

# NO-FIRST-USE IN U.S. DIPLOMACY, DETERRENCE STRATEGY, AND PUBLIC OPINION

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*When McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan, Robert McNamara, and Gerard Smith first proposed a no-first-use policy for the United States, they wrote that they aimed "to start a discussion, not to end it." In this article, Richard D. Nethercut offers his contribution to the ongoing debate over no-first-use. The author notes that unlike the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, the United States does not have a clearly defined declaratory policy on the use of nuclear weapons. He reveals how this policy of ambiguity hinders the U.S. both abroad and at home. Nethercut provides a broad framework for U.S. nuclear policy and concludes that the U.S. should unilaterally endorse the concept of no-first-use with a multilateral NATO exception, as this would reduce tension, improve the prospects for arms control, make the American threat more credible, and present to the world a more responsible image of the U.S.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The United States does not have a clearly defined declaratory policy on its use of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.), however, have both proclaimed policies of no-first-use and of non-use against non-nuclear states. Proposals that the U.S. take a similar stance have been criticized on the grounds that this would weaken our commitment to the Atlantic Alliance and gratuitously surrender what seems to be an effective deterrent against any form of Soviet attack.

This article examines the relationship between the deterrence strategies and declaratory policies of the Soviet Union, China, and the U.S. It does not attempt to focus on the technical and specific aspects of arms control, NATO doctrine, or the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Instead, it is intended to contribute to the public discussion of nuclear policy and to emphasize

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the need for congruence in our deterrence strategies, foreign policies, and public opinion. It contends that the U.S. should formulate strategy and policy that: (1) accord with our interests, values, and resources and enjoy broad public support; (2) support the security interests and needs of our allies and friends; and (3) deter the Soviet Union in the most economical and least threatening way, allowing the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to explore areas of common agreement in an atmosphere of reduced tensions.

This study concludes that there are two steps the U.S. could take which would not jeopardize U.S. or allied security, but would address Soviet fears and test their willingness to resume an arms control dialogue: first, the U.S. could clarify its declaratory nuclear weapons policy by endorsing the principle of no-first-use, but providing for an exception if the NATO governments should *collectively* determine that an imminent Soviet attack with conventional forces required the use, or threatened use, of nuclear weapons. Second, the U.S. could offer to negotiate a bilateral "no-first-strike" agreement with the U.S.S.R. which would ban any *unilateral* nuclear attack by one party against the other and establish a process under which this agreement would be monitored and controlled.

The above declaration and agreement would entail no arms reduction *per se*, but would create an atmosphere far more conducive to U.S.-Soviet strategic arms negotiations. Without diminishing its own security, the Atlantic Alliance would be adopting a strategy less threatening to Soviet security, thus enhancing prospects for successful negotiations. Experience has demonstrated that these negotiations will be difficult and protracted, but a successful outcome is far more likely if NATO is unified by a common purpose, and if there is a popular domestic consensus behind negotiations.

The foundation on which the approach outlined above is based is U.S. self-interest: the economic imperative of developing a less expensive defense strategy and the political necessity of adopting a policy which is unifying, not divisive, and will permit the U.S. to repair its alliances and refurbish its international image. To understand how a declaratory policy of no-first-use would benefit the U.S., it is instructive to look at the Soviet and Chinese approaches to deterrence and nuclear weapons policy.

## II. THE SOVIET APPROACH

Soviet deterrence strategy is rooted in a war-waging capability: the construction of a military machine inferior to none, capable of waging conventional, nuclear, or chemical/biological warfare. The Soviets value

their military strength for both military and political purposes, viewing deterrence as more of a political than a military concept.<sup>1</sup> To the Soviets, military power not only constitutes a principal guarantee of security, but also entitles the Soviet Union to political equality with the U.S. and involvement in all international matters of concern to them.

Moscow's military build-up, and actions such as the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, are explained and justified in terms of protecting national security. Soviet media frequently remind the population of the devastating losses suffered in World War II: 20 million killed, large areas of Soviet territory under enemy occupation or attack, a crippled economy, and a disrupted Party and state apparatus. Soviet leaders considered the establishment of a buffer zone of East European states to be absolutely essential to Soviet security and a legitimate consequence of the Soviet victory. This concern underlay Leonid Brezhnev's proclamation of "limited sovereignty" which was cited as justification for the entry of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The recent crisis in Poland is viewed in a similar light. The fact that basic Soviet security interests appear to have been maintained without the overt use of Soviet military force is probably regarded in Soviet circles as a model of prudent crisis management, akin to the way U.S. handling of the Cuban missile crisis is regarded here. Though the Soviet leadership was almost universally excoriated abroad for the shooting down of the Korean airliner, it may have been more concerned with demonstrating to the Soviet citizenry its zealous concern for the protection of Soviet territory.

The CPSU leadership can boast a creditable record of success in protecting the Soviet population since the ravages of World War II. Under the initial SALT agreement, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agreed to limit their anti-ballistic missile (ABM) installations to two each (later reduced to one). The U.S. initially protected an ICBM site in North Dakota, while the Soviets protected Moscow. The U.S.S.R. has a far more extensive civil defense program than the U.S.: a civil defense command that is at least nominally on a par with the service branches; blast-resistant shelters for 100,000 key personnel; and plans to expand shelter capacity to accommodate up to one-fourth the urban population and to evacuate the remainder to rural areas if there is a sufficient lead time of three to seven days. While these measures are of dubious practical value in a thermonuclear exchange, they are of great domestic propaganda value. Moreover, aside from some minor skirmishes with China, there has been no incursion into Soviet territory since 1945, and Soviet armed forces

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1. See Freeman Dyson, *Weapons and Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 189-192.

have had no sustained military involvement, or extensive casualties, outside of the U.S.S.R. before invading Afghanistan in 1979.

The foregoing is not intended to minimize the threat posed to American and allied security interests throughout the world by Soviet military capabilities and expansionist policies. However, it is important to note first, the paramount Soviet concern for national security and second, the implicit Soviet desire to pursue a low-risk strategy whenever possible in expanding or maintaining its sphere of influence or control. With its mounting economic woes, the cost of any strategy is an important, but not determining factor in Moscow's calculations.

Because the Soviets view deterrence as more of a political than a military concept, they usually try to coordinate their declaratory statements on nuclear weapons with their negotiating tactics and proposals at arms control talks. Many arms control statements are timed to have maximum political and propaganda impact and frequently piggyback on concepts advanced by others. For example, in the case of no-first-use, China originated the concept in 1964, and a distinguished quartet of Americans reintroduced it in a *Foreign Affairs* article in April 1982.<sup>2</sup> It was not until June 1982 that no-first-use was suddenly proclaimed as Soviet policy in a message from Leonid Brezhnev to the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on Disarmament. Brezhnev called on the other nuclear powers to "assume an equally precise and clear obligation."<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, in June 1983 the Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution calling on the U.S., Britain, France, and China to join together with the U.S.S.R. in declaring a freeze on nuclear weapons. This was promptly rejected by all four nations who claimed that the effect would be to freeze the existing imbalance. In September and October 1983, President Andropov and Foreign Minister Gromyko repeated their call for a freeze and added several embellishments, including assurances of "appropriate verification" and prior U.S.-Soviet implementation of a bilateral freeze as an example to the other nuclear powers.<sup>4</sup> These Soviet proposals are designed to preserve Soviet advantages and to exploit differences of views among its adversaries.

Although the Soviets have made no substantive progress toward an agreement on no-first-use or a nuclear freeze with the other nuclear powers, they have succeeded in fashioning a package which appears

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2. McGeorge Bundy, George F. Kennan, Robert S. McNamara, and Gerard Smith, "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* 60 (Spring 1982): 753-768.

3. *Facts on File*, 15 June 1982, p. 432. For example, see Foreign Minister Gromyko's speech to the UNGA.

4. *New York Times*, 5 October 1983.

responsive to worldwide appeals for reversal of the arms race and which can be presented to the Soviet nation as evidence of the leadership's concern for peace. Although these Soviet proposals were designed to score propaganda points, they could provide a basis for useful bilateral discussions if the U.S. adopted a declaratory policy on nuclear weapons which was compatible with the Soviet one. It is noteworthy that since walking out of the INF negotiations in Geneva in November 1983, the U.S.S.R. on numerous occasions has reiterated its no-first-use pledge and called on the U.S. and other nuclear countries to join in that pledge. Most recently, President Konstantin Chernenko, in an interview with an American correspondent, cited "no-first-use" as one of four areas of nuclear policy where a demonstration of interest or reciprocity by the U.S. would open the way for a resumption of arms control negotiations.<sup>5</sup> Having survived the transition from Andropov to Chernenko, the no-first-use principle has become an integral part of the Soviet declaratory policy on nuclear weapons.

### III. THE CHINESE APPROACH

In contrast to the U.S.S.R., the P.R.C.'s deterrence strategy is based on a war-*survival* capability, rooted in indigenous capacities, and supplemented by outside strength and assistance in various forms. The P.R.C. clearly perceives the U.S.S.R. as the principal external threat to its security. The Soviet military build-up in Asia over the past 15 years — including the deployment of some 110 intermediate range SS-20s — has served to reinforce its threat to Chinese security though not necessarily make it more imminent.

Against this threat, the P.R.C. brings to bear its own minimal but developing capability in nuclear weapons; a friendly relationship with the U.S. including cooperation on defense; massive, albeit outmoded conventional forces; and a similarly massive militia force with rich experience in waging protracted "peoples' wars". The Chinese appear to calculate that their ability to survive and eventually defeat Soviet attack in any form, together with Moscow's concern over the possibility of a two-front war are themselves important deterrents to Soviet attack, provided a credible level of military preparedness is maintained.

In addition, the Chinese believe that Soviet expansionist desires and military strength are offset by its economic weaknesses, overextension (most notably in Afghanistan), and a cautious military/political strategy, which together attenuate any immediate Soviet threat to Chinese security.

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5. *Washington Post*, 16 October 1984.

Since 1982, the P.R.C. has modified its tactics towards the U.S.S.R., lowering its rhetoric, though not its guard. Beijing has emphasized its independent foreign policy, maintaining a studied "equidistance" between the two superpowers in foreign affairs (though not in security policy) and endeavoring in the context of the "strategic triangle" to use American-Soviet rivalry to its own advantage.

China's nuclear weapons program and strategy fits within this larger framework. In happier times, and to its lasting regret, Moscow helped China acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Now the P.R.C. looks to the U.S. — not without some ideological and nationalistic misgivings — for assistance in confronting the Soviets' overwhelming military superiority, one that is particularly pronounced in the area of strategic weapons. Though China now denies that it has a "strategic relationship" with the U.S., there are clearly elements of military and strategic cooperation. For example, there are persistent reports that in establishing relations in 1979, the U.S. and P.R.C. secretly agreed to set up a joint monitoring facility in Northwest China to provide the U.S. with an important source for verifying Soviet compliance with arms control agreements.<sup>6</sup> In turn, through a series of high-level visits and negotiations, the P.R.C. will increasingly enjoy access to advanced U.S. technology, probably including non-military nuclear technology, and will be permitted to purchase a wide array of defensive weapons systems.

So far, however, China's military modernization has been kept within the parameters of its long-term reconstruction program and China has limited its purchases of military material and advanced technology. Due to economic exigencies, the P.R.C. military budget was reduced in 1980 and again in 1981. Despite pressures for increased military spending, especially on nuclear weapons, the tendency of the Chinese leadership has been to reassess the Soviet threat rather than to increase the military budget. This reassessment apparently concluded that a policy of excessive confrontation with the U.S.S.R. was not in China's interests; instead, a limited amount of fence-mending has begun in response to Soviet overtures.

Though China has limited its military spending, it has strenuously resisted controls over its nuclear weapons program. It has opposed most arms control agreements, characterizing them as U.S.-Soviet devices to preserve their nuclear supremacy and competition, and has refused to participate in multilateral negotiations on strategic weapons convened or dominated by the two superpowers.

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6. Strobe Talbott in *The China Factor*, ed. Richard H. Solomon (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1981), p. 92.

Nevertheless, from its initial test in 1964, China has sought to underscore its assertion that its nuclear weapons were purely defensive by declaring a policy of no-first-use and of non-use against non-nuclear states or in nuclear-free-zones (NFZ). China's arms control proposals have been broad and sweeping, designed for political effect rather than for serious negotiations.<sup>7</sup> For example, it has called for the other nuclear powers to emulate its no-first-use and non-use declarations, which could then lead, it suggests, to a multilateral agreement by the nuclear powers on the non-use of nuclear weapons. More recently, however, a shift toward a more forthcoming approach may have been signalled by a Chinese spokesman in July of 1984, in a statement which, without mention of pre-conditions, encouraged discussion between the nuclear powers on the reduction of nuclear weapons and indicated China would participate.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, China has developed a comprehensive policy framework for its strategic weapons program, one that includes a carefully formulated deterrence strategy and a clear declaratory policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, both of which conform to China's perceived national interests, circumstances and resources.

#### IV. THE U.S. APPROACH

U.S. deterrence strategy has been rooted in our initial dominance in strategic weapons and technology — a dominance which lasted into the 1960s and seemed to validate a strategy of preventing any form of enemy attack by threatening an unacceptable level of punishment in return. Phrases such as "massive retaliation", "mutually assured destruction", "flexible response", and now "escalation dominance" have all been used to express this strategy. Through the concept of extended deterrence, the U.S. nuclear umbrella has been applied to the protection of treaty allies, such as NATO, Japan, and South Korea, and, by implication, to areas deemed to represent vital interests of the U.S. such as the Persian Gulf. This strategy was seen as an effective and inexpensive way of providing protection against the threat posed by superior Soviet conventional forces.

The exact circumstances under which the U.S. would use nuclear weapons have never been clearly defined. Opinion differs over whether this ambiguity enhances or diminishes the deterrence value of nuclear weapons. Some have argued that the "incalculability" of the American reaction keeps the Soviets off balance and is the principal protection from

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7. For a more detailed description of China's position on arms control, see David Salem, "The People's Republic of China, International Law and Arms Control," *Reprint Series in Contemporary Asian Studies* 6 (Baltimore, Maryland, 1983), pp. 47-58.

8. *Boston Globe*, 29 July 1984, p. 15.

Soviet attack for exposed areas such as West Berlin.<sup>9</sup> Others, including the author, contend that an ambiguous U.S. policy concerning the use of nuclear weapons is dangerous and counter-productive, increasing doubts both domestically and among allies about American judgement and restraint, and simultaneously, raising both doubts about U.S. determination and fears over a U.S. overreaction. Because the nuclear weapons balance has changed from one of U.S. superiority to a rough parity between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., and because the territory of both powers are now "at risk" to the strategic arsenals of the other with dramatically shortened delivery times to target, the credibility of an ambiguous U.S. nuclear deterrent against conventional attack has been greatly reduced.

Although an implicit U.S. deterrence strategy based on possible first use of nuclear weapons has gradually evolved in the context of NATO, there has never been a clearcut declaratory statement of U.S. nuclear policy. To frame a declaratory policy, the U.S. will have to reconcile differing domestic beliefs on what the policy should be. Currently, there is a strong, inchoate yearning for arms control as demonstrated in national polls and through the "nuclear freeze" movement; there is also a growing sentiment concerning the immorality and unusability of nuclear weapons, even as a deterrent, as expressed in the Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter. Conversely, there is a belief, especially prevalent in Western Europe, that American and allied security can be assured only through military strength and a capacity to inflict unacceptable punishment on the enemy. In reconciling these views, some compromise will be inevitable and essential, but our unhappy involvement in Vietnam demonstrated all too clearly the perils of pursuing ill-defined policies which do not enjoy broad public support.

U.S. policy must be in accord with national interests and traditional values. Though an implied policy of first-use was once generally accepted as being in the U.S. national interest, this is no longer the case. Increasing awareness of nuclear destructiveness, questions of morality, growing disapproval of previous use, and fears of nuclear retaliation and escalation all underlie the present ambivalence in the U.S. and abroad toward nuclear weapons.

The weakness of American nuclear policy becomes clear when one asks: which U.S. president or Congress would be willing to sanction our unilateral first use of nuclear weapons, even in response to a massive Soviet conventional attack on our allies? The consequences would be so

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9. Karl Kaiser, Georg Leber, and Franz-Joseph Schulze, "Nuclear Weapons and the Preservation of Peace: A German Response to No First Use," *Foreign Affairs* 60 (Summer 1982): 1161.



catastrophic that it is unlikely the U.S. would use nuclear weapons to counter a non-nuclear attack despite our commitments to NATO.

The present emphasis in NATO strategy on a "nuclear option" against Soviet conventional attack constitutes an implausible and provocative strategy. But if NATO adopted a less threatening strategy, it would both strengthen its unity and cohesion and diminish Soviet apprehensions to the extent they are based on misperceptions of U.S. and West European intentions.

#### V. A NEW APPROACH TO DETERRENCE

A recent survey of voter attitudes on nuclear weapons issues in the U.S. dramatically illustrates the lack of both public support for and understanding of NATO strategy regarding the use of nuclear weapons. Over 80 percent of those polled mistakenly believed it was U.S. policy to use nuclear weapons "if, and only if, the Soviets attack the U.S. first with nuclear weapons."<sup>10</sup> The survey concludes that the policy option favored by most Americans is to assign nuclear weapons the single purpose of deterring or retaliating against a nuclear attack.

Given the weakness of the current U.S. policy of ambiguity and the strength of the prevailing view among Americans that nuclear weapons should be used only to deter a nuclear attack, a new U.S. approach to deterrence is required.

The challenge to the U.S. is to fashion a deterrence strategy that meets the criteria noted in the introduction: consistency with U.S. values, interests, and resources; compatibility with our allies' security interests and needs; and effectiveness in deterring the adversary economically and non-provocatively. Both the P.R.C. and U.S.S.R. have a more comprehensive policy framework for their nuclear weapons strategy than does the U.S. So how should the U.S. go about redressing this situation? To borrow from Gilbert and Sullivan's aphorism of letting the punishment fit the crime, we should begin by making the deterrent fit the threat.

The four distinguished proponents of a no-first-use policy for the U.S. contended in their *Foreign Affairs* article that "there is no current prospective Soviet 'superiority' that would tempt anyone in Moscow toward nuclear adventurism" such as a "massive first strike on land-based American strategic missiles."<sup>11</sup> This point was not disputed in the subsequent debate over their proposal. Even four West German critics of no-first-use agreed that a Soviet nuclear first strike against the U.S. can be

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10. *Voter Options on Nuclear Arms Policy* (New York: The Public Agenda Foundation and the Center for Foreign Policy Development, Brown University, 1984) p. 34.

11. Bundy, et al, "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," p. 764.

excluded as a serious possibility. Moreover, they argued that a first strike by the NATO Alliance is not a relevant issue and "must remain unthinkable."<sup>12</sup> Both proponents and opponents of no-first-use explicitly judged that the prospect of a Soviet conventional attack against the nations of Western Europe was remote at present — while the reverse situation, a West European attack on Eastern Europe was also unthinkable.

The logic of the current situation in Europe demands a clarification of U.S. doctrine. It is impossible to foresee any circumstances that would lead the Soviets to contemplate a massive attack on Western Europe. It would put at risk all the gains of World War II and, more fundamentally, the security and survival of the Soviet nation. Equally one cannot conceive that the West European governments would resort to a nuclear deterrent, with its attendant danger of an all-out nuclear war, until all other avenues of resolution or of prevention had been explored.

Even though the Soviets have compelling reasons for refraining from attacking Western Europe, many West Europeans believe it has been the NATO nuclear option that has deterred the Soviets from using military force against Western Europe. At present, a U.S. no-first-use policy without a NATO "exception" could have an adverse psychological effect in Western Europe — the equivalent of stripping away a cherished security blanket. When an unadorned no-first-use policy was first proposed in *Foreign Affairs* in April 1982, it was strongly opposed by both the U.S. Government and several NATO partners. Secretary of State Haig declared that such a policy was "tantamount to making Europe safe for conventional aggression" and would leave the West "nothing with which to counterbalance the Soviet conventional advantages and geopolitical position in Europe."<sup>13</sup> And in response to the June 1982 Brezhnev statement of a Soviet no-first-use policy, a State Department spokesman termed the pledge "unverifiable and unenforceable."<sup>14</sup> More recently, in response to Chernenko's conciliatory statements in October 1984, the NATO Secretary General, Peter Carrington, rejected a non-nuclear defense strategy for Western Europe; he contended that adoption of no-first-use would "weaken the deterrent against conventional attack and thus undermine our fundamental aim of preventing war."<sup>15</sup>

This reaction either gravely underestimates the determination and capacity of the West European countries to defend themselves or grossly exaggerates the capabilities and intentions of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. It also ignores the political realities in Western

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12. Kaiser, et al, "Nuclear Weapons and the Preservation of Peace," p. 1161.

13. *Facts on File*, 8 April 1982, p. 240.

14. *Ibid.*, 18 June 1982, p. 433.

15. *Boston Globe*, 17 October 1984.

Europe: former Secretary of Defense McNamara has concluded that despite the proclaimed NATO "nuclear option" and objections to no-first-use, there is less and less likelihood that NATO would authorize the use of nuclear weapons except in response to a Soviet nuclear attack.<sup>16</sup> He detects a growing perception within NATO of the costs and risk of a first-use threat. Thus, in time, NATO itself may discard the "nuclear option" but for the U.S. to do so at this juncture would clearly be viewed by many within the Alliance as destabilizing and divisive.

But the U.S. is not foreclosed from a statement of restraint concerning nuclear weapons use because of the special circumstances pertaining to NATO. There are steps which the U.S. could take without jeopardizing U.S. or allied security that would respond to Soviet statements and test their willingness to resume an arms control dialogue. First, the U.S. could acknowledge public opinion by endorsing the concept of no-first-use in principle, while noting our longstanding and overriding treaty commitment to the Atlantic Alliance. Second, it could pledge to work with France, the U.K., and the NATO Council to formulate joint and separate policy statements which would make no-first-use a declared policy objective, perhaps contingent upon progress in arms control and security negotiations with the U.S.S.R. and Warsaw Pact countries. Third, in these consultations, the NATO Allies should agree upon a strategy for providing the conventional Western defenses needed to deter a Warsaw Pact attack.

Before these steps can be taken, however, it will be necessary to have a thorough public discussion to resolve the contradiction between official policy and public opinion. This discussion should achieve two objectives: First, the American public must be made aware of the adverse impact of suddenly taking away the nuclear crutch on which European governments have relied as a deterrent to Soviet attack; and second, U.S. and West European leaders and strategists must be sensitized to the strong public aversion (in the U.S., as well as in Europe) to the NATO nuclear option which many believe would inevitably lead to an all-out nuclear exchange if exercised.

An honest public discussion of NATO policies would lead to a new consensus. The public would come to realize that a change in NATO strategy to use nuclear weapons only to deter nuclear attack would work against U.S. interests unless it were carried out gradually, patiently, and in close consultation with allies. Also, the U.S. and the European allies

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16. Robert S. McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons," *Foreign Affairs* 61 (Fall 1983): 74-5.

would see that sacrifices will be necessary to assure that NATO retains adequate non-nuclear defense forces.<sup>17</sup>

By pursuing the policies outlined above and engaging in thorough public discussion of the dilemmas of deterrence, NATO solidarity would be underscored rather than undermined. In the process, East-West tensions would be diminished by reducing Soviet fears of a precipitate or preemptive use of nuclear weapons by NATO members.

## VI. A JOINT U.S.-SOVIET PLEDGE

Although Moscow might publicly protest the NATO exception and tack on a "Warsaw Pact" exception to its own no-first-use policy, in its strategic calculations it would surely conclude that the U.S. and NATO pronouncements had decreased the danger of a sudden nuclear strike. Such a conclusion might make the Soviets more willing to negotiate an arms reduction treaty. The keystone of a de-escalation program would be a joint agreement between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. formally renouncing unilateral nuclear attacks against the other party. At present, both sides claim it would be "unthinkable" for them to launch a preemptive nuclear attack against the other, but entirely "thinkable" that the other side might do just that to them. For example, in October 1983, an authoritative Soviet spokesman stated Moscow had the impression the U.S. wanted to acquire a first strike capability against it, something which the U.S.S.R. would not allow.<sup>18</sup> At present, with the deployment of both Soviet and U.S. weapons with a first strike capability and shortened delivery times, the ability to execute a preemptive attack against the other side has greatly increased even though the avowed intention not to do so has not changed. The fear of a preemptive attack has fuelled much of the arms race, impelling both sides to develop and deploy more sophisticated, accurate, and destructive weapons which blur the distinction between a first strike and a retaliatory capability.

It is manifestly in the interests of both sides, and of mankind, to reverse this process. A joint no-first-strike compact would formally prohibit the "unthinkable" and would conform to the stated policies of both countries. It would have tremendous political impact domestically, and could provide a basis for a summit meeting between the two leaders. A bilateral agreement would have to provide for better communication and consultation arrangements, in order to reassure both sides. Previous Soviet

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17. Mark Garrison, "Time to Address Real Nuclear Issues," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 21 October 1984, p. A23.

18. Georgiy Arbatov interview in *Der Spiegel*, Hamburg, October 24, 1983.

statements have indicated a willingness to be responsive on this score. Senators Nunn (D.-Georgia) and Warner (R.-Virginia) have proposed crisis management centers in Washington and Moscow which could help perform this function, perhaps in conjunction with the bilateral Standing Consultative Commission established under SALT.

Neither the unilateral or joint declarations proposed above in themselves involve specific arms reductions or prohibit the development and deployment of new weapons systems. However they clearly signal a policy of mutual restraint and establish a *climate* of reduced tensions and threat in which mutual arms reductions can be more readily negotiated. Crisis stability can then be maintained and deterrence achieved at mutually decreased levels of nuclear weapons capability.

Once the sense of threat is reduced and the military deterrents made more credible and more appropriate to the situation, other factors can come into play. Economic imperatives are now being virtually ignored by both sides in the name of national security needs and the enemy threat. The specious strategy of putting the enemy "at risk" by developing a stronger, more accurate destructive capability only causes the enemy to retaliate in kind, putting not only the national security but the economy of both countries "at risk." The current budget deficits facing the U.S. may be a greater long-term danger to our national security and viability than is the Soviet threat.

To use a medical analogy, one does not undergo a heart transplant if a by-pass operation will suffice, nor any surgery at all if a combination of medication, diet and exercise can prevent heart failure. So too in the international arena it is prudent to keep both the costs and the risks at the lowest level necessary. If both sides recognize the very limited role nuclear weapons can play in the East-West rivalry — and also the costs and risks they entail — they should be persuaded by their own self-interest to adopt less expensive, less risky defense strategies and to give greater play to non-military mechanisms in their policies and actions.

Most of the countries of Western and Eastern Europe have equally strong incentives to find ways to ease East-West tensions and reduce the crushing burden of military spending. It has been argued that adoption of no-first-use and/or no-early-use policies may save money on strategic weapons programs but will require even greater outlays for conventional weapons and forces to compensate for the Soviet/Warsaw Pact superiority. This contention holds true only if deterrence is viewed purely in military terms. By paying greater attention to the economic and psychological dimensions of deterrence, a more complete picture of the costs of deterrence may be gained. In the long-run, the growing economic interdependence in Europe could prove to be as powerful a disincentive to

aggression as military deterrents. Also, the increases in defense spending mandated by NATO in 1979 have not resulted in a perception of improved security by most NATO members, especially in the face of continuing SS-20 deployments by the U.S.S.R. Since many NATO members have been unable to meet their pledges to increase their military budgets, additional increases at this time would probably be viewed by these members as both politically and economically infeasible. Therefore, if the above proposals do result in perceptions of a reduced security threat by both sides and if this can be parlayed into agreements concerning reductions in strategic and conventional forces, it would be both unnecessary and undesirable for the U.S. to insist on higher levels of defense spending within NATO.

## VII. U.S. POLICY IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

Most proposals for U.S. declaratory nuclear policy have been based on a U.S.-Soviet confrontation in Europe. This is the context in which the no-first-use proposal appearing in *Foreign Affairs* was advanced, criticized, and defended. However the more fundamental question is whether no-first-use makes sense as a global U.S. policy. Although such a policy will clearly be endorsed publicly by almost all nations of the world, the question that U.S. policymakers must resolve is whether it serves the security interests of the U.S. and its allies in certain specific situations or jeopardizes them.

It has been argued that U.S. adoption of a no-first-use policy would gravely threaten the security of South Korea (ROK). A closer examination belies this contention. Seoul lies 30 miles south of the DMZ, making it militarily vulnerable to sudden North Korean attack which, it can be argued, necessitates the threat of nuclear first-use by the U.S. as a deterrent to bolster U.S.-South Korean conventional defenses. In the wake of the brutal killing of 15 senior South Korean leaders in a 1983 terrorist bombing in Rangoon, it is difficult to argue that North Korea does not pose an active threat to the security of the Seoul government nor that U.S. forces are not required there. This heinous act reinforces Pyongyang's image as a renegade pariah, but it does not increase the likelihood of a North Korean offensive against the South.

Many factors besides the U.S. nuclear umbrella work to deter a North Korean attack. The interplay of major power interests on the Korean Peninsula is a strong factor for maintaining the *status quo*. Although the P.R.C. and U.S.S.R. compete for North Korea's affections, neither country would benefit from a renewed conflict in Korea which would dramatically escalate tension among the four major powers (U.S.,

U.S.S.R., P.R.C. and Japan) with vital interests in the region. Furthermore, China has commented on the need to maintain stability on the Peninsula,<sup>19</sup> and has gingerly explored unofficial contacts with South Korea. American nuclear weapons are not required to deter North Korea; conversely, they complicate cooperative efforts between Japan, China and the U.S. with respect to Korea. Moreover, an implicit U.S. threat to use nuclear weapons against North Korea could cause the latter to acquiesce in the stationing of Soviet missile units in its territory. A more mischievous and inimical development for the stability and security of East Asia is difficult to imagine.

In Asia, there is no collective security organization analagous to NATO which would assume collective responsibility for using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, nor is there ever likely to be one. The onus for using nuclear weapons would be completely on the U.S. There is already widespread suspicion in Asia that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. are willing to use weapons in Asia that they would not use in Europe. The U.S. use of A-Bombs in Japan, defoliants and napalm in Vietnam and the Soviet use of "yellow rain" in Laos, Kampuchea and Afghanistan have heightened these suspicions.

There is strong regional sentiment for a nuclear-free zone in Asia and a wariness toward the U.S. nuclear umbrella even among those whom it covers. Japan, for example, has an understandable allergy to nuclear weapons. A "nuclear first use" policy in Asia creates many disadvantages for the U.S. It could stultify Asian diplomatic initiatives involving China, Japan, or ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Nuclear first use is very unlikely to be supported by our allies and friends in Asia and provides a handy propaganda target for our enemies and detractors. It is not a realistic policy option for the U.S. and hence not a credible deterrent against non-nuclear attack.

The same argument can be made for other parts of the world as well. In particular, neither the U.S. unilaterally nor the NATO governments acting collectively would receive regional support for extending a nuclear first use policy to the troubled Middle East. Although President Carter implied such a U.S. policy option in the Persian Gulf, it would be the height of diplomatic folly for the U.S. to pursue such a strategy over the objections of our friends in the region.

By contrast, U.S. adoption of no-first-use and non-use policies would have an extremely favorable impact in Asia and throughout the Third World. It is as conspicuous as it is ironic that the U.S. and the two

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19. For example see Premier Zhao's statements during a visit to the U.S. in *Beijing Review* 27 (January 23, 1984): 19-20.

other Western democracies who are nuclear powers have been unwilling to enunciate declaratory policies of restraint on nuclear weapons use, while the two totalitarian nuclear powers have done so. This reluctance of the Western democracies seems to stem from the mistaken belief that creating uncertainty in the mind of the enemy about one's reaction is an effective deterrent. This approach ignores the fact that democratic governments must operate from a national consensus and that any ambiguity in government policy will weaken this consensus and will be exploited to denigrate the Western image throughout the world.

The U.S. and U.S.S.R. as nuclear superpowers have a special charge on them to act responsibly. Neither can afford to be viewed as a rogue elephant or loose cannon, capable of wreaking destruction through recklessness, fear, or narrow self-interest. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the tragic Korean Air Lines incident was that in its aftermath, neither power demonstrated a willingness to examine the incident in the context of their rivalry and take steps to insure that similar or worse incidents do not recur.

It has been argued that detente is a policy *option* for the U.S.; but for the vast majority of the world's population, detente is not so much an alternative policy course as it is an inherent characteristic of a responsible world power. The U.S. has no option but to remain in communication with its principal adversary and to be open and responsive to Soviet willingness to act in ways that are in the mutual interests of both sides and of third parties as well.

#### VIII. PROSPECTS FOR MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT

The authors of "Living With Nuclear Weapons" have observed that the protection of our sovereignty by nuclear weapons must not place other innocent people at high risk.<sup>20</sup> This imposes a special obligation on the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to agree to constraints that protect the interests of third parties, and sets limits on what is justifiable nuclear strategy.

The two superpowers must also take the lead in the broader area of international controls over nuclear proliferation, nuclear materials, and nuclear technology. Nuclear proliferation has both a vertical and horizontal dimension; while some 120 nations are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, the vast majority are as concerned with the failure of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to live up to their treaty pledge (Article 6) to curb the further development of strategic weapons as they are with the danger of more states acquiring a nuclear

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20. The Harvard Nuclear Study Group, *Living with Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), p. 244.



weapons capability. Several non-signatories have faulted the NPT for this very reason and characterized the treaty as a U.S.-Soviet device for maintaining their nuclear supremacy. Since 1968, only one nation, India, has joined the nuclear club (and promptly declared it would never develop nuclear weapons), while perhaps ten other nations have achieved "near nuclear" status, meaning they have the technology and materials to develop nuclear weapons but have not done so, or at least have not acknowledged doing so.<sup>21</sup>

In any strengthening of non-proliferation controls, a key element will be for the nuclear powers to acknowledge the special responsibilities and obligations that attend their status and to forswear any effort to translate this capability into bargaining leverage over non-nuclear nations. In this connection, specific unilateral and multilateral declarations of non-use against non-nuclear states are an important adjunct of a no-first-use policy. The thrust of this approach is to provide incentives to non-nuclear states to remain in that status, bolstering the constraints of cost, risk, and technology that already restrict them.

If the U.S., U.K., and France endorse the concept of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, however qualified their endorsement may be, it will bring the five declared nuclear powers (excluding India) into rough congruence and create opportunities for discussions among them. An endorsement of no-first-use by all nuclear powers clearly affords the best prospect of engaging China in multilateral discussion of nuclear issues. No-first-use is a more fruitful basis for negotiation and agreement at this stage than the freezing or reduction of nuclear weapons by all nuclear powers, since the other three nuclear powers are unlikely to agree to actual reductions until the U.S. and U.S.S.R. have made substantial cuts in their programs and inventories.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The analysis and prescriptions in this article are not an attempt to discover a panacea, a simple solution to the enormously complex problems of nuclear weapons and the U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Rather the intent of this presentation is to set forth a broad framework for U.S. nuclear weapons policy. The several steps proposed here would conform to U.S. interests and values, would acknowledge the special concerns of our NATO allies, would confront the Soviets with a more specific, credible and less-threatening deterrent, and would present to the world a more responsible image of the U.S. By reducing tensions on both sides, the

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21. *Newsweek*, 5 December 1983, p. 56.

several unilateral and joint statements proposed above place the U.S. and Soviet negotiators in a better position to reach agreement on reductions in strategic weapons and on other arms control measures without incurring an increased threat to national security. This in turn can greatly facilitate multilateral efforts to curtail nuclear proliferation and increase controls over nuclear materials and technology. The key is for the U.S. to set its own house in order by developing a public consensus for its policies and priorities, to confer with its NATO allies on a common strategy, and then to explore prospects, first with the U.S.S.R. and then in a broader context, for bilateral and multilateral agreements that will reduce tensions and the prospects of a nuclear war.