

Acceptance of a Stable Balance: An Interview with Paul Warnke

Forum: President Reagan has argued that the United States and NATO must build up their nuclear forces before negotiating with the Soviet Union, yet he has agreed to conduct negotiations before the buildup has really taken place. What factors could explain this apparent inconsistency?

Warnke: I would say that the factor which explains it is that essentially the President is wrong in saying that a buildup has to precede negotiations. The Administration's position proceeds on the fallacy — expressed in the spring of 1982 — that the Soviets have a definite margin of superiority. If you look at the strategic balance, it is obvious that the Joint Chiefs of Staff are right when they say that the United States and the Soviet Union are roughly equal in strategic power. Now the problem is, of course, that if you start off with the thesis that we are behind, then you cannot afford arms control. The only kind of arms control that you then could afford would be one in which the Soviets held still while you built up, or in which the Soviets made disproportionately large reductions. Now they are not going to do either one because they know that they are not ahead. The Soviets know that, in the most significant characteristics, to the extent that either side has an advantage it is the United States.

Forum: What effect, if any, did the anti-nuclear weapons movements in the United States and in Europe have on Mr. Reagan's decision to negotiate?

Warnke: I think that, to a very large extent, the reason for starting the INF talks back in November of 1981 was to defuse the anti-nuclear weapons movement in Europe. I think that the President would have preferred not to get into those negotiations; I think he felt that it was a political necessity because support for the American position was rapidly eroding. And, if you look at the timing, it was only some seven months later that the strategic arms negotiations were resumed. That, I think, was in direct response to the freeze movement in the United States. So although they may become serious negotiations, they were basically conceived in sin.

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Forum: What factors have contributed to the recent increase in opposition to INF deployment in Europe?

Warnke: I think the anti-American missiles movement has built up in Europe for two reasons: one, the early, ill-advised statements by some Reagan Administration officials, including the President and Vice President, about the possibility of a limited nuclear war. When you talk to a European about limited nuclear war, he knows who it's limiting; therefore it just brings the concern to the fore in Europe that the two nuclear superpowers may act out their aggressions over the dead body of Europe.

The second thing that gave rise to concern was the absence of any movement toward arms control. The fact that here it was, late in 1981, and there weren't even any talks going on. Now the double-track decision of December 1979 was to pursue an arms control solution. That pursuit was not taking place and that worried the Europeans. I think they were temporarily mollified by the initiation of the talks and by the fact that the President was willing to propose no new American missiles. They did not, however, anticipate that some fifteen months later we'd still be saying "zero option," and I think that is why the concern is building up again.

Forum: Could you comment on the debate over theater nuclear forces and on the current theater balance in Europe?

Warnke: When you are talking about theater nuclear weapons, of course, they should be divided into two categories: one is the so-called intermediate-range nuclear missiles and the theater aircraft that are capable of striking Soviet territory and the territory of Western Europe; the other is the tactical battlefield nuclear weapons. Now as far as the intermediate-range nuclear forces are concerned, they are not a separate part of the strategic balance. The idea that there is a separate Eurostrategic balance is a fallacy and I think a disruptive fallacy at that. What counts is the overall strategic picture, and the intermediate-range nuclear forces are only a part of that. As a result, you have an artificial distinction and a set of negotiations that can never really succeed when you are dealing just with INF and not putting them in the category of ICBMs, SLBMs and strategic bombers.

Forum: So you do not favor the separation of negotiations in the Geneva talks?

Warnke: No. It was never contemplated until the Reagan Administration took office and then, as I say, largely as a response first to the European concern about nuclear weapons.

Forum: How do you explain the fact that a lot of people in the present administration think that they have to negotiate theater nuclear weapons before they can negotiate strategic weapons?

Warnke: They think that because they do not understand the fact that the intermediate-range nuclear forces are only a part of the overall strategic balance. Look back at history; at one point we did have nuclear missiles stationed in Europe, the so-called Jupiter and Thor missiles. At about that point we invented the ballistic missile submarine, and it became apparent that you could have a much more stable response to the Soviet missiles that were aimed at Western Europe by assigning a certain number of Polaris submarines and missiles to NATO. As a consequence, we took the Jupiters and Thors out. The fallacy of the idea of a theater nuclear balance is that there is nothing that these 572 proposed new American missiles can do that cannot already be done by ten thousand strategic warheads plus the forces that we already have in the European theater.

Forum: In that context, what military requirement is there for the new theater missiles?

Warnke: There is none. They are strictly political. They are a political response to a political discomfort on the part of the Western Europeans. The Western Europeans became concerned about the fact that, in the SALT talks, we were not dealing with things like the SS-20. What Chancellor Schmidt was concerned about was not getting new American weapons in Europe; he was concerned about the fact that he could see that if the SALT process continued — and very substantially reduced Soviet ICBMs and Soviet SLBMs but did not affect the SS-20s — there would be a decoupling phenomenon, because Western Europe would remain hostage to an increased Soviet threat and the United States would be relatively relieved of the threat. So he wanted to get the SS-20s involved in the SALT talks. I talked with him back in 1977 and that was his major concern.

Forum: What effect would the failure to respond militarily to the SS-20s have on what some Europeans have called “the continuum of deterrence” — in other words, NATO’s ability to meet the Soviet threat at every level?

Warnke: Those who fear the effects of a failure to respond to the SS-20s are dealing with theology rather than with logic. There is nothing that the 572 cruise missiles and Pershing IIs will do to increase deterrence.

The reason is that, if you look at it logically, the United States is no more apt to launch a weapon that blows up the Kremlin from West Germany than from the Great Plains of the United States. It is still an American missile with an American finger on the button. Now, a lot of the confusion comes from those who say, "Yes, but NATO needs missiles. NATO needs missiles to respond to the threat to NATO." These aren't NATO missiles. They are American missiles. In fact, one of the conditions that the West Germans put on agreement to accept deployment was that they would have absolutely no control over the weapons. So the idea that the Soviets will think that we are more likely to respond to an SS-20 attack on Western Europe with a Pershing or a cruise missile from West Germany proceeds on a fallacious assumption because if we start striking Soviet territory they will start striking us. They ought to recognize that if they start striking NATO territory, whether they do it with an SS-11, an SS-18 or an SS-20, we will respond with attacks on the Soviet Union.

Forum: If the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles aren't deployed, what are the implications for conventional war threats?

Warnke: None, because they are totally unrelated. Again, you have to make a distinction between tactical battlefield nuclear weapons and the SS-20s, Pershings and the cruise missiles.

Forum: Yet the President has often argued that if we don't build a stronger nuclear deterrent, Europe will be forced to build up its conventional forces.

Warnke: That's true because he doesn't understand the difference between nuclear weapons and military weapons.

Forum: Could you explain the difference?

Warnke: If the Soviets launch a tank attack on Western Europe, we aren't going to respond by blowing up the Kremlin — not with a Minuteman, not with a submarine-launched ballistic missile, not with a Pershing II. The only nuclear response under those circumstances would be a battlefield response which has nothing to do with the Pershing IIs or cruise missiles.

Forum: The Army's doctrine right now, Air-land Battle 2000, incorporates the use of tactical nuclear weapons early on in the battle. It seems that, given the present force levels between Warsaw Pact and NATO, such use would be our only defense in terms of stopping an invasion. How might

NATO correct that situation so that it would not have to go immediately to a tactical nuclear weapon?

Warnke: In the first place, don't be misled by some of the scare talk about this massive imbalance. It doesn't exist. The Soviets have a distinct lead when it comes to armored forces, but we have a distinct lead when it comes to anti-armored vehicle weapons. I think the idea that the Soviets are ten feet tall is something that is frequently used to try to support greater defense expenditures and get our Western European allies to pull up their socks. But if you look at it from the standpoint of the existing situation and the potential situation, there is no reason why we can't have the conventional military forces to beat any Soviet offensive attack. NATO has more people, more money and better technology. If you look at the record over the past decade, NATO — including the United States — has been spending more money on defense than the Warsaw Pact — including the Soviet Union. So these reports about the massive Soviet expenditures are just because the comparison is between the United States and the Soviet Union. The fact that we have been able to share the burden with our allies is a benefit rather than a detriment. The Soviet Union doesn't dare let the Eastern Europeans — the Poles and the Hungarians — take over a greater share of the Warsaw Pact military force. In addition, these scare stories about an irresistible Soviet conventional military force assumes a couple of things. First, it doesn't count the French forces as part of NATO. And second, it assumes that the Soviets will be able to rely on the Eastern European divisions. In case of war, I'm not quite sure which direction those men would be firing. And neither are the Soviets.

Forum: The Soviets seem to wait until the very last minute to make concessions, perhaps to see if the United States will make any concessions first. Given this, what might have been the Soviet reaction to the Paul Nitze-Yuli Kvitsinsky agreement? Was Kvitsinsky operating on his own or did he have instructions from Moscow to negotiate an agreement like that?

Warnke: First let me say that the notion that the Soviets just come forward with a position and then stick with it until the eleventh hour is a myth. That is not the way it happens. If you look back at the record of SALT, the Soviets have made the major concessions ever since 1969. It has been the United States that has tended to be much more obdurate. I think it is because of the fact that the Soviets, perhaps, are more interested in nuclear arms control than we are.

Second, as far as what the Soviets might do with the kind of approach

that apparently was outlined by Mr. Kvitsinsky and Ambassador Nitze; it is, to me, highly unlikely that Mr. Kvitsinsky would have come forward with any sort of suggestion unless he had some authorization. That is just not the way it happens. Whereas we can perhaps explore on a "what if" basis, which is essentially what Paul Nitze is doing, I have never found that the Soviet negotiators were authorized to do that. The way in which you get them to change their position is to drive them back to Moscow, where they can get a position shift. So, at least at that time, which I guess was last summer, there must have been some sort of authorization allowing Mr. Kvitsinsky to explore.

Forum: Ambassador Nitze had originally proposed to limit the number of intermediate-range launchers to seventy-five, to dismantle all SS-4s, SS-5s and SS-20s southwest of Siberia, and to deploy no Pershing IIs in Europe. Given the fact that this compromise was not seriously considered but has instead been termed a mistake by some arms control opponents, is there another option that can be seriously considered?

Warnke: There are a variety of ways of dealing with the problem. The Nitze-Kvitsinsky proposal is one. Their agreement would have created a situation in which the Soviets would have against us mostly seventy-five SS-20s which could strike NATO targets with 225 warheads. We would have seventy-five launchers, each provided with four cruise missiles, for a total of approximately three hundred cruise missiles. It is a possible solution. Let me put it this way: any solution that is satisfactory to the Western Europeans ought to be satisfactory to the United States. They are the ones that are most intimately involved and I think that the Western Europeans would welcome that sort of a solution.

Now, another possibility would be to say to the Soviets, "Look, we recognize that this is an artificial separation and, therefore, what we propose is a temporary solution. What we will say is that we will not deploy any of the cruise missiles and Pershing missiles for a period of at least two years, provided that you immediately eliminate as many warheads as possible. In other words, we will refrain during 1983 and 1984 from putting in 572 new American warheads if you take out 580 of the Soviet intermediate-range nuclear warheads." In other words, the Soviets would be eliminating 280 SS-4s and SS-5s and approximately one hundred SS-20s. Now, when I talk about eliminating, I mean destroying. Just moving them east of the Urals is no solution at all.

Forum: How might you verify something like that?

Warnke: Destruction? Very simply. All with reconnaissance satellites. You just work out the rules, require that what they do is dismantle the SS-20 launchers, leave the dismantled parts available for verification by a satellite, then throw them away.

Forum: The theater negotiations have been complicated by U.S.-Soviet disagreement over the French and British forces that are not included. How can the problem of the British and French nuclear forces ever be resolved?

Warnke: First, you have got to want to find an arms control solution. I believe that, up to this point, those who have been controlling strategic arms policy in the Reagan Administration would prefer not to find an arms control solution. What they would prefer instead is that the Europeans would accept the 572 cruise missiles and Pershing IIs. So you have, first of all, to consider the fact that you can't get a solution unless you want to find one.

Forum: Does that imply that the United States should include British and French forces in the negotiations?

Warnke: You can include them in the negotiations, but at the same time you have to recognize that whatever you propose will be considered by the Soviets in the light of the fact that the British and French do have these nuclear forces that can strike Soviet targets. No matter what you say to the Soviets, they are not going to wipe that out of their mind. So you have to recognize that any solution you propose has to accept the fact that they will take the British and French forces into account.

That is what is wrong with the zero option; we don't look at it from the standpoint of whether it would conceivably be regarded as an acceptable deal by the Soviets. What we are saying to them is, "You eliminate your approximately six hundred intermediate-range ballistic missiles. We want you to do it even though this is a category of weapons that you have had now for two decades. Twenty years ago we recognized that you had seven hundred warheads on the SS-4s and SS-5s directed against Western Europe. We want you to change your mind and eliminate this category of weapons from the face of the earth." Then they say "yes, but count the French and British forces which are there and which are going to be modernized. They are going to be MIRVed and then we will have more warheads directed against us." We say "yes, but those aren't NATO weapons." And they say, as they've said in the past, "yes, but they aren't directed

against the Falkland Islands.” In addition to that, what we are saying is that we won’t deploy these 464 ground-launched cruise missiles and 108 Pershings. Well, what do we say if they say “yes, but how about sea-launched cruise missiles? Is it a conceivable deal for us to eliminate 320 or so SS-20s and 280 or so SS-4s and SS-5s when you remain free to put not 464, but four thousand cruise missiles on ships in waters where they can easily strike Soviet targets?”

Forum: What, if any, inconsistencies between ACDA policy and national policy — which historically has been a national deterrence strategy — exist?

Warnke: When you say national deterrence strategy, I think what you have to consider is that there is apparently a deep split within the Reagan Administration, and it is not just between the arms control agency and the Department of State. I think that it is obvious that there are some in the Reagan Administration who genuinely feel that you can achieve a strategic edge, and I would say it is very largely civilians in the Defense Department who feel that deterrence strategy is not enough, because it is the Defense Department that has been spawning these documents that talk about having the nuclear forces that can prevail. The Defense Guidance for 1984 to 1988 that was leaked to the press back in the spring of 1982 said just exactly that: that we could end up with nuclear forces that could prevail and force termination of a nuclear war in terms favorable to the United States. If you read the Secretary of Defense’s annual posture statement for 1983, he says the same thing — that among the things that our nuclear forces must be able to accomplish is to compel termination of a nuclear war in terms favorable to the United States. At the same time, I think that there are those in the Reagan Administration, notably in the Department of State, who recognize that this is absurd and that you cannot have forces that will enable you to fight, survive and win a nuclear war. So you get these conflicting statements.

Forum: If the United States cannot fight and win a nuclear war, what does this mean for NATO’s nuclear deterrent and, in particular, does this imply that NATO should shift to a policy of “no first use” of nuclear weapons?

Warnke: When you talk about no first use, I think you have to break it down into two different issues. There is, in my opinion, a no first strike policy that has existed tacitly for some time. In other words, I don’t think

that, in response to any Soviet conventional military attack, the United States would begin hitting targets in the Soviet Union. The response would be disproportionate to the event. That does not mean you wouldn't use tactical battlefield nuclear weapons — such use is not a first strike, but it is a first use. NATO doctrine has for some time been that in the event of a massive Soviet military attack we would begin to use tactical battlefield nuclear weapons to avoid being overrun. That too is a grave decision with immense potential for escalation, but it is different. Nothing irrevocable would have happened to the Soviet Union — it would remain intact — and the Soviets have the perfect response to the American use of tactical battlefield nuclear weapons; they can stop invading and go back home. So when you are talking about no first use, you have to specify what weapons you are talking about.

Forum: How does U.S. arms control policy conflict with that type of strategy? How does it fit in?

Warnke: I don't think that it does conflict because if you feel, as I do, that the United States has a policy under which it would not be the first to start striking targets in the homeland of the other, then what you want to do is to reduce the strategic nuclear weapons to the lowest level possible. And you can then preserve deterrence at the lowest level of risk, with less chance of miscalculation, with less chance of a war starting from fear.

Forum: What strategic weapons systems pose the greatest problem, in terms of technology, for arms control in the next five to ten years?

Warnke: The two systems that are of the greatest concern from the standpoint of preserving a strategic balance, having a clear idea of the threat which is arrayed against you and having some possibility of effective arms control, are the new ICBMs and the cruise missiles. The problem with the new ICBMs is, as I have mentioned, that they will have greater accuracy than they have had in the past. The MX will be very accurate. The Soviets are testing new ICBMs; they will be solid-fueled, will probably have the SALT II-committed total of ten warheads each, and they will be very accurate. So both sides ought to agree that there will be no new ICBMs. The other great risk is the cruise missile because of the fact that, except for the air-launched cruise missile, they are extraordinarily difficult to measure and control. They are relatively small and, if you have ground-launched cruise missiles, you are never going to know how many launchers there are. If you have sea-launched cruise missiles, it's going to be even

tougher. And if we deploy them, the Soviets will too, and ten years from now — just like MIRVs today — we are going to say, “why did we do it?”

Forum: The United States is planning to deploy some four thousand sea-launched cruise missiles. How does this affect conditions for verification of arms control?

Warnke: It would be very difficult. Look at it from the standpoint of our knowing what the Soviets have. With air-launched cruise missiles, you have an identifiable vehicle — the provisions in SALT II being that if they ever equip any one of any type of airplane with a cruise missile, then all airplanes of that type are counted against the SALT totals. This means that if the Soviets put cruise missiles on a passenger liner, then the entire Soviet passenger liner fleet would be subject to SALT control. If they ever put them on a Backfire, every Backfire then counts against the Soviet totals. But when it comes to sea-launched cruise missiles, how do you identify what is a cruise missile carrier? I'll just take one example: any time you saw a Soviet fishing trawler off of Cape Cod, you would have to ask yourself whether it was carrying cod fish or cruise missiles; you would have to ask yourself whether it was a strategic nuclear delivery vehicle. So deployment of sea-launched cruise missiles makes detection and measurement extraordinarily difficult if not impossible.

Forum: What types of verification technology may be developed which can keep pace with this weapons technology?

Warnke: There are none except an absolute ban. I think you can verify zero, I don't think you can verify anything above that.

Forum: President Carter was willing to go down to quite low levels before his departure from office, yet that was not acceptable to Congress. If we are not able to go down to those levels, what would be an appropriate solution in terms of negotiations?

Warnke: I think that there has been too much emphasis on numbers. Reductions are fine, but what is really important is a stable strategic balance. Now the fallacy in the President's START proposal is that it doesn't provide for a stable strategic balance; it focuses just on numbers. What he has proposed is that both sides have no more than 850 ballistic missiles — that is both SLBMs and ICBMs. Out of that total, there would

be a ceiling of five thousand warheads of which no more than 2,500 could be on ICBMs.

Now that might be a worse situation than we have today — if what remains on both sides are 2,500 very accurate ICBM warheads — because you would then have cut back on the number of targets but you would not have effectively controlled the number of warheads that could be launched against those targets. Today we have a situation in which we have 1,051 ICBMs. The Soviets have about 1,400. In order to get the number of warheads down to 2,500, each side would have to reduce to something between three hundred and four hundred ICBM launchers. We would have less than that because we would want to maintain the bulk of our five thousand warheads on the ballistic missile submarines. But, if we have something like 250 ICBM launchers instead of 1,051 and if the Soviets are free to maintain very accurate ICBMs, then the risk of a preemptive strike is for the first time a real risk. Instead of a theoretical window of vulnerability, you've got a real one.

Now on the other hand, if we say to the Soviets, "You cut back to no more than 2,500 ICBM launchers" — assuming an average of six warheads per ICBM — then that is something like four hundred launchers. Since what they would probably do is keep a lot of the SS-18s, the average number of warheads per ICBM would probably be closer to eight, so they would have left only three hundred to four hundred ICBM launchers. If we go ahead with the MX, then out of our 2,500 ICBM warheads, we would have one thousand super-accurate MX warheads which could be directed against no more than three hundred to four hundred Soviet launchers.

