

## The Dual Problems of Peace and National Security

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The strategic consensus that has characterized American official and popular thinking about nuclear weapons since World War II has greatly eroded in recent years. That consensus consisted not only of an American determination to use nuclear weapons to deter a direct Soviet attack on the United States but also of a commitment to extend the American deterrent to cover a Soviet nuclear or large scale conventional attack on America's principal allies. In the face of the recent massive and continuing growth of Soviet nuclear and conventional capabilities this consensus has come under growing challenge.

This challenge to the consensus on the policy of nuclear deterrence has come from both ends of the political spectrum. On the political "right," the Reagan administration has argued that deterrence alone is too weak a reed to forestall a Soviet attack on the United States or one of its allies; the prevention of a Soviet attack requires the development of a nuclear war-fighting strategy similar to that which the Soviets themselves are presumed to possess. On the political "left," a large and highly vocal antinuclear movement largely under the banner of the "freeze," challenges one aspect or another of the deterrence strategy and demands a deemphasis on, if not the complete elimination of, nuclear weapons. Both of these positions, I believe, are flawed and fail to provide a satisfactory solution to the difficult situation in which the United States finds itself in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

Both the Reagan administration and the anti-nuclear movement have tended to neglect the fact that the American people face two fundamental problems in the realm of foreign affairs and not just one. The first problem

is the control of nuclear weapons and the prevention of a devastating nuclear war; the second is protection against Soviet and other threats to American society and its way of life. National policy must address both of these important issues.

Whereas the Reagan administration has been overly insensitive and indifferent to the dynamics of the arms race and the dangers of nuclear war, the anti-nuclear movement has behaved as if the control of nuclear weaponry were the only problem that we face as a nation, or at least the most important one. If the latter were the case, we could solve the nuclear problem very easily. We could simply throw away our nuclear and other weapons and place ourselves at the mercy of the Soviets, the Quaddafis of this world, or whoever else may have designs against the United States. Few countries in history have willingly put their fate in the hands of others, and I do not believe that the United States should be the first to do so in the nuclear age. Therefore, the United States, in my judgement, must fashion a response to the nuclear threat that simultaneously ensures the security of America's most precious values and national interests.

Recognizing the equal importance of these two fundamental problems, I propose to analyze and evaluate the three essential positions that one can hold with respect to nuclear weapons: (1) the *nuclear war-fighting* strategy, (2) *complete nuclear disarmament* and (3) the strategy of *nuclear deterrence*. I shall discuss each of these positions and shall present an argument for nuclear deterrence as the appropriate policy for the United States. Unfortunately, the anti-nuclear movement, for all its good intentions, has tended to obfuscate the crucial differences between the second and third positions and has thus lessened the possibility that the United States may develop a new consensus on nuclear arms. In contrast to the policies of the Reagan administration, the United States requires policies that control nuclear weapons and at the same time secure the nation's fundamental values and interests. What, then, are the alternatives?

The first position, the nuclear war-fighting strategy, is the stated position of the Reagan administration. The proponents of this strategy hold that there is no fundamental difference between nuclear and conventional weapons.

They assume that it is possible to fight, limit, and win a nuclear war. A nuclear war, according to this position, need not be catastrophic.

This belief in the "controllability" and "winability" of a nuclear war between the superpowers is highly questionable and, in fact, is very dangerous because any nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union could rapidly escalate into a major conflict and be an unmitigated disaster for the world.

The second position, *complete nuclear disarmament*, argues that precisely because a nuclear war would be a universal disaster, the common interest of nations lies in the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. These weapons, it is contended, have no military utility, not even that of nuclear deterrence. For the proponents of this position, the imperative of complete nuclear disarmament is so compelling and self evident that they believe the world can and will be converted to this goal. They consequently will accept nothing less than the pursuit of the goal of complete nuclear disarmament.

As a long-term objective, complete nuclear disarmament is no doubt desirable, but its achievement presents some very serious problems. First, can you really put the genie back in the bottle? The knowledge of making nuclear weapons will be with us forever. Even if today everyone decided to disarm, what would stop someone in the future—a Hitler or a terrorist group—from using this knowledge to make new weapons?

Second, disarmament, or at least complete disarmament, poses very difficult, if not impossible, problems of verification. Although it is generally assumed to be possible to verify the development of new weapons through spy satellites and other technical means, the verification of a complete disarmament agreement would require extensive on-site inspection of all nuclear countries and potential nuclear powers; verification of this nature would undoubtedly necessitate a completely open world. For example, one can carry around a modern cruise missile, a weapon possessed by both the United States and the Soviet Union, in the back of a station wagon. Even if one assumes a willingness on all sides to achieve nuclear disarmament, past Soviet resistance to on-site inspection indicates that extended negotiations would be required for the establishment of such a system of foolproof verification; this is likely to require

more time than may be available to us if we are to arrest the nuclear arms race and increase international stability. The problem of the nuclear arms race is immediate and cannot await the working out of the necessarily complex problems associated with complete nuclear disarmament.

The most important weakness of the disarmament position, however, is that its advocates misunderstand the nature of the nuclear problem. Nations acquire nuclear weapons, and other weapons for that matter, because they have political conflicts with other nations and because nations distrust one another. Nuclear weapons are a symptom of underlying political conflicts and not the cause of these conflicts. Thus, we and the Soviets arm against one another because we have serious conflicts in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Conversely, we do not arm against the Canadians, nor they against us, despite the fact we share a 3,000-mile border, because we and the Canadians have no major political conflicts with one another.

Where you find nuclear weapons or the effort to acquire them, you also find the basic political conflicts that have given nations cause to develop these weapons: the Soviet Union and the United States because of one another; China because of the two superpowers; India because of China; Pakistan because of India; Israel because of the Arabs; Iraq because of Iran and Israel; South Africa because it feels isolated and threatened; and Argentina because it seeks revenge against Great Britain. Until these underlying political conflicts that give nations a powerful incentive to acquire nuclear weapons are eliminated, it will not be possible to eliminate nuclear weapons completely. For this reason complete disarmament is at best a very long-range solution to the problem of nuclear weapons.

The third position is the *strategy of nuclear deterrence*. The advocates of this position seek a solution to the nuclear problem that lies between the two extremes, that is, between the dangers of nuclear war-fighting and the utopia of complete disarmament. According to the deterrence position, the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter or prevent the use of nuclear weapons by a hostile power.

This strategy has two basic requirements. The first is a declaration by the United States that it will not use nuclear weapons except in retaliation

for a nuclear attack on the United States or on one of its principal allies. The second is that the United States must have a nuclear capability to retaliate in the event of a nuclear attack. It must have nuclear weapons that could survive a surprise attack so as to be able to strike back. That is, it must have what is known as an invulnerable second-strike nuclear force. It should be noted that this position has never been the declared policy of the United States. Policy under successive American presidents has been that, if war should break out between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States *could* be the first to use nuclear weapons.

Deterrence differs from disarmament in several key respects. In contrast to the disarmament position, the deterrence position assumes that the fundamental problem causing the nuclear arms race and the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons is the existence of underlying and intense political conflicts. This position maintains that the United States, in this world of intense hostilities and political differences requires nuclear weapons to deter a nuclear attack on itself or its allies. It also requires conventional weapons for its defense in case some power seeks to settle its political differences with us by force of conventional arms.

Secondly, the deterrence position recognizes that nuclear weapons have played an important role in keeping the peace. The mutual fear of nuclear weapons does restrain nations. Ironically, the elimination of nuclear weapons could, by making war less destructive, in fact make war more probable. The existence of this crucial trade-off between the destructiveness of war and the probability of war is one that has long been recognized. It would be tragic indeed if nuclear disarmament made the world once again safe for conventional war between the great powers.

The purpose of nuclear strategy and arms control, according to the deterrence position, is to increase international stability by decreasing the incentive of one side or the other to start a nuclear war. This means that nations should eliminate certain types of nuclear weapons, such as those that could not survive a first-strike and, therefore, would be useful only if used first. The MX missile is, many experts believe, an example of this type of first-strike weapon. On the other hand, nations should develop new types of nuclear weapons which

are invulnerable to a first-strike and, therefore, are less threatening to others and which thus enhance strategic stability. The so-called Midgetman missile is considered by many experts to be such a weapon.

In short, different nuclear weapons are not identical to one another in their effect on international stability or instability. For this reason, the freeze proposal should be evaluated in terms of its effects on the different types of nuclear systems that it would stop. For example, whereas the vulnerable MX missile with its ten warheads would tend to be destabilizing, international stability could in fact be increased with the development of something like the Midgetman with its one warhead. The substitution of this invulnerable, second-strike missile for more vulnerable types of missile systems would actually help the cause of peace. Paradoxically, by eliminating our own capability to strike first and thereby destroy the Soviet retaliatory forces, we would be increasing our own security through reducing the threat of accidental war.

The deterrence position also recognizes that we shall need to increase our conventional forces as we move away from our present heavy reliance upon a nuclear war-fighting strategy. It is worthwhile to question, however, whether or not the American people would really be willing to pay the price of de-emphasizing nuclear weapons if there were such a shift to the deterrence strategy. The fact is that the United States decided long ago to base its security on nuclear weapons largely for economic reasons, i.e., "more bang for the buck," and, as a consequence, has become heavily dependent upon them. Nuclear weapons are relatively cheap when compared to the costs of comparable conventional forces. Thus, the return to an emphasis on a conventional defense of this country and its allies would be expensive although feasible economically.

The freeze movement has failed to address this question of how the United States is to protect itself and its interests around the globe if our present over-reliance upon nuclear weapons were eliminated. Parenthetically, as we in this country talk about nuclear disarmament, other countries (notably France and Great Britain) are actually increasing their own reliance on nuclear weapons largely for economic reasons.

In addition, the anti-nuclear movement's failure to distinguish between nuclear disarmament and nuclear deterrence has undermined the development

of a national consensus on the control of nuclear weapons. Indeed, this failure has divided those who oppose the war-fighting position of the Reagan administration. This is especially unfortunate in light of the fact that new initiatives in the field of nuclear arms control, such as the so-called "build-down" proposal, i.e., the substitution of fewer and less vulnerable missiles for existing ones, and that of "no first-use" of nuclear weapons, despite their inherent difficulties, appear to offer for the first time in years an opportunity to reduce the more vulnerable types of nuclear weapons and to stabilize the nuclear environment.

### **Questions about Deterrence**

Several questions can be raised about the position of nuclear deterrence. The first is whether or not a strict policy of nuclear deterrence would stop the arms race. The honest answer is that it probably would not. But it would slow it down and make it less dangerous. The fact is that the arms race is going to continue as long as nations are inventive and have political conflicts. Ironically, the nuclear arms race as we have known it over the past several decades may be less important in the future than other areas of technological competition such as those of biological, chemical, and electronic warfare.

A related question is whether a deterrence strategy rather than the pursuit of complete disarmament would block further efforts toward arms control. If one means by "arms control" the bilateral and multilateral negotiation of the limitation of nuclear armaments, one must realistically conclude, I fear, that the era of negotiations such as SALT and START have come to an end. Although the talk and rhetoric will no doubt continue, the achievement of negotiated settlements on nuclear matters, even assuming good will on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union, has become exceptionally difficult for three reasons. First, the negotiations have proceeded much too slowly relative to the pace of contemporary technological advance. Second, negotiations will become infinitely more complex as it becomes increasingly necessary to include those powers with rapidly expanding nuclear capabilities such as France, China, and Great Britain. Third, arms limitation agreements have become hostage to hostile powerful interests in all the nuclear powers. In recognition of these difficulties, more and more proponents of arms limitations

and measures to increase international stability are placing their hope in unilateral initiatives such as the "build-down" and "no first-use" proposals, proposals which it is hoped would also be adopted by other powers.

A further question is whether a deterrence strategy would arrest the proliferation of nuclear arsenals to more and more countries. The answer to this question is difficult because the adoption of such a strategy by the United States would undoubtedly have contradictory effects. On the one hand, because a deterrence strategy is primarily "defensive," at least certain other nations might feel less threatened and, therefore, would presumably have a reduced incentive to acquire nuclear weapons of their own. However, those nations from whom the United States would partially withdraw its nuclear umbrella would undoubtedly have an increased incentive to acquire a nuclear deterrent of their own. This second consideration applies especially to America's West European and Japanese allies. The irony of the situation is that as the United States contracted its present policy of extended deterrence, the consequence might well be an acceleration of the process of nuclear proliferation.

There is the further question of whether or not the United States, were it to adopt a deterrence strategy, would have an obligation to assist its allies to improve or even to acquire their own nuclear deterrent to replace the one that the United States would withdraw. Nonsense, one might retort. It is very difficult, however, to rebut the argument of President Charles de Gaulle of France that if a deterrence strategy is appropriate and necessary for the United States, it is equally appropriate and necessary for France; perhaps, Japanese and West Germans might one day reach similar conclusions for their own countries as well.

Yet another vexing question has been posed by American Catholic Bishops, certain Protestant churches, and others. They challenge the morality of a strategy of nuclear deterrence. Is it morally right, they ask, to threaten the death of millions of innocent civilians? Many theologians and philosophers answer that it is not. Deterrence is unjust, and that is that. I myself do not know an easy or morally satisfying answer to this complex and terribly difficult question. I note as well that the theologians themselves are deeply divided on the issue. The French and German Catholic Churches, for example, disagree



with their American co-religionists and have upheld the morality of nuclear deterrence; geography and nationality, it would appear, have some relationship to matters of morality and theology.

One must ask whether it is moral to kill even one person in war, however noble the cause. It may be that the only moral course of action is to become a conscientious objector with respect to all forms of warfare. My own personal view is that it is necessary in the contemporary state of things to threaten the lives of *tens* of millions in order to deter a war whose consequence would surely be the death of *hundreds* of millions.

A final question is whether all other peoples of the world would be willing to join the United States in the elimination of the threat posed by nuclear weapons. It is undoubtedly true that the Soviets and all other peoples do desire peace. The problem in the world today and throughout human history, for that matter, is that all peoples want peace, but peace on their own terms. As I wrote at the beginning of this article, if peace were all that one wanted, it could be easily attained. It is only necessary to disarm and place your full faith in those others who also profess a desire for peace. But this course of action also has its dangers. Hitler believed that Great Britain wanted peace at any price. He misjudged the British and thus plunged Europe into the Second World War. At the same time, therefore, that the United States must increase its efforts to arrest the nuclear arms race, it must also take steps to guard against the danger of a potential aggressor one day making the same misjudgment about the United States. The task of statesmanship today, as it has been in the past, is to develop policies that both guarantee peace and ensure the nation's security against those who would threaten it.