

PRESIDENT REAGAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY FROM  
1981 TO 1983: THE EFFECTS ON NATIONAL  
DEFENSE, FOREIGN POLICY,  
AND SOCIETY

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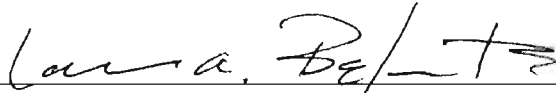
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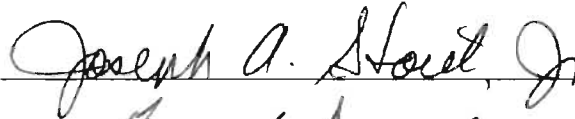
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## PREFACE

Relations with the Soviet Union were essential issues to United States foreign and military policy for a large part of the Twentieth Century. The legacies of many American presidents have been determined by their skill in handling this issue. The Reagan presidency was vital in changing the face of relations with the U.S.S.R. (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). One of the key issues in relations to the Soviet Union was the proper size and focus of United States' nuclear forces. Although Reagan spent eight years in office addressing the issue of his nation's nuclear armaments, the basis of many of his policies to the Soviet Union was formed during his presidential campaign in 1980 and his first three years in office. The conduct of the Carter administration and Reagan's criticism of it formed another important element in the formation of his nuclear doctrine. Reagan harshly criticized the nuclear policies of his predecessor and their effects on national defense and foreign policy. In the first days of his presidency, Reagan promised to improve the country's position in these matters by increasing the strength of its nuclear defense. In 1983, President Reagan asked the country to allow him another term to pursue his goals for the United States. The nation complied, and Ronald Reagan went on to be the dominant voice in United States' military and foreign policy in the decade. One of the most emphasized areas of Reagan's first term was his nuclear policies. It is important to examine the actual effectiveness of these policies. One needs to examine the question of whether President Reagan fulfilled to the promises made on nuclear policies in his first days in office.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of President Reagan's nuclear doctrine on United States' defense, its ability to conduct foreign policy, and domestic

confidence in safety from nuclear war. The thesis of this work is that despite promises to improve conditions in the nation quickly through a change in nuclear doctrine in a rapid fashion, the first three years of the Reagan administration's nuclear arms doctrine caused a slight decline in United States defense, foreign policy, and public approval compared to the previous administration. Reagan gained considerable support in his presidential campaign by criticizing the nuclear policies and foreign policies of President Carter. After his election, Reagan promised to enhance national security rapidly through a new nuclear program based on modernization of United States' forces. He reasoned improvement on the nation's nuclear forces would put it in a better position to negotiate arms reduction treaties with the Soviet Union, making the United States' doubly protected from nuclear attack. However, the early years of the Reagan administration suffered some of the same problems in its nuclear policy as President Carter had. Public opinion was aligned against the policies of both presidents for much of their terms. Members of Congress and the country's European allies reacted negatively to both nuclear programs and questioned their credibility and feasibility. However, conditions grew worse under Reagan. The United States' European allies became increasingly hostile to the administration's nuclear doctrine because of their fears that the administration was jeopardizing the security of Europe. A portion of the American public expressed its concern through books, films, and rising memberships in nuclear protest groups. Polls indicated the United States' public was increasingly concerned over the threat of nuclear war and believed that Reagan, not the Soviet Union was the chief antagonist.

It is important to recognize the limitations of gauging overall public opinion through film, literature, newspaper editorials, and polls. One must realize that the upper class and educated elites in American society, who often held more liberal views than Reagan, enjoyed great influence on the content of film and literature. Public opinion

polls can also be misleading because they have the the potential manipulated by those who conduct them. This can be done by wording questions in a certain fashion to make one side of an issue seem more attractive. It is also reasonable to conclude that the content of literature and mass media productions do not equally represent portions of American society outside of their producers. While keeping these qualifications in mind, the evidence presented in this work will demonstrate Reagan's nuclear policies spurred a substantial reaction from the elite and liberal portions of the American public, as seen in films, literature, and polls. This work will refer to the terms "public" and "public opinion" with these considerations in mind.

Reagan's early nuclear doctrines on national defense, foreign policy, and society have not been specifically or completely addressed in secondary historical literature. Larger works address this issue in fragments or brevity, but none give it comprehensive attention. However, there are various interpretations available on the motivation behind Reagan's overall defense program as well as comparisons of it to the Carter administration. These interpretations partially relate to the topic of this work and deserve attention.

The dominant secondary interpretation on the motivation behind Reagan's nuclear buildup is that the administration's program was greatly formulated by conservative advisors of the president. This interpretation holds that Reagan was somewhat dominated by the wishes of his advisors. In The Reagan Doctrine, Mark Lagon argues that the beliefs of conservative advisors played a key role in formulating United States' policy on military issues.<sup>1</sup> This view is also held by Lou Cannon in President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime. Cannon argues Reagan's advisors provided the majority of direction in the administration's plan to modernize the country's nuclear

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Lagon, The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter. (Westport, CN; Praeger, 1994), 154.

forces. He cited the administration's advocacy of the building of the MX Missile as a particular example of this trend.<sup>2</sup>

In explaining how the administration justified its buildup, the majority of historians have expressed two arguments. One of these interpretations is the administration claimed that the inadequacies of the Carter administration had dangerously weakened the country. Michael Staak makes this claim in The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of American Strength?, edited by Helga Haftendorn and Jakob Schissler. Staak argues Reagan justified his nuclear buildup by constantly pointing back to the failures of the Carter administration in its dealings with the Soviet Union, the dangers it posed to United States' national security, and the need for a drastic change through an increased emphasis on defense.<sup>3</sup> Others argue that the United States had a moral duty to establish peace through a strong foreign policy and military influence. This view is articulated by Christian Tchnoff in the Haftendorn and Schissler compilation. Tchnoff argues that Reagan believed in the moral mission of the United States to police the world and applied this belief to his foreign policy.<sup>4</sup>

Two conflicting interpretations emerge in historical analyses of the overall military policies of President Reagan compared to those of past administrations. One argument is that Reagan used many of the same methods in dealing with the Soviet Union, following the policy of containment, increasing military readiness, and attempting negotiation to resolve conflict. This view is represented by Louisa Hulett in From Cold Wars to Star Wars. Hulett argues Reagan's policies are particularly similar to those of

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<sup>2</sup>Lou Cannon, President Reagan: A Role of a Lifetime. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 168.

<sup>3</sup>Helga Haftendorn and Jakob Schissler, eds. The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of American Strength? (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 103.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

Presidents Truman and Eisenhower.<sup>5</sup> The contrasting interpretation is seen in On The Brink, by Jay Wink. He argues that Reagan broke from past presidents by aggressively employing military confrontation and brinkmanship to encourage peace. Wink concludes these new policies decreased the chances the United States would have to face the Soviet Union in nuclear conflict.<sup>6</sup>

This work seeks to fill a gap in the secondary literature concerning the specific effects of Reagan's first three years in office on defense, foreign policy, and society. It will address the early years of the presidency and the effectiveness of Reagan's nuclear program. It will also compare the merits of Reagan's nuclear doctrine to the heavily criticized Carter administration. This work will finally seek to refine the conclusions of existing secondary work when applicable to the focus of its study. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Laura Belmonte for her guidance and support in the writing of this work and in my other graduate studies. I also wish to thank Dr. Joseph Stout and Dr. George Jewsbury for serving on my thesis advisory committee and lending their advice on this work. In addition, this study was vastly improved with the valuable assistance of Mr. John Phillips and his staff in the Government Documents Department at the Edmon Low Library. I also wish to express my thanks to Dr. John Maple, Dr. John Thompson, and Dr. Jim Wilson for their inspiration and guidance while pursuing my bachelor's degree at Oklahoma Christian University.

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<sup>5</sup>Louisa Hulett, From Cold Wars to Star Wars (New York: University Press of America, 1988), 43.

<sup>6</sup>Jay Wink, On the Brink (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 10.

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## NOMENCLATURE

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
CBO	Congressional Budget Office
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting Company
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
MAD	Mutual Assured Destruction
MIRV	Multiple Targetable Reentry Vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCC	National Council of Churches of Christ
NCCB	National Conference of Catholic Bishops
NRC	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
NSC	National Security Council
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SAIAS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Talks
U.S.	United States
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: PRESIDENT CARTER'S NUCLEAR ARMS DOCTRINE AND THE EFFECTS ON FOREIGN POLICY

To examine the effects of President Reagan's nuclear policies, one must assess the condition of national defense and foreign policy under the previous administrations. In the 1976 presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter criticized the foreign policy of President Gerald Ford and called for changes in the country's approach to defense. Carter criticized Ford for the deterioration of United States-Soviet relations under his tenure. Carter stated that Ford's administration had been based on "style and spectacular," instead of focusing on improving relations between the superpowers. He argued that under Ford's leadership, the United States had lost respect in the world.<sup>1</sup> Carter's solution to this problem began with a commitment to addressing domestic problems in the nation in order to project a strong presence abroad. Carter's vision for foreign policy largely entailed infusing the morality of the American people into government decision making. In his 1976 campaign, Carter promised to involve Congress and American allies in the formation of the nation's foreign policy and decision making. Carter stated this involvement of Congress and allies was a positive contrast from the secretive decision-making processes of the Ford and Nixon administrations.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Carter called for a reduction in the nation's defense budget while maintaining parity in strategic weapons with the Soviet Union.

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<sup>1</sup>Sydney Kraus, ed., *The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 476.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 480.

In the presidential campaign of 1976, Carter took advantage of the decline of detente that occurred during the Ford presidency. Detente, a period of relaxed tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, began under the presidency of Richard Nixon from 1969 to 1973. Nixon granted the Soviet Union Most Favored Nation Status and successfully negotiated a nuclear arms reduction treaty at the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). However, doubts began to arise as to Ford's ability to continue these positive and relaxed relations with the Soviets. In response to Soviet aggression in Angola, Ford removed the Most Favored Nation status on the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> However, Ford continued to attempt negotiation on nuclear weapons reduction. Ford's attempts to negotiate a second agreement at the SALT II negotiations met resistance from the conservative elements of the Republican party and the general public. They reacted negatively to Ford's willingness to negotiate with the Soviet Union while it conducted aggressive international activities and violated human rights. In The Rise and Fall of Detente, Richard Stevenson argues that public approval aligned against this type of "amoral" foreign policy with the Soviet Union. He also states detente was declining as the 1976 election approached.<sup>4</sup> Carter's message of infusing morality into foreign policy helped him publicly challenge the policies of Ford.

Upon election, Carter presented the foreign policy goals of his administration and began to take action on his campaign promises. In short, he proposed to improve relations with the Soviet Union and China, commit to the global promotion of human rights, and promote international cooperation to solve the threat of nuclear war.<sup>5</sup> He promised to make strategic decisions towards dealing with the Soviet Union more public

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<sup>3</sup>Stevenson, Richard W., The Rise and Fall of Detente: Relaxations of Tension in US-Soviet Relations (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 174.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>5</sup>Haas, Garland A, Jimmy Carter and the Politics of Frustration (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc, 1992), 98.

to allies and the American public.<sup>6</sup> Carter selected Cyrus Vance as Secretary of State, promising to conduct foreign policy with less “fanfare” than the previous administration. He appointed Harold Brown as Secretary of Defense. Brown had gained notoriety for his killing of many military defense programs while previously working at the Department of Defense.<sup>7</sup> Conservatives in Congress resented this selection based on Brown’s history of resisting defense expenditures. Carter selected Paul Warnke, a favorite of dovish members in Congress, to head the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in 1977. Warnke believed that the United States should adopt a policy of restraint in its buildup of nuclear weapons while calling for the Soviet Union to do the same. This policy of decreasing nuclear production, in hopes the Soviets would follow suit, greatly disturbed conservative defense analysts. Despite this criticism, Carter called Warnke’s policies “sound” at the time of his selection.<sup>8</sup> These selections suggested Carter planned to reduce the previous atmosphere of confrontation and encourage cooperation with the Soviet Union. Carter advertised this policy as a change from the confrontational styles of Nixon and Ford.

Carter’s stance on nuclear defense was based on the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), which guided U.S. foreign policy since the 1960’s. Under this belief, the United States was safe from a nuclear attack as long as it held enough nuclear weapons to devastate the Soviet Union. Under MAD, this nuclear strength would deter the Soviet Union from nuclear attack because it would ensure the destruction of both sides. Government documents confirm that President Carter held enough weapons to inflict serious damage on the Soviet Union. Carter felt safe in that this was the case at the time of his election. In fact, he felt the United States held an edge compared to the Soviet

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<sup>6</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.:Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1977), Jimmy Carter, 1977, 1:94.

<sup>7</sup>Haas, Jimmy Carter, 52.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers, 1977, 1:94.

Union. In 1977, he declared “At the present time, my judgment is that we have superior nuclear capability” compared to the Soviets.<sup>9</sup> This assertion was supported by other government agencies. According to a 1978 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study, United States’ forces could destroy at least 80% of all Soviet industry and more than 90% of its military targets.<sup>10</sup>

Carter had experience in the military and with nuclear power to base his beliefs on. Before his political career, he had risen to the rank of lieutenant second grade in his seven years of service in the U.S. Navy. Before resigning from the military, he was scheduled to serve as chief engineer on the Seawolf, a prototype nuclear submarine. During his time in the military, Carter took college courses on nuclear physics and technology.<sup>11</sup> This experience adds validity to Carter’s conclusions on nuclear weapons and the military.

This CBO study also illuminates some problems in American nuclear forces in 1978. The Minuteman Missile, a staple of the nation’s nuclear force, was considered increasingly vulnerable to attack as the Soviets improved their nuclear forces. U.S. officials questioned the Minuteman missile’s ability to survive a first nuclear strike. The CBO study stated the possibility of a strong threat to Minutemen missiles due to improvements in Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) that targeted them. The Soviets were developing Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs) on their nuclear missiles. The MIRV technology was seen as a substantial threat to Minutemen silos, or holding facilities.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the silos in which Minuteman missiles were held were not comparable to those used by the Soviet Union. Soviet ICBM missiles were in hardened silos, which stood a higher chance of surviving a

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<sup>9</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers, 1977 , 1:95.

<sup>10</sup>Congressional Budget Office, Planning Nuclear Forces for the 1980’s (Washington, DC: CBO, 1978), 2.

<sup>11</sup>Burton Kaufman, The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 6.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

nuclear attack than the silos holding United States' missiles. The CBO stated that the country would have to develop new weapons in order to destroy the Soviet silos, where most of the Soviet's nuclear force was held.<sup>13</sup> These findings also indicated the need for improvement in the survivability of United States' missile silos.

One of the remedies being considered during Carter's presidency for improving the United States' nuclear forces was the MX missile. Proponents of this initiative called for a configuration of missiles randomly moved among thousands of protective shelters similar to the Soviet hardened silos. The CBO anticipated a force of 200 to 300 MX missiles would be less vulnerable to nuclear attack than the existing force of 1,000 Minutemen ICBMs. The actual ability of MX missiles to survive a nuclear attack in a superior fashion to Minutemen was hotly debated during the Carter administration.

In his first two years, Carter did not favor the deployment of the MX system. He viewed the missile as unnecessary because of his claim of adequate deterrence capabilities against the Soviet Union. By 1978, increasing pressure from analysts writing in defense journals and falling public approval spurred Carter to call for various improvements to the country's nuclear abilities in 1978. To address the problem of hitting hardened Soviet ICBM silos, Carter requested funds to begin the development of a transport jet to carry cruise missiles to attack missile sites. The CBO study stated that the deployment of this jet "could provide enough additional bomber-launched weapons to target Soviet ICBM silos in a second strike."<sup>14</sup> While providing a solution to hitting Soviet sites, this bomber did not solve the problem of U.S. ICBMs being less protected than Soviet missiles. Carter did show initiative in respect to the problem of inequality in missile silos, but did not seek to rectify the situation through nuclear buildup or the pursuit of qualitative equality with Soviet forces. Carter stated in 1978 that the United States held qualitative advantages over the Soviet Union. He felt these qualitative

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 5.

advantages would maintain an “equivalence in strategic nuclear strength” between the superpowers.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the CBO concluded that the problem of Minuteman comparative vulnerability would not be solved through Carter’s arms reduction negotiations with the Soviet Union, such as the Second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II). This treaty proposed a decrease in the strategic forces by both the United States and the Soviet Union. Carter promised that these reductions would be equal by both nations. In addition, he promised the reductions by the Soviets would be verifiable and that the United States’ deterrence abilities “will remain overwhelming.”<sup>16</sup> However, the CBO concluded that the stipulations of SALT II would not prevent the Soviets from developing the capability to destroy the vast majority of Minutemen forces. Under SALT II, the Soviet Union could still target two nuclear warheads to each Minuteman silo.<sup>17</sup> Further criticism arose to SALT, one of the most significant products of Carter’s foreign policy. Senator Henry Jackson called the proposed treaty an illustration of United States fatigue in the Cold War and the administration’s ineffectiveness in influencing the leaders of the Soviet Union who “only understood strength.”<sup>18</sup> Even Senator Edmund Muskie, a political ally of Carter, called the intentions of SALT II “noble” and favorable to an unchecked arms race.<sup>19</sup> This is hardly a ringing endorsement from a political ally on the product of the Carter Administration’s arms negotiations. These objections and other problems in the methodology and terms of SALT II would lead to its defeat in Congress.

The failure of SALT II was one of the defining events of the Carter presidency, Criticism was abundant for what many considered a lack of resolve on this issue. A March 1979 New York Times poll showed 53 percent of respondents felt the United

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<sup>15</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers, 1977, 1:123.

<sup>16</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers. 1977, 107-08.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>18</sup>Timothy Maga, The World of Jimmy Carter: U.S. Foreign Policy, 1977-1981 (West Haven, CT: University of New Haven Press, 1994), 140.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 138.

States was “weaker” than 10 years before.<sup>20</sup> In the same month and publication another poll listed a 30 percent approval rating for the president’s foreign policy as a whole.<sup>21</sup> I.M. Destler of The New York Times argued the president bowed to public pressure in this issue, dooming the chances of a treaty being formed. In the face of this plummeting public opinion, the Carter administration accused the Soviets of violating detente with their aggressive activities in Africa. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, told the U.S.S.R. to “choose either cooperation or confrontation.”<sup>22</sup> Destler felt this ultimatum poisoned the negotiations with the Soviets. He argued the president showed weakness for bowing to domestic pressure and weakened western confidence in the direction of United States’ foreign policy. The criticism of lack of direction in the decisions of Carter is common among analysts during and after his term of office.

The Carter administration’s nuclear doctrine encountered more problems with its handling of the proposed deployment of the neutron bomb. This weapon’s function was to kill enemy troops through a release of radiation while inflicting much less damage on surrounding structures such as buildings and military equipment. Many defense analysts believed this weapon could be useful in deterring Soviet aggression through conventional forces in Europe. The Carter administration also spoke optimistically about the use of this weapon as an incentive to encourage the Soviet Union to engage in arms reduction talks that would benefit the United States.<sup>23</sup> Secretary of Defense Harold Brown hinted the neutron weapon could be “shelved” in exchange for the Soviet Union limiting the production of its SS-20 nuclear missiles.<sup>24</sup> The Soviet Union did not respond to Brown’s overture. The Soviets only promised to not build a neutron weapon if the United States

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<sup>20</sup>New York Times, 4 March 1979, 4.

<sup>21</sup>New York Times, 2 March 1979, 1.

<sup>22</sup>I.M. Destler, “Treaty Troubles: Versailles in Reverse,” Foreign Policy 33 (Winter 1978-79): 56.

<sup>23</sup>New York Times, 10 March 1978, 4.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 14 March 1978, 4.



did the same. Although Carter rejected this proposal in 1978, he remained convinced that this weapon was necessary for the defense of Europe.

In the winter of 1978, Carter's support for the production of this weapon came under attack from his own advisors while he defended its usefulness. Carter's Arms Control and Disarmament Agency released a report in February concluding the deployment of a neutron weapon would increase the chances for a nuclear war. The report also listed doubts as to the weapon's usefulness in arms negotiations with the U.S.S.R. The agency argued that the production of this weapon was contrary to Carter's policies of mutual restraint by the superpowers in nuclear arms production.<sup>25</sup> The contradictory statements by Carter and the Arms Control Agency would lead to a stunning reversal in administration policy on the neutron bomb.

In April, administration officials stated that the president planned to delay production of the neutron bomb indefinitely. Publicly administration officials stated the delay would ease United States relations with West Germany, a country that opposed the program, and encourage the Soviet Union to exercise restraint in its recent aggression in Third World areas. Privately, they conceded they held little realistic hope that the cancellation of production of the neutron bomb would curb Soviet aggression in Angola and Ethiopia.<sup>26</sup>

Carter's decision not to produce the neutron bomb drew harsh criticism from a variety of sources. Members of his own party, such as Senators Henry Jackson and Sam Nunn opposed the decision. Jackson stated he was considering congressional action to override Carter's decision by passing legislation allotting the necessary funds to the weapon, forcing its production. Richard Burt, editorial columnist for the New York Times, stated that this decision has raised doubts in Europe "over Mr. Carter's

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<sup>25</sup>New York Times, 1 February 1978, 5.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 4 April 1978, 3.

decisiveness and willingness to take the lead on difficult defense matters.<sup>27</sup> Burt reported that NATO officials who did not wish to be named stated the organization's European members were near a position of unified support for the deployment of the weapon when Carter began to backslide on his commitment. Burt argued that the most concerning aspect of the neutron bomb issue was that the president opened negotiations with the allies without first solidifying his position on the weapon.<sup>28</sup> Burt's article was an editorial piece on his opinions of the Carter Administration, and must be understood as the beliefs of one individual. The fact Jackson and Nunn joined Burt in this criticism of Carter make his personal opinions more significant. These combined statements give evidence to a growing perception Carter lacked a decisive direction in his nuclear doctrine.

By 1979, widespread fear arose that the Soviet Union had gained "escalation dominance" in Europe and calls for action to restore a balance in this region arose. Abandoning the intentions of SALT II, the Carter administration conceded to the fears of the National Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in December of 1979. Carter ordered the deployment of 464 cruise missiles and 108 Pershing II nuclear missiles.<sup>29</sup> In 1980, the nuclear defense budget increased by \$47.6 billion compared to the previous year. This was the largest increase in nuclear defense in American history to date. Carter's 1979 defense budget proposal of \$126 billion was the largest in history. From 1978 to 1980, Carter's proposals for defense spending increased 3% each year.<sup>30</sup> The administration hoped that this spending and deployment of additional nuclear weapons would lead to beneficial arms negotiations with the Soviet Union. Conservatives and military analysts such as Richard Pipes and Senator Jake Garn, who believed the best way

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 1 April 1978, 5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 1 April 1978, 5.

<sup>29</sup>David Holloway, The Soviet Union and the Arms Race (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 70.

<sup>30</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers, 1:187.

to negotiate with the Soviets was from a position of strength, favored this action. This announced deployment was seen as a movement to a stronger negotiating position. The Soviet Union contended the 1979 NATO proposal was an American attempt to regain its nuclear dominance over them before entering into arms negotiations. The NATO decree had significant influence over the negotiation posture of the Soviet Union. In reaction to the prospect of a NATO nuclear buildup, Soviet Prime Minister Leonid Brezhnev offered to reduce his nation's medium range delivery systems if the 1979 plan was aborted.<sup>31</sup> The Carter administration preferred negotiation to buildup as a remedy for the threat of nuclear war. However, Carter turned to nuclear deployment late in his term after negotiations based on the current nuclear balances had failed, producing modest success.

Another fundamental element of Carter's foreign policy towards the Soviet Union was a focus on human rights. His administration openly communicated with Soviet dissidents and encouraged civil rights campaigns within the Soviet Union. He was highly critical of human rights violations by communist nations.<sup>32</sup> Many European and American observers questioned whether Carter's human rights policy was diminishing the sense of detente between the two nations. In the interest of SALT II negotiations, Carter put aside his human rights critique of the Soviet Union. This shows a lack of resolve in the fundamental goals of the administration.

Several disturbing international incidents occurred under the Carter administration fueled doubts about the president's foreign policy leadership. On September 26, 1978, the House of Representatives discussed the problems in United States' foreign policy and their relation to the efforts of the Soviet Union. Several witnesses testified to a sense of heightened tension between the two nations at the closing of the decade. At this session, Chester A. Crocker, the Associate Director of the International Relations Department at Georgetown University, called Carter's policies instinctive and reflexive reactions to the

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>32</sup>Stevenson, The Rise and Fall of Detente, 203.

Soviet Union. He argued that United States' foreign policy had been on a decline since the Nixon administration.<sup>33</sup> The hearings pointed to events such as the Soviet airlift of Cuban troops in Ethiopia and the communist government there. Similar Soviet activities in Somalia placed considerable pressure on the president to take a harder foreign policy stance. Mr. Crocker favored engaging in the practice of what he called "linkage," informing the Soviets their aggression in Africa would threaten the SALT II negotiations. However, he expressed "serious reservations" about the Administration's resolve in engaging in this practice at the expense of arms negotiations.<sup>34</sup> These discussions demonstrated that Congress began to doubt Carter's ability to produce fruitful agreements with the Soviets.

President Carter believed the Cold War had been equally frustrating and tiring for both sides. With this belief in mind, he took a curious attitude toward the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. He believed this action would be unsuccessful and show Soviet leaders the perils of this sort of imperialism and create dissent among its public. He believed the frustrations in the Afghanistan invasion would encourage the Soviets to abandon their aggression as the United States did following its actions in Vietnam and engage in a period of "peaceful coexistence."<sup>35</sup> Carter's Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, argued that the United States should renounce what he called "American Imperialism." Carter felt this action would warm third world nations to the United States and put further pressure on the Soviets to change their policies toward developing nations. As the Soviets showed increased commitment in Afghanistan, Carter changed his tone stating events there caused a "dramatic change in my opinion of what the Soviet Union's ultimate goals are..."<sup>36</sup> Fears arose in the administration that actions in Afghanistan were

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<sup>33</sup>Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, United States-Soviet Relations, 1978, 95th Congr., 2nd session, 9 Aug 19, 26 September, 1978, 45.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>35</sup>Maga, The World of Jimmy Carter, 143.

<sup>36</sup>Stevenson, The Rise and Fall of Detente, 204.

a prelude towards Soviet efforts to gain increased control over the oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. In addition, the United States' poor relations with nations in the area eliminated the chance of a regional backlash. These events again showed a lack of resolve in the positions of this president along with an initial lack of judgment.

The few statements by Carter regarding Soviet activity in Africa threatening arms negotiations were criticized at this session in Congress. Many believed Carter was being too indecisive in their message of consequences to the Soviets. Critics also made the point that the United States lacked the military and diplomatic footing to impede Soviet activities in Africa. This criticism was further evidence to the foreign policy difficulties of the administration.

On the positive side, the Carter administration improved relations with China. This was a contrast to the deteriorating relations between the two countries under President Ford. China began to oppose the Ford administration in its foreign policy initiatives. China supported a faction in the struggle for power in Angola that opposed the group President Ford was supporting.<sup>37</sup> This deterioration of relations slowed under Carter, as a potential alliance began to form between the two nations after the death of Mao Tse Tung in 1978. Alarmed by these actions, Prime Minister Brezhnev warned that Carter should not play the "China card," calling it a "short sighted and dangerous policy" that the United States might come to regret.<sup>38</sup> Showing resolve against the warnings of Brezhnev, the United States granted Most Favored Nation status to China. However, this action came after the president abandoned SALT II talks. In The Soviet Union and the Arms Race, David Holloway also points out that China spent most of its resources on industrial, not military development after 1978, limiting its role as a threat to the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Greene, John R. The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 113.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 95.

Evidence suggests the Soviet Union viewed the Carter administration as a worthy target for political and diplomatic pressure. In a report by Morris Rothenburg for the Defense Nuclear Agency, the Soviet Union entered into a public relations campaign to disrupt and discourage two aspects of United States' policy. The first was the movement of the United States towards a "limited nuclear options" weapons modernization program initiated in 1974 by Secretary of Defense Kissinger. The Soviet Union also attacked the United States' initiative to build the neutron bomb in conjunction with NATO. Citing Carter's decision not to begin the immediate deployment of these weapons, Rothenburg's report considered the Soviet campaign against these actions "eminently successful" during Carter's term.<sup>40</sup>

These campaigns consisted of promises of terror for the European continent and an extensive attempt to create a wedge between the United States and West Germany over deployment of new weapons. The Soviet leaders believed this effort was highly successful in undermining the Carter administration's diplomatic efforts to West Germany and all of Europe. The Soviet newspaper Izvestiia, triumphantly reported that the neutron bomb received a "stormy reaction in Germany" because of the United States' "intention to make West Germany the most probable theater for the use of this inhumane weapon."<sup>41</sup> The report stated Moscow took extreme satisfaction from the Carter administration's hesitancy to initiate neutron bomb deployment despite the program's favorable reception from Congress. The editors of Izvestiia concluded they stopped the deployment by successfully undermining support for the deployment in Europe.<sup>42</sup> The only reason the Soviet campaigning slowed was because its leaders felt that so little was being done in terms of modernization after 1977. The Soviet Union viewed Carter's

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<sup>40</sup>Morris Rothenburg, Research and Analytical Evaluation of the Soviet Union and Modernization of Nuclear Weapons Forces in Europe (Washington, DC: Advanced International Studies Institute, 1982), 54.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

withdrawal of support from the development of the neutron bomb, which they considered a viable threat, as a significant victory. This victory fueled the Soviet Union's belief the Carter administration had significant and exploitable diplomatic weaknesses.

In July of 1980, President Carter introduced a new nuclear weapons plan in partial reaction to the concerns created by Soviet activities in Afghanistan. Carter's plan was called Presidential Directive 59 and was designed to emphasize nuclear war fighting aspects of the nation's strategy. It called for additional targeting of Soviet missile silos and war making capabilities. Carter also endorsed the allotment of funds to the goal of deploying the MX missile system that he had opposed in his first two years in office.<sup>43</sup> The Soviet Union labeled the directive as an attempt by the United States to regain strategic superiority over the Soviet Union. Soviet leaders stated the only reason for this plan was that their forces had achieved parity in terms of nuclear capability. However, in open Soviet literature during Carter's presidency, experts doubted the weapons called for in Presidential Directive 59 were survivable enough to make this a credible program.<sup>44</sup> By survivability, Soviet planners were referring to a weapon's ability to survive a nuclear strike and still function. Survivability was an important factor to Soviet strategists in their evaluation of a nuclear system. In addition, Soviet publications such as SSha: Ekonomika, politika, ideologiya argued that Presidential Directive 59 was not a credible influence on the nuclear balance because the systems involved in making the plan a reality would not be available to until the second half of the 1980's.<sup>45</sup>

Additional opposition to Carter's handling of nuclear issues arose from the crisis at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania. In March of 1979, mechanical difficulties at this plant allowed radiation to spill into the atmosphere. The plant ownership and the federal body overseeing the plant, the Nuclear Regulatory

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<sup>43</sup>Jonathan S. Lockwood, The Soviet View of U.S. Strategic Doctrine: Implications for Decision Making (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1983), 153.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 165.

Commission (NRC) were slow to release accurate information to the public. The lack of coherent information created fear of a massive meltdown of the reactor. Pennsylvania Governor Richard Thornburg's call for evacuation of children and pregnant women created additional panic. In total, 50,000 residents evacuated the areas surrounding the plant.<sup>46</sup> President Carter, who held training in nuclear physics, was a calming influence on the situation. He and his wife toured the plant in the days after the accident wearing only protective covers on their feet. However, the events at Three Mile Island created substantial panic and negative sentiment in the nation. As panic of a massive meltdown rose, the Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg authorized the granting of absolution in area churches.<sup>47</sup> Over 65,000 people participated in protests against nuclear power plants in Washington DC, the largest demonstration against nuclear power in United States' history. California Governor Jerry Brown demanded the NSC close a nuclear plant identical in design to Three Mile Island in his state. Jane Fonda, starring in "The China Syndrome," a film concerning radiation leaks at a nuclear plant called for the resignation of Energy Secretary James R. Schlesinger Jr. Wendell Rawls Jr. of the New York Times stated in a May editorial that the pace of nuclear protest movements had quickened since the accident in Pennsylvania.<sup>48</sup> An April 1979 New York Times/CBS Poll showed that only 46 percent of Americans favored further development in nuclear power compared to the 69% who supported it in July of 1977.<sup>49</sup> Only 20% of those polled felt the government had been honest in their release of information to the public.<sup>50</sup> Despite Carter's diffusing of the situation with a visit, the Three Mile Island crisis created additional resistance from the American public to his handling of nuclear issues.

In terms of conventional forces, the Soviets took action to gain advantages over

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<sup>46</sup>Staley, John and Roger Seip, Three Mile Island: A Time of Fear (Harrisburg, PA: RFJ, Inc., 1979), 22.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>48</sup>New York Times, 7 May 1979, 1

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 10 April 1979, 1.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 10 April 1979, 16.



the United States during the Carter presidency. A report from the Department of Defense stated the Soviet Union had been the largest exporter of military equipment over these years. In connection with this supply of weapons, the study stated the Soviets had been more aggressive in the use of military forces “to project their power and influence.”<sup>51</sup> This transportation of arms also included the placement of twenty thousand military advisors playing key roles in training forces in Iraq, Syria, and South Yemen. These events transpired while the Carter administration failed to construct a coherent policy to counter this Soviet aggression. In particular, the buildup was stated as being key in eroding NATO air superiority in Europe.<sup>52</sup>

Some of the greatest fears regarding Soviet military power in Europe centered around conventional war. Western nations feared the Soviet Union could mount a rapid conventional offensive through Europe, utilizing what was perceived as a Warsaw Pact advantage in conventional forces over NATO. European nations feared the Soviets would use their conventional forces to threaten Europe in the same manner they influenced events in Third World regions in Africa. Pentagon officials also feared the levels of Soviet military training for combat in a post-nuclear environment. In addition, the study stated the existence of a plan based on a small scale nuclear attack on NATO nations. This nuclear attack would be followed by a conventional assault through the breach left by the surprise strike.<sup>53</sup> To these conventional military threats, the Carter administration gave no substantial answer or comparable plan for post-nuclear conventional activities.

However, this report also argued that the arms buildup had caused a considerable strain on the Soviet Union’s economy. The emphasis on military expenditures created food shortages, low labor productivity, and transportation disruptions. Despite these

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<sup>51</sup>Department of Defense, Soviet Military Power 1981 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1981), 90.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

problems, the report stated that there “are no signs of a de-emphasis of military programs” for the future.<sup>54</sup> However, it did seem reasonable to assume this strain on the economy would take a toll on the country and eventually cause a capitulation of military production.

Other problematic trends emerged for the United States and its allies in the realm of nuclear weapons. During administrations prior to President Carter, United States’ leaders believed the Soviet Union enjoyed numerical advantages in nuclear missiles. In response, American officials contended that their nuclear weapons were qualitatively superior to their Soviet counterparts and that their qualitative advantage was balanced against Soviet numerical superiority. The 1981 Department of Defense study on the Soviet capabilities during Carter’s presidency questioned this assertion. It stated that in past years, modernization efforts by the U.S.S.R. had dramatically reduced the United States’ lead in “virtually every important technology” involving nuclear weapons and significantly reduced qualitative differences.<sup>55</sup> The study stated that the United States held a two-to-seven year lead in microelectronics. However, the Soviet Union had 900,000 research and development scientists devoted to nuclear projects compared to the United States’ 600,000.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the gap seemed to be closing at an increasing rate. Similar to conventional weapons programs, this modernization was expected to continue despite Soviet economic problems.

United States’ defense planners also worried about Soviet research and development in Civil Defense. In 1978, the Soviet Union employed 100,000 people in their civil defense program. A Central Intelligence Agency report on Soviet civil defense stated that the Soviets likely had nuclear blast shelter space for virtually all leadership

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 73.

elements of the nation, approximately 110,000 people.<sup>57</sup> The study estimated the Soviet Union could accommodate up to 30% of its citizens in such shelters by 1985. As to the effectiveness of this program, the agency stated “the Soviets almost certainly believe their present civil defense would improve their ability to conduct military operations” and enhance government survival after a nuclear exchange occurred.<sup>58</sup> Although the study determined that the present Civil Defense capabilities in the Soviet Union would not encourage the Soviet leaders to expose their nation to attack, these analysts believed the program gave the Soviets increased confidence in their overall nuclear policies

The Carter administration’s dealings with Iran caused a further decline in public trust in his ability to conduct foreign policy and make sound military decisions. Despite his stance on human rights, Carter supported the dictatorial government of the Shah in Iran, which routinely engaged in torture of political opponents. In 1978, it became evident that the Shah’s government was in peril. United States Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan, opened negotiations with groups opposing the Shah. In contrast, the National Security Council (NSC) refused to open dialogue with opposition groups gaining power in Iran. In The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr., Burton Kaufman states the contrasting statements of the NSC and Sullivan caused the Iranian military to refuse to defend the Shah as the Ayatollah Khomeini completed a successful coup.<sup>59</sup> This is another example of the Carter administration lacking coherence and direction in its foreign policy.

Carter showed further lack of direction in his granting of asylum to the Shah. Carter offered and then rescinded an invitation to the Shah for entrance into the United States. The reason for this change related to fear for the safety of the United States’ Embassy in Iran. However, Carter changed his mind when the deposed leader required

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<sup>57</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, Soviet Civil Defense. (Washington, DC: The Director, 1978), 2.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>59</sup>Kaufman, The Presidency of Carter, 127.

treatments for Cancer and allowed the Shah to enter the country in the fall of 1979. Iranian militants seized the United States' Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, taking 60 hostages.<sup>60</sup> Carter initially reacted to the situation by freezing Iranian assets and ceased oil purchases from the country. His approval rating to the handling of the situation initially soared to 71% in favor of his actions. However, the administration was unable to negotiate a release of the hostages and Carter's approval rating fell below 40 percent in April of 1980 in a Newsweek/Gallup Poll. With the urging of the National Security Council, except for Vance, Carter authorized a rescue attempt of the hostages. Mechanical problems doomed the mission and the attempt failed miserably.<sup>61</sup>

Congressional leaders in both parties were critical of Carter's handling of the rescue operation. Senators such as Henry M. Jackson of Washington were furious that the administration did not consult Congress before acting. Democratic Congressman Henry Reuss stated that Carter should announce he would not run for re-election in 1980 and "quietly serve out his term without any more impulsive actions."<sup>62</sup> Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts called for an investigation by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee into the matter. Leaders in Congress did not blame Carter for the mechanical problems that caused the mission to fail, but they questioned Carter's military and diplomatic competency.

During the Carter years, his nuclear and foreign policy provoked mostly negative reactions within government agencies. In its 1978 session on planning United States' nuclear forces for the future, the CBO admitted the administration had made strides in modernizing its theater nuclear forces in Europe. However, the study questioned the ability of nuclear forces to maintain the deterrence doctrine due to the survivability problems of United States' missiles after a first strike. The CBO also concluded

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid, 175.

<sup>62</sup>New York Times, 26 April, 1980, 11.

modernization of conventional forces would be necessary for the proper defense of Europe.<sup>63</sup> This study showed a need for improvements in the United States' nuclear arsenal.

After examining United States-Soviet relations, few congressional representatives praised President Carter's contribution to this matter. In February of 1980, Representative Bob Michel stated the past three years demonstrated that Carter's declarations to the Soviet Union "have no follow through, no basis in reality, no force of law or action." He argued that Carter's stated intention to get tough with the Soviets through a defense buildup had no "past basis to stand on" and would not curb Soviet actions.<sup>64</sup> The most optimistic witnesses testified that perhaps strained relations with the Soviet Union had "bottomed out" and mending would occur in the future.<sup>65</sup> Others suggested that the expectations of detente were too lofty and events during Carter's presidency provided a dose of reality for the United States. What is certain is that the failures of SALT II and Soviet worldwide aggression created a decline in relations between the two superpowers. The best evaluations of Carter's performance hinged on hope for improvements against these setbacks in the future.

Carter's cancellation of programs developing new weapons also drew wide criticism. In June of 1977, he announced his decision to cancel procurement of the B-1 bomber in favor of deploying cruise missiles on the existing B-52 bomber. Carter stated, however, that if relations deteriorated with the Soviets "at the end of a few years it may be necessary for me to change my mind."<sup>66</sup> Francis Hoerber of the Center for Strategic

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<sup>63</sup>Congressional Budget Office, Planning Nuclear Forces, 29.

<sup>64</sup>Congress, House, Congressman Cheney of Wyoming speaking on the foreign policy record of President Carter, 96th Congr., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 126, pt. 2 (4 Feb. 1980): 1736.

<sup>65</sup>Congress, United States-Soviet Relations, 132.

<sup>66</sup>Francis P Hoerber, Slow to Take the Offensive: Bombers, Cruise Missiles, and Prudent Deterrence (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1977), i.

and International Studies argued this cancellation greatly weakened the United States' position in SALT negotiations. Carter's relaxation of military buildup was commonly criticized as an example of his weakness in foreign policy and arms negotiations.

The increases in Soviet nuclear strength raised fears the United States was initiating a general retreat in international affairs as relations with the Soviet Union continued to deteriorate. Historian Dr. Jonathan Lockwood argues his 1983 study, The Soviet View of U.S. Strategic Doctrine: Implications for Decision Making, that United States' initiatives had been "curbed" due to the Soviets new missile increases.<sup>67</sup> He stated the Carter administration's foreign policy had been impeded by its flawed nuclear policies. Lockwood further argues Carter's human rights advocacy had little impact on superpower relations, being regarded as "hypocritical propaganda" by the Soviet Union. Despite these problems, public opinion did not favor increased intervention by United States' forces. Only 48% of Americans in a New York Times poll approved of sending forces to protect Middle East oil resources in the face of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the public seemed against the restrained activities of Carter but did not give a clear answer to what course it wished foreign policy to take.

Members of the Carter administration argued strongly against the claim that the United States was retreating from a leadership role in foreign policy. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski stated that the country was committing to broader global engagement strategy for the future.<sup>69</sup> Secretary of State Cyrus Vance argued the notion of an American retreat was "not only wrong as a matter of fact but dangerous as a basis for policy."<sup>70</sup> This point by Vance is a telling description of the situation at the end of the Carter administration. The United States suffered declines in its foreign policy in areas such as Africa during Carter's presidency. The Soviet Union gained a greater voice with

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<sup>67</sup>Lockwood, The Soviet View, 161.

<sup>68</sup>New York Times, 2 March 1979, 4.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 2 May 1979, 7.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 2 May 1979, 7

nations such as West Germany to speak against United States' political and military doctrines. It is, however, unclear that the decline was drastic or due to the United States' lack of nuclear procurement during Carter's administration. Secretary of State Vance pointed to the danger of a public belief in an American retreat in foreign policy. Vance feared this belief could lead to a decline in domestic and international support for the administration's defense and foreign policies. It is clear this danger existed at the close of this administration. This is the most valid criticism of foreign policy and nuclear doctrine under President Carter.

Secretary of Defense Brown also made some important statements about the issue of United States' nuclear and foreign policy doctrines towards the end of his tenure. In his annual report for the 1979 fiscal year he warned "Assured Destruction cannot be the only response available to the President."<sup>71</sup> He argued that the United States should have the flexibility to respond to differing levels of Soviet aggression. Brown advised the country to engage in a large nuclear buildup to achieve a more flexible response. This buildup was begun during his administration, but did not achieve the level of a truly flexible response by the time Carter left office. He argued that neither superpower had a clear military advantage in 1979. Critics of the administration disputed this point. However, Brown conceded that the growing vulnerability of land-based nuclear missile forces, if not corrected, "could have potentially destabilizing military consequences."<sup>72</sup> Again, the course of corrective action to this problem Brown called for was not taken under his leadership. Brown's statements show at the least a partial admission that the Carter administration had placed the nation on a dangerous course to facing increased nuclear and conventional threats to itself and its allies.

As Carter's first presidential term ended, additional discontent against the

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<sup>71</sup>Congressional Budget Office, Planning Nuclear Forces, 21.

<sup>72</sup>Benjamin Schemmer, "New Study Shows Russia Would Hold a 70% Greater Edge in Nuclear Exchange than is Shown in FY DOD Annual Report," Armed Forces Journal International 116 (May 1979): 8.

administration arose because of the United States' economic problems. Carter's goal of energy conservation for the country included endorsement of unpopular gasoline consumption legislation. This goal proved problematic as Carter continually waffled in his public statements on whether there actually was a gas shortage in 1979 and 1980. Administration advisor Stu Eizenstat warned the president that this wavering "gives the impression of an absence of leadership" on a critical issue.<sup>73</sup> Discontent began to arise concerning Carter's energy conservation policies in 1979, as oil prices continued to rise. In addition, inflation in the country rose at alarming rates. In its evaluation of the economic situation, the public perceived presidential ineptitude and lack of direction in its handling of this problem.<sup>74</sup> These events show the perception that the Carter administration lacked direction its leadership was not limited to nuclear and foreign policy issues.

The actions the Carter administration took in the realms of nuclear doctrine and strategy were considerably flawed. The Soviet Union made advances in its nuclear arsenal during Carter's presidency. Many sources criticized Carter for lacking the necessary resolve on nuclear policy matters. The Soviet Union's aggressive actions in areas such as Ethiopia and Afghanistan coupled with United States' failures in situations such as the Iran hostage crisis caused public criticism to the foreign policy of the administration. These problems and the resulting criticism of the administration created the perception around the world that the United States was declining in military readiness. These factors invariably had detrimental effects on the United States' ability to conduct foreign policy. These realities can be seen in the Soviet belief that their propaganda campaign against nuclear modernization prior to 1979 had splintered allied consensus on nuclear policy. Carter's 1980 campaign promises of relaxing nuclear and diplomatic tensions with the Soviet Union caused worldwide doubts about his

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<sup>73</sup>Kaufman, The Presidency of Carter, 141.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 143.



competency and conviction. At the close of Carter's term, public opinion was aligned for a dramatic increase in conventional engagements by the United States and action to rectify its declining strategic balance in nuclear weapons. The next decade would be perilous for the United States and its allies unless different courses of action were taken.

## CHAPTER TWO

CONSERVATIVE CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT CARTER AND  
RONALD REAGAN'S 1980 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Discussing Soviet military strategy, Richard Pipes of the United States National Security Council quoted Vladimir Lenin's statement that " 'peace is a breathing space for war.' "<sup>1</sup> Pipes, an outspoken critic of the Soviet Union and advisor to Ronald Reagan, was not alone in his opinions towards the Soviet Union. Many members of the United States' military, along with politicians, authors in defense journals, and defense analysts shared this appraisal and made up a group of conservatives on defense issues. This group considered their rival superpower a menace to the freedom and possibly the survival of democracy. These people did not debate on the possibility of armed conflict with the Soviets: they accepted it as inevitable. Believing this, they feared possible Soviet nuclear superiority over the United States. This conservative group of government officials and defense analysts, often labeled dangerous and overly aggressive by political enemies, contended that their country was in no position to deal with the type of coming conflict. They believed the Soviets were preparing for a kind of warfare the Carter Administration's strategy of deterrence was not prepared to for. This was a nuclear war not initiated for the total destruction of the world, as envisioned by strategists in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, many analysts believed Soviet leaders envisioned a conflict with winners and losers. This group believed a massive American nuclear buildup was needed to prepare for this eventuality.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Pipes, "Soviet Strategic Doctrine: Another View," Strategic Review 10 (Fall, 1982), 54.

This conservative drive for a weapons buildup was done with a sincere desire to strengthen U.S. defenses, but there were other possible motivations for those advocating a nuclear buildup and criticizing deterrence under Carter. It is important to note these conservative groups stood to benefit the most from an increase in defense spending through financial and political gain. Many of these conservative authors and politicians held close relationships with weapons manufacturers. These weapons producers often contributed financial support to friendly political campaigns and the publications for whom these conservative authors wrote. The possible benefits from a nuclear buildup included profits for arms manufacturers and gains in political favor for leaders appearing to make the nation safe from attack. The statements of this group of conservative politicians and analysts must be taken with these possible motivations in mind.

Conservative analysts were dissatisfied with the Carter Administration's foreign and military policy. They were also critical of the failed rescue attempt of hostages in Iran. These critics stated that the Carter Administration failed to weigh the odds for success and risks of the rescue operation. Conservatives viewed the failed rescue as evidence that the president could not uphold the nation's international image of military strength.<sup>2</sup> Critics of Carter also feared the Soviet Union was expanding its areas of influence, becoming a greater threat to the United States. Conservatives began to publicize reports that the Soviets were influencing and supporting the governments of Libya and Algeria. Analysts feared the goal of this action was to surround Egypt and Saudi Arabia with communist countries, thereby shifting the balance of power in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> This Soviet activity could threaten the United States' oil supply. Conservatives criticized the president for not taking action in Africa to counteract this trend. These foreign policy shortcomings led to criticism of other military and defense

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<sup>2</sup>Alexander Scott, "The Lessons of the Iranian Raid for American Military Policy," *Armed Forces Journal*, 117 (June 1980), 26.

<sup>3</sup>Arabel G. Kossow, "Soviet and Radical Arab Designs on the Saharan Belt," *Armed Forces Journal*, 117 (June 1980), 22.

issues during Carter's presidency.

Opponents of deterrence were critical of some the assumptions made by this strategy. Captain Carl Krehbiel, author for Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies and officer in the United States Air Force, considered hostile confrontation to be a more likely description of superpower relations. Krehbiel did not accept the idea of cooperation or detente between the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>4</sup> John Jenson was also critical of the ideas behind deterrence. He did not believe it was wise for the U.S. to have an inferior nuclear force compared to its chief adversary, that was only intended to convince the Soviets nuclear war was not profitable.<sup>5</sup> These men considered the idea of keeping a lesser force compared to a country they considered a rival defeatist in nature. They worried about how military planners could possibly know what specifications a force seeking the goal of deterrence required. Conservatives argued deterrence was an inadequate form of defense because it left the United States in an inferior and possibly vulnerable position to the Soviet Union.

Conservative authors also attacked the arms reduction treaties proposed under President Carter, such as SALT II. Many critics of SALT alleged that the Soviets enjoyed a huge advantage in nuclear arms at the time of these agreements. They also felt the treaties would limit the "survivability" of United States and NATO nuclear weapons. SALT II placed limits on the ability of both countries to move their mobile nuclear arms to different areas. This ability to move weapons added to the chance they would avoid destruction in attack, enhancing their survivability. American critics of SALT II pointed out that its proposed restriction on mobility increased the advantage held by Soviet missiles, which were stored in hardened silos; this type of storage facility was more

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<sup>4</sup>Carl Krehbiel, "Military Asymmetries in the Soviet-American Strategic Balance," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies*, 125 (June 1980), 24.

<sup>5</sup>John W. Jenson, "Nuclear Strategy: Differences in Soviet and American Thinking," *Air University Review*, 30, (March/April 1979), 4.

resistant to a nuclear strike, an advantage most United States' sites lacked at that time. Opponents claimed these agreements failed to achieve a balance in the armaments of the two nations. While complying with SALT, analysts feared the Soviets could enjoy a three to one ratio of nuclear weapons. Micheal May, Associate Director of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, opposed these agreements because in reducing United States' nuclear weapons, they increased Soviet advantages.<sup>6</sup> This was due to Soviet quantitative advantages prior to the treaties. May's objectivity is questionable because of his employment in the defense industry. Paul Nitze, in his article in Foreign Policy, stated that the agreements have no "discernible effect in arresting the trend toward an increasingly large margin of Soviet superiority."<sup>7</sup> He argued that buildup of military strength, not treaties, were the only hope in making detente a reality.<sup>8</sup> Nitze was an example of an outspoken critic of deterrence and strong conservative on nuclear defense issues. Carter passed Nitze over for the position of U.S. chief arms negotiator in 1976, fearing his views would poison the chance for beneficial agreements with the Soviets. Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinburger also criticized him for holding overly aggressive on nuclear issues.<sup>9</sup> These facts place the value of Nitze's conclusions into question. These critics felt American representatives to the negotiations were ignorant of this reality in their dealings with the Soviet Union. This lack of competency and the limitations of the SALT agreements heightened conservative fears of the possibilities of a nuclear conflict for which the United States was not prepared. Conservative military and political analysts found the nuclear policies of President Carter quite dissatisfying. Despite their possible biases, May and Nitze are two examples of a considerable group of

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<sup>6</sup>Micheal May, "Nuclear Weapons: Address, March 10, 1978," Vital Speeches of the Day, 44 (June 1978), 486-87.

<sup>7</sup>Paul Nitze, "Deterring Our Deterrent," Foreign Policy, 25 (Winter, 1976-77), 202-3.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>9</sup>Strobe Talbot, Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 53.

conservative critics to deterrence and the Carter Administrations nuclear doctrine.

The political makeup conservative analysts associated with the Soviet Union led them to believe an offensive nuclear strike was not out of the question. John Jenson stated that the Soviets believed their system of socialism was superior to western capitalism and would eventually triumph. Conservatives such as Jenson felt this belief encouraged the Soviets to take aggressive action against the western world. Others worried that the communist system placed few political restraints on the Soviet leaders. Unlike a democratic government, no electoral bindings existed on Soviet leaders to check their military actions.<sup>10</sup> Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan called socialism a ““religion”” and stated belief in it required its followers to attempt to create a one-world Communist state. Krehbiel argued that from childhood, Soviet children were “reared on an ideology of conflict from international class struggle to the battle against international imperialism.”<sup>11</sup>

Analysts made other assumptions about the international goals of the Soviets. Leading analysts, who studied the Soviet Union’s leaders, were not satisfied with the current “world order” and might attempt to change it through aggression.<sup>12</sup> Young Soviet leaders had not experienced the horrors of World War II. Those in the United States military felt this fact would make communist leaders more aggressive. Edgar Ulsamer, analyst of the Soviet Union for Air Force Magazine, felt a greater danger existed because “for the first time in Soviet history, the USSR and its allies will be militarily superior to the rest of the world.”<sup>13</sup> Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense under Reagan, agreed that the Soviets held imperialistic Soviet goals. He stated it was the responsibility of the United States to “bring a halt to the further expansion and consolidation of the Soviet

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<sup>10</sup>See Jenson, “Nuclear Strategy,” 54; and Krehbiel, “Military Asymmetries,” 25.

<sup>11</sup>Krehbiel, “Military Asymmetries,” 25.

<sup>12</sup>Dimitri Simes, “Disciplining Soviet Power,” Foreign Policy, 43 (Summer, 1981), 41.

<sup>13</sup>Edgar Ulsamer, “Moscow’s Goal is Nuclear Superiority,” Air Force Magazine, 63 (March 1980), 45.

Empire.”<sup>14</sup> Conservatives used the assumed political and international policies of the Soviets to substantiate their belief in the strong possibility of a coming nuclear conflict. It is important to note the objectivity and lack of evidence to support of conservative appraisals of the beliefs and intentions of the Soviet Union. None of these analysts had access to verifiable information on the exact beliefs of Soviet leaders, the beliefs of citizens, or what was being taught to children.

In relation to nuclear arms, analysts made some disturbing conclusions about the Soviets. Jenson believed there was no reason, considering the history and political ideology of the Soviets, to believe they would ever accept a position of nuclear inferiority to the United States. This belief caused some to question whether the United States should trust the Soviet Union to adhere to arms reduction treaties.<sup>15</sup> Even if the parity and congruence did exist between the superpowers, conservatives believed that it would not discourage the Soviets from acting in an aggressive fashion. Due to the horrors of World War II in the Soviet Union, many felt they had an entirely different belief towards “acceptable losses” in war. Pipes believed the Soviets considered defensive strategies in a nuclear war as important as offensive tactics. Pipes argued that the Soviets felt preparations prior to a nuclear war could lead to possible victory.<sup>16</sup> The Soviets might initiate a nuclear war because it was the best political option available to them at the time. Philip Peterson made the chilling conclusion that if the Soviets concluded war was inevitable, “their long standing recognition of the importance of surprise will undoubtedly prompt them to strike first.”<sup>17</sup> These conclusions fueled arguments for immediate action to upgrade the nuclear capabilities of the United States in order to prepare for Soviet aggression.

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<sup>14</sup>Keith Shimko, Images and Arms Control, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 66.

<sup>15</sup>See Jenson, “Nuclear Strategy,” 17; and Shimko, Images, 115.

<sup>16</sup>See Jenson, “Nuclear Strategy,” 5; and Pipes, “Soviet Doctrine,” 56-57

<sup>17</sup>Phillip Peterson, “Flexibility: A Driving Force in Soviet Strategy,” Air Force Magazine, 63 (March 1980), 98.

In addition to fears of the ideology of the Soviets, many people cited tremendous differences in weapons spending by the two superpowers. In the 1970's, Ulsamer pointed to a CIA study claiming the Soviet Union outspent the United States by 30 percent.<sup>18</sup> Senator Jake Garn, a staunch conservative on defense issues and critic of Carter, cited a 1980 CIA study stating the Soviets were outspending the United States by 50 percent and held a 2.6 to 1 advantage in strategic forces advantage. He also claimed Soviet nuclear expenditures were nearly 50 percent of their entire strategic budget; this compared to 15 percent for the United States.<sup>19</sup> General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1980 of the consequences of current patterns continuing; he stated the Soviets would have a certain statistical advantage in every nuclear arms category by the early part of the decade.<sup>20</sup> In 1983, a study by the Congressional Budget Office estimated the Soviets quadrupled their offensive nuclear forces in the past ten years.<sup>21</sup> This imbalance and America's predicted arms deficit, coupled with their supposed political agenda, was a cause of serious concern for citizens who placed a high value on military strength. This position of inferiority caused some Americans to believe an arms buildup was necessary for ensuring the safety of the country.

Conservatives claimed that Soviet civil defense was making progress towards negating the problem of radiation fallout after a nuclear conflict. As early as 1960, United States analysts believed the necessary technology existed to construct facilities capable of reducing the effects of radiation. James H. Douglas, Secretary of Defense in 1960, stated in a White House study that shelters stocked with adequate provisions could

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<sup>18</sup>Ulsamer, "Moscow's Goal," 45.

<sup>19</sup>Jake Garn, "Exploitable Strategic Nuclear Superiority," International Security Review, 5 (Summer, 1980), 173.

<sup>20</sup>See Ulsamer, "Moscow's Goal," 46; and Garn, "Exploitable Superiority," 174.

<sup>21</sup>The Congressional Budget Office, Modernizing U.S. Strategic Offensive Forces: The Administration's Program and Alternatives, report prepared by Alice M. Rivlin, 98th Congr., 1st sess., 1983, 13.



significantly reduce casualties from nuclear explosions.<sup>22</sup> Secondary literature suggests President Carter took unprecedented action in civil defense preparation. In Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom, Allan Winkler wrote that civil defense was valued by the Carter Administration. Winkler points to Carter's creation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as evidence of his argument that civil defense was important to this president.<sup>23</sup> Despite the creation of FEMA, conservative analysts such as Krehbiel and Peterson believed the Soviet Union led the United States in civil defense preparation through the 1970s. This belief concerning civil defense led to observers identifying radiation control as another area in which the Soviets held an advantage during Carter's presidency.

Proponents of a change in nuclear planning pointed to history for examples of past mistakes by nations and the possibility of their recurrence. They stated current actions by the United States were similar to the mistakes made by the Allied powers in the 1930's. They used such terms as " 'd' eja' vu " when comparing deterrence with the failed policy of appeasement used in Europe towards Hitler. Conservative analysts feared treaties and defensive, damage control strategies used in respect to the Soviet Union would lead to similar results.<sup>24</sup> Unlike during World War II, the United States dealt with an enemy possessing nuclear weapons. Allied powers were able to recover from early strategic mistakes in the 1940's. A nuclear war would not be as forgiving to early errors, creating another argument for a stronger United States defense force.

Some observers believed the United States faced changes in the technology of nuclear weapons. Major Roger Lewis worried that the increased accuracy of nuclear weapons in the 1980's compared to two decades earlier created a problem. This new

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<sup>22</sup>Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, White House Conference on Fallout Protection (January 1960), by Leo A. Hoegh, 11-14.

<sup>23</sup>Winkler, Allan, Life Under a Cloud: Anxiety About the Atom, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 133.

<sup>24</sup>Shimko, Images, 64.

accuracy had a negative effect on deterrence strategy because of the ability of these new missiles to threaten United States nuclear submarines and bombers.<sup>25</sup> Lewis wrote for Joint Perspectives, a conservative military magazine that published many articles by military officers calling for a nuclear buildup. Senator Garn stated his fear that the long amounts of time a B-52 required to takeoff and become safe from a nuclear blast was an example of vulnerability. The B-52 had been in service since the 1950's and was outdated in the opinion of many military officials, especially if being used for a nuclear strike. These analysts feared the accuracy of new nuclear weapons and anti-aircraft defenses, coupled with the slow take off or escape time of the B-52 made this aircraft extremely vulnerable in the 1980's. Even Harold Brown, Secretary of Defense in the Carter administration and proponent of deterrence, admitted to U.S. vulnerability in this area. Brown predicted in 1980 that during that decade, the Soviet Union would gain the ability to destroy United States B-52 bombers and nuclear submarines through technical advances. Brown's statements give validity to Lewis and Garn's criticism, which otherwise could be considered agenda-based arguments for a defense buildup. Nuclear bombers and submarines played a vital role in the overall arsenal of the United States.<sup>26</sup> Senator Garn quoted Brown's further prediction that increased accuracy gave the Soviets the ability to destroy missiles on the ground in their silos, or holding areas. Before this innovation in technology, destroying missiles in silos was a more difficult task to accomplish. In the 1980s, more accurate missiles gave the Soviets the ability to do this with a small fraction of their forces.<sup>27</sup>

Some politicians worried the United States was not making efforts to upgrade its nuclear weapons under President Carter. Micheal May claimed that the country had

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<sup>25</sup>Major Roger D. Lewis, "The Evolution of US Nuclear Doctrine and the Need for a Countervailing Strategy," Joint Perspectives, 2 (Nov, 1982), 35.

<sup>26</sup>Harold Brown, "US Strategic Nuclear Policy," Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders, Sup. (Oct. 1980), 2.

<sup>27</sup>Garn, "Exploitable Superiority," 174.

spent some funds on improving the survivability of its nuclear weapons, but admitted no effort existed to improve the efficiency of these weapons. His belief was while the Soviets upgraded their weapons in areas such as efficiency, the United States only attempted to increase survivability.<sup>28</sup> Others questioned this strategy because no hardened installation could withstand repeated nuclear assault by nuclear weapons.<sup>29</sup> Air Force Lieutenant Andrew Andrews, research and development coordinator for the Defense Nuclear Agency, took criticism of his country's lack of flexibility a step farther by claiming that it had no organized tactical doctrine for nuclear defense or established method of deploying its arsenal in the event of a war.<sup>30</sup> Andrews wrote for another journal, Military Review, that was known for its conservative stance on defense and criticism of Carter's policies in this area. The fact Andrews' critical analysis of the nation's defense current defense strategy was published a month prior to the 1980 Presidential election should be considered when evaluating its objectivity. This increase in Soviet technology still gave further evidence to support the contention that the United States was not nearly as prepared for a nuclear conflict compared to their chief adversary and was vulnerable.

Conservatives argued that the greatest failure of deterrence was its lack of impact on the Soviet Union's military and foreign policies. Lewis stated that under this strategy the realities of the United State's strategic capabilities were not nearly as important as "is our enemy's perception of those realities that counts."<sup>31</sup> Nitze echoed these sentiments in arguing the capacity of United States' armaments needed to deter nuclear war must be measured against how much of an advantage the Soviets believed they needed for victory. In his opinion, a nuclear war could be initiated and won under certain

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<sup>28</sup>May, "Nuclear Weapons," 487.

<sup>29</sup>Leslie J. Hamblin, "Deterrence: After the Golden Age." Air University Review, 33 (Jan./Feb. 1982): 30.

<sup>30</sup>Andrew Andrews, "Toward a Tactical Nuclear Doctrine." Military Review, 60 (Oct. 1980), 18.

<sup>31</sup>Lewis, "The Evolution," 46.

conditions.<sup>32</sup> Krehbiel stated the Soviet Union agreed with Nitze's analysis and calculated, "the side with superior offensive weapons, defensive preparations, and strategy could achieve a favorable outcome in war."<sup>33</sup> Little doubt existed, even among advocates of deterrence, that the Soviet Union held strategic advantages in all of these categories. Conservatives believed current United States' defenses did little to discourage Soviet military aggression. To Nitze and Krehbiel, deterrence failed because politicians in the United States lacked a fundamental understanding of the Soviet Union. Conservatives felt leaders in the western world did not understand that the defense they perceived as adequate in preventing a nuclear war fell short of convincing the very nation it sought to deter. The conclusion was that lack of nuclear abilities could cause the United States to be subject to "political bullying" by the Soviet Union in foreign policy issues. This possibility angered and frightened conservatives accustomed to a dominant position in world affairs.<sup>34</sup>

As Carter's presidency progressed, military analysts began to conclude that the Soviets were planning for nuclear aggression. Nitze wrote that nuclear war would not be instigated as mutual suicide. Instead, he believed it would be an action engaged in to pursue military or political goals. Krehbiel concluded the Soviets were studying a "cold launch technique." This was a method of launching a nuclear missile with relatively few start up procedures; making a missile launch more difficult to predict and detect. This would add an element of surprise to nuclear warfare.<sup>35</sup> Using limited amounts of information coming out of the Soviet Union, Pipes deduced their leaders showed interest in the impact of a surprise "first strike" against the United States. These analysts felt that their greatest fears were coming true; the strong possibility of a nuclear conflict in a time

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<sup>32</sup>Nitze, "Deterring our Deterrent," 198.

<sup>33</sup>Krehbiel, "Military Asymmetries," 27.

<sup>34</sup>May, "Nuclear Weapons," 486.

<sup>35</sup>See Nitze, "Deterring Our Deterrent," 197; and Krehbiel, "Military Assymetries," 29.

of United States' vulnerability.

Nitze stated some specific requirements for any side emerging with favorable results from a nuclear war. The side attempting to win a conflict would need to have a powerful "counterforce capability." This term referred to the amount of weapons the side attacking first would have after its opponent replied with a wave of missiles. Nitze believed that in order to achieve eventual victory, the aggressor needed a clear strategic advantage after the first exchange of missiles. Also, the aggressor must protect the majority of its weapons in hardened positions, effectively insulated from a nuclear blast. Lastly, the aggressor nation needed to have a capable conventional military force to survive the first exchange of missiles.<sup>36</sup> Nitze and other analysts felt that the Soviet Union possessed these three requirements. The Soviet buildup of weapons during the 1970s convinced many people that the counterforce requirement was a reality.

One type of conflict, often called a "limited nuclear war" between superpowers did not favor the United States according to many military analysts. This was a conflict in which the two superpowers would not exchange all of their forces simultaneously; instead one side might strike first with a smaller number of weapons. One problem the United States would face in this scenario was its amount of "throw weight," or the amount of nuclear tonnage available to it.<sup>37</sup> In the early 1980s, United States' nuclear planners conceded these throw weight disadvantages. Military analysts argued that the United States' weapons were of superior accuracy and technology, making tonnage differences less important. The problem with this belief lay in the conditions of a limited nuclear conflict. Many feared the Soviets would strike first, with perhaps a third of its nuclear forces. Due to throw weight advantage, the Soviets could conceivably not use any of their nuclear submarines and bombers in this strike.

If this were to occur, the United States president would be forced to choose one of

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<sup>36</sup>Nitze, "Deterring Our Deterrent," 197-198.

<sup>37</sup>Krehbiel, "Military Asymmetries," 30.

two unfavorable options. He could retaliate with a strike of similar strength. This action would have serious consequences. After the deployment of these weapons and the impact of the Soviet wave, the United States would have very few nuclear warheads in reserve. In comparison, their adversaries would have a large portion of their forces still available due to perceived advantages in hardened silos and civil defense. Soviet bombers and submarines could also be moved away from nuclear impact points and made available to be held in reserve. The second option would be not to retaliate to the Soviet surprise attack with a large number of weapons. This strategy would run the risk of nuclear missiles being destroyed in their launching areas by the incoming strike. This second reaction to a Soviet first strike would leave the United States with a strategic disadvantage due to original throw weight problems. Even worse, this action would result in a ravaged United States' landscape with huge casualties from the strike, and little damage done to the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup>

After either course of action, analysts predicted a Soviet victory, partial destruction of the United States, and global political upheaval. Representative Robin Beard of Tennessee released a study stating that after a "surprise attack" by the Soviet Union and a reply by the United States, a 70 percent nuclear warhead advantage would be held by the Soviets.<sup>39</sup> In addition, Nitze claimed Soviet civil defense was capable of saving up to 90 percent of its population from a nuclear strike. If correct, the Soviet Union would be easily capable of fielding a conventional army. After this limited form of nuclear war, the Soviet Union would stand as the unchallenged power in terms of nuclear weapons, conventional forces, and population. This force could then intimidate the United States and the rest of the world into accepting any terms of surrender the Soviets decided upon.<sup>40</sup> The possibility of these horrible events led Reagan and other

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<sup>38</sup>See Krehbiel, "Military Asymmetries," 29; and Nitze, "Deterring Our Deterrent," 207.

<sup>39</sup>Schemmer, "New Study Shows Russia," 5.

<sup>40</sup>See Nitze, "Deterring Our Deterrent," 205; and Lewis, "The Evolution," 45.

conservative leaders to call for a buildup in the nation's nuclear forces.

Conservative fears concerning the Soviet Union's preparations for a limited nuclear war are supported in the limited amount of secondary literature concerning Soviet military thought on nuclear war in the late 1970's. In Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91, former Secretary of the Soviet Defense Council and Deputy Minister of Defense Andrei A. Kokoshin argued that the Soviet Union was preparing for conventional troop activities in a post-nuclear environment. He stated that Soviet strategic and operational concepts included the theory of "deep operations" into enemy territory after a nuclear strike. Soviet Army General Pavlosky believed the combination of increased developments of nuclear weapons combined with enhanced training of ground forces made this strategy feasible.<sup>41</sup> This line of strategy can also be seen in the writings of Lieutenant General I.I. Yurpol'sky and his belief in the "three-dimensional battle." In the 1970's he was developing offensive tactics involving the transportation of ground forces over radiation contaminated areas for deep offensive activity after a nuclear strike.<sup>42</sup> Kokoshin argues that as late as the end of the 1970's, Soviet military professionals believed in the "principle of strategy's subordination to policy" despite the realities of the nuclear age.<sup>43</sup> Kokoshin argues that Soviet military planners considered nuclear war an element of political policy, not necessarily the total destruction of civilization. This type of strategic thinking is similar to American conservatives' vision of a limited nuclear war.

As a presidential candidate in 1976 and 1980 Ronald Reagan made an issue of conservative's fears on the nation's nuclear defense. Similar to Jimmy Carter's 1976 campaign, Reagan was critical of President Ford's nuclear defense and foreign policy record. Reagan stated that Ford "lacked a coherent world view," and argued the Soviet

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<sup>41</sup>Kokoshin, Andrei, Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 177.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 53.

Union had achieved nuclear superiority over the United States in 1976.<sup>44</sup> In agreement with conservative defense analysts, Reagan argued that the United States should be able to negotiate arms reduction treaties from a position of strength over the Soviet Union. Reagan joined Carter in attacking Ford's willingness to negotiate arms treaties with the Soviets while they conducted aggression in such areas as Angola. Reagan blasted Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, stating they "must be made accountable to history" for allowing the United States to slip behind the Soviet Union in military power. Although his 1976 campaign was unsuccessful, Reagan presented himself as a sympathetic figure to the concerns of conservatives on the issue of nuclear defense.

Reagan's use of this issue continued in his 1980 campaign. He warned Americans that in the event of nuclear war, "the Russians could just take us with a phone call."<sup>45</sup> This type of rhetoric was common through the political career of Ronald Reagan. He employed with considerable frequency harsh statements in respect to the issue of nuclear war. The general public was concerned about the subject of nuclear war during this period. Nuclear related issues were key in forming public opinion and deciding many elections. Reagan's political success and popularity fluctuated during his years of office holding and seeking. In speeches and statements, Reagan used the issue of nuclear war as a means of attaining political goals. He frequently used this sore spot in the American public's mind as a club to beat groups dissenting from his policies. Reagan used nuclear war as a scare tactic to garner support for controversial administration programs and attack his political enemies.

Beginning in 1976, several conservative advisors supported and influenced Reagan. One group was known as "Team B." This group was made up of advisors to then CIA Director George W.H. Bush. Team B was essential in forming the Reagan claim in the 1980 presidential campaign that the Soviets held nuclear superiority over the

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<sup>44</sup>New York Times, 2 February 1976, 15.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Scheer, With Enough Shovels (New York: Random House, 1982), 66.



United States. Historians and writers accuse Bush and Team B members of manipulating CIA data to conform to their personal political ideology. The CIA data that Bush and his advisors compiled led to increased statements on the nuclear vulnerability of the United States to the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup> As Reagan announced his decision to run for president, another key advisory group formed. During the 1980 presidential campaign, the Committee on the Present Danger, made up of former members of Team B, re-evaluated the United States' assessment of the Soviet Union. Committee members criticized the SALT treaties and the moderate views some individuals had of the Soviet Union.<sup>47</sup> Thirty-three members of this committee became members of the first Reagan administration.<sup>48</sup> Reagan also hired Harvard historian Richard Pipes to serve on his National Security Council Staff. Pipes was well-known for his critical opinions and statements about the Soviet Union. An example of Pipes' views was a speech in 1981 in which he stated, "Soviet leaders would have to choose between peacefully changing their communist system...or going to war."<sup>49</sup> Reagan's use of these advisors and staff members by Reagan in his political campaign demonstrated his intent on to make nuclear defense a main focus in his presidency.

As the election of 1980 neared, President Carter faced two publicity problems. Both dealt with issues of foreign policy and the strength of the United States. First, the American public worried over its president's lack of control over international affairs, such as the Iranian hostage crisis. Second, the perception existed that the Soviet Union held a strategic advantage over the United States.<sup>50</sup> A call began for movement to remedy this weakness in respect to America's greatest rival. In January of 1980, 49 percent of

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<sup>46</sup>Sheer, Shovels, 53-54.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 36-39.

<sup>48</sup>Helga Haftendorn and Jakob Schissler, eds., The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of American Strength? (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 94.

<sup>49</sup>Scheer, Shovles, 6-8.

<sup>50</sup>Elizabeth Drew, Portrait of an Election: The 1980 Presidential Campaign (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 108-116.

the general public favored of increasing defense spending.<sup>51</sup>

Reagan noted that conservative military analysts held serious reservations about Carter's reliance on deterrence and MAD. At the Republican National Convention, where Reagan won his party's nomination, his and the party's attack on Carter's defense initiatives became a part of the party platform and key to the rest of the campaign. The Republican platform rejected Carter's theory of MAD "which limits the President to a Hobson's choice between mutual suicide and surrender."<sup>52</sup> The platform also called for immediate work towards a superior nuclear technology.<sup>53</sup> As election day neared, the attack on Carter's policies increased. After receiving the nomination of his party, Reagan became more aggressive on the shortcomings of Carter's defense policies. His argument against MAD centered around his belief that this policy would lead America to a position of total inferiority and inability to deal with the Soviet Union. He called the policy one of "weakness, inconsistency, vacillation, and bluff." In addition, he accused his opponent of being "totally oblivious" to the military and political designs of the Soviets.<sup>54</sup> The attacks on Carter became more personal and venomous as the election day neared. Following this pattern of attack on MAD, Reagan staff member Kenneth Adams stated "How ironic it is that liberals, who pride themselves on their moral motives, advocate such a blood curdling approach, namely that all is well as long as we can launch enough missiles to kill a hundred million or so Soviets." In an even more aggressive attack, Reagan insinuated the Soviets might directly aid Carter in an effort to continue their gains in increased nuclear superiority over the United States. Reagan referred to an "October Surprise" in which "the Soviet Union is going to throw a few bones to Mr. Carter during

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<sup>51</sup>Bruce Russett and Donald Deluca, "Don't Tread on Me: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in the Eighties," *Political Science Quarterly* 96 (Fall 1981): 397.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>53</sup>Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: A Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 320.

<sup>54</sup>*The New York Times*, 17-19 August 1980.

this coming campaign in order to help him continue as President.”<sup>55</sup> Reagan made this statement with no factual basis to substantiate it. It is an example of a statement made for the sole purpose of demeaning his opponent over this issue.

In the final month of the campaign, Reagan backed down from his outcry against the U.S. nuclear defense policy. His emphasis on defense began to backfire as seen in his declining public opinion ratings. Advisors feared the public would view Reagan as a “war monger” causing his approval to suffer.<sup>56</sup> In reaction to his opponent’s falling approval rating on the issue, Carter described his opponent’s stance on relations with the Soviet Union as “dangerous” and “disturbing.”<sup>57</sup> The media also began to attack Reagan’s aggressive beliefs on defense. Hedrick Smith, Chief Washington Correspondent for the New York Times, stated “Even allowing for the exaggerated hyperbole of a political campaign,” Reagan’s statements “have continually rung with alarm.”<sup>58</sup> Smith called Reagan’s statements on the future of the Cold War and the fate of the West “apocalyptic.”<sup>59</sup> Reagan responded to these charges by agreeing to re-open discussions on the SALT treaties after his election. Reagan had initially criticized the SALT agreements as detrimental to American defense and promised not to pursue it upon his election. After Reagan took this relaxed stance towards defense, polls indicated public opinion against him began to shrink.<sup>60</sup> This backsliding by Reagan demonstrated his position on nuclear defense was not static. Instead, it is obvious that nuclear defense was a political tool to be manipulated however the situation dictated in his quest for office.

Carter attempted to commit considerable resources to both nuclear and general defense. The second greatest increase in United States’ history had been a \$47.6 billion

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<sup>55</sup> See Cannon, President Reagan, 322; and Drew, Portrait of an Election, 119.

<sup>56</sup>Drew, Portrait, 315

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 324.

<sup>58</sup>New York Times, 16 November 1980, 172.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 16 November 1980, 172.

<sup>60</sup>Drew, Portrait, 324.

increase by the Carter Administration at the end of 1980. Carter's 1979 defense budget proposal of \$126 billion was the largest in U.S. history. Carter's proposals for defense spending raised 3 percent each year from 1978 to 1980.<sup>61</sup> These increases in proposed and actual increases in Carter's defense spending must be evaluated with consideration to the severe inflation during his presidency. The inflation rate in the U.S. rose 12.2 percent from October 31, 1978 to October 31, 1978.<sup>62</sup> Considering this economic reality, Carter's defense spending increases were less revolutionary.

These actual and attempted increases did not satisfy conservative analysts, Reagan or the American people. The attacks on the defense record of the Carter administration proved successful according to polling sources. A University of Michigan poll documented the effects of Reagan's attacks on the incumbent president. Of those polled, 40 percent agreed "weak" described Carter "extremely well" or "quite well."<sup>63</sup> Another 60 percent of those answering the survey chose "not too well" or "not well at all" in evaluating the statement that Carter was a "strong presidential leader."<sup>64</sup> In contrast, over 50 percent of those polled, who had an opinion, agreed that the characteristic of "strong presidential leadership" applied to Reagan "extremely" or "quite well."<sup>65</sup> Despite the subjective nature of polls, these conclusions give evidence public opinion on defense and presidential strength played a role in determining the election.

In addition, other problems in the Carter Administration aided in Reagan's victory in 1980. As earlier discussed, a sagging economy created widespread criticism of Carter. Rising inflation and oil prices plagued Carter's last years in office. The continued plight of hostages taken at the United States' Embassy in Iran continued to be an issue in the last days of the campaign. Similar to Carter's nuclear doctrine, the public questioned his

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<sup>61</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers, 1:187

<sup>62</sup>New York Times, 13 December 1979, 12.

<sup>63</sup>The American National Election Study, 1980: Major Panel File. by Warren E. Miller, principal investigator. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982., 715.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 717.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 709.

conviction and leadership in foreign and domestic policy. This credibility issue obviously hurt Carter and aided Reagan in the election.

Ronald Reagan took up the arguments of the conservative analysts and used them to create additional fear of Soviet aggression. The factuality of conservative arguments and the motivations behind them are questionable. However, the concerns of this group played a role in the outcome of the 1980 Presidential election. The conservative analysis of a Soviet Nuclear threat did not originate with Reagan, but he was aware of the argument and it had tremendous influence on his career as a politician and world leader. One could argue that conservative analysts influenced him to some degree. Reagan placed a considerable amount of blame on the policies of President Carter for a deterioration of the nation's nuclear position. His adoption and advertisement of nuclear doctrine criticism played a key role in his subsequent victory. The question remained whether President Reagan could improve on the nation's nuclear and foreign policy and whether espousing these conservative dogmas would help him attain his foreign policy goals.

## CHAPTER 3

## REAGAN'S NUCLEAR ARMS RECORD: 1981-1983

On October 2, 1981, newly-elected President Reagan announced his plan to rectify the nation's ailing nuclear defenses. In conjunction with Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger, the three goals of Reagan's initial nuclear program were to modernize the triad of United States forces, end delays in the development of new programs, and improve communications and controls systems vital to military forces. In the next five years, he promised to deploy 100 B-1 bombers and develop a new "stealth bomber," in addition to expanding the Trident submarine force. Contrasting his plans to those of President Carter, he pledged to deploy 200 MX missiles, as well as improve United States civil defense. Reagan also announced a new plan for deterrence that would ensure the safety of his nation and its allies. The most interesting promise Reagan made was that his policies "will signal our resolve to maintain the strategic balance, and this is the keystone to any genuine agreement with the Soviets."<sup>1</sup> Reagan identified nuclear arms reduction treaties with the Soviet Union as a goal of his administration. However, he argued that a buildup in the nation's nuclear forces was necessary before these negotiations could begin. He believed the United States should engage in arms reduction talks from a position of strength. Reagan argued that only this enhanced bargaining position would produce arms reduction treaties favorable to the United States. He also claimed that he wanted to maintain the strategic balance. This is curious because he campaigned on the

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<sup>1</sup>President, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters, "United States Strategic Weapons Program," The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 17, no 2 (2 October 1981), 1075.

issue that the Soviet Union had an advantage in nuclear weapons. It is also important to note that President Reagan identified nuclear reduction agreements with the Soviet Union as a goal for his nuclear doctrine at the early date of 1981.

The president's goal of improving the nation's nuclear defenses would come at a price. Increases in nuclear spending were only one part of Reagan's economic plans for the country, which were dubbed "Reaganomics" in the early days of the administration. In The Reagan Presidency, Wilbur Edel calls Reaganomics "the belief that uninhibited freedom in economic activity is basic to all freedoms"<sup>2</sup> This economic doctrine included sharp reductions in income taxes, increases in military spending, and the pursuit of a balanced budget. The pursuit of the goals came at the expense of domestic spending, specifically welfare. Reagan soon abandoned his support of a balanced budget for increased tax cuts in 1981. Reagan believed these tax cuts would stimulate the nation's stagnant economy. His initial tax initiative called for reductions of taxes to capital gains and the reduction of "bracket creep," the government practice of forcing taxpayers into higher income brackets, increasing their payments.<sup>3</sup> Many of these tax cuts benefited wealthier Americans, and Reaganomics failed to stimulate the economy. A recession crippled the economy through 1983. The failure of the president's economic programs drew criticism in Congress and the in findings of public opinion polls. A 1982 New York Times/CBS Poll showed 51 percent of Americans believed Reagan was to blame for the country's economic problems. To the question "are you better off than you were a year ago," 61 percent asked answered "no".<sup>4</sup> Congressman Richard Ottinger called Reaganomics a failure and stated it caused the recovery from recession to be "sickeningly slow by historic standards."<sup>5</sup> Dissent of Reaganomics ncreased as the administration continually asked for additional military spending while cutting expenditures for

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<sup>2</sup>Edel, Wilbur, The Reagan Presidency (New York: Hipocrene Books, 1992), 44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>4</sup>New York Times, 19 January 1982, 1.

<sup>5</sup>New York Times, 25 May 1983, 16.

domestic programs.

Despite these economic pitfalls, Reagan claimed success against the Soviet aggressive nuclear balance as early as August of 1981. Pointing to the successes of his programs and the Soviets' reaction, he stated that the Soviet Union was concerned and "I can understand their anguish. They are squealing like they're sitting on a sharp nail." He claimed that "we're not going to let them get to the point of dominance...and they don't like that."<sup>6</sup> Secondary historical literature does suggest that Reagan's programs influenced Soviet strategic planning. Kokoshin states that in the 1980's, Soviet military planners began to view the prospect of nuclear as negative. He concludes that Soviet planners believed they lacked the numerical advantages in nuclear weapons needed to conduct a limited nuclear campaign in an effective manner.<sup>7</sup> Reagan expected these successes to lead to further increases in national security and breakthroughs in arms reduction treaties.

In an effort to gain public support for additional nuclear spending in 1981, Reagan and Weinburger again warned the nation of the Soviet Union's massive nuclear spending program and its imminent threat. In August, Reagan reminded the country that the Soviets had spent \$300 billion more than the United States in past years and the result was an imbalance in strategic nuclear delivery systems. This claim of imbalance in nuclear forces contrasted with the statement he would later make in October claiming that he only wished to maintain a strategic balance. He stated that "to allow this imbalance is a threat to our national security" and that it was "my duty as President and all our responsibility as citizens, to keep this country strong enough to remain free."<sup>8</sup> Reagan also stated he had information that the Soviets were spending "about a hundred million in

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<sup>6</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1981), Ronald Reagan, 1981, 1:709.

<sup>7</sup>Kokoshin, Soviet Strategic Thought, 133.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 1981, 1:309.



Western Europe alone a few years ago.”<sup>9</sup> He did not provide a reliable source or basis for this information, but gave great emphasis to its threat to security. Reagan argued that the Soviets had engaged in “the greatest military buildup in the history of man” and promised that “it cannot be described as necessary for their defense. It is plainly a buildup that is offensive in nature.”<sup>10</sup> He had harsh words for the ideas behind the failed SALT II treaty of his predecessor. Reagan criticized the treaty for allowing large increases in the numbers of Soviet warheads and not providing reliable means for the United States to verify reductions agreed to under SALT II.<sup>11</sup>

Secretary of Defense Weinburger made similar statements about the buildup of Soviet forces and the need for modernization of United States forces. He told the Senate Armed Services Committee in January 1981 that it was becoming “difficult, if not impossible” to employ conventional forces or conduct diplomacy without a nuclear strategic balance. He argued that an enhanced nuclear position “offers our best hope of negotiating a meaningful arms control agreement with the Soviet Union.”<sup>12</sup> Weinburger again promised nuclear buildup as a means to nuclear reduction treaties in the early days of the administration. These declarations of Soviet nuclear threat by the Reagan administration seemed long on the rhetoric of fear and short on specifics.

Claiming a Soviet nuclear threat and the need for buildup to solve it, Reagan announced his 1982 military budget proposal. He asked Congress to increase military spending by \$7.2 billion over President Carter’s budget of \$181.5 billion in 1981. He also called for increases in the military budget of more than 20% for at least the next two years.<sup>13</sup> Supporting the president, Weinburger promised the budget would “significantly and quickly strengthen” the ability to respond to a Soviet conventional and nuclear threat

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 1:708.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1:711.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 1: 57.

<sup>12</sup>George J Selier, Strategic Nuclear Force Requirements and Issues (Maxwell A.F. Base, AL: Air Univ. Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>13</sup>New York Times, 19 February 1981, 1.

in all areas of the world vital to United States' national interest. He accused the Soviet Union of worldwide aggression and stated the previous administration failed to build the necessary military power to meet these actions.<sup>14</sup> In response to these requests, the Senate approved a \$136.5 billion military authorization bill with almost no significant opposition while the House of Representatives approved a large part of another \$222 billion request for the 1982 fiscal year beginning in October. The New York Times called congressional approval of this budget "another clear victory" that "appeared only to underscore the wide spread support in Congress for increased military spending."<sup>15</sup> Weinburger promised this spending package would achieve the needed strategic balance for the nation. Based on this statement, it was reasonable to assume this favorable climate for military spending would reap rapid increases in national security, arms negotiations, and the United States' foreign policy clout.

As Reagan's spending proposals passed Congress in 1981, seeds of opposition began to mount in the media and in Congress. Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri confirmed support existed for military spending but warned that "throwing money about indiscriminately" would not be accepted.<sup>16</sup> He stated that Reagan's defense proposals needed to be "established within the context of a coherent national strategy."<sup>17</sup> Harsher criticism about the direction and need for Reagan's spending proposals came from the media. James Fallows, editorial writer for the New York Times and editor of The Atlantic, criticized the president for not "discriminating between weapons that are affective and those that merely cost a lot of money."<sup>18</sup> Fallows cannot be classified among liberals generally opposed to measures strengthening the military. In the same

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 5 March 1981, 1.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 15 May 1981, 15.

<sup>16</sup>Congress, Senate, Senator Eagleton of Missouri speaking on support for President Reagan's defense spending initiatives, 97th Congr., 1st sess., Congressional Record 127, pt. 22 (1 Dec. 1980): 29223.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 29226.

<sup>18</sup>New York Times, 14 June 1981, 19.

article he criticized Reagan's policies, he also called for the re-institution of a universal draft to make the military more effective.<sup>19</sup> The fact conservatives such as Fallows criticized the Reagan's defense policies as early as 1981 foreshadowed additional problems for the administration.

Budgeting increases continued in 1982. The Pentagon reported a record \$114.5 billion increase in the cost of 44 major and future weapons systems. Military officials stated that the cost estimates reflected the first "complete planning and budgeting cycle under the Reagan administration."<sup>20</sup> These new expenditures had not produced any significant arms reduction treaties by 1982. Opposition began to a rise against the administrations nuclear spending increases in 1982. In September, Congress passed a budget resolution calling for an \$8 billion reduction in military spending compared to what the administration requested. The president originally accepted this reduction, against the wishes of Weinburger. President Reagan soon changed his position and backed Weinburger's refusal.<sup>21</sup>

The administration's plans for the MX missile came under attack in December. The House of Representatives voted to reject funds for the procurement of the missile. Steven B. Roberts, an editorial writer for the New York Times, stated the vote reflected a belief on Capitol Hill that the military buildup has "gone too far, too fast."<sup>22</sup> He also believed the defeat of procurement funds for the missile was a victory for the budding nuclear freeze movement, organizing support around the nation to lobby against the bill and other increases in United States' nuclear weapons. Democratic Congressman Charles Wilson, a hawk on military matters, called the president's arguments on the feasibility of a nuclear war unreal and immoral. Wilson stated administration plans for MX missiles in "dense pack" formation, on movable tracks in Wyoming "sound like Pac-Man," the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 14 June 1981, 19.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 20 March 1982, 1

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 16 September 1982, 1.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 7 December 1982, 23.

popular video game.<sup>23</sup> Roberts and Wilson's statements give evidence to the existence of a growing group of critics to Reagan's defense policies among the media and in Congress.

In addition, 50 Republican congressmen voted against the MX bill. Republican Congressman Jack Edwards, who led the fight for the bill, urged the Pentagon to dispel survivability concerns and illustrate the need for the MX. This questioning of the effectiveness and justification for the missile by proponents of Reagan's program shows problems in the administration's planning. If members of Reagan's own party questioned the need for the MX, there were obviously serious weaknesses in the proposal.

Despite killing the MX bill, the house decided to retain \$2.5 billion of funding for research and development of the missile. Thomas A. Foley, Democratic Whip, stated "there is a strong consensus to increase the military budget, and you shouldn't read into the MX vote that Congress is marching away from defense."<sup>24</sup> There was still approval for nuclear weapon increases. It was the burden of the Reagan administration to propose a reasonable plan to a receptive Congress. The defeat of the MX proposal was one of the first substantial defeats of Reagan's defense proposals in Congress. It was an early example of what was growing opposition to the administration's defense proposals. While bipartisan support existed for nuclear spending in 1982, Congress became increasingly unwilling to accept administration programs without questioning their cost and actual benefit to defense.

In March of 1983, Weinburger made statements that the United States was making progress in achieving the military posture he envisioned. These arguments followed and attempted to justify a Pentagon report called "Soviet Military Power" that called for more military spending. He argued that despite continued Soviet military

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 7 December 1982, 23.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 9 December 1982, 20.

buildups in the 1980's, "I think we have begun to catch up."<sup>25</sup> This statement was an attempt to justify additional military spending. He estimated, however, that it would take at least five more years to regain the strategic and conventional forces needed to be an effective deterrent to the Soviet Union. This statement counters his earlier claim that the budget plan of 1981 would "significantly and quickly strengthen" United States' deterrence capabilities.<sup>26</sup> Tass, the official Soviet press agency called the Pentagon report "a mass of doctored data full of shamelessly manipulated facts and groundless contentions."<sup>27</sup> This statement was politically motivated. However, the Soviet Union did not demonstrate a warming of relations with the United States. The Soviets were not rushing to negotiate reduction treaties in reaction to Reagan's modernization program, as the president and secretary of defense suggested in 1981.

Resistance to budget increases in defense rose to new levels in 1983. The administration called for a \$245.3 billion military budget for the 1984 fiscal year. In response to Reagan's proposal, the Senate Armed Services asked the administration to come up with cuts in the budget. In addition, the committee called for military personnel cuts from 110,000 to 140,000 people instead of the 37,000 the administration requested. Democratic Senator Carl Levin accused Weinburger of "exaggerated rhetoric" and "one sided charts" to depict the United States falling behind the U.S.S.R. in military power and nuclear armaments.<sup>28</sup>

Reagan sent a message to Weinburger, who was testifying before the Senate Budget Committee, to oppose any cuts in the proposed military budget. In the message, Reagan instructed him to say "we have reached the bone and any further cuts would do severe damage to our national security."<sup>29</sup> Reagan did this in order to place additional

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 10 March 1983, 1.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 5 March 1981, 1.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 10 March 1981, 1.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 2 February, 1983, 15

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 4 February, 1983, 5.

pressure on Congress to pass his military budget in its current state. He challenged anyone in Congress to be specific on what cuts to make and to realize that “his cuts mean cutting our commitments to allies or inviting greater risk or both.”<sup>30</sup> Weinburger also refused the committee’s request to identify the lowest priority items in the budget. He commented that the country could not put off “unpopular military programs” for a few more domestic programs at the expense of national security. This lack of flexibility demonstrated the Reagan administration’s squandering of opportunities to work with the Democratic Congress for the increase in military spending it wished for.

Reagan made strong statements against cutting the defense budget. He argued that “there is no logical way to cut defense by X amount.” He called talk of cuts “the same kind of talk that led democracies to neglect their defenses in the 1930’s and invented the tragedy of World War II.”<sup>31</sup> Reagan claimed a freeze in nuclear arms would be a reward for the Soviets “for their massive buildup while preventing us from modernizing our aging and increasingly vulnerable forces.”<sup>32</sup>

In January of 1983, the president defended his defense policies and reminded the country of the progress he believed his administration had made. He stated that when he took office, “there was a real question then about how well we could meet a crisis” and that the nation had to engage in a “major modernization program to ensure we could deter aggression and preserve the peace.”<sup>33</sup> He stated that with NATO in 1979 the United States began to develop new weapons as an incentive to the Soviet Union to meet in “serious” arms control negotiations. He failed to mention this buildup was initiated under President Carter. He claimed that in arms control, the two vital factors are leverage and determination. He argued that there was no hope of the Soviets engaging in serious arms control negotiations when he took office. Reagan stated that the Soviets “had all the

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<sup>30</sup>U.S. President, Public Papers, 1983, 1:438.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 1: 442.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:441.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:441.

marbles” in 1981. Specifically, this statement referred to the aging bomber force of the United States compared to the Soviet Union. Reagan claimed in 1981 “our bombers were older than the pilots who flew them” and “today that’s no longer the case.”<sup>34</sup> He reminded the nation that he was building badly needed new submarines and bombers to balance the threat to United States land-based missiles.

However, the president quickly changed his posture on the strategic balance of forces in March of the same year. He claimed the Soviets were adding an average of three new nuclear warheads a week and had 1,300 in 1983.<sup>35</sup> He reminded the public that the United States was not making equal deployments. In attempt to garner support for additional spending, Reagan changed his tone on this issue from one of extolling great progress to stating great danger and a need for continued buildup. This wavering on the issue of strategic balance brings the effectiveness of the administration’s nuclear modernization program into serious question.

The President’s Commission on Strategic Forces gave further arguments to the Senate for deployment of the MX missile in 1983. The commission submitted a report of its findings to the Senate in April 1983 that was endorsed by former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Secretary of Defense Kissinger, and former Secretary of Defense Brown.<sup>36</sup> The report argued that without a modest employment of MX missiles, arms control agreements would be difficult to achieve. Members argued that the primary goal of the buildup was still to induce the Soviets into nuclear reduction agreements. General Brent Scowcroft of the commission called for the deployment of around 100 MX missiles to modernize United States’ forces and show a sense of national cohesion and will on the issue. Scowcroft stated the MX deployment was needed to rectify United States’

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 1:50.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 1:439.

<sup>36</sup>Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. President’s Commission on Strategic Forces: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 98th Congr., 1st session, 11 May 1983, 1.

weakness in the throw weight of nuclear weapons.<sup>37</sup> James Schlessinger, Senior Counselor to the commission, continued on this theme of asymmetry between the superpowers by stating the Soviets still enjoyed an asymmetry in counterforce capabilities in 1983.<sup>38</sup>

A new aspect appeared in Reagan's nuclear doctrine in 1983. The New York Times reported that a "group of experts" had urged the president to order an increase in long range research on "exotic technologies" of nuclear defense.<sup>39</sup> At the center of these proposals was the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) or "star wars" as sarcastically labeled by Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy. Reagan announced his SDI proposal in conjunction with another strong appeal for military spending. The basics of the plan were to employ satellites in space to destroy incoming Soviet missiles with a yet-to-be developed laser technology. Reagan called the proposal "a vision of the future which offers hope."<sup>40</sup> According to the president, SDI would be strictly defensive in nature- as opposed to Mutual Assured Destruction's reliance on offensive weapons to provide security from nuclear attack. To justify this new defensive program, he asked "Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them?"<sup>41</sup> Senior administration officials stated SDI did not threaten the USSR because it was purely defensive in nature. A difficult issue involving this proposal was its relation to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty outlawing anti-nuclear missile technology. The Reagan administration maintained SDI did not currently violate the terms of the treaty because it was still in the research and development stage. The administration did not explain how this program becoming a reality would not violate the treaty.

Reagan's SDI proposal illuminated some substantial problems in his nuclear

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>39</sup>New York Times, 24 March 1983, 32.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 24 March 1983, 21.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 24 March 1983, 21.



policies. White House officials stated the president was motivated to announce SDI plans because the Joint Chiefs of Staff had informed him that land based missile systems, including the new MX missile, “seemed to be increasingly vulnerable to attack.” This statement shows weakness in the administration’s early promise to create strategic stability in rapid fashion, with the MX missile as a key part of these plans.<sup>42</sup> The New York Times stated that government officials reported SDI was a concerted effort by the president to give priority to undeveloped technologies instead of employing additional weapons systems in a more rapid fashion. This brings the Reagan promise of expedient nuclear security further into question.

A second addition to the Department of Defense’s 1981 study of Soviet Military Power, published in 1983, compared Reagan’s military policies and the activities of the Soviet Union. Since the first edition of this report in 1981, the Department of Defense concluded that the margin between Soviet and United States expenditures on defense had decreased. This was attributed to a slowing of Soviet military expenditures in 1981. However, the report stated that the Soviet Union had produced 2,000 ICBMs to the United States’ 350 in the two year time period since the first study.<sup>43</sup> The report called the rate of upgrade in Soviet forces since 1981 “extraordinary” and stated that there were no signs of a slowdown in these trends. In addition, the 1983 report continued to maintain that the “global military balance has been shifting steadily against the United States and its Allies.”<sup>44</sup> The report promised the president’s programs “would help to redress the adverse trends in the military balance...”<sup>45</sup> However, the report did not give an immediate time at which a military balance would be achieved and gave no indication of a lessening of the Soviet threat since Reagan took office. The promises of the report

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 5 November 1983, 32.

<sup>43</sup>U.S. Department of Defense. Soviet Military Power 1983, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), 68.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 106.

for an improved strategic situation for the United States was highly contingent on more years of military spending and spoke of little immediate impact as of 1983.

Criticism of the need and effectiveness of Reagan's modernization of nuclear forces mounted as Reagan's first term progressed. In some instances, criticism over the effectiveness of Reagan's nuclear defense doctrines came from his own political party. One of these critics was Representative Robert Walker, the ranking minority leader of the House Committee on Science and Technology. In 1982, Walker stated that "today we are at a low point in our ability to defend ourselves and our allies."<sup>46</sup> Strong concerns also existed on the administration's strategic planning for the survivability of military hardware, such as hardened missile silos. Dr. Jack Geiger of the School of Biomedical Education at City College of New York argued that "the concept of survivability itself, which is central to both our military and civil defense planning, is a fantasy."<sup>47</sup> This testimony weakens the technical credibility of many of Reagan's new weapons, specifically the administrations to the enhanced survivability of the MX missile.

The scientific community also offered strong argument against the possibility of a limited nuclear war not escalating to a global or catastrophic level. Dr. Sydney Drell of Stanford University pointed out that there was no technical basis for control of a nuclear war once missiles were launched. He stated that once the nuclear threshold was crossed "there will inevitably be a broad delegation down the line of authority for nuclear release."<sup>48</sup> Drell further argued that in 1982, leaders in both the Soviet Union and the United States were erroneously confident in the abilities of civil defense systems. He argued this incorrect belief in the utility of civil defense also contributed to the belief in a limited conflict with substantial survival of world population and infrastructure. Reagan criticized Carter on his preparedness for a limited nuclear conflict and justified his

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<sup>46</sup>House, Committee on Science and Technology, The Consequences of Nuclear War on the Global Environment 97th Congr., 2nd session, 15 Sept. 1982, 8.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 8.

nuclear buildup on the need to prepare for such an engagement. The research of a majority of the scientific community against the possibility of such a conflict weakens these campaign contentions.

In 1984, testimony before the Joint Committee on Economics brought forward further scientific and strategic criticisms of the administration's policies in 1984. Senator William Proxmire, Vice-Chairman of this committee argued that the Reagan administration had done little to prepare public policy after a nuclear exchange in the type of limited conflict it deemed possible. Many scientists at this meeting testified about the effects of a nuclear winter that would begin after this type of conflict. A nuclear winter was described as a period in which soot and ashes from explosions would cover the sky and block the sun from reaching areas near nuclear explosions. The growth of vegetation and overall habitability of the planet would be considerably affected by this phenomenon. Richard L. Wagner, Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, stated the actual effects and strength of a nuclear winter were not known and his department's estimates put it at a matter of months.<sup>49</sup> Statements by scientists at the committee session placed the length of a nuclear winter at one year, which they considered a conservative estimate. Wagner could offer no definite plan for government policy towards a nuclear winter. One must find it disturbing the administration favored deployment of medium range missiles in Europe as a regional deterrence and did not research a plan for the aftermath of their deployment. The scientific communities' statements about the high probability of a limited exchange escalating to a global conflict also bring a troubling point. If scientific research on the chances of escalation were correct, the United States was also in need of a nuclear winter policy as well. Thus, for all the emphasis the Reagan administration placed on nuclear doctrine, it did not sufficiently prepare for the aftermath of the use of the weapons it was deploying.

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<sup>49</sup>House, Senate. Committee on Economics, Consequences of Nuclear War 98th Congr., 2nd session, 11-12 July 1984, 101.

Another highly criticized initiative was the Strategic Defense Initiative. The strongest source of opposition to SDI came from nuclear scientists concerning its feasibility. The Union of Concerned Scientists was an organization largely dedicated to criticizing the buildip and possible use of nuclear weapons, including SDI. Jack Ruina was an electrical engineering professor at M.I.T. and analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists. Ruina stated that the majority of his colleagues had serious doubts about the feasibility of this system. He argued that many U.S. scientists had refused to criticize SDI only because many of them were employed by the government. He stated there was a widespread fear among government employees that they should not question the technological basis of President Reagan's space-based defense programs.<sup>50</sup>

The Union of Concerned Scientists also questioned the feasibility of the technology involved in making the program a reality, stating that the necessary technology did not exist. In addition, this group argued if a breakthrough in technology occurred, the Soviets were in a better position for rapid production of it.<sup>51</sup> This group also evaluated the effectiveness of a fully-deployed SDI system. They concluded that the outcome of the system's deployment would be the creation of "a defense of precarious reliability, confronted by offensive nuclear forces designed to circumvent and overwhelm it."<sup>52</sup> The Union of Concerned Scientists concluded mutual arms reductions were a more productive means to the reduction of the threat of nuclear weapons than the SDI proposal. This group's agenda against the policies of Reagan and the use nuclear weapons is clear. Their statements on the benefits of arms reduction treaties must be considered subjective and without basis in diplomatic experience. However, their criticism of the feasibility of SDI cannot be ignored due to their expertise in this area.

As late as 1983, Congress questioned the United States' ability to defend Europe

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<sup>50</sup>New York Times, 16 November 1983, 8.

<sup>51</sup>Tirman, John, ed, The Fallacy of Star Wars (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 156.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 45.

from Soviet aggression. The House Armed Services Committee concluded that the shift of the nuclear balance was impairing the credibility of a NATO nuclear response to non-nuclear Soviet aggression. The allies' ability to discourage a conventional Soviet attack against Europe was referred to as "extended deterrence." This committee concluded Soviet advances in tactical and strategic nuclear weapons had reduced the ability of the allies to maintain the strength of extended deterrence.<sup>53</sup> The committee stated that increases were needed in the nuclear arsenal of the allies to maintain extended deterrence. They stated for extended deterrence to maintain its credibility it would require "a good deal of planning and *budgeting*."<sup>54</sup> These statements show that after two years of the administration's nuclear spending, serious problems remained unsolved in the nuclear defense of American allies.

In conclusion, Reagan's first two years in office saw a definite commitment to increasing military funding in the interest of national security. The administration rectified the military spending imbalance of the United States in respect to the Soviet Union. Also, Secretary of State George Shultz was correct in his analysis that the United States' nuclear policy was not totally reliant on arms negotiations as the only means of pursuing a strategic balance during Reagan's first years. Instead, he argued that the administration increasingly relied on a buildup of nuclear weapons "to secure ourselves against the possibility of failure" in arms negotiations.<sup>55</sup> However, this went against Reagan's early goal of gaining arms reduction agreements as a direct result of the nation's nuclear buildup. In addition, after its first two years in office, no administration official indicated a significant change in the strategic imbalance of forces to the Soviet Union. This must be seen as a failure due to the 1981 promises of President Reagan and

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<sup>53</sup>House, Committee on Armed Services, Improved Conventional Force Capability Raising the Nuclear Threshold: A Staff Study (Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O., 1984), 3.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>55</sup>Senate, United States-Soviet Relations, 16.

Secretary of Defense Weinburger to alleviate an imbalance of nuclear arms and threats to national security in a rapid amount of time. As of 1983, the administration's program for alleviating the problem of nuclear asymmetry relied on an unspecified number of additional years of spending and technology yet to be completely developed.

## CHAPTER 4

## NUCLEAR ARMS AND FOREIGN POLICY: 1981-1983

President Reagan felt positively about the effects of the first two years of his nuclear and military policies on the United States' ability to conduct foreign policy. He recalled, "when I took office in January 1981, I was appalled by what I found: American planes that couldn't fly and American ships that couldn't sail..."<sup>1</sup> Reagan contended this situation was not only a direct risk to military security, but also diminished the force of United States' foreign policy. He stated that under the Carter administration, the Soviets had no reason to engage mutual arms reduction treaties because they held a strategic advantage in both nuclear and conventional weapons. He argued his military program and buildup had changed that posture. Reagan now boasted "the Soviets are now at the negotiating table...without our planned developments, they wouldn't be there."<sup>2</sup> This 1983 statement was made without the administration having signed any tangible reductions.

One contributing factor to the failed negotiations of the first two years of the administration came in Reagan's selection of arms negotiating personnel. Reagan chose Paul Nitze as chief arms negotiator for his administration. Nitze was outspoken in his call for increases in United States' nuclear weaponry and mistrust of the Soviet Union. These views can be seen in his 1976 article "Deterring our Deterrent." Based on these views, Carter passed over Nitze for the position of chief arms negotiator because the president believed he was too "hawkish" to conduct profitable negotiations with the

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<sup>1</sup>Reagan, Public Papers, 1:440.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1:441.

Soviet Union. Carter was not alone in this judgment of Nitze. Former Secretary of Defense Weinburger also feared that Nitze's beliefs would hurt arms negotiations. In addition to the possibility of Nitze hampering relations with the Soviets, Weinburger worried that he would alienate U.S. European allies.<sup>3</sup> Statements of Weinburger, and Nitze's own published views, demonstrated that Reagan made a poor selection for this critical position.

In Europe opposition to the United States' nuclear buildup increased during Reagan's first term in office. In response the United States purchased a live satellite and radio transmission to Europe to communicate a new weapons reduction proposal. Reagan announced his Zero Option Plan, which proposed that the United States would cancel the research towards the development of the Pershing missile. In return the Soviets would dismantle their existing SS-20, SS-4, and SS-5 missiles. While gaining favorable reaction among American allies, this proposal was almost certainly doomed to failure. The obvious problem was the fact Reagan asked the Soviets to reduce their existing arsenal of nuclear weapons in exchange for the United States not continuing research towards the possible creation of a new missile.<sup>4</sup> Reagan criticized the Soviets refusal as an example of their imperialistic nature and goals. He further accused the Soviets of attempting to destroy the existing world community of nations in favor of aggressive imperialism.

Reagan later admitted in a statement to the press that the Soviets entirely ignored the Zero Option proposition. He called this a "source of deep disappointment."<sup>5</sup> In light of this setback, Reagan proposed a second agreement that would reduce the United States planned deployment of a smaller number of Pershing II and ground launched cruise missiles in return for an equal reduction of existing Soviet forces. This proposal was a

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<sup>3</sup>Talbot, *Deadly Gambits*, 53.

<sup>4</sup>Reagan, *Public Papers*, 1983, 1:439.

<sup>5</sup>Ronald Reagan, "Nuclear Weapons," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 49 (April 1983): 390.



smaller reduction but on the same terms as Zero Option. This second proposal also called for elimination of existing Soviet forces for promises not to deploy future United States' weapons. Reagan did not learn from his prior mistake in judgment on Zero Option. Due to an unwillingness to compromise, he failed to propose an agreement that had a realistic chance of ratification. These actions brought Reagan's sincerity for arms reductions in 1983 into question. This is troubling because Reagan announced his desire for mutual arms reductions after a United States' buildup at the beginning of his presidency.

Furthermore, the Zero Option proposal did not gain the support from Europe which the administration had hoped. European nations resisted this proposal to reduce the number of intermediate missiles on their continent. United States' allies such as Great Britain and France considered their nuclear forces vital to their defense. This was because the conventional forces of these nations were hopelessly overmatched by those of the Soviet Union. European allies saw their nuclear forces as the main deterrent to a conventional Soviet attack. The nations of Europe were against the removal of their nuclear weapons because they would be dependent on the United States' nuclear arsenal for their defense. Another fear by these nations was that without nuclear weapons of their own, the United States and the Soviet Union would engage in a nuclear conflict limited to the continent of Europe. Zero Option was therefore opposed by leaders in many nations in Europe because the allies did not want their primary means of their defense, nuclear weapons, removed from their direct control.<sup>6</sup>

In West Germany, Zero Option was opposed for different reasons. The majority of the nation was beginning to align against Reagan's policies. Unlike many Western European nations, West Germany did not wish to use nuclear weapons as a means of defense from Soviet aggression. Zero Option was aimed at pacifying West German resistance to American deployment of nuclear weapons within German borders. The

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<sup>6</sup>Robert Tucker and others, eds., SDI and U.S. Foreign Policy (Washington, DC: Westview Press, 1987), 62.

failed negotiations between the two superpowers on Zero Option fostered increased sentiment against the Reagan administration. In 1982, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt informed Nitze that support for additional missile deployment in West Germany was sure to collapse completely.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet Union stated that the United States was forcing an end to reduction negotiations by its planned deployment of missiles in 1983. This belief was accepted in West Germany, especially with the political left. The United States considered negotiating arms reductions specifically for West Germany to alleviate this problem. However, Reagan advisor Richard Burt worried that negotiating such a treaty would create resistance to deployment in other allied nations.<sup>8</sup> The Zero Option proposal, meant to galvanize support for United States' nuclear doctrine, instead created an increase in division and dissension for nuclear defense.

Europeans also attacked the Strategic Defense Initiative. As discussed earlier, United States' allies in Europe were at a strategic disadvantage in conventional forces to the Soviet Union. Western European nations relied on nuclear missiles as a deterrent to conventional Soviet aggression. The entire premise of NATO nuclear strategy was based on the doctrine of deterrence. Reagan's statements in reference to abandoning deterrence in favor of SDI worried European leaders. This was because the Reagan administration had given no indication in 1983 that SDI would be used to protect Europe. Leaders in Europe feared the United States would be more willing to sacrifice its nuclear arsenal in Western Europe through arms reduction treaties if SDI was implemented, threatening their security from conventional attack.<sup>9</sup> The manner in which SDI was presented was also problematic. Robert Osgood of the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIAS) at John Hopkins University stated that the initiative was presented to European leaders in the incorrect context. He believed the plan would have been more acceptable

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<sup>7</sup>Talbot, Deadly Gambits, 92.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>9</sup>Tucker and others, eds., SDI and U.S. Foreign Policy, 66.

had the administration introduced the system as a means of missile-site defense or a measure against the Soviet's strategic superiority. Instead, Reagan introduced SDI as a means to "make nuclear weapons obsolete."<sup>10</sup> This method of presentation fueled European resistance because of their reliance on nuclear weapons for conventional deterrence to the Soviet Union.

In addition to fearing an abandonment of deterrence, European leaders had other concerns about SDI. The French government resisted SDI because it would only encourage the Soviets to construct a similar system. They feared it was just another aspect of the arms race done at the possible expense of European security through a decline in the United States' commitment to missiles in Europe. General Bernard Rogers, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, also expressed concern SDI would draw funds allotted to the defense of Europe. David Calleo of the SAIAS also agreed with this perception, stating many Europeans "fear that the urge to 'decouple' from the risks of nuclear deterrence has been, all along, a principal driving force behind SDI."<sup>11</sup> Osgood also stated that France and England would be resistant to SDI on the basis that it violated the ABM treaty unless the program was complemented with additional protection for the nuclear missiles in their nations.<sup>12</sup> Other Europeans feared SDI would encourage the Soviet Union to engage in a nuclear strike before the United States could complete the project in order to avoid a position of strategic inferiority.

The Soviet Union attempted to take advantage of European fears over SDI. During discussions on a treaty on the deployment of Pershing II missiles, the Soviets called upon the United States to choose between banning SDI or reducing missiles in France and Britain to complete an agreement.<sup>13</sup> This was a Soviet attempt to divide the allies further on the already controversial topic of SDI. In the months after its

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 61.

introduction, SDI had increasingly become a point of friction between the United States and its allies.

Despite the frightening possibilities of SDI, the reaction against it in Europe was not extreme. This was because the European community doubted the feasibility of the project. They were even more doubtful of SDI's enduring impact on constructive arms reduction treaties between the superpowers, even if it was totally deployed. This skepticism damaged Reagan's entire nuclear defense program. David Calleo argued that the president's rhetoric on making nuclear weapons obsolete created more fears than the physical realities of the system.<sup>14</sup> According to Calleo, SDI caused a decline in European faith in the credibility of the U.S. nuclear defense doctrine and its technological basis.

Concern about American nuclear policies was evident in the actions of the Soviet Union from 1981 to 1983. The Soviets renewed a propaganda campaign formerly used against the nuclear buildup of the Carter administration. This was partially due to their concerns over Weinburger's suggestions to renew the neutron bomb program. Morris Rothenburg's report to the SAIAS stated that the administration's nuclear modernization incited direct responses in the Soviet media and "more impressively, by indirect responses manifest in leadership policies" of the Soviets in 1981.<sup>15</sup> He stated it was clear from his study of Soviet writings that they believed Reagan's modernization plans would give the United States "new abilities." He also stated the Soviets were treating the matter with "the utmost seriousness."<sup>16</sup> Rothenburg argued the Soviets were also very concerned with Reagan's plans to deploy additional cruise missiles, stating the program "seems to have exposed Moscow's greatest fears."<sup>17</sup> He used the massive Soviet propaganda effort as evidence of Soviet concern on the issue.

Additional evidence shows that the Soviet Union was concerned about Reagan's

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>15</sup>Rothenburg, Research and Analytical Evaluation, 56.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 140.

nuclear buildup and foreign policy. Declassified Soviet documents show Reagan's actions concerned Politburo members such as Yuri Andropov. He stated on May 31, 1983, that "If you look at the events in the Western countries, you can say an anti-soviet alliance is being formed out there." Andropov informed the Politburo that Reagan was "a bearer and creator of all anti-soviet ideas" that were forming this "anti-soviet alliance." Andropov considered the formation of this alliance to be very dangerous. Politburo member A.A. Gromyko argued that Reagan had effectively gained support for the deployment of Pershing II missiles in many European nations. Gromyko stated the Soviet Union should attempt to involve Britain and France increasingly in arms reduction talks to try and stop this deployment, which he considered dangerous to the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> These statements clearly show Soviet leaders were on the defensive in reaction to Reagan's policies.

However, Rothenburg claimed his research of Soviet writings showed their military analysts believed the modernization program actually began in 1979 under Carter.<sup>19</sup> The Soviets obviously encountered a new level of commitment to modernization from President Reagan compared to his predecessor. While credit must be given to Carter for setting the program into motion, the Reagan administration's program shook the Soviet propaganda machine from its sense of complacency to U.S. nuclear policy. This concern must be connected to the threat of Reagan's modernization to Soviet military security.

Rothenburg argues that Reagan's Zero Option speech also had an effect on the Soviet Union. He argued that after the speech, "the Soviets clearly found themselves on the defensive." Brezhnev rejected Zero Option based on their long argument position that medium-range missile parity already existed in Europe.<sup>20</sup> The Soviets eventually

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<sup>18</sup>"More Documents from the Russian Archives," Cold War International History Project Bulletin 3 (Fall 1993): 55-69.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 115.

offered a counterproposal completely unacceptable to the United States and NATO. After this counterproposal failed, the Soviets continued their propaganda campaign against the United States. They questioned the Reagan administration's sincerity to negotiate on arms reduction. In 1982, the Soviets still believed a propaganda campaign could discourage nuclear weapons modernization and effectively divide the United States and its allies.<sup>21</sup> While not producing significant arms reduction treaties by 1983, Reagan's nuclear policies caused increased Soviet concern over the possibility of tipping the strategic balance in favor of the United States.

It is also certain that diplomatic relations between the two nations had not improved as a result of Reagan's nuclear modernization program. Charles Percy, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations agreed with this notion. He stated "the peril that we are facing is greater now than it was two and a half years ago when this administration took over."<sup>22</sup> Percy attributed this condition on the "crescendo of administration rhetoric."<sup>23</sup> Thomas J. Watson Jr., former United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, stated that the two superpowers were making "no serious effort to reach an agreement on even the basic question of preventing a further spiral of the arms race."<sup>24</sup> Watson accused the Reagan administration of not prioritizing arms control and pointed out that its actions also threatened the spirit of past arms agreements.

Others seriously questioned the commitment of the administration to arms control. Four officials from past administrations testified before the Senate on their evaluation of the administration's arms reduction record. They argued the administration's policy of conducting an arms buildup to induce fruitful negotiations was flawed. Paul Wanke, former nuclear arms negotiator in the Carter administration called

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>22</sup>Senate, U.S.-Soviet Relations, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 52.

Reagan's "arms race theory of arms control" incompatible with serious bargaining.<sup>25</sup> Leslie Gelb, national security correspondent for the New York Times, pointed out that by 1983 "even by the reckoning of Reagan administration officials themselves they have yet to achieve their first diplomatic success."<sup>26</sup> Gelb later conceded that the buildup and development of forces could be valuable to diplomacy and could create an atmosphere of negotiation with a potentially hostile force. He stated that even the United States' allies in Europe who felt that Reagan had overdone his nuclear buildup to encourage arms negotiations preferred his policies to those of Carter. He also criticized the Reagan administration for using nuclear buildup to "compel capitulation rather than induce compromise."<sup>27</sup> Gelb concluded that "there is a mounting sense the world has become a more dangerous place" and Reagan "has not done much to reduce those dangers."<sup>28</sup> While Reagan's policies may have been preferred to those of Carter, they still failed to produce favorable diplomatic results in the minds of many domestic leaders and foreign allies.

Perhaps one of the strongest criticisms of Reagan's nuclear doctrine and its relating diplomacy came in the passage of House Joint Resolution 13. The bill issued a call for a mutual and verifiable freeze in nuclear arms buildup by both superpowers. The resolution called for the upcoming START negotiations to have several definite objectives from the American perspective. The resolution stated START should "pursue a complete halt to the arms race" and the two sides should decide "how to achieve a mutual and verifiable freeze on testing, production, and further development" of all

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<sup>25</sup>New York Times, 23 June 1983, 21.

<sup>26</sup>Leslie Gelb, "Reagan, Power, and the World," New York Times Magazine, 13 November 1983, 77.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 77.

nuclear weapons.<sup>29</sup> The resolution also called for expedient arms reductions through measures such as numerical ceilings and annual percentage-based reductions. This resolution passed the House of Representatives by a margin of 278-149. Clement J Zablocki, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, stated the issue of a mutual freeze needed to be addressed because of the tremendous public interest and concern “about the diminished role of arms control in the formulation of U.S. national security policy” and their “immediate” calls for arms reduction.<sup>30</sup> The call for a freeze on nuclear developments struck directly against the administration’s plans to induce arms reductions through upgrading the quality and quantity of the United States’ nuclear forces. Prior to new negotiations with the Soviets, the American people and their representatives in the House of Representatives seemed substantially opposed to the premise of Reagan’s nuclear doctrine. This resistance definitely demonstrates flaws in the administration’s policies and its ability to conduct arms negotiations.

President Reagan’s nuclear doctrine had a mixed effect on the United States’ ability to conduct foreign policy. It must be acknowledged that this buildup generated concern in the Soviet Union. However, the actual buildup, contrary to the campaign rhetoric of Reagan, was begun by Carter. The Soviet Union did not engage in new invasions or violations of rights to nations outside of their sphere of influence prior to Reagan’s election. It is reasonable their concern over the rise in nuclear readiness played a role in this curtailment of Soviet aggression. The Soviet foreign policy was more conservative from 1981 to 1983 compared it character in the Carter years. Evidence in Soviet sources indicate Reagan’s nuclear defense and foreign policy actions placed the Soviet leadership on the defensive. It is important to note the Soviet Union was also experiencing domestic and financial crises because of the costs of its intense military

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<sup>29</sup>House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Calling for a Mutual and Verifiable Freeze On and Reductions in Nuclear Weapons 98th Congr., 1st session, 17 Feb 2 and 8 March 1983, 244.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., iii.



modernization program. It is reasonable to conclude these problems also contributed to the curbing of Soviet nuclear and foreign policy aggression. However, these gains came at a considerable price. Administration projects such as SDI created division between the United States and its allies. Despite spending more funds on nuclear defense, the United States' overall commitment to the defense of its allies was also questioned. Most important, from 1981 to 1983, the administration failed to achieve one of its primary foreign policy and diplomatic goals, significant arms reduction treaties with the Soviet Union. This failure can be attributed to the Reagan administration's lack of flexibility in nuclear arms negotiations. These setbacks came in spite of tremendous increases in nuclear weaponry spending.

## CHAPTER 5

## CULTURAL REACTION TO REAGAN'S NUCLEAR ARMS POLICY

The reaction within the United States to President Reagan's nuclear doctrine was considerable. As the administration implemented its policies, the public increasingly reacted with a mixture of disapproval and panic. The statements of religious leaders, the increase in nuclear protest, and the statements of citizens themselves reflected these sentiments. From 1981 to 1983, the number of functions and overall strength of anti-nuclear armament groups steadily rose compared to their prevalence during the Carter administration. The actions of the Reagan Administration were the dominant catalyst for the rise of these groups and other forms of anti-nuclear sentiment.

The Catholic Church traditionally supported the notion of defensive wars, under certain conditions. A "just-war criteria" had existed within the Catholic church in past centuries that determined the proper justification for military behavior. This criteria traditionally held that the taking of human life was wrong unless it conformed to the principles of justice. A war could only be just if undertaken for defensive purposes. Indiscriminate killing did not fall within the realm of just-war criteria in any situation.<sup>1</sup> A group of Catholic authors published a work on the implications of nuclear war to just war criteria. In this work, Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War, James T., Johnson argued that nuclear weapons did not fall into the just war criteria. Johnson further argued that deterrence as a defensive strategy was allowable. He stated the targeting of population centers was not allowable. These statements show the Catholic church was

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Davidson, Nuclear Weapons and the American Churches: Ethical Positions on Modern Warfare (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 19.

opposed to some aspects of United States' nuclear policy prior to the Reagan Administration. This opposition rose to new levels during his presidency.

Reagan's statements on the use of nuclear weapons in 1981 spurred this increase in Catholic opposition. Donald Davidson argued that Reagan's position at this time created "fervent discussion about the risk of nuclear war."<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the position of Johnson, Bishop John O'Connor's statements in 1983 were an example of this increasing opposition. O'Connor condemned the indiscriminate destruction that would be caused in cities and other large population centers. He stated that the Catholic church "seriously questions" the strategy of nuclear deterrence, due to its threats to civilization as a whole.<sup>3</sup> O'Connor did not condemn a defensive or limited war against the military targets of an attacking nation. He was not against the possession of weapons of mass destruction. O'Connor stated that the church called for the eventual goal of banning all nuclear weapons and urged reductions begin immediately. These statements show considerable opposition to Reagan's policies in the Catholic leadership.

The Catholic Church also offered its own plan for a "morally legitimate defense."<sup>4</sup> Catholic author James T. Johnson gave conditions for this defense in 1981. Non-combatants would be protected from the threat of attack from weapons of mass destruction. He argued that defense strategies should have the flexibility to respond to different levels of aggression, a statement against the reliance on MAD. He called for the removal of strategic nuclear weapons in favor of "morally usable weapons." He did not believe the policies of the Reagan administration were moving toward these proposals. He considered the MX missile and anti-ballistic missile systems equally unfavorable when compared to past proposals. He did not see space-based defense systems as a substantial means toward protecting large population centers.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Reagan's proposals

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 54.

to ensure safety through a nuclear buildup went against the beliefs of the Catholic church. The Catholic Church also opposed space-based defense systems that the administration considered beneficial to the defense of population centers. These opinions of the Catholic church did not receive substantial attention from the administration in 1981.

Displeased with the reaction of the administration to its written statements, Catholic leaders mobilized to take more active measures of opposition. Pax Christi, a group of Catholics advocating a pacifist position to nuclear war, was founded during Reagan's first term. Pax Christi was opposed to the traditional position of deterrence adopted by past presidents. Pax Christi considered deterrence a "morally bankrupt position." They argued on its current path, deterrence would lead to war instead of preventing it. However, the experience of this group demonstrated an increase activity during Reagan's first years. The number of bishops affiliated with Pax Christi rose from 3 to 60 by 1983.<sup>5</sup> This rise in bishop membership came despite the group lacking official endorsement from the Catholic church.

Catholic bishops also engaged in more aggressive means of opposition to Reagan's nuclear policies. Bishop Leroy Matthieson led a movement against a factory in Amarillo, Texas that produced materials for nuclear weapons. In 1981, Matthieson strongly criticized the Reagan Administration's decision to stockpile and to produce the radiation enhanced neutron warhead. He further urged workers at the factory in Amarillo, Texas, "to consider what they are doing" and "seek employment in peaceful pursuits."<sup>6</sup> In 1982, Matthieson received \$10,000 in contributions to develop a trust fund to give counseling and financial aid to workers leaving the Amarillo plant. Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle, Washington, advocated more disruptive levels of resistance than Matthieson. He argued in 1981 that the United States was keeping its nuclear armaments to protect its privileged class and to exploit the world economically.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 77.

He urged Catholics to target the Internal Revenue Service by withdrawing their income tax payments as a protest to Reagan's defense buildup.<sup>7</sup>

The strongest form of opposition offered by the Catholic Church against the Reagan Administration came in the drafting of a pastoral letter in 1983. This letter, written by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), became the official position of the church in the United States. The drafting of this letter revealed the strong presence of Catholic resistance to Reagan's nuclear policies. In July of 1981, the NCCB began the process of writing this document by forming an ad hoc committee to prepare the letter in July of 1981. Between this date and June 1982, the committee interviewed former and present government members along with religious leaders.<sup>8</sup> The first draft of the letter stated the church's reluctant acceptance of deterrence as a means of preventing a nuclear war. This initial version criticized peace advocates in the church for opposing deterrence without offering an alternative plan that would ensure United States' security. The authors strongly stated their opposition to the use of nuclear weapons on population centers under any circumstance. This initial draft also stated the church's objection to any "destabilizing" weapons to the nuclear balance.<sup>9</sup> Despite not condemning deterrence, this initial letter is a clear statement against the Reagan Administration's modernization plans.

Peace advocates within the Catholic church forced a second drafting of the letter. They were angered that the initial draft did not take a sufficiently strong position against the existence of nuclear weapons and the policies of the Reagan Administration. The peace elements of the church objected to the committee allowing Weinburger to testify. The second draft included stronger attacks on the Reagan Administration. This version rejected the administration's "quest for superiority" over the Soviets and instead stated

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<sup>7</sup>Wall Street Journal, 14 January 1982, 30.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 88.

only the “sufficiency to deter” was necessary.<sup>10</sup> Upon its release, the second draft drew harsh criticism from the Reagan Administration and conservative elements of the Catholic Church. The NCCB was not the only source of American Catholic opinion on nuclear war during Reagan’s presidency. A less critical stance on the morality of nuclear weapons can be seen in the 1983 work of Catholic author David Hollenbach, Nuclear Ethics: A Christian Moral Argument. He argued nuclear weapons had value if used for “threat without use.” Hollenbach believed nuclear weapons were allowable if used to keep the peace. This view was shared by the French and West German Catholic bishops.<sup>11</sup> These elements of the church played a substantial role in encouraging the drafting of a third and final copy.

The final draft adopted in May of 1983 did not criticize the administration or the policy of deterrence as strongly as the second version. Many peace advocates in the church desired that the letter call for an immediate freeze in the production of nuclear weapons. The final copy of the letter did not specifically call for a freeze in the buildup of nuclear weapons. The final draft also conceded nuclear weapons were necessary for the deterrence of the Soviet Union and national defense. The letter affirmed that governments had the right to defend their people, but advocated this protection be achieved through the use of conventional weapons.<sup>12</sup>

The Reagan Administration was pleased with the final copy of the letter. An administration spokesman stated the new draft was “substantially improved” over past copies. The final draft was weaker in its direct criticisms of the administration compared to the second copy. The condemnation of the administration’s nuclear buildup, even in the interest of encouraging arms treaties, remained in this final draft. The language of the letter did not include specific approval for Reagan’s policies. The second copy of the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Miller, Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism, and the Just-War Tradition (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 179.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 104.

draft demonstrated that dramatic opposition to the president's policies within the Catholic Church existed and that was not prevalent against the Carter administration. In addition, Donald Davidson argued in 1983 that the Catholic Church was abandoning its adherence of the use of just war criteria and was moving to the position of "nuclear pacifism."<sup>13</sup> This statement and the content of the pastoral letter demonstrate a significant, but not absolute portion of the American Catholic Church was aligned against Reagan's nuclear policies from 1981 to 1983.

Evidence suggests that opposition in the Protestant churches to nuclear war had also increased since 1978. Reasons for this movement include increases general funding and in the development of new weapons systems. One group against nuclear buildup was the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC), a federation of 32 Protestant and orthodox churches. The NCC had been mildly complimentary to Carter in its statements but was more critical of the Reagan Administration. The NCC believed Reagan's pursuit of nuclear superiority placed the nation at undue risk. The group accused the administration of turning the country "away from the uneasy d'etente of the past decade and reviving the distorted version of the bipolar Cold War."<sup>14</sup>

Davidson concludes that concern about nuclear war had risen in the ranks of United States' religious leaders during Reagan's first years. He argues that church leaders advocacy of "peacemaking" had "mushroomed in the last three years."<sup>15</sup> This statement and the evidence in Davidson's work demonstrated a deterioration of trust and approval in segments of the Catholic Church and American society concerning the actions of the Reagan Administration's handling of nuclear defense. The increases in spending in the interest of nuclear security had not gained the trust or approval of at least a portion of the U.S. public.

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<sup>13</sup>Davidson, Nuclear Weapons, 57.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 83.

President Reagan's nuclear buildup created resistance, fear, and controversy in other elements of society. This fear was expressed by the mass media during Reagan's first two years in office. In October 1983, the American Broadcast Company (ABC) aired their original film, "The Day After," in prime time. The film dealt with the effects of nuclear war on the residents of Lawrence, Kansas. Shown on two consecutive nights, the film highlighted the difficulties the population would encounter surviving in a post-nuclear war environment. The film specifically focused on one family. Through their experiences, the film chronicles the breakdown of law enforcement, medical support, and communication technologies. The subject family has difficulty locating adequate food and water to maintain themselves. The film also included disturbing depictions of the prevalence of radiation and disease in the aftermath of the war.<sup>16</sup> The film concluded with the statement "The catastrophic effects you have just witnessed are, in all likelihood, less severe than the destruction that would occur."<sup>17</sup> The disturbing content of the film created increased debate over the arms control record of the Reagan Administration.

The portions of the film concerning the biological effects of nuclear war increased public awareness and scientific discussion on the realities of a post-nuclear world. In response to the film's depiction of the effects on Lawrence, many scientists argued this movie "sanitized" the negative aspects of a nuclear conflict. Scientists argued that the film failed to portray in an adequate manner what they believed would be medical problems after a nuclear conflict. They stated the film was inaccurate because it did not show many of the widespread problems they believed would occur, such as heavy burns, radiation sickness, vomit, and diarrhea. Dr. Carl Sagan, astrophysicist at Cornell University, also stated that in target areas for a nuclear missile, the sky would be "pitch black for several days" totally impairing vision for survivors. Sagan pointed to scientific

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<sup>16</sup>Richard Schwartz, Cold War Culture: Media and the Arts, 1945-1990 (New York: Facts on File, 1998), 74

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, 12 November 1983, 19.



evidence that after a massive exchange depicted in the “Day After,” conditions would be much worse. He argued after a major conflict, the Northern Hemisphere would be totally uninhabitable and that only small bands of hunters and gatherers would remain in the rest of the world. At a another conference on the effects of nuclear war, The Federal Emergency Management Agency concluded semi-rural areas, such as Lawrence, might face even greater disaster than the film described.<sup>18</sup>

Widespread concern arose as to the effects “The Day After” would have on children. During the week prior to the film’s airing, the children’s show “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood” ran five half-hour shows on children’s anxieties about nuclear war. Dr. Robert Simon, director of clinical training at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy, also voiced concerns. He recommended families or even groups of families watch the film together and that parents not allow children to view the film alone. Dr. Dorothy Singer of Yale University, stated that the film could be developmentally damaging to children. She argued that ABC missed its goal of creating “nuclear aversion” and instead created potential for widespread fear and panic towards nuclear war. She stated her fears that children would have nightmares about the film and worry about for weeks or even months. Family therapist Dr. Kenneth Porter further advised parents not to allow children to view any panel discussions held after the film. He believed seeing more information “would lock feelings of despair and fatalism” inside children.<sup>19</sup> New York City school officials sent a memo to superintendents and principals recommending children under the age of 12 not see the film. School officials also stated the “Day After” could create feelings of hopelessness.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the film created widespread concern among educators and physicians over the issue of nuclear war and its effects in many areas of society.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 21 November 1983, 19

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 7 November 1983, 16.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 7 November 1983, 16.

Conservative supporters of the administration's nuclear defense plans were critical of the "Day After" and the message sent by the film. Reverend Jerry Falwell called the film a "pre-emptive strike" in the debate over nuclear arms. He demanded ABC allot time for his group, the Moral Majority, to present their point of view on nuclear defense. Phyllis Schlafly of the "Eagle Forum," which she described as a "pro-family" group requested ABC affiliates allow them to air contrasting views in a "two-hour political editorial."<sup>21</sup>

The Reagan administration also took a stance on the film. David Gergen, campaign director for the president, declared the film did not address the most important issue to the nation: how to prevent the events in the movie from becoming a reality. Gergen stated those who view the film should be aware of the administration's plan to reduce the risks of war. He admitted the film had the potential to create anti-government sentiment.<sup>22</sup> Secretary of State George Shultz took a different approach to the film. He felt the film validated the president's efforts to nuclear arms reduction, which had produced no tangible results at this date. He argued the film "dramatizes the unacceptability" of nuclear conflict, but that it did represent the future. Shultz argued the film states "to those who have criticized the President for seeking arms reductions that this is the course to take."<sup>23</sup> He stated the proper course of action to the threat of nuclear war was to support the president's policies.<sup>24</sup> This attention from the administration and its conservative supporters to this film shows the vulnerability of their nuclear doctrine to public opinion. They were seeking to avoid the possibility of this movie creating additional resistance to their nuclear doctrine. Political opponents of President Reagan and anti-nuclear activists used the film to increase their influence on the question of nuclear defense and arms reduction to the public. The New York Times declared the film

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1983, 20.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1983, 20.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 21 November 1983, 1.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 21 November 1983, 1.

had the potential to damage the president if viewers came away from the film supporting a nuclear freeze or unilateral disarmament. Groups and individuals opposed to Reagan's nuclear policy engaged in serious attempts to use the film to achieve this goal. Steven Solomon, aide to Congressman Thomas Downey, an advocate of a mutual and verifiable nuclear freeze, stated the "left was fairly unabashed about using the film to further freeze and arms control."<sup>25</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara argued that the Reagan Administration could do more in the realm of arms control, stating the reduction of warheads per-missile as one possible option. To the possibility of mobilizing opposition to the president's policies, anti-nuclear activist David Cartright stated "I view next week as an electric moment when interest will peak," after the film.<sup>26</sup>

A series of ant-nuclear advertisements arose in the in the weeks following the movie. The 800-NUCLEAR project, supported by many disarmament groups, purchased \$200,000 for advertising the week following the film's broadcast. This group's advertisement showed a United States and Soviet general inflating a balloon that exploded into a nuclear cloud. The ad was followed by a toll free phone number for viewers to call to get involved in the nuclear freeze movement. The Center for Defense Information, led by former military officers, aired an advertisement featuring actor Paul Newman. In the ad, Newman offered a phone number for viewers to call and obtain a "nuclear war prevention kit."<sup>27</sup> The Union of Concerned Scientists place an add in the New York Times on November 21, after the first broadcast of the film. The ad stated that the "Day After" was only a television program and that "you and your family are still alive." The ad went on to tell readers "In case you lost some sleep last night," they could mail the coupon at the bottom of the add to obtain information about the group, make a monetary donation, or hear information about how to aid the group through volunteer

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1983, 20.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1983, 20.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1983, 20.

activities.<sup>28</sup> These groups were playing off the significant emotional shock of the movie to create support for their groups and opposition to the administration's nuclear policies. These groups believed the film would awaken and increase existing opposition to the current nuclear situation. The fact conservatives reacted to the film with such strength shows the film was an important catalyst for nuclear opposition movements.

The reaction from those who viewed the movie was a mix of shock and resignation. During the film's first showing on November 20, 1,000 viewers called ABC affiliates. Three screenings of the film in Lawrence and Kansas City, Missouri drew similar reactions. Holli Hartman, age 12 from Lawrence, stated that "It was scary to think about what will happen."<sup>29</sup> Patty Lucas of Atlanta, expressed her sentiments by stating "Either they do it to us or we do it to them, as long as we have the same amount of power it's okay."<sup>30</sup> To the overall effect of the film, the New York Times stated it was "shaping up to be a national viewing phenomenon," citing the massive planned group viewings of the film in schools, churches, and town halls across the nation.<sup>31</sup> The broadcast of this film created a wave of discussion of the value and considerable opposition to President Reagan's nuclear doctrine and arms control record. This devotion of prime time network television to this subject was unprecedented. The concern about the president's nuclear policies was clearly growing in the nation.

Other media outlets reflected evidence of an increased public awareness of the threat of nuclear war and conflict with the Soviet Union can be found in relation to media outlets. This fact is argued in secondary literature on this subject. In, The End of Victory Culture, Tom Englehardt argues that the Reagan presidency created a "Lucas-like" reconstruction of war at the governmental level, referring to the heroic "Star Wars" trilogy of movies. He claims Reagan took on a sense of pursuing "victory" in his

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 21 November 1983, 15

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 21 November 1983, 19.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 21 November 1983, 18.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1983, 20.

speeches regarding foreign policy, nuclear arms, and relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> However, the positive effects of these references must be balanced with the effects of films such as the “Day After,” which portrayed nuclear war in negative terms and created fear instead of a sense of confidence or victory.

The increase in the amount of anti-nuclear literature produced during Reagan’s early years also indicates an increase in the activities and strength of sentiment against the administration’s programs. One aspect of this literature was a sympathy for the Soviet public. In Moral Principles and Nuclear Weapons, Douglas Lackey argued the Soviet people were innocent because of their inability to influence the policies of their government. He contended they would remain innocent even in the event of a Soviet first-strike. He further argued Soviet citizens had the right to life regardless of the actions of their government, even after an aggressive pre-emptive nuclear movement by the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> In Against the State of Nuclear Terror, Joel Kovel called for the public to rise in more active opposition to the government’s nuclear policies. He argued that the nation was suffering from “nuclear terror” created by government oppression and intimidation of the public. Kovel argued that a State possessing nuclear weapons must be willing to destroy its own society to attain its goals through the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>34</sup> He called on people to rise above traditional methods of nuclear protest such as writing, protesting, and marching because these methods were not sufficiently influencing governments. He felt that the energy devoted to nuclear protest should be proportionate to the effort governments were giving to create nuclear terror within the public. Instead, he stated anti-nuclear movements should no longer react to the government, but initiate

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<sup>32</sup>Tom Englehardt, The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 270.

<sup>33</sup>Douglas Lackey, Moral Principles and Nuclear Weapons. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984.

<sup>34</sup>Joel Kovel, Against the State of Nuclear Terror (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 33.

their own agenda.<sup>35</sup> Kovel called the initial years of the Reagan Administration “practically a continuous exercise in nuclear thuggery and blackmail” consistent with his definition of nuclear terror.<sup>36</sup> He also spoke of the rise in activity in anti-nuclear movements. He argued in 1984, that the anti-nuclear movement had been growing in the past three years at an “impressive scope.” His statements of anger at the Reagan Administration suggested its activities were significant in encouraging the growth of nuclear protest moments.

More evidence about the rise of anti-nuclear movements in Reagan’s early years came in a wave of protests in October of 1983. These protests were against additional deployments of United States’ Pershing II missiles in Europe. Arrests numbered 1,100 over one weekend during 140 anti-nuclear rallies nationwide. Anti-nuclear activities included trespassing on weapon production centers and human blockading of roadways to inhibit vehicles carrying components for nuclear weapons.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, polls conducted in 1983 indicated overall public opinion was shifting against the administration’s nuclear program. A New York Times/CBS poll showed that the public felt the United States was no longer trailing the Soviet Union in nuclear prowess, and increases in nuclear spending were no longer necessary. The poll numbers showed 48% of United States residents felt the government was spending too much money on defense. Republican Congressman Dan Coats further argued this point by stating the public consensus on the need for nuclear spending had eroded in the last two years. He argued members of his district had turned against the “blank-check mentality of the defense department.”<sup>38</sup>

Anti-nuclear movements had significant effects on the policies of the Reagan Administration. One movement that had particular influence on the administration was

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 206.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>37</sup>New York Times, 25 October 1983, 20.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 6 February 1983, 12.

the nuclear freeze movement, which called for an immediate end to the procurement of new armaments. Reagan publicly criticized the movement and its ideals. He felt a nuclear freeze would threaten United States' security by perpetuating its nuclear inferiority to the Soviet Union and decreasing the chances for reaching arms reduction treaties.<sup>39</sup> However, authors such as Robert Tucker argue that the strength of this nuclear freeze movement and other protest groups did influence the president's actions. He believes the public outcry over nuclear buildup was a motivation for commitment to research programs that were defensive in nature, such as SDI.<sup>40</sup>

Evidence indicates rising criticism of nuclear policies effected the actions of the Reagan Administration. A New York Times report indicated the administration was delaying a \$10,000 purchase of morphine sulfate, a pain-killing drug held in reserve for civil defense purposes. The New York Times stated this delay was aimed at diffusing public fear the nation was preparing for a limited nuclear war. This report also claimed a large debate ensued over delaying this purchase and its implications on public opinion and national security.<sup>41</sup> This story gives further evidence that the public's growing opposition to the administration's nuclear policies had substantial effects.

The reaction to the threat of nuclear war was strongly negative during the Carter administration and the first two years of the Reagan Administration. From 1976 to 1982, more articles appeared on nuclear weapons and their implications on national security. By 1982, the number of articles on this subject was second only to 1964 in United States' history.<sup>42</sup> It is true that public opinion was strongly aligned against the nuclear doctrine of the Carter administration. It is important to note that the Reagan administration campaigned in 1980 on the promise of improving national security

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<sup>39</sup>Ronald Reagan, "Arms Control Policy," Vital Speeches of the Day 49 (April 1983): 394.

<sup>40</sup>Tucker, SDI and U.S. Foreign Policy, 10.

<sup>41</sup>New York Times, 25 October 1983, 20.

<sup>42</sup>Spencer Weart, Nuclear Fear: A History of Images, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 376.

compared to conditions under Carter and made further promises to alleviate this problem in rapid fashion in the first months of his presidency. By 1983, significant portions of the public held an equally bad, if not worse, opinion towards national security and the threat of nuclear war. This opinion was greatly influenced by the rise of anti-nuclear messages in the media and by pockets of protest groups. The difference between public fears during the two administrations is that instead of fearing United States' nuclear inferiority would lead to conflict, by 1983, the public feared their own president's nuclear buildup would be the cause of a war



## CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF PRESIDENT REAGAN'S FIRST THREE YEARS  
IN OFFICE

In 1981, President Reagan took office under bleak conditions in defense and foreign policy. The Carter administration had suffered several setbacks in its nuclear doctrine. In the first three years of his term, President Carter believed that the Soviet Union shared his weariness of the Cold War. Perhaps due to this belief, the Carter administration showed reluctance to modernize United States' nuclear forces. Carter blocked the procurement of the MX missile and B-1 Bomber for his entire presidency. The Soviet Union did not show a desire to end hostilities or slow down the development of its nuclear forces as Carter believed it would. Military analysts stated the Soviet Union was moving toward the goal of "escalation dominance" over the United States in its nuclear forces. Public opinion polls demonstrated the public's belief the country was falling dangerously behind the Soviet Union in nuclear weapons. Many also believed the Soviet nuclear buildup was beginning to threaten United States' national security because of a decline of U.S. nuclear defense abilities.

These problems in nuclear policy were linked to problems in foreign policy for the Carter administration. The Soviet Union was becoming more aggressive in its attempts to increase its influence over other nations through the promotion of its brand of communism in nations such as Poland, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia. The Soviet Union's gains in the nuclear and military balance against the United States gave it more confidence to pursue these goals. Public opinion in the United States showed its citizens believed the Carter Administration was not in a favorable position to curb this increasing

Soviet aggression.

The Soviet Union was also successful in creating indecision among the Carter administration and its European allies over the proper course of nuclear policy. The Soviet government and its media outlets felt confident that their propaganda campaign against additional deployments of nuclear weapons in Europe was successful in stopping the United States and its allies from modernizing their forces. Critics of the administration argued that this delay increased the Soviet's ability to increase its nuclear advantages over the United States.

The Carter Administration suffered a major setback with the defeat of SALT II in Congress. The administration devoted a great deal of its energy and influence to negotiating the terms of this treaty with the Soviets. Carter felt the treaty would be a positive step towards reducing both nation's nuclear arsenals on equitable terms. This important defeat showed the administration's lack of leadership and influence within the United States. The failure of SALT II also advertised the weakness of the administration in respect to the rest of the world. In addition, critics of the administration stated the terms of the failed SALT II would further weaken the American nuclear position against the Soviet Union. Thus, the treaty was further evidence of the decline in the U.S. nuclear defense capabilities under the Carter administration.

The administration's failure to encourage the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact to improve their human rights stance was another setback. This goal was one of the central thrusts of the administration's policies on the Soviet Union. Despite considerable effort, the administration made negligible impact on the human rights policies of the Soviet Union. This unsuccessful attempt at changing the human rights policies of the Soviet Union actually served as a hindrance to Carter's diplomatic relations. Carter's increasingly critical statements against the human rights violations of the Soviet government poisoned nuclear reduction talks between the nations, hardening Soviet negotiators against compromise in the face of criticism of their human rights actions.

In 1979, President Carter deviated from his policy of restrained modernization and deployment of nuclear weapons. He was vastly criticized by political and military analysts for compromising his policies in the face of public demand. This change was encouraged by Carter's falling public approval ratings on defense and foreign policy. One initiative by the Carter Administration designed to curb the advantages gained by the Soviets in their nuclear modernization program was a joint initiative with NATO in December of 1979 to deploy over 600 missiles in Europe. This was an important move because it shows a fundamental change in the nuclear policies of the Carter Administration. The president moved away from his policy to negotiate with the Soviets at the current strength of his nuclear arsenal. He now began a nuclear buildup of his own in the face of Soviet modernization and the lack of a substantial arms reduction treaty. The Reagan Administration would later adopt this policy.

Another part of this change in policy came in Presidential Directive 59. This program called for the development of new nuclear weapons to target Soviet missile silos and industrial centers needed for the war-making capabilities. This initiative did not impress the Soviet Union. The Soviets doubted the feasibility of this program because many of the weapons systems would not be available until the second half of the 1980's. The Soviets also doubted the survivability of these new systems once the technology became available to deploy them.

The 1980 NATO buildup and Presidential Directive 59 did not enhance President Carter's ability to negotiate arms reduction treaties or conduct foreign policy from a position of greater strength. This was largely because the Carter administration had lost substantial credibility in respect to its nuclear doctrine. Public opinion polls and a lack of cooperation in Congress were manifestations of the belief in the United States that the administration had lost direction in its defense and foreign policy affairs. The nation's allies worried about the United States' ability to defend them from Soviet nuclear and conventional aggression. The Soviet Union believed its diplomatic and propaganda

efforts had curbed nuclear modernization by Carter and doubted American resolve to maintain a credible nuclear defense. Even though it began to modernize the nation's nuclear forces in 1979, the administration had lost world wide credibility and influence.

During Carter's presidency, conservatives on military defense continually attacked him for allowing the Soviet Union to gain advantages in the nuclear balance. Specifically, analysts feared that the Soviet modernization would lead to vulnerability in a limited nuclear conflict. They argued the Soviets were continually gaining throw weight and numerical advantages which would allow them to engage in a first strike with a reduced number of its nuclear weapons. Analysts believed this would force the United States to retaliate in mass with its nuclear forces or conserve its forces. This was because the Soviet Union could afford to leave nuclear weapons in reserve in a small attack while the United States could not engage in a similar limited strike. Thus, many analysts and conservatives feared the nation's defense, foreign policy abilities, and national security were being diminished by inferiority to the Soviet Union.

Ronald Reagan took advantage of concerns over the lack of credibility in Carter's nuclear policies. He heavily criticized Carter's ability to defend the nation and its allies from the aggression of the Soviet Union. He adopted the criticism of conservatives that the Soviet Union had moved closer to nuclear superiority under the watch of Jimmy Carter. Reagan pointed to Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and Ethiopia in conjunction with Cuba as evidence of the rise of a communist threat to the United States. He promised to curb the aggression of the Soviet Union through modernization of the United States' military and specifically, nuclear force. The nuclear and foreign policies of the candidates were key elements in Reagan's victory in the presidential election of 1980.

In the first year of its existence, the Reagan Administration made promises to increase the level of national security for the United States in rapid fashion. In 1981, Reagan and Secretary of Defense Weinburger introduced their plan to induce the Soviet Union to negotiate arms reduction treaties. He believed the Soviets had no motivation to

negotiate while they were gaining strategic advantages over the United States. He proposed that the United States begin modernizing its nuclear forces by beginning production of many of the weapons systems Carter had opposed, such as the MX missile and B-1 bomber. He argued that this modernization would increase the strength of the U.S. nuclear forces. From this position of strength, the United States could persuade the Soviets to negotiate arms reduction treaties. Reagan declared this modernization plan would quickly alleviate national defense problems and force the Soviets to negotiate. In 1981, Weinburger stated the administration's proposed budget for nuclear defense would "significantly and quickly strengthen" the nation's nuclear position.<sup>1</sup> The New York Times declared that Congress passed the vast majority of Reagan's nuclear requests in 1981 with little opposition.<sup>2</sup> Also, Weinburger declared in 1983 that "we are beginning to catch up" to the Soviets in the nuclear balance.<sup>3</sup> The Reagan administration promised to increase national security through increased nuclear strength and arms reduction treaties. This plan received the support of the Congress and the public opinion polls in 1981. In 1983, the secretary of defense declared substantial progress to improving the nations nuclear defense position against the Soviets. The question that must be asked is if this administration fulfilled its promises of security and arms in reduction after achieving its 1981 requested gains in nuclear weaponry.

Despite the initial successes in gaining funds for modernization, Reagan's nuclear program suffered setbacks. Public opinion polls, though limited in measuring all aspects of American society, indicated in 1983 that a substantial portion of the public believed too much money was being spent on defense. These polls also indicated that many U.S. citizens believed a equitable strategic balance existed between the superpowers in 1983. Thus, a considerable percentage of the public saw no need for

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<sup>1</sup>New York Times, 5 March 1981, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 15 May 1981, 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 10 March 1983, 1.

increases in spending on nuclear defense. Congressional leaders followed suit in backing away from the president's proposals. Congress began slashing budget requests of the administration in 1982 and 1983. Even members of the Republican party criticized the president's increasingly high demand for spending on nuclear weapons. Congressional leaders voiced their support for increases in defense spending, but not at the high rate asked by the Reagan administration. Weinburger and Reagan resisted negotiation of lower budget totals. Congress also began to question the effectiveness and feasibility of Reagan's nuclear doctrine. This deterioration of support for the president's nuclear policies limited the funds Reagan was able to get allotted for nuclear defense in the 1983 and 1984 fiscal years. The inability of the administration to foster congressional support in 1982 and 1983 was a drawback of Reagan's first three years. Reagan was able to gain substantial increases in nuclear spending. Despite congressional resistance, Reagan increased spending on nuclear weapons at a higher rate than any past president in his 1981 budget.<sup>4</sup>

A severe flaw that arose in the president's nuclear doctrine was his reliance on technology still in development. Many of the programs that were allotted funds were not projected to be technologically feasible until the later half of the decade. This was a problem because the administration had promised rapid results after its 1981 nuclear defense budget was approved.

The president's nuclear doctrine had an adverse effect on United States' foreign policy from 1981 to 1983. The primary failure in this period was the administration's inability to negotiate an arms reduction treaty. Reagan and Weinburger promised arms reduction treaties through increases in U.S. nuclear strength. Although vast amounts of funds were allotted to nuclear weapons, this spending did not produce the promised treaties. Instead, both nations continued to increase their nuclear arsenals from 1981 to

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 20 March 1982, 1

1983. This fact was not beneficial to national security.

Another negative result of Reagan's doctrine was the wavering of European support for U.S. nuclear defense program. Britain and France felt the administration's buildup was not allotted for their benefit. They believed the patterns of American nuclear weapon and defense procurement increased the chances of a limited nuclear war. Europeans feared this limited nuclear conflict would be fought on their continent and that North America would be spared of the effects. American allies saw SDI as a prime example of this attempt by the United States to spare itself from the effects of nuclear war while leaving Europe unprotected, because the Reagan administration demonstrated no intent to protect Europe with this system. The only reason European protest against SDI did not reach extremely high levels was that the allies of the U.S. doubted the feasibility of the technology required for the program. Thus, they questioned the credibility of Reagan's nuclear doctrine while standing against its intended purpose.

The reaction within U.S. society against Reagan's nuclear program was strong. Books began to be published at an increased rate on the dangers of Reagan's nuclear buildup. Films depicted the effects of nuclear war. This release of media material served as a catalyst for nuclear protest groups and their goals. Many groups attempted to capitalize on the shock value of the film "The Day After" that depicted the effects of nuclear war on Lawrence, Kansas. One of the most influential groups that arose against the policies of Reagan was the Nuclear Freeze Movement. This group called for the immediate end to the building of new nuclear weapons. This group had substantial impact on government policy. The United States House of Representatives approved an initiative calling for a mutual and verifiable freeze of nuclear weapons buildup that was close in content to the goals of the Nuclear Freeze Movement. In addition, nuclear protest movements and their effects on the public influenced the policies of the Reagan Administration. Evidence suggests that the SDI program was an attempted answer to the strong outcry against procurement of offensive nuclear forces. The Reagan

Administration began to delay other actions towards its nuclear doctrine to avoid creating public fear and resistance.

The results of this study slightly contrast with the conclusions of Lou Cannon and Mark Lagon who studied the overall military practices of the Reagan Administration. The evidence of this study, concerning events from 1981 to 1983, shows President Reagan was a strong influence on Secretary of Defense Weinburger. This is particularly true concerning the formulation of national defense budgets and negotiating these proposals to Congress.

In addition, the findings of this work refine some of the existing secondary arguments comparing the Reagan Administration in respect to past presidencies. The evidence presented in this work shows Reagan engaged in unprecedented spending from 1981 to 1983, while producing no arms reduction treaties. This conclusion is a contrast from the argument of Louisa Hulett's contention that the Reagan administration's position was similar to many other presidents in diplomatic, military, and foreign policies. In addition, the Reagan Administration was not the first to take strong stands against the Soviet Union, as Jay Wink suggests. President Carter for one made strong, but flawed stands on his demands for human rights improvements by the Soviet Union. Perhaps a synthesis of these two interpretations is correct. President Reagan engaged in increasingly aggressive measures against the Soviet Union through his nuclear doctrine. However, these aggressive policies produced unfavorable results from 1981 to 1983 compared to the successes of past administrations, such as detente under President Nixon.



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