

*Bishops, Statesmen, and Other Strategists
on the Bombing of Innocents (1983)*

Albert Wohlstetter

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Must the West threaten to bomb innocent bystanders in order to deter nuclear war? Does the West itself need to be threatened with annihilation of its civil society in order to be deterred? President Reagan's speech of March 23, 1983, proposing a decades-long research program to protect civilians against ballistic-missile attack revived these questions. The instant hoots of ridicule and references to *Star Wars* from many Senators and Congressmen suggest that holding out the nightmare vision of last things, the apocalypse, is now part of the nature of things; that the need to threaten the end of the earth must dominate earthly policy.

In fact, the West has for years used apocalyptic threats as a substitute for improving our capacity for discriminate response and in particular for a conventional reply to conventional attack. (The media hardly noticed the more immediate technical effort urged in the President's speech—to improve conventional technology.) Reckless nuclear threats and the intimidating growth of both Soviet conventional and nuclear strength have had much to do with the rise of the anti-nuclear movement here and in Protestant Northern Europe. By revising many times in public their pastoral letter on war and peace, American Catholic bishops have dramatized the moral issues which statesmen, using empty threats to end the world, neglect or evade. For the bishops stand in a long moral tradition which condemns the threat to destroy innocents as well as their actual destruction. They try but do not escape reliance on threatening bystanders. Ironically, the view dominating all their revisions reflects an evasive secular extreme which, instead of speeding improvements in the ability to avoid bystanders, has tried to halt or curb them. But because the bishops must take threats seriously, they make more visible the essential evasions of Western statesmen. That, however, is a kind of virtue. The letter offers a unique opportunity to examine the moral, political, and military issues together, and to show that, as the President suggests, threatening to bomb innocents is not part of

the nature of things. Nor has it been, as is now widely claimed, an essential of deterrence from the beginning. Nor is it the inevitable result of "modern technology." It may be that our Senators and even some of our younger Congressmen haven't watched *Star Wars* closely enough.

The bishops have been sending a message to strategists in Western foreign-policy establishments—and to strategists in the Western anti-nuclear counter-establishments. It seems unequivocal: "Under no circumstances may nuclear weapons or other instruments of mass slaughter be used for the purpose of destroying population centers or other predominantly civilian targets." Though that only restates an exemplary part of Vatican II two decades earlier, it is far from commonplace. Nonetheless it should be obvious to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Informed realists in foreign-policy establishments as well as pacifists should oppose aiming to kill bystanders with nuclear or conventional weapons: indiscriminate Western threats paralyze the West, not the East. We have urgent political and military as well as moral grounds for improving our ability to answer an attack on Western military forces with less unintended killing, not to mention deliberate mass slaughter.

The bishops *seem* to be countering the perverse dogma which, after the Cuban missile crisis, came to be used by Western statesmen eager to spend less on defense: that the West should rely for deterring the Soviets on the ability to answer a nuclear military attack by assuring the deliberate destruction of tens or even hundreds of millions of Soviet civilians; and that the United States should also, for the supposed sake of "stability," give up any defense of its own civilians and any attack on military targets in order to assure the Soviets that they could, in response, destroy a comparable number of American civilians. The long humanist as well as the religious tradition on "just war" stresses especially the need to avoid attacks on "open," that is undefended, cities. The new doctrine exactly reversed this; it called both for leaving cities undefended and threatening to annihilate them. John Newhouse succinctly states this dogma, to which he was sympathetic, in the "frosty apothegm": "Offense is defense, defense is offense. Killing people is good, killing weapons is bad." The late Donald Brennan, a long-term advocate of arms control to defend people and restrain offense from killing innocents, was not sympathetic. He noted that the acronym for Mutual Assured Destruction—MAD—described that Orwellian dogma.

Having observed long ago that not even Genghis Khan avoided combatants in order to focus solely on destroying noncombatants, I was grateful, on a first look at this issue in the evolving pastoral letter, to find the bishops on the side of the angels. Unfortunately, a closer reading suggested that they were also on the other side. For, while they sometimes say that we should not threaten to destroy civilians, they say too that we may continue to maintain nuclear weapons—and so implicitly threaten their use as a deterrent—while moving toward permanent verifiable nuclear and general disarmament; *yet we may not meanwhile plan to be able to fight a nuclear war even in response to a nuclear attack.*

Before that distant millennial day when all the world disarms totally, verifiably, and irrevocably—at least in nuclear weapons—if we should not intend to attack noncombatants, as the letter says, what alternative is there to deter nuclear attack or coercion? Plainly only to be able to aim at the combatants attacking us, or at their equipment, facilities, or direct sources of combat supply. That, however, is what is meant by planning to be able to fight a nuclear war—which the letter rejects.

Perhaps the bishops can work this out in later statements. But a close reading of their changing text, their congressional testimony, and the writings of their associates suggests that this is unlikely. For their struggle with conscience has led them to make only more explicit the widespread confusions and evasions of many secular strategists—including many statesmen, scientists, Senators, editors, and business leaders. Take John Cardinal Krol and Father Brian Hehir, who was staff adviser to the ad hoc committee drafting the pastoral letter. Cardinal Krol repeated in a sermon at the White House in 1979 what he and his associates had been saying in recent years: in brief, “possession, yes, for deterrence . . . but use, never.” It is all right for the United States implicitly to threaten the use of nuclear weapons, but “at the point of such decisions, . . . political and military authorities are responsible to a higher set of values” and so “must reject the actual use of such weapons, whatever the consequences.” Any consequence “whatever” includes giving up military resistance. But “the history of certain countries under Communist rule today shows that not only are human means of resistance available and effective but also that human life does not lose all meaning with replacement of one political system by another.”

Father Hehir elaborates this view: (A) We should not get or keep an ability to attack combatants. (B) We may maintain

an ability to attack noncombatants while waiting for nuclear disarmament, and (C) We may use that ability implicitly (though not explicitly) to threaten retaliation against noncombatants. (D) Indeed, to deter nuclear attack, we must *convince* other nations that our “determination to use nuclear weapons is beyond question.” (E) We should never intend to use nuclear weapons. (F) Nor (to make the deception harder) *declare* an intent to use them even in reply to a nuclear attack. (G) We should never actually use them; that is to say, we shouldn’t retaliate at all.

Precisely how this volubly revealed deception is to fool allies and adversaries “beyond question” has not itself been revealed. (Future sermons at the White House might have to be classified.) If the bishops could transmit that revelation, it would fortify a good many strategists in our foreign affairs establishment who want fervently to believe that we can safely deter an adversary solely by threatening the nuclear extermination of his cities while making clear to the entire world that we would never use nuclear weapons at all; and who also want firmly to believe we needn’t spend much money on a less reckless defense. In sending that message to Western elites the letter only relays, amplifies, and broadcasts signals our elites have themselves been sending for years. The troubling obscurity of the letter reflects that establishment ambivalence and incoherence. On many matters of technical military and political fact, the bishops derive their views not from sacred authority but from a more doubtful range of secular strategists than they realize. Much of the letter, for example, stems from the strategists who hold that defense is offense and that killing people is good and killing weapons bad—the very strategists who would rely exclusively on threatening to destroy cities.

In invoking divine authority to sustain such lay strategies, the bishops’ power seems dangerous to many Catholics who disagree. But their moral prestige alone gives weight to the bishops’ strategic views with non-Catholics and Catholics. They reinforce the impassioned pacifist and neutralist movements that have been growing in Europe and in the United States, as well as the establishment strategies which helped to generate these protest movements.

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For the bishops pass lightly over or further confound many already muddled and controversial questions of fact and policy. In a world where so many intense, deep, and sometimes mutually reinforcing antagonisms divide regional as well as superpowers, are there serious early prospects for negotiating the complete, verifiable, and permanent elimination of nuclear or conventional arms? If antagonists don't agree, should we disarm unilaterally? If we keep nuclear arms, how should we use them to deter their use against us or an ally? Might an adversary in some plausible circumstance make a nuclear attack on an element (perhaps a key non-nuclear element) of our military power or that of an ally to whom we have issued a nuclear guarantee? Might such an enemy nuclear attack (for example, one generated in the course of allied conventional resistance to a conventional invasion of NATO's center or of a critical country on NATO's northern or southern flank) have decisive military effects yet restrict side effects enough to leave us, and possibly our ally, a very large stake in avoiding "mutual mass slaughter"? Could some selective but militarily useful Western response to such a restricted nuclear attack destroy substantially fewer innocent bystanders than a direct attack on population centers? Would any discriminate Western response to a restricted nuclear attack—even one in an isolated area on a flank—inevitably (or more likely than not, or just possibly, or with some intermediate probability) lead to the destruction of humanity, or "something little better"? Or at least to an unprecedented catastrophe? Would it be less or more likely than an attack on a population to lead to unrestricted attacks on populations? Can we deter a restricted nuclear attack better by threatening an "unlimited," frankly suicidal, and therefore improbable attack on the aggressor's cities, or by a limited but much more probable response suited to the circumstance?

The bishops' authorities slip by or confuse almost all these questions. The bishops sometimes seem only to be saying that the extent of direct collateral harm done by a particular restricted attack is uncertain, quite apart from the possibilities of "escalation." At other times they are certain that restricted attacks will lead to an entirely unrestricted war. And they then suggest that the chance is "so infinitesimal" that any Western nuclear response to a restricted attack would end short of ending humanity itself, that we might better threaten directly to bring on the apocalypse. The bishops

cite experts as authority for their judgment that any use whatever of nuclear weapons would with an overwhelming probability lead to unlimited destruction. And some of their experts do seem to say just that. But some they cite appear only to say that we cannot be quite sure (that is, the probability is not equal to one) that any use of nuclear weapons would stay limited. If any response other than our surrender is to be believed, it makes a difference whether we talk of a probability that is not quite zero or a probability that is not quite equal to one that any nuclear response would bring on a suicidally total disaster. Yet two successive paragraphs in the 1982 *Foreign Affairs* article by McGeorge Bundy, George F. Kennan, Robert S. McNamara, and Gerard Smith proposing “no first use” of nuclear weapons, which the bishops cite, assert each of a wide range of such differing possibilities without distinction. Most authorities relied on by the bishops are themselves not very discriminating about which point they are trying to make.

Some important components of conventional military power vulnerable to nuclear attack are close to population centers. Others, however, may be very far from them—for example, naval forces at sea; or satellites in orbit hundreds or even a hundred thousand miles above the earth, that may be expected to perform the essential tasks during a conventional war of reconnaissance, surveillance, navigation, guidance, and communications. These are more vulnerable to nuclear than conventional attack. If we have no way of discouraging a limited nuclear attack except by extracting a promise from an adversary that he will not attack, or by threatening that we will respond to such isolated attacks with a suicidal retaliation on his cities, an adversary might, in the course of a conventional war, chance a small but effective nuclear attack against such isolated military targets. Such an attack would do incomparably less damage to civilians in the West than any of the “limited” attacks discussed by the bishops’ authorities. Is it really so evident that a similarly restricted Western nuclear response to such a nuclear attack would be nearly certain to escalate to the end of humanity? Wouldn’t a restricted response doing minimal damage to civilians on either side be much less likely to escalate than an attack on cities? And wouldn’t the ability to respond in a proportionate way be a better deterrent to an adversary’s crossing the gap between nuclear and conventional weapons? The bishops’ lay experts tend to see the Soviets as mirror images of themselves, but sometimes diabolize them. They argue as if the Soviets would not continue during a war to have the strongest possible incentives

to keep escalation within bounds; and as if the Soviets would love every killing of a Western bystander exactly as much as the West values his survival; as if the Soviet interest were in annihilating rather than dominating Western society.

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In fact, calculations cited by the bishops' authorities hardly probe the issue as to whether an adversary might use nuclear weapons that would destroy key components of a military force discriminately, leaving us a very large stake in making either a discriminate response or no response at all. The calculations published in 1979 by the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), in answer to an inquiry by supporters of MAD on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, deal with hypothetical "small" and supposedly "limited" attacks. However, OTA's "limitations" were not seriously designed to test the feasibility, now or in the future, of destroying military targets and *not* population. One of their "limited" cases involves direct attacks on the populations of Detroit and Leningrad. And OTA's most "limited" Soviet attack directed 80 one-megaton¹ nuclear warheads at oil refineries, including some inside Philadelphia and Los Angeles, in order "to inflict as much economic damage as possible" and "without any effort to maximize or *minimize* human casualties" (emphasis added). No one should be surprised that such a "limited" attack might kill about 5 million bystanders; or that a similar attack on Soviet oil refineries might kill 840,000—a result which the influential English military historian, Michael Howard, describes as "little better" than "a genocidal pact" killing up to 160 million in each country and leaving the rest "to envy the dead."

The bishops rely heavily on a three-and-a-half page study embodying the views of fourteen scientists who seem mainly to be specialists in public health. The Papal Academy of Sciences convened this group from several countries, including the Soviet Union, "to examine the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons on the survival and the health of humanity." Like the Physicians for Social Responsibility in this country, the group considers (except for one paragraph) only the effects of intentionally bombing cities. It says that the consequences of such an attack on the survival and health of humanity "appear obvious." Indeed they have always been. That is the principal reason to reject MAD and avoid threatening cities.

The papal study devotes one paragraph to “a nuclear attack directed only at military facilities.” Like the pastoral letter, that paragraph assumes that any nuclear attack by an aggressor anywhere or any response by his victim would be directed at *all* the adversary’s military facilities, however minor or irrelevant to the immediate outcome of the conflict that generated the use of nuclear weapons. It also assumes there would be no attempt to explode the weapons at altitudes that avoided fallout and no attempt in any other way to confine destruction to targets critical to the conflict’s outcome.

But such analyses dodge all the serious issues as to whether an adversary might, in the course of a conventional war, use some nuclear weapons with substantial military effect and yet deliberately leave us and our allies with very strong incentives to avoid mutual mass slaughter; and as to whether we should have no response to such an attack except bringing on the mass slaughter or surrendering; and no better way of deterring it than promising one or the other or even, like the bishops’ strategists, *both* of these two incompatible bad alternatives.

Yet the problem of deterring nuclear coercion or attack on an ally will persist. Despite lip-service at Geneva and the United Nations, hardly anyone seriously expects that each and everyone of the six or seven or eight nations that have made nuclear explosives will destroy all their nuclear arms irretrievably and verifiably in a future near enough to govern our present actions. (The uncertainty as to the number of *present* nuclear powers suggests some of the difficulty we would have in getting actionable evidence that all of the existing nuclear powers had destroyed all of their weapons.) Nor are all prospective nuclear powers likely or even able to surrender the possibility of making the bomb. Moreover, the harm that these weapons can do is so great that merely reducing them to the numbers talked of by “minimum deterrents,” who would use the remainder to threaten the mass slaughter of populations, would not remove and might increase the probability of an enormous catastrophe. And it would not prevent the potent use of threats of mass slaughter for coercing those who have disarmed. Pope John Paul II has observed that “a totally and permanently peaceful human society is unfortunately a utopia”; and that “pacifist declarations” frequently cloak plans for “aggression, domination, and manipulation of others” and could “lead straight to the false peace of totalitarian regimes.” (The Pope has known that false peace personally.)

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It has been obvious since the 1950's that the West needs: to rely less on threats of nuclear destruction and much more on improving conventional defenses; to discourage the spread of nuclear weapons; and to continue making nuclear weapons less vulnerable to attack, safer from "accidental" detonation, and more secure against seizure and unauthorized or mistaken use. The Soviet Union has its own reasons, as have we, for undertaking such measures unilaterally, with or without formal agreements or even "understandings." Formal agreements on these matters, in fact, have frequently defeated their overt purpose. Agreements, for example, that were supposed to encourage exclusively peaceful uses and research on nuclear energy have spread plutonium usable in explosives. The bishops call for "strengthening command and control over nuclear weapons" to make them more secure against unauthorized or inadvertent use, but call more strongly for agreement on a freeze— which would halt all current programs to replace aging nuclear weapons with ones that are not only more secure against seizure but safer against accidents, more discriminate, and less susceptible to attack.

What is more, the West has many excellent reasons for reducing the numbers and destructiveness of its nuclear weapons quite apart from any agreement. The indiscriminate destructiveness of the American stockpile (as measured in numbers of megatons) was four times higher in 1960 than in 1980. The number of weapons was one-third higher in 1967. The persistent failure of the bishops and other strategists who make a fetish of bilateral agreements to observe the unilateral decline in destructiveness and numbers in American nuclear stockpiles shows, at the very least, a certain lack of seriousness. In any case, if a freeze doesn't stop it from doing so, the U.S. can reduce further and drastically the numbers and destructiveness of its nuclear stockpile by exploiting the improved accuracies possible today. Improved accuracies make feasible greater discrimination as well as effectiveness in the use of nuclear weapons, and they also make possible more extensive replacement of nuclear with conventional weapons.

My own research and that of others has for many years pointed to the need for a much higher priority on improving our ability to hit what we aim at and only what we aim at. That would mean, in particular, that effective conventional weapons could drastically

reduce the West's reliance on nuclear force. Moreover, for years now, the thrust of technology, as in the electronics revolution, has been to improve the possibilities of discrimination and control. It can increasingly provide us with just such intelligent choices between using conventional or nuclear weapons, and between killing innocent bystanders with nuclear weapons or attacking means of aggression and domination.

The danger of Soviet aggression is more likely to be lessened by a Western ability to threaten the military means of domination than by a Western ability to threaten bystanders. First, the Soviets value their military power, on the evidence, more than the lives of bystanders. Second, Western nonsuicidal threats against legitimate military targets are more credible than threats to bring about the destruction of civil society on both sides. The latter have a negligible likelihood of being carried out by Western leaders, and therefore cannot be relied on to dissuade Soviet intimidation or aggression. Finally, it is even more absurd and dangerous to suppose that the only way to dissuade the U.S. from unleashing aggression is to help the Soviets threaten our civilians by leaving them defenseless and by leaving us no choices other than capitulation or an uncontrollably destructive offense against Soviet cities that would invite the reciprocal destruction of our own civil society.

Only some widely prevalent but shallow evasions and self-befuddlements, and not any deep moral dilemma or basic paradox, force us to threaten the annihilation of civilians in order to prevent nuclear or conventional war. The bishops are clear about rejecting the actual use of nuclear weapons to kill innocents. About *threats* to kill innocents, they are much less clear. Their obscurity mirrors an uneasy area of darkness at the core of establishment views.

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Precisely because the bishops' views do not come from on high but are shared by many in the establishment, and also in the anti-nuclear and pacifist movements that shake the establishment, it is worth looking at their arguments on the morality of nuclear deterrence in the context of changing defense policies. Anti-nuclear arguments proceed from premises about the inevitable dependence of deterrence on threats deliberately or uncontrollably to kill innocents. To some degree, bluffs about bringing on the nuclear apocalypse helped generate the rise of the unilateral

nuclear disarmers; and continuing reliance on such bluffs helps to disarm the establishment from answering the unilateral disarmers. The arguments of both undermine deterrence.

Many recent accounts of defense policy in the nuclear age rewrite history to lend an aura of inevitability to the extreme view that we can reliably deter a nuclear attack in any plausible circumstance solely by threats to kill innocents on both sides, threats which we plainly should never and would never carry out. Advocates of that dangerous self-paralyzing bluff claim that this extreme has been the essential base of Western defense policy since Hiroshima. It wasn't at the beginning. Nor was it the meaning of the second-strike theory of deterrence that originated near the start of the 1950's. The second-strike theory did not hold that we had to choose between deterring and being ready and willing to fight if deterrence failed. Americans who oppose unilateral disarmament have never split into a "party of deterrence" as distinct from a "war party" that prefers fighting to deterring a nuclear war. Advocates of MAD suggest as much. But MAD was not declaratory policy before the mid-1960's. And it has never been operational policy. Yet many liberal and conservative critics of the bishops, like the bishops themselves, are under the impression that it always has been. Many believe that MAD has kept the nuclear peace and is therefore necessary, at least as myth. But the evolution of doctrines and policies of deterrence needs to be seen in relation to the changing technologies of discriminateness and control as well as the technologies of nuclear brute force.

Mass Destruction and Initial Doubts about Stability

Manhattan Project scientists assumed immediately after Hiroshima² that the least destructive fission (or atomic) bomb would affect so large an area and the number of such bombs would always be so scarce that they were suited only to attacks on large population centers rather than military forces or war plants directly supporting them. Hence the standard description—weapons of "mass destruction" or "mass slaughter." Worse yet, the atomic scientists thought atomic deterrence extremely unstable. (Leo Szilard, for example, thought in 1945 that the odds for nuclear war in ten years were 9 in 10.) In short, the imminence of total destruction was so probable that nothing less than world government soon and total disarmament would permit survival. It was—in a slogan common in 1945 to which Jonathan Schell might now subscribe—"One World or None."

By the time it had become clear that we were not about to get one world, and that atomic weapons could be used effectively and in adequate numbers against military targets, the atomic scientists' movement had come to the view that they should be used *only* against military targets. By then, fusion weapons were in prospect and many of the same scientists assumed, as they had at first about the A-bomb, that the new H-bomb was suited only to destroy population centers and, at that, offered a net advantage over A-bombs only against a few of the largest population centers. Therefore, they opposed the H-bomb and advocated a vast expansion of the A-bomb stockpile to be used in fighting a ground war in Europe, in anti-submarine warfare, in continental defense, and against enemy bomber bases.

In 1952, thoughtful analysts of the implications of thermonuclear weapons like the economist Charles Hitch found that—contrary to many claims—H-bombs were indeed much more effective than A-bombs against military targets and war-supporting industry; but, like the atomic scientists, he was concerned that they raised the gravest problems of *unintended* collateral damage to noncombatants. To reduce civilian casualties one should give priority to targets outside cities and warn urban populations to evacuate. Like the physicists, Hitch considered mainly very large (25-megaton) H-bombs delivered with great inaccuracy, that is, with half the bombs missing by a radius of at least a half-mile and generally by well over a mile. Other writers on the H-bomb at the time, like Bernard Brodie, an international relations theorist who had once thought A-bombs were suited only to attack whole cities, sometimes agreed with Hitch that H-bombs made restraint essential and that war objectives had to be limited as well; at other times he talked of them as “city busters”; at still other times, he talked about their tactical advantage for use in Europe where they could destroy so large an area as to frustrate dispersion and concealment of ground forces.

Yet, whether one considered H-bombs or A-bombs, the trend in NATO policy — if only to keep defense budgets within domestic political bounds — was to rely increasingly on nuclear weapons in large numbers and to neglect the unintended harm they would do. Churchill, who justified British nuclear weapons in part because they would be able to destroy military targets of special interest to Britain, was so impressed by the destructive side-effects of the H-bomb soon to be acquired by both Britain and the U.S., that he talked vividly and hopefully of safety becoming the “sturdy child

of terror." The Republicans, coming to power at the end of an unpopular and costly conventional war in Korea, talked of nuclear weapons as simply "modern weapons" which furnished a "bigger bang for a buck." They talked of massive retaliation against lesser threats; and the NATO Military Committee in 1957 formally adopted a strategy of threatening a "full" nuclear response even to a local persisting incursion into NATO territory.

Inevitably, uneasiness about the sturdiness as well as the morality of a balance based on threats of such massive destruction, however unintentional, led many sober critics to propose more limited applications of nuclear force, and especially the use of small nuclear weapons on the battlefield. But it soon became clear that nuclear weapons used on the battlefield in the center of Europe also had drawbacks as a replacement for adequate conventional force. The Carte Blanche exercise in 1955 indicated that the side effects of their early introduction might kill nearly 2 million West Germans and wound many others. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer therefore resisted an increased reliance on nuclear weapons and changed his mind only at the end of 1956, when he saw that a conventional build-up in West Germany would be drastically constrained by domestic political problems in getting eighteen-month terms for army conscripts. After that, the Germans and other West Europeans came more than any American President since 1961 to favor relying on nuclear weapons as a cheap substitute for conventional force.

Operational plans, however, have always differed from the rhetoric of indiscriminate threats. Certainly NATO has never planned to avoid military targets in order deliberately to kill innocents at long or short range. NATO plans have always included various restraints on the size of weapons used against military targets in Eastern as well as Western Europe. Nonetheless the problem of unintended harm to noncombatants on both sides remained and always cast some doubt about the sturdiness of deterrence and especially about the Western will to respond to limited or isolated nuclear attacks against the military forces of an ally. (Where that ally is a country on the northern or southern flanks of Europe, the doubt is most obvious; yet these "flank countries" are at present more endangered and more critical for the Alliance than ever. Doubts have increased, especially about the effectiveness of massive nuclear threats as a substitute for conventional force.)

The Second-Strike Theory

Another line of research that was pursued intensively in classified form, beginning in 1951, disclosed a different but even more urgent range of problems about the sturdiness of nuclear deterrence. This research, which generated the second-strike theory of deterrence, looked at the vulnerabilities of all the essential elements of strategic nuclear forces under nuclear attack, and the problems these entailed for maintaining a convincing deterrent. These problems had been badly neglected in part because the original belief after World War II that nuclear weapons could be used effectively only against cities predisposed political and military leaders, as well as scientists, to overlook the possibility that our own nuclear force might come under attack; also because bombing doctrines during and before World War II had stressed that the chief aim of strategic forces was to destroy the centers of war-supporting industry and not the military forces themselves.

As a result, the force we had planned for the mid- and late-1950's, before the introduction of ballistic missiles, was much more vulnerable than is generally realized even today. That was dangerous in particular because NATO had always counted on the help of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) to deter or oppose an invasion of Western Europe and to reduce the intimidating political shadow cast by the possibility that an invasion might grow out of some future crisis. A strategic force, however powerful when left undisturbed to do its work, cannot deter an attack which it is unable itself to survive; and the studies showed that we needed to protect not only the vehicles but all the complex elements of an effective response, including in particular a politically responsible command-and-control. Moreover, preserving control required operating in peacetime in ways that avoid a large risk of lethal "accidents" or even more lethal mistakes in response to false alarms. It excludes, for example, "launching under attack," a euphemism for launching ICBM's on ambiguous electromagnetic signals.

Popularizations of the second-strike theory and some recent academic accounts distort history to make it seem essential deliberately to threaten innocents rather than military forces in order to deter. They frequently identify a second strike with attacks on civilians. In its origins the second-strike theory assumed no such identity. The study that generated the distinction [between first- and second-strike] and first specified requirements for

a second strike, the Rand Base Study, in which I was engaged between 1951 and 1953 with Fred Hoffman, Harry Rowen, and Robert Lutz, made explicit that it would not deal with how to choose targets, but rather how to choose a protected mode of basing and operating a strategic force that would be best for any of several target systems. It looked at several target sets typical of the time: a quite limited number of key war plants supporting combat; military targets whose destruction might retard the advance of ground forces in Europe; and those that might blunt a continuing enemy strategic attack. It did so in order to show in all cases how best to reduce the vulnerability of our own strategic forces. That was the more important result, but the study also saved 9 billion 1953 dollars, showing that one does not have to aim to destroy cities only, or to destroy cities at all, to avoid “exponential” increases in defense spending, as one implausible rationalization for bombing innocents has it.

The authors’ next long study, started at the end of 1953, was about defending a strategic force in the coming ballistic-missile era of reduced warning—then seven years or so off. It paid particular attention to “fail-safe methods” of avoiding war through mistaken responses to ambiguous signals and to the difficult issues of protecting political command-and-control. However, like the Base Study, it dealt only with the urgent problem of choosing responsible ways to protect SAC, not with choice among SAC’s targets. Separating targets for SAC never looked harder than in the mid-1950’s, since our bombs were then at their most destructive and expected inaccuracies near their anguishing worst. However, in successive later studies of strategic aims, the authors became increasingly clear that to have only the alternative of indiscriminate attack would seriously compromise the credibility that there would be any response at all. The two lines of research, one on targeting and reducing collateral damage and the other on protecting the strategic force, converged. It had become apparent that to have a persuasive deterrent, we had not only to be able to protect command-and-control, but also to have some alternatives which a responsible political leader would be willing to command.

Imprecision and Unintended Harm

The recognition at the end of 1953 that fusion warheads might be made small enough to be carried in ballistic missiles by the 1960’s might have seemed to hold out the prospect for reducing

collateral damage somewhat. For these first ballistic-missile warheads were expected to be substantially smaller than the gravity bombs carried in aircraft. (Later Navy SLBM warheads were about the same size as some early A-bombs, 40 kilotons. Even the first SLBM and ICBM warheads were about a half-megaton, much smaller than the H-bombs contemplated in the initial debate.) In fact, however, the prospect of the ballistic missile worsened expectations about collateral damage because the first generation of missiles was expected to be much more inaccurate than aircraft. The median miss distance then expected for the first ballistic missiles was anywhere from two to five miles. A five-mile median radius of inaccuracy meant that half the bombs would strike outside of an 80-square-mile area!

But inaccuracy determines the unintended harm done in destroying a small target more basically than does the explosive yield of individual bombs. It is the lack of technology smart enough, rather than the availability of large brute-force single weapons, that lies at the root of the problem of collateral damage. One makes up for incompetence in aiming by filling an enormous area of uncertainty either with a few large-yield nuclear weapons or, as the British did in World War II, with many thousands of small conventional bombs. When the British discovered in June 1941 that only a third of the bomber crews who thought they had bombed the target were within 80 square miles of it, they resorted to huge raids involving thousands of bombers with results that became visible in Hamburg and in Dresden. David Irving's estimate of the dead in Dresden came to 135,000—much more than the official estimates of the Hiroshima dead. A single American conventional raid on Tokyo in March 1945 destroyed an area over three times that destroyed by the Hiroshima bomb (15.8 compared to 4.7 square miles) and nearly nine times that destroyed by the Nagasaki bomb (1.8 square miles). The average area destroyed in 93 conventional attacks against Japanese cities amounted to the same as that in Nagasaki.

During the postwar period the prospects for reducing collateral damage seemed at their worst in the late 1950's when the average explosive yield of a bomb was *ten* times the present level and when anticipated missile inaccuracies were also at their maximum. Some of the most familiar and perverse current views on nuclear deterrence, including those that have shaped the pastoral letter, were formed at that time. Since then, the prospects of hitting only what one is aiming at have changed

by several orders of magnitude. That implies improvements in effectiveness against small, hard fixed targets that are in some ways more revolutionary than the transition from conventional to fission explosives or even fusion weapons. The fission and fusion revolutions blasted themselves, so to speak, into public awareness. Revolutionary improvements in our ability to focus destruction on targets alone have proceeded quietly and attracted less public notice and understanding.

The fact is, however, that a tenfold improvement in accuracy is roughly equal in effectiveness to a thousandfold increase in the explosive energy released by a weapon. Improving accuracy by a factor of 100 improves blast effectiveness against a small, hard military target about as much as multiplying the energy released a million times. The fission bomb at Hiroshima released about a thousand times more energy, and a 10-megaton fusion bomb can release a million times more energy, than a 10-ton conventional "block buster." A one-hundredfold improvement in accuracy roughly equals in effectiveness a millionfold increase in the release of destructive energy to enable the blast destruction of a small fixed target.

The Revolution in Precision

But while the improvement in effectiveness may be the same, these two technologies achieve it in essentially different ways. When one improves effectiveness by releasing more destructive energy, there is a corresponding increase in collateral damage. When one improves the ability to destroy a target by increasing one's accuracy, there is a corresponding decrease in collateral damage.

Improvements in guidance using midcourse adjustments have already reduced cruise-missile inaccuracies to 200 feet from the 12,000-30,000-foot average misses expected for ballistic missiles in the late 1950's. That improvement by a factor of 60 to 150 makes feasible radical reductions in collateral damage. Even more important, terminal guidance systems in development now that can be deployed in the late 1980's could further reduce inaccuracies at extended ranges by another order of magnitude. That would permit a conventional weapon to replace nuclear bombs in a wide variety of missions with an essentially equal probability of destroying a fixed military target. It would drastically raise the threshold beyond which one would have to

resort to nuclear weapons in order to be effective. It would mean a much smaller likelihood of "escalation" and incomparably smaller side effects.

Destroying ground targets that might decide a conventional conflict could have much more troubling side effects even in relatively isolated areas than the destruction of equally decisive naval forces at sea or key satellites deep in space. Yet the situation has altered greatly here too. Most such land targets are less blast-resistant than ICBM silos. Yet attacking them effectively with the huge inaccuracies expected in the late 1950's would have meant filling an enormous area of uncertainty with destruction. That might typically have subjected an area of 1000 square miles or so to unintended lethal effects. By contrast, a current cruise missile, with midcourse guidance and a small nuclear warhead, could be equally effective against a military target while confining lethal damage to less than one square mile. Most important, improved terminal guidance in the next few years could enable a cruise missile with a suitable *non*-nuclear warhead to destroy a military target and reduce the area of fatal collateral damage to about one-thousandth of a square mile—an enormous contrast with World War II.

Some conservative critics counter the bishops' strictures against a nuclear response to conventional attack by suggesting that any "conventional war in Western Europe would almost certainly mean terror and destruction far in excess of World War II"—with perhaps 100 million dead; that, in short, any conventional conflict in Europe would bring on horrors hardly less terrible than nuclear war. Such expectations lead many Europeans to feel that even a conventional war would destroy Europe and end Western civilization. For the bishops, a policy of No-First-Use follows from the broader nuclear policy of "Use, Never." And both are only part of Cardinal Krol's injunction in his White House sermon against all war. ("No more war, war never again.") Through all the political compromises in various drafts, the bishops support conventional alternatives only grudgingly. But estimates of conventional damage by the bishops' critics have even less basis in evidence than those the bishops cite to show that nuclear damage would be unlimited. It is plain that the increasing advances in precision and control can be most fully exploited by suitably designed conventional weapons.

It is essential to emphasize that advances in our ability to reduce collateral damage and increase the effectiveness of

conventional weapons do not blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional force. On the contrary, that remains vital. But these revolutionary changes make it much more feasible to avoid crossing the divide between nuclear and conventional weapons. They give us choices.

Discussions of the morality of bombing and deterrence today often proceed as if “the technical realities” foreclose choice (as one eminent physicist, Wolfgang Panofsky, suggests), as if “the mutual hostage relation” were not at all a “consequence of policy and therefore . . . subject to change,” but a matter of physics—permanently determined by the technology for releasing nuclear energy. Yet the evolution since the 1950’s of technologies other than the release of nuclear energy has altered the possibilities of discrimination and will not excuse us from the responsibility for preparing to keep violence from mounting without bounds.

III

With few exceptions, even the most thoughtful considerations of the morality of nuclear threats have been frozen in the technology of the late 1950’s and specifically that of nuclear brute force. This can be shown by referring to the evolution of NATO policy, to the development of technologies of destruction and of discrimination and control, and to a sequence of substantial analyses of the morality and prudence of threats to bomb innocents between the end of the 1950’s and the present.

Terror and Technology at the End of the 1950’s

Robert W. Tucker’s book, *The Just War* (1960), observed that the policy of nuclear deterrence in the 1950’s had demonstrated “at least a striking verbal insensitivity” to the consequences of the defensive use of nuclear force. Indeed, “the more extreme versions” were “obsessed” with the idea that the deterrent threat would never have to be carried out and therefore regarded “the effectiveness of deterrence as directly proportionate” to its horrors. If one accepted this extreme, then one had to acknowledge that “in the nuclear age . . . virtually no substantive restraints . . . need to be observed by those waging a defensive war.” But Tucker himself leaned toward the extreme, since he thought no restraints would be effective. He was writing when the average destructiveness of our weapons and the expected inaccuracies, and hence the probable unintended harm, were all near their peak.

Indiscriminateness, he suggested, is a “‘necessity’ that is inherent in technology.” He rejected the position taken by the World Council of Churches in 1958 against “all-out” use of nuclear weapons. As Paul Ramsey observed, Tucker agreed with the pacifists that statecraft in the nuclear age entails using evil means—threats whose execution would inevitably exterminate civilians. He parted company with the pacifists because the pacifists would abandon statecraft. Tucker would rather abandon morality. His concluding paragraph argued: “There is something patently absurd in the complaint that a threat of extermination, even when restricted to preventing one’s own annihilation, signifies a moral decline for which there is no explanation other than that men have deliberately chosen to abandon any sense of restraint. If men presently show less restraint in threatening their adversaries, it is largely because they are less secure than in an earlier age.” But during the 1950’s, doubts grew about the credibility and the political and military implications of threats of extermination and about whether there were no better choices.

The McNamara Doctrine of the First Two Years

The view dominant among the Kennedy administration and its advisers during its first two years embodied the two converging lines of research on the protection of the strategic force and its targeting. It put into effect many of the criticisms of massive retaliation that had accumulated during the 1950’s. It stressed the importance of a second-strike capability, including a responsible command-and-control system with its vulnerabilities reduced, for example, by the use of airborne command posts. But it also called for a conventional build-up to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and contemplated the use of nuclear force itself only with discrimination and restraint in the service of political ends. Both conventional and nuclear force, neither of which could substitute for the other, would have to be used in limited ways, if we were to deter aggression, or frustrate it should it occur.

Alain Enthoven defended the continuing relevance of the traditional Christian doctrine of “just war” in the context of the initial Kennedy policy. He explicitly rejected the “realist” and pacifist views of deterrence, both of which assume the incompatibility of morality and statecraft in the nuclear age. We do not, he said, have to choose one or the other. The realists would eliminate moral restraints because they believe them impossible

or suicidal. The pacifists think that the impossibility of restraint in nuclear war proves what they had believed all along, that the only moral course is to disarm totally, even if unilaterally, and that this would bring universal peace.

Enthoven distinguished his view also from the obsessive extreme which Tucker had in mind—the position known sometimes by the euphemisms “Minimum Deterrence” or “Deterrence Only.” Enthoven noted that this view, which had begun to take hold among academics after Sputnik (1957), resembled that of the pacifists in its belief that a lasting peace was feasible in the short term. But Deterrence Only would base stability on threats to respond to an attack on our strategic force by *deliberately* bombing enemy civilians, by avoiding enemy military targets, and by exposing our own civilians to attack. The core of this newer view, as he might have noted, was therefore an antithesis both of pacifist nonviolence and of the Christian and other ethical traditions of humane warfare.

It also differed drastically from preceding U.S. policy. In one sense the new dogma seemed to return to the immediate postwar understanding of nuclear weapons. But the typical view after Hiroshima held that the number of either side’s nuclear weapons would be intrinsically so small and the individual bombs so destructive that they could be effective only against large population centers. An aggressor *could* effectively attack only cities. His victims *could* effectively retaliate only against the aggressor’s cities. Deterrence Only, on the other hand, accepted the fact that strategic forces *could* bomb military forces, but held that we *should* threaten to respond to a nuclear attack only by bombing cities, and that we *should* leave our own cities undefended. It was remarkable not only for its extreme departure from humane ethics, but also because it represented a 180-degree turn by many of its main proponents, who, for nearly a decade before they adopted this dogma, had proposed using nuclear weapons only against military targets—in continental defense against invading bombers, against ground forces in Europe, and against combat ships at sea—and who had recommended immense deep-shelter programs for civil defense. Deterrence Only was an extreme minority view at the time of Enthoven’s writing. After the Cuban missile crisis, it became an established ideology.

It was in a speech at Ann Arbor, Michigan, in June 1962 that Robert McNamara made public that, in a nuclear war growing out of a major attack on NATO, our main goal would be to destroy

enemy military forces, not civilians. He added that we could reserve enough power to destroy the enemy's society, "if driven to it," and that threat would give him "the strongest imaginable incentive to refrain from striking our own cities." (This last resort, which some moralists questioned at the time, I believe was unnecessary: the Soviets have the strongest incentives to preserve their military power.) The part of McNamara's speech about restricting, so far as feasible, the use of strategic forces to military rather than civilian targets, was embedded in statements stressing that American military force was designed only to discourage aggression, not to change the status quo and never to initiate a war; and that the United States was reducing reliance on nuclear weapons in general and wanted to discourage their spread.

Despite these cautions, his speech produced a strikingly negative response from conservatives as well as liberals both here and abroad, and from keepers of the traditional morality of "just war." McNamara's harsh didactic style can hardly explain it. Rather, a certain ambivalence about, if not affection for, nuclear terror had become nearly universal. Franz Josef Strauss, then West German Defense Minister, made clear that he continued to believe that deterrence depended on threatening the immediate use of tactical nuclear weapons at the battle line, to be followed quickly by massive strategic retaliation. Senator Richard Russell and Senator Margaret Chase Smith, Democratic and Republican stalwarts respectively on the Senate Armed Services Committee, denounced McNamara's statement. Some scientists and engineers, who had only recently, in the aftermath of Sputnik, turned to relying on threats to bomb cities and away from advocating the use of nuclear weapons against military forces and from massive continental defense and deep-shelter programs, now pronounced any ability to attack military forces or to defend cities to be "destabilizing." With a rancor suggesting a bad conscience, they said that the very modest Kennedy fallout-shelter program, and the new official focus on military targets rather than massive retaliation, might influence American leaders to initiate preventive nuclear war. This, though members of the administration had abundantly stated the very opposite and had explicitly recognized that any nuclear war would be an "unprecedented catastrophe."

* * * * *

It was plainly silly to suppose that American political leaders would be eager to unleash such an unprecedented catastrophe simply because it might not be total. The reaction was all the more striking since neither these critics nor anyone else had ever suggested that the much more costly and supposedly more effective programs the critics had been backing a few years earlier (for nearly leakproof air defenses, a thick ballistic-missile defense of population as well as of strategic forces, extensive deep shelters for civilians, and the limitation of nuclear weapons to legitimate military targets) would induce American leaders to undertake preventive war. All in all, the venomous response, including that of the media, was shallow, partisan, and, not infrequently, in bad faith. Such venom unfortunately continues to poison current debate as to whether there is an alternative to suicide or surrender. It takes great civic courage to sustain that burden and, in the détente that started after the missile crisis, the administration did not show such courage. Nonetheless, every one of the last six Secretaries of Defense has found it essential both to rely less on nuclear weapons and to return to the subject of the limited use of long- as well as short-range nuclear forces against military targets. Much of Paul Ramsey's work on "just war" (brought together in *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility*, 1968) is related to such a policy.

Ramsey's answer to Tucker states that the conduct of a nuclear war need not—and, if it is to be moral, must not—"violate the moral immunity of noncombatants from direct attack." Any harm to noncombatants should at least be unintended. He implies, moreover, that the conduct of nuclear war should involve a serious effort to minimize such unintended damage. If he had been more aware of the possibilities implicit in the electronic revolution, he might have added that research and development need to aim at improving the ability to discriminate. He insists that attacks should not only attempt to discriminate but that the unintended damage should be proportionate to any good that would come out of the war.

In a chapter on "The Limits of Nuclear War," Ramsey considers what actions in a nuclear war are "undoable" even if they are "thinkable." He notes that McNamara's announcement at Ann Arbor that our main aim in responding to an attack on the Alliance should be to destroy the enemy's forces, not his civilian

population, had occasioned hardly a single amen on either side of the Atlantic. The only responses were stereotyped objections from defense establishments here and abroad, and the same from publications like the *Christian Century*, normally regarded as keepers of such a civilized rule. Ramsey proceeds with a brilliant support of such limitation and with a sympathetic but penetrating critique of Thomas Schelling and Herman Kahn, who favored limiting nuclear war, but included under those limits attacks on cities, and who held that it might be rational to threaten such attacks even though it would be irrational to execute them. Limited attacks on military installations and forces are both thinkable and doable, according to Ramsey; but a direct attack on innocent civilians to achieve some other goal, even a good goal, is wrong. Like art, a political action has consequences beyond itself, but, as Aristotle pointed out, an action is also right or wrong in itself. Attacking innocent civilians is wrong even to accomplish something else. Ramsey rejected the use of threats of even limited city attacks.

Enthoven criticized such threats on the ground also that they would not be believed; that policies based on “the rationality of irrationality” (on which Father Hehir and the bishops also rely) are not viable in the long run for a democracy, especially one with allies: “Rather, the most credible kind of threat is the threat that we will do what in the event will be most in our interest to do.”

According to Michael Walzer, in *Just and Unjust War*, Ramsey relies on unintended “collateral civilian damage from counterforce warfare in its maximum form to deter potential aggressors.” Walzer himself believes that to deter one must intentionally or unintentionally threaten to kill innocents. But Ramsey was not referring in that context to deterrence of the initial outbreak of an aggression. He was talking of the possibility that, *during a war waged against military targets on both sides*, both sides might avoid attacking cities and also avoid a maximum counterforce attack — in order to prevent the collateral damage that would ensue from attacking even military targets that are closely co-located with population centers. That is very different from saying that to deter an initial attack one must threaten civilians — even unintentionally. Nor does selectivity in attacks on military targets *during* a war mean threatening civilians, but rather the opposite. Ramsey did sometimes falter by recommending a “studied ambiguity” about our intentions to retaliate in kind to an attack on cities. Michael Novak’s answer to the bishops also finds “the best of the ambiguous

but morally good options . . . in a combination of counterforce and countervalue deterrence." Yet even he is affected by the insidious semantics of MAD: "countervalue" suggests the Soviets value only bystanders, not military force. But to deter we need rely neither on unintended harm nor on ambiguous intentions.

IV

McNamara, MAD, and MADCAP

One difficulty in getting the evolution straight of both official doctrines and operational policies on nuclear weapons is that the two have often diverged, and the statements of doctrine have often been designed for political combat within domestic bureaucracies rather than potential combat with the Soviets. McNamara in his first two years as Secretary of Defense sought options between suicide and surrender, according to Stewart Alsop, "as Parsifal sought the Grail." Out of office, he has ended ironically by foreclosing all such options. With an intensity that dims his memory as well as his understanding, he doubts that any nuclear response to nuclear attack can limit destruction.

After the missile crisis, McNamara often talked of Assured Destruction—and later Mutual Assured Destruction—as if they were serious operational policies. Neither was. While Secretary, he never abandoned the goal of using strategic forces against Soviet military forces or the goal of limiting harm to American civilians. Even as declaratory doctrine he never stated MAD in the unqualified and brutal Orwellian form of the aphorism "killing weapons is bad, killing people is good." When he talked about a capability for assured destruction of 20-25 percent of the Soviet population, he was thinking of deterring the Joint Chiefs of Staff from asking for higher budgets rather than the Soviets from attacking the U.S. It was his way, if not the best way, of winning a budget battle and putting a lower ceiling on the size of our strategic forces. He stressed that we would have the capability for destroying the Soviet population—and he expected that capacity to deter the Soviets; but if deterrence failed, we would use our strategic forces to destroy Soviet forces attacking the United States. Later, when he drifted toward regarding it as desirable for the Soviets to deter us, he was still talking about capabilities.

In short, the form of MAD doctrine he introduced can best be described by the acronym MADCAP rather than MAD.

McNamara said we would use a MAD *capability* for deterrence without seriously intending to assure the destruction of enemy noncombatants. Nor was he entirely serious about attacks on combatants. MADCAP did not lead to any persistent thought about how to improve the force to make it increasingly discriminating, and it discouraged thinking about the selection of various theater and other military targets suited to proportionate responses. It led to slowing or stopping various programs that would have increased our ability to discriminate between military and civilian targets. It made us less serious about the problems of nuclear targeting of combatants *or* noncombatants: it avoided some of the obloquy of *seriously* threatening to do the cheap and easy job of killing large "soft" concentrations of civilians without forcing thought about the harder job of carefully selecting and, if necessary, destroying military targets without killing bystanders; or about the hard but feasible and necessary job of keeping violence under control.

The bishops, their defenders, and the strategists on whom they rely all talk of the uncontrollability of nuclear weapons as a deplorable but unavoidable fact of life. However, they make a virtue of this supposed necessity. John Garvey, columnist for the Catholic *Commonweal*, knows that one may not threaten what one does not intend to do, and grants that "if your enemy knows that you will absolutely refuse to use a weapon, what you have is no longer a weapon and is therefore useless"; but he claims that "it would be naive to think that we are so fully in control of ourselves that in the event of an attack we would not say, 'What the hell,' and hit them with everything we've got." Which apparently would give the threat, however immoral, some use as a deterrent.

However, it would be naive or worse to suppose that we cannot impose controls over both initial and subsequent uses of nuclear weapons. "Permissive action links," which we place on all our weapons overseas and which microchips and other electronic advances are constantly improving, can make it essentially infeasible for military commanders to use nuclear weapons without release by a remote political authority. Moreover, if we really thought political authority were reckless, we could make this release mechanism as elaborate as we liked and even divide the releasing codes so that they would require the agreement of many parties. But the processes of consultation in the Alliance are now complex, and would affect not only the initial, but also subsequent releases. It is most unlikely that we would simply say "Whee!" and let everything go. In Europe the problem is quite the

opposite. We should not and do not rely on the threat of losing control to deter either nuclear or conventional attack. But MAD and the fictions of uncontrollability it has propagated encourage us to rely on the threat of losing control as a substitute for dealing with the dangers of conventional conflicts. In short, they have led us to be less serious about conventional war as well.

The bishops' strategists, who believe that one can deter even if one is plainly committed never to use nuclear weapons, first, second, or ever, would maintain a capability but never use nuclear weapons at all. McNamara, when he changed from the doctrine of his first two years to talk of capabilities for mutual assured destruction, said he would maintain the capability to kill Russian civilians but would actually use nuclear weapons against certain military targets. That's rather different. Nonetheless it was a long step on the way to the present absurdities and evasions of the moral and prudential problems of discouraging a nuclear attack on the U.S. or one of its allies. Or a conventional attack.

Soviet Values and MAD Nuclear Threats to Deter Conventional Attack

Michael Walzer writes perceptively about the use of terror by guerrillas to provoke counterterror against innocents. But when it comes to nuclear weapons, he accepts the MAD stereotype about the use of threats of terror against innocents to deter attack. He doesn't question the technical determinism of the nuclear technologists that limiting harm to civilians on either side is impossible. He advances comfortably the familiar paradox about "the monstrous immorality that our policy contemplates" but thinks it inevitable. "The unavoidable truth is that all of these policies rest ultimately on immoral threats." Like Tucker, Walzer is unwilling to give up immoral threats because he thinks they are necessary for deterrence. Here he rests on the baseless judgment that the *only* thing that will deter Soviet aggression is the prospect that Russian bystanders will be killed.

To reject that view one need not assume that Soviet values are the same as our own; nor that the Soviets are simply monsters who don't care or even like to see civilians killed. We need only observe that the Soviets value military power and the means of domination at least as much and possibly more than the lives of Russian civilians. This is surely evidenced by a long history documented by careful scholars like Adam Ulam, Robert Conquest, Nikolai

Tolstoy, and many others, in which the Soviets have sacrificed civilian lives for the sake of Soviet power. Their collectivization program in the 1920's gained control over the peasants at the expense of slaughtering some 12-15 million of them. (Stalin told Churchill that the great bulk of 10 million kulaks had to be wiped out or transferred to Siberia.) The Soviet government sharply increased grain exports during the famine year of 1933, when 5 million Ukrainian peasants were dying. If Robert Conquest is right, the Great Purge of the late 1930's killed several million more Soviet citizens. If Nikolai Tolstoy is right, Stalin and the NKVD were responsible for more than half of the 20-30 million deaths suffered by the Soviets during World War II. Soviet refusal to abide by the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War doomed many additional Soviet as well as German prisoners.

Whatever else one may say of these actions, they do not suggest that Soviet leaders value the life of Russian citizens above political and military power. If the West responded to Soviet military attack by destroying military targets, it would affect something on which Soviet leaders continue to lavish a huge part of their painfully scarce resources and which they appear to cherish quite as much as they do Russian citizens; and the prospects of such a Western response would be the best deterrent to their initiating war. Moreover, continued attacks during a war on elements of their military power and means of domination would appear to be the best way to bring the war to a rapid close. Prudence does not force us to rely for deterrence on even *unintended* damage done to civilians. Discrimination remains an important goal during the war—and an important capability to achieve in advance of the war. It helps deter the war or bring it to an end.

But Walzer believes that "counterpopulation deterrence" is basic. He also believes it is perfectly effective. It "rules out" (i.e., makes so unlikely as to be negligible) any nuclear war between the great powers; even though the Soviets know we believe that nuclear attacks on populations would be suicidal, our threat would be sure to deter them. And, typical of his time, he is also quite comfortable about the effectiveness of counterpopulation deterrence for forestalling a conventional invasion. His complacency here parallels that expressed in various British and American magisterial writings of the late 1960's and 1970's. He quotes with approval a passage from Bernard Brodie: "The spectacle of a large Soviet field army crashing across the line into Western Europe in the hope and expectation that nuclear

weapons would not be used against it — thereby putting itself and the U.S.S.R. totally at risk while leaving the choice of weapons to us — would seem to be hardly worth a second thought. . . .” One may surmise that if Brodie were alive he would be having second thoughts. Many who wrote that way in the late 1960’s and 1970’s are less comfortable today, in particular about threatening mutual annihilation as a way of deterring a conventional attack on Western Europe.

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McGeorge Bundy illustrates the change in the American establishment. He had chided Henry Kissinger for expressing public doubts on the credibility of American strategy for the protection of West Europe at Brussels in 1979. “American strategy for the protection of West Europe,” he was satisfied, was “a classic case of doctrinal confusion and pragmatic success.” (He inserted the two words “so far,” suggesting he was not completely satisfied.) I cautioned at the time that it would be a great mistake to attribute the pragmatic success to the doctrinal confusion; and Bundy did not disagree. The protest movements in Europe were already visible, for one thing; for another, there were the Soviets, and they might not be confused just because we were. We cannot count on a Mutual Assured Confusion. In any case, Bundy, less confident now about MAD threats to deter conventional invasion, has joined Robert McNamara, George Kennan, and Gerard Smith in proposing that we exchange pledges with the Soviets that neither would be the first to use nuclear weapons. The four stress the No-First-Use pledge much more than any serious and extensive program to improve the size or quality of NATO conventional forces, so that NATO could depend less on nuclear threats to overcome Soviet advantages in the use of conventional force. These advantages have to do not only with the massive and increasing size and quality of the Soviet force, but with the Soviets’ geographical position and their relatively improving access to air space and bases near critical areas. Japan and Korea as well as all our European allies are within immediate range of Soviet, but far from the center of American, conventional power. So is Persian Gulf oil on which they all have come to depend.

Indeed, it seems that Bundy and his three co-authors have not really abandoned an implicit threat of the first use of nuclear weapons to make up for our conventional disadvantage. For

while the four may *mean* the Western pledge [of no-first-use], they rely on the Soviets not trusting us to live up to our pledge and so continuing to keep their ground forces dispersed and less effective for conventional attack and defense. In short, the policy they advocate resembles the pastoral letter in *explicitly* abandoning a nuclear threat, while implicitly continuing to rely on it. In their case, the threat is implicit in NATO's continued capability to use nuclear weapons first. If their policy led each side to believe the *other's* pledge, the Soviet Union would be more likely to concentrate its conventional force effectively – and safely since, on their recommendation, we would keep our pledge. On the other hand, if we trusted the Soviet pledge, we might concentrate our defenses at the likely points of attack. That would *not* be safe since NATO has no way of enforcing such a Soviet pledge. It seems that the four want neither side to believe the other's pledge. In sum, recommendations for exchanging unenforceable pledges about the first use of nuclear weapons in Europe do not reduce the doctrinal confusion that has been troubling NATO even on the subject of nuclear deterrence of conventional attack. They only alarm West European leaders who continue to rely excessively on nuclear weapons.

Many have observed that the four are rather perfunctory about a program to improve NATO conventional forces – in size, quality, method of deployment, or strategy – which would make it less necessary for European leaders to rely on nuclear weapons by making it more likely we could defeat by conventional means any of several plausible Soviet conventional attacks. They do talk of “maintaining and improving the specifically American conventional forces in Europe” but claim, in the face of much evidence of an unanticipated worsening in our ability to defend Europe's interests in more than one critical area near the Soviet periphery, that we tend to exaggerate Soviet relative conventional strength. And they say we underestimate “Soviet awareness of the enormous costs and risks of any form of aggression against NATO” – which is to rely covertly on the threat of first use of nuclear weapons that they overtly abjure.

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Recently Bundy and McNamara have joined Cyrus Vance and Elmo Zumwalt in a letter to the Congressional Budget Committees calling for large cuts in the administration's FY '84-

FY '89 defense budget—with two-thirds of the dollars cut coming out of conventional programs. Like some drafts of the pastoral letter warning that an “upward spiral even in conventional arms may lead to war,” and saying that “we do not in any way want to . . . [make] ‘the world safe for conventional war,’ which introduces its own horrors,” their budget letter warns of the dangers of “spurring the arms race.” What is more, the conventional arms cuts it recommends are squarely incompatible with reduced reliance on the early first use of nuclear weapons or indeed with any coherent view of potential critical conventional conflicts. It plans for only a short conventional war, cutting in half the program for increasing the number of days of stocks of “modern conventional munitions” in Europe. But it would cancel the C-5B program for rapid airlift and depend much more on the comparatively slow sealift that would be important in a long conventional war. It would focus the Navy largely on the defense of the sea lines of communication in the North Atlantic, yet drastically cut Navy programs important for defending these sea lines, such as those permitting long-range precise conventional attacks on the Soviet naval air bases from which Backfire bombers could menace both the sea lines and ships defending them.

I do not doubt the earnestness of the authors' desire for a more than nominal decrease in NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons. I can testify that Robert McNamara's interest goes back at least twenty-two years. I was his representative on the Acheson Committee which drafted the National Security Council decision formally to end the U.S. policy of massive retaliation in the spring of 1961. That decision called for raising the nuclear threshold by preparing a capability to defeat at its own level all but a very massive conventional attack; and the use of nuclear weapons only if our increased conventional force did not suffice. But as the stormy reaction to the McNamara doctrine of his first two years indicated, NATO's threats of first use showed its reluctance to spend the resources needed for an adequate conventional defense rather than any convincing willingness actually to use nuclear weapons quickly or at all. Moreover, though McNamara doubted the utility of battlefield nuclear weapons, to quiet the political storm he did not resist sending several thousand more tactical nuclear weapons to Europe, making a stockpile there of 7,000. And contrary to his recent memory, he increased our total stock of nuclear weapons until it reached its peak in his last year as Secretary. When six years after the Acheson Report the Europeans

did agree to “flexible response,” it was a grudging compromise—agreeing on the need for improved conventional forces but insisting that the main defense would be nuclear. That tended to undercut the seriousness with which they or we attended to the problem of improving NATO’s conventional ability to defend itself against conventional attack.

Carl Kaysen, McGeorge Bundy’s former deputy as National Security Adviser, in his influential contribution to the 1968 Brookings study, *Agenda for the Nation*, contemplated a No-First-Use pledge, but also called for large cuts in defense including the halving of U.S. ground forces in Germany. Senator Mark Hatfield and Senator William Proxmire, eager to freeze nuclear weapons then as now, led the battle to cut conventional arms. All that may seem bizarre, but it is not. The wave of “study groups” that deplored “exaggerations” of the Soviet build-up and the supposed spiraling of U.S. strategic budgets that forced the Soviets unwillingly to follow our lead, continued to set national priorities toward more social spending. But not much social spending could be got out of strategic budgets. They had been spiraling not up but down at 8 percent a year. By the early 1970’s, they were less than 1 percent of GNP, and by FY ‘76, less than one-half of 1 percent. The Soviet deployment of ICBM’s, SLBM’s, and heavy and medium bombers averaged twice as great as the “greater-than-expected” threat predicted by Defense Secretaries for ten years starting with Secretary McNamara. Now, once more with program cuts in mind, the Bundy *et al.* budget letter talks of “greater-than-expected” threats and, like the bishops, resurrects the old apparition of our spurring an arms race by doing too much.

From the beginning of the 1960’s to the late 1970’s, the U.S. and all its major allies, while prattling about a U.S.-driven arms race, halved defense budgets in percent of GNP, while the Soviets steadily spent more in real terms for conventional as well as nuclear forces. As a result, NATO found itself continuing to rely on the early and first use of nuclear weapons, while the “correlation of forces” was changing so as to make that less convincing than ever before.

If the anti-nuclear movement in West Europe has served any useful function at all, it has done so by making responsible West Europeans more aware of the recklessness of depending on apocalyptic nuclear threats to meet conventional attacks. And given Europe’s economic problems, key Western leaders

are forced to think not merely of multiplying brute numbers but also of exploiting the new intelligent technologies to increase the effectiveness of the resources used. Such an effort has been hampered up to now by a kind of Luddite and moralistic resistance to qualitative improvement and by a particular antipathy to technologies that improve the possibility of discrimination and choice.

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Moralists who have chosen to emphasize the shallow paradoxes associated with deterrence by immoral threats against population have been at their worst when they have opposed any attempts to improve the capability to attack targets precisely and discriminately. While they have thought of themselves as aiming their opposition at the dangers of bringing on nuclear mass destruction, they have often stopped research and engineering on ways to destroy military targets without mass destruction; and they have done collateral damage to the development of precise, long-range conventional weapons. (Junior Congressmen like Thomas Downey and Edward Markey, who had their fun with talk of *Star Wars* in March, might have benefited from observing that Luke Skywalker used one accurately placed weapon to destroy the indiscriminately destructive Death Star. And with advanced terminal guidance we need not rely on "The Force.") They have tried to stop, and have slowed, the development of technologies which can free us from the loose and wishful paradoxes involved in efforts to save the peace with unstable threats to terrorize our own as well as adversary civilians.

The events leading to the destruction of German and Japanese cities in World War II offer parallels. British scientists, when the menace of Hitler overcame their natural distaste for arms research, formed a Committee for the Scientific Study of Air Defense which backed Watson Watts's development of radar for the defense of Britain. Their distaste was not overcome enough for them to support as energetically the Committee for the Scientific Study of Air Offense, whose work was quite desultory. The lag in developing radar for navigation and bombing, however, did not prevent the bombing of German targets. It only assured that the raids would destroy more German civilians. Some blame lies with the Royal Air Force's failure to improve accuracy in the period between the wars. Marshall Trenchard, relying on the special experience

of strategic bombing in clear weather against undefended targets in Iraq, thought British accuracy in general excellent. In 1928 he argued, "What is illegitimate, as being contrary to the dictates of humanity, is the indiscriminate bombing of a city for the sole purpose of terrorizing the civilian population." Citing the draft code of rules for air war drawn up at the Hague in 1922-23, he held that air attacks were legitimate—"provided all reasonable care is taken to confine the scope of the bombing to the military objective. . . ." But he hardly took reasonable care to improve discriminateness *before* the war. (A minor fault, compared to that of religious strategists who testified to Congress *against* "targeting systems that minimize collateral damage to civilian life" and against any defense of U.S. civilians.) Trenchard's opposite numbers in the British Army and Navy had doubted that the state of accuracy in 1928 would permit either the effectiveness or the discrimination that Trenchard claimed. During World War II, when he found how poor its aim was, Trenchard advised that if Bomber Command missed its intended targets it would still kill Germans and so do good work.

Declaratory doctrine for the American defense of Europe started in the 1950's with the belief that strategic and tactical nuclear weapons could replace the conventional firepower which our NATO allies hesitated to supply against conventional invasion. It went through a phase in which many of the present advocates of MAD entertained exaggerated hopes for limiting the harm done by the large-scale use of tactical nuclear weapons on European battlefields; and for using massive active and civil defense, limiting to quite small amounts the damage done by a large raid on U.S. cities. When their hopes began to seem excessive, they switched to the view that the *threat* of unlimited mutual destruction was actually good, since it was nearly sure to deter even a conventional invasion. The last year or two have seen signs of a renewed serious interest in improving NATO's ability to meet a conventional invasion in Europe on its own terms. Manfred Woerner, the current Minister of Defense in the German Federal Republic, has set forth a program which is designed not only to discourage a Soviet conventional invasion, but to do it responsibly in a way that will also put to rest the growing West German anti-nuclear movement. He would exploit the advanced technologies that are coming to be available for that purpose.

Woerner's view stands in contrast to that of his predecessor, who held that even a conventional war in Europe would be "the

end of Europe,” and that it was essential that tactical nuclear weapons be used quickly but only as a link to the “intercontinental exchange” – which would be “the end of the world.” But anyone who relies on such threats to deter a conventional attack is likely to threaten up to the last minute and then, when it would have become clear that the Soviets did not believe that NATO leaders would consciously bring on the end of Europe and then the end of the world, rush to reassure the Soviets that they did not really mean to execute the “threat.” Such a policy, Herman Kahn accurately labeled “preemptive surrender.” It differs from the policy advocated by West Germany’s party of the Greens in the anti-nuclear movement who would make their accommodation with the Soviets now, in time of peace, safely in advance of a threatened Soviet attack. Pierre Hassner has characterized the difference between the leaders of the anti-nuclear movement and some leading figures in the West European establishment who rely on suicidal threats: it is the difference between “preventive surrender” and “preemptive surrender.”

V

Deterring Nuclear Attack on an Ally

Bundy, McNamara, Kennan, and Smith have lost their faith in suicidal threats as a way of deterring a conventional invasion. They believe in the necessity and adequacy of such threats to deter nuclear attacks. However, a hope that an adversary can be safely deterred by our threat to blow him up along with ourselves, is unfounded not only for a conventional attack but also for a *nuclear* attack on the ally.

Consider a strategically placed ally like Norway with an American nuclear guarantee and no nuclear weapons of its own. How would a capability to destroy Soviet civilians, along with American civilians and possibly the civilization of Europe itself, discourage Soviet use of nuclear weapons against military targets in the course of an attack aimed at seizing the sparsely populated but strategic northernmost counties of Norway? No one – no Norwegian, no American leader, and no Soviet leader – would seriously expect us to respond to such an attack by consciously initiating the killing of 100 million or so innocent Soviet civilians and a corresponding number of Americans and/or West Europeans. That is one reason why some believers in

MAD are explicitly *for* threats and *against* their execution. But a capability which plainly will never be used to initiate a chain of events we believe would lead to the end of civilization will terrify an adversary no more than a capability that would destroy half, or a tenth, or a millionth the number of civilians, or no civilians at all. The only way weapons can inspire concern is by the likelihood that they will be used. The residual fear that the West might deliberately blow up the world tends to terrify some in our own elites much more than the Soviets who chatter less on this subject.

The Incoherence of "Deterrence Only" Even for Deterring Nuclear Attack on Oneself

Dogmas of "Minimum Deterrence" and "Deterrence Only" had their origins in the late 1950's in the writings of General Pierre Gallois. Gallois believed that nuclear weapons spelled the end of alliance: no nuclear guarantee to a non-nuclear ally was credible since no nation would commit suicide for another. His version of Minimum Deterrence formed the center of his justification for the spread of nuclear weapons to any nation, even very small ones that wanted protection against nuclear attack or coercion. Initial American variants of the Minimum-Deterrence doctrine in 1958 cited some of Gallois's principal arguments and the calculations he had designed in order to prove the necessity for targeting cities rather than opposing military forces; and some 1958 American writings on Minimum Deterrence recommended distributing Polaris submarines to NATO allies to replace the American guarantee. However, the incoherence of the Deterrence Only view is thorough and applies to deterring an attack on oneself. If it is true that a nation will not commit suicide for another, neither can it commit suicide to assure its own survival. Suicidal threats are *in general* not a reliable means of dissuasion.

Yet the total separation of threat from any possibility of execution has been common in establishments abroad as well as here, even among those who would maintain the Alliance. A former associate director of that pillar of the European establishment, the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), talked in much the way Father Hehir does. Father Hehir holds that nuclear weapons exist "to be not used; their purpose is to threaten, not to strike." Ian Smart, then of IISS, has said that "nuclear weapons are exclusively destined to deter" and suggested that only certain

misguided American hawks view them "as reasonable and effective" for fighting. An instrument that destiny or purpose plainly made unreasonable and ineffective for actual use, and thus sure to remain unused, could hardly deter. It would make war more likely, not less.

William O'Brien's 1981 book, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War*, while a painstakingly honest and informed inquiry into the circumstances in which war is justified and into its discriminate and proportionate conduct in a wide range of historical conflicts, is less incisive on MAD. He gives a little credence to the possibility that at least a one-sided abandonment of the threat against innocents might be destabilizing, and, though he is aware of the possibilities, he appears to underestimate the actual progress in technologies that gives us a choice between destroying military targets and destroying innocents. However, he is right on the mark in his more recent writings answering the Deterrence Only version of the pastoral letter proposed by Father Hehir and the Jesuit Father Francis Winters.

O'Brien is blunt about the insanity of deception labeling itself deception, as does the doctrine of Deterrence Only. Father Winters has an enthusiastic explication of the pastoral letter as opting "with notable casuistic ingenuity for possession of the strategic arsenal along with renunciation of the intention to employ it." O'Brien responds that, "given the centrality of credibility to deterrence . . . this proposition is insane. What is needed is not casuistic ingenuity, but a serious commitment to face the dilemmas of nuclear deterrence without recourse to escapist diversions."

As for Father Hehir, he is aware of but troubled by the fact that some nuclear weapons are less destructive than some conventional ones. He has argued on the basis of "psychological criteria" that we may continue to threaten to use nuclear weapons but should ban their actual use because he wants to solidify in our minds the dangers of crossing the gap between conventional and nuclear weapons. He wants to set up a psychological barrier against *our* ever using them. Unfortunately, like the lay strategists who are his model, he is less concerned to set up a psychological barrier against the use of nuclear weapons by our *adversaries*. Assuring them that we would never use nuclear weapons, even in response to a nuclear attack, cancels the deterrent and, for them, opens up a psychological expressway.

One can see why "casuistry," which once meant dealing with

cases of conscience and the resolution of questions of right or wrong in conduct, acquired a bad name and came to refer to the trivial and false application of moral principles to make things seem like their opposite. The upholders of the bishops' doctrine of "Use, Never" (i.e., No Use—First-Second-Or Ever) seem unaware that an adversary might be concerned not only about the magnitude of the harm we threaten but about the likelihood that we will inflict it.

However, it is a familiar fact of everyday life that we consider implicitly in our behavior not only the size of the assorted catastrophes we might conceivably face when we get up each morning but also their likelihood. Blizzards in August might find us peculiarly unequipped to survive them. So also sunstroke in December. Neither bothers us much, nor leads us to wear furs in summer and carry parasols in winter. Even when we face adversaries and not merely environmental dangers, we have a way of arraying threats according to the probability that they will be carried out and not only in terms of the damage they would do if they were. When a threatener can execute a terrible threat to us with little harm to himself, we worry more than when he would suffer at least as much as we would. Moreover, when a threatener, who expects to destroy himself and his allies along with the aggressor, says that he has no intention whatsoever and, in fact, would regard it as immoral to execute his threat, this can only be reassuring to a potential aggressor. It is an invitation rather than a deterrent. Somehow it does not occur to those who hope to deter by a suicidal threat (which they loudly proclaim they will never execute) that they may be doing the opposite of deterring. Their policy is—to use that dread catchword—"destabilizing."

Soviet leaders who were not deterred by a threat they knew would never be executed would not, as Cardinal Krol suggests, have to be insane. It seems more nearly insane, as O'Brien says, to hold that in all circumstances, even during a stalled conventional invasion when all alternatives looked risky to them, the Soviets would be deterred "beyond question" from using nuclear weapons by our self-confessed suicidal bluff. Nonetheless, the doctrine of "Use, Never" advanced by the bishops merely makes more explicit the operational meaning of secular strategies of Deterrence Only. The Stanford physicist, Sidney Drell, recently has repeated the standard jumble about deterrence and fighting: instead of observing that our *threat* to fight back will dissuade an opponent only if he thinks we are able and if necessary willing

to fight back, Drell says deterring and fighting are incompatible goals.

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Deterrence only focuses on deterring Western responses rather than Soviet attacks. It assumes that it is really the West, and especially the United States, in its misunderstanding of the Soviets, that menaces the nuclear peace and not the Soviets. This is an assumption widely held, even by those who oppose the disarmers. Michael Howard of Oxford tells us that the Soviets are entirely satisfied with the present division of Europe and that only Western extremists are not. He grants that the Soviets would revise the rest of the world, but doesn't notice that in that process they might effectively alter the division of power within West Europe too. It would be hard for the Soviet Union to avoid altering the division of power in Europe, even if unintentionally, if it seized some future opportunity to satisfy its long expressed interest in expanding toward the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean. (England is said to have acquired its empire in a fit of absentmindedness.) Moreover, from the Soviet point of view, the destruction of the Western alliance that would result would surely be a bonus in defense of Soviet Western borders. George Kennan draws rather more satisfaction than is warranted from Soviet paranoid defensiveness. Paranoids can be dangerous.

But Michael Howard isn't terribly worried about the Soviets beginning a war. He worries about Americans. Though he has been subject to attack by E. P. Thompson and the nuclear disarmers, he sometimes sounds a little like them. He says: "Whether I could encounter the same phenomenon in the Soviet Union, I do not know. But wars begin in the minds of men, and in many American minds the flames of war seem already to have taken a very firm hold." And: "When I hear some of my American friends speak of that country [the Soviet Union], when I note how their eyes glaze over, their voices drop an octave, and they grind out the words '*the Soviets*' in tones of gravelly hatred, I become really frightened; far more frightened than I am by the nuclear arsenals themselves or the various proposals for their use." I know some of Howard's American friends (indeed have counted myself as one), but none resembling that description. If such glazed-eyed monsters controlled the U.S. arsenal, instead of planning proportionate Western responses that might credibly discourage Soviet attack,

the West might focus its attention entirely on stopping us and let the credibility of U.S. guarantees erode.

Unfortunately, the reactions to the President's speech of March 23 on protecting civilians showed that the view of some Americans, indeed of some former Cabinet officers firmly attached to MAD doctrine, resembles that of Michael Howard. These Americans, like their British counterparts, may deplore the "oversimple" view of Soviet leaders which they attribute to American "hawks." But when seized by MAD dogmas their view of U.S. leaders is more outrageously simple. They suppose American leaders to be so wantonly unconcerned about the unprecedented catastrophe of nuclear war that they are very likely to start one in any grave crisis. Anyone professing to believe that finds it even easier to believe that an American President would casually unleash nuclear war if he thought that American civil society had some substantial protection. But it is absurd to think that American *or Soviet* leaders are straining at the nuclear leash.

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Former Defense Secretary Harold Brown answered the President with a variant of the fantasy that American hawks are likely to unleash nuclear war if they think the U.S. has a fair chance of coming out gravely but not totally ruined. The bishops cite him in support of their view that there is "an overwhelming probability that a nuclear exchange would have no limits." While in office, Brown was torn between, on the one hand, the view forced upon him by evidence that Soviet arms had been going up while ours went down and, on the other hand, the view that *both* superpowers are engaged in a spiraling build-up incapable of yielding either side the ability to fight, to coerce, or even to gain some political advantage. Thus "the Soviets have as great an interest and should have as great an interest in strategic arms limitations as we do." And he oscillated between the MAD dogma that all either side needs is to be able to destroy the other as a "functioning modern society" — an implicit pact for mutual suicide — and the recognition embodied in Presidential Directive 59 that the Soviets have made no such pact and shown no desire to make any possible Soviet attack an act of suicide. Like Hamlet (and McNamara) he is "but MAD north-northwest; when the wind is southerly, he knows a hawk from a handsaw." But now the political winds blow more from the north and Brown's American

leaders are amazingly susceptible to clever briefers:

Deterrence must leave no doubt that an all-out nuclear war would destroy the nation — and the leadership — that launched it. Realistically we must contemplate deployments by both superpowers, investing huge amounts in such defensive systems. If a clever military briefer, in a time of grave crisis, with such systems in place, can persuade the political decision-makers that the defensive systems, operating together with other strategic forces, had a reasonable chance to function well enough to result in even a severely damaged “victor,” the scene will have been set for the ultimate disaster.

One might suppose that leaders on either side might be given pause if they thought that *they* would be completely destroyed even if the nation were not. But evidently the American leaders Brown contemplates wouldn't mind that and would be easily swayed by a military briefer who told them that the nation would have a reasonable chance of coming out only “severely damaged.”

The United States could have launched a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union during any of several crises that came up while we had nuclear weapons and they did not. For example, we had 50 nuclear weapons and they had none in 1948 at the time of the Berlin crisis. It would not have taken a very clever military briefer to convince our leadership that the United States would not be destroyed by a nuclear attack in 1948. Yet since McNamara introduced the notion that it was very important for the U.S. that the Soviets be able to threaten the U.S. with annihilation of its cities, the absurdities implicit in MAD have become gospel even with intelligent men like Harold Brown.

The United States never seriously considered an attack on the Soviets when it had a nuclear monopoly; nor for many years after, while Soviet nuclear forces were extremely vulnerable. The idea that it would launch nuclear aggression now is a fantasy worthy only of the conspiracy theorists in the disarmament movement. Nor should we take seriously the idea that the Soviets tremble in fear that the United States might launch a nuclear attack simply because it had deployed some defense of innocent bystanders.

Many analyses in the 1960's related the use of our strategic forces to the objective of limiting harm done to ourselves and our allies in case deterrence should fail; and they related deterring an

adversary to the ability to harm him *if* we responded. McNamara's Annual Posture Statements after the missile crisis, for example, tended to treat these two aims as independent. However, the separation misconstrues the problem of deterring. In a war, when all alternatives may be extremely risky to an adversary, we may not convince him that the alternative of nuclear attack is riskier than the others if we have persuaded him also that it can be done safely because we won't retaliate for fear of the unlimited harm we would bring on ourselves. We only complete the absurdity and undermining of deterrence when we *say* that we have no intention to fight, that is, to use nuclear weapons if deterrence fails. Unfortunately, the principle of deterrence and the principle of "Use, Never" mutually annihilate each other.

VI

Declaring—or telling oneself—that one does not really mean to use nuclear weapons if deterrence fails is one way of stilling uneasiness about threatening to kill innocents in order to deter. Another standard way of softening guilt is to say that the West should continue to raise such a threat even implicitly only if it is making serious progress toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons. That, however, does not lie solely within the West's power. It depends on others who have or may acquire nuclear weapons, and in particular it depends on the disposition of the deeply suspicious, hostile leadership of the Soviet Union.

For a brief time in the immediate aftermath of Hiroshima, some Western leaders talked fervently about world government and the need to sacrifice national sovereignties to assure world peace. British Prime Minister Clement Attlee invoked "an act of faith" by the United States, the United Kingdom, and other nations, and "a new valuation of what are called national interests." Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson "spoke continuously about a way to use nuclear energy for other things 'than killing people' " and of "the changed relation of man to his universe." It is easy to understand and sympathize with their initial emotional reaction to the enormous destruction released at Hiroshima and to feel their disappointment as Soviet behavior made evident that such hopes were utopian. But thirty-eight years later, the utopian hopes expressed by Jonathan Schell and others are more obviously groundless. Since then, Soviet behavior has made clear many times that Soviet versions of utopia differ from our own.

The Soviets see the lasting independence of Western democracies side by side with their own system as a permanent danger to its maintenance, not to say its expansion toward an international utopia. Meanwhile, there is little evidence that some plausible arrangement would lead them to surrender so powerful an instrument of coercion or defense. That, after all, was indicated in their rejection of the Baruch-Acheson-Lilienthal plan for international control of atomic energy. Stalin exhibited none of the anguish sincerely felt by Western leaders and none of their momentary hopes for a world authority governing Communist and non-Communist nations side by side. The contrast of his private view with that of Western leadership is illustrated by the accounts of such privileged and reliable witnesses as Milovan Djilas: "He spoke of the A-bomb. 'That is a powerful thing, powerful!' His expression was full of admiration. . . ."

Nor have Soviet leaders since Stalin shown any lesser awareness of the value of nuclear weapons as an implicit or explicit means of intimidation in a hostile world they do not dominate. Their value is only enhanced by the contrasting Western scruples on the same subject. If Western political as well as religious leaders take Western possession of nuclear weapons as justified only if there is progress toward agreement with the Russians to eliminate them altogether, they place in Soviet hands the decision as to whether the West will continue to maintain a nuclear deterrent.

Not all differences are negotiable. Pretending that they are suggests a willingness to disarm unilaterally—either because the Soviets prevent agreement or because they agree only to a disarmament which would be purely nominal for them but real for the West. The Greens in West Germany look forward to the total elimination of nuclear weapons and their immediate withdrawal from Eastern and Western Europe. They are not noted for their realism. However, they reject Reagan's zero option for intermediate nuclear forces in Europe as "unrealistic," even though it would seem to be a substantial step on the way to their own goal. Petra Kelly and Manon Maren-Griesbach, two of their principal leaders, explain that the zero option is "unrealistic" because the Russians would never agree to it. It is therefore "not even an honest step toward arms reduction." But the inconsistency of the Greens and their willingness to see the West accommodate to an unwavering Soviet aim to increase Soviet advantage does not differ substantially from many in the West who complain that the American government has not been able to convince the *Soviets* that we are sincere.

Paul Ramsey has understood very well what was involved in Western tendencies to take agreement with adversaries as an absolute essential. He questions the "omnicompetence of negotiation" and observes about some statements in *Pacem in Terris* that there can be hope in negotiations only if these proceed "from inner conviction" that, if such statements mean that "the way to conduct negotiations is not to permit them to fail," then for any single nation to adopt that way of negotiating would mean "its premature surrender. . . . It takes two to negotiate in any such fashion."

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The view of the present administration on this subject is, at best, mixed and sometimes lacks conviction. The President has said "it takes two to tango." But when *The New York Times* editorialist, who apparently thinks the impulse for social dancing is universal, said "So Tango!," and when the American Catholic bishops proposed negotiating rather than responding to the Soviet build-up, the administration tended mainly to justify its programs as the best way to get agreements. Implicitly, the administration, then, seems to see no escape from the holocaust except by agreeing with the Soviets. But this particular apocalyptic view also has no basis in fact.

We should recognize that utopian hopes for total nuclear disarmament cannot excuse a Western failure to defend its independence soberly without using reckless threats. Unfortunately, our elites now link the phrase "arms control" not only to millennial dreams of early complete nuclear disarmament, but to the strategy of using threats to annihilate cities as a way of deterring attack; and to a perverse myth of the "arms race" that suggests that nuclear war is imminent because our nuclear arms have been spiraling exponentially and will continue to do so unless we limit our objectives to the destruction of a fixed small number of vulnerable population centers. (No one has ever suggested that the only way to avoid an exponential race in conventional arms is to train our fire on villages rather than enemy tanks. But when it comes to nuclear arms our elites will believe almost anything.) That is not the "arms control" Donald Brennan had in mind. "Arms control," as he and the Princeton physicist, Freeman Dyson, have understood it, should aim at the more traditional and more sensible goal of restraining the bombardment of civilians. But the

phrase is now loaded with wishful and mistaken prejudices. It suggests that without arms agreements our spending on defense inevitably will rise exponentially and uncontrollably; and that with arms agreements Soviet arms efforts will diminish. Experience for nearly two decades after the Cuban missile crisis illustrates the opposite.

A serious effort to negotiate agreements with the Soviets might enable us to achieve our objectives at lower levels of armaments than might otherwise be possible. (Improved active defenses, as J. Robert Oppenheimer observed, could facilitate such bilateral agreements since they would make us safer from cheating or assaults by third countries.) Being serious about arms agreements, however, is not the same as being desperate. Even without agreements the West is quite able to deter war and defend its independence against a formidable and persistently hostile adversary committed, as the Soviet Union has been, to changing the "correlation of forces" in its favor. The contrary view is deeply pessimistic and ultimately irresponsible, leading easily to treaties and "understandings" which only worsen the situation of the West.

For a serious and indeed sincere pursuit of arms negotiation by the West calls for a sober assessment of how any arrangements contemplated in an agreement are likely to affect the West's long-term objectives of security and independence, and its intermediate objective of redressing the balance which worsened during the period of *détente*. These are not merely technical matters. The actual results of arms negotiations have, in the past, contrasted sharply with our expectations and desires. The negotiations of the last two decades started with Western expectations that the agreements achieved would reduce arms spending on both sides without any change in the balance. We assumed that the Soviets, like ourselves, had, as a principal objective, the desire to reduce the percentage of their resources devoted to arms spending and that they would choose "arms control" rather than arms competition. The record plainly shows that Western assumptions were wishful. The Soviets pursued arms agreements as a method of limiting Western spending—which did decline as a proportion of GNP by nearly half in the period after the missile crisis—while they themselves steadily increased their spending and did succeed in changing the balance. Now the West has the problem of catching up and that is especially hard to negotiate.

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Serious negotiations today must recognize the limits to what they can accomplish. We and the Soviets share an interest in avoiding mutual suicide, an interest which each of us will pursue whether or not we reach genuine agreement in various understandings and formal treaties. But the Soviets also have interests in expanding their influence and control and, in the process, destabilizing the West, if necessary by the use of external force rather than simply by manipulating internal dissension. Arms agreements might temper, but are unlikely to eliminate, this reality. In particular, there seems scant basis to hope for major economies in our security effort through negotiated limits or reductions.

Experience suggests that when the Soviets agree to close off one path of effort, they redirect their resources to other projects posing differing but no lesser dangers. On the other hand, many of the ostensible goals of arms agreements are best achieved through measures which we can and should implement on our own. Our current efforts—which a freeze would stop—to design and deploy nuclear weapons which are more accident-proof and more secure against theft or unauthorized use, are a good example. Measures to improve the safety, security, and invulnerability of nuclear weapons can be implemented by both sides individually because they make sense for each side independently of formal treaties or elaborate verification measures. These need not mean a net increase in the numbers or destructiveness of nuclear weapons in our stockpile. The United States has already greatly reduced both the megatonnage and the numbers of its nuclear weapons. It recently removed 1,000 weapons from Europe and has said that if, in accordance with NATO's decision in 1979, it installs 572 intermediate-range nuclear missiles, it will withdraw an equal number of warheads. If we increase precision further, we can drastically further reduce the number and destructiveness of our nuclear weapons. Increased precision can also improve the effectiveness of conventional weapons so that they may increasingly replace nuclear brute force. And it would improve our ability to avoid the unintended bombing of innocents with nuclear or conventional warheads. It would enlarge rather than foreclose our freedom to choose.

But many strategists in our foreign-policy establishment prefer to foreclose choice. The orthodox view, expressed by editors of our magazines dealing with foreign affairs, liberal Senators, scientists, and many former officials, holds that any use of nuclear weapons by us will almost surely end in a disaster leaving almost everybody dead or worse than dead; yet that we should have no alternative other than to threaten the bombing of cities; and that we should therefore make clear to our adversaries and allies that we will never fight a nuclear war. Anyone who holds that as the true faith will want to believe that he has no other choice. If he cannot say, like Flip Wilson, "The Devil made me do it," he can introduce the *deus ex machina* of technology: Nuclear Technology makes me do it. He is likely to be outraged by any heretic who dares suggest we might have choices.

The grand inquisitors on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had Kenneth Adelman on the rack recently during the hearings on his appointment as director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. They probed to find some trace of a doubt in him on the question as to whether we should try to be able to limit nuclear destruction. Dostoevsky would have been fascinated. His Grand Inquisitor, a venerable Jesuit who had had Christ seized on the streets of Seville, argued with the savior that his mistake was not to recognize that men cannot bear the burden of free choice. That's a point on which many in our establishment have impaled themselves.

ENDNOTES - Wohlstetter - Bishops, Statesmen, and Other Strategists

1. In the final version of the article, "80 one-megaton" was printed as "100 one-megaton." Albert Wohlstetter wrote a letter to the journal's editor to correct this error. See Wohlstetter, "Letter to Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary*," June 16, 1983, Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter Papers, Writings, Box 180, Folder 13. — *Zarate*

2. Wohlstetter had intended "after Hiroshima" to be added after the word "immediately." See *ibid.* — *Zarate*