



FROM THE ARCHIVE

The first selection in the “Archives” includes excerpts from the 1983 President’s Commission on Strategic Forces (commonly known as the “Scowcroft Commission”). Despite being over four decades old, the Commission’s report remains surprisingly contemporary. Its call for national unity in the face of a totalitarian belligerent adversary is as relevant today as it was in 1983. The United States is learning again the hard way that the failure to keep up with an adversary’s nuclear modernization efforts and U.S. conventional weakness lead to international instability and undermine U.S. alliances. The Commission also emphasized that a key deterrence requirement is to understand the unique characteristics of the opponent, and to target U.S. deterrent threats accordingly. Lastly, the Commission challenged policymakers to recognize the importance of a moral dimension of a strategic competition “as citizens of a great nation with the humbling obligation to persevere ... both peace and liberty for the world.”

The second selection includes several paragraphs excerpted from Keith Payne’s 1982 text, *Nuclear Deterrence in U.S.-Soviet Relations*. These excerpts are again of contemporary value. They illustrate the late Dr. Henry Kissinger’s intellectual movement from the view, expressed rhetorically in 1974 immediately following arms control negotiations with Moscow, that strategic nuclear superiority was meaningless, to his 1979 view that U.S. superiority had been of value, while looming Soviet superiority was cause for concern.

Document No. 1. *Report of the President’s Commission on Strategic Forces, April 1983, Select Excerpts*

I. Deterrence and Arms Control

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At the same time the Commission is persuaded that as we consider the threat of mass destruction we must consider simultaneously the threat of aggressive totalitarianism. Both are central to the political dilemmas of our age. For the United States and its allies the essential dual task of statecraft is, and must be, to avoid the first and contain the second.

It is only by addressing these two issues together that we can begin to understand how to preserve both liberty and peace. Although the United States and the Soviet Union hold fundamentally incompatible views of history, of the nature of society, and of the individual’s place in it, the existence of nuclear weapons imbues that rivalry with peril unprecedented in human history. The temptation is sometimes great to simplify—or oversimplify—the difficult problems that result, either by blinking at the devastating nature of modern full-scale war or by refusing to acknowledge the emptiness of life under modern totalitarianism. But it is naive, false, and dangerous to assume that either of these, today, can be ignored and the other dealt with in isolation. We cannot cope with the efforts of the Soviet Union to



extend its power without giving thought to the way nuclear weapons have sharply raised the stakes and changed the nature of warfare. Nor can we struggle against nuclear war or the arms race in some abstract sense without keeping before us the Soviet Union's drive to expand its power, which is what makes those struggles so difficult.

[...]

By the same token, however, our task as a nation cannot be understood from a position of moral neutrality toward the differences between liberty and totalitarianism. These differences proceed from conflicting views regarding the rights of individuals and the nature of society. Only if Americans believe that it is worth a sustained effort over the years to preserve liberty in the face of challenge by a system that is the antithesis of liberal values can our task be seen as a just and worthy one in spite of its dangers.

We do have many strengths in such an effort. Over the long run, strengths lent by liberty itself are our greatest ones—our abilities to adapt peacefully to political change, to improve social justice, to innovate with technology, to produce what our people need to live and prosper. What we have most to fear is that confusion and internal divisions—sometimes by products of the vigorous play of our free politics—will lead us to lost purpose, hope, and resolve.

We have good reason to maintain all three. Neither time nor history is on the side of large, centralized, autocratic systems that seek to achieve and maintain control over all aspects of the lives of many diverse peoples. We should, with calm persistence, limit the expansion of today's version of this sort of totalitarian state, the Soviet Union. We should persuade its leaders that they cannot successfully divert attention from internal problems by resorting to international blackmail, expansion, and militarism—rationalized by alleged threats posed by us or our allies. We should also be ready to encourage the Soviets to begin to settle differences between us, thorough equitable arms control agreements and other measures. But moral neutrality and indifference or acquiescence in the face of Soviet efforts to expand their military and political power do not hasten such settlements—they delay them, make them less likely, and ultimately increase the risk of war.

Deterrence is central to the calm persistence we must demonstrate in order to reduce these risks. American strategic forces exist to deter attack on the United States or its allies—and the coercion that would be possible if the public or decisionmakers believed that the Soviets might be able to launch a successful attack. Such a policy of deterrence, like the security policy of the West itself, is essentially defensive in nature. The strategic forces that are necessary in order to support such a policy by their very existence help to convince the Soviet Union's leaders: that the West has the military strength and political will to resist aggression; and that, if they should ever choose to attack, they should have no doubt that we can and would respond until we have so damaged the power of the Soviet state that they will unmistakably be far worse off than if they had never begun.

There can be no doubt that the very scope of the possible tragedy of modern nuclear war, and the increased destruction made possible even by modern non-nuclear technology, have

changed the nature of war itself. This is not only because massive conventional war with modern weapons could be horrendously destructive—some fifty million people died in “conventional” World War II before the advent of nuclear weapons—but also because *conventional* war between the world’s major power blocs is the most likely way for *nuclear* war to develop. The problem of deterring the threat of nuclear war, in short, cannot be isolated from the overall power balance between East and West. Simply put, it is war that must concern us, not nuclear war alone. Thus we must maintain a balance between our nuclear and conventional forces and we must demonstrate to the Soviets our cohesion and our will. And we must understand that weakness in any of these areas puts a dangerous burden on the others as well as on overall deterrence.

Deterrence is not, and cannot be, bluff. In order for deterrence to be effective we must not merely have weapons, we must be perceived to be able, and prepared, if necessary, to use them effectively against the key elements of Soviet power. Deterrence is not an abstract notion amenable to simple quantification. Still less is it a mirror image of what would deter ourselves. Deterrence is the set of beliefs in the minds of the Soviet leaders, given their own values and attitudes, about our capabilities and our will. It requires us to determine, as best we can, what would deter them from considering aggression, even in a crisis—not to determine what would deter us.

Our military forces must be able to deter war even if the Soviets are unwilling to participate with us in equitable and reasonable arms control agreements. But various types of agreements can, when the Soviets prove willing, accomplish critical objectives. Arms control can: reduce the risk of war; help limit the spread of nuclear weapons; remove or reduce the risk of misunderstanding of particular events or accidents; seal off wasteful, dangerous, or unhelpful lines of technical development before either side gets too committed to them; help channel modernization into stabilizing rather than destabilizing paths; reduce misunderstanding about the purpose of weapons developments and thus reduce the need to over-insure against worst-case projections; and help make arsenals less destructive and costly. To achieve part or all of these positive and useful goals, we must keep in mind the importance of compliance and adequate verification—difficult problems in light of the nature of the Soviet state—and the consequent importance of patience in order to reach fair and reasonable agreements.

This is a vital and challenging agenda. In some of these areas of arms control our interests coincide closely with those of the Soviets. In others, their efforts to undermine the effectiveness of our deterrent and to use negotiations to split us from our allies will make negotiations difficult.

But whether the Soviets prove willing or not, stability should be the primary objective both of the modernization of our strategic forces and of our arms control proposals. Our arms control proposals and our strategic arms programs should thus be integrated and be mutually reinforcing. They should work together to permit us, and encourage the Soviets, to move in directions that reduce or eliminate the advantage of aggression and also reduce the risk of war by accident or miscalculation. As we try to enhance stability in this sense, the Commission believes that other objectives should be subordinated to the overall goal of

permitting the United States to move—over time—toward more stable strategic deployments, and giving the Soviets the strong incentive to do the same. Consequently it believes, for the reasons set forth below, that it is important to move toward reducing the value and importance of individual strategic targets.

II. Soviet Objectives and Programs

Effective deterrence and effective arms control have both been made significantly more difficult by Soviet conduct and Soviet weapons programs in recent years. The overall military balance, including the nuclear balance, provides the backdrop for Soviet decisions about the manner in which they will try to advance their interests. This is central to our understanding of how to deter war, how to frustrate Soviet efforts at blackmail, and how to deal with the Soviets' day-to-day conduct of international affairs. The Soviets have shown by word and deed that they regard military power, including nuclear weapons, as a useful tool in the projection of their national influence. In the Soviet strategic view, nuclear weapons are closely related to, and are integrated with, their other military and political instruments as a means of advancing their interests. The Soviets have concentrated enormous effort on the development and modernization of nuclear weapons, obviously seeking to achieve what they regard as important advantages in certain areas of nuclear weaponry.

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III. Preventing Soviet Exploitation of Their Military Programs

In our effort to make a strategy of deterrence and arms control effective in preventing the Soviets from political or military use of their strategic forces, we must keep several points in mind.

The Soviets must continue to believe what has been NATO's doctrine for three decades: that if we or our allies should be attacked—by massive conventional means or otherwise—the United States has the will and the means to defend with the full range of American power. This by no means excludes the need to make improvements in our conventional forces in order to have increased confidence in our ability to defend effectively at the conventional level in many more situations, and thus to raise the nuclear threshold. Certainly mutual arms control agreements to reduce both sides' reliance on nuclear weapons should be pursued. But effective deterrence requires that early in any Soviet consideration of attack, or threat of attack, with conventional forces or chemical or biological weapons, Soviet leaders must understand that they risk an American nuclear response.

Similarly, effective deterrence requires that the Soviets be convinced that they could not credibly threaten us or our allies with a limited use of nuclear weapons against military targets, in one country or many. Such a course of action by them would be even more likely

to result in full-scale nuclear war than would a massive conventional attack. But we cannot discount the possibility that the Soviets would implicitly or explicitly threaten such a step in some future crisis if they believed that we were unprepared or unwilling to respond. Indeed lack of preparation or resolve on our part would make such blackmail distinctly more probable.

In order to deter such Soviet threats we must be able to put at risk those types of Soviet targets—including hardened ones such as military command bunkers and facilities, missile silos, nuclear weapons and other storage, and the rest—which the Soviet leaders have given every indication by their actions they value most, and which constitute their tools of control and power. We cannot afford the delusion that Soviet leaders—human though they are and cautious though we hope they will be—are going to be deterred by exactly the same concerns that would dissuade us. Effective deterrence of the Soviet leaders requires them to be convinced in their own minds that there could be no case in which they could benefit by initiating war.

Effective deterrence of any Soviet temptation to threaten or launch a massive conventional or a limited nuclear war thus requires us to have a comparable ability to destroy Soviet military targets, hardened and otherwise. If there were ever a case to be made that the Soviets would unilaterally stop their strategic deployments at a level short of the ability seriously to threaten our forces, that argument vanished with the deployment of their SS-18 and SS-19 ICBMs. A one-sided strategic condition in which the Soviet Union could effectively destroy the whole range of strategic targets in the United States, but we could not effectively destroy a similar range of targets in the Soviet Union, would be extremely unstable over the long run. Such a situation could tempt the Soviets, in a crisis, to feel they could successfully threaten or even undertake conventional or limited nuclear aggression in the hope that the United State would lack a fully effective response. A one-sided condition of this sort would clearly not serve the cause of peace.

In order, then, to pursue successfully a policy of deterrence and verifiable, stabilizing arms control we must have a strong and militarily effective nuclear deterrent. Consequently our strategic forces must be modernized, as necessary, to enhance to an adequate degree their overall survivability and to enable them to engage effectively the targets that Soviet leaders most value.

Also, as described below, we should seek to use arms control agreements to reduce instabilities and to channel both sides' strategic modernization toward stabilizing developments, deployments, and reductions. Regardless of what we are able to accomplish with arms control agreements, however, two aspects of deterrence are crucial. The problems of maintaining an effective deterrent and of reaching stabilizing and verifiable arms control agreements cannot be addressed coherently without keeping in mind the nature of Soviet expansionism. Second, the deterrent effect of our strategic forces is not something separate and apart from the ability of those forces to be used against the tools by which the Soviet leaders maintain their power. Deterrence, on the contrary, requires military effectiveness.

IV. U.S. Strategic Forces and Trends

A. Strategic Forces As A Whole

The development of the components of our strategic forces—the multiplicity of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and bombers—was in part the result of an historical evolution. This triad of forces, however, serves several important purposes.

First, the existence of several strategic forces requires the Soviets to solve a number of different problems in their efforts to plan how they might try to overcome them. Our objective, after all, is to make their planning of any such attack as difficult as we can. If it were possible for the Soviets to concentrate their research and development efforts on putting only one or two components of U.S. strategic forces at risk—e.g., by an intensive effort at anti-submarine warfare to attempt to threaten our ballistic missile submarines—both their incentive to do so and their potential gains would be sharply increased. Thus the existence of several components of our strategic forces permits each to function as a hedge against possible Soviet successes in endangering any of the others. For example, at earlier times uncertainties about the vulnerability of our bomber force were alleviated by our confidence in the survivability of our ICBMs. And although the survivability of our ICBMs is today a matter of concern (especially when that problem is viewed in isolation) it would be far more serious if we did not have a force of ballistic missile submarines at sea and a bomber force. By the same token, over the long run it would be unwise to rely so heavily on submarines as our only ballistic missile force that a Soviet breakthrough in anti-submarine warfare could not be offset by other strategic systems.

Second, the different components of our strategic forces would force the Soviets, if they were to contemplate an all-out attack, to make choices which would lead them to reduce significantly their effectiveness against one component in order to attack another. For example, if Soviet war planners should decide to attack our bomber and submarine bases and our ICBM silos with simultaneous detonations—by delaying missile launches from close-in submarines so that such missiles would *arrive* at our bombers bases at the same time the Soviet ICBM warheads (with their longer time of flight) would arrive at our ICBM silos—then a very high proportion of our alert bombers would have escaped before their bases were struck. In such a case the Soviets should have no confidence that we would refrain from launching our ICBMs during that interval after we had been hit. It is important to appreciate that this would not be a “launch-on-warning,” or even a “launch under attack,” but rather a launch *after* attack—after massive nuclear detonations had already occurred on U.S. soil.

Thus our bombers and ICBMs are more survivable together against Soviet attack than either would be alone. This illustrates that the different components of our strategic forces should be assessed collectively and not in isolation. It also suggests that whereas it is highly desirable that a component of the strategic forces be survivable when it is viewed separately, it makes a major contribution to deterrence even if its survivability depends in substantial measure on the existence of one of the other components of the force.

The third purpose served by having multiple components in our strategic forces is that each component has unique properties not present in the others. Nuclear submarines have the advantage of being able to stay submerged and hidden for months at a time, and thus the missiles they carry may reasonably be held in reserve rather than being used early in the event of attack. Bombers may be launched from their bases on warning without irretrievably committing them to an attack; also, their weapons, though they arrive in hours, not minutes, have excellent accuracy against a range of possible targets. ICBMs have advantages in command and control, in the ability to be retargeted readily, and in accuracy. This means that ICBMs are especially effective in deterring Soviet threats of massive conventional or limited nuclear attacks, because they could most credibly respond promptly and controllably against specific military targets and thereby promptly disrupt an attack on us or our allies.

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VI. Arms Control.

It is a legitimate, ambitious, and realistic objective of arms control agreements to channel the modernization of strategic forces, over the long term, in more stable directions than would be the case without such agreements. Such stability supports deterrence by making aggression less likely and by reducing the risk of war by accident or miscalculation. The strategic modernization program recommended herein and the arms control considerations contained in this report are consistent with an important aspect of such stability. In light of the developments in technology set forth at in Section IV.B. above, they seek to enhance survivability by moving both sides, in the long term, toward strategic deployments in which individual targets are of lower value. The recommended strategic program thus proposes an evolution for the U.S. ICBM force in which a given number of ballistic missile warheads would, over time, be spread over a larger number of launchers than would otherwise be the case.

[...]

Arms control agreements of this sort—simple and flexible enough to permit stabilizing development and modernization programs, while imposing quantitative limits and reductions—can make an important contribution to the stability of the strategic balance. An agreement that permitted modernization of forces and also provided an incentive to reduce while modernizing, in ways that would enhance stability, would be highly desirable. It would have the consideration benefit of capping both sides' strategic forces at levels that would be considerably lower than they would otherwise reach over time. It would also recognize, realistically, that each side will naturally desire to configure its own strategic forces. Simple aggregate limits of this sort are likely to be more practical, stabilizing, and lasting than elaborate, detailed limitations on force structure and modernization whose ultimate consequences cannot be confidently anticipated.

Encouraging stability by giving incentives to move toward less vulnerable deployments is more important than reducing quickly the absolute number of warheads deployed. Reductions in warhead numbers, while desirable for long-term reasons of limiting the cost of strategic systems, should not be undertaken at the expense of influencing the characteristics of strategic deployments. For example, warhead reductions, while desirable, should not be proposed or undertaken at a rate that leads us to limit the number of launching platforms to such low levels that their survivability is made more questionable.

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Finally, the Commission is particularly mindful of the importance of achieving a greater degree of national consensus with respect to our strategic deployments and arms control. For the last decade, each successive Administration has made proposals for arms control of strategic offensive systems that have become embroiled in political controversy between the Executive branch and Congress and between political parties. None has produced a ratified treaty covering such systems or a politically sustainable strategic modernization program for the U.S. ICBM force. Such a performance, as a nation, has produced neither agreement among ourselves, restraint by the Soviets, nor lasting mutual limitations on strategic offensive weapons.

[...]

The Commission believes that all of the difficult issues discussed in this report—including the devastating nature of modern war and the totalitarian and expansive character of the Soviet system—must be considered fairly in trying to reach a national consensus about a broad approach to strategic force modernization and arms control that can set a general direction for a number of years. Clearly there will be, and should be, many different views about specific elements in that approach. But the Commission unanimously believes that such a new consensus—requiring a spirit of compromise by all of us—is essential if we are to move toward greater stability and toward reducing the risk of war. If we can begin to see ourselves, in dealing with these issues, not as political partisans or as crusaders for one specific solution to a part of this complex set of problems, but rather as citizens of a great nation with the humbling obligation to persevere in the long-run task of preserving both peace and liberty for the world, a common perspective may finally be found.



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Document No. 2. *Nuclear Deterrence in U.S.-Soviet Relations*, Keith B. Payne (Foreword by Colin S. Gray), Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 1982, pp. 3-4

Strategic stability, superiority, inferiority, and parity are terms used widely in American defense and arms control debates. Despite the widespread use of these terms, they are woefully misunderstood. They have become primarily buzz words generally employed for their political effect rather than as analytically useful concepts. Various measures of United States and Soviet strategic offensive forces are often compared (typically in a highly politicized fashion) to “prove” Soviet or American advantages, or more recently, continued American “rough parity.” However, the relevance of strategic superiority or parity on United States-Soviet relations usually is assumed to be significant or benign without reference to any supportive reasoning.⁶

Despite the typically shallow use of the terms “stability” and “superiority/parity/inferiority,” they have had a profound impact. The United States has accepted the vast expansion of Soviet strategic capabilities with relative passivity because of the policy influence of a particular model of stability that permits a logical conclusion to the effect that increments of strategic nuclear superiority/inferiority entail negligible political-military consequences. Henry Kissinger’s well known rhetorical statement in defense of the asymmetrical ICBM and SLBM launcher ceilings in the SALT I Interim Agreement captures the essence and policy relevance of this model.

What in the name of God is strategic superiority? What is the significance of it, politically, militarily, operationally, at these levels of numbers? What do you do with it?⁷

Such a comment has always been answerable conceptually, and from the perspective of the 1980s it can be illustrated that the model of stability it reflects lacks integrity as the basis for United States strategic nuclear doctrine. That said, it must be acknowledged that such a critique of Kissinger’s statement and its underlying rationale cannot be made lightly as they represent much of the “responsible” American strategic theorizing of the nuclear age.

An object of this study is to examine the suitability for the 1980s of the model of stability that has dominated United States strategic thought so thoroughly for over a decade, and continues to exert an overwhelming effect on United States strategic thinking.⁸ Indeed, one

⁶ Some of the useful exceptions to this generalization are Paul Nitze, “Deterring our Deterrent,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 25 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 195-210; and Nitze, “Assuring Strategic Stability in an era of Détente,” *Foreign Affairs* 54, no. 2 (January 1976), pp. 207-232; Colin S. Gray, *The Future of the Land-Based Missile Force*, Adelphi Papers, no. 140 (London: IISS, Winter 1977); and Edward Luttwak, *Strategic Power: Military Capabilities and Political Utility*, the Washington Papers, Vol. 4, no. 38 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, 1976).

⁷ See “News Conference at Moscow, July 3,” *Department of State Bulletin* 71, no. 1831 (July 29, 1974), p. 215.

⁸ For example, Secretary of Defense Brown stated, “In the interests of stability, we avoid the capability of eliminating the other side’s deterrent, insofar as we might be able to do so. In short, we must be quite willing—as we have been for some



could view the *leitmotiv* of this analysis as an attempt to determine the theoretical and immediate validity for Kissinger's rediscovery of the political significance of superiority in 1979.

On at least one occasion, I contributed to the existing ambivalence. After an exhausting negotiations in July 1974, I gave an answer to a question at a press conference I have come to regret: "What in the name of God is strategic superiority?" I asked, "What is the significance of it at these levels of numbers? What do you do with it?" My statement reflected fatigue and exasperation, not analysis. If both sides maintain the balance, then indeed the race becomes futile and SALT has its place in strengthening stability. But if we opt out of the race unilaterally, we will probably be faced eventually with a younger group of Soviet leaders who will figure out what can be done with strategic superiority.⁹

And,

Our strategic doctrine has relied extraordinarily, perhaps exclusively, on our superior strategic power. The Soviet Union has never relied on its superior strategic power. It has always depended more on its local and regional superiority. Therefore even an equivalence in destructive power, even assured destruction for both sides is a revolution in NATO doctrine as we have known it.¹⁰

time—to accept the principle of mutual deterrence and design our defense posture in light of that principle." (Emphasis added) *Department of Defense Annual Report Fiscal Year 1980* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, January 25, 1979), p. 61.

⁹ U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The SALT II Treaty*, Hearings, Part 3, 96th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1979), p. 169.

¹⁰ Quotation from Henry Kissinger's September 1, 1979 speech in Brussels, reprinted in "Kissinger Looks at the future of NATO," *Congressional Record*, September 6, 1979, p. E4292.