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Getting on the Road to Peace: A Modest Proposal*

Jan Narveson

INTRODUCTION: SECURITY, MISTRUST, AND INSECURITY

The world's superpowers and their allies currently maintain military establishments of utterly unprecedented destructive power and costliness; and, notoriously, they add daily to their armaments. If we were to ask either of them what the purpose of all this activity is, we would be sure to get the same reply, Defense, or, Security. If we were further to ask, Security from what? each would unhesitatingly cite as the overwhelmingly major object of concern the other party. Neither has much to fear from anyone else, especially if the other possible threateners are taken individually. Even Russian concern about China seems scarcely of a kind to call for the assembling of thousands of megatons of nuclear warheads to secure the situation. And certainly both the United States and the Soviet Union would strongly disclaim any aggressive intentions. The whole thing is for defense, both would insist. It's the other party's fault! Thus, for example, what was once known as the War Department in the United States has for decades been called the Department of Defense.

On the face of it, this situation is anomalous, if not downright absurd. How could two states each go to enormous trouble and expense to arm themselves to the teeth against each other if each really believed that the sole reason the other was taking up arms was for defense against itself and no one else? Evidently there is some serious misunderstanding or mistrust on the part of at least one. But of both, actually—it can hardly be asymmetric. Imagine that Jones seriously mistrusts Smith, to the point where he equips himself with a revolver, but that Smith does not mistrust Jones at all, feeling in fact perfectly confident that Jones will never use the weapon in question. In that case, Smith will not arm himself in response, one would suppose; and one would further suppose that his

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refraining from doing so would eventually lead Jones to dismantle his revolver or at least to leave it at home when a likely encounter with Smith was in the offing. It would be surprising, in the absence of mistrust or misunderstanding, if they did not soon resume normal civil relations.

Mistrust can be a potent source of misunderstanding, as we know. Othello's readiness to believe that Desdemona is unfaithful betrays a strong streak of fear or mistrust: if he loved her in the right way, we take it, his standards of evidence for assessing charges of infidelity would be much more rigorous than the ones he actually employed. In the nuclear age, such attitudes bring with them perils of the worst kind. For a superb illustration, consider the notorious incident which occurred about the time this article was first being written (autumn 1983). Pilots of the Soviet Air Force, acting on explicit orders from higher up, shot down an airliner with some hundreds of civilians on board. That unfortunate plane had strayed far from its route and deep into Soviet air space, overflying some major Soviet military installations. On being duly accused of murder in the Western press, the Russians replied that their pilots had warned the airliner, as required, but that their attempts had elicited no response.

Why did he not respond? Two hypotheses came to public attention. (*a*) He was asleep, or else the attempts were insufficient to get his attention. (*b*) Although he did see the warnings, he was actually engaged on a spying mission of such a level of duplicity that he was constrained to fake response *a* in hopes that the Russian pilots would let him blunder onward. As between these two, the second was manifestly incredible. For one thing, the Russians knew that the Americans operate spy satellites over the site routinely. And they knew that the Americans know that they are quite capable of shooting down stray airliners if it comes to that. Above all, they must surely have known that no plane on a spying mission could conceivably fail to be aware of the presence of Soviet fighter planes in the vicinity and that any pilot attempting to fake it in the way called for by hypothesis *b* would have to be literally insane. In short, the first hypothesis was overwhelmingly more reasonable than the second was. Nevertheless, the Soviets professed to believe the second, and so persistently that one began to wonder if they did not really believe it. In their minds, it seems, intruders on Russian air space are to be assumed guilty unless proven innocent beyond the shadow of not only a reasonable doubt but even a wildly unreasonable one.

Behavior of the kind illustrated by the Russians in this incident sends a chill through Western spines, and for good reason. Contemporary weapons systems are enormously complicated but are still operated, in the end, by mere fallible humans. Error is possible. But the consequences of misinterpreted error are unfathomable. Thus the need to make allowance for the possibility of such errors, to anticipate them and build in safeguards against rash response, is urgent. If the Soviet response in the airliner

case is indicative of their standard frame of mind, then how is any sort of "security" to be possible in present technological circumstances?

What are we to think of those who exemplify, or worse yet instill, such sets of mind? One's first impulse is to write them off with a modishly clinical adjective: "paranoid." And no doubt the history of Russia provides support for that description. But doing so seriously has two disadvantages. In the first place, the label is widely taken to be pejorative, and rightly so; and it can hardly help to promote the cause of peace to go around attaching such labels to one's putative enemy. And in the second place, paranoia is a pathological condition. These are conditions one "treats" rather than inviting a rational response. And among the things that do not help any is taking a patronizing attitude toward one's putative enemy. It is obviously dangerous. Moreover, I suggest, it is unjust.

It is unjust to assume that someone is evil who cannot prove innocence beyond the shadow of an unreasonable doubt. It is also unjust to assume, without very good evidence, that he is irrational. Reason requires us to presume that those we deal with are neither malevolent nor irrational. It does not require that we love them or share their ends; it does require that we refrain from hatred, or at least the actions that flow therefrom. And it requires that we respect their right to pursue their ends so long as such pursuit is compatible with our pursuit of our own; and where it is not, to be willing to negotiate on terms of moral equality regarding trade-offs from our maximally preferred courses of action.

Why does reason require this? Because we will all be worse off if we act on contrary assumptions. If I assume that you are out to get me by whatever methods you can as soon as you can, my obvious move is preemptive attack. If you assume that I have made this assumption, your obvious move will be pre-preemptive attack. If I distrust you to the point where, even when we do make a treaty, I do my best to fudge it in my favor, I invite a similar response from you. And so on.

Of course the presumption that the other party is rational and non-malevolent is rebuttable. Reason certainly does not require an absolute faith in one's enemy, even in these rudimentary respects. The question is, rebuttable how? Military thinking generally proceeds on what has come to be called "worst-case reasoning": assume the worst the enemy could do, and prepare for that. But military thinking concerns our dealings with known enemies, people who are known to be intent on killing us because they have already tried to do so or have otherwise made their intentions exceedingly clear. However, when we are dealing not with known enemies but only with those with whom we have differences of ideology or perceived interest, the worst-case assumption is not obviously appropriate. In the worst case, my dear and good friend Bill would suddenly turn into a homicidal maniac, or it would suddenly become clear that he has for all these years been intent on my ruin, pursuing this with surpassing ingenuity that has deceived us all. Should I, then,

shoot him now, just in case? Should I be on guard every moment, lest the dire issue of this worst case come about? After all, I cannot claim to know, beyond the aforementioned unreasonable shadow of a doubt, that this hypothesis is untrue. The situation is merely that I have not the slightest reason to believe it.

But that is not all there is to it. Mere lack of any basis for making this outrageous assumption is not all that prevents me from doing so. For there is also the fact that if I were really to take up this strange stance—say, a slight stiffening when Bill comes into view, a tendency to edge toward the nearest escape or to hide the cutlery when he is about—then I would be behaving in a way that invites Bill's suspicion, doubt, and fear. This is not how one behaves toward a friend—nor indeed toward any civilized stranger. Behavior of the kind motivated by the belief that he is about to kill me, in addition to being positively idiotic under the circumstances, is also poisonous, insidious, and intolerable. Who would want to live the sort of life called for by continuous application of worst-case reasoning to all and sundry?

Reason does not require, of course, that we be "friends" with the Soviet Union. But there is an idea of good relations among states that does not involve anything quite so committal, and it is not unreasonable to assume that decent relations in that sense ought to be the norm in international dealings. We should not get hung up on niceties. Whatever the minimal norms of international relations should be thought to be, it is surely clear that pointing large numbers of thermonuclear-tipped missiles at nation *X* is not compatible with having such relations with *X*. That behavior invites fear, suspicion, and response in kind; and the invitation has, not surprisingly, been accepted. There is ample reason to think that NATO policy in the years since the Second World War has been dominated by worse-case reasoning. And we surely ought to ask whether that kind of reasoning is really justified in the circumstances that have prevailed since then.

If we were engaged in what has come to be called a zero-sum game with the Soviet Union, worst-case reasoning would, of course, be appropriate; it is, indeed, the sine qua non of rational action in such cases. But the idea that we are in the midst of such a game is misguided. Doubtless there are competitions of various kinds—ideological, especially (competition for the "hearts and minds" of people). But the zero-sum format does not apply there. If my enemy "loses" in an ideological competition with me, he has surely, in my view, won: for now he has the truth (at least in my view), which he did not before. And in any case, if the Russians were to vaporize us all, it is hard to see how that would do anything for a program of ultimate world communism. Economic competition is likewise benign, or at least there is no reason in principle why it should not be; for the "winners" are merely those who sell more and better goods than the "losers," and consumers in the "losing" country benefit as well as those in the "winning" one.

Of course, the stakes in the nuclear era are very high, and with such stakes, aversion to risk is indicated. The consequences of wrongly assuming that there is no threat are indeed catastrophic. Were there no comparable consequences for wrongly assuming that there is a threat, it would obviously make sense to assume this. But there are such consequences. Western overreaction to a presumed Russian threat is certain, given this century's track record, to stimulate similar reactions on their part. Thus the arms race continues. Yet such a race is both extremely expensive and quite dangerous. With many thousands of nuclear weapons already deployed, the world we live in is not a terribly safe place; and assuming that the risk of accident increases as the number of weapons increases, we are surely making the world a less safe place with each passing week. Not to mention that so long as the weapons are there, ready for use by sovereign states, there is a risk not only of accidental or mistaken use but also of irrational intentional use. Really irresponsible leaders are hardly unknown in the history of mankind; but they have never been in a position to do as much damage as they could now. If the arms race is due to worst-case reasoning, then worst-case reasoning can make things worse. It can help to bring the worst case about. The possibility that it has done so, with proposed correctives, is the subject of this article.

The question we need to raise is why there is a threat, insofar as there is one. The standard assumption has been that the threat is all one-way: the Soviet Union is out to get us, or everybody. But what if the threat is due to their perception that we are the threat? What if our assumption that there is a terrible threat against which we must defend ourselves has prompted "defensive" moves on our part which do not look defensive to them and which have in turn prompted them to increase their armaments as defensive measures against us? What, in short, if we are the "bad guys"?

TWO VIEWS OF SOVIET ACTIONS

Clearly, a rational defense depends on a rational appraisal of the sort of threat that exists. And that depends, in turn, on the assumption that the presumed enemy is rationally motivated, unless one has very good evidence that he is irrational. There is, certainly, an alternative on the borderline between those two possibilities, for conceivably an enemy might simply prefer war to peace. That is a preference which most of us do not very well understand. Considering the risks and discomforts of conventional war, only an extremely dull or miserable civilian life could be reasonably thought inferior to life—an expectedly short life at that—on the battlefield. But in any case, the nature of nuclear war is such as to make any such preference totally irrational. Indeed, nuclear war of the kind we mainly think of, with exchanges of hundreds of warheads in the megaton class, is not exactly "war" in the usual sense of the term. Such virtues as conventional wars have enabled people to display in the past can hardly find

any scope for operation when the pressing of a few buttons by a very few people, none of them in any sort of direct contact with the enemy, will result in the impersonal extermination of millions, nearly all of them noncombatants with literally no possibility of defense against the aggressor. Only profound ignorance or total lack of imagination, one supposes, could permit the thirst for war as we have known it in the past to motivate this new kind of war.

And of course the publicly professed motivations of the superpowers are entirely contrary to any such bellicose motivations. Both have loudly proclaimed the virtues of peace, and not just peace on their own preferred terms but peace in the sense of coexistence with their rival. No doubt we should not simply take their word for it, but can we seriously think that either has any interests that would conceivably be promoted by resort to full-scale war, nuclear or conventional, between the superpowers? In the case of nuclear war, there is, for one thing, the question how you go about "building socialism" or "building democracy" in an area rendered uninhabitable, as well as uninhabited, by a surfeit of H-bombs, even supposing one had anything left to do the building with. But conventional war makes no sense either. Just the stupefying costs involved, even if one were on the winning side, would render it a bad bargain for either, quite apart from the cost in lives. And it is very questionable whether it is in the Soviet Union's interest to "conquer" Western Europe. Would it be happy to have nations enormously stronger than, say, Poland or Hungary as supposed members of the Soviet team? Germany, for instance—and of course it would have to be a reunified Germany at that—would be an extremely formidable tail for the Soviet dog to try to wag. And on the economic front, it is surely reasonable to suggest that the Soviets have more to gain from peaceful trade than from attempts at conquest. Western powers, perhaps, have more to gain from a Soviet block at last practicing democracy. But really, this is an altruistic gain in the main. We would "gain" mainly the satisfaction of knowing that those oppressed peoples are at last free from the burdens of communism. This is important, but it is hardly a reason for military conquest, especially one that kills off a large fraction of the people we would be supposedly liberating.

Well, if there is no good reason for war on the part of either side, and there are only two sides, then why is there not peace? Or rather, why is there not a much more secure and satisfying peace than the present tension-ridden situation? It must be that neither side really believes the other's professed interest in such a peace since otherwise their military behavior over the past forty years would make no sense. So the question is, why do they not believe them? Perhaps it is naive to believe that, if the causes of the current uneasy situation can be found, then a less dangerous and expensive peace would be possible. But it is difficult to see what else there is to do but hope that it is not naive and press on.

We must, then, seriously address ourselves to those causes, with a view to asking ourselves what we can do that offers a reasonable prospect

of improvement. We need, to start with, answers to two major questions. (*a*) Which Soviet actions have constituted reasonable grounds for Western mistrust? (*b*) Which Western actions have constituted reasonable grounds for Soviet mistrust? In both cases we want to know whether some other interpretation of those actions is reasonable, one that would provide the basis for a less dangerous policy vis-à-vis the other.

In general, the answer to *a* is, a few details apart, fairly easy. First, since the Second World War, the Soviet Union has acted to establish a ring of "buffer" states around its borders, insofar as possible, seeing to it, by force of arms or threat of such force when necessary, that only regimes "friendly" (as they put it) to the Soviet Union ruled in those states. We may take it that Afghanistan is another case in point. And second, it has maintained a very large military establishment, both in conventional and, later, in nuclear terms. The first of these facts has led Western leaders to believe that the Russians were embarked on a program of world domination. The second backed up this conclusion, which was also reinforced by traditional Russian secretiveness and (as it appeared to us, at least) diplomatic belligerence and intransigence. In short, the Soviet Union was perceived as a militaristic, imperialist power whose evil designs called for the reestablishment of American and European military power to counter it.

Was this American construction of the postwar situation borne out by the facts? Possibly not. For there was, and is, a rival hypothesis: that these Soviet actions can be construed as genuinely defensive in nature rather than essentially offensive. The United States enjoys excellent relations with its immediate neighbors and has (a few overenthusiastic critics to the contrary notwithstanding) shown no tendency (in recent times, anyway) to try to tamper with the internal politics of either of them; nor has it deployed significant military forces near its continental borders with a view to shoring up its security against them. These facts undoubtedly contribute to American inability to contemplate the tamer hypothesis concerning Soviet intentions. We interpret moves to subvert neighbors as threats to world peace; but perhaps the Soviets see them as entirely reasonable means of securing their own borders against potential aggressors, of which, goodness knows, Russia has seen plenty in its history. It has also engaged in a good deal of its own, to be sure, and this is a fact not to be ignored. But it requires no stretching of the facts to take it that Soviet movements in relation to its own border states have been motivated by essentially defensive concerns. And the "American" hypothesis, that the Soviet Union is instead out for world conquest, does encounter serious problems, such as the cases of Finland and Austria. In both those cases, the Soviet Union actually had armies within their borders and could easily have left them there and created puppet governments. It voluntarily chose not to do so, and neither of those countries has been under threat of Russian military conquest since the late 1940s. Why should they leave such defenseless countries alone if their aim is what it is claimed to be on the harsher hypothesis?

Obviously we should not accept the idea that one may secure one's borders by militarily subverting the governments of neighboring states when the latter themselves show no evident sign of hostile designs. But a critic on the other side will have no difficulty trotting out cases of American military action against weak neighbors with the very same evident purposes—Americans will not soon be allowed to forget Grenada, for instance, or Nicaragua. The point is that Russian actions may be viewed in a way that makes sense in the light of relevant facts and presents us with a much different and distinctly less uncomfortable picture (for the world, if not for Soviet neighbors). If Soviet intentions are basically defensive, even if their view of what constitutes "defense" is rather strong stuff by our standards, that fact would have enormous implications for world security at the nuclear level.

But first let us turn to question *b*: what Western behavior is occasion for reasonable mistrust on the part of the Soviets? In part, they point to the past, citing especially such things as the sending of armies to aid the White Russians following the Revolution.[1] As against such facts, the West can reasonably respond by pointing out, first, that America contributed substantially to the Russian war effort against the Nazis and, second (with a *tu quoque*), that Russian military assistance, including personnel as well as arms, has been frequently invoked in the recent past to shore up governments believed friendly to the Soviet Union or to assist revolutionary activity of types they approve.[2] More seriously, the Soviets can point to the fact that the Americans have consistently been in the lead in the development of nuclear arms and delivery systems. The United States was the first to build an atomic bomb, the first and still the only party to have used one in wartime, first with the H-bomb, first to develop the MIRV, and in the early stages of the nuclear arms race its stockpile of weapons was, as is now publicly known, enormously much greater than that of the Soviet Union.[3]

Of these, the second is much the more important from the present point of view. On the hypothesis that Russian intentions are fundamentally aggressive, Western (especially American) military activities in the nuclear sphere make a certain amount of sense. But on the lesser hypothesis, they decidedly do not. Let us try to frame a reasonably accurate global

1. For a synopsis of the Russian situation, see Ground Zero's *What about the Russians—and Nuclear War?* (New York: Pocket Books, 1983). More general background on American attitudes following the war is to be found in Greg Herkin, *The Winning Weapon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980). For the development of such attitudes during the war, see Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1975).

2. See Thomas Powers, *Thinking about the Next War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982), chap. 15 ("The Moral Fallacy," pp. 105–21), in which there is a splendid series of "What about . . . ?" questions, such as "What about Afghanistan?" "What about Vietnam?" etc.; see pp. 118–19 esp.

3. I assume I am speaking from common knowledge here, but a useful storehouse of relevant information for all these claims may be found in G. Prins, ed., *Defended to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), chaps. 2–4 in particular.

picture. For perhaps two decades after World War II, Russian conventional military forces were of a size that conceivably might, with some plausibility, be thought to have been capable of supporting an invasion of Western Europe—the prospect that has always been invoked to justify NATO military expenditures, especially the development of battlefield nuclear weapons. In fact, even its strategic nuclear force was justified by that prospect, at least indirectly, since the assumption was that Soviet bombing would be in support of such an attack.[4] But in the recent past it has been argued, convincingly in my view, that the supposed immense superiority of Russian conventional forces required by this picture simply does not exist.[5] (It has also been argued that it never did exist, for that matter, though this is not so relevant here.)[6] What does matter is that Russian conventional strength has been exaggerated, and Western weakness likewise overdrawn, so as to justify Western arms increments.

And yet, it is also commonly accepted that, in order to mount a conventional invasion with any prospect of success, the attacking army must have great superiority in numbers and equipment. Mere parity will not do. Yet this is at most what currently obtains, according to most estimates.[7] But this means that the Russian army is capable only of resisting

4. See Herkin.

5. See Prins, ed., pp. 178–79. But more impressive still is Andrew Cockburn, *The Threat* (New York: Random House, 1983). Chapter 6 in particular analyzes numerical strengths. The book as a whole gives a most interesting picture of the Soviet military machine, one which overwhelmingly disconfirms any idea that the Soviet army could overrun Western Europe in a matter of days, for instance, as has often been claimed. Cockburn suggests that it would have a hard time "overrunning" it in a matter of months, even against absolutely no opposition whatever!

6. See Cockburn, p. 101.

7. Edward N. Luttwak, who is a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University and the author of many books, dissents from my previous claims and those supported by Cockburn in particular. According to Luttwak, in "How to Think about Nuclear War," *Commentary*, vol. 79 (1982), "If nuclear weapons were now disinvented . . . the Soviet Union would automatically emerge as the dominant power on the continent, fully capable of invading and conquering Western Europe and beyond if its political domination were resisted" (p. 21). Luttwak agrees that there is, on paper, a rough overall parity between NATO and Soviet forces. But he argues that many of the ground forces are untrained for the relevant kind of fighting—one wonders what he would say about Cockburn's reports, got from first-person accounts by people who had been in the Soviet draftee army, about the level of Soviet personnel preparedness! And he claims that NATO, far from being able to rest with less than or even equal forces, needs more of certain forces, especially tanks (of which it has about one-third the number of its Soviet counterpart, or so he claims). This in turn rests on the claim that the Soviets could "be concentrated during an offensive against a few narrow segments of the front, while NATO's divisions must defend all along a 600-kilometer border" (p. 23). Why NATO could not anticipate where the Soviets would be attacking with a concentrated force of heavy armor is an interesting question. If we assumed utterly legendary powers of organization and mobility, of course, something of the sort might conceivably be brought off. But unless we assume that NATO commanders are crackbrained, instead of being highly competent Germans, Americans, and Englishmen, this hypothesis is simply silly. It would take the Russians months of hard work to assemble such a force, during which time every movement

invasion from Europe by NATO forces and not of mounting an invasion of Western Europe from the East. If this is so, however, then it is difficult to see how the hypothesis that Soviet actions are motivated by aggressive desires for conquest and the like squares with the military facts. For whatever the facts may be concerning strategic-size nuclear weapons—and only the very hawkish estimate the situation there as at all advantageous to the Soviet Union—the fact is that strategic nuclear weapons are not what one could use for invasions. The milder hypothesis, therefore, squares much better with current facts, indisputably, and perhaps past facts, if more disputably, than the stronger one. Under the circumstances, such things as the American refusal to embrace a no-first-use policy, as well as its relentless pursuit of technologically more advanced weapons, would certainly appear to constitute prima facie evidence of aggressive intent on the part of the West in the eyes of the Russians. The trouble is, it would also seem to be such evidence. This ought to worry us, if peace is our concern.

How do we choose between these rival hypotheses? I have already inveighed against worst-case reasoning, both as a general strategy and in reference to the present situation. In light of the above considerations, "worst case" would seem to be indefinable: what is the upper limit if irrational actions are envisaged? But trying to fix the worst rational case, the worst thing our presumed enemies could do to us insofar as they are rational agents, depends on our assessment of their goals. It cannot sensibly be attempted independently of such appraisals since doing the absolutely worst possible thing with what they have would be utterly insane and thus not worth contemplating as a possible course of action for a rational agent.

What we need is to select the appropriate response to actions lying within a spectrum that can reasonably be thought to include Soviet intentions, given purely defensive intentions on the part of the West. Or at any rate, this is what is needed if that is the correct description of Western intentions. One may be forgiven for sometimes suspecting that something more lurks in the backs of the minds of Western leaders. Perhaps some think that maybe we just could liberate all those unfortunate people in Eastern Europe, break up the Soviet "evil empire," and so forth. It should hardly be necessary to dismiss such ambitions as dangerous fantasies, and I do not suppose that the people who sometimes appear to be harboring such thoughts would for a moment come right out and give public voice to them. But if some are entertaining such ideas, then it will surely be salutary for them to appreciate what is required by genuine commitment to defense only, leaving anything further to the evolution of internal politics in the relevant states. Such is the purpose of the present article.

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would be carefully monitored by satellite. And if Americans are good at anything, it is logistics. Luttwak's article beautifully illustrates the kind of worst-case reasoning needed to frame any sort of case for beefed-up defenses, in my judgment.

The problem of finding an appropriate stance in relation to current Soviet actions, given the history of the past few decades especially, is of course compounded when one does not really know what their intentions are, and compounded further when one does not know how one's actions will be taken by them. But my suggestion is that two guiding principles ought to be followed. (1) One should have a defensive capability that would be sufficient for protection against any likely aggression; and (2) one's actions should be such as (*a*) to make it clear to the putative enemy that they are purely defensive and (*b*) to make it possible for him to respond to one's actions in such a way as to confirm a hypothesis that his actions are likewise defensive if they are—and conversely, to be clearly identifiable as aggressive if that is what they are.

Of course, in adumbrating such principles I am assuming that there is a distinction between defense and aggression. And it must be agreed that the distinction is not always easy to make out. That is why I formulate 2*b* as I do; for it may be that some possible actions would be ambiguous and others clear and that some among the clear ones would be clearly defensive. In those cases, 2*b* is intended to require the agent to choose the latter rather than the former. Clarity is to be preferred because it enables the opposing party to show by his responses what he is up to. If there are countermoves on his part that are the obvious ones to make if his intentions are peaceful, then if he does make them, that is encouraging, and if he does not, then we have justification for the less benign further moves we would then be inclined to make. Thus my point is that my position does not presuppose that the distinction is clear; it requires, instead, that clarity is one of the variables that we can, to a degree, control and our management of which has a crucial bearing on the outcome. Thus a refined notion is not, I think, necessary for immediate purposes.[8]

OPTIONS

It has become customary to distinguish four general nuclear strategies, as follows.

1. *Superiority or first strike capability.*—Enough nuclear weapons to destroy the other side's nuclear capability while retaining further strategic capability.
2. *Parity.*—Roughly match the other side's nuclear capability.
3. *Minimum deterrence.*—Enough strategic nuclear capability to inflict unacceptable damage on the enemy, but not more.
4. *Unilateral nuclear disarmament.*—Dismantle all nuclear weapons, retaining only conventional capability (possibly, at an enhanced level).

The proposal to be advanced in this essay differs from all these, however, lying somewhere between 2 and 3. By way of arguing for it, let us begin with a brief review of each of the four as characterized above.

8. One can hardly do better than consult Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), for a start on this matter; see esp. pt. 2, pp. 56–126.

1. Little needs be said about superiority. It is, for one thing, generally thought to be impossible, given the known ability of the Soviet Union to tag closely along behind every American technological advance. And it is obviously unstable and obviously stimulates the arms race to the maximum possible degree. For if A is known to be working on a system capable of achieving that level by time t, then there is a motivation on the part of B to launch a preemptive strike at $t - x$, where the degree of nervousness generated among all parties approaches infinity as x approaches 0. And obviously it is logically impossible for both sides to pursue this strategy successfully. So an arms race with no possible upper limit is in store for us if either side pursues it; and there being no such upper limit, it is difficult to see how it could ultimately end in any way short of war. It is depressing that American policy has looked, and continues to look, disconcertingly as though it is committed to a superiority strategy.

2. The official stance of each superpower today, no doubt, is parity. But just what is the rationale of parity today? As has repeatedly been pointed out, a credible threat of retaliation against a strategic nuclear attack does not require a similar number of weapons. Perhaps the leaders attach intrinsic significance to parity: if A has more nuclear weapons than B, then A is a Greater Power than B, and being a Great Power is a Good Thing. So the compromise is for both to have an equal number and thus be, at any rate, equally Great Powers.

Neither of the propositions cited commends itself to the sober intellect, especially if we delete the upper case letters. Taken in and of itself, being a Great Power, at least in the military sense, is not a good thing. It is, instead, expensive, dangerous, and in extremely questionable taste at the very least. And having more nuclear weapons than the other fellow, if it means anything, means only that you can kill more people (it probably does not even mean that, considering that each side can kill virtually everybody anyway). Surely, if one proposes to employ that as a criterion of being a Great Power in the first place, one's criteria of greatness are due for a rethink.

In any case, there is a serious problem about embracing parity. To begin with, nobody knows what it is. There are many measures of nuclear strength, and by different measures, different superpowers are stronger.[9] One could in principle, no doubt, negotiate an agreement about what is to constitute parity, but it would be arbitrary. Worse, however, is that it is unstable. The history of arms negotiations in the recent past makes it eminently clear that an agreement specifying levels of this and that type of hardware is treated by each side as an invitation to redouble one's energies at increasing the items not covered and to fudge on every imprecise variable that is agreed on. To aim at parity is, for all practical purposes, to aim at continuing the arms race.

9. See the Harvard Nuclear Study Group's *Living with Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), chap. 6, pp. 115–32, for a thorough explanation.

3. Minimum deterrence has its advocates and is perhaps the most popular stance today among intellectuals. One main problem is that it is impossible to identify it. One thought is that, when you can wreck the other party's country totally, then that is enough if anything is. But perhaps only 25 percent of his country would be enough? Or 10 percent? How do you find out—ask?

Besides this, there is the difficulty that what thus deters would evidently have to be the threat to destroy centers of population, that is, to go in for mass killing. Without a lot of weapons, one could hardly threaten to destroy all the relevant military targets (notably missiles—but if they are cruise missiles, one will not be able to locate them for such purposes—then what?); but apart from people and their property, what else is there? A handful of government buildings, perhaps; but presumably their normal occupants would be exceedingly well protected, notably by being somewhere else at the time.[10]

4. Unilateral nuclear disarmament (UND) also has its attractions. Very intelligent people have come out in favor of it, and it can hardly be laughed off. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that it is politically impractical to the point of fantasy; any politicians running on a UND platform are in for quick and decisive defeat at the polls. And there are the usual questions about nuclear blackmail and the like. Of course there are also the usual questions about the conceivable moral permissibility of nuclear weapons, as well. In the main, however, I wish simply to table this one, especially on the ground that whistling in the dark is not a very profitable activity on this matter.

It should be noted that all the policies I have listed, and the one I shall advocate, are unilateral. Now, obviously one cannot simply object to multilateral arrangements in themselves. It is just that they require at least two parties, and the other party is unlikely to be about to agree to anything we might have to say to him. Or at least, it is so at present. What we need are unilateral initiatives that will stimulate the right kind of response, including perhaps a willingness to come to the bargaining table for a joint solution. The option I propose is a unilateral one, but among its main virtues is that it would set the stage for stable mutual disarmament.

A MODEST PROPOSAL

What would the military establishment of a state really concerned only about defense look like? The answer, I suggest, is fairly simple in general outline: *the offensively usable part of it would look distinctly less formidable than that of its opponents.* If B, the "enemy," has various amounts of various kinds of military hardware and personnel of a type suitable for offensive

10. I am indebted to Terry Tomkow for bringing this home to me, in his paper "Three Cheers for the Arms Race," presented at the Waterloo Conference on Philosophy and Nuclear Arms, Waterloo, September 29, 1984.

warfare, then A ought in general to have clearly less in each relevantly corresponding category, barring special conditions. (Thus, geography might make it easy for state A to attack B in a way that would require B to have an unusually large complement of weapon *X* against which A would have to defend itself.) It should be emphasized that this principle applies to offensive weapons only. Items not usable for offense, if there are any such, would not come under this restriction since no danger of war originating with the state so armed could be traced to its possession of those particular weapons. For instance, antitank wire-guided missiles are of no evident use except for destroying tanks, which are offensive weapons par excellence. A's tank force, on the other hand, should be sufficiently less numerically impressive than B's so as to make it clear that no invasion led by tanks would be possible from A's side. (This criterion is presumably met by NATO in Western Europe.)

Against nuclear missiles there is as yet no defense, though perhaps this will soon change. In the meantime, deterrence is the only option. Thus a state bent only on defense cannot but equip itself with weapons usable for offensive purposes. My proposal, in effect, is that it make clear its defensive stance by limiting itself to a force that could not plausibly be employed to serve basically aggressive purposes. My proposal calls for A opposing B with a force that is clearly quantitatively inferior to that of B by any reasonable measure. In particular, it would use the measures that B has proposed, so long as they are not plainly outrageous. Further, I do not take "quality" into account in general. This is partly because that consideration could become imponderable, which would make application unworkable, and also because presumably no state is going to admit that its weapons are technically inferior, even if they are. The world is not going to take quality into account when A says, But I've got to have more because B's are better! A nuclear-armed state that would attempt a nuclear attack with an inferior force would be committing suicide even more obviously than would one attempting it with a superior force—though it is admittedly questionable why one form of suicide should be intrinsically preferable to another. The point, however, is that quantities of various kinds of arms is a publicizable variable, one that is obviously strongly relevant even if not the only relevant variable and thus suitable for entering into a principle of the present kind, whereas one can hardly require a state to manufacture inferior equipment when it could instead make superior equipment, in its view.[11]

What is the rationale for the present proposal? Two different considerations converge to support it. In the first place, it is assumed that nothing is really lost in the way of defensive security by inferiority as compared with parity or even superiority. Thus the state following my

11. The factor of personnel quality, for instance, is of decisive importance—who would attack the Israeli army with anything short of overwhelming superiority? But obviously this factor cannot enter into the formulation of a principle of the kind I am proposing.

policy will not expose itself to greater risk than is faced by anyone exposed to attack by nuclear missiles. And in the second, this stance offers a clear inducement to the opponent to reduce, and certainly not to increase, his arms establishment. In the eyes of the onlooking world, there would be no doubt as to which superpower is the aggressive one, which is to blame for those of the world's tensions that are due to the possibility of superpower conflict, if one of them is plainly keeping his military forces in a condition which could not permit aggression against the other. And if that other seriously means it in proclaiming—as both presently do, remember—to be concerned only with defense, then the onus would certainly be on the one with the greater force to reduce it under the circumstances. The deescalation ball would be in that one's court. Up until very recently, at least, it has in general been in the court of the West, and we have not picked it up.

Undoubtedly the most disputable of these two assumptions is the first. Hawkish thinkers will contend that one does lose security if one settles for a smaller force than the other side has. The common view is certainly the one I take here, and I can hardly go into this important but technical question here. It will have to stand as an assumption, criticisms of which would need to be refuted. But not here.

Were my policy to be adopted by both sides, then we should be in for a spiral of the opposite kind from what we are presently witnessing. Just as mutual pursuit of superiority tends toward infinity, so, of course, mutual pursuit of inferiority must tend toward zero. I do not offer a detailed proposal about the end point of this process. International inspection procedures and so forth are presumably to be expected since my unilateral initiatives would presumably eventuate in multilateral agreements. And we in the West will expect that at some point the Soviet Union is likely to withdraw from my proposed contest, for it will insist on retaining what is in fact a rather large army for the control of its own captive populace. The political value of this from the Western point of view is evident; and in any case, a force just sufficient for that purpose is not sufficient for mounting an invasion against Western Europe. Thus the primary objective of my proposal would have been achieved.

Whether other nations would retain sizable armies just for show is doubtful. But given the political state of the rest of the world, it must be admitted that there is little basis for expecting a general reduction in arms to insignificant levels. And it must also be admitted that there is little basis for expecting a reduction in the number of wars between various pairs of states. The possession of nuclear weapons by the superpowers, as we know, has done nothing whatever to prevent such wars. It may even have promoted them, as the lesser states can be confident that more than one superpower would never directly intervene in one of its "small" wars for fear of escalation to the nuclear level. Even where one member of the pair is a superpower, if the small state, say B, is small enough, a superpower military establishment much too small for aggressive

use against another superpower might well be large enough for intervention in a war where B is a principal (or in a situation of internal strife in B). At some point, leaders will find war preferable to peace from the point of view of their vision of their state's national interest. When defense is no longer the only consideration, my argument will plainly have no purchase. For these other cases, what is needed is a satisfactory theory of justice between states—satisfactory, that is, not only to the theorists who think it up but also to the leaders of states involved in conflicts of interest of a level that can lead to war, including wars in which one or both superpowers have intervened in one way or another into Third World conflicts. Producing a principle or principles sufficiently sensitive to handle the range of disputes underlying present small-state conflicts is no easy matter. The present article makes no claim to have done that.[12] But the superpowers do claim to be motivated by defensive consideration alone, just as they also claim to agree that only such considerations are permissible for nuclear arms. So my argument should have application to this largest and, from the global perspective, most threatening of arms races.

The major question, surely, is whether defense is the only relevant consideration. It almost certainly is not, de facto. But both powers, as I say, do profess this, and the underlying value judgment, that defense is the only consideration that can justify resort to nuclear arms—if indeed any can—is surely overwhelmingly plausible.[13] Mutual nuclear devastation must surely be worse, from the long-run point of view of each superpower, than the mutual nonattainment of domination, revolution, or whatever might otherwise be aimed at in any possible war between today's great powers. Since that is scarcely deniable, it behooves us to do whatever is necessary to avoid that eventuality. That requires renunciation of any ambitions beyond those of defense, and it requires them of all parties. But the implementation of peace in circumstances of international mistrust requires a careful gauging of others' intentions rather than a cavalier attribution to them of aggressive aims; and it requires that we give others no good reason for attributing such aims to us. The principle, and the proposal, suggested here is the only one I can think of that does not involve extravagent idealism, or at least the appearance of it, and yet offers a clear way to the relaxation of tensions. Any other nonidealistic alternative will leave us where we are now: with an arms race whose dangers increase with each successive wave of "improvements," ending who knows where?[14] Operation on my proposed principle would match

12. Again, Walzer's book has much to offer on these subtle matters.

13. The basic argument is, of course, Hobbesian. For one attempt at a reasonably applicable contemporary formulation, see Jan Narveson, "In Defense of Peace," in *Moral Issues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 59–71.

14. This may be over hasty. I now think, e.g., that the cruise missile is a major improvement over the ballistic missile. It is too slow to use as a first-strike weapon and at the same time invulnerable because portable, so that the enemy could never target them

our military deeds to our oft-reiterated words: namely, by being demonstrably confined to legitimately defensive ends. This would seem to be both the most and the least that can reasonably be asked in a difficult world.

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stably even if it could find them in the first place. To start a nuclear war with cruise missiles, therefore, would be sheerest folly; to retaliate with them, on the other hand, will always be possible. One might almost classify the cruise missile—in its current form—as a "purely defensive weapon." Yet its development will undoubtedly stimulate further developments on the offensive side, in which case my dictum will again apply. Meanwhile, the principle proposed in this article would at least call for the drastic reduction, or perhaps even elimination, of ballistic missiles as the stock of cruise missiles increases.