to anti-communism. Thus Truman couched his request for congressional aid for Greece and Turkey in idealistic terms: "I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."<sup>32</sup>

Yet it would be a mistake to regard the "idealization" of the Soviet-American confrontation solely as a public relations ploy. American leaders themselves saw the confrontation as one between ideologies as well as between states. The so-called "Munich analogy," for example, the theory that a state will only be encouraged to expand further should its initial aggression remain unopposed, was cited to show that the United States did have a material interest in protecting even remote and undeveloped states. Soviet absorption of such states would only hasten an eventual confrontation between the superpowers.

A subtle difference did exist, however, between the "idealistic" justification of the perimeter approach and the "Munich analogy" justification. The former stated that ideological solidarity, rather than self-interest, motivated American protection of other states; the latter asserted that self-interest provided the ultimate motivation, since the early containment of Soviet power would prove far less costly than a delayed defense. But this distinction appeared blurred in official policy statements. "Totalitarian regimes imposed on free people," Truman explained, "undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States."<sup>33</sup> National Security Council Memorandum (NSC) 68 of April 1950,<sup>34</sup> the most elaborate and comprehensive national security policy guideline of the period, was more adamant yet no more precise:

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31. See Steel, p. 7.

32. Truman's speech is reprinted in Joseph Marion Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955). See p. 272.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Reprinted in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 385-442.

The assault on free institutions is world-wide now, and in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere. . . . [It is] in the intangible scale of values that we register a loss more damaging than the material loss we [have] already suffered.<sup>35</sup>

Dwight D. Eisenhower's inaugural address was quite similar: "Conceiving the defense of freedom, like freedom itself, to be one and indivisible . . . we reject any insinuation that . . . one people or another is in any sense inferior or expendable."<sup>36</sup> Kennedy's inaugural address, cited above, merely restated this same point. Because the United States "stood for" freedom, one could not therefore speak of American self-interest as something distinct from, let alone inconsistent with, the interest of freedom.

The United States' original error lay in its definition of American interests through an analysis of the Soviet threat, rather than the reverse. The post-war "foreign policy consensus" of anti-communism has almost by definition been an entirely negative, reactive one. American involvement in international affairs, focused on the containment of communism and the spread of freedom, has been pursued diligently only in those states perceived to be threatened by communism. From opposition to the establishment of all communist regimes it is a small step to opposition to change *per se*; in precisely this manner, then, the United States' policy of anti-communism has become in practice indistinguishable from unvaried defense of the global status quo.

### III. NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

The closure of the North American frontier, the growth of American economic and military power, the collapse of the European balance of power, the emergence of a strong and expansionistic Soviet state, and the decline of the European empires, explain how the United States became a global power. The atomic bomb, although in no way responsible for any of these factors, did have a tremendous impact on America foreign policy and military strategy due to American fascination with the power of nuclear weapons. Their real power, however, was psychological rather than physical, for nuclear weapons were above all a *symbol*, not a source, of power. Because Americans failed to understand this distinction, they placed too much faith in nuclear weapons and vastly overestimated their actual utility. As successive administrations realized, however, the recognition of this error proved far easier than its rectification.

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

36. Quoted in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 129.

At first the United States decisively embraced nuclear weapons as a political and military tool: Roosevelt and Truman consistently advocated the use of the atomic bomb as soon as it became available to obtain a Japanese surrender as quickly as possible.<sup>37</sup> Numerous revisionist historians, however, assert that Truman also intended to use the weapon politically: to coerce Stalin into compromising on the questions of the Far East and Eastern Europe.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, a critical element of the ongoing historical debate over the Cold War is whether America attempted to use "atomic diplomacy"<sup>39</sup> in the intrawar and postwar periods to extract Soviet concessions. No consensus has yet emerged on this issue, but it is probably safe to say that Truman did hope that American possession of nuclear technology would facilitate Soviet-British-American negotiations over the creation of a postwar world order.

The Truman administration's awareness of the political utility of nuclear weapons intensified after the Japanese surrender. As early as September 1946, for instance, Truman's Special Counsel Clark Clifford submitted a report to Truman in which he argued that "the United States must be prepared to wage atomic and bacteriological warfare if necessary. The mere fact of preparedness may be the only powerful deterrent to Soviet aggressive action."<sup>40</sup> Clifford's proposed policy, which would later be termed "extended deterrence," has been central to American strategy throughout the postwar period. It sought to use the American nuclear monopoly to offset Soviet conventional superiority: the Soviets would not attack American allies out of fear of an American nuclear reprisal.

Clifford felt that American reliance on nuclear weapons necessitated a strong nuclear force:

The United States, with a military potential composed of highly effective technical weapons, should entertain no proposal for disarmament or limitation of armament as long as the possibility of Soviet aggression exists. . . . The result of such arms limitation would be to deprive the United States

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37. See Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975).

38. For example, William Appleman Williams argues that "The United States dropped the bomb to end the war against Japan, and thereby stop the Russians in Asia, and to give them sober pause in Eastern Europe," in Robert A. Divine, ed., *Causes and Consequences of World War II* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 335.

39. The term comes from Gar Alperowitz, *Atomic Diplomacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965). For an excellent bibliography of the realist versus revisionist debate, see Joseph M. Siracusa, *New Left Diplomatic Histories and Historians: The American Revisionists* (London: Kennika Press, 1973).

40. Reprinted in Ertold and Gaddis, p. 66.

of its most effective weapons without impairing the Soviet Union's ability to wage a quick war of aggression.<sup>41</sup>

A report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on arms control the following June made much the same argument.<sup>42</sup> The United States could not afford either nuclear disarmament or nuclear parity: NSC-7 of March 1948 called on the United States to "maintain overwhelming U.S. superiority in atomic weapons" as part of a "counter-offensive" against world communism.<sup>43</sup>

The need for American nuclear superiority was psychological as well as military: the success of extended deterrence depended upon a credible threat of nuclear reprisal. American willingness to use nuclear weapons in response to Soviet aggression in turn depended upon U.S. expectations about the outcome of a nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union. The greater the expected cost, the less would be the American incentive to use nuclear weapons. Thus a growth in Soviet offensive capabilities would affect the preceptions of American allies and uncommitted states about the credibility of American extended deterrence, even though it would not affect the actual growth of the American capability to destroy Soviet targets. The Policy Planning Staff's August 1949 report (PPS-58) on the political implications of a Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons noted:

Most of the free nations of the world are inclined at present to cooperate with the United States in view of the threat of Soviet aggression. A belief that we are not the sole possessor of atomic bombs . . . probably tends to increase their desire to collaborate with us . . . Knowledge that the USSR did in fact possess the bomb might tend to incline third countries toward a position of neutrality between the United States and the USSR.<sup>44</sup>

Events soon following PPS-58 appeared to confirm the fears it expressed. The Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb in September, the communist victory in China became obvious during the fall, and the invasion of South Korea occurred the following June. The first two events, as well as the debate within the administration over the wisdom of developing the hydrogen bomb, prompted the drafting of an interdepartmental analysis of foreign policy, NSC-68 of April 1950. NSC-68 gave a stark and gloomy assessment of the existing international situation:

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41. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

42. JCS1731/22 of 5 June 1947, reprinted in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 279-81.

43. Reprinted in Etzold and Gaddis, p. 157.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

The Soviet Union is pursuing the initiative in the conflict with the free world. Its atomic capabilities, together with its successes in the Far East, have led to an increasing confidence on its part . . . . The shadow of Soviet force falls darkly on Western Europe and Asia and supports policy of encroachment. The free world lacks adequate means — in the form of forces in being — to thwart such expansion locally. The United States will therefore be confronted more frequently with the dilemma of reacting totally to a limited extension of Soviet control or of not reacting at all . . . . Continuation of present trends is likely to lead, therefore, to a gradual withdrawal . . . until we discover one day that we have sacrificed positions of vital interest.<sup>45</sup>

In short, extended deterrence was no longer a credible policy in the face of Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons.

The ability to defend peripheral areas against Soviet attack was the only way to limit Soviet aggression. The administration and Congress approved the buildup of conventional forces advocated by NSC-68, but events in Korea rather than acceptance of NSC-68's recommendations spurred this rearmament. When the invasion of South Korea transformed containment from the politico-economic strategy of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan into a military strategy, the United States employed the collective defense provision of the U.N. charter to make enforcement of containment a task for collective security. But American faith in the U.N.'s ability to ensure peace was never strong, and growing impatience with the stalemate in Korea led to the election of an administration which was to make regional collective security the basis of its containment efforts. While supporters of the U.N. saw its purpose as the abolition of war, the Eisenhower administration placed the burden of war prevention squarely on American diplomacy backed by nuclear weapons. The inability of American intervention to bring about a decisive conclusion to the Korean conflict discredited NSC-68's call for a strategy of global defense, and in so doing gave new life to extended deterrence.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' "Massive Retaliation" speech of January 12, 1954 exhibited its new importance of extended deterrence. In his speech, Dulles termed the Truman Doctrine and the U.S. intervention in Korea as "emergency measures . . . [which] cannot be depended on to serve our long-term interests." Too much time and effort had been wasted in a hopeless effort to counter every communist probe:

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45. *Ibid.*, pp. 427-28.

"there is no local defense which alone will contain the mighty landpower of the communist world. Local defences must be reinforced by the further deterrent of massive retaliatory power." The United States must "be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and with means of its own choosing."<sup>46</sup>

Dulles' apparent eagerness to escalate local conflicts into global nuclear conflicts proved disconcerting to friend and foe alike; although his article in the April 1954 issue of *Foreign Affairs* contained more restrained rhetoric, Dulles did not back away from his endorsement of extended deterrence. In fact, he placed it within a global framework:

An answer [to the Soviet threat] can be found by drawing on those basic concepts which have come to be regularly practiced within our civic communities . . . . Primary reliance is placed on the . . . creation of power on a community basis and on the use of that power so as to deter aggression by making it costly to an aggressor. The free nations must apply these same principles in the international sphere.<sup>47</sup>

In his article, Dulles described the American view of defensive war as international law enforcement and the American intention to use nuclear weapons to enforce the prohibition against aggressive war. Furthermore, Dulles incorporated the United Nations' responsibility for the preservation of world peace into American foreign policy: "Today there rests upon us, to a unique degree, the . . . task of providing insurance against another world war."<sup>48</sup> The idea that aggression should be prohibited and punished was not new, but the United States' responsibility to accomplish that task on a global scale was. Massive retaliation combined Americans' longing for international harmony with their distaste for foreign entanglements and thereby created a unilateral, yet universal, program for world peace, based upon American nuclear power.

Assigning political utility to nuclear weapons was consistent with the American tendency to regard power as a reward for virtue and a tool for future good works. Therefore, many Americans interpreted their country's leadership in nuclear technology not merely as the result of dedicated effort but of divine intervention, and as such a source of power and responsibility. Truman was among them: "The possession in our hands of this new power of destruction we regard as a sacred trust. Because of

46. Peter V. Carl, ed., *Documents in American Foreign Relations 1953* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1954), pp. 8-10.

47. John Foster Dulles, "Policy for Security and Peace," *Foreign Affairs* 32 (April 1954):355.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 353.

our love of peace, we know that trust will not be violated."<sup>49</sup> In his memoirs he expanded on this theme:

The power of the atom is of key importance in a search for a peaceful world. . . . The atom's power in the wrong hands can spell disaster. In the right hands, however, it can be used as an overriding influence against aggression and reckless war, and for that reason I have always insisted that . . . we stay ahead of all the world in atomic affairs.<sup>50</sup>

Truman felt no need to justify his assertion that the "right hands" were American ones; that fact was obvious. The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed a similar opinion in advocating development of the hydrogen bomb:

Friendly peoples know that the United States would never use [thermonuclear weapons] for aggrandizement but would use [them] in order to protect the security interests of those people who seek the achievement of international peace and security. Those who malign the position of the United States will believe that which they are told to believe.<sup>51</sup>

This opinion is a classic example of the American habit of identifying national purpose with an ideal, thereby denying the existence of any selfish American interest. Moreover, the same altruism that entitled the United States to develop and stockpile weapons capable of mass destruction also entitled the use of those weapons against aggressors, since the purpose would be law enforcement rather than selfish gain.

#### IV. THE DECLINING UTILITY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Keeping watch over world peace was in reality more difficult than in theory. Nuclear weapons themselves complicated the situation since estimates of the tradeoff between their costs and benefits were subjective and depended on external events. As perceived costs grew and corresponding benefits declined, the utility of nuclear weapons decreased accordingly, a trend which prompted various attempts to find alternate strategies.

The most obvious benefit of nuclear weapons was their low cost. Both Truman and Eisenhower questioned the United States' ability to defend

49. Remark by Truman in a speech on 27 October 1945; quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 268.

50. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2 (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Co., 1956), p. 312.

51. Reprinted in Etzold and Gaddis, p. 372.

conventionally all areas of the non-communist world. Both also feared that excessive military spending would impede American economic growth and possibly even lead to internal strife.<sup>52</sup> Extended deterrence was the solution because it removed the need for large, expensive conventional forces by enabling the United States, at least in theory, to halt all further Soviet expansion by threatening nuclear reprisal. The coercive power of nuclear weapons enabled the United States not only to defend those areas considered vital to national security, but also to spread its nuclear umbrella over virtually the entire non-communist world. The United States could have the best of both worlds: the power and the prestige of global involvement and the satisfaction of anti-militarism and foreign policy idealism.

Critics of extended deterrence attacked the Truman administration's reliance on nuclear weapons because the parallel development of Soviet nuclear weapons undermined the credibility of nuclear threats. NSC-68 called on the United States to mobilize its superior economic resources and confront Soviet expansionism with conventional means: "it would be to the long-term advantage of the United States if atomic weapons were to be effectively eliminated from national peacetime armaments" because the Soviets could use them in a surprise attack to destroy American industrial power.<sup>53</sup>

When the Eisenhower administration moved in the opposite direction with its massive retaliation rhetoric and "New Look" conventional force cutbacks, the concepts of NSC-68 reappeared to attack administration policy in the guise of limited nuclear war theory. This theory consisted of two distinct yet related concepts. The first, expressed by Henry Kissinger, argued that low-yield tactical nuclear weapons could be integrated into the battlefield as a cheap source of firepower.<sup>54</sup> The second, made famous by Herman Kahn and Thomas Schelling, maintained that the limited use, or threat of limited use, of strategic nuclear weapons could induce enemy concessions without recourse to all-out war.<sup>55</sup> Both

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52. Truman wrote in his memoirs that "war expenditures . . . destroy and exhaust and consume the resources and manpower and materials which make up the wealth of the nation" (vol. 2, p. 40). Similarly, Eisenhower stated that "economic health is an indispensable basis of military strength and the free world's peace"; he also warned that the Soviets "have hoped to force upon America and the free world an unbearable security burden leading to disaster." Robert L. Branyan and Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Eisenhower Administration 1953-1961: A Documentary History*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 30. For a thorough analysis of defense budgeting under Truman and Eisenhower, see Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

53. Erzold and Gaddis, p. 417.

54. Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957).

55. Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) and *On*

concepts sought to restore the credibility of American extended deterrent threats by providing "rungs" on the escalatory "ladder" on the assumption that the threat of a limited nuclear response, as opposed to an unlimited one, was more believable.

The Kennedy and Johnson administrations looked favorably on limited nuclear war theory but found it difficult to implement as it terrified those American allies on whose soil the war would be confined. It also disturbed those who believed that the strategic superiority necessary for nuclear coercion would be provocative enough to incite Soviet pre-emptive attack. Succeeding administrations have not been able to escape these dilemmas.

The steady growth of Soviet nuclear capabilities undermined the logic of extended deterrence, thereby compounding the political difficulties of limited nuclear war strategies. Yet administrations preferred an incredible extended deterrence to none at all, for like Truman and Eisenhower they saw no affordable alternative to it. Successive administrations failed to think beyond the military dimension and to reexamine the political foundations of extended deterrence. In particular, no one considered switching from a perimeter form of containment to a strongpoint form, which would have reduced American commitments and made conventional defense more plausible.<sup>56</sup> The notion of the United States as defender of the free world and protector of peace was too familiar, too consistent with the American tradition of idealism, to be replaced by a strategy of defending only certain areas against Soviet expansion. Furthermore, continued failure to define interests independently of threats meant continued ignorance of what those American interests were.

Despite the debate surrounding containment, and the term's virtual disappearance from contemporary politics, it remains the assumption upon which most foreign policy decisions are based. Military force structure and targeting are predicated on the requirements of extended deterrence. Unfortunately, neither the Soviet military establishment nor the American public is ever likely to assent to the restoration of American nuclear superiority upon which a credible extended deterrent threat depends. Of course, efforts to improve theater and strategic capabilities and C<sup>3</sup>I (Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence) endur-

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*Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965); Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) and *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

56. One could argue that the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, which called for greater efforts by American allies to provide for their own defense, was a step in the direction of a strongpoint form of containment. One could also argue that the United States has, as a result of Vietnam, implicitly abandoned perimeter containment since American intervention in remote areas appears unlikely. Despite these possible qualifications, however, it remains true that no formal contraction of commitments has taken place.

ance can and will be continued, but these efforts cannot eliminate American vulnerability to Soviet nuclear attack, which continues to undermine extended deterrence.<sup>57</sup>

The effect of American nuclear power on Soviet actions cannot be determined with total precision, but it is difficult to prove that nuclear weapons have played a decisive role in shaping any of the pivotal events and trends of the postwar era. In *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*,<sup>58</sup> Alexander George and Richard Smoke provide eleven historical case studies of American confrontations with the Soviet Union and China which demonstrate the difficulty of translating military power, especially nuclear power, into political leverage. While threats of nuclear response may have contributed to a peace settlement in Korea and may have prevented a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, American nuclear superiority proved unable to prevent either the initial North Korean invasion or repeated Chinese harassment of Taiwan.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the American nuclear monopoly failed to dissuade Stalin from absorbing Eastern Europe or from imposing the Berlin blockade.<sup>60</sup> Throughout the years of conflict in Indochina and during the Chinese revolution of 1949, American nuclear power again proved simply irrelevant.<sup>61</sup>

Nuclear weapons did have some impact in these situations, however, for fear that local conflict would escalate into general war prompted contending parties to act with restraint and to accept compromise solutions. But the point is that this fear-induced restraint characterized *American* as well as Soviet and Chinese policy. American self-deterrence repeatedly compromised efforts to deter communist aggression and compelled the United States to revert to the traditional means of defense which nuclear threats were supposed to replace. In specific crises, American willingness to brandish its nuclear sword rarely lived up to either rhetoric or hopes. The growth of Soviet nuclear capabilities reinforced the caution which existed even when the United States could have devastated the Soviet Union with impunity. Nuclear weapons remain a means of superpower communication — Nixon's nuclear alert during the Yom Kippur War is a good example — but their value is symbolic rather than substantive. The more they become symbols rather than usable weapons, the less credible is any threat to use them, for it becomes

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57. The contention that continued American vulnerability to Soviet nuclear attack undermines any American strategy for limited nuclear war can be found in Robert Jervis, *The Illlogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

58. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974.

59. See George and Smoke, chapters 6-9, 12.

60. See *ibid.*, chapter 5.

61. See *ibid.*, chapter 8.

increasingly difficult to conceive of a situation in which their use would further the interests of either superpower.

#### V. THE RISING COSTS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The decline in the utility of American nuclear weapons has been continuous: it began with Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons, accelerated as their nuclear capabilities grew, and was reinforced by Vietnam and SALT. The increase of the political cost of nuclear weapons has been more erratic but equally drastic. Public concern over nuclear issues began as a vague fear of the destructiveness of nuclear war, and grew into a sophisticated analysis of the probable effects of nuclear war, culminating in the criticism that the destructiveness of nuclear weapons made their use or threatened use morally unacceptable. What had been taken for granted — that the pursuit of a just end permitted the use of otherwise unjust means — came increasingly into question.

Willingness to employ morally dubious means to secure just objectives had long been part of the American theory of war. For example, in the latter part of World War II, the American bombing of Dresden, Tokyo, and other cities was prompted by the strong, though unproven and incorrect, belief that attacks on civilians could result in the collapse of the enemy.<sup>62</sup>

Atomic weapons did not, therefore, pose an entirely unprecedented moral problem for the United States. The U.S. had already inflicted enormous damage on German and Japanese cities *on purpose*, rather than as an unintended side-effect of a military attack. The justification for area bombing was the same as that for other wartime acts: having been attacked without cause or provocation, the United States was entitled to employ whatever means it possessed to bring about a speedy and decisive end to the war. To make a moral distinction among means, such as to endorse precision bombing while condemning area bombing, ignored the central overriding moral issue of war: its *inherent* illegality and immorality.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed this attitude frankly in their statement supporting development of the hydrogen bomb:

It is difficult to escape the conviction that in war it is folly to argue whether one weapon is more immoral than another.

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62. The belief in the ability of strategic bombing to bring about enemy surrender primarily through its impact on civilian morale can be traced to Giulio Douhet, whose *The Command of the Air* (trans. Dino Ferrari, New York: Coward McCann, 1942) became increasingly influential in the interwar years. Douhet's thesis was, on the whole, not proven by the experience of World War II. See *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on the German War Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), especially pp. 779-81.

For . . . it is war itself which is immoral, and the stigma of such immorality must rest upon the nation which initiates hostilities.<sup>63</sup>

NSC-30 (1948) made a similar point: "If war itself cannot be prevented, it appears futile to hope or suggest that the imposition of limitations on the use of certain military weapons can prevent their use in war."<sup>64</sup>

Yet policymakers were aware of the potential for public controversy over use of nuclear weapons. NSC-30 responded in an extraordinary manner:

In this matter [whether and when to use nuclear weapons], public opinion must be recognized as a factor of considerable importance. Deliberation or decision on a subject of this significance, even if clearly affirmative, might have the effect of placing before the American people a moral question of vital security significance at a time when the full security impact of the question had not become apparent. If this decision is to be made by the American people, it should be made in the circumstances of an actual emergency when the principal factors involved are in the forefront of public consideration.<sup>65</sup>

The American people could not in peacetime be trusted to approve the use of nuclear weapons; instead, that approval was to be postponed until the advent of hostilities, at which time public emotions would be higher and more favorable to nuclear use, and the presence of an immediate threat to national security would preclude any sort of national referendum on military strategy.

In deciding not to decide whether and when to use nuclear weapons, NSC-30 implicitly approved the use of nuclear threats to deter aggression, since stockpiling of weapons and formulation of targeting doctrines would proceed as though the weapons would be used. Logical consistency compelled people who found nuclear use morally unacceptable to reject nuclear threats as well, since a threat implies an intention to act.<sup>66</sup> Attempting to elude that logic, some sought to divorce intention from

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63. Reprinted in Etzold and Gaddis, p. 372.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

66. For example, Paul Ramsey writes that "If deterrence rests upon intending massive retaliation, it is clearly wrong no matter how much peace results . . . [since] it is never right . . . to intend to do wrong that good may come of it. *The Limits of Nuclear War* (New York: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1963), p. 46.

threat by arguing for a nuclear strategy of pure bluff.<sup>67</sup> Others admitted that threat implies intention, but claimed that nuclear use could be justified as long as serious efforts were made to minimize civilian losses.<sup>68</sup> A third group asserted that threats bolstered by actual intention tended to be most effective and were therefore morally acceptable, because the threats would never have to be carried out.<sup>69</sup>

Elements of each of these three arguments can be found in the 1982 pastoral letter of American Catholic bishops, arguably the most important non-governmental critique of American nuclear strategy.<sup>70</sup> Its authors included advocates of varying viewpoints, and the attempt to combine all of them into one coherent document demonstrated, as did the vagueness and inconsistency of the document itself, the lack of definite "answers" to what was fundamentally a *moral* problem. Still, it was a moral problem with a multitude of policy implications, which could not be skirted simply because they had moral underpinnings. It was in the realm of policy that the pastoral letter's faults were most apparent, a fact evidently clear to its authors, who confessed: "Reflecting the complexity of the nuclear problem, our arguments in this pastoral must be detailed and nuanced; but our 'no' to nuclear war must, in the end, be definitive and decisive."<sup>71</sup>

The pastoral letter's forays into policy prescription became mired in the contradiction between an acceptance of deterrence and an unwillingness to accept either of the targeting doctrines (counterforce or counter-value) on which deterrence must rest.<sup>72</sup> The bishops simply failed, as

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67. In his critique of deterrence theory, Philip Green hypothesizes that most advocates of minimum deterrence "literally believe, deep down, that a minimum deterrence strategy raises fewer ethical questions, because *the deterrent will never be used.*" *Deadly Logic* (Ohio State University Press, 1966), p. 237.

68. Paul Ramsey is the most notable advocate of the so-called "double effect" theory, derived from Aquinas, which states that one may knowingly commit evil in pursuit of a just end so long as the evil committed is not the means by which the just end is achieved, but rather is an unavoidable side-effect. The distinction between destruction which is deliberately maximized (as in counter-value warfare) and destruction which is deliberately minimized (as in counterforce warfare) is therefore crucial, and "is not determined by the amount of devastation or the number of deaths, but . . . by what is deliberately intended and directly done." See Ramsey's essay in John C. Bennett, ed., *Nuclear Weapons and the Conflict of Conscience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962); see also *The Limits of Nuclear War*, especially pp. 46-49.

69. Examples of this argument can be found in James E. Dougherty, *The Bishops and Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge MA: Archon Books, 1984), especially pp. 62, 148, and in Charles Krauthammer's essay in R. James Woolsey, ed., *Nuclear Arms: Ethics, Strategy, Politics* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1984).

70. The text of the pastoral letter is reprinted in Jim Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb* (Garden City NJ: Image Books, 1983). Castelli's book is largely devoted to the evolution of the pastoral letter, and describes it in useful detail.

71. Castelli, p. 229.

72. Counter-value targeting was ruled out because it violated the just war criterion of discrimination.

had so many others before them, to produce a credible strategy of deterrence that was not simultaneously a strategy of nuclear use.

The letter's ambivalence about deterrence is entirely understandable and reflects popular ambivalence. On the one hand, the very word "deterrence" guarantees the strategy's popularity: people would hardly endorse a strategy of "reprisal" or "threat," but doubting deterrence seems akin to doubting peace or even to promoting war. Because deterrence has been touted by successive administrations as synonymous with peace, however, the American public has not until recently taken its darker side — its threats — seriously. Increased awareness of the technical aspects of deterrence, in particular the amount of destruction the United States threatens to inflict upon the Soviet Union and the amount of destruction we cannot avoid receiving in return, has had a chilling effect on public attitudes towards deterrence.

The fear that comes from knowledge of the horrors a nuclear war would entail prompted the most recent peace movement, which peaked in the early 1980s but remains politically active in the United States and abroad. While a bilateral nuclear freeze was indeed a simpler, catchier rallying cry than, for example, "pursuit of strategic stability through a bilateral freeze in RV/launcher ratios through de-MIRVing," it is also true that the emotional stimulus behind the freeze was a fear that the arms race had run out of control. Specialists in nuclear issues are right to deride the American peace movement's neglect of issues of strategic stability, but they are very wrong to deride the fear which gave rise to the movement and which still fuels the desire to halt the arms race.

Nor will specialists be able to ignore public concern, for public knowledge of, and participation in, decisions of military strategy is unprecedentedly high. Although war plans are still not subject to referendum, the political leaders who buy the weapons and oversee military strategy are. Weapons systems themselves (the MX missile or B-1 bomber, for example) have become campaign issues, as have candidates' views on arms control; arms control and weapons procurement have provided the American public's entree into nuclear strategy-making. Most people are still ignorant of its fine points but still address issues of strategy by supporting or opposing particular arms control and weapons procurement policies. Public influence on nuclear strategy is indirect but it is nevertheless real, and is likely to increase in the future.

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Counterforce targeting was ruled out because of the bishops' skepticism about the ability of counterforce use to pass the just war test of proportionality, and because the force capabilities necessary for a counterforce targeting doctrine (e.g., high missile yields and accuracy) could prove provocative and therefore destabilizing. See text in Castelli, pp. 238ff.

Although there is no apparent popular consensus on nuclear strategy, the popular *impact* on nuclear strategy is still substantial, for in a deeper sense there is agreement that nuclear war is bad.<sup>73</sup> This public opinion provides no policy prescription, but it will push policymakers in the direction of war prevention, even if this requires changes in the strategy of containment. There are other factors as well, such as declining public ignorance and fear of the Soviet Union,<sup>74</sup> which contribute to an emphasis on war prevention rather than containment in the public consciousness: the risks incurred by reliance on nuclear weapons to combat Soviet aggression are too high and therefore must be decreased.

## VI. THE REBIRTH OF STRATEGIC DEFENSE

These strategic and political trends — the declining political utility and increasing moral dubiousness of nuclear weapons — produced the Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan's "star wars" proposal took much of the defense community by surprise, but the notion of strategic defense was both familiar and timely. The Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations had all wrestled with various schemes for defending American cities and/or ICBM sites against nuclear attack. Nagging doubts about the effectiveness of defense prompted the decision codified in the ABM Treaty signed with the Soviet Union in 1972: to forego strategic defense.

Technological advances throughout the 1970s made strategic defense seem more plausible; the breakdown on the SALT process made it seem more sensible. The SALT process collapsed primarily because Americans decided that the Soviet Union was manipulating arms control, as well as detente, its political counterpart, in order to gain unilateral advantages. Increased Soviet military involvement in the Third World and the Soviet buildup of conventional and nuclear forces both contributed to that impression. The feeling that the Soviet Union had taken advantage of American efforts at superpower cooperation led naturally to renewed interest in a unilateral pursuit of national security, such as strategic defense.

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73. A 1984 poll reported that 89% of respondents felt that "there can be no winner in an all-out nuclear war; both the U.S. and the Soviet Union would completely be destroyed." In 1954 only 27% agreed with the statement. The 1984 poll also revealed a significant increase in Americans' interest in, and pessimism about, nuclear war. See Daniel Yankelovich and John Doble, "The Public Mood: Nuclear Weapons and the U.S.S.R.," *Foreign Affairs*, 63 (Fall 1984):33-46.

74. 58% of respondents felt that the United States should no longer try to reform the Soviet Union, and 67% felt that capitalism and communism can peacefully coexist. *Ibid.*

The United States embraced nuclear weapons, both during World War II and during the decades following, because they offered a solution to American security needs. They were cheap enough yet effective enough for and allowed the United States to operate a long-term policy of containment at little domestic sacrifice. As time wore on, however, it became apparent that the success of containment resulted from factors other than American nuclear power, such as internal weakness of the communist powers, American conventional military efforts, and lack of Third World enthusiasm for communism. In addition, the possession of nuclear weapons by both superpowers raised the prospect of nuclear war, thereby weakening popular support at home and abroad for American foreign policy in general. As nuclear weapons became less useful, and more troublesome, their elimination became more attractive.

Beyond that explanation, there are elements of SDI that reflect the basic American national characteristics described previously. SDI is merely the military component of a broader movement urging the American government to employ space for various military and economic purposes. Common to those purposes is the notion that space represents a new frontier whose exploration and exploitation can free the United States from the limitations which constrain it, and pent-up entrepreneurial energy. As Daniel O. Graham, an early advocate of the military utilization of space, stated in *High Frontier*,

The United States is faced with an historic, but fleeting, opportunity to take its destiny into its own hands. The ominous military and economic trends which today beset the peoples of the Free World can be reversed . . . . We need not pass onto our children the horrendous legacy of "Mutual Assured Destruction," a perpetual balance of terror that can but favor those inclined to use terror to bring down free societies. We need not succumb to ever gloomier predictions of diminishing energy, raw materials, and food supplies. We need not resign ourselves to a constant retreat of free economic and political systems in the face of totalitarian aggressions.<sup>75</sup>

These sentiments, which so closely resemble the call to arms of NSC-68, are echoed in an issue of the *High Frontier Newsletter*: "Our free society is oriented toward growth and opportunity, and we are discontented with limits and fears."<sup>76</sup>

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75. Daniel O. Graham, *High Frontier: A New National Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1982), pp. 1, 13.

76. "America — A Spacefaring Nation" *High Frontier Newsletter* vol. 1, no. 8 (8 January 1984): 1.

The source of those limits and fears, of course, is not nuclear weapons *per se* but *Soviet* nuclear weapons; space is seen as a means to negate the Soviet threat as much as the nuclear threat. *High Frontier* calls for "a new strategic approach and a technological end-run on the Soviets to meet President Reagan's 'margin of safety.'"<sup>77</sup> In other words, strategic defense unilaterally possessed by the United States could restore effective American nuclear superiority by limiting the Soviet Union's ability to inflict damage on the United States. While many proponents of strategic defense argue that politico-military advantage is not its goal — "We seek neither military superiority nor political advantage," Reagan stated in his March 1983 speech<sup>78</sup> — there is an undeniable feeling on their part that strategic defense could bring the United States "enormous strategic advantages," as stated in *High Frontier*.<sup>79</sup>

The charge that SDI has offensive as well as defensive uses has repeatedly been raised. Reagan anticipated it in his speech;<sup>80</sup> he and others have countered by inviting the Soviet Union to join the United States in a program of strategic defense.<sup>81</sup> SDI proponents have also responded that the nature of the American political system rules out any coercive use of strategic defense:

A democracy does not, in practice, have the option of expansion, least of all expansion by military means. . . . Given the nature of the democratic system and the empirical data of experience, the hypothetical assumption that a unilateral strategic defense capability on the part of the United States would have a destabilizing effect cannot be maintained.<sup>82</sup>

Besides exhibiting a curious reading of American history, this passage also exhibits with rare candor the traditional faith in the justness, by definition, of American actions. Advantages dangerous when possessed by others are acceptable when possessed by Americans, since Americans will use those advantages not for personal gain but for universal benefit.

Thus, strategic defense has revived traditional American beliefs: the belief in Americans' moral superiority, in their ability to succeed at all their endeavors, and in their altruism and pacific nature: "In the very act

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77. Graham, p. ix.

78. The text of Reagan's speech is reprinted in Werner Kaltefleiter, *The Strategic Defense Initiative: Some Implications for Europe* (Institute for European Defense and Strategic Studies, 1985). See p. 31.

79. Graham, p. 3.

80. "If paired with offensive systems [strategic defense] can be viewed as fostering an aggressive policy, and no one wants that." Kaltefleiter, p. 31.

81. Graham, p. 14.

82. Kaltefleiter, pp. 11-12.

of defending our country against a nuclear missile attack, we will be opening the doors to dramatic improvements in the way we live our lives," claims the *High Frontier Newsletter*.<sup>83</sup> It is now far too soon to predict whether the promise of space will prove elusive. Yet the very duration of Americans' unfulfilled search for a world commensurate with their ideals, despite the doggedness with which that search has been carried out, suggests that this latest effort will also fail. It might simply be that American hopes and expectations have always been too high, that, as Reinhold Niebuhr states, "American idealism [must] come to terms with the limits of all human striving, the fragmentariness of all human wisdom . . . and the mixture of good and evil in all human virtue."<sup>84</sup> We can only hope that coming to this realization need not cost us the institutions and values on which our idealism is based.

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83. "The Economic Benefits of High Frontier" *High Frontier Newsletter* vol. 3, no. 6 (3 June 1985): 2.

84. Niebuhr, p. 133.

