



SPECIAL ISSUE INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518

March 23, 2022

This Special Issue of National Institute's *Information Series* commemorates the 39th anniversary of President Reagan's March 23, 1983 speech introducing the Strategic Defense Initiative. Below is the speech given by the Rt Hon the Baroness Thatcher LG OM FRS to a conference hosted by the National Institute for Public Policy on December 3, 1998. In her speech, Baroness Thatcher lays out a fundamental rationale for missile defense. Her remarks are as pertinent now as they were then.

Deterrence is Not Enough: Security Requirements for the 21st Century

Purpose

The former Israeli foreign minister, Abba Eban once remarked that democratic leaders could always be relied upon to adopt the wise and prudent course - once all other possibilities had been exhausted.

I believe that in responding to new and disturbing developments within the security environment, the West is proving to be needlessly painstaking in exhausting those 'other possibilities.' The point of Dr Payne's conference is doubtless to speed up the process. I congratulate him on his initiative, and promise to do all I can to help.

Indeed, there are two good reasons for congratulating the National Institute for Public Policy for having organised this conference.



First, the programme focuses on a real crisis, as opposed to the kind of ‘crises’ that scream for remedy in our newspapers, but which are no more than the reflection of minor or transitory ills. By contrast, the crisis with which we are concerned today, that of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, does merit that description.

Secondly, the conference programme obliges us to reflect more deeply on the ways in which the international order has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and on the implications of that change for our security. These are matters which I believe have still not been given the attention they deserve, but which can only be neglected at our peril.

The History of Offensive and Defensive Weapons

It is already clear that one of the most remarkable features of the chapter of history which has recently closed was the reliance placed on offensive weapons. This stands in marked contrast to previous centuries. Indeed, from the very earliest times armies incorporated offensive and defensive weapons and strategies. Progress in the development of the one was followed by corresponding improvements in the other. So more deadly swords led to the creation of better armour. Improvements in fortifications led to more imaginative means of breaching and scaling castle walls.

In modern times, the development of the tank led to the invention of a range of anti-tank weapons. Similarly, the development of the bomber - “the ultimate weapon” - led to the introduction of radar systems capable of tracking its flight, and to the use of anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes to shoot it down.

In large part, the history of warfare is thus the story of the competition between offence and defence. Sometimes, the balance of advantage has been with attack, and at other times, with defence; at others defence and offence have been so keenly matched that other things being equal, aggressor and defender fought themselves to a standstill.

During two world wars, Britain used both active and passive means to defeat German aggression. In 1915, German policy makers hoped that the deployment of the Zeppelin would paralyse London and have a decisive impact on morale. For the first time ever, civilians were the indiscriminate targets of attack from the air. Initially, the German Zeppelin offensive appeared to achieve its aim; war production fell and morale plummeted as Londoners took refuge in improvised shelters, including the London Underground. But within a short time Britain developed the first integrated air defence system, comprising anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes, an early warning system, and civil defence.

On 2 September 1916, British forces shot down one Zeppelin. However, by 1 October, British forces had effectively neutralised the Zeppelin threat, shooting down a further three. One eye



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

witness recorded: “...blazing from end to end like an enormous cigar, the Zeppelin canted over and sank nose down-towards the earth. Sounds of cheering came over the air....the Zeppelins had suddenly become prey to the defences.”

In the inter-war period, as Hitler rearmed, fears about the vulnerability of London in a future conflict grew again. Winston Churchill described the capital as “..the greatest target in the world...a valuable fat cow tied up to attract the beasts of prey.” While Stanley Baldwin, leader of the National Government, emphasised our vulnerability to air attack by famously declaring: “The Bomber will always get through.” But when war came the German bomber, although much improved since the days of the Great War, did not always get through. During the crucial months of August and September 1940, 600 were shot down, either by British fighter pilots, or by ground batteries. As a consequence, Hitler abandoned his plans for invasion. It was the Nazis’ first defeat, and because it assured the survival of an independent Britain, it proved an historic turning point. Credit for victory in the Battle of Britain has understandably gone to the “Few” - the young pilots of the Spitfires and Hurricanes of whom it is still impossible to think without being moved by their courage and self-sacrifice. But it is important to remember that their triumph was only possible because they were part of a comprehensive air defence system.

When Hitler abandoned his invasion plans and switched to the bombing of industrial centres and cities, Britain’s air defences were again adapted and modified. With the help of American technology they were further strengthened to meet the challenge of the V-1, a pilotless aircraft powered by a pulse jet, the forerunner of today’s cruise missile. Just a few weeks after a government minister announced that the battle for the defence of London had been won, some 10,000 V-1s were fired on the city, and more than 2,000 hit their target. At first the V-1 achieved a high success rate, causing more than a million Londoners to be evacuated from their homes and many thousands of casualties. But five weeks after the first V-1s rained down on London half of them were being intercepted or shot down, and this figure rose to ninety per cent by the eleventh week of the V-1 campaign. Morale rose as the public came to realise that its greatest fear - that the capital was defenceless in the face of such attacks - was groundless, and that once again the Nazi challenge was being seen off.

No defence, however was available against the V-2 rocket, the world’s first tactical ballistic missile, a fact which made an inevitable impact on public morale and confidence. Because the rockets flew faster than sound there was no warning of an attack: a gap would suddenly appear in a row of houses to be followed by the sound of an explosion. The rockets caused more than 21,000 casualties before British soldiers overran the V-2 launch sites in Holland.

Even so, had Hitler realised the potential of the rocket programme earlier the weapons could have played havoc with the preparations for the Allied invasion of France. And there were also plans to use the V-2 as the second stage of a rocket capable of striking America.



Cold War Strategy – Mutually Assured Defence

The strategic environment was again transformed by the development of long range nuclear weapons during the early stages of the Cold War. It was now argued that this technological change meant that deterrence was henceforth the only rational basis for effective defence. Here surely, the argument ran, were weapons of such immense destructive force, so devastating in their consequences and so unstoppable in their delivery, that once these were possessed by both Cold War adversaries mutual deterrence, and so peace, was assured.

It followed - or seemed to follow - that no step should be taken to protect the civilian population or industry from a nuclear attack since this would undermine the very threat on which human survival depended. Each super-power had effectively taken the other's population hostage, or so many of the West's influential strategic thinkers argued. As a consequence, vulnerability to the most lethal weapons that the world had ever known was viewed as the key to preserving the human species in the Nuclear Age. This entirely novel view - for no one had ever before suggested that it was a good idea to be defenceless against armed attack - was expressed in the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, otherwise known as MAD. Accordingly, the well-placed advocates of MAD resisted all attempts to re-open the question of researching and deploying defences against missile attack.

I don't want to revisit the controversies that once raged over such matters, but it is worth recording that although nuclear deterrence was rightly at the core of western strategy, we never wholly relied upon it. The threat of massive retaliation proved unrealistic and unwieldy in some of the scenarios which political and military leaders were actually obliged to contemplate. So, various modifications and revisions were made to give greater flexibility and credibility to western strategy. Nevertheless, MAD remained influential; it shaped the climate in which military planners thought about preventing a war with the Soviet Union - and most relevant for us now, it helped pave the way for the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

The Strategic Defence Initiative

According to Secretary of State Rodgers, one purpose of that treaty was to serve as a kind of teaching aid to enable the Soviet leadership to understand the logic of assured mutual vulnerability and to signal their belief in it. Alas! By the 1980s it was becoming clear that the Soviet leaders were slow learners. They had signed the Treaty but had obvious difficulty in grasping that the best interests of the Soviet Union lay in its vulnerability to US missiles! They took industrial and civil defence seriously, and invested heavily as we now know in the development of defence against missile attack which was in clear breach of the Treaty.

No fundamental change in Western strategic thinking occurred until the visionary speech of Ronald Reagan of 23 March 1983, in which he opened up the prospect of using advanced



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

technology to destroy enemy missiles in flight. The intense opposition which that speech aroused in certain circles in the West, is a reflection of the widely held belief that defence against missile attack would undermine deterrence and thus make a thermonuclear war more likely. During this period I came to believe exactly the opposite: namely, that properly configured defences against missile attack could strengthen deterrence by protecting America's retaliatory capacity. What I did not realise at the time - what I think probably no one then realised - was the profound impact of the SDI programme upon events within the Soviet Union. Recognising that it could not compete in a qualitative arms race with the United States without modernising its economy, the Soviet leadership, first under Andropov, and then under Gorbachev, set in train a series of economic and political reforms. Perestroika had the aim of preserving Soviet communism - but it led to loss of political control. The forces of reform once unleashed proved beyond the leadership's power to direct, and this led ultimately to the collapse of the ideology which the Soviet leaders sought to protect, and of the unlamented empire created in its name. Thus, SDI - widely criticised on the grounds that it threatened to undermine the peace - helped foreshorten the life of an implacable adversary, bringing an end to the Cold War and giving millions of citizens in Central Europe and Russia the chance of freedom and a better future. I do not know of any greater historical irony.....unless it be the fact that the ideas embodied in SDI have not been applied, while the old ABM Treaty is still revered as the cornerstone of stability!

So let me recap at this point. While deterrence is still necessary, it is not enough. During the Cold War, an era in which military technology greatly favoured the offensive, deterrence worked. Although there were some close calls, it was credible enough in the circumstances to deter an attack. And it is clear that two factors helped in this. First, although the Soviet leadership remained faithful to an expansionist ideology until the very end, it was mostly not adventurous. It preferred to pursue its aims through support for proxy forces or terrorists and through low-intensity conflict by means of subversion, propaganda, and disinformation. The men in the Kremlin believed that inexorable forces of history assured their ultimate triumph - so they could afford to wait.

Secondly, during the Cold War, we were in the rare situation of having to deal with a single adversary whom we came to know, one whose reactions and behaviour we could often anticipate, and with whom we could usually communicate effectively. Even so there were misunderstandings and some moments of acute tension in super power relations.

Post Cold War Threats – Proliferation and Its Consequences

With the end of the Cold War the whole security equation changed. As Soviet power broke down, so did the control it exercised, however fitfully and irresponsibly, over rogue states like Syria, Iraq and Libya. They have in effect been released to commit whatever mischief they wish, without bothering to check with their arms supplier and bank manager.



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

One of the most alarming aspects of this transformed picture is the ease and speed with which Third World states have begun to acquire the weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. In 1995 the then Director of Central Intelligence stated that no country, other than major declared powers, would in the next 15 years, acquire a ballistic missile that could strike America. Alas, it now appears that he was mistaken.

Indeed, it is evident that proliferation is accelerating so rapidly that our depleted intelligence services are having difficulty in keeping track. This is partly the result of co-operation and trade between states, and partly due to the sale of military technology to third parties by Russia and China, both of which continue to modernise their own missile forces.

It is also due to the astonishing ease with which many of the necessary technologies can now be acquired from the West. The German scientists who built the V-1 and V-2 rockets, and the outstanding British and American scientists who developed the atomic weapon, had to overcome huge scientific and technological problems. Today, all that is required, I am told, to build a missile or weapon of mass destruction is a credit card, a shopping list, and a personal computer. Some of the necessary technologies can be bought over the counter, some over the internet. So-called 'secrets' can be obtained from technical books and magazines easily available from American bookshops and libraries. According to a recent majority report from a Senate sub-committee on the problems arising from missile proliferation, much useful information can also be obtained from scientific institutions anxious to share the fruits of their research with mankind. NASA, for example, welcomes visitors to its homepage on the website with the following message: "The Internet puts the vast technical resources of the United States - and those of other countries - at the disposal of anyone with a telephone line." The report lists a range of research papers obtainable through NASA, which would be of undoubted use to those with ambitions to join the club of nations possessing missiles and weapons of mass destruction. All of that is in addition to technologies that may be purchased from China (probably the biggest supplier), from Russia, and from North Korea.

Although it is clearly getting easier, and cheaper, to build ballistic missiles and the various warheads with which they may be armed, skilled technicians and engineers are still needed to complete the task. But here again, the West is abundant in its gifts. A state bent on acquiring or developing missiles or weapons of mass destruction can equip its technicians and engineers with the relevant knowledge and skills by the simple expedient of having them enrol at Western universities. I was amazed to learn recently that since the Gulf War, the US has granted visas to more than 140,000 students and their dependants from North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria and China. A high proportion of these students are known to have pursued degrees in science and engineering, although no attempt is made to monitor their subsequent careers.



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

Not surprisingly the Rumsfeld Commission, which was recently asked by Congress to report on the missile threat against the United States, has concluded: “ Nations that want to develop ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction can now obtain extensive technical assistance from outside sources. Foreign assistance is not a wild card. It is a fact.”

It is indeed a fact that the freedom and openness of American society assists those to whom openness and freedom are anathema and who would like to snuff out any glimmer of freedom in their own societies.

It is a fact, too - although a curious one - that the sale of small arms to gun enthusiasts or sportsmen produces a greater sense of moral outrage in Western society, than is produced by the sale to psychotic despots of weaponry capable of killing thousands.

According to the Rumsfeld Commission there are now an estimated 13,500 missiles in 26 countries, with as many as 30 new types of missile under development. Moreover, as far as warhead technology is concerned, a recent report from Lancaster University suggests that 18 countries possess nuclear, chemical, or biological capabilities.

The authoritative report of the Rumsfeld Commission is cautious in reaching judgement but it finds that within five years of a decision to acquire such a capability, North Korea and Iran would be able to inflict major destruction on America. In the case of Iraq the period would be 10 years. But for much of that time the United States might not know that such a decision had been taken. Although the Commission does not say so, it is clear that for reasons of distance the danger is maturing even more quickly for Europe than for here.

The Rumsfeld Commission concludes:

First, the threat posed by these emerging capabilities is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than reported by the intelligence services.

Secondly, the intelligence services’ ability to provide accurate and timely estimates of missile threats is being eroded, and the warning time of missile deployment that the US can expect is being reduced.

And thirdly, nations are increasingly able to conceal important elements in their missile and weapons programmes and are strongly motivated to do so.

So what is to be done?

It would be convenient if we could rely on the weapons and responses developed during the Cold War to prevent future wars, and could do so with confidence. But that’s not possible. In



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

the coming decades we will have to deal with a range of potential adversaries and scenarios, and what will work in one case will not work in all.

To successfully deter an enemy requires some knowledge of how that enemy is likely to react in particular circumstances. That in turn requires some insight into his background and culture.

It is also important that potential adversaries know and understand something about the nature of Western society, not least its capacity to resist aggression in spite of its habitual preference for compromise. Such knowledge reduces the risk of war arising from miscalculation. The Falklands War as well as the conflict in the Gulf, remind us that dictators are prone to underestimate the resolve of democratic states to respond vigorously to aggression. Our strategic intentions must therefore be signalled unambiguously if conflict is to be avoided. We must not give the impression that we in the West have so indulged ourselves on the fruits of peace that we are incapable of protecting our vital interests.

In the case of rogue states I do not believe that the conditions required for deterrence are presently met. Moreover, matters are likely to worsen as the military capabilities of these states grow.

Indeed, we only have to pose some difficult questions to realise the limitations of a response based purely on the threat of retaliation. Would it be worth the American President's time trying to find the basis for common action if it was also known that our adversary's missiles could strike London, Paris or Bonn? And would Washington even contemplate a military response if a Middle Eastern ally was swallowed up by a state with the capacity to target New York with a nuclear missile?

Arms Control and the ABM Treaty

Instead of posing the difficult questions, Western governments have placed great store on diplomatic attempts to discourage the flow of military technology and to bring stability to the international order.

Restricting the flow of technology through the Missile Control Technology Regime and by other formal means should most certainly be tried, even if these attempts do nothing to dampen the desire of the rogue states and others to acquire missiles and their warheads. Some countries may be unwilling to participate in restricting the flow of technology; some may participate but turn a blind eye to violations by exporters. In addition there is the dual use problem and the near impossibility of full and effective monitoring. Diplomatic measures may make the acquisition of the relevant technologies a little harder and more expensive to obtain. But as a former assistant director of the United States Arms Agency has noted: "...while the Missile



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

Control Technology Regime may be a valuable tool in slowing proliferation it is incapable of stopping it.”

Moreover, the benefits of trying to deal with the problem through arms reduction or limitation talks are also likely to be modest, and could even present a number of traps to the unwary. An arms treaty can be valuable in codifying or lending formal expression to an understanding between nations about the levels of weaponry to be deployed, but it cannot of itself produce that understanding. I know of no miraculous diplomatic means by which a nation that doesn't want to be disarmed can be stripped of its weapons. What may be disarmed is public opinion. But there are times when the public should be alarmed, not assuaged. To give the public a sense of security when this not justified by the facts is the very negation of leadership.

Although the complexities of arms control are legion and may be difficult to grasp, the underlying realities are not. States which present no problem to their neighbours will gladly sign and will abide by the rules. But revisionist states - the ones that want to redraw the boundaries on the map - are likely either to refuse to sign, or to sign but get round the provisions of the treaty, or simply to cheat.

Arms talks can have one further defect: the agreements reached may continue to exert an influence long after the circumstances which called them into being have vanished. An arms treaty can end up by damaging the interests it was intended to serve. I suspect that some of you may have guessed the particular treaty which prompts these remarks: the ABM Treaty.

As it happens, the Treaty did not achieve some of its original purposes: it did not produce a slow down in the building of Soviet long range missiles; nor did it prevent the Soviets investing large sums in developing ballistic missile defence. Nevertheless, it was possible to understand the case for the Treaty when there was a single military threat. But those days are gone. So what conceivable sense does it make to keep to a treaty that ensures that the United States and its allies remain vulnerable to multiple threats? Yet the United States government has confirmed its commitment to a Treaty which makes vulnerability a formal obligation, and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding which enlarges the number of signatories by including Belarus, the Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. This is likely to make withdrawal from or revision of the Treaty more complex and difficult. The preservation of this Cold War relic is bizarre, and I am somewhat baffled when spokesmen for the United States government describe it as the cornerstone of strategic stability.

To continue to regard strategic relations between the United States and Russia, important though they are, as the centrepiece of American security policy in this way is to ignore important respects in which the world has changed. It is the political equivalent of continuing to dance the waltz when the orchestra has changed to one of those modern dances in which there are no set steps and all who wish to participate may do so.



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

I believe that the case for the deployment of a global ballistic missile defence system is now overwhelming. The requirements of such a system are also clear: it must be capable of providing protection for America, its armed forces and its allies against a limited or unauthorised attack, while strengthening deterrence against the now-reduced threat of a major missile offensive. The deployment of such a system should generally dampen the impulse to acquire offensive systems, and contribute to regional stability by reducing the risk of surprise attack.

Having followed the progress of research into ballistic missile defence during the 15 years since President Reagan's landmark speech, it seems clear that a global system would include space-borne sensors and interceptors in order to target missiles in the early stages of their flight, as well as ground-based systems. And I believe that NATO provides the most appropriate organisational means by which America's European allies can make their contribution.

Conclusion

To sum up.

My friends, human ingenuity is such that a way will always be found to counter new weapons, however destructive or "smart." Equally, ways will be found to modify those weapons so that they in turn can "outsmart" the latest improvement to the defence. The competition between offence and defence did not end with the advent of the nuclear missile, as some strategists appeared to believe, any more than it did with the Zeppelin. With the improved perspective which the end of the Cold War permits we can see that the renunciation of the means to defend our cities against missiles was, in historical terms, an aberration.

Remaining vulnerable to Soviet missiles was the consequence of a flawed logic, but there is no logic in a policy decision that ensures that North America and Europe remain vulnerable to missiles targeted at them by the tyrannical and ruthless leaders of volatile and unstable regimes. The absence of systems capable of defending Western cities against missile attack will be seen as an incentive for those leaders to make the acquisition of missiles and weapons of mass destruction their top priority.

Conversely, the deployment of a global ballistic missile defence system could dampen the desire to acquire those weapons by virtue of its ability to frustrate their use. In an increasingly unstable, and fast moving world such a system possesses a stabilising potential; without ballistic missile defence it will become much more difficult for America to remain true to her best traditions of international engagement.



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 518 | March 23, 2022

For these reasons the ABM Treaty does not enhance our security in the coming century; rather it represents a pointless constraint on America's ability to protect her cities, her civilian population, her armed forces, her interests, and her allies. A vulnerable giant attracts tormentors who will become bolder as they see that the giant has denied himself the means of protection.

This thought clearly inspired the cartoonist who illustrated the cover of the Senate report to which I referred earlier in my remarks. The illustration shows Uncle Sam as Gulliver newly arrived in Lilliput and chained to the ground as the Lilliputians clamber disrespectfully all over him. The comparison is apposite, except in one respect: the bonds which held down Swift's fictional hero were tied by the Lilliputians, rather than by Gulliver himself.

I am a great admirer and friend of America, one who is mindful of the enormous benefits my country has enjoyed as a result of its friendship with the United States. I continue to believe that American influence in the world is crucial but that it may diminish in the absence of effective global defences against missile attack.

As matters stand, America - and so the West - is in danger of entering a new century. with a strategy designed to counter a foe that no longer exists, with notions of deterrence designed to meet the requirements of a world that has changed, and constrained by a treaty that bears no relation to reality.

As I have argued in the past, the risk is that thousands of lives could be lost in an attack which foresight and prudence might have prevented.

My friends, it is a risk too far.

The National Institute for Public Policy's *Information Series* is a periodic publication focusing on contemporary strategic issues affecting U.S. foreign and defense policy. It is a forum for promoting critical thinking on the evolving international security environment and how the dynamic geostrategic landscape affects U.S. national security. Contributors are recognized experts in the field of national security. National Institute would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that makes the *Information Series* possible.

The views in this *Information Series* are those of the author and should not be construed as official U.S. Government policy, the official policy of the National Institute for Public Policy or any of its sponsors. For additional information about this publication or other publications by the National Institute Press, contact: Editor, National Institute Press, 9302 Lee Highway, Suite 750 | Fairfax, VA 22031 | (703) 293-9181 | www.nipp.org. For access to previous issues of the National Institute Press Information Series, please visit <http://www.nipp.org/national-institutepress/informationseries/>.