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STRATEGIC NUCLEAR DETERRENCE IN THE 90's AND BEYOND

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

by

Stephen V. Knowles

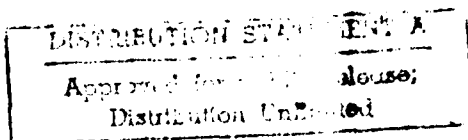
Lt Colonel, USAF

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: Stephen V. Knowles



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Abstract of
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With the end of the Cold War, the defense landscape has been substantially changed. But it has not been so dramatically altered as to eliminate the Russian need for a nuclear deterrent or to justify completely ignoring them as potential competitors on the world stage. The nuclear stalemate which characterized relations with the former Soviet Union has been replaced with an unpredictability which presents both danger and promise, prompting the question, "where do we go from here?" The "alternatives" of defense dominance, U.S. nuclear superiority, or nuclear disarmament/near-disarmament have all been suggested as possible replacements to the strategy of deterrence through assured destruction. A closer examination of these proposed strategies finds that all have the potential to leave us less secure than we might have otherwise believed. Before we try to escape from the "mutual balance of terror" which has dominated most of the nuclear age, we should have a firm idea of where the strategy will lead. This includes taking into consideration the legitimate security concerns of Russia and the other commonwealth states. A successful new strategy for nuclear deterrence will provide incentives for cooperation rather than confrontation. As a result, it might not look much different than today.

PREFACE

This paper attempts to outline the major concerns which should help define strategic nuclear deterrence in the 1990's and beyond. It is not meant to be an all-inclusive examination of the many factors which might affect what is an extremely complicated subject. The paper does not address the specifics of nuclear targeting (countervalue vs. counterforce), targeting classes (nuclear forces, leadership, other military, war-supporting industry), what a potential START II treaty should encompass, or the continuing problem of nuclear proliferation. All are worthy of separate efforts. Instead, it is a serious examination of the overarching concerns which will determine the path our strategy should take.

The "alternatives" of defense dominance, U.S. nuclear superiority, and nuclear disarmament/near-nuclear disarmament are examined in detail. These areas were chosen because, in the opinion of the author, they represent the most often discussed "replacements" for our current strategy of assuring destruction through a series of flexibly responsive options. This is not an attempt to exclude other factors which may impact strategic nuclear deterrence.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Introduction	1
Thesis	2
Evolution of Deterrent Strategy: How We Got To Here	4
Nuclear Deterrence Today	9
Do We Still Need A Nuclear Deterrent?	10
Alternatives To Mutual Vulnerability: Are They Desirable?	13
Defense Dominance: The Case Against SDI?	15
U.S. Superiority: Does It Increase Our Security?	19
Nuclear Disarmament/Near Disarmament	21
Conclusion	24
Notes	26
Bibliography	28

INTRODUCTION

Throughout most of our history, the United States has been blessed with relatively weak or friendly neighbors and protected by two oceans which provided a natural barrier against invasion of the North American continent. As a result of these geographical and political facts, the American perception of a military threat has always been somewhat different from that of Europe and other parts of the world where war has all too often meant physical destruction of the homeland and rebuilding of the societal infrastructure. However, our perception of the effects of war underwent a radical change when the Soviet Union developed and tested its first atomic weapons and then subsequently secured the intercontinental means of delivering them directly against targets on U.S. soil. The realization that "fortress America" was vulnerable to direct attack by weapons which threatened the very existence of our society compelled every American to contemplate our new political and military role in a world dramatically changed by technology and competing ideologies. It is from within this framework that deterrence and its implications for nuclear war, became a household word and one of the most discussed and debated concepts in history. With the rapid demise of the Soviet Union as a monolithic threat, the focus of the debate has changed today, but the dialogue is just as intense. We have been left asking, "where do we go from here?" The responses to the question have been many and varied, but any

serious answer must address the means of increasing stability in what has become a very unstable world, and providing incentives for continued cooperation rather than confrontation. These were our goals in the midst of the Cold War, they must remain our goals as we transition to the future.

THESIS

To say that the world stage has undergone dramatic changes in the last several years would be a gross understatement. The Cold War is finally over, and we won! For over 40 years our foreign policy was built upon opposing the expansionist ambitions of the Soviet Union and its client states. We carried out this policy with "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies", as outlined by George Kennan in his famous 1947 Foreign Affairs article.¹ With the introduction of nuclear weapons into the equation, the concept of deterrence was added to the vocabulary of international relations. After years of confrontation, we and the Soviets achieved a mutual understanding of the destructive power of our nuclear arsenals and a stalemate based upon parity was achieved. This rough equivalence in capability and the strategies to support it developed because both sides had the capacity to destroy the other. With destruction assured if the nuclear threshold was breached, a degree of predictability was introduced into our dealings. Ideological posturing and confrontation through

surrogates, through doctrine, and through declaratory policies was allowed, but we were deterred from direct military confrontation by the reality of nuclear armageddon.

In contrast, the situation today is highly fluid. Many planners have suggested that this new and unpredictable environment is cause to revamp our nuclear deterrent strategy to fit a vastly altered landscape. Others have suggested that nuclear deterrence itself is an unneeded relic of the Cold War, that it is unduly provocative and an impediment to peace in this new era. The most notable "alternatives" to the uneasy (but comfortable) stalemate of assured destruction include transition to a defense dominated posture, perceived opportunity to now achieve nuclear superiority, and at the other end of the spectrum, proposals calling for almost complete nuclear disarmament.

Obviously, all agree that a reevaluation of the concept of nuclear deterrence, and the strategy which supports it, is clearly warranted. What is less clear, is the form deterrence should now take. Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) still retain a very formidable nuclear arsenal. Despite the best of intentions today, the will of governments can change almost overnight in response to a variety of unexpected events. Before we substantially change a strategy that has worked for more than four decades, it is prudent to understand just where it will lead us and whether or not it serves our

long-term security interests. When examined from this perspective, each of the "alternatives" mentioned above has the potential to leave us less secure than perhaps we might have otherwise believed. If the past is truly prologue to the future, it is especially important to understand the evolution of deterrence, just where we are today, and what effect it might have on tomorrow.

EVOLUTION OF DETERRENT STRATEGY: HOW WE GOT TO HERE

Obviously, the concept of deploying military forces to prevent war has been around for ages, but its only since the advent of nuclear weapons that it has taken on such overriding importance. Before the atomic age, nations generally built their militaries for their own, very specific offensive and defensive purposes. Deterrence was hardly a conscious consideration in strategy. Little thought was given to how military capability might be perceived by potential enemies and what effect it might have on his actions.² For the past 40 years, however, the cornerstone of U.S. strategy has been to maintain sufficient power, particularly in nuclear forces, to deny potential adversaries any perception that aggression might lead to victory. Prior to World War II, and through most of our history, our failure to sufficiently recognize threats to our interests and our unwillingness to prepare for them even when they were recognized, contributed greatly to the price we paid for their protection.

The terrible cost of war in the modern age has led us to consider different ways of avoiding it. In the nuclear age we have essentially defined our primary threat as war itself and justified building a vast arsenal to try and keep from fighting it.

But this was not always the case. The concept of deterrence and the strategies to support it have undergone several evolutionary changes since the end of the Second World War. When WWII ended, the U.S. found it prudent to build a stockpile of atomic weapons. The stockpile grew, even though there was no clear-cut policy in the immediate post-war period for their specific use.³ There was, however, much concern in the American government about the future implications of such weaponry. This concern manifested itself in the Baruch Plan of 1946 which was supported by the Truman administration and called for the United Nations to exercise international control of all the world's nuclear activities.⁴ In the environment of mistrust after the war, the plan never had a chance of being accepted. The Soviets saw it as a violation of their national sovereignty and an attempt by the West to lock them into a position of military inferiority. With its failure, the competition in nuclear arms which has characterized most of the last half of this century was underway. With it also was born the concept of strategic nuclear deterrence. Though in its infancy in the 1950's, it was soon to be the guiding principle of U.S. military strategy.

The deterrence debate was to come into much sharper focus when the Soviets successfully tested their first nuclear device in September 1949. Although this test did not make them instantly capable of effective nuclear attack on the U.S., it did concentrate the minds of planners and politicians alike on the very real prospect of a future where nuclear superiority could not be assumed.

The Eisenhower administration was the first American government to give a formal answer to what political purposes nuclear weapons would serve and how they would be deployed to serve those purposes. Secretary of State Dulles, in a speech, stated "that it was the aim of the U.S. to deter the Soviets by meeting a range of communist acts of aggression with the full might of massive retaliation."⁵ The policy retained a degree of ambiguity by not specifying what acts would evoke this retaliation. It also left decision makers with an all or nothing choice which would soon become less credible as the Soviets developed a more capable nuclear force of their own.

Defense policy and nuclear deterrence played a key role in the presidential campaign of 1960. President Kennedy focused much attention on the perceived "missile gap", which echoed the general realization that the Soviets were building and the country was directly vulnerable to the effects of nuclear war.⁶ Kennedy reaffirmed the strategy of deterrence through massive

retaliation and left it to his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, to solve the problem of ensuring that deterrence remained credible. McNamara concluded that we must have a survivable retaliatory force capable of responding to even a pre-emptive attack on the U.S. In a 1962 speech, he outlined the tenets of this capability. "We can no longer hope to have a deterrent merely by maintaining a larger stockpile of nuclear weapons. Our weapons must be hardened, dispersed, and mobile, so that they can survive an enemy attack."⁷ He went on to outline that this new policy would offer the flexibility of several operational plans which would give decision makers different choices in response to crisis. This strategy was further refined to include an emphasis on targeting the enemy's military forces and not his population per se. In the process, the massive retaliation of the 1950's gave way to assured destruction and damage limitation.

In addition to creating strategic flexibility with nuclear forces, McNamara also called upon NATO to strengthen their non-nuclear forces. This strategy of strong conventional forces coupled with a wide range of credible nuclear options would form the basis of "flexible response" and put teeth into the concept of deterring across the entire spectrum of potential conflict.⁸ To keep the strategy "flexible", theater nuclear weapons were increasingly deployed to Europe. But no significant improvements were really made to conventional forces. In fact, the ability of

our nuclear weapon systems to carry out this strategy was greatly in question. A politician can announce a change to policy in an instant, it takes longer for the military to turn that new policy into operational practice.

It wasn't until the mid-1970's that the technology began to catch up with the policy. Greatly improved accuracy of weapons, less vulnerability in the form of a Triad with more synergistic qualities, rapid retargeting, and a greater range of warhead sizes all helped give rise to an almost unlimited menu of potential options short of all-out nuclear armageddon.

By the 1970's and 1980's, both the U.S. and Soviet Union had come to the realization that a nuclear war could not be fought and "won" in commonly accepted terms. Gradually, a "mutual balance of terror" was achieved. To keep the "mutual" in the equation, the Reagan administration made modernization of our strategic nuclear capability the centerpiece of its defense buildup. This confirmed the realization that relative numbers are psychologically important and that signaling our will to compete, rather than concede advantages, enhances deterrence. On the whole, deterrence, based upon the mutual capability to inflict unacceptable levels of damage, has been a pretty successful strategy. Despite tensions that might well have provoked war in

earlier times, the worlds superpowers kept an uneasy peace with each other and were deterred from becoming aggressive enough to evoke a nuclear response.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE TODAY

The unexpectedly rapid end to years of superpower competition has left us facing a vastly altered defense landscape. The bi-polar world of confrontation that existed with the Soviet Union for over 40 years has been replaced by a "new world order" with a completely different set of challenges. Astounded by the sudden realization of the dreams of decades, we are only just beginning to grasp both the possibilities and perils of the post-Cold War era.⁹ In reality, the defense debate itself has become the principal vehicle for discussing the much larger issue of the place of the U.S. in this changed world. The challenge for current strategic planners is to determine just which Cold War strategies are worth retaining and which new ones do we need to add.¹⁰ Despite the change in focus in defense planning toward regional contingencies and away from the monolithic Soviet threat, the common thread which connects both is deterrence of aggression in any form. Deterrence still underpins every aspect of the four pillars of the new national military strategy. So, before we go too far in rethinking our nuclear deterrent strategy for the rest of the decade, it would be prudent to examine the

basis for that deterrent. A closer look may reveal that it has more in common with the past than we may have initially thought in the afterglow of the Cold War.

DO WE STILL NEED A NUCLEAR DETERRENT?

Whatever happens in the former Soviet Union, someone in that vast land is going to inherit a lot of nuclear weapons, including the only mobile ICBM's in the world. So, the obvious answer to the question, is yes. But, given the altered nature of their governments, it is certainly prudent to ask whether or not the U.S. still needs a policy of nuclear deterrence against Russia in particular, and the other republics of the CIS which may retain nuclear weapons. In sharp contrast to its Cold War attitude, Russia is now interested in joining many Western institutions which can help sustain its fledgling market economy. Given this turn of events, why should the U.S. not entirely discount Russian military potential, especially its nuclear capability, just as we currently do with France and Britain? The answer is relatively straightforward, if not entirely popular to contemplate in today's world. Although the geopolitical changes of the past few years have been truly remarkable, a total transformation of U.S. policy regarding the military capability of Russia is at best premature.¹¹ To many this will, no doubt, sound like Cold War rhetoric and it is not meant to imply that "the Russians are coming." To me it is just a pragmatic assessment of the

potential implications of a greatly unsettled situation. Russia is just beginning to develop a new domestic order and formulate a new foreign policy. Who will be in power over the next decade, and more importantly, what their primary goals will be, is almost impossible to predict with confidence. After all, just as we could not predict the sudden end to the Cold War, we should not have much confidence in our ability to determine, with certainty, which direction events will now take. While cooperation with the West will most likely be the way of doing business, there are many scenarios where tension could once again develop. Martial law to quell domestic chaos, or problems with the Ukraine, unrest in the other republics, or rebellion by any of the many ethnic groups which might eventually lead to military solutions, are all conditions which come to mind as potential points of disagreement.¹² While none of these situations pose a direct threat to U.S. security, the effect they might have in damaging overall relations cannot be ignored.

It is also safe to assume that the end of the Cold War has not eliminated the Russian need for a nuclear deterrent.¹³ Despite its many problems and the growing dependence on the West for capital and technology, the issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament has not been a serious topic. Russia will almost certainly have to conclude, among its many security concerns, the possibility of renewed adversarial relations with the West. It is only prudent for them to do so. They will most certainly not

become a compliant puppet who will bend to Western will, just for economic assistance. They will, no doubt, try to work with the West to continue to improve relations, but will still have their own foreign policy agenda. If the U.S., Britain, and France are going to retain nuclear weapons, you can bet that Russia will also want to maintain a nuclear deterrent capability. While the size and composition of that force is debatable, it is a safe bet to assume it will be large enough to pose some threat to U.S. forces and assure destruction of the U.S. as a viable, functioning society. Highly survivable because of its mobility, it would perhaps be aimed at Western cities. This dictates we seriously contend with the capability it represents.

As much as we would like to believe otherwise, the nuclear genie can never be returned to its bottle; therefore, we are still going to have to contend with the existence of nuclear weapons and the ways of preventing their use. Direct deterrence of strategic nuclear war, or preventing the escalation of conventional war to the nuclear threshold, remains the overriding goal of the U.S. military. This fact is not likely to change in the foreseeable future, even as the total numbers of nuclear weapons decrease and the threat of full scale nuclear war has been greatly reduced. But just what form should that deterrence take? The answers are not simple or always readily apparent and there are many factors we will need to consider if we are going to effectively manage what promises to be a very confusing era.

ALTERNATIVES TO MUTUAL VULNERABILITY: ARE THEY DESIRABLE?

Our goal, throughout the nuclear age, has always been to reduce the vulnerability of American society to destruction by the nuclear forces of the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War is making escape from this vulnerability appear more feasible every day. But is it really desirable? Certainly it's a strange question, but one that needs to be examined carefully in light of the ultimate goal of actually increasing U.S. security in a rapidly changing nuclear world.

I see three alternatives currently "on the market" which have been proposed by various planners as replacements to our current strategy of deterrence through assured destruction. They are: defense dominance - the U.S. is protected from attack by highly effective strategic defenses (although not necessarily leakproof) along the lines of what we envision from the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), U.S. superiority - a situation somewhat analogous to the early-1950's where the U.S. had a clear superiority in the quantity and quality of weapons, more advanced technology, and an extensive research and development base, or finally, what amounts to nuclear disarmament or near-nuclear disarmament - agreements which require total/near-total elimination of strategic nuclear forces.¹⁴

The end of the Cold War is likely to make any of these alternatives appear more feasible and therefore more desirable as a strategy for nuclear deterrence. If Russian policies continue to progress to the point where they completely alleviate Western concerns about a return to the competitiveness of the past, there will be growing interest in negotiating what amounts to near-nuclear disarmament with a corresponding reliance on the deployment of defenses to protect the homeland. However, if strained relations result from some foreign or domestic policy which threatens relations with the West, it could fuel interest in gaining clear superiority over a Russia which might appear incapable of engaging in an arms race.¹⁵

On the surface, it appears that with each of these alternatives the U.S. would be more secure and that any one of them would be preferable to a strategy of assured destruction. Each of these alternatives would certainly have the effect of reducing damage to the U.S. should a nuclear war actually occur. But the true test of their effectiveness as a strategy is whether or not they would actually contribute to the prevention of such a war. It is this measure which has guided our nuclear policy for almost 50 years. Before we put assured destruction (achieved through a series of flexibly responsive options) on the shelf of history, we ought to fully understand how changing to something else will strengthen our goal of avoiding conflict.

DEFENSE DOMINANCE: THE CASE AGAINST SDI?

Advocates of SDI argue that there are enormous benefits to the ambitious goal of protecting U.S. society from a large-scale ballistic missile attack. Obviously, such a system would help free us from a threat which has haunted us from the very beginnings of the nuclear age. The prospect is so appealing that we have spent billions of dollars searching for a commonsense solution to this threat. Even many who believe that either perfect or near-perfect defenses are neither possible nor affordable, believe that the potential benefits are such that it justifies extensive research and development.

The emotional appeal of this defense dominated world is so strong, that we have had a difficult time in understanding any objections to it. But the Soviets and now the Russians, have steadfastly indicated an unwillingness to alter the terms of the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty which stands in the way of this goal. In a 31 January, 1992 press conference, Russian President Boris Yeltsin again reiterated his country's long-standing position, calling the ABM Treaty, "an important factor in maintaining strategic stability in the world."¹⁶ Russian desires to keep the treaty intact go to the very heart of deterrence by assured destruction. Even a limited capability by the U.S. to defend against ballistic missiles beyond treaty limits, has the potential (even if only perceived) to reduce the

certainty of their retaliatory capability. They knew in the midst of the Cold War they could not match our technology to produce and deploy an SDI-type, space-based system, at least not in the near-term. They also realize today that they are just not economically capable of such an enormous project.

The fielding of a comprehensive strategic defensive system could have either of two important effects, neither of which are especially desirable:

(1) A defense, in and of itself, does nothing to control the escalation of building offensive nuclear arms. In fact, it may have the effect of precipitating what it seeks to avoid, the constant spiral of an arms race to overcome or reduce defensive effectiveness. Even a greatly disabled Russia, with its many other worries, could see a unilateral deployment of strategic defenses as a direct threat to its security and act accordingly. Especially, if it involved abrogation of the current ABM Treaty. If the atmosphere is sufficiently tense, an arms race could easily occur even from within the recently negotiated limits of the START Treaty. The Russians unilaterally cut their arsenal of strategic nuclear warheads to 5000 (1000 below the treaty imposed ceiling of 6000), it would require relatively little effort to stop this dismantlement process. The Russians could release their mobile missiles from garrisoned locations and return SLEM carrying submarines to our coasts. Our nuclear bombers could

return to alert status and the accelerated dismantlement of the Minuteman II system could be slowed. Counting rules which favor strategic bomber, gravity delivered weapons could be actively pursued. Both sides could actively seek technological improvements in guidance, survivability, mobility, and other Cold War measures of merit. In other words, if defenses provoke the other side to build in response, they do not really serve a greater purpose.

(2) From the U.S. perspective, the most likely effect of a defense dominated strategy is to greatly raduce the desire to modernize and therefore we might begin to lose confidence in our own offensive capability. Defenses might be seen as a substitute for offensive forces and the latter allowed to atrophy. The deterrent recipe is composed of equal parts of both capability to punish and the will to use that capability. Its effectiveness will be sampled abroad and must speak persuasively to the values of any potential adversary, from Boris Yeltsin to the likes of Saddam Hussein. In other words, deterrence without punishment might invite limitless efforts to find a solution to overcoming our defenses. We might constantly worry that a "window of vulnerability" to either strategic attack or technological breakthrough would raise questions about their continued effectiveness.¹⁷ These kind of worries are no different than those we experienced with offensive systems during the Cold War.

In reality, a defense dominated strategy, anchored by an SDI, reflects a Cold War desire to find technological solutions to our strategic problems without really addressing the root causes of political and ideological differences. The development of MIRVed warheads and mobile missiles are other examples of technology driving our strategy instead of the other way around. Many of our differences have disappeared, even though Russia and the CIS will retain the tools of a formidable nuclear state well into the foreseeable future. An SDI will not help us foster that relationship, in fact, it will likely hinder our efforts by promoting distrust of our motives. Especially, if the Russians see it as a means of gaining advantages which call into question their ability to defend themselves. The stark contrast is between a world of mutual vulnerability and little incentive for competitiveness, and a world where both sides constantly angle for advantage, with the prospect of mistrust and miscalculation. We must remember that Russia and the CIS will eventually recover, it is just too big and it has too many natural and human resources for it not to do so. When it does, we want to ensure it does so as a friend, not as a strengthened adversary.

The case for a much less ambitious defensive system which is designed for protection against limited strikes from terrorist elements or a rogue third world state makes more sense. The current efforts toward a Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS) system proposed by the Bush administration could

actually help relations between the U.S. and Russia.¹⁸ With its many ethnic and nationalistic factions and facing the possibility of a "loose nuke", Russia may have more of a practical need for such a capability than we currently do. In combination with effective ground-based point defenses, it could help with the growing problem of nuclear proliferation by offering an effective counter to limited nuclear attack or accidental launch. But as the capability of this limited system is proven, there will be natural pressure to expand to the more ambitious objectives of SDI. The 1991 DOD Annual Report to Congress hints at this possibility.¹⁹

U.S. SUPERIORITY: DOES IT INCREASE OUR SECURITY?

Would a U.S. defense strategy which attempts to gain clear nuclear superiority over Russia be in our long-term best interest? The answer is, probably not, especially if they continue efforts to reform their government and did not pursue a confrontational foreign policy. Although there may now be the temptation to exploit Russian weakness to increase near-term U.S. security, we would do so at the risk of creating problems further down the road. In light of our recent emergence from the tensions of the Cold War, the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons appears increasingly out of character with the political and moral requirements of this new era.

But the question is not as improbable as it might initially seem. There are several situations that might occur which would increase the value of nuclear superiority. The first might involve offering ambitious security guarantees to the republics, perhaps to a Ukraine which faced Russian military interference.²⁰ Since it would be difficult to establish the credibility of these guarantees without much larger, forward deployed conventional forces, clear nuclear superiority would put teeth into the policy. Obviously, such a policy would involve considerable risk. But we extended nuclear deterrence to Europe during the Cold War despite its risks because we thought it was in our national interest. The same calculations would have to occur here. A position of superiority might also be attractive if a new Russian government again adopted hard-line policies which ran counter to Western interests.

The ability of the U.S. to pursue such a strategy is within relatively easy reach, given the near-term political and economic difficulties of Russia. Maximum utilization of the "bomber counting rule" and "discounts" for cruise missile carrying aircraft could greatly increase the numbers of nuclear weapons available while remaining within the limits of the current START treaty.²¹ But absent very definite security reasons for wanting to gain nuclear superiority, it is a condition we could never sustain. Eventually, the Russians would also build and a rough

parity would again exist. In the process, we would have lost the opportunity to promote good relations by greatly increasing Russian insecurity.

So the deterrent benefits of nuclear superiority are relatively small and probably only temporary. The real answer to our security needs is found in the meaning of deterrence itself, not in the "bean count" of weapons and delivery vehicles. As we noted earlier, the real threat in the nuclear age is war itself. We reduce the risk of war by understanding and addressing the legitimate security concerns of all. Our nuclear forces themselves should not become an unnecessary impediment to that goal.

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT/NEAR-DISARMAMENT

The issue of nuclear disarmament or near-disarmament is a completely different case. Given our fears about the nuclear age, it evokes an emotional response that is hard to deny. If it were realistically achievable, certainly no rational individual could be against it. But clearly, we can never return the nuclear genie to its bottle. Even in a world where all nuclear weapons were outlawed, we could not disinvent the knowledge required to manufacture them. Therefore, nuclear disarmament is probably not achievable in our lifetime and might only occur when something more destructive comes along to take the place of these

weapons. Near-disarmament is achievable, but only under certain conditions and with definite risks. As noted before, it comes down to a realistic understanding of the problem. In this case, the meaning of the old saying, "we do not distrust each other because we have weapons, we have weapons because we distrust each other", is certainly true. Weapons are only a symptom of our underlying distrust. We will do better to address the root causes of our differences.

Given these facts, does a situation where both the U.S. and Russia have only a token nuclear force really promote security? Only under very specific conditions and not without risks. This situation would only be feasible if our relations had improved so radically that the possibility of future conflict was all but eliminated. Even the most carefully designed arms control process (including a very intrusive verification scheme) would have to have this degree of confidence. Without this confidence, the possibility of falling behind in a rearmament race would have potentially dire consequences for U.S. security. We would be sensitive to even small changes in Russian force levels. For better or worse, and you can effectively argue either side, relatively large numbers of nuclear weapons have enhanced stability. During START negotiations, the Soviets were fond of saying that "quantity has a quality all its own", and its hard to argue with the logic. With a large cushion of weapons, we worried little about the relative differences in numbers. At

token force levels, the advantages of adding even a few more could be considered significant. Once committed to this course of near-disarmament, it would take monumental efforts to rebuild capability, redundancy, and mobility to the levels of today. Therefore, it is not a step to be taken lightly. It should be based upon a realistic assessment of our long-term security concerns, not the emotional need to escape from the reality of nuclear technology.

However, once the possibility of nuclear conflict has been dramatically reduced, near-disarmament does not really do much to increase our security. If U.S.-Russian relations have progressed to the point where we see Russian nuclear forces in the same fashion as we currently view French and British forces, then our security would not necessarily be enhanced by agreeing to token force levels. A crisis would be relatively rare and generally easy to resolve. Neither we nor the Russians would be inclined to make threats using our nuclear forces as collateral, or for that matter, we would not use conventional forces either. In other words, nuclear near-disarmament confuses the problem with its solution. The real problem is political and is best solved by political means.²²

CONCLUSION

So, where does this leave us as we try to determine where to go from here? The questions are many, accurate answers are much harder to come by. It was Winston Churchill who cautioned, "It is difficult to look further than you can see."

The real key to what will constitute our nuclear deterrent strategy in the coming decade is just how permanent the changes in the former Soviet Union turn out to be. If, over time, their governments and policies are brought more in-line with Western values, then force levels and strategies for their use probably will not matter as much as they have in the past. The threat of full-scale, strategic nuclear attack, as we came to accept it, will be largely relegated to the annals of history. But, despite our hopes and best intentions, the future of strategic nuclear weapons might not be as benign as we would hope. With the consequences of miscalculation so devastating, a degree of caution is certainly in order as we sort out a new, developing relationship with our former Cold War adversary.

Even under the best of circumstances, the change in that relationship will be evolutionary. Our strategy in the coming decade should stress a willingness to cooperate in mutual security interests. Strategies which are seen as provocative and generate mistrust of our motives should only be undertaken after

careful evaluation of our long-term interests. In trying to free ourselves from the continued threat of nuclear annihilation, it is important to recognize what actually constitutes the threat, weapons or will. If we remove concerns which generate the will to use weapons, by the means of diplomacy, aid, and assistance, we will have gone a long way in determining where our strategy needs to take us.

NOTES

1. John Newhouse, War and Peace in the Nuclear Age, (Alfred A Knopf, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1989) p. 81.
2. John T. Correll, "Shall We Dump Deterrence," Air Force Magazine, Jan 1992, p. 6.
3. Timothy Garden, Can Deterrence Last? Peace Through A Nuclear Strategy (Buchan and Enright Publishers, London, 1984), pp. 39-40.
4. Newhouse, p. 63-64.
5. Garden, p. 40-41.
6. Ibid., p. 42.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 44.
9. Thomas B. Grassey, "The New Deterrence Strategy," Proceedings, June 1991, p. 33.
10. Snider and Grant, "U.S. Military Strategy," The Washington Quarterly, Winter 1992, p. 218.
11. Charles L. Glaser, "Nuclear Policy Without and Adversary," International Security, Spring 1992, p. 36.
12. Ibid., p. 37.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 38.
15. Ibid., p. 39.
16. Spurgeon M. Keeny, "The State of Nuclear Cutbacks," Arms Control Today, Jan/Feb 1992, p. 2.
17. Glaser, p. 41-42.
18. U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Report to the President and Congress (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, Jan 1991), p. 59.

19. Ibid.

20. Glaser, p. 42.

21. Heavy bombers, at U.S. insistence, are the most leniently treated strategic system in START. The U.S. successfully argued that slow-flying, air-breathing systems represented less of a first strike threat than ballistic missiles. Whereas each deployed ICBM and SLBM warhead counts as one against the 6,000 weapon limit, heavy bombers (non-cruise missile carriers) equipped with gravity weapons and the Short Range Attack Missile (SRAM) are considered to carry one accountable warhead no matter how many weapons are actually on board. In addition, bombers capable of carrying cruise missiles (ALCM) were "discounted." Each ALCM designated bomber would only count as having 10 missiles, regardless of how many it carried (up to the first 150 aircraft).

22. Glaser, p. 43.

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