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The End of the Triad: Morality, Reality, and the Ideal Deterrent

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Morality without security is ineffectual; security without morality is empty. To establish the relationship between these two goals is perhaps the most profound challenge before our government and our nation.

Henry Kissinger

S INCE THE CLOSING DAYS OF WORLD WAR II, we have witnessed an evolution of the national nuclear deterrence strategy. From the early days of Massive Retaliation, born of our nuclear monopoly, we have seen the strategy pass through stages of Mutual Assured Destruction, Flexible Response, and a graduated scale of destruction sufficiency. But today's radically altered geopolitical environment calls for a radically altered deterrent strategy. The old global landscape of bipolar predictability (and stability), which formed the backdrop for a weak United Nations, has now given way to a new vista marked by regional and ethnic rivalry, multipolarity and *ad hoc* coalitions, all underpinned by a United Nations of increasing global significance.[1] As a consequence of this, the foreseeable threat to the United States is regional, not global, and directed more at our allies than our homeland. The United States is the only true superpower; with that undisputed status, however, comes the unique responsibility for determining the future of our national military strategy, and with that the future of our allies and potential adversaries.

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We find ourselves at a crossroads. We may choose to use our relative power domination to return to the days of massive retaliation, or we may move forward and define a new deterrence strategy, one in which our nuclear arsenal will play a greatly reduced role within a larger spectrum of deterrent options. Through the arguments presented here, I will show that it is this second road that we must take, for it is both strategically and morally the right path to the future.

Oftentimes, our moral ideals regarding what should be done conflict with the practical reality of what can be done. There may be, for example, no near-term pragmatic solution to a moral dilemma. For many years, this was the case with the U.S. policy of nuclear deterrence. The moral case against nuclear war, on which deterrence is based, seems clear. Yet the obvious security benefits of nuclear deterrence prevented all but the most narrowly focused political philosophers from eschewing the policy, despite the fact that its credibility required the threat of swift and decisive (and—many would hold—immoral) nuclear retaliation.

It is now apparent, however, that practical reality is at last catching up with the dictates of ideal morality. My purpose in this article is to argue that strategic capabilities, arms control patterns, radical geopolitical transformations, federal budget constraints, and moral considerations all now point in a common direction: the abandonment of the nuclear triad. The future U.S. nuclear arsenal should consist solely of a "monad" of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs); land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) should be retired or converted to other uses, and bombers should be limited to the increasingly important role of conventional deterrence.[2] The Trident/D-5 submarine missile system, with its improved accuracy and communications capabilities, offers the United States the opportunity to move up the scale of morality to a deterrent force that is, if not completely ideal, at least significantly more acceptable, and away from the high-risk posture embodied in fixed-site ICBMs and, to a lesser extent, strategic bombers. I will seek to prove this thesis by first establishing a theoretical basis for discussion regarding a morally and strategically ideal deterrent force. Secondly, I will show that a force composed solely of SLBMs most closely approximates this ideal. Finally, I will examine some of the more common strategic arguments against an SLBM-only force structure and show that these arguments are no longer sound in today's geopolitical environment.

Defining an Ideal Deterrent Force

Most of us have a fairly intuitive notion of deterrence, i.e., the process of preventing someone from acting. This concept, however, must be clarified if it is to serve as a useful starting point for our discussion.[3] We may more accurately define deterrence as a set of actions taken to prevent another from achieving a

particular goal, by developing a recognizably credible barrier to achievement of that goal.

This definition, while broad enough to encompass all forms of deterrence (from threat of retaliation to threat of denial—strategic defense), focuses on an important element of deterrence, i.e., the active role played by the one to be deterred. Deterrence is not accurately attributable to the agent who seeks to evoke that effect; it is more a quality of the respondent toward that agent. Precisely speaking, one does not deter; rather, one is (chooses to be) deterred— although the ordinary usage of the term tends to blur this distinction. In the realm of international relations in particular, as Edward Luttwak notes, deterrence "is not in the keeping of armed strength, but rather in the response of others to such strength."[4]

A second element brought out by this definition is that deterrence is a product of perception and belief: a potential adversary will choose to be deterred or not based on his perception of his opponent. He will take into account such things as his opponent's capability to carry out the threat, the benefits and harms of acting despite that threat, and his beliefs about the resolve or will of the opponent. I may seek to deter would-be intruders by placing a sign on my fence which states "Beware of the Dog." Whether or not the sign is effective depends not so much on my efforts (e.g., whether or not I have a ferocious dog) but rather on the sign's perceived credibility. Without the appropriate perceptions and beliefs, the mere existence of a "deterrent" force cannot fulfill its purpose. The Japanese, for example, chose in 1940 and 1941 not to be deterred by the United States' decision (designed to induce dissuasion) to base its Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor and instead launched an attack against that force.[5] Similarly, the size alone of the deterrent force is not a sufficient measure of its effectiveness. A powerful deterrent force that is nevertheless perceived to be weak and thus non-credible (as was likely the case with Saddam Hussein's perception of the force amassed against him in Operation Desert Shield) will fail to give an enemy pause. More importantly for the argument presented in this article, a force that is so excessively powerful that opponents believe that it would not actually be used will also lack credibility and will therefore fail to deter.

The implication for national policies of nuclear deterrence is important: deterrence is not a function of any particular class of weapon system. Rather, it is almost solely the function of the recipient and requires, as political theorist Colin Gray puts it, "the active collaboration of the designated deterree."[6] As such, it is a political and not a purely military function. The implication of that conclusion, in turn, is equally important: a deterrent force of whatever composition, be it a triad or not, must be accompanied by some sort of declaratory policy that announces both the purpose of the force and the conditions for its employment. Without such a declaration, the force cannot effectively deter.

Moral Considerations for an Ideal Deterrent

Ideally, in designing a deterrence strategy one must take into account two types of considerations, those of morality and those of strategy. To begin with, what are the moral considerations that bear upon deterrence? In order for a (retaliatory) deterrent threat to be credible, the person who seeks to deter must form (and demonstrate) the intention to retaliate should deterrence fail.[7] This is not normally a moral problem, provided the threatened action is itself morally acceptable. A city council may, in good conscience, threaten fines, etc., for parking violations. Generally, potential violators are deterred by the declaratory policy ("No Parking" signs). For those who choose not to be deterred, retaliation is carried out without much introspection.

However, the moral landscape changes significantly when the threatened retaliation involves committing an immoral act. A city council that, for example, seeks to curb parking violations by threatening to execute any driver found guilty has entered a moral minefield. Leaving aside the serious lack of credibility of such a policy, the council would find itself forced to form the intention actually to execute violators. Even if the policy is 100-percent effective (that is, no one parks illegally and thus no one is put to death), the council must *intend* to carry out the executions. Because the retaliatory act is immoral, and because (by the Wrongful Intentions Principle) intending to perform an immoral act is itself immoral, we may condemn the city council as immoral, even if they never carry out any execution.[8]

The analogy to retaliatory nuclear deterrence policy is inescapable—a nation declares its intention to retaliate swiftly and decisively if faced with a direct act of aggression. That retaliation will likely involve nuclear war on a global scale. Such a nuclear holocaust, even if limited to legitimate military targets, would unquestionably kill millions of people both in the offending nation and beyond its borders, most of them innocent of any wrongdoing. Such nuclear retaliation would thereby violate the accepted Just-War Theory criteria of discrimination and proportionality. So this intentionally threatened genocidal act is immoral, just as, by the Wrongful Intentions Principle, is the intention itself. But the intention is a necessary component of effective, credible nuclear deterrence. Therefore, the overall policy of nuclear deterrence must also be immoral.

Or so it would appear. The deterrent purpose in question, however, exhibits several important characteristics that render it uniquely different from ordinary intentions. Although a detailed discussion of those characteristics would take us far afield we should note that the "intention" in question is actually dualistic—one who seeks to deter actually forms two distinct intentions.[9] The first is, of course, the intention to retaliate should deterrence fail; the second, and over-riding, intention is to deter the adversary from acting. Furthermore, the

retaliatory intention, unlike other intentions, is not formed as a preparatory step to action. In ordinary circumstances, intentions precede the actions with which they are associated. I form an intention to get a drink of water as a rational precursor to my action of getting the drink. Forming the intention focuses my energies, as it were, toward reaching a particular goal through action. But this is clearly not the case with the deterrent intention to retaliate. To see this, one need only consider that a deterrence policy will be considered completely successful *only if the intention to retaliate is never carried out.* Unlike the ordinary case, there is a significant mismatch between intention and preference.[10] That the deterring agent simultaneously prefers one thing (deterrence) and publicly intends another (retaliatory attack) appears to contradict our common notions regarding rational preference and intention. This mismatch can be explained, in a rational agent, only by the dual intention. More importantly, nuclear deterrence can be morally sanctioned only when the acceptable primary intention to deter clearly overrides the secondary intention to retaliate if necessary.

The idea of "intention dualism" begins to rescue nuclear deterrence policies from moral condemnation. But it should not be construed as a blanket absolution of nuclear deterrence in any form. In general, nuclear deterrence strategies are morally acceptable (and successful) only to the extent that they prevent either the initiation or the escalation of an "aggression-retaliation" cycle. Put another way, strategies that more effectively prevent events that would otherwise lead to retaliation are morally superior. With this in mind, we can imagine a moral continuum that can be used to evaluate deterrent strategies and weapon systems. At the immoral end of the scale would be hair-trigger "use or lose" systems employed in destabilizing strategies (e.g., MIRVed ICBMs in launch-on-warning postures), which run a greater risk of forcing immoral action based on the retaliatory intention.[11] At the opposite end of the scale would be strategies and systems that are much less likely to force the intended action. Of course the ideal at this end is a nuclear-free arena, which for obvious reasons could never lead to nuclear war. Unfortunately, given that nuclear weapons technology can never be dis-invented, this is an ideal that must for the foreseeable future remain beyond our reach. But what *is* within our reach is the development of systems and strategies that move toward that ideal; the more a policy approaches the ideal state of no risk of nuclear war, the more morally acceptable it will be.[12]

Before moving on to examine strategic considerations, it would be wise to discuss briefly the role of what may be called the "escalation hypothesis" in nuclear policy planning and debate.[13] The hypothesis states that in any conflict, once the nuclear threshold is crossed—that is, once a nuclear weapon is used in combat—the conflict will escalate into an all-out exchange between the nuclear powers. Each side will launch its nuclear arsenal at its opponent, devastating not only that opponent and its population, combatant and noncombatant alike, but

also a significant portion of neutral territory, due to the nature of fallout from nuclear warfare and the catastrophic climatic effects of even a comparatively small number of nuclear detonations.[14] It is because even one such explosion will escalate into catastrophe that any use of nuclear weapons is deemed immoral.

The impact of this hypothesis on nuclear policy debate cannot be overstated. Despite the fact that the idea of escalation originated from worst-case scenarios, it has become accepted as a legitimate policy-planning assumption. It ultimately drives decisions regarding the need for a wide variety of nuclear forces capable not only of retaliating on warning of a first strike but also of acting as intra-war deterrents to assumed follow-on attacks (i.e., escalation). The assumption of escalation has led to large, redundant nuclear arsenals capable of rapid and sustained attack—exactly the types of systems that would place a deterrence policy at the lower end of the morality scale. Indeed, acceptance of the hypothesis may well have contributed significantly to the development of the concept of system redundancy that has become known as the nuclear triad.

But escalation is a hypothesis that, thankfully, has never been tested. Moreover, it is not universally accepted by all theorists. As David Fisher writes, "escalation is not a mechanistic process to the outcome of which no human agent can contribute after the initial decision."[15] Indeed, once the nuclear firebreak has been crossed, it might well be the case that the parties to the conflict (assuming some degree of rationality) will see that escalating—or even merely continuing—the destruction is purposeless. Each would see it in his best interest to terminate the escalation, if not the entire conflict, as rapidly as possible. Therefore, escalation leading to global devastation, while a possibility, should not be considered inevitable.

Strategic Considerations for an Ideal Deterrent

Having examined the moral side of the deterrence policy coin, we can now turn our attention to strategy. What are the strategic characteristics of an ideal nuclear deterrent force? In 1959, Albert Wohlstetter, a seminal thinker in the application of systems analysis to defense policy, set out six characteristics essential to a force whose aim is sturdy strategic balance: 1) the ability to survive massive surprise attack; 2) a peacetime alert status that is stable, safe, and accident-free; 3) reliable communication capability; 4) intercontinental range; 5) the capability to penetrate enemy defenses; and 6) a capability to destroy protected, or "hardened," targets.[16] For our purposes, we may condense these into two overarching considerations, credibility and survivability.

Credibility. The first, which encompasses Wohlstetter's characteristics (2) through (6), means simply that the force (and the declaratory policy underpinning that force) is to be sufficient to cause a potential aggressor to decide against the advisability of his contemplated action. Given the awesome destructive power of nuclear weapons, it might seem that achieving this state of affairs would be relatively easy, especially against a potential aggressor who is not similarly equipped. Unfortunately, history has shown this not to be the case. There have been a number of situations where U.S. nuclear weapons have failed to deter aggression and in fact have proven to be self-deterring. The Korean and Vietnam wars come to mind here, as does the more recent war against Iraq, where the U.S. nuclear arsenal had no deterrent effect on Saddam Hussein.[17] This lack of deterrent effectiveness would also be evident against a group that may possess a limited nuclear capability but lacks a vulnerable strategic center of gravity at which an opposing nuclear force can be aimed. Indeed, it might be argued that the only truly successful case of sustained deterrence occurred between two nations (the United States and the Soviet Union) who were in a state of rough nuclear parity and who shared a reciprocal credibility born of a common interest in avoiding crisis escalation.

Survivability. The second consideration is derived directly from Wohlstetter's first condition. An ideal deterrent force must be capable of absorbing a massive first strike while retaining the means to retaliate effectively. While this consideration seems straightforward, its application has tended to twist its meaning. Due primarily to the vulnerability (despite silo hardening) of the weapon systems predominant in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, survivability has come to mean, almost exclusively, *prompt response*. That is, the only way rapidly to take out of harm's way those weapons (especially ICBMs) that would otherwise be destroyed in an extensive counterforce strike is simply to launch them—to retaliate on very short notice. However, retaliation that is swift as well as sure is not, as is commonly thought, a necessary ingredient in credible deterrence. Rather, it has been added simply because it is the lesser of two evils; given the makeup of the deterrent force, retaliation must be swift in order to be sure.

For an ideal deterrent, by contrast, survivability should permit national leadership, even (or perhaps especially) in the face of massive attack, the time to contemplate options and decide upon the best, most rational course of action, which may or may not include nuclear retaliation. Given the degree to which Clausewitz's "fog and friction of war" are likely to be amplified in a nuclear environment, to arrive at such a decision may require days or weeks rather than minutes.

Survivability, when viewed this way, points to several important implications about deterrence policy. First, to understand the concept of survivability in terms

of these sorts of extended timelines is to understand it not in its traditional sense but more as "withholdability"—a concept that would end the need for the highly destabilizing hair-trigger decisions that have characterized nuclear deterrence to this point.[18] The "use it or lose it" mind-set would be replaced by a more rational "ride-out and then decide" approach to retaliation.[19]

Secondly, the developmental and deployment methods used to achieve long-range survivability would differ dramatically from the standard approaches. Up to now, survivability of U.S. nuclear forces has been achieved through the diversity and redundancy of the triad. A potential enemy, it was argued, cannot hope to defeat simultaneously all three legs of the arsenal. If he chooses to attack bomber bases with SLBMs, we can retaliate with ICBMs; if he chooses to neutralize the ICBM force, the bombers (on alert) can respond with a (delayed) retaliation. And all the while the SLBM force can hold his cities at risk (albeit with degraded accuracy). The problem with this strategy is that the apparent synergism requires a near-instantaneous decision to launch the vulnerable force of alert bombers and ICBMs, only part of which is recallable. However, if the emphasis is to be placed on long-term delay, a survivable force need not require diverse redundancy but merely that a sufficient and effective retaliatory arsenal be able to survive long after an attack upon it has been initiated.

The Ideal Nuclear Deterrent Force

Since the early days of the Cold War, there has been a widely held idea that deterrence can only mean nuclear deterrence. As the above discussion of essential characteristics makes clear, however, this is in fact a misconception. Nothing requires that deterrent forces be composed solely of nuclear weapons. All that is required is that the force be sufficiently effective and credible to compel an adversary to choose to be deterred. Indeed, the force need not have a nuclear component at all, although because of a nuclear arsenal's psycho-political impact, and barring the dis-invention of nuclear weapons technology, it is unrealistic to assume that all nuclear powers will completely eliminate their arsenals. However, it is quite realistic to envision deterrence strategies that encompass the entire spectrum of weapon types and employment options, including positive political efforts to build mutual trust among potential adversaries (i.e., confidence and security–building measures), conventional forces, and strategic defense, all underpinned by a minimum, but effective, force of offensive nuclear weapons. This wider view of deterrence has always been applicable, but it is even more appropriate in the present era of multipolarity and potential regional conflict, where a deterrence strategy must be sufficiently dynamic to respond to a diverse range of threats.

What should such a deterrent look like? Much as in effective war planning, effective deterrence strategy should respond to the entire spectrum of potential conflict, from low-intensity contingencies through conventional conflict to nuclear exchange. At the lower end of the continuum, programs that build confidence represent in fact a form of deterrence, in that they help to prevent a potential adversary from actualizing that potential. The Open Skies Treaty, concluded in 1992 between Nato nations and those of the former Warsaw Pact, stands as a classic example of the power of this form of deterrence, designed to replace fear with trust. Further up the scale, conventional capabilities are designed to deter aggression in that area of the conflict spectrum. It is only at the extreme upper end of potential conflict that nuclear weapons become effective deterrents. Given that any increase in the number and types of response options available increases the deterrent credibility and thus reduces the likelihood that any will be exercised, this concept of comprehensive deterrence is significantly more acceptable (both morally and strategically) than traditional nuclear deterrence policies, which lack such options.[20]

The role of a nuclear arsenal in this ideal deterrence policy is quite limited: it is solely to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others. It can be nothing more—for we have seen that a nuclear threat against a smaller, conventionally armed adversary is not credible. And it can be nothing less—a nuclear adversary is likely to be deterred, if at all, only by an opposing nuclear arsenal. This last point is well made by Leon Sloss: although conventional weapons are essential to broad deterrence, they "cannot wholly substitute for nuclear weapons as a deterrent. Nuclear weapons have a unique psychological impact that conventional weapons cannot duplicate."[21] They will complement confidence-building measures and non-nuclear forces as weapons of last resort and limited utility.[22]

In order to enhance credibility, the nuclear bedrock of the comprehensive deterrence policy must be highly survivable. As we discussed above, it must be capable of withstanding a first strike without the *necessity* of retaliation. For both moral and strategic reasons, the political leadership must have the option of withholding a nuclear response without risking its loss. It is also important to note that this concept of long-term survivability undermines traditional support for the escalation hypothesis. Strike absorption and retaliation restraint are antithetical to an inevitable climb up the escalation ladder.

The overall size of the nuclear arsenal required to fulfill the proper role in comprehensive deterrence is surprisingly small, perhaps significantly less than the 3,500 warheads agreed to in the Start II Treaty. The requirement for damage sufficiency, which has rapidly replaced that of strategic parity popular during the heyday of the Cold War arms race, can be achieved even with substantial force reductions, since all that is required, in the words of Robert McNamara, is that "each side recognize that the other can inflict unacceptable damage in a

retaliatory strike."[23] Even though "unacceptable damage" is left undefined, it is clearly a level of destruction well short of complete annihilation. This small number of nuclear weapons would function in the overall deterrence strategy as a secure reserve force, capable of being employed *ex post facto*, as it were. Of course, with such significantly reduced warhead numbers, survivability and invulnerability from preemption become critically important.

SLBMs as the Nearly Ideal Deterrent

If we accept this moral and strategic framework for a deterrent force structure as an ideal goal, we must then determine, as a first step toward that goal, which if any of our current weapon systems approach that ideal. For compelling strategic and moral reasons, of the triad of systems now deployed, only the sea-launched ballistic missile submarine is a viable candidate as an ideal deterrent. The Trident submarine, carrying the D-5 SLBM, can, by itself, fulfill the role of a sufficient nuclear deterrent force; all other nuclear forces can be either retired (in the case of ICBMs) or permanently converted to conventional systems (in the case of the bombers).

The Trident/D-5 combination represents what Admiral William Holland calls a "qualitative improvement" in SLBM technology.[24] His opinion, written in 1989, is dramatically substantiated in a 1992 General Accounting Office report, the result of an extensive two-year study of the U.S. strategic triad by the GAO's Program Evaluation and Methodology Division.[25] The primary purpose of the study was a "comparison of strategic weapons systems across all three legs, taking into account both the threat they were addressing and the arms control agreements that would necessarily constrain them."[26] In conducting the evaluation, the GAO assessed seven different measures of effectiveness (survivability, accuracy, reliability of warhead, reliability of weapon system, flexibility, communications, and responsiveness) in order to compare the various systems more accurately. The results are unambiguous: noting that "there exist systematic disparities between the estimates or claims that have been made about the triad systems and what the data actually show," the report finds that the "sea leg of the triad gets top grades on cost-effectiveness, uninterrupted communications, and invulnerability."[27]

Strategic Superiority. Several particular findings of the GAO need to be highlighted, as they serve to demonstrate the dissonance between myth and reality regarding ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). The first of these myths concerns survivability and detection while on patrol. Relying on SSBNs as the sole nuclear deterrent force, it is argued, dangerously discards any hedge against a possible technological breakthrough that would facilitate the detection of submarines

enough to degrade seriously their survivability. But the study finds no evidence that there is a real danger here. Indeed, GAO test results show that "submerged SSBNs are even less detectable than originally understood, and that there are no current or long-term technologies that would change this."[28] Even if an SSBN could somehow be readily detected, that information would not easily translate into an attack threat, given both U.S. maritime superiority and the extended range of the D-5, which allows it to hold a potential enemy's vital centers at risk from a safe distance, perhaps even from a home port.[29] SSBNs, being much less detectable than either ICBMs or bombers, are therefore more survivable; they need not depend on advance warning.

A second myth put right by the GAO report concerns an alleged lack of communication reliability that, if true, would call into question SSBN responsiveness in a crisis. As the report makes clear, "the speed and reliability of day-to-day communications to submerged deployed SSBNs were far better than widely believed, and about equal to the speed and reliability of communication to ICBM silos. Contrary to conventional wisdom, SSBNs are in essentially constant communications with the national command authorities and, depending on the scenario, SLBMs from SSBNs would be almost as prompt as ICBMs in hitting enemy targets."[30] This capability, when combined with the extended survivability discussed above, makes the SSBN force well suited to fulfill the ideal deterrent requirement of nearly indefinite withholdability.

The final lingering myth effectively debunked by the report regards the presumed lack of an accuracy sufficient to attack hardened targets successfully, a mission up to now thought to rest only with ICBMs. GAO test findings reveal that the accuracy of the D-5 "is about equal to that of the most lethal ICBM."[31] Owen Coté goes one step further by demonstrating that the D-5 actually has a better hard-target, single-shot kill probability than the Peacekeeper ICBM (.91 versus .85), making it even better suited than the ICBM for the task in question.[32]

Moral Superiority. As this exhaustive GAO study makes clear, current U.S. SSBN capability is sufficient in strategic terms to bear the nuclear deterrent burden. The Trident/D-5 system is close to ideal from a moral perspective as well. Nearly indefinite withholdability means that the nuclear force can be accompanied by a declaratory deterrence policy of first-strike absorption followed by a retaliatory response that could come at *any* time. Such a policy would be effective since the potential aggressor must still consider the awesome cost of suffering a retaliatory response, whatever its timing. Given our understanding of how deterrence is accomplished, it should be clear that it is just that sort of consideration, if the aggressor is deterrable at all, that will dissuade him from acting. This declaratory policy is morally superior to "rapid response" in that it allows a much greater opportunity for reasoned evaluation of the decision to

retaliate, an opportunity that can only serve to reduce the risk of imprudent action and the danger of escalation. Furthermore, the extended survivability of the Trident/D-5 system means the chance of aggression occurring (especially direct preemptive strike) is significantly reduced, since there would be no lucrative counterforce targets vulnerable to attack. A potential enemy is thus more likely to be deterred, making this type of policy morally superior to those which allow for a greater chance of aggression.

The Future of the Triad

If, as I have argued, the SSBN force is both a strategically and morally preferable deterrent, where does this leave the other two legs of the triad? Clearly they, along with the triad concept, have outlived their usefulness. Before examining the reasons for this conclusion and its implications, it may be helpful to examine briefly several arguments most often raised in support of the triad. The most common of these, and one that is propounded in official policy documents, is that the triad has worked effectively to this point and therefore should not be abandoned.[33] Unfortunately, this argument ignores the historical reality that the triad was adopted (reluctantly) as an unhappy compromise among feuding branches of the military and not as "the actual goal of force structure decisions."[34] Since that time, the triad concept has been enshrined with a quasi-religious aura that makes it exceedingly difficult to attack.[35] The argument also dismisses the realities of today's radically altered geopolitical landscape, a new landscape that demands new thinking about strategic deterrence needs.

A second prevalent argument holds that the redundancy and diversity of the triad is still essential to effective deterrence.[36] ICBMs are seen as a hedge against massive surprise attack, and bombers are viewed as the only withholdable weapon system. Much like the historical-precedent argument for the triad, this line of defense ignores the technological reality of Trident/D-5, which is not only substantially more withholdable than a bomber (weeks versus hours) but can outwait and outshoot the best fielded ICBM system. This, of course, does not even address the political reality that no potential aggressor now or in the foreseeable future, including the republics of the former Soviet Union, possesses or will possess the capability or disposition for a "bolt-from-the-blue" preemptive strike; that reality obviates any need for launch-on-warning or launch-under-attack.[37]

We need only mention a final prevalent argument for the triad: that because the future is an unknown quantity, to sacrifice any capability unilaterally is to risk the danger of being caught short should the need arise—that we simply cannot afford to give away future options. This, of course, is a fallaciously constructed scare tactic more to be expected of disreputable insurance salesmen

than strategic analysts. Accepting this type of argument would have resulted in keeping a stockpile of flintlocks. The reality is that as situations and technical capabilities evolve, the force structures designed to support national objectives must keep pace. This is doubly true during times of fiscal constraint, when choices must be made.

What then of the future of the triad force? Of the remaining legs, land-based ICBMs should be eliminated from the military inventory. Not only are they much less acceptable morally than the other two systems, given the hair-trigger response necessary to avoid losing them to preemptive strike, but they are strategically unnecessary, given the capability of Trident/D-5. Official recognition of the obsolescence of the ICBM is reflected in the U.S. negotiating positions in and the results of Start I and Start II, wherein MIRVed ICBMs were eliminated and the overall number of ICBMs significantly reduced.

The future of the bomber force is brighter, given its usefulness as a conventional weapons platform. It is in this role that bombers can support the policy of comprehensive deterrence, which requires a substantial conventional capability to counter possible (indeed much more likely) aggression in that range of the conflict spectrum. Again, this changing role of bombers is reflected in official policy, which no longer requires them to maintain a constant alert posture, and in the Start II agreement, which eliminated the bomber "discount" counting rule contained in Start I.

Is SSBN Deterrence Destabilizing?

Of the remaining objections to an all-SLBM deterrent force, all are relatively insignificant, with one exception: that the SLBM is claimed to be destabilizing in that potential adversaries view it as a first-strike weapon that can launch without warning.[38]

Several points can be made in response to this objection, the first of which is theoretical. As in offensive-defensive and strategic-tactical distinctions, it is weapon employment policy and not the weapon itself that renders a particular system stabilizing or destabilizing. This point is well made by Colin Gray: "A lot of what purports to be analysis bearing upon so-called stable deterrence is naked of consideration of the contending political motives that give life and meaning to strategy."[39] It is primarily the declaratory policy, not the force structure, of deterrence that affects stability. Even if force structure did affect stability, an SSBN-only deterrence structure would not be any less stable than a triad that included SSBNs as well as ICBMs and bombers. Secondly, declaring a weapon system destabilizing implies that it risks inviting a pre-emptive strike. As Admiral Holland points out, "crisis instability is generated more from the *vulnerability* of offensive weapon systems than from the offensive capabilities of

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those systems."[40] SLBMs, however, by virtue of their survivable nature, are invulnerable to such a strike. Therefore, whether they are destabilizing or not is, as a practical matter, inconsequential. Finally, the emerging world order, as we have noted, is characterized by regional threats against which any significant nuclear force, if viewed as threatening at all, is in itself *politically* destabilizing in that it spurs proliferation. Therefore to move toward an SSBN deterrent is not necessarily to sacrifice crisis stability.

The argument for an SSBN-only deterrent is both theoretically and practically compelling. The nuclear component of a morally and strategically ideal deterrent—a withholdable, credible force capable of holding at risk a wide variety of potential adversaries—is most closely mirrored in the Trident/D-5. Objections against a single-force deterrent have been largely overcome by the advanced capabilities of this system.

Politics, economics, and technology have coalesced to present us with a unique opportunity to align practical reality with the dictates of our moral conscience. The emerging regional focus, coupled with downward pressures on the defense budget, demands a new look at the cornerstone of the U.S. defense—nuclear deterrence. As if on cue, technological advances inherent in Trident/D-5 provide the means to break with the traditional Cold War views that have worked well to this point but run a great risk of failing to adapt. Under the current triad force structure, "US strategic thinking remains chained to obsolete doctrines."[41] The time may well be right to break those chains. Admittedly, the Trident/D-5 deterrent force is not perfect; tensions, however, will always exist between the ideal and the practical. Moving to implement these recommended changes in force structure will set us on the road toward resolving those tensions.

Notes

1. The deterrence policy and force structure which I advocate are based on the most realistic assumption that this multipolar geopolitical environment will continue for the foreseeable future. However, the proposals are equally compatible with any number of possible future worlds, including a return to superpower bipolarity.

2. I intentionally omit from this article any discussion of air-launched and sea-launched cruise missiles, for two reasons. First, I limit the topic to an examination of what has been traditionally considered the strategic triad of nuclear systems; cruise missiles, lacking as they do intercontinental range, are more correctly considered sub-strategic. Secondly, I believe that the most effective use of cruise missiles lies, much like that of bombers, in the area of conventional deterrence.

3. For a discussion in depth of this concept, see Jeffrey A. Zink, "An Analysis of the Morality of Intention in Nuclear Deterrence," Dissertation, Oxford Univ., Oxford, U.K.: 1990, pp. 14–8.

4. Edward Luttwak, *Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), p. 191.

5. Luttwak, p. 191, n.1.

6. Colin S. Gray, "The Definitions and Assumptions of Deterrence," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, December 1990, p. 5.

7. It is entirely possible that a successful deterrent strategy could be constructed without forming an intention to carry out the threatened retaliation—that is, the deterrent could be based on a bluff. There are, however, some theoretical difficulties as to the rationality of such a plan, e.g., whether it is possible to intend to commit an act that one knows will not be carried out should the situation arise. For a more complete discussion of these problems and their relevance to nuclear deterrence, see, e.g., Zink, pp. 51–66.

8. For further discussion of this principle, see Gregory S. Kavka, "Some Paradoxes of Deterrence," *The Journal of Philosophy*, v. 75, no. 6, p. 289.

9. For a more thorough discussion of deterrent intention as compared with ordinary intention, see Zink, esp. pp. 99–120.

10. Kavka (p. 291) makes this comment with respect to intending and desiring to intend.

11. That destabilization stems in large part from employment policies rather than weapon systems is apparent when one considers that MIRVed ICBMs, for example, could be employed under a policy of first-strike absorption, which would increase stability, albeit at the risk of significant losses to a pre-emptive strike should deterrence fail. The issue of destabilization is discussed in greater detail below.

12. This view of course may be inconsistent with a more absolute view of moral right and wrong, since it implies that there are degrees of rightness. Without entering into this debate, we may respond that given the practical reality discussed at the outset, policies that may be wrong but tend toward correcting their faults are in some important sense more commendable than those that display no such tendency.

13. See, e.g., John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and Germain Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1987), esp. pp. 148–9, where the authors argue not only that escalation is inevitable but that it plays an essential part in effective deterrence, which must rely on the threat of final and complete retaliation. For additional commentary on the hypothesis, see Anthony Kenny, *The Logic of Deterrence* (Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 27–31, and Carl H. Builder, *The Future of Nuclear Deterrence* (RAND Corp.: February 1991), p. 8.

14. See, e.g., Carl Sagan, "Nuclear War and Climatic Catastrophe: Some Policy Implications," in *Nuclear War, Nuclear Proliferation and Their Consequences*, ed. Sadruddin Aga Khan (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 241–75.

15. David Fisher, *Morality and the Bomb* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 99. See also pp. 96–105, where he carefully lays out the arguments for and against several versions of the escalation hypothesis, eventually favoring a rejection of it.

16. Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1959, pp. 211–34.

17. Carl Kaysen, Robert McNamara, and George Rathjens, "Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1991, p. 100.

18. Owen Coté, "The Trident and the Triad," *International Security*, Fall 1991, p. 144.

19. Harold A. Feiveson and Frank N. von Hippel, "Beyond START," *International Security*, Summer 1990, p. 156.

20. For an expansion of this point in a regional conflict regime, see Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Ricky L. Waddell, "The Future of Conventional Deterrence," *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1992, pp. 78–88.

21. Leon Sloss, "US Strategic Forces After the Cold War," *Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 1991, p. 152.

22. The utility of nuclear weapons in deterring an overwhelming conventional force (e.g., the classic Nato–Warsaw Pact confrontation) remains an open, yet important, question. Sloss argues that nuclear weapons can effectively be used as a "hedge against the massive failure of conventional deterrence." (*Ibid.*, p. 149). However, their role in the ideal deterrence strategy that I am suggesting would not necessarily include such a first-use employment policy.

23. Kaysen *et al.*, p. 108.

24. William J. Holland, "The End of the Triad?" *Arms Control Today*, September 1989, p. 10. The Trident II/D-5 SLBM is a two-stage, multiple warhead-capable ballistic missile with a maximum range of approximately 11,000 km (6,820 nm) and a CEP (accuracy) of under 400 feet. It went into production in 1987 and will eventually replace all other SLBMs in the U.S. inventory.

25. "GAO [U.S. General Accounting Office] Report on US Strategic Nuclear Triad," *The Congressional Record—House* (29 September 1992), pp. H9861–4. This is the unclassified extract from the original classified, eight-volume study.

26. *Ibid.*, p. H9862.

27. *Ibid.*, p. H9861.

28. *Ibid.*, p. H9862.

29. Holland, p. 11.

30. GAO Report, p. H9862.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Coté, p. 125.

33. U.S. Department of Defense, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, January 1992, p. 20.

34. Holland, p. 14; see also Builder, p. 5.
35. James R. Lynch, "Triad or Dyad?" US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January 1990, p. 61.
36. See, e.g., Donald Rice, "The Manned Bomber and Strategic Deterrence," *International Security*, Summer 1990, p. 101.
37. GAO Report, p. H9861.
38. See, e.g., Builder, p. 19, and also Feiveson and von Hippel, p. 165.
39. Gray, p. 6.
40. Holland, p. 13. (Emphasis added.)
41. Kaysen *et al.*, p. 106.

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