

# THE HERITAGE LECTURES

92

The Future of  
Deterrence

*By The Honorable Alexander M. Haig, Jr.*



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## THE FUTURE OF DETERRENCE

by The Honorable Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

Throughout the 20th Century, democratic leaders have sought to create a system of international relations in which disputes between nations could be resolved peacefully under the guidance of law. In the course of this quest, there have been tragic failures. The theory that the balance of power upheld by one nation could prevent aggression was discredited by the first World War. The second World War dashed the belief that a peaceful coalition in the League of Nations could provide collective security. In the aftermath of that war, renewed hopes for peace through a strengthened United Nations fell victim to the conflict between the democracies and Soviet-led totalitarianism.

Today, the peace of the world is disturbed by conflicts in many regions. Yet we must ask ourselves, how have we avoided a global conflagration? Surely, the answer cannot be found in the confluence of ideology. If anything, the passage of years has convinced Americans, and all nations who cherish liberty, that Moscow's essential beliefs have not changed. Soviet-style Marxist-Leninism remains an engine for seizing and exercising power. As a locomotive for economic and social progress, it derailed long ago. But for the Soviet leaders, no matter how openly they acknowledge the imperfections of their society, no matter how striking the degree of glasnost, the ideology that denies Western values at home and abroad still justifies their continued rule. The Soviet model of international relations continues to envisage a hierarchy of subservient states, all of them responsive to Soviet interests, if not copies of Soviet society.

Diplomacy alone could never moderate this conflict. How often have we seen the use of force to subdue unwilling nations or to keep them within a sphere of influence contrary to their inclinations and traditions. All too frequently, the yearnings for change have been suppressed or perverted by such force. And, as we have learned to our sorrow, the range of such aggression knows no precise geographical limits. Kampuchea, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and, in our hemisphere, Cuba

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and Nicaragua, are melancholy monuments to the reach of Soviet or Soviet-sponsored military force.

We are left then with only one answer. The peace of the world depends upon deterrence and specifically, the deterrence of aggression across a spectrum of force, ranging from the nuclear to the conventional. Deterrence has many components. There must be adequate capabilities, in fact and in perception, to meet challenges at any level. There must be sufficient will, reflected in the sacrifices to sustain those capabilities, to convince the would-be aggressor that his challenge will be met. Finally, of course, there must be wisdom, to use deterrence to build a more peaceful international order in which democratic values can flourish.

Experience with deterrence thus far teaches that these elements are interrelated. The failure of one is likely to result in the failure of all. By now, diplomats know the truth that the arguments of interest and right must be escorted by the argument of countervailing force if our positions are to be taken seriously by our adversaries, especially Moscow. We also know--or should know--that diplomacy will never win at the bargaining table what we are unwilling or unable to do for ourselves. And every democratic leader has come to understand that the buildup of military power, while necessary, will never merit lasting public support in the absence of constructive efforts to reduce international tensions.

Today, this well-knit and effective structure of deterrence faces a determined and dangerous assault. By far the greatest threat stems from a relentless Soviet military buildup across the board. Far from interpreting arms control agreements as a signal for restraint, Moscow has exploited every loophole to improve its forces. The prompt, hard target ballistic missiles that threaten the survival of U.S. ICBMs are being modernized. Not content with the SS-20, that endangered the theater balance in Europe, the Soviets are now deploying shorter range mobile weapons--the SS-21, 22 and 23, which can be equipped with conventional, nuclear, or chemical warheads. Where loopholes could not be found, the Soviets simply violated agreements, most notoriously the ABM Treaty, through the Krasnoyarsk radar. This radar, the SS-10 and SS-12 surface-to-air missiles, extensive ABM research, a vast civil defense program and a deployed anti-satellite system, may be parts of a larger pattern. Some analysts believe that the USSR is preparing a "break-out" in missile defenses--a strategic surprise equivalent to a latter-day Sputnik.

We also face a lower level, conventional attack on deterrence. We call it terrorism. Fanatical groups, too often supported by governments, are attempting, often successfully, to intimidate the U.S. and other democracies into conceding vital values and interests. The terrorists evidently believe that no matter how powerful our military forces, their tactics enable them to slip beneath deterrence to work their will.

We are now in the midst of a corrosive controversy stemming from the divided counsels and questionable policies that have marked our approach to terrorism thus far. Yet in the end I believe we face more danger from the near mishap at the Reykjavik summit than the actual mishap in Tehran. Our confusion about the role of deterrence is eroding our moral convictions, clouding our understanding of how our interests can be defended, and finally, obstructing the measures we must take to strengthen our security.

All of the illusions, uncertainty, and error that characterize our debates have been translated into a posture best described as the "three zeros." The first "zero" is the proposal to remove U.S. and Soviet intermediate nuclear missiles from Europe. The second "zero" is to eliminate offensive ballistic missiles from the U.S. and Soviet arsenals. The third "zero" is to set the superpowers--and the other nuclear powers with them--on the road to a nuclear free world, in which deterrence presumably will be upheld by conventional forces, or become unnecessary altogether.

Some believe that contrary to the laws of mathematics, these three zeros add up to something--a safer world. But these zeros will never be more than what they are. They will always add up to less than something. The deterrence we have now, dangerous though it may be, will be vastly diminished by each and every one of these proposals. While we debate the pros and cons of SDI, while the lawyers have been set loose to discover what they will from the carefully drawn imprecision of the ABM Treaty, the "zeros" continue to infiltrate our thinking and even our diplomatic positions.

Let me begin with the first zero option, the proposal to eliminate U.S. and Soviet intermediate nuclear forces from Europe, the most heavily armed continent in the world. The background to this proposal can be stated briefly.

From the beginning of their deployment in the late 1970s, the Soviet SS-20s threatened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's deterrence because these multiple-warhead ballistic mobile missiles added an overwhelming intermediate nuclear imbalance to the existing Western-theater nuclear deficiencies. These nuclear imbalances, together with longstanding conventional shortfalls, compelled the alliance to rely illogically even more heavily on American strategic forces at a time when the U.S. strategic arsenal was itself in urgent need of improvement. Modernization of alliance theater nuclear forces was therefore essential--along with conventional enhancement--to restore the "flex" in the alliance strategy of flexible response and to strengthen the credibility of the transatlantic link.

That is why, as Secretary of State, I opposed the so-called zero option in 1981 because in my view modernization was essential to the

alliance's basic military capability. We had to establish two cardinal principles:

First, that Soviet attempts to gain unilateral advantages would be countered by comparable Western systems which would lay the basis for effective arms control by demonstrating the futility of their buildup. We sustained this principle through the deployment of Pershing 2s, with their rapid response, high speed, and great accuracy, leaving the Soviets to reflect upon the wisdom of a strategy that had resulted in U.S. missiles five minutes from Soviet territory rather than fifteen.

Second, that arms control in theater weapons would be measured by its impact on overall global nuclear balances, lest the result reduce the effectiveness of our deterrence, not just in Europe but world-wide. We could sustain this principle by insisting that deterrence at lower levels meant real reduction in Soviet capability, not just a temporary shifting of the risk from west of the Urals to points farther east.

Today, we are in great danger of violating both of these principles. Reviving the zero option is to revisit the original mistake of trading necessary modernization for only one Soviet system. Trading all the Pershings for reduction of SS-20s in Europe--a version of the famous "walk in the woods" formula, properly rejected until now by the President--grants the Soviets unilateral military advantage.

To do so while ignoring the recent Soviet deployment of shorter range missiles that can substitute for the SS-20s would actually worsen NATO's military situation. Both alliance solidarity and the real, if modest, improvement in NATO's capability represented by the Pershing/cruise missile deployment would be lost.

Taking either of these options while leaving SS-20s at large in Asia compounds the blunder, burning our alliance candle at both the European and Asian ends. Does anyone believe that the mobile SS-20s will be restricted to eastern latitudes and longitudes during a crisis? Could there be any clearer signal to our allies and friends--including the People's Republic China--that "improved" U.S.-Soviet relations means improvement at their expense?

The European reaction to the reappearance of the zero option at the Reykjavik summit should instruct us about the reality of this false course. Some Pentagon officials have been complaining lately that our European allies lack forthrightness, which leads to confusion and wishful thinking. It is true that on the subject of nuclear weapons the Europeans suffer from a schizophrenia: they want desperately to be defended but they want equally desperately to avoid war--any war, nuclear or conventional. Sometimes, this psychology breeds illusions about Soviet ambitions. Yet sometimes it also



inspires great clarity. In the wake of the summit, our allies were much less perturbed that the zero options failed because of SDI and much more disturbed that it might have succeeded even if the Soviets had accepted SDI. Surely, our much maligned European friends did not sacrifice clarity simply to achieve consensus.

Their concern is both logical and clear: The zero option should be put into the realm of the future while, for the sake of European security, the necessary modernization of NATO's intermediate nuclear forces should continue. Such a course does not rule out reduction of INF on both sides but only if both the new Soviet short range missiles, and the conventional imbalances are also taken into account. The Europeans should repeat this formulation often, so that even those least willing to hear it in Washington do not fail to hear it.

What of the second zero option, the idea of eliminating strategic ballistic missiles, leaving deterrence in the hands of bombers, cruise missiles, and conventional forces? Some proponents of this scheme argue that the speed and accuracy of ballistic missiles tempt a first strike. Eliminating them therefore constitutes a step towards stability. Presumably, in this view, the additional time made available by the slower moving bombers and cruise missiles gives the target country more options, including the option of a more capable defense, while making the results more uncertain in the aggressor's calculation.

Upon closer analysis, however, this zero option emerges as dubious, to say the least. As Henry Kissinger has pointed out, the American people and their allies would still be vulnerable to nuclear attack. The Soviets could overcome part of the timing problem by forward basing. Surely the Soviets would not be found lacking in ways to station their aircraft and submarines within shorter range of our territory. Many are so deployed today. Thus, the opportunities and advantages of preemption could be recreated.

In Europe, of course, the argument that the elimination of ballistic missiles would reduce the danger does not apply. Shorter distances mean the existing Soviet cruise missiles and bombers would hardly be slower to arrive on NATO targets than ICBMs. From the perspective of our allies, both "intermediate range" as well as short range weapons are already strategic.

Even more important, the uncertainty that muddies the aggressor's calculations will distort our own. Deterrence depends upon uncertainty to the extent that an attacker should not be sure that a war will be waged only at the level of force that he chooses to employ. But he is deterred decisively when he knows for certain that his objectives, at whatever level of force, will not be achieved.

Can we be more confident that our bombers and cruise missiles, rather than ICBMs, will penetrate already formidable Soviet air defenses to reach their targets?

Would we be more ready to use nuclear weapons in the defense of our allies if we can be attacked by cruise missiles or bombers rather than ICBMs? These uncertainties undermine rather than strengthen deterrence.

Finally, we should face up to the third zero--the nuclear free world. It is easy enough to castigate this vision for the illusion that it is. The issue of verification alone defeats it. As the old saying has it, in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. In an otherwise non-nuclear world, the one-bomb power would dominate.

Yet this vision retains its popular hold on the imagination. After all, nuclear holocaust could destroy our civilization. Is nuclear deterrence immoral because it must be based on threats that if carried out would obliterate much of the world? Are we not much better off to accept the risks of conventional defeat than a "successful" defense by weapons as dangerous to us as to our opponents?

Immorality is a word often abused. To me it means an action unworthy of man or against the essence of humanity. In the final analysis, we oppose tyranny and totalitarianism because these doctrines are immoral. We oppose the subjugation of individual freedom--the birthright of every human being--to an arbitrary human will. But the values of freedom and democracy do not exist as hothouse plants. They must be allowed to flourish. They can take root in every land. And while we do not insist that the world be remade in our own image, we do insist that it not be remade through force in someone else's image. Twice in this century we have fought world wars to defend this principle. We know from bitter experience that if we are not prepared to respect our own values, no one else will do it for us.

The power of nuclear weapons and Soviet hostility to democracy confront us with seemingly impossible choices. If we say "better red than dead," then we sacrifice our essential humanity, that which makes life worth living. If we say we shall defend ourselves by committing suicide, then we sacrifice life itself. Clearly, in this world, the only moral choice is to deter such alternatives, which are not choices at all. The President has said, "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." The only way to assure that and to preserve freedom is to deter it with all of the capabilities at our disposal, including nuclear weapons.

Can we deter war with conventional weapons alone? Clearly not, if the other side has nuclear bombs. But even if this were not the



case, the history of this century tells a cautionary tale about conventional deterrence. We should face the truth. Only an overwhelming superiority of conventional forces could do the job. The Secretary of State has declared his conviction that we would have the "will" to provide such forces. That would mean not only much larger budgets but a much greater degree of regimentation to provide the ships, the planes, the tanks, the artillery, the rifles--and the men and women--to succeed. Are we prepared to convert to a war economy? And even if we were, would the permanent mobilization of a larger part of America and Europe still deter against the size and power of the Red Army? Would we not find ourselves engaged in an even greater arms race, with less security to show for it?

The zero option in Europe, the zero option for ballistic missiles, and the illusion of a world free of nuclear weapons are all dangerous distractions from the real problem of sustaining deterrence. If adopted, in practice or even as goals, such fallacies have the power to damage our existing defenses against war or coercion without putting anything in their place. The current arguments over SDI and arms control should be seen in the general framework of deterrence, not simply as single issues to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Let me state my views on SDI. I support the exploration of strategic defense. As the United States noted after signing the ABM Treaty, lack of progress in dealing with the threat of an offensive missiles imbalance would compel us to reopen the defense issue. I do not know--no one knows--whether one day we can create a leak proof defense for all Americans against nuclear weapons. Yet it seems clear that research along these lines will surely yield technology, which will complicate the calculation of an aggressor. We simply cannot afford to yield the right to explore strategic defense as an important element in our deterrence.

SDI, however, is not the only element nor can it be the sole salvation of deterrence. To prevent aggression, we must be prepared to show the Soviets that they cannot out-arm us, that they cannot over-awe us and that, when all is said and done, they will be able neither to coerce us nor to defeat us. The sad story of our inability to deploy MXs even in the modest numbers specified by the Scowcroft Commission, of our continuous conflict over the follow-on "Midgetman," and of our confused debate over SDI, has left us little choice. We search in vain for the consensus that will enable us to put into place those capabilities that set the stage for genuine arms control. I mean arms control that strengthens deterrence at lower levels of risk and preferably at lower level of arms.

Arms control today appears to be a rickety and half-dismantled structure. The fact is that if arms control alone must bear the burden of compensating for our unwillingness to offset Soviet capabilities, it will always be a failure. To put it bluntly, it is that very unwillingness on our part to do what we need to do in the

face of increased Soviet capability that has brought us to the current impasse. The great national consensus to strengthen our defenses, so evident a few years ago, has now dissolved in confusion about deterrence, arms control, and the demands of the budget deficit.

At Reykjavik, the President and Mr. Gorbachev came to a moment of truth on this score. Perhaps the Soviets believed on the basis of the Daniloff affair, the forthcoming congressional elections, and the White House's determination to sell subsidized grain, that Mr. Reagan would choose the zeros for the sake of his political future. The President, however, has grasped in his way that without SDI--an offsetting capability against the Soviet threat--no solid or stable foundation for real arms control could be laid.

Now we see the unedifying spectacle of arguments over the "loose" or "tight" interpretation of the ABM Treaty. The record will show that we and the Soviets have reversed ourselves on this issue since 1972. At that time, the Soviets wanted a loose interpretation. Later, for reasons we can only speculate, they changed their minds. We have followed the opposite course.

These arguments can only be a prelude to a rerun of all or part of Reykjavik, but this time with a happy ending for the Soviets. Moscow has seen that each and every one of three zero options is a potent weapon to disrupt the West and forestall the modernization of our capabilities. So they will seek through new-found flexibility on SDI to bind the United States to a framework that contains one or more of those options. They know that such a framework would inflict serious political and military damage upon the structure of deterrence that currently preserves the peace long before SDI arrived to supplement it. The outcome would be a folly of truly historic proportions.

To sustain deterrence in the near term, we must do something to relieve the mounting vulnerability of our land-based ICBMs to a first strike. Only a larger deployment of the MX, as advocated by the Scowcroft Commission, offers the best opportunity to remedy our deficiency in prompt, hard target retaliation over the next five years. Only the development of the Midgetman gives us a better shot at a less vulnerable land-based missile force over the next ten years. These actions would show the Soviets that we will not permit them to enjoy a lasting unilateral advantage. By doing so, we would also solidify the basis for equitable arms control.

But if we do not seize these options, what are the alternatives? Can we really expect the Soviets to trade their existing ICBM advantages for a research program, the results of which cannot be foreseen? Can we contemplate any form of arms agreement which will not constrain our exploration of an SDI that might protect our cities? Will there be any other choice than to plan for the earliest

possible deployment of a defensive system which reduces our ballistic vulnerability?

Only if we pursue a balanced program of both actual strategic modernization and SDI research will we be able to reduce our existing vulnerabilities. Only if we lift from SDI the burden of being the sole incentive for the Soviets to negotiate will we be able to achieve a useful arms control agreement. And only if we reject the various zero options will we be able to avoid the weakening of our deterrence. To do otherwise is to risk repeating the very errors that have put us in our current predicament. Such a course offers neither safety for ourselves nor for the world.

Thirty-two years ago, Winston Churchill made a fateful observation. "It may well be," he said, "That we shall, by a process of sublime irony, have reached a stage in this story where safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation." It may be a noble objective to try to separate this often unhappy family, to try to escape this sublime irony, but before we do so, we ought to be sure which brother will survive and whether the child can live apart from its parent. In the final analysis, freedom itself and our own survival depend upon the future of a secure deterrence.

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