

## NUCLEAR STRATEGIES AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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Amid great controversy, the Reagan administration has undertaken an ambitious programme of modernising the US strategic forces. Some of the new weapons are offensive in character. They include the land-based MX, the submarine-launched Trident II, cruise missiles, and two new bombers—the B-1 and the 'Stealth'—to carry them. In addition, new ground-launched cruise missiles are to be stationed in Europe along with a medium-range land-based missile, the Pershing II. These are all counter-force weapons. They threaten Soviet retaliatory forces. The new systems enhance the possibility of striking first and raise the possibility—at least in theory—of limiting the damage that the Soviet Union will be able to inflict on the US in response.<sup>1</sup>

The Reagan administration is also attempting to improve its defence capacity. Civil defence programmes are receiving more money. T.K. Jones, an Assistant Secretary of Defense, argues that the US can rebound from a full-scale nuclear attack within two to four years. The MX may be deployed with a ballistic missile defensive system that some claim can be expanded into a full scale ABM. After a March speech promising that new exotic technologies have become feasible, Reagan established an office that will accelerate development of space-based lasers and particle beam weapons designed to intercept Soviet missiles before they can strike the US. Administration officials believe that this commitment to an effective defence permits political leaders to act more forcefully. A commitment to improving defence capacity demonstrates a resolve that can be translated into negotiating advantages.

Members of the Reagan administration have also been quite forthcoming in their discussion of fighting and winning both limited and protracted nuclear wars.<sup>2</sup> A commitment to developing warfighting capabilities can be seen in the renewed concern of the Pentagon with preparing command, control and communication facilities (C<sup>3</sup>) against the effects of blast, radiation, and electromagnetic pulse. Actually to fight a nuclear war, a political leader must be able to contact the military forces at his command. Assessment of damage, determining the opponent's intentions, deciding on a proper response, communicating that decision reliably, and maintaining control over military forces so that the actual response matches the original decision are all notoriously difficult to achieve in war. The

unique conditions of nuclear war make reliable C<sup>3</sup> even more difficult to achieve.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the Reagan administration has plunged ahead with efforts to protect communication lines, computers, and command stations from interruption. It has been called the most important priority of the recently announced strategic modernisation package.

The Reagan administration has begun arms control talks with Moscow, but argues that progress is dependent on modified Soviet behaviour in other areas of foreign policy such as Poland, Afghanistan and Central America. The strategists associated with the Reagan administration believe that the deployment of weapon systems will lead to greater political influence over Moscow. For them, arms negotiations are not a process of mutual concession with the aim of preserving rough parity. Nor is arms control *per se* held to be in the national security interest of the US. Negotiations are, instead, a strategy to mould Soviet behaviour. In the meantime, the specific proposals advanced by the President under START are geared to achieving superiority or forcing Soviet rejection.<sup>4</sup>

In pursuit of these goals, the Reagan administration is willing to spend vast sums of money. The total obligational authority of the Pentagon for 1984 is more than two hundred and fifty billion dollars. Over the next five years defence spending will total 1.8 trillion dollars. Some administration members argue in private that it will be necessary to spend an additional 750 billion dollars over the same time period. Military spending will rise from 24 to 37 per cent of the defence budget.

The Reagan administration's wholesale adoption of a nuclear war-fighting posture has developed in parallel with foreign policy commitments predicated on unremitting hostility towards the Soviet Union. Before examining the connection between Reagan's nuclear strategy and his foreign policy, let me outline in more detail the main features of the debate over the use of nuclear weapons.

#### *Deterrence versus Warfighting Postures*

Strategic doctrines are usually divided into two groups. The first, called deterrence, recognises that nuclear war would inevitably end in holocaust. To talk of winners and losers in this context is nonsense. The only purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter, or prevent, war between the US and the Soviet Union from breaking out. Bernard Brodie, an early deterrence theorist, recognised that the bomb changed the very way in which we think about war. He argued that 'thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to prevent them. It can have almost no other useful purpose'.<sup>5</sup> Brodie anticipated the fact that nuclear weapons would make war irrational for either side.

The second group, advocates of warfighting doctrines (or what is sometimes called 'extended deterrence'), admits that the level of destruction

may be great in a conflict involving nuclear weapons. But, as in all other wars, there will still be winners and losers. There are two purposes for weapons. The first is to win the war between the US and the Soviet Union. The second is to threaten war so that the US can exert greater influence on other issues of foreign policy. Colin Gray, a supporter of warfighting and a consultant to the Reagan administration, argues that if 'American nuclear power is to support US foreign policy objectives, the United States must possess the ability to wage nuclear war *rationally*.'<sup>6</sup> It is this view that now dominates governing circles in the US.

Those associated with the deterrence position include former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, former head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency Paul Warnke, former CIA director William Colby, and former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. Prominent members of the warfighting camp include Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Burt, former National Security Council staffer Richard Pipes and Reagan administration advisors Colin Gray, Scott Thompson, and William Van Cleave.

Let us look a little more closely at the arguments of each group.

The first contrast between the deterrence and warfighting schools concerns the posture that strategists and decision makers should adopt towards nuclear weapons. Those in the deterrence camp believe that the development of nuclear weapons and their use in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a qualitative break in the history of war. They recognised that nuclear weapons carry enormous destructive power and that the impact of even a few bombs would be catastrophic. As military instruments, nuclear bombs are unique.

The advocates of the warfighting position strongly disagree. Nuclear weapons are more destructive than other weapons, but they are not qualitatively different. Our thinking about nuclear wars, they argue, should not be different from our thinking about previous wars. For example, any past introduction of a new weapon has been in combination with existing weapons. There is no reason to think that nuclear weapons are any different in this respect from the machine gun, the spear, the rifle, or a *tank*.<sup>7</sup> The bomb can be used alongside the existing arsenal. There is no great divide between nuclear and conventional weapons.

The second contrast concerns the connection between nuclear weapons and 'unacceptable damage'. The deterrence position recognises that it is comparatively easy for one side to inflict a level of damage that the other side considers unacceptable. The warfighters disagree. Critical to the exchange is the precise definition of what constitutes 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' damage. Most readers of the *Socialist Register* would no doubt consider the dropping of just one bomb on one city 'unacceptable' and would, as a result, be deterred from starting a war with this as a consequence. On the other hand, American militarists have argued that

the Soviet Union would accept the loss of some thirty million people since that was the approximate level of damage that they suffered in World War II.<sup>8</sup> American policy makers have, for the most part, followed former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's definition of unacceptable damage as twenty-five per cent of the civilian population and seventy five per cent of the industrial capacity. This official conception of 'unacceptable' can be achieved by delivering as few as 400 bombs. Those in the deterrence camp feared nuclear war because they believed that any exchange of hostilities would inevitably escalate to at least this level of destruction. For them, nuclear weapons obviated the Clausewitz dictum that war was the extension of politics by other means. Nuclear war, they argued, could only be the continuation of madness.

Those in the warfighting position are not so sure. They believe that nuclear wars can be kept limited in the sense that they involve levels of destruction that do not threaten the existence of the other state. Nuclear wars can also be protracted. They can take days, weeks, even months. They reject the belief of the deterrence school that wars involving nuclear weapons will inevitably escalate to an all-out exchange leading to the destruction of both sides. Clausewitz has not been transcended. The warfighters believe that it is still possible to think of war as the extension of politics.

A third contrast concerns the targeting of nuclear weapons. Under deterrence, the main purpose of nuclear forces is to prevent war by threatening unacceptable damage to the other side. To do this most effectively, American bombs should be aimed at Soviet cities and the industrial base. This is called counter-city targeting. The supporters of warfighting doctrines favour counterforce targeting or aiming at the military forces and command centres of the other side. Counterforce raises the possibility of striking the other side so that they will not be able to retaliate. The logical extension of counterforce is a first-strike capability or the ability to strike at the other side's retaliatory forces so that they are either unable to reply, or can reply only at a level that the attacking country considers 'acceptable'.

Since many targets, especially missile silos and command bunkers, are 'hardened' with steel and concrete, destroying them requires fantastic accuracies—as close as a tenth-of-a-mile. (Many of the new weapon systems are achieving these levels of accuracy—at least in testing carried out under optimum conditions.)

A fourth comparison concerns the possibility of erecting an effective defence against nuclear attack. The deterrence position has always been sceptical and has respected the weight of the scientific community which has argued that the difficulties associated with intercepting warheads travelling at close to eighteen thousand miles an hour are virtually impossible to overcome. Some in the warfighting camp, on the other hand,

believe in the possibility of erecting a 'layered' defence. This includes the so-called exotic, space-based systems such as lasers and particle-beam weapons designed to intercept Soviet missiles shortly after they leave their silos; exo-atmospheric systems that are supposed to intercept warheads before they re-enter the atmosphere; endo-atmosphere defences that will intercept warheads before they explode on the earth's surface; and, finally, a programme of civil defence that properly conceived and carried out can save the lives of millions. The technical evidence stands against them. Yet advocates of warfighting argue that their support for counterforce targeting and erecting a defence against nuclear attack is morally superior to deterrence which would target civilian populations and, by denying the possibilities of defence, leave oneself open to attack.

Those in the deterrence camp recognise that the Soviet Union has had, at least since the late-sixties, the capacity to inflict unacceptable damage against the US. No matter what the US does, no matter how effective the first blow, the Soviet Union will be able to retaliate. The ability of the US and the Soviet Union to inflict unacceptable damage on the other is called mutually assured destruction or MAD. MAD is a fact of life in a world afflicted with nuclear weapons.

But those supporting the warfighting posture are concerned with another question: what if deterrence fails. Their answer is that there will be war and the US must be prepared to fight it. After the hostilities end, one side will be in a better position than the other to organise whatever remains. The victor will be in a position to issue orders to the loser. To maximise the possibility of winning, the US should demonstrate its superiority at every possible step in a 'ladder of escalation'. Political and military leaders should enjoy the flexibility of selecting from a 'menu of options', both nuclear and conventional. In particular the US should never, in their view, be in a position where it would be deterred from using nuclear weapons first.

Another contrast concerns Soviet intentions. The deterrence camp thinks that Moscow accepts the inevitability of holocaust should a war start. Basing its analysis on statements from government officials and the more recent pronouncements of military officers, those in the first school argue that Moscow accepts the reality of MAD, does not really have a serious civil defence programme, and wants to reduce the risk of nuclear war. The warfighting camp argues that Soviet 'strategic culture' does not reject the idea of fighting and winning a nuclear war. Basing their analysis on military manuals they argue that Moscow plans for nuclear war in much the same terms as they have previous wars. The implication is that the US fails to do likewise at its own peril.

The final issue dividing the two positions is the stance taken towards arms control efforts. The logical result of deterrence is support for talks designed to regulate the competition between the two superpowers.

Supporters of deterrence hope to use arms treaties to isolate nuclear weapons from the inevitable tension between Washington and Moscow. Negotiations are seen in the direct national security interests of the US.

Warfighting advocates may reject arms negotiations entirely or, more commonly, see these talks within the context of all relations with the Soviet Union. A clever negotiating stance may enhance superiority, or elicit compliant behaviour from Moscow on other crucial issues. The prospect of arms control should be used as leverage. If Moscow wants arms control, it should be willing to pay for it. The implication is that nuclear weapons can be used in pursuit of other defence interests and foreign policy goals.

### *The Instability of Deterrence*

Clearly the actual history of US strategic policy is much more complicated than a simple comparison between deterrence and warfighting would imply. As outlined above, deterrence and warfighting doctrines should be seen as ideal types, with the actual behaviour of a particular policy maker or even an administration falling somewhere between the two poles.

A further complication is that governments present different policies to different audiences. It is necessary to make a distinction among *declaratory policy*, that which is announced publicly; *internal policy*, that which is actually believed by government officials; and *operational policy*, that which the actual force structure is capable of carrying out. In general, declaratory policy tends to focus on deterrence. The internal, or actual policy, is more a warfighting doctrine. (In fact, actual policy has been more a warfighting position than one of deterrence since the mid-fifties.)<sup>9</sup> The operational forces tend, for a variety of technical and bureaucratic reasons, to lag behind internal policy.

Given all this, it is still important to realise that as a doctrine, **deterrence** is, by itself, unstable. Pressures generated within the ideology and structure of deterrence have produced significant dangers even without considering the perils offered by the warfighting position. For example, a 'pure' or minimal deterrence position requires a limited arsenal; certainly no more than several hundred bombs. Yet the United States has more than ten thousand strategic bombs and another twenty thousand tactical warheads. One reason for this instability is the paradox built within the concept of deterrence itself. Under deterrence, nuclear weapons are not to be used because to do so will produce unacceptable levels of destruction on both sides. The arms race is a rough standoff. Stability comes from a balance of terror. Yet the stability implied in deterrence is based on threatened destruction. To make this threat credible, decision makers approve the construction of powerful offensive weapons systems, and engage in various acts of *sabre-rattling*.<sup>10</sup> Political leaders who do not seriously believe in the possibility of actually fighting a nuclear war will

nonetheless procure better weapons and make threats to use them because the doctrine of deterrence requires them to do so. The weapons and threats acquire a history. Organisations establish a vested interest in maintaining 'their' weapons. Or they lobby for new ones. The threats become institutionalised. The result is an environment of brinkmanship within which supporters of warfighting doctrines can operate to their own advantage.

There are other important elements of instability within the deterrence position. The advocates of deterrence find nuclear weapons politically useful, even if they are not to be used. In actual battle, it may be recognised that the level of destruction obviates Clausewitz's dictum regarding war as the extension of politics. But in the *preparation for battle*, nuclear forces certainly remain political. For example, nuclear weapons not only preserve the balance between Moscow and Washington, but are instrumental in preserving a bipolar world. The respective nuclear umbrellas have a significant impact on the structure and politics of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Private messages can be exchanged with the Soviet Union through the medium of nuclear forces. All American presidents have threatened to use nuclear weapons, in part to maintain a commitment to Europe, in part to lower the chances of a Soviet response to US conventional intervention in regional conflicts. Strategic war between the US and USSR may be rejected. Yet the structure of forces required to sustain the threatened use of nuclear weapons go far beyond the requirements of minimal deterrence. Domestically, a president can support certain types of weapons to protect himself from his political opponents. The specific configuration of nuclear weapons is a valuable way of managing Pentagon politics. The secrecy and command procedures accompanying nuclear weapons sustain the authority of a president within the governmental structure. And his virtual control over public pronouncements regarding strategic policy make it possible to influence and even manipulate the electorate. Nuclear forces, in other words, are 'politically useful'. It is hard for a president, for both international and domestic reasons, to give them up, even if he doesn't expect to use them in a war. Additional breaks with the pure deterrent posture are the result.

Deterrence has been further undermined by technical advances in weapon systems. The accuracy of ballistic missiles has improved—at least in tests—and now sustain counterforce arguments regarding the possibility of limited strikes against the other side's land-based missiles. Computers and surveillance techniques have also improved to the point where some supporters of the warfighting position are able to argue that it will be possible to detect and track Soviet submarines. Technical advances are also occurring in defensive systems. Accurate land-based and cruise missiles, in combination with anti-submarine warfare and an effective defence, raise the prospect of achieving a disarming first-strike. In reality,

a first-strike remains impossible. But changes in technology are enabling advocates of warfighting to argue that a first-strike and more limited counterforce scenarios may be possible to execute in the near future. In the meantime, no president, including those believing in deterrence, has been able to block these technical developments.

Another factor that drives the arms race forward and makes deterrence unstable is the pattern of inter-service rivalries that exist within the US military. For example, an almost unchallengeable component of American strategic thinking is that each leg of a triad that includes bombers, submarines, and land-based missiles must be capable of independently delivering unacceptable damage.<sup>11</sup> The result, at a minimum, is a tripling of the four hundred equivalent megaton bombs that are necessary to deliver the prevailing definition of unacceptable damage. In addition, presidents are often forced to compromise and bargain with various military interests. Even a president who enjoyed such impeccable anti-communist credentials as Richard Nixon found a price tag attached to his desire to sign a SALT agreement that had the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There was a trade-off. In exchange for Congressional testimony from the Joint Chiefs that SALT I would not undermine US national security, Nixon approved construction of a new submarine—the Trident.<sup>12</sup> The Trident boat is larger and has longer range. But most importantly, it will carry a new missile, the Trident D-5 that is capable of counterforce levels of accuracy. In effect, a political bargain that was made in the early seventies to stabilise deterrence created the conditions that may undermine deterrence in the late 1980s. There are other examples of this trade-off dynamic. When Carter cancelled the B-1 bomber—temporarily as it turned out—the Air Force was given permission to develop cruise missiles. The MX was in part a price for military support for SALT II. This pattern of trade-offs has less to do with relations between the Soviet Union and the United States than with politics inside the Pentagon. Presidents have been loath to tamper with the Pentagon for their only other choice would be the deliberate mobilisation of public opinion against the arms race. Instead they have chosen a series of accommodations. These have preserved political niches that have been exploited by opponents of deterrence.

The implication of these factors—the paradox embedded in deterrence, presidential interests, improvements in technology, and trade-offs with the Pentagon—is that, left to their own devices, the deterrence camp will be defeated by the warfighting camp. Only popular movements can rescue the minimal deterrence position yet also create movement towards genuine disarmament.

### *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*

Let us now return to the issue of foreign policy and its connection to the development of nuclear weapons. The most important reason driving up

the number of nuclear weapons is that the bombs have been harnessed to Washington's foreign policy goals *even by those who did not expect to use them in actual combat*. Those former American government officials who are currently quite visible in their opposition to Reagan's strategic policy, approved, *while in office*, of quantitative and qualitative improvements in the nuclear arsenal. In effect, they recognised that a nuclear war with the Soviet Union would be terrible. But they maintained that if the US could stay ahead in numbers of warheads, accuracy and other measures those advantages could be translated into political leverage on other issues. For example, it was felt that the USSR would be much less likely to aid their third world allies if the US held nuclear superiority. If the US intervened in the Middle East, Moscow would be less likely to respond. If Washington attempted to destabilise a revolutionary government, the Soviet Union would be reluctant to develop a counter response, all for fear of taking the first step in a scenario in which the US held the winning hand.<sup>13</sup> Thus nuclear weapons proved useful for American international interests.

By and large, this thinking has been followed by both the deterrence and warfighting supporters. The difference is that the former thought it was important to stop short of war, and the latter took more seriously the task of preparing for a war that would use nuclear weapons. In addition, to further the political influence of nuclear weapons, *every* post-war US administration has ruled out a declaration of no first use. Washington has deliberately preserved uncertainty concerning the policy of the US towards the initiation of nuclear war. Closely coupled to the refusal to rule out no first use is the practice of American presidents of threatening to use these weapons in crisis situations. Dan Ellsberg has listed twelve cases where the US had used nuclear weapons, not in the literal sense, but as a deliberate threat on behalf of American interests.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, every president has *not* made a concerted effort to improve the operational forces—the actual warheads, delivery systems, and communications—in a way that enhanced their capacity to fight a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. In other words, while the actual policy regarding nuclear weapons has consistently been one of warfighting, the effort to bring the operational forces more in line with actual policy has been more episodic. In fact, such an effort has only happened in four distinct periods: between 1948 and 1950 while Truman was President; in 1961 and 1962, the first two years of the Kennedy administration; the last two years of the Nixon administration; and, finally, from the last year of the Carter presidency to the present. (Note that in the last case the dividing line is not between Carter and Reagan. Reagan has merely continued—albeit with a substantial boost—the commitment to prepare to fight a nuclear war that was initiated by Carter.)<sup>15</sup>

From the point of view of establishing a link between nuclear weapons and foreign policy, it is useful to remember that in each of these four

periods major debates took place in the US foreign policy establishment. The most important was specifying the main international threat to American capitalism. Was it more important to preserve the economic and political structures of Western Europe and Japan or prevent the expansion of Soviet influence and power? A second disagreement concerned the origins of revolutions in the third world. Were they the product of local conditions or the inspiration of the Soviet Union? A third disagreement revolved around the methods of responding to those revolutions. Should the US use a combination of modest reforms coupled with comparatively small counterinsurgency operations, or a large, more conventional, military response?

These intra-elite conflicts are all linked to different perspectives regarding the conflict between East and West. On one side is the more pragmatic view. Its main assertion is that the Soviet Union is a great power and, as such, enjoys certain entitlements. Ideology does not drive the Soviet Union forward. In fact, the proper diplomacy can make Moscow behave as a junior partner in the task of world management. The other half of this disagreement is based on the premise that the Soviet Union is inherently expansionist, that it seeks world domination and that the stakes between East and West are *global*.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet Union is the devil and the West represents a higher moral code. Good and evil must inevitably collide. The Soviet Union is an illegitimate state. Scratch the surface and you will find festering underneath the roots of internal revolt. Ethnic groups are against the Russians. Eastern Europe is on the verge of rebellion. All of the religious minorities want to rise up. And the proper policy can act as a catalyst in undermining the very brittle forms of social control exercised by the Kremlin. The Soviet Union, in short, is vulnerable.

It is at this point that the nuclear issue returns. One motivation on the part of Reagan is to force Moscow to compete in an arms race that it cannot afford. The US economy is larger. If the Soviet Union is forced to match US military spending, the level of resources that Moscow will have available for investment in agriculture, consumer goods, and industry will be severely reduced. Reagan has been understood to support a technology embargo on the grounds that it will hasten the process of internal crumbling. The connection between this ideological view of the Soviet Union and nuclear warfighting postures can be seen as well in the emergence of so-called decapitation strategies. In this scenario a few well-placed bombs would destroy the KGB, the Kremlin, and other political command posts. In this view, power in the Soviet Union is over-centralised. With the political head lopped off, the commanding officers of the local missile silos and submarines will not respond. The military forces would be indecisive and the US will be able to dictate terms. The Pershing II missile, due to be deployed in Germany, is crucial for this strategy since it has a flight time of only eight minutes to Moscow.

The influence of this distorted view of the Soviet Union in the Reagan administration has enormous significance. The implication is that the issue raised by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 has yet to be resolved in American ruling circles. Does the US want 'merely' to contain socialism, or should the US attempt actually to roll back revolutions that have established communist or socialist parties in power?

### *Containment or Rollback*

Many representatives of the Reagan administration have called for a return to Truman's policy of containment.<sup>17</sup> The most influential presentation of containment during that period was offered by George Kennan who argued in his 'Mr X' telegram:

**The main element of any United States policy towards the Soviet Union must be that of a long term patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence.**<sup>18</sup>

For Kennan the measures necessary to prevent Soviet expansion included military force, or at least the threat of military force. But the main counter-pressures were economic and political. Kennan, for example, saw the West's economic strength as its best weapon. He pointed out that of the five key industrial regions in the world—the United States, the United Kingdom, the Rhine valley, the Soviet Union and Japan—only one was a threat. Kennan also advocated the exploitation of actual and potential splits between Soviet leadership and the international communist movement. A non-communist government was of course preferable, but a communist government independent of Moscow presented possibilities that were worth exploring.<sup>19</sup> Yugoslavia offered the best opportunities in this regard.

Containment is usually thought to be the policy of enforcing the existing dividing line between East and West. Yet, some policy-makers defined containment more as a policy of rollback or liberation. The overthrow of communist governments would not be accomplished directly, that is by military action. Instead, internal instability in the East was to be promoted through economic and political pressures and by the *threat* of military attack. Containment was redefined as a more moderate version of rollback which included economic warfare, covert operations against Eastern Europe, and political isolation. For both Truman and Reagan this conception of containment was accompanied by the development of war-fighting doctrines.

The reflection of containment-as-rollback in the Truman administration

can be clearly detected in National Security Council-68, a lengthy planning document approved by the President in April 1950. NSC-68 called for a significant commitment to rearming the US. As set out by its authors, containment was defined as 'all means short of war to block further expansion of Soviet power' (so far consistent with normal usage), but also as 'a retraction of the Kremlin's control and influence' and 'fostering the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system' (which is more a roll-back position).<sup>20</sup>

It is worth pausing for a moment to examine the image of Soviet society embedded within NSC-68 and the parallels that exist between that document and the views of the Reagan administration. NSC-68 makes an important distinction between the Soviet government and the Soviet people. The problem is not with the Soviet Union as a whole, only with the Kremlin which is 'inescapably militant' because it is 'possessed by a world-wide revolutionary movement, because it inherits the traditional Russian drive for imperialism and because it is a totalitarian dictatorship'. The fundamental design of the Kremlin is to gain the 'complete subversion or forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of societies of the non-Soviet world'. The conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union is total; no compromise or 'peaceful coexistence' is possible. The stakes are civilisation itself. In this battle, the Soviet Union enjoys two organisational sources of strength: the Communist Party and the secret police. Each is capable of imposing 'ideological uniformity' at home and 'propaganda, subversion, and espionage' abroad. The Soviet Union's ideological 'pretensions', or promises of a society with equal justice and a fairer distribution of resources, are another source of strength. So is an 'utterly amoral and opportunistic conduct of foreign policy' that gives the Kremlin great tactical flexibility. By contrast, the goals of the US are completely benign. According to the authors of NSC-68 they are '... to form a more perfect union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity'.

The weaknesses of the Soviet Union are also important. The greatest vulnerability of the Kremlin is the nature of its basic relations with the Soviet people. These are 'characterised by universal suspicion, fear and denunciation'. The Kremlin is also vulnerable with regard to its relations with its satellites and their peoples. Nationalism (on the side of the Eastern European nations) remains the most potent emotional-political force. Here Soviet 'ideas and practices run counter to the best and potentially strongest instincts of men, and deny their most fundamental aspirations'. The authors of NSC-68 speculate on the possibilities of making the Soviet people allies of the West (if successful 'we will obviously have made our task easier and victory more certain'). The final weakness of the Soviet

system is the necessity continually to expand. Efforts to prevent or contain this expansion, either through meetings with the 'superior force' or a 'superior counterpressure' will lead to stagnation. In short, willingness on the part of the United States to counter Soviet expansion will create a situation in which 'the seeds of decay within the Soviet system would begin to flourish and fructify'. In this view containment becomes a catalyst to the 'rot' spreading within the Soviet system itself.

There is a link between this conception of containment-as-rollback and plans to fight a nuclear war. The war plans of the Truman administration included **DROPSHOT** which was based less on deterrence than on delivering an initial disabling blow. Another plan, code named **BROILER**, reflected on the possibility of liberating Eastern Europe and Russia 'immediately following the initial bomb campaign'.<sup>21</sup> The drafters of the plan urged that 'preparations should be made early. . . to enable the Allies to take quick action in case of an early Soviet collapse'. The bomb was the key factor in the hope of inducing this early surrender. Air Force plan **TROJAN** provided for a total of 300 atomic bombs in an initial attack on Russia and expected the political and economic system to collapse as a

The expectation that the threatened use of the bomb could catalyse internal weaknesses in the Eastern bloc, especially to the point of collapse, was hopelessly optimistic. Yet the identical view can be found some thirty-odd years later among many members of the Reagan administration. As in the 1948-50 period, policy makers continue to hold open the possibility that some combination of economic pressure, political isolation and military threat involving atomic weapons will hasten internal crumbling.

As in NSC-68, members of the Reagan administration believed that Russian history displays an inherent militarism and drive for expansion. For example, Richard **Perle**, the current Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Policy, thinks that the Soviet Union is much like **Hitler's Germany**—both driven toward world control unless the West responds. Perle believes that nuclear warfighting plans are necessary to counter the threat. He is not as worried about nuclear escalation as he is about appeasement.

**I've always worried less about what would happen in an actual nuclear exchange than about the effect that the nuclear balance has on our willingness to take risks in local situations. It is not that I am worried about the Soviets' attacking the United States with nuclear weapons confident that they will win that nuclear war. It is that I worry about an American President's feelings he cannot afford to take action in a crisis because Soviet nuclear forces are such that, if escalation took place, they are better poised than we are to move up the escalation ladder.**<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, the Reagan administration believes that Russia is

weak because it is over-centralised and its policy is brittle. As argued above, these features, for some members of the Reagan administration, leave the Soviet Union open to a decapitation strike (an attack on the Moscow political command posts). Destruction of the 'brain' in combination with the Soviet tendency to refuse to delegate authority, will, in this thinking, prevent the land-based retaliatory missile force from responding—at least before the European-based cruise missiles and US-based ICBMs hit their silos. The new five-year defence plan explicitly bases nuclear war strategy on decapitation. American forces are to 'render ineffective the total Soviet (and Soviet-allied) military and political power structure'.<sup>24</sup> The five-year plan also calls for 'investment on weapon systems that render the accumulated Soviet equipment stocks obsolescent'. 'Costs on the Soviets' are to be imposed, 'by raising uncertainty regarding their ability to accomplish some of their higher-priority missions'.<sup>25</sup> The expectation is that the effort of the Soviet Union to keep up with the US in the arms race will be so exacting that their civilian economy will collapse.

On this view the US must prepare itself to gain victory over the Soviet Union. Eugene Rostow believes that we are living in 'a pre-war and not a post-war world'.<sup>26</sup> Before his appointment to the staff of the National Security Council, Harvard historian Richard Pipes had criticised the nuclear war plans of previous administrations because 'deeply embedded in all our plans is the notion of punishing the aggressor rather than defeating him'. Pipes now makes explicit the connection between the arms buildup and the goal of transforming Soviet society. 'Soviet leaders would have to choose,' Pipes has said, 'between peacefully changing their communist system. . . or going to war'.<sup>27</sup>

The plans of the Reagan administration for conducting war with the East include special operations, or guerrilla warfare, sabotage, and psychological warfare. The five-year Pentagon plan calls for 'revitalising and enhancing special operation forces to project United States power where the use of conventional forces would be premature, inappropriate, or infeasible'.<sup>28</sup> As with NSC-68, the goals are total. A senior White House official has stated that Reagan has 'approved an 8-page national security document that "undertakes a campaign aimed at internal reform in the Soviet Union and shrinkage of the Soviet empire"'.<sup>29</sup>

The strategic doctrines and operational programme of the Reagan administration essentially return us to Truman, NSC-68 and the other war plans of the 1948-50 period. But what of the Kennedy and Nixon administrations, the other two periods in which a concerted effort was made to develop an operational warfighting capacity using nuclear weapons? The continuity among all four periods is empire. In each case, Washington decision makers found it necessary to develop and implement new programmes taken in defence of American interests. Passage of these pro-

grammes involved a major effort and a review of the traditional issues that divided the foreign policy elite. For Washington decision makers these changes constituted a 'project', a redefinition of the role of the US as the guarantor of the world order. Accompanying the project was an ambitious modernisation programme.

Between 1948 and **1950**, Truman took the steps that transformed the US into the active leader in creating and protecting an international system. By **1950**, the US had given economic and military assistance to Europe, and made a substantial military effort in Korea. From a post-war low the defence budget had more than tripled. An atomic arsenal had been created that could be used in a war with the Soviet Union. Domestic opposition to an active international role had been swept aside.

By **1960** new tensions appeared in the system, tensions that seemed to require different military capabilities. Kennedy was concerned with the spread of revolutionary movements in underdeveloped countries, particularly in the case of Cuba. Using methods ranging from assassination to full-scale invasion, Kennedy tried to overthrow the Castro government. American foreign policy and defence interests seemed threatened in Indochina as well. During the first two years of his administration, Kennedy defined revolutionary movements and accompanying regional instability as grave threats to the US, and yet found Washington's capacity to respond quite inadequate. Something had to be done. The answer was 'flexible response' or the development of capabilities against national liberation movements as well as preparing the nuclear force structure for use in a variety of situations short of all-out war. By **1962** Kennedy had created a defence posture that permitted a more active programme of intervention and at least the illusion of being able to fight a limited ~~war~~.<sup>30</sup> Because of the more adequate defence preparations, Moscow, it was thought, would be deterred from responding to American actions in underdeveloped countries.

By the early-seventies the world order that the US had organised was beginning to unravel. Control could no longer be exercised through the comparatively simple management of a system. Bretton Woods was defunct. International financial adjustments, such as the convertibility of the dollar, were necessary. Inter-capitalist competition increased. After making a major commitment in Southeast Asia, the US was all but defeated. The Nixon Doctrine, pledging support to allies capable of helping themselves, but avoiding a direct US commitment, was one kind of evidence demonstrating the limits of American military power in the third world. Another was the use of the 'China card', a more determined effort to take advantage of tensions existing inside the Communist bloc. Domestically, the political situation, especially in the Watergate atmosphere, weighed against a sustained remilitarism. In this context, **Nixon** and **Kissinger** felt it was important to demonstrate American

power. Increased strength in nuclear weapons was seen as providing additional leverage for American policy makers.<sup>31</sup>

By 1980 the process of deterioration had proceeded still further. Summit meetings among the leading capitalist nations had become no more than rhetorical exercises. The structure of US alliances was more volatile and opportunist. Iran demonstrated the impotence of the US to control political developments in a region of central interest. While the contours of the empire could still be seen, the substance of the system was more precarious. Nuclear warfighting scenarios and operational improvements appeared again.

In each of the four periods, the executive branch reoriented the global position of the US, often against domestic as well as international opposition. Under Truman, the main structures of the post-war order were put into place. Under Kennedy, a new focus on revolutionary movements in the third world was adopted. Under Nixon, the US began the difficult adjustment to the limits that had been placed on American power. Under Reagan, the US is continuing to act as an imperial power, but after the structures set up for maintaining orderly economic growth and political control have been severely weakened—in some cases to the point of collapse. Nuclear warfighting strategies were instrumental in this process. By contrast, the years 1950-60, 1963-8 and 1976-8 did not call for such major adjustments in the world role for the US. And the strategic doctrines of this period have been closer to deterrence. Over the post-war years Washington retained its commitment to containment. Yet, its ability to secure this policy through economic, political and conventional military means has gradually diminished. A tendency to redefine containment as rollback, focused either on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe or against successful revolutions in the third world, has proved remarkably persistent. There has also been an increased reliance on nuclear weapons and atomic diplomacy as substitutes for control through economic and political organisations. The post-war order is over. The US must adjust. Failure to do so will only lead to desperation. And the danger is that, in this desperation, nuclear weapons will be used.

#### NOTES

1. See Robert Aldridge, *First-Strike* (Boston, South End Press, 1983).
2. See especially Richard Halloran, 'Pentagon Draws Up First Strategy for Fighting a Long Nuclear War', *New York Times*, May 30, 1982, pp. 1, 12.
3. See William Broad, 'Nuclear Pulse: Awakening to the Chaos Factor', *Science*, Vol. 212, May 29, 1981; pp. 1009-1012.
4. Christopher Paine, 'A False START', *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, August/September 1982.
5. Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon*, 1946.
6. 'Victory is Possible', *Foreign Policy*, Summer, 1980.

7. Colin Gray, 'Across the Nuclear Divide', *International Security*, Summer 1977.
8. Richard Pipes, 'Why the Soviet Union Thinks it Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War', *Commentary*, March 1977.
9. See David Alan Rosenberg, 'A Smoking Radiating Ruin at the End of Two Hours': Documents on American Plans for a Nuclear War with the Soviet Union', *International Security*, Winter 1981/82, p. 13.
10. On this point see Anders Boserup, 'Deterrence and Defence', *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, December 1981.
11. See Fred Kaplan, *Wizards of Armageddon*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1983).
12. John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT*, (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).
13. For an assessment of the successes and failures of this strategy see Barry Blechman, *Force Without War*, (Washington, Brookings, 1979).
14. 'Call to Mutiny', E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith, eds., *Protest and Survive*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1981).
15. On the deterioration of Carter's commitment to a minimal deterrence position see Thomas Powers, 'Thinking About World War III', *Atlantic*, November 1982.
16. For an analysis of the impact of this dispute on the early history of the cold war see Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977).
17. For an example see the testimony of Eugene Rostow quoted in *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, June 29, 1981, p. 24; or Norman Podhoretz' sympathetic commentary in *The Present Danger*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1980).
18. 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, pp. 576-86.
19. See NSC-2011 ('US Objectives With Respect to Russia'), August 18, 1948 included in Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, *Containment Documents on American Policy and Strategy: 1945-1950*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1978). NSC-20/1 was drafted by Kennan.
20. NSC-68 ('United States Objectives and Programs for National Security'), April 14, 1959, in Etzold and Gaddis, op. cit.
21. See Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945-50*, (New York, Vintage, 1982), p. 228.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
23. Robert Scheer, 'With Enough Shovels', *Playboy*, December 1982, p. 154.
24. Halloren, op. cit.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Scheer, op. cit., p. 120.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
28. Halloren, op. cit.
29. Scheer, op. cit., p. 122.
30. Desmond Ball, *Politics and Force Structure in the Kennedy Administration*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981).
31. See Desmond Ball, 'Đẹp Vu: The Return to Counterforce in the Nixon Administration', California Seminar on Arms Control and Foreign Policy, occasional paper, December 1974.