



FROM THE ARCHIVE

The featured article for this issue's "From the Archive" section is a 1983 essay by Dr. Colin Gray, co-founder and first President of National Institute for Public Policy. Dr. Gray wrote this article in response to the second draft of the Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1983 Pastoral Letter on the subject of nuclear weapons and deterrence. This Pastoral Letter attracted extensive press attention and commentary at the time—both sympathetic to and critical of its main points and conclusions. Indeed, it sparked numerous subsequent studies on the same subject by other religious denominations. Dr. Gray was largely critical in this essay but judged that the Pastoral Letter was sufficiently important to warrant his critique.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Dr. Colin S. Gray, President, National Institute for Public Policy, *Information Series* No. 140, April 1983.

NUCLEAR REALITIES

The author has no pretensions to expertise as a theologian. He is writing as a nuclear strategist who believes both that moral questions are relevant to our security policy, and that those questions have not been posed as directly or as insistently in the recent past as perhaps they should have been.

This paper discusses what the author believes to be the salient facts of the world as it is and the present nuclear strategy of the United States and then offers commentary on the Second Draft of the Pastoral Letter of the National Council of Catholic Bishops.

It is probably useful to begin by saying that, fierce though the rhetoric often is, contributors to the current nuclear policy debate generally are disagreeing on means rather than ends. There is no lobby for nuclear war, for limited nuclear war, or for protracted nuclear war. The abominable character of nuclear war is not an issue.¹

It is less than obvious to this author quite how one contributes to peace if one reminds people (people in the *West* that is) that nuclear war would be terrible—as if everyone did not know that already—and then proclaims that we must abolish war in general, and nuclear war in particular. Vision and good intentions are cheap and easy to come by. Virtually anyone, writing on the back of an envelope, can invent a world order superior in moral (and other) terms to the present one. Unfortunately, the currency of relevant policy debate is *not* imagination alone. How has one performed a noble service for peace, if he reminds people that "apocalypse now" is an ever-present possibility, tells them that there is a better world out there somewhere but lacks even the faintest glimmer of a half-way-plausible theory concerning how we are to proceed from here to there? Jonathan Schell has no advice on the transition to offer, and neither have the Catholic Bishops.² For reasons that this author has explained in detail elsewhere, the promise of arms control—on which the Second Pastoral

¹ See Colin S. Gray, "Issues and Non-Issues In The Nuclear Policy Debate," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 37, No. 10 (December 1981), pp. 47-69.

² See Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Knopf, 1982); particularly Part III.



Letter reposes such hope, if not faith—is not at all encouraging.³ (The Catholic Bishops themselves, with their references to distrust, political hostility, and the illiberal character of the Soviet state, damn their own theory of transition from dependence upon an imperfect system of nuclear deterrence).⁴

Policy debate must at least begin with recognition of the world as it is, with all its dangerous imperfections. The paragraphs that follow present the most salient facts of nuclear reality.

First, nuclear weapons are here to stay; they cannot be disinventured. Humankind cannot return to an age of pre-nuclear innocence. Whether or not we have signed a Faustian Pact that one day must be redeemed remains an open question.

Second, the super- and great powers will never agree to anything remotely close to total nuclear-disarmament. The reasons are all-too-obvious. A nuclear disarmed country would be open to blackmail by any Power that had hidden away a handful of nuclear weapons, or which produced a handful of such weapons in secret.

Third, countries build and maintain nuclear weapons for reasons that seem good to them. The Soviet Union finds nuclear armaments to be ideal weapons of political intimidation with respect to Western democracies, wherein the general public is a genuine player in policy decisions. In fact, one of the more persuasive cases for U.S. strategic superiority lies in this region of argument. The U.S. and the Soviet Union are very dissimilar in their vulnerability to intimidation, because of the differences in their political systems. It can be argued that the U.S. needs military compensation for the openness of her political life. Also, the West has found nuclear weapons very useful, if not essential, as a way of coping with the unfortunate facts of geography. For a host of geopolitical reasons, the Soviet Union has far easier access to important areas along the periphery of Eurasia than does the United States. Without nuclear threat, the structure of Western security probably would not work.

Fourth, a functioning nuclear deterrence system is critical to the tenuous international security order. Any of us can criticize the nuclear deterrence system as well as the Catholic Bishops can, but we should not forget that the current system is the only system that we have. Before we begin experimenting with bold new designs for “world order” and the like, let alone begin weakening the existing system, there had better be a very good story for the future. At the present time, there are no bold new *designs* for a better world that incorporate a plausible theory of how we proceed, *safely*, from here to there. The Bishop’s letter posits *arms control* as the key, but history and the logic of inter-state competition tell us that that is not going to work. Indeed, the Pastoral Letter does not even attempt to explain why arms control will accomplish in the future what it has failed to accomplish in the past. In short, if someone insists that we move from a here that “works,” albeit with considerable danger, to a better future, the burden of proof regarding the feasibility of the transition and the details of the new world order rest with the visionary.

³ Colin S. Gray, *Arms Control: Problems, Information Series* No. 132 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, January 1983).

⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace, “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response [Second Draft of Pastoral Letter],” *Origins, NC documentary Service*, Vol. 12 (October 28, 1982), p. 32. Hereafter cited as “Pastoral Letter.”

Fifth, given that nuclear weapons are here to stay, there has to be a nuclear strategy, and governments have to engage in what, traditionally, has been called “war planning.” All that is worth debating is what the nuclear strategy should be. For both moral and strategic reasons, this author rejects strategies that threaten civilians directly. He agrees with the Pastoral Letter that the U.S. should not target civilians intentionally, and that the U.S. should not execute a *retaliatory* (or revenge) attack against cities under any circumstances. It so happens in this case that strategic reasoning leads to the same conclusions as does moral reasoning.

Sixth, U.S. policy-makers have no responsible choice other than to *plan* for the limited, discriminating employment of nuclear weapons. The alternatives are the following: should deterrence fail on the one hand there would be the certainty of a Holocaust; on the other hand there would be the strong, even very strong, *possibility* of a Holocaust. It would be criminally irresponsible to conduct nuclear defense planning in such a manner that if the deterrence system should fail, it could only fail in the most deadly manner possible. To say this is not to affirm a belief in limited nuclear war as a prospective fact, rather, it is to affirm the necessity for planning so as to maximize the possibility that any nuclear war would be limited. There really is no sensible debate possible on the subject of strategic flexibility, since no one can seriously favor being strategically inflexible.⁵

Seventh, there is the contentious issue (or really non-issue) of planning to “win a nuclear war.” Again, the U.S. (and Soviet) Government has no responsible choice other than to *plan* to win, or prevail, or conclude hostilities on favorable terms—the preferred form of words may vary. How would a government go about planning, purposively, to *lose a war*, or even to conclude a *stalemate*? All countries plan to use force with the intention of succeeding in their efforts. What would the American people make of a government in Washington which said that it planned to lose a war? It should never be forgotten that politically the Western Alliance, is, and always will be, on the political defensive. U.S. war aims in the event of an East-West armed conflict likely would be very modest. “Victory” in nuclear war may be translated into the West achieving its political goals, and those goals may be no more extravagant than persuading or coercing the Soviet Union to withdraw Warsaw Pact forces back behind their starting lines.

Eighth, nuclear deterrence is the first priority of the U.S. Everybody agrees on this. But, uncomfortable though it may be to have to face up to the fact, the prevention of nuclear war is not an overriding objective under all circumstances. If it were such an overriding objective, then the United States should disengage very promptly from her security commitments around the periphery of Eurasia.⁶ It is U.S. (and NATO) policy, to be taken only in the gravest of circumstances and for plainly defensive reasons, that she will use nuclear weapons first if the only other choice is conventional defeat. This policy is dictated both by

⁵ See the discussion of this point in “‘Dangerous to Your Health’: The Debate Over Nuclear Strategy and War,” *Orbis*, Vol. 26 (Summer 1982), pp. 342-345. The prospective difficulties of limiting nuclear war are well argued in Desmond Ball, *Can Nuclear War Be Controlled?*, Adelphi Papers No. 169 (London: IISS, Autumn 1981); and, John D. Steinbruner, “Nuclear Decapitation,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 45 (Winter 1981-1982), pp. 16-28.

⁶ See Earl C. Ravenal, “The Case for a Withdrawal of Our Forces,” *The New York Times Magazine*, March 6, 1983, pp. 58-61, 75.

geography and by commonsense. The United States, in an abstract sense, does have a choice. But that choice is not between today's policy of first use in the last resort and the bluff recommended in the Second Draft of the Pastoral Letter. The United States is at liberty to renounce nuclear threats and nuclear weapons. To merit respect, people who favor that option must be prepared to accept the likely consequences, both geostrategic and moral.

Finally, most people agree that there is a role for an arms control process. But, history shows that we cannot achieve "peace," in any of the meanings of that overworked word, through arms control. If anything, excessive rhetoric and unrealistic expectations concerning arms control tend to do real damage to international security, because the disillusionment that must follow is similarly excessive. Arms control can be of modest assistance to strategic stability—no more than that.⁷

POLICY TODAY

What is the nuclear deterrence theory of the Reagan Administration? This administration, in common with every administration over the past twenty years, recognizes that incredible threats will be discounted by a potential aggressor. Indeed, an incredible threat of instant Apocalypse, or Holocaust now, probably frightens us more than it frightens the Russians. Over the past decade, embracing four administrations, the U.S. Government has asked itself two central questions: what do the Soviets find most deterring? And, should deterrence fail, what might it actually be in the U.S. interest to do? The answer to the first question is believed to be to deny the Soviet Union any credible theory of victory on its own terms. In other words, the U.S. does not need a theory of American victory in nuclear war, but she does need a theory (and posture to match) for the defeat of the Soviet Union.⁸ Naturally, the question follows—what would defeat the Soviet Union? The answer provided is that Soviet military power must be made to be defeated and Soviet leaders must fear that their ability to retain political control would be degraded or destroyed.

Needless to say, a U.S. strategy aimed at engaging Soviet military forces of all kinds would not only have pre-war deterrent benefit but would also be in the U.S. interest to implement in time of war. It should be obvious that both sides in a World War III would have the strongest imaginable motives to implement their targeting policies in a restrained manner. Because both superpowers would be very interested indeed in fighting a war removed from their home territories, there is some merit in the proposition that protracted conflict should be anticipated. The Soviet Union knows that political systems can come unraveled as a consequence of the pressures that long wars invariably place on society. It is important for *deterrence* that the West look to be capable of sustaining an armed conflict for weeks and months.

⁷ Excellent reviews of the (limited) roles for arms control are Richard Burt, "A Glass Half Empty," *Foreign Policy*, No. 36 (Fall 1979), pp. 33-48; and "The Relevance of Arms Control in the 1980's," *Daedalus*, Vol. 110, No. 3 (Winter 1981), pp. 139-177.

⁸ For an analytical description by a former leading participant in the strategy-making process, see Walter Slocombe, "The Countervailing Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Spring 1981), pp. 18-27. Also of value is Desmond Ball, "U.S. Strategic Forces: How Would They Be Used?" *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Winter 1982/1983), pp. 31-60.

Clearly, some measure of cooperation between enemies over the “rules of engagement” would be needed. But in a context where neither side wants to initiate a homeland-to-homeland nuclear war, the ability of the West to wage a protracted conventional conflict may be of critical significance both for deterrence and for insurance against the event.

A great deal of nonsense is spoken today about the nature of deterrence, and frequently generic deterrence is confused with a *particular theory* of deterrence.⁹ The Draft Pastoral Letter encourages this confusion by quoting a selective definition of deterrence provided by some officials of the Arms Control Association who should know better.¹⁰ A little theoretical rigor is required if meaningful debate is to be formed.¹¹

First, there are several theories of deterrence, and the current debate over U.S. nuclear strategy is between those theories. No one is challenging deterrence *per se*. Second, to greatly oversimplify, there are two basic “camps” in the debate. One camp says stable deterrence is secured through the mutual ability to punish societies. The other camp says stable deterrence is secured when the United States can engage and thwart the strategy of Soviet military power directly (or indirectly through attacks on command and control). This second “camp” is characterized, misleadingly, as the “war-fighting” school of thought. To repeat, the “war-fighting” theory is a theory of deterrence. A so-called nuclear “war-fighter,” no more wants to fight a nuclear war than a so-called mutual assured destroyer actually wants to destroy anything. So much for semantic confusion.

By way of an added refinement, there are a few people, President Reagan included, who are very dissatisfied with the offense-dominant character of current defense preparations.¹² This author believes that the deterrent value of the threat to deny the Soviets a plausible plan for success is much attenuated by the fact that the North American continent lies naked to any kind of Soviet retaliation.¹³

The weapon choices in the Reagan Administration’s strategic modernization program follow from its theory of deterrence, and the weapon requirements of that theory are very heavy principally because the United States chooses to accept extended deterrent duties on behalf of distant friends and allies. A U.S. deterrent posture capable solely of devastating a handful, or perhaps several handfuls, of Soviet cities (which probably would be evacuated), would be a deterrent posture *possibly* appropriate to a United States that asked of its strategic forces only that they deter a large-scale nuclear assault on North America. The so-miscalled “war-waging” theory of nuclear strategy and deterrence is driven by U.S. overseas, foreign policy commitments. One cannot debate the MX ICBM or the *Trident II* SLBM intelligently, save in the context of the strategy they are designed to enforce, and that

⁹ As, for example, in Robert C. Gray, “The Reagan Nuclear Strategy,” *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (March 1983), pp. 1-3, 9-10.

¹⁰ “Pastoral Letter,” p. 31.

¹¹ For a detailed presentation of alternative approaches to nuclear deterrence, see Colin S. Gray, *Nuclear Strategy: The Range of Choice, Information Series No. 103* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, December 1982). The best recent book-length treatment of nuclear deterrence questions is Keith B. Payne, *Nuclear Deterrence in US-Soviet Relations* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982).

¹² On March 23, 1983, President Reagan announced that he was directing the U.S. Government to seek ways by which the United States could be protected against Soviet strategic nuclear weapons.

¹³ Colin S. Gray, “Nuclear Strategy: The Case for a Theory of Victory,” *International Security*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Summer 1979), pp. 54-87.

strategy cannot be discussed intelligently save in the context of the foreign policy of the United States.

THE PASTORAL LETTER

While the differences between nuclear and conventional weapons, one-to-one, are very obvious, this author is ethically uneasy about drawing moral distinctions between threatening or killing people by one means as opposed to another means. For example, what is the *moral difference* between a World War II that killed approximately fifty-five million people over the course of six years, and a World War III that could kill anywhere between, say, five and one-hundred-and-five (or more) million people in an afternoon? Is the difference strictly quantitative? What if it could be demonstrated that in the most just of just causes a particular nuclear strategy could not possibly result in more than, say, one, two, five, or ten million deaths? Is the moral objection to the nature of the weapon? In which case, why? Is it to the *probable* scale of casualties? In which case where is the numerical threshold between just and unjust war? Or is it to the scale of *possible* casualties?

1. The Pastoral Letter begs the central issue when, near its beginning, it *asserts* that “it is neither tolerable nor necessary that we should be doomed to live under such conditions” (the threat of nuclear war).¹⁴ The Letter offers no way out of these conditions, save for vague and unsubstantiated hopes for arms control, so the proper question may well be how do we render these conditions as tolerable as possible?
2. The Pastoral Letter asserts that “[t]he arms race is to be condemned as a danger, an act of aggression against the poor and a folly which does not provide the security it promises.”¹⁵ The *arms race* is not the danger, the danger lies in the foreign policy (mis)behavior of governments. Moreover, the United States is competing in arms in order to protect an international order of which she is the principal Western guardian. Given the strategic culture of the Soviet empire, it is folly not to race energetically.¹⁶ As for the allegations that the arms race *promises* to provide security, it is difficult to imagine to whom the Bishops can have been listening. The West competes in arms because it has no prudent choice.
3. The Letter alleges that the possibilities for placing political and moral limits on nuclear are “infinitesimal.”¹⁷ This is a gross exaggeration. Both U.S. and, one must presume, Soviet nuclear strategy are permeated with political limitations. What would happen in the event of nuclear war is pure speculation. One may be skeptical of the prospects for reciprocal restraint, but to characterize of [sic] those prospects

¹⁴ “Pastoral Letter,” p. 307.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

¹⁶ See Richard Pipes, “Soviet Global Strategy,” *Commentary*, Vol. 69 (April 1980), pp. 31-39; “Militarism and the Soviet State,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 4 (Fall 1980), pp. 1-12.

¹⁷ “Pastoral Letter,” p. 313.

as “infinitesimal” is to transform a plausible argument into an implausible argument by going too far.

4. The Pastoral Letter contains the demagogic sentence: “To say ‘no’ to nuclear war is both a necessary and a complex task.”¹⁸ What does it mean, “to say ‘no’ to nuclear war”? What are the alternatives? Is the United States to say ‘no’ always? In which case, the strategy is a gigantic bluff which, in practice, would be culturally and politically impossible to support in a democracy?
5. The Pastoral Letter claims that nuclear capabilities deny the protective functions associated with national sovereignty.¹⁹ However, the Soviet Union, with its damage-limitation programs, denies this assertion. Until President Reagan’s announcement in favor of strategic defense on March 23, 1983, the United States had decided not to attempt to defend its homeland directly. Admittedly, such defense is vastly more difficult today than in the past, but the idea that homeland defense is impossible in the nuclear age is simply wrong.
6. The Pastoral Letter, in effect, would deny a workable nuclear deterrent while offering nothing plausible to take its place. “We believe it is necessary, for the sake of prevention, to build a barrier against the concept of nuclear war as a viable strategy of defense.”²⁰ The Letter seems not to understand that a “viable strategy of defense” is a robust, if contentious, theory of deterrence against a distinctively Soviet adversary.
7. The Pastoral Letter argues that nuclear weapons must not be employed against population targets.²¹ The Catholic Bishops would deny the U.S. the right to target military targets (that is a war-fighting strategy for defense) as well.²² What then can be targeted, given that limited, contingent endorsement of nuclear deterrence is the reluctant position of the Letter?²³
8. The Letter advises that the deliberate initiation of nuclear warfare can never be justified.²⁴ This will be welcome news to the Soviet Union and will suit their military schemes very well. This author has some difficulty with the product of this ethical calculus that has been performed. The Bishops are advising that, if need be, Western civilization should surrender in the face of Soviet state power rather than use a single nuclear weapon (for fear of escalation to Holocaust). This idea lacks for a strong constituency in Europe.²⁵

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 313.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 313.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 314.

²¹ Ibid., p. 316.

²² Ibid., pp. 314, 315, 317.

²³ Ibid., pp. 316-317.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 314.

²⁵ See Henry A. Kissinger, “Nuclear Weapons and the Peace Movement,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer 1982), pp. 31-39.

9. On the subject of “Limited Nuclear War,” the Pastoral Letter asks “would not the casualties, even in a war defined as limited by strategists, still run in the millions?”²⁶ The answer is yes they would, and quite possibly run into the tens of millions. No one is trying to promise cheap, let alone painless, nuclear wars. If the United States cannot face the possibility of taking millions of casualties in a nuclear war, should deterrence fail, then she would be well advised to extricate herself as best she could from those political commitments that might even remotely serve to involve her in nuclear war. When one is in combat in the main theater of operations, large wars against large countries are always very expensive. The United States suffered relatively lightly in the two World Wars of this century, in large part, because the Wars were not waged on U.S. territory, because the United States entered the conflicts late, and because—in the 1941-45 case—the main body of the German Army was heavily occupied in the East.
10. The Pastoral Letter asserts that “in the nuclear age deterrence is often contrasted with defense. Since the presumption exists that defense against a nuclear attack is not feasible, the burden of both U.S. and Soviet policy has shifted to deterrence.”²⁷ While it is true that deterrence is often contrasted with defense, that contrast is logically false and should not be perpetuated without challenge. Defense is a theory of deterrence. In addition, it is far from a settled fact that defense against nuclear attack is infeasible.
11. The Letter asserts the importance of the superpowers moving by negotiation to nuclear weapon reductions and “eventually to the phasing out altogether of nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutual-assured destruction.”²⁸ It may well be important, just as the eradication of cancer is important, but it does not follow that just because it is important it is possible. Moreover, as has already been observed, the phasing-out of nuclear deterrence would translate into Soviet hegemony over Eurasia.
12. The Letter says that “[i]n current conditions ‘deterrence’ based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may be judged morally acceptable.”²⁹ Appropriate comments on this are to the effect that there would be no balance, since the nuclear deterrent acceptable to the Catholic Bishops would deny the U.S. the bargaining leverage needed for negotiating success with the Soviet Union; that it would not be a real deterrent, since the Bishops have denied the U.S. the right to target civilian or military targets; and that nuclear disarmament is infeasible unless there has been a prior political revolution in the terms of East-West relations (and the Bishops do not claim to know how to effect such a revolution). In short, the whole approach recommended in the Letter rests upon a

²⁶ “Pastoral Letter,” p. 315.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

central fallacy: Nuclear deterrence is acceptable, *pro tempore*, contingent upon a progressive disarmament which all of the evidence indicates is not likely to occur.

13. The Pastoral Letter, again and again, misstates the character of nuclear deterrence. "If deterrence exists only to prevent the *use* of nuclear weapons by others [which it does not], then proposals to go beyond this objective to encourage war-fighting capabilities must be resisted. We must continually say 'no' to the idea of nuclear war."³⁰ The Bishops, somehow, hope to deter with unusable weapons. Perhaps they understand their argument, but others (this author included) do not. A "war-fighting" strategy, perhaps paradoxically is a strategy for the deterrence of war. The Bishops license a temporary nuclear deterrent, but deny the right to a nuclear strategy of any kind.
14. The Pastoral Letter repeats old fallacies about destabilizing weapons.³¹ The MX IBCM, survivably deployed, is not a destabilizing weapon. However, the fulminations of the Letter against "war-fighting" strategies and "hard-target kill" weapons are much undermined by the fact that the Letter does not suggest an alternative strategy (remember that the U.S. must not target population).
15. In common with some freeze ideas, the Letter asks "support for immediate, bilateral verifiable agreements to halt the testing, production and deployment of new strategic systems."³² The Soviet Union will have to deny her basic political culture (always possible, but hardly very likely) before this can come about, since the U.S. cannot verify Soviet weapons production, save by very intrusive on-site inspection.
16. The Letter says that "efforts for negotiated control and reduction of arms must continue."³³ Public opinion certainly insists on this, but the Letter does not tell us why success is any more likely in the future than it was in the past. The whole structure of argument of the Bishops' Letter tumbles down if it is admitted that there are excellent grounds for having very severe reservations about the prospects for the negotiability of disarmament.
17. The Pastoral Letter asserts that "the numbers of existing weapons must be reduced in a manner that reduces the danger of war."³⁴ That sounds good as rhetoric, but it lacks substance. The fact is that there is no persuasive, powerful theory concerning the relationship of weapons numbers or quality to the danger of war.
18. The Letter advises that the United States should be prepared to take some "independent initiatives to reduce some of the gravest dangers and to encourage a constructive Soviet response."³⁵ It is difficult to oppose the idea of assuming limited, calculated risks in a good cause. But, it is contrary to the Soviet political culture to

³⁰ Ibid., p. 317.

³¹ Ibid., p. 317.

³² Ibid., p. 317.

³³ Ibid., p. 317.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 318.

³⁵ Ibid., p.318.

indulge in the business of gesture reciprocation. U.S. initiatives will be read by the Soviet Union as a sign of weakness. George F. Kennan advised the U.S. of that back in 1946 and 1947, and his advice is as true now as it was then.³⁶

19. The Letter, correctly and sensibly, stresses the need for political engagement between East and West.³⁷ But, the problem of peace is not so much a problem of communication or even understanding as it is a problem of the content of Soviet policy.
20. The Letter makes some general approving points which really do not apply to the United States today. It advises that “[n]ations must accept a limited view of those interests justifying military force. True self-interest may include the protection of weaker states, but does not include seizing the possessions of others, or the domination of other states or peoples.”³⁸ This describes a United States that is guilty of none of these heinous things.
21. The Letter advises that “it is necessary to develop means of defending peoples that do not depend upon the threat of annihilation or upon a war economy.”³⁹ The Bishops are preaching to the already converted. U.S. nuclear strategy does not threaten (or intend to execute) annihilation; and the United States does not have a war economy. Was there ever a *war*-economy that devoted only 6-7% of its GNP to defense and did not draft people into military service?
22. The Pastoral Letter advises that “[h]istory has demonstrated that an upward spiral even in conventional arms and a continuing unbridled increase in the armed forces, rather than securing true peace, are provocative of war.”⁴⁰ History demonstrates no such thing. If the authors intend this remark to refer to the present time, could the U.S. defense build up be called “unbridled”? Undisciplined language like this damages the credibility of the whole document.
23. The Letter informs us that Soviet imperial policing behavior in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan “has led in some quarters to an obsessive perception that Soviet policy is directed by irrational leaders striving insanely for world conquest at any costs.”⁴¹ One may be sure that it has, but those quarters are not very important for the debate over nuclear deterrence. This author does not know any participant in the current debate who believes either that Soviet leaders are irrational, or that they are “striving insanely for world conquest at any costs.”

³⁶ In his “Long Telegram” from the U.S. Moscow Embassy in 1946—which was the inspiration for his “Mr. X” article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947 on “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.”

³⁷ “Pastoral Letter,” p. 318.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

It is all too easy to be misunderstood. There is much of value in the Pastoral Letter. However, as should be plain enough by now, this author believes that the central tenets that the Letter advances are devoid of merit. To summarize, the Letter:

- Suggests that the U.S. adopt a policy of nuclear bluff (she must never go first, and it would be irrational and immoral to go second).
- Ties temporary acceptance of a non-operational nuclear deterrent to the achievement of progress in arms control, when it provides no plausible idea how to succeed in arms control.
- Would have the general effect of weakening the Western end of the only security system that now exists.