

# Letters to The Times

## Weinberger View on Nuclear War

I am increasingly concerned with news accounts that portray this Administration as planning to wage protracted nuclear war, or seeking to acquire a nuclear "war-fighting" capability. This is completely inaccurate, and these stories misrepresent the Administration's policies to the American public and to our allies and adversaries abroad.

It is the first and foremost goal of this Administration to take every step to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again, for we do not believe there could be any "winners" in a nuclear war. Our entire strategy aims to deter war of all kinds, but most particularly to deter nuclear war. To accomplish this objective, our forces must be able to respond in a measured and prudent manner to the threat posed by the Soviet Union. That will require the improvements in our strategic forces that the President has proposed. But it does not mean that we endorse the concept of protracted nuclear war, or nuclear "war-fighting." It is the Soviet Union that appears to be building forces for a "protracted" conflict.

The policy of deterrence is difficult for some to grasp because it is based on a paradox. But this is quite simple: to make the cost of nuclear war much higher than any possible benefit. If the Soviets know in advance that a nuclear attack on the United States would bring swift nuclear retaliation, they would never attack in the first place. They would be "deterred" from ever beginning a nuclear war.

There is nothing new about our policy. Since the awful age of nuclear weapons began, the United States has sought to prevent nuclear war through a policy of deterrence. This policy has been approved, through the political processes of the democratic nations it protects, since at least 1950. More important, it works. It has worked in the face of major international tensions involving the great powers, and it has worked in the face of war itself.

But, for deterrence to continue to be successful in the future, we must take steps to offset the Soviet military buildup. If we do not modernize our arsenal now, as the Soviets have been doing for more than 20 years, we will, within a few years, no longer have the ability to retaliate. The Soviet Union would then be in a position to threaten or actually to attack us with the knowledge that we would be incapable of responding. We have seen in Poland, in Afghanistan, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere that the Soviet Union does not hesitate to take advantage of a weaker adversary. We cannot allow the Soviet Union to think it could begin a nuclear war with us and win.

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This is not just idle speculation. The Soviet Union has engaged in a frenzied military buildup, in spite of their economic difficulties. They have continued to build greater numbers of nuclear weapons far beyond those necessary for deterrence. They now have over 5,000 nuclear warheads on ICBMs, compared to about 2,000 only five years ago. They have modified the design of these weapons and their launchers so that many of their land-based missiles are now more accurate, more survivable and more powerful than our own. They have also developed a refiring capability that will allow them to reload their delivery systems several times. They have elaborate plans for civil defense and air defense against any retaliation we might attempt. And, finally, their writings and military doctrine emphasize a nuclear war-fighting scenario. Whatever they claim their intentions to be, the fact remains that they are designing their weapons in such a way and in sufficient numbers to indicate to us that they think they could begin, and win, a nuclear war.

In the face of all this, it is my responsibility and duty as secretary of defense to make every effort to modernize our nuclear forces in such a way that the United States retains the capability to deter the Soviet Union from ever beginning a nuclear war. We must take the steps necessary to match the Soviet Union's greatly improved nuclear capability.

That is exactly why we must have a capability for a survivable and enduring response—to demonstrate that our strategic forces could survive Soviet strikes over an extended period. Thus we believe we could deter any attack. Otherwise we would be tempting them to employ nuclear weapons or try to blackmail us. In short, we cannot afford to place ourselves in the position where the survivability of our deterrent would force the President to choose between using our strategic forces before they were destroyed or surrendering.

Those who object to a policy that would strengthen our deterrent, then, would force us into a more dangerous, hair-triggered posture. Forces that must be used in the very first instant of an enemy attack are not the tools of a prudent strategy. A posture that encourages Soviet nuclear adventurism is not the basis of an effective deterrent. Our entire strategic program, including the development of a response capability that has been so maligned in the press recently, has

been developed with the express intention of assuring that nuclear war will never be fought.

I know that this doctrine of deterrence is a difficult paradox to understand. It is an uncomfortable way to keep the peace. We understand deterrence and accept the fact that we must do much more in order to continue to keep the peace. It is my fervent hope that all can understand and accept this so that we can avoid the sort of sensationalist treatment of every mention of the word "nuclear" that only serves to distort our policy and to frighten people all over the world. Our policy is peace, and we deeply believe that the best and surest road to peace is to secure and maintain an effective and credible deterrent.

The purpose of U.S. policy remains to prevent aggression through an effective policy of deterrence—the very goal which prompted the formation of the North Atlantic Alliance, an alliance which is as vital today as it was the day it was formed.

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