Ronald Reagan, SDI, and the Nuclear Freeze: Reordering the Ethics of Mass Destruction

A Master's Thesis

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by
Joseph Brown

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ABSTRACT

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By proposing the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Ronald Reagan co-opted the rhetoric of the nuclear freeze movement and reversed the relationship that had previously existed between himself and his anti-nuclear opponents. Prior to Reagan's announcement of SDI, the nuclear freeze movement played the role of the ethically principled critic, denouncing Reagan for perpetuating the nuclear arms race and the policy of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). By adopting a proposal for space-based missile defenses, Reagan took on the role of the peace-loving nuclear critic.

The Strategic Defense Initiative eclipsed the ethical appeals of the nuclear freeze movement, promising the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Ironically, the nuclear freeze movement found itself promoting MAD, because its own proposal to halt the arms race would do nothing to change the dynamic of offensive nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although Reagan openly advocated the expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, he was able to justify his strategic modernization plan as a temporary measure, necessary to preserve America's security until his missile shield could be put in place.

Reagan thus reordered the ethical terms of debate. He appealed to the public's traditional moral sensibilities to win their support for a policy that, on its face, ran counter to those sensibilities – a policy that adhered to a Machiavellian ethics of necessity and served to ensure Reagan's own political success.

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Introduction

In the foreword to his 1997 translation of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*,[1] Boston University international relations professor Angelo M. Codevilla writes that "words are means of exercising power." *The Prince*, Codevilla argues, is an "attack on a political language," an effort by Machiavelli to "discredit a certain conception of human virtue" and present a new conception, based not on "abstract notions of goodness," but on "what men ought to do to attune themselves to the fundamental truth of the world."[2] Machiavelli's aim, according to Codevilla, is to "reorient political morality" – away from classical and Christian notions of objective good and evil and toward "a new ethical framework structured by the concepts of necessity and usefulness."[3] To accomplish this, Machiavelli "capture[s] the word *virtue*, ... disorder[ing] the words of which the concept of virtue consisted" and "reorganiz[ing] them according to his 'new orders' to fight on his side."[4]

Machiavelli himself writes that virtue and vice should not be understood strictly in terms of moral "qualities which bring ... blame or praise." He perceives that "what is done" by successful people is often the opposite of "that which one ought to do," according to traditional morality. As such, Machiavelli advises "a prince, wanting to maintain himself," to behave "according to necessity," because success is a higher virtue than the moral behavior dictated by traditional ethics:

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[1] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, edited by Angelo M. Codevilla (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997).
[2] Angelo M. Codevilla, "Words and Power," in Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Angelo M. Codevilla, ed. xxxiii-xxxvii (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997).
[3] Ibid, xxvii; xxv.
[4] Ibid, xxxvii.

> [L]et him not care about incurring infamy for those vices without which he might hardly save the state; because, if one considers everything well, one will find that something that appears a virtue, if followed, would be his ruin, and that some other thing that appears a vice, if followed, results in his security and well-being.[5]

Machiavelli's prescriptions are particularly relevant to scholars of international relations, because they helped to establish the philosophical basis for realism, the prevailing school of thought in American international relations theory. Hans Morgenthau, one of the intellectual founders of realism, explains:

> Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: *"fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (let justice be done even if the world perish)', but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.[6]

Machiavelli nonetheless observes that abstract ethical formulations, particularly those promulgated by religion, have their uses. Although one must often transgress "against religion" to "maintain the state," Machiavelli contends that "nothing [is] more necessary" than "to seem to have" religion, if one is to be politically successful. The common people ("the vulgar") are impressed by displays of piety, even from leaders who ruthlessly pursue their own interests. Thus, Machiavelli advises a prince to "win and keep the state: and the means will be judged honorable ... because the vulgar are taken by what seems and the outcome."[7]

Angelo Codevilla offers his own analysis of Machiavelli's views on religion and traditional morality. The "central teaching of *The Prince*," Codevilla writes, is that "if inhuman cruelty and animal cunning are verified by reality to be necessary to successful

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[5] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 57-8.
[6] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd edition (New York: Knopf, 1985), 12.
[7] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 67.

human life, then … what passes for human virtue in the minds of most people is false. Even more, the common conception of virtue brings defeat and subjugation to *il vulgo,* 'the many' who hold it."[8] Yet according to Codevilla, "The best verbal flag is the one most saluted."[9] Machiavelli intended for his words to empower "the enlightened few who know what is truly important," but his teachings also demonstrate the rhetorical utility of "the common conception of virtue," in marshalling the behavior of "the unenlightened many."[10]

Twenty years before he authored these words, Codevilla was engaged in his own battle to capture and exploit the concept of virtue. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, as a national debate raged over the United States' nuclear weapons policies, Codevilla and other foreign policy "hawks" sought to defuse the moral critiques of activists and religious leaders who called for an end to the Cold War nuclear arms race. In doing so, they argued that the exigencies imposed by the Soviet nuclear threat should be the primary determinants of U.S. strategic policy.

Codevilla's own rhetoric echoed Machiavelli's ethics of necessity. He saw greater virtue in the actions of "men trying to do the best they can" to protect the United States than in the "moralistic pronouncements" of activists and religious leaders who condemned nuclear weapons as objectively evil.[11] The ethics of Codevilla and most U.S. national security planners required that the United States maintain nuclear "parity" with the Soviet Union, in the interest of deterring a Soviet nuclear attack.

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[8] Codevilla, "Words and Power," in Machiavelli, *The Prince*, xxxv-xxxvi.
[9] Ibid, xxiv.
[10] Ibid, xxxv-xxxvi.
[11] Angelo M. Codevilla, "Justice, War, and Active Defense," in *Justice and War in the Nuclear Age*, Philip F. Lawler, ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1983), 97.

Nevertheless, Codevilla differed from many U.S. policymakers in his advocacy of exotic defensive measures to protect the United States from the Soviet Union's most fearsome weapons – nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles. Codevilla and a cadre of like-minded conservative activists claimed that advanced technology offered the possibility of destroying Soviet missiles in flight. They argued that futuristic anti-missile weapons, based in outer space, provided a morally and militarily superior alternative to the United States' sole reliance on retaliatory threats to ward off a Soviet attack.

Like the religious proponents of the anti-nuclear movement, Codevilla denounced the superpowers' constant threat of reciprocal annihilation, or Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), as a moral failing. Yet Codevilla and the anti-nuclear movement opposed MAD for different reasons. Anti-nuclear activists condemned MAD because it threatened the lives of innocent civilians. Codevilla instead criticized the U.S. government's abandonment, under MAD, of the moral obligation to defend its own citizens. The deterrent threat of retaliation was permissible, according to Codevilla and other missile defense advocates, as long as U.S. leaders also exploited the potential of technology to defend the United States from a nuclear attack, should one occur.

In promoting their plans among U.S. policymakers, the missile defense advocates also touted the rhetorical utility of defensive measures in undercutting the ethical appeals of the anti-nuclear movement. Anti-nuclear activists proposed a "freeze" on the nuclear arms race – a policy that would halt the production of new nuclear weapons, while leaving the morally abhorrent MAD doctrine in place. In contrast, a proposal for a space-based anti-missile shield offered the hope of shifting the United States away from its

reliance on retaliatory threats and toward a defensive posture more compatible with traditional ethics.

This aspect of missile defense appealed to President Ronald Reagan. The nuclear freeze proposal, as it gained support among the general pubic, threatened to derail Reagan's plans to expand the United States' nuclear arsenal. At the same time, ethical critiques of President Reagan's nuclear program – particularly those advanced by members of the American Catholic Church hierarchy – threatened Reagan's 1984 campaign for reelection.

Reagan understood the importance of appealing to the moral sensibilities of the general public. He articulated his own proposal for a space-based missile shield on March 23, 1983, offering Americans the hope of transcending MAD. Expanding upon the claims of Codevilla and the original proponents of space-based strategic defenses, Reagan suggested that, by rendering nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete," his missile shield could "pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate the weapons themselves."[12] Yet Reagan also argued that until the missile shield could be put in place, the United States would need to maintain the credibility of its nuclear deterrent, expanding and modernizing it to keep pace with Soviet advances in nuclear technology.

Like Machiavelli, Ronald Reagan captured the concept of virtue. He co-opted the moral rhetoric of his anti-nuclear critics, positioning himself alongside those who advocated the abolition of nuclear weapons. By proposing a technological escape from Mutual Assured Destruction, Reagan reordered the terms of the ethical debate over U.S. nuclear policy. He appealed to the public's traditional moral sensibilities to gain their acceptance of his strategic modernization program – a plan that adhered to the ethics of

[12] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security" (March 23, 1983).

necessity and, on its face, ran counter to the principles of traditional morality. Reagan's proposal for a space-based anti-missile defense also accomplished another Machiavellian goal, bolstering the president's own political position and helping to ensure his reelection.

Chapter One

Ronald Reagan and the Nuclear Freeze

Ronald Reagan began his first term in office promising to expand and modernize the United States' strategic nuclear arsenal, a massive undertaking that would cost $222 billion over a five year period.[13] At issue was the United States' perceived vulnerability to a new generation of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Larger, more powerful, and more accurate than previous Soviet designs, these missiles could be fitted with multiple independently-targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs), allowing a single ICBM to deliver up to ten 550 kiloton warheads (each yielding the explosive equivalent of 550,000 metric tons of TNT) to different targets in the United States.[14]

During the 1970's, as the Soviet Union began to deploy these new missiles, American nuclear strategists grew concerned that the United States' own ICBM force, consisting of silo-based Minuteman missiles, had become vulnerable to a disarming "first strike" by the Soviet Union. Although the exact capabilities of the new Soviet ICBMs were not known to U.S. strategists, some worried that the missiles were accurate enough to score direct or near-direct hits on the United States' Minuteman silos, destroying them. In a worst-cast scenario, a Soviet first strike that eliminated a substantial proportion of the American ICBM force would rob the United States of the weapons most suitable for a rapid, accurate "second strike" against Soviet targets, particularly those ICBMs not used in the initial attack on the Minutemen. This would leave the United States vulnerable to

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[13] Janne E. Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal: The Politics of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 147.
[14] "R-36M/SS-18 SATAN," GlobalSecurity.org, http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/r-36m-specs.htm (accessed March 15, 2008).

further Soviet missile attacks, if a nuclear conflict lasted beyond the initial exchange of first and second strikes.[15]

Although American strategic doctrine had always relied on the threat of retaliation against Soviet cities ("countervalue" strikes) to deter a Soviet nuclear attack, U.S. strategic planning also called for "counterforce" strikes on Soviet missile sites, to limit the damage to the United States in the event of a protracted nuclear conflict. In his seminal 1960 work, *On Thermonuclear War,* RAND Corporation strategist Herman Kahn stressed the importance of damage-limitation in differentiating between various "tragic but distinguishable postwar states," in which American deaths from a nuclear exchange could range from 2 million to 160 million. Kahn conceded that any nuclear war with the Soviet Union would be disastrous, but he maintained that the prewar actions of U.S. leaders would help to determine the level of disaster endured by the United States – as he put it, whether "the survivors envy the dead." Despite the macabre stakes of such contingency planning, Kahn expressed optimism that with proper preparation, postwar conditions need "not preclude normal and happy lives for the majority of survivors and their descendants."[16]

Given the premium placed (or misplaced) on damage-limitation, the debate over "ICBM vulnerability" came to dominate U.S. defense planning during the 1970's and early 1980's.[17] Alarmist nuclear strategists, including those who advised Ronald Reagan's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns, alleged that the United States faced a "window of vulnerability" until it could match the Soviet Union's arsenal of large, accurate, land-based missiles. While the window of vulnerability persisted, the Soviet

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[15] Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), 387-92.
[16] Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), 20-1.
[17] Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 392.

Union could potentially carry out a disarming first-strike on the U.S. Minuteman force, leaving the United States with only its Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) and its strategic bomber force – weapons not as well suited for conducting damage-limiting counterforce attacks on Soviet missile silos. Proponents of this theory argued that without its ICBMs, the United States would face a choice between surrender and retaliation against Soviet cities, an action that would provoke an overwhelming response by the Soviets, who would still have many ICBMs left over after their initial attack on the U.S. Minuteman force.[18] As early as 1972, Washington Democratic Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson warned that Soviet leaders "might conclude that no American President would order such a [retaliatory] move," greatly undermining the credibility of the United States' nuclear deterrent.[19]

In fact, the window of vulnerability and the doomsday predictions that followed from it were based on a series of unrealistic assumptions about U.S. and Soviet nuclear capabilities. Proponents of the window of vulnerability based their claims on the most generous estimates of the accuracy of the Soviet Union's new ICBMs. These missiles were not accurate enough to destroy all of the U.S. Minuteman force at once, and even if they had been, the Soviet leadership would have taken a very serious gamble by attempting such an attack. American early warning systems would likely have detected the Soviet missile launches, giving the American president an opportunity to launch the Minutemen at the Soviet Union before they could be destroyed. Moreover, even if the Soviet Union had somehow managed to destroy all of the United States' ICBMs, those missiles only accounted for 40 percent of the American strategic nuclear arsenal. The

[18] Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal*, 238-9.
[19] Quoted in Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 388.

other two "legs" of the United States' strategic nuclear triad – the American nuclear submarine and strategic bomber forces – accounted for the remaining 60 percent.[20] The United States maintained more than 5,000 warheads on its submarines alone – enough to devastate the Soviet Union several times over.[21] Senator Jackson's concerns about the credibility of the United States' nuclear deterrent were wildly overblown.

Its implausibility notwithstanding, Ronald Reagan made the window of vulnerability an important campaign issue in the 1980 presidential race. Like the fictive "missile gap" exploited by John F. Kennedy during his own 1960 campaign for the presidency, the window of vulnerability provided a pretext for massive increases in defense spending, in the interest of regaining nuclear "parity" with the Soviet Union.[22] Although incumbent President Jimmy Carter had increased defense spending and commissioned two new "MIRVed" missile designs to compete with the Soviet Union's multiple-warhead ICBMs, Reagan accused Carter of letting America fall far behind in the nuclear arms race. This proved to be an effective political attack, contributing to Reagan's decisive election victory – 51 percent to 41 percent in the popular vote and 489 votes to 49 votes in the Electoral College.[23]

Upon taking office in January 1981, Reagan vowed to rebuild America's defenses, after years of purported neglect. He hoped to gain congressional approval for the deployment of several new weapons systems, including the ten-warhead MX (Missile Experimental) ICBM first proposed by President Carter, the eight-warhead submarine-

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[20] Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal*, 238-9; Strobe Talbott, *Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 120-1.
[21] "NRDC: Nuclear Data – Table of US Strategic Offensive Force Loadings, 1945-2002," Natural Resources Defense Council. http://www.nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/datab1.asp (accessed May 2, 2008).
[22] Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal*, 238-9.
[23] Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Ronald Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 109-10; 189.

launched TRIDENT II missile also proposed by Carter, and the B-1 bomber, a program Carter had canceled in favor of increased cruise missile production. However, Reagan's strategic modernization plan faced two significant obstacles.

The first of these was congressional opposition. Reagan, like Carter, was unable to gain approval for the deployment of the ten-warhead MX ICBM, on the grounds no one had yet found a suitable "basing strategy" for the missile. Congressional critics argued that unless the missile could be hidden, shielded, or placed on a mobile launcher and regularly moved, it would be an easy target for a Soviet first strike. President Carter's final basing proposal called for building an elaborate railroad system that would shuttle 100 MX missiles among 1,400 hardened concrete bunkers, hiding them from Soviet spy satellites and making it difficult for the Soviet Union to disable them without expending a substantial number of its own ICBMs. This strategy proved unworkable, largely because of the difficulty in finding a state or congressional district willing to invite a massive nuclear strike on itself, in the event that the Soviet Union did attempt to destroy the MX missiles. Reagan was unable to negotiate a politically-feasible basing arrangement until his second term in office, eventually settling for the installation of the MX missiles in conventional silos.[24]

The vocal opposition of a growing anti-nuclear movement proved to be a second major obstacle for Reagan's strategic modernization program. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, the American public became increasingly concerned that the United States and the Soviet Union were headed toward nuclear war. U.S.-Soviet relations had deteriorated significantly with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and with President Carter's withdrawal of the SALT II nuclear arms control treaty from Senate

[24] Ibid, 85; 187-9.

consideration in response. Reagan's own hawkish statements led many Americans to believe that the new president did not fully appreciate the apocalyptic consequences of a potential nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

As a presidential candidate, Reagan's defense platform had called for the United States "to achieve overall military and technological superiority over the Soviet Union … to prevail in the event deterrence fails."[25] His suggestion that the United States could somehow "win" a nuclear war was unsettling to many Americans, as was his offhand suggestion, at an October 16, 1981 press conference, that he "could see where you could have an exchange of tactical [nuclear] weapons against troops in the field without it bringing either one of the superpowers into pushing the button" and initiating a broader exchange of strategic weapons, such as ICBMs.[26] (As if to prove that he had not misspoken, Reagan made a virtually identical statement about tactical nuclear weapons at a November 10, 1981 press conference.[27]) Such remarks led a substantial proportion of the American public – 57 percent, according to one January 1983 Harris poll – to fear that President Reagan might involve the United States in a nuclear conflict.[28] Motivated by these fears, many Americans were willing to entertain a proposal, introduced by anti-nuclear activists, for a freeze in the development, testing, and deployment of new nuclear weapons and delivery systems.[29]

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[25] David S. Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent: The Nuclear Freeze and American Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 38-9.
[26] Bernard Gwertzman, "Reagan Clarifies His Statement on Nuclear War," *The New York Times*, October 22, 1981, Section A.
[27] Quoted in Ronald E. Powaski, *March to Armageddon: The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race, 1939 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 191.
[28] Rebecca S. Bjork, *The Strategic Defense Initiative: Symbolic Containment of the Nuclear Threat* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 48.
[29] Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal*, 147-9.

Nuclear freeze proposals were by no means new in American politics. During the 1960's and 1970's, U.S. and Soviet leaders had exchanged several proposals to freeze the deployment of new nuclear weapons, typically when one side felt it had the upper hand in the arms race and hoped to preserve its advantage by instituting a freeze. In 1979, Senator Mark Hatfield, a Republican from Oregon, had introduced his own nuclear freeze proposal as an adjunct to the SALT II arms control treaty then under consideration.[30]

During the late 1970's, a popular movement to enact a nuclear freeze also emerged. This movement drew its initial support from peace organizations that had campaigned against the Vietnam War or in favor of earlier nuclear weapons treaties, such as the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty and the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. (The former banned all but underground nuclear testing, and the latter prohibited the deployment of large-scale anti-ballistic missile defenses by the United States and the Soviet Union.)[31]

The idea that united these organizations – a proposed freeze on the development, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons delivery systems – emerged in early 1979 from discussions among long-time peace activists.[32] Randall Forsberg, a doctoral student in political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, drafted a concise policy proposal for a nuclear freeze, unveiling it in December 1979. Her *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race* advocated a dramatic reversal in the nuclear policies of both superpowers:

> To improve national and international security, the United States and the Soviet Union should stop the nuclear arms race. Specifically, they should adopt a mutual freeze on the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and of

[30] Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent*, 159.
[31] Ibid, 149.
[32] Ibid, 160.

> missiles and new aircraft designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons. This is an essential, verifiable first step toward lessening the risk of nuclear war and reducing the nuclear arsenals.[33]

If enacted, Forsberg's proposal would cap the number of nuclear warheads deployed by the United States and the Soviet Union at existing levels – as of 1979, approximately 11,000 strategic warheads for the United States and 8,000 strategic warheads for the Soviet Union.[34] The nuclear freeze would also halt the development of the weapons delivery systems President Reagan was promoting under his strategic modernization plan, including the MX missile, the TRIDENT II, and the B-1 bomber.

Forsberg expressed hope that her freeze proposal would engage the general public in the debate over arms control, which had previously been confined to elite government and academic circles. She argued that although the "pros and cons of the SALT II Treaty" were "too technical for the patience of the average person," the "simple, straightforward, effective and mutual" nuclear freeze could generate "the scale of public support that is needed to make nuclear arms control efforts successful."[35] Forsberg hoped to rally political moderates and self-styled "average Americans" around the nuclear freeze proposal, based on the commonsense proposition that the nuclear arms race was dangerous and should be stopped.[36]

Forsberg and other nuclear freeze activists worked diligently over the next four years to build a broad base of support for the nuclear freeze and to pressure politicians to endorse the proposal. In 1980, they secured the endorsements of several liberal arms

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[33] Randall C. Forsberg, "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race," reprinted in Douglas C. Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze: An Inside Look at the Politics of a Mass Movement* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 305-7.
[34] "NRDC: Nuclear Data – Figure of US and USSR/Russian Total Strategic Warheads (Force Loadings), 1945-2002," Natural Resources Defense Council, http://www.nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/dafig2.asp (accessed May 2, 2008).
[35] Forsberg, "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race," in Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze*, 307.
[36] Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent*, 161-2.

control organizations, including the Institute for Policy Studies, the United States Peace Council, the Mobilization for Survival, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and Women Strike for Peace. Nuclear freeze activists also gained the support of left-leaning religious organizations, including the American Friends Services Committee (AFSC), Clergy and Laity Concerned, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Two groups with broader membership, the Catholic organization Pax Christi and the National Council of Churches, also lent their support.[37]

However, with the 1980 elections looming, the leaders of the emerging nuclear freeze movement found it difficult to secure the endorsements of major party politicians. Only two Democratic Congressmen – Ronald Dellums of California and Ted Weiss of New York – would offer their support, and freeze advocates were unsuccessful in their effort to add a plank endorsing a nuclear freeze to the 1980 Democratic Party platform. Attempting to fend off Ronald Reagan's challenge to his national security credentials, President Carter instead campaigned on pledges to increase military spending and proceed with the deployment of the MX and TRIDENT II missiles.[38]

The Democratic Party's poor performance in the 1980 elections provided an unlikely boost to the nuclear freeze campaign, which stood out as one of the few success stories in an otherwise dismal year for political progressives. Beginning in 1979, Sister Judith Scheckel of the AFSC and Randy Kehler of Deerfield Massachusetts's Traprock Peace Center had mounted a petition drive to place nuclear freeze referenda on the ballots in local elections throughout Western Massachusetts. Despite the conservative landslide in the 1980 national elections, the nuclear freeze resolutions passed in 59 of the 62

[37] Ibid, 163-4; 172; 175-6.
[38] Ibid, 164, 172.

Massachusetts towns considering them. Ronald Reagan had carried all three state senate districts in which these referenda passed, and he had carried 33 of the 62 towns. The freeze referenda nonetheless received an average of 59 percent support in the town elections, suggesting that the nuclear freeze could appeal to a broad range of voters, including many who had supported Reagan.[39]

Nuclear freeze activists mobilized to promote their proposal at both the local and national levels during the 1982 election cycle. By June 1982, they had secured the passage of nuclear freeze resolutions in 177 Vermont towns, 107 Massachusetts towns, 54 New Hampshire towns, 25 Connecticut towns, 62 Maine towns, and two towns in Delaware. By the summer of 1982, similar resolutions had passed in eight state legislatures, 144 city councils and 31 county councils nationwide.[40]

National public opinion polls also showed substantial support for the nuclear freeze. A March 14-17, 1982 *Los Angeles Times*-CNN poll found that a majority Americans favored a freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons by both superpowers – by a margin of 57 percent to 37 percent – even though 40 percent of the respondents also believed that the Soviet Union possessed a superior nuclear arsenal.[41] (As of 1982, the United States actually possessed a numerical advantage in deployed strategic warheads – approximately 10,300 to the Soviet Union's 8,700.)[42] In May 1982, a nationwide Associated Press-NBC News telephone survey indicated 83 percent approval for the nuclear freeze.[43] Riding this wave of public

[39] Ibid, 173-4.
[40] Ibid, 178; 183.
[41] Untitled/unsigned article, United Press International, March 20, 1982.
[42] "NRDC: Nuclear Data – Table of US Strategic Offensive Force Loadings, 1945-2002"; "NRDC: Nuclear Data – Table of USSR/Russian Strategic Offensive Force Loadings, 1956-2002."
[43] Timothy Harper, "Americans Favor Bilateral Nuclear Disarmament," Associated Press, May 16, 1982.

opinion, the nuclear freeze rapidly accumulated endorsements from members of Congress, gaining the support of 169 House members and 25 senators by June 1982.[44]

On June 12, 1982, nuclear freeze organizers staged one of the largest political demonstrations in American history. Timed to coincide with the United Nations' Second Special Session on Disarmament, the demonstrations drew a million marchers into the streets of New York City, with fifty thousand marching in solidarity through the streets of San Francisco. A diverse group of well-known activists, academics, and celebrities spoke at the associated June 12 rally in New York. More importantly, from the standpoint of Randall Forsberg and others who sought to position the movement within the political mainstream, five Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives came to speak to the assembled crowds, representing districts from New England to Texas. Organizers actually declined requests by Senator Hatfield, a Republican, and Massachusetts Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy to speak at the events, wary of associating the nuclear freeze movement with a potential presidential bid by either senator.[45]

The participation of Democratic lawmakers in the June 1982 demonstrations continued a trend that began earlier that year, in which an increasing number of Democratic lawmakers sought to identify themselves with the nuclear freeze proposal. On February 5, 1982, Massachusetts Congressman Ed Markey circulated a "Dear Colleague" letter, asking members of Congress to endorse a non-binding resolution in favor of a nuclear freeze. Within five days, he gained the support of 28 congressional Democrats, several of whom offered to introduce the resolution for consideration by the

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[44] Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent*, 178; 183.
[45] Ibid, 184-187.

House of Representatives. Leading nuclear freeze organizers hesitated to endorse this move, hoping to build broader support for the resolution, particularly among political moderates and centrist Republicans, before putting it up for a vote. Senator Kennedy forced their hands, however. Eager to claim the nuclear freeze issue for his intended 1984 presidential campaign, Kennedy informed the leaders of the nuclear freeze movement that he would introduce a non-binding freeze resolution in the Senate, with or without their support. With the reluctant backing of the nuclear freeze movement's national leaders, Senator Kennedy and Congressman Jonathan Bingham of New York held a press conference on March 10, 1982, announcing the introduction of the nuclear freeze resolution in both the House and the Senate.[46]

The non-binding nuclear freeze resolution authored by Senator Kennedy and his aides called upon President Reagan to "decide when and how to achieve a mutual verifiable freeze on the testing, production, and further deployment of nuclear warheads, missiles, and other delivery systems." Many of the bill's supporters, including the eventual 1984 Democratic presidential nominee, Walter Mondale, touted the non-binding resolution as a means of pressuring President Reagan to open new arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union. Randall Forsberg, Randy Kehler, and other nuclear freeze activists found the language frustratingly weak, but they had no means of changing it.[47]

Still, Republican legislators were sufficiently concerned about the resolution to introduce their own bill, asking President Reagan to negotiate a nuclear freeze with the Soviet Union *after* both nations agreed on substantial cuts in their nuclear arsenals. As

[46] Ibid, 223-4.
[47] Ibid, 225-7.

such, the "phony freeze" resolution merely affirmed Reagan's existing policy, which called for expanding the American nuclear arsenal to increase the United States' bargaining leverage in subsequent arms control negotiations. The passage of phony freeze bills in both houses of Congress diverted enough support from the Kennedy nuclear freeze resolution to prevent its passage by either house during the 1982 legislative session.[48]

Democrats nonetheless adopted the nuclear freeze as a campaign issue during the 1982 elections. Their gain of 26 House seats (perhaps due, in some degree, to their successful exploitation of the freeze issue) greatly increased the chances that the freeze resolution would pass the House in 1983. Nuclear freeze activists made the passage of the House bill a primary goal for 1983, organizing a "Citizens' Lobby" event that brought 5,000 activists to Capitol Hill on March 7-8, 1983, to promote the freeze resolution. Had President Reagan not persuaded House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Clement Zablocki, a Wisconsin Democrat, to postpone consideration of the bill – on the grounds that its passage would boost West Germany's anti-nuclear Green Party in that country's upcoming elections – the Kennedy nuclear freeze resolution would likely have passed the House of Representatives sometime in March. Reagan's intercession delayed passage of the bill until June 1983, allowing him to announce his own plan to abolish nuclear weapons first.[49]

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The idea of a nuclear freeze appealed to different groups of people for different reasons. Randall Forsberg's *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race* made the case for a

[48] Ibid, 226-227.
[49] Ibid, 228-30.

nuclear freeze on pragmatic grounds, arguing that it would "improve national and international security" by "lessening the risk of nuclear war."[50] Forsberg did not frame her proposal in explicitly ethical terms, instead appealing to the widely-held belief that the nuclear arms race was making the world more dangerous and should therefore be curtailed. This did not, however, preclude other activists from making an ethical case for the nuclear freeze, based on their own religious or philosophical views. In fact, the nuclear freeze movement drew much of its support from religious organizations that endorsed the nuclear freeze on moral grounds.

Of these organizations, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) played a particularly important role in promoting the nuclear freeze. As the leadership body of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, the NCCB represented the largest single religious denomination in the United States, accounting for approximately one quarter of the U.S. population.[51] The NCCB's vocal opposition to the nuclear arms race and its general support for a nuclear freeze (though not for any specific proposal) added substantial moral weight to the nuclear freeze movement's appeals.[52] Additionally, a pastoral letter prepared by the NCCB during the early 1980's challenged the legitimacy of the United States' strategic nuclear doctrine, forcing the Reagan administration to defend its nuclear policies – and attack the nuclear freeze – in explicitly ethical terms.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops was treading well-worn ground in opposing the Reagan administration's nuclear arms buildup. The Vatican had taken a

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[50] Forsberg, "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race," in Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze*, 305-7.
[51] Jim Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb: Waging Peace in a Nuclear Age* (New York: Image Books, 1984), 19; 21.
[52] Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent*, 107.

strong stance against the nuclear arms race in 1965, with the release of the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution: On the Church in the Modern World.* As delivered by Pope Paul VI, the *Pastoral Constitution* condemned the ability of "scientific weapons" to "inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction … far beyond the bounds of legitimate defense." Although the *Pastoral Constitution* acknowledged the possibility that such weapons, used as a "deterrent to possible enemy attack," could preserve "peace of a sort … at the present time," it warned that the arms race was "an utterly treacherous trap" that could "eventually spawn all the lethal ruin whose path it is now making ready."[53]

A November 15, 1968 pastoral letter issued by the NCCB reaffirmed the Second Vatican Council's "condemnation of wars fought without limitation."[54] A November 11, 1976 pastoral letter went even further, condemning the concept of nuclear deterrence itself. The 1976 pastoral letter declared that "not only is it wrong to attack civilian populations, but it is also wrong to threaten to attack them as part of a strategy of deterrence." The letter called for "the continued development and implementation of policies which seek to … remove [nuclear weapons] entirely" from the world.[55]

The NCCB's involvement with the nuclear freeze movement began at the organization's November 1980 annual meeting, when P. Francis Murphy, an Auxiliary Bishop from Baltimore, delivered an informal lecture on the importance of clarifying Catholic Church doctrine on the issue of nuclear weapons. Bishops at the conference expressed interest in revisiting the issue, in light of president-elect Reagan's promise to

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[53] Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution: On the Church in the Modern World – Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965.
[54] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Human Life in Our Day*, November 15, 1968.
[55] Quoted in Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 22.

expand the United States' nuclear arsenal so that the U.S. could "prevail" in a nuclear conflict.[56] Following the November 1980 meeting, the NCCB's general secretary established a committee, led by Archbishop Joseph Bernardin of Cincinnati, Ohio, to produce a pastoral letter explaining the church's teachings on war and peace and, more specifically, on the issue of nuclear weapons.[57] As the nuclear freeze movement gained strength, the Bernardin Committee also considered whether to call for the institution of a nuclear freeze.

In 1981, several American Catholic bishops publicly endorsed the nuclear freeze proposal and spoke out in opposition to President Reagan's defense policies. In October 1981, Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco called upon Catholics to join the nuclear freeze movement and engage in fasting, prayer, and political protest to halt the "madness" of the nuclear arms race.[58] Quinn claimed that the problem of global poverty was "in large part a direct by-product of an arms race out of control." In this sense, he argued, the nuclear arms race was "an appalling form of theft" that "takes lives just as surely as if the weapons produced had actually been put to use." [59]

Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle, Washington, asked Catholics and other religious Americans to withhold half of their federal income taxes to protest U.S. government spending on nuclear weapons. In a June 12, 1981 address to the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Lutheran Church of America, Hunthausen asserted that "the teaching of Jesus tells us to render to a nuclear arms Caesar what that Caesar deserves –

[56] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 13-18.
[57] Ibid, 19.
[58] "Quinn Denounces Arms Race as "Madness," Associated Press, October 4, 1981.
[59] Robert Strand, "The Teaching of the Church is Clear," United Press International, October 3, 1981.

tax resistance."[60] Hunthausen told his Tacoma, Washington, audience that "[w]e must take special responsibility for what is in our own backyard," and "when crimes are being prepared in our name, we must speak plainly." In language that proved to be especially controversial when reported in the press, Hunthausen also characterized the U.S. Navy's TRIDENT nuclear missile submarine program, based in Bangor, Washington, as "the Auschwitz of Puget Sound."[61]

In late 1981, Pope John Paul II became personally involved in the Catholic Church's attempts to influence the Reagan administration's nuclear policies. On November 29, the pontiff announced that he had sent letters to President Reagan and Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev, encouraging the two leaders to take mutual steps to reduce the threat of nuclear war. Two weeks later, the Pope announced that he would be sending separate delegations from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to meet with Reagan and Brezhnev, to present each leader with a paper detailing "the disastrous effects" of a potential nuclear war.[62]

Reagan received the papal representatives when they arrived in Washington. During his meeting with them, he nonetheless reiterated his position that arms reductions could only occur after the United States built its nuclear forces up to parity with those of the Soviet Union. (Reagan's quest for "parity" led him to increase the estimated minimum number of nuclear warheads required to maintain U.S. security – from 8,000 in 1981 to more than 13,000, as of 1989.[63]) To affirm that he understood the apocalyptic

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[60] John R. Long, "Archbishop Attacks Arms Race," United Press International, August 2, 1981.
[61] Wallace Turner, "Tax Refusal Completes Prelate's Moral Journey," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1982.
[62] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 50-1.
[63] Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal*, 241.

stakes of the nuclear competition, Reagan also referenced a passage from the Book of Revelation:[64]

> And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.
>
> And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.
>
> And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.
>
> And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.
>
> And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.[65]

Far from reassured, and not content to leave such matters in Reagan's hands, the United States' Catholic bishops spoke out in increasing numbers to oppose the nuclear arms race and support the nuclear freeze movement. During the early months of 1982, members of Pax Christi U.S.A. circulated a request to the members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, asking for their personal endorsements of the nuclear freeze. Pax Christi, which counted 57 bishops among its membership, had already lent its support to the movement, but the written request generated additional support. By late April 1982, Pax Christi had secured the endorsements of 132 bishops, nearly half of all the active bishops in the United States.[66]

Given the importance of the Catholic vote in the upcoming 1984 election, Reagan's political advisors began to worry about the impact of the Catholic bishops' anti-

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[64] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 50-1.
[65] King James Bible, Revelation 16:16-20.
[66] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 60.

nuclear activism on the president's prospects for reelection. A loss of popularity among American Catholics – a "Catholic problem," to quote one memo circulated by White House religious liaison Morton C. Blackwell – could jeopardize Reagan's chances of winning key states with large Catholic populations.[67]

Reagan had won a plurality, though not a majority, of the Catholic vote in 1980. A CBS/*New York Times* exit poll showed him beating incumbent President Carter by a comfortable 49 percent to 42 percent margin, but the Reagan White House's own data suggested that the margin may have been much slimmer – 47 percent to 46 percent.[68] Reagan was only the second Republican presidential candidate since 1948 to win the Catholic vote, following Richard Nixon's 52 percent to 48 percent victory among Catholics in his successful 1972 race against George McGovern. An "Ethnic/Catholic Strategy" memo authored by White House public relations aide Elizabeth H. Dole attributed Reagan's success among Catholics to his emphasis of "the 'shared values' concept" during the 1980 campaign. Nonetheless, Dole observed that the nuclear freeze was "perhaps the most rapidly-growing issue in the Catholic community." Although "the bishops and clergy are the most vocal elements," Dole noted that "the [nuclear freeze] issue has wide support among the Catholic laity." With the upcoming release of the NCCB pastoral letter on war and peace, she warned that the nuclear freeze was "an issue

[67]Adam Walinsky, "Memorandum to Governor Jimmy Carter," undated memorandum (ca. July-August 1976) appended to Morton C. Blackwell, "Attached Carter Campaign Document," memorandum to Linas Kojelis (August 26, 1983), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA 12450.

[68] Reagan White House poll data taken from Elizabeth H. Dole, "Ethnic/Catholic Strategy," memorandum to James A. Baker III., Michael Deaver, and Edwin Meese III (undated), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA 12450. For CBS/*New York Times* poll, see Gerald Pomper, *The Election of 1984: Reports and Interpretations* (New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1985), 68.

that deserves watching in the Catholic community and could prove to be the 'sleeper' in the next year or so."[69]

A similar strategy document circulated by Morton Blackwell identified the nuclear freeze as the foreign policy issue most likely to affect President Reagan's support among Catholics in the 1984 election. According to Blackwell, polls had shown the nuclear freeze to be "a rapidly escalating issue throughout the United States ... and this trend is no less true among American Catholics." Furthermore, "[t]he Pope's calls for a nuclear arms freeze" had lent "credence to this as an issue and has helped bring together again many of the Catholic activists last united in their opposition to the Vietnam War."[70]

In early 1982, the Reagan administration launched a concerted effort to minimize any potential political damage the American Catholic bishops' anti-nuclear activism might cause to the president and his policy agenda. In a series of letters, high-level administration officials attempted to persuade Archbishop Bernardin and the rest of the committee drafting the NCCB's pastoral letter that the administration's nuclear policies were morally sound, given the overriding imperative to deter a Soviet nuclear attack on the United States. In public statements and newspaper opinion pieces, Reagan and his aides also attempted to rebut the moral critiques of Catholic Church officials who spoke out in opposition to the administration's nuclear policies.

The Reagan administration received its first opportunity to address the Bernardin Committee on February 5, 1982, when Archbishop Bernardin wrote to President Reagan requesting the administration's opinions on issues related to nuclear weapons. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency Director Eugene

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[69]Dole, "Ethnic/Catholic Strategy," memorandum to James A Baker III, et al. (undated).
[70] Morton C. Blackwell, draft strategy memorandum (undated), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA12450.

Rostow, and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger met with the Bernardin Committee on May 13. During the meeting, Weinberger reiterated the administration's position that there could be no large-scale reductions in nuclear arms until the United States built its nuclear forces up to parity with those of the Soviet Union – a task that would take approximately eight years, according to Weinberger, lasting well beyond the end of Reagan's presidency.[71]

In a follow-up letter to the May 13 meeting with the Bernardin Committee, Under Secretary Eagleburger also defended the United States' maintenance of "a nuclear capability … sufficient to convince the leadership of the Soviet Union that starting a war would entail unacceptable costs to their society." Nuclear deterrence, Eagleburger wrote, was the "one realistic strategy to prevent nuclear war" and "the very policy which has prevented holocaust" during the preceding three decades of the Cold War. Abandoning deterrence would be "a terribly dangerous course," he argued, and the adoption of a nuclear freeze "would lock in a Soviet advantage," undermining the prospects for arms control. Eagleburger added that although "[w]e do not enjoy being in a situation in which we have to arm before we can disarm," that was precisely what America's situation required.[72]

The Bernardin Committee finished the first draft of its pastoral letter in late May, 1982, circulating it at a June 12-23 NCCB retreat in Collegeville, Minnesota. The document, titled "God's Hope in a Time of Fear," did not reflect the opinions offered by Weinberger and Eagleburger. The bishops' letter declared that nuclear weapons must be abolished, condemning nuclear deterrence as an "objectively sinful situation" that was "at

[71] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 82-3.
[72] Lawrence S. Eagleburger, letter to Archbishop Joseph Bernardin (May 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA12450.

most ... marginally justifiable" until U.S. and Soviet leaders negotiated mutual agreements for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The letter asserted that as long as nuclear weapons still existed, any "ethically acceptable defense policy" would have to renounce the bombing of civilian targets, the threat to initiate nuclear war, and any use of nuclear weapons that was not expressly retaliatory and limited in scope. A separate section of the draft, titled "Toward the Waging of Peace: An Appeal," called for an "immediate end, by all states, to the further development, production and deployment of major new nuclear weapons and delivery systems." Although the letter never mentioned Randall Forsberg's nuclear freeze proposal, its language was virtually identical to that of her *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race.*[73]

The full text of the draft pastoral letter appeared in the *National Catholic Reporter* as the June 1982 NCCB conference ended.[74] On July 30, President Reagan's National Security Advisor, William P. Clark wrote a letter criticizing the draft pastoral, sending it to Clare Boothe Luce, a member of Reagan's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board who also sat on the board of directors of the Pope John Paul II Center of Prayer and Study for Peace. Although Clark addressed his statements to Luce, he clearly expected her to pass them on to Bishop John O'Connor, who headed the John Paul II Center and sat on the ad hoc committee responsible for drafting the NCCB's pastoral letter on war and peace. [75]

In his letter, Clark accused the Bernardin Committee of harboring "a fundamental misunderstanding … concerning existing U.S. nuclear deterrence policy." Specifically, he sought to convince the committee that "[f]or moral, political, and military reasons," it

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[73] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 87-91.
[74] Ibid, 93.
[75] William P. Clark, letter to Clare Boothe Luce (July 30, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA12450.

was not the policy of the United States "to target Soviet civilian populations as such" – an arbitrary distinction, given the United States' enduring policy of targeting Soviet industrial capacity. Additionally, Clark defended "NATO's strategy of flexible response," which included provisions for the first-use of nuclear weapons in the event of an attack by the Soviet Union's overwhelmingly superior conventional forces in Europe. According to Clark, flexible response had "kept the peace in Europe for over 30 years," and if the Reagan administration adopted the bishops' suggested policy of "no-nuclear first use, deterrence would … be undermined, and the risk of outbreak of war would be increased."[76]

In an August 3, 1982 speech at the centennial commemoration for the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus, President Reagan offered his own critique of the NCCB's draft pastoral letter. Speaking to an audience of 8,000, including 150 prominent Catholic Church officials, eight cardinals, and the Vatican Secretary of State, Reagan thanked the Knights of Columbus for supporting "the morality of maintaining our strategic deterrence." He criticized the nuclear freeze proposal as "obsolete" and "sterile," touting his own plan for the "complete removal of the most threatening intermediate-based (sic) missiles and deep reductions in the number of strategic weapons."[77] Both of these proposals – the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty and the START treaty – were one-sided by design, requiring the Soviet Union to give up its best weapons and allowing the United States to keep its best weapons.[78]

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[76] Idem.
[77] Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan Calls on Catholics in the U.S. to Reject Nuclear Freeze Proposal," *The New York Times,* August 4, 1982.
[78] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There In the Blue,* 153-4.

Secretary of Defense Weinberger was next to denounce the draft pastoral letter. In a September 13, 1982 letter to Archbishop Bernardin, Weinberger repudiated the pastoral letter's call to renounce the first-use of nuclear weapons, claiming that "[o]nly a policy which presents [the Soviet Union] with a credible continuum of response can effectively deter aggression at all levels." According to Weinberger, abandoning the policy of flexible response would "increase the chances of war which, in turn, increases the chances of nuclear war." Weinberger called the pastoral letter's critique of deterrence "troubling," arguing that "the horrible consequences which would accompany war – especially a nuclear war" placed "the burden of proof … upon those who would depart from the sound policies of deterrence which have kept the peace" since the beginning of the Cold War.[79]

Despite the criticism they received from the Reagan administration, the members of the Bernardin Committee made few changes to their pastoral letter before releasing a second draft for public comment in October 1982. The timing of the letter's release was particularly irksome to the Reagan administration, which accused the NCCB of seeking to promote the nuclear freeze resolutions on the November 1982 ballot by releasing the draft letter weeks in advance of their annual convention, which was not scheduled to begin until November 15. The second draft of the pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," reiterated the Bernardin Committee's support for a bilateral freeze on the development and deployment of new nuclear weapons and delivery systems. It also called for the abandonment of first-strike weapons and an end to

[79] Caspar W. Weinberger, letter to Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin (September 13, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA12450.

strategic planning focused on nuclear "war-fighting," as opposed to deterrence.[80] These statements could be interpreted as a challenge to President Reagan's strategic modernization program, because the highly accurate MX and TRIDENT II missiles could easily serve as first-strike or "war-fighting" weapons, if U.S. leaders chose to use them that way.

On November 15, the opening day of the NCCB's 1982 convention, Navy Secretary John P. Lehman, Jr. published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, defending Reagan's strategic modernization program and suggesting that the recommendations of the NCCB's draft pastoral letter "could lead directly to immoral consequences," if adopted. Lehman, who may not have been aware of National Security Advisor William Clark's earlier claim that the United States did *not* target population centers, acknowledged that "American strategy has long been predicated on the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction, which essentially holds both the U.S. and Soviet populations hostage to retaliation." He argued that President Reagan's effort to build new counterforce weapons, such as the MX missile and the TRIDENT II, would "move the U.S. away from the hair-trigger … implications of such a posture." According to Lehman, "the nuclear freeze advocated by the bishops would arrest this change – in effect, freezing us in the very posture of Mutual Assured Destruction that the bishops oppose."[81]

In a November 16 letter to Archbishop Bernardin, William Clark expressed the Reagan administration's "regret … that the Committee's latest draft continues to reflect fundamental misreadings of American policies, and continues essentially to ignore" the

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[80] Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 99-105; 118; 126.
[81] John P. Lehman Jr., "The U.S. Catholic Bishops and Nuclear Arms," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 1982.

Reagan administration's efforts at "further reducing the risks of war" through arms control. A careful consideration of these efforts, Clark wrote, "should lead to the Bishops' Conference (sic) strong support for them," and would also demonstrate that the nation's deterrent posture was "morally defensible." Clark added that "[a]s we continue our earnest efforts toward genuine peace, to turn our backs on a course that has kept the peace for over three decades … would increase the risks of war and endanger the cause of freedom throughout the world." [82]

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Throughout 1982, the Reagan administration invoked the ethics of necessity to defend the president's nuclear policies against the moral critiques of the nuclear freeze movement and its religious supporters. Administration officials defended nuclear deterrence as the only plausible strategy for preventing nuclear war. They defended NATO's policy of flexible response, which relied upon the threat of nuclear "first-use," as the only means of deterring an attack by the Soviet Union's numerically superior conventional forces in Europe. Administration officials also defended President Reagan's strategic modernization program, stressing the need to maintain the United States' nuclear deterrent, and the possibility of moving the United States away from the posture of Mutual Assured Destruction, as future advances in technology permitted more precise targeting of Soviet military assets. This emphasis on the ameliorative potential of technology would figure prominently in the administration's subsequent promotion of space-based missile defenses as an ethically superior alternative to the nuclear freeze proposal.

[82] William P. Clark, letter to Archbishop Joseph Bernardin and enclosures (November 16, 1982), OA12450.

Chapter Two

Missile Defense Advocates

As the Reagan administration sought to defend the president's nuclear policies against the moral critiques of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, a group of conservative activists lobbied the White House, attempting to convince President Reagan of the merits of space-based missile defenses. The missile defense advocates argued their case on both practical and ethical grounds. In practical terms, they claimed that destroying Soviet missiles in space would negate the Soviet Union's apparent superiority in offensive weapons, conferring a substantial military advantage on the United States. In ethical terms, they claimed to offer the U.S. government a means of satisfying its moral obligation to defend the American population – an obligation that remained unfulfilled by the United States' sole reliance on offensive deterrence to keep the Soviet nuclear threat at bay. Additionally, the missile defense advocates argued that space-based strategic defenses would move the United States away from its posture of offensive deterrence and toward a defensive posture that better comported with traditional ethics.

However persuasive these assertions might have been in their own right, the missile defense advocates were unable to provide any scientific proof that space-based strategic defenses could actually work. Their practical arguments in favor of missile defense evaporated when it became clear that shooting down Soviet ICBMs from space was simply not possible, given the limits of modern technology. Nonetheless, the missile defense advocates soon realized that they had a more convincing case to make, by touting the political utility of strategic defense. This argument found traction with President

Reagan, who perceived that strategic defense, its scientific merits aside, held great promise as a rhetorical counter to the ethical arguments of his anti-nuclear opponents.

Strategic defense was not a new concept in the early 1980's, when it emerged as an issue in the public debate over President Reagan's nuclear policies. The United States military had previously deployed missile defenses, and had quickly discovered their limitations. In 1975, the U.S. Army activated the SAFEGUARD system, a battery of one hundred nuclear-tipped anti-ballistic missiles intended to protect the Minuteman ICBM silos at Grand Forks, North Dakota. The system remained in operation for less than a year. When members of Congress discovered how easily SAFEGUARD could be disabled – by a large-scale Soviet attack or by the electromagnetic pulses from its own detonating warheads – Congress canceled the program.[83]

The Pentagon continued to fund research on ballistic missile defense, but the practical impact of this research was limited by the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.[84] Signed in 1972, this treaty restricted the United States and the Soviet Union to the deployment of one anti-ballistic missile system each. It also forbade the installation of nationwide ABM defenses by either superpower. After the failure of SAFEGUARD, the United States opted not to install another limited missile defense system. The Soviet Union, however, maintained a battery of nuclear-tipped anti-ballistic missiles, positioned to defend Moscow in the event of an American nuclear attack.[85]

During the late 1970's, conservatives in the political, scientific, and philanthropic communities sought to redress the United States' vulnerability to Soviet nuclear attack, a

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[83] Donald Baucom, *The Origins of SDI, 1944-1983* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 91-7.
[84] Ibid, 99-100.
[85] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 116.

problem that seemed more significant in light of the Soviet Union's recent advances in ICBM technology. These missile defense advocates fell into three loosely-defined camps, each promoting its own vision for a comprehensive, space-based strategic defense – the ABM Treaty notwithstanding.

The first of these camps to emerge was that led by Senator Malcolm Wallop, a Republican from Wyoming, and his staff assistant, Angelo Codevilla. Elected to the Senate in 1976, Wallop earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at Yale University, served in the U.S. Army from 1955 to 1957, and pursued a career as a businessman and cattle rancher. He later ran for a seat in the Wyoming State House of Representatives, serving from 1969 to 1971, and was elected to Wyoming's State Senate, serving from 1973 to 1976.[86] Wallop began his first U.S. Senate term in 1977, taking a seat on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Despite his Army background, Wallop was new to the planning aspect of national security policy, and he quickly hired Codevilla, then a general assistant to the committee, to serve on his personal staff.[87] Codevilla had earned a Ph.D in security studies, U.S. foreign policy, and political theory from the Claremont Graduate School, studying with neoconservative founding father Leo Strauss. Codevilla had also served as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy and had worked as a staff assistant to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, beginning in 1975.[88] It was Codevilla who introduced Wallop to the topic of missile defense.[89]

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[86] "Wallop, Malcolm – Biographical Information," United States Senate, http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=w000092 (accessed February 20, 2008).
[87] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 123.
[88] Idem; "The Claremont Institute – Angelo M. Codevilla," The Claremont Institute, http://www.claremont.org/scholars/scholarid.25/scholar.asp (accessed February 20, 2008); Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 122; for connection to Leo Strauss, see "James Madison Program," Princeton University, http://web.princeton.edu/sites/jmadison/people/archives/fellows0304.html (accessed February 20, 2008).
[89] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 122.

Codevilla and Wallop delved into the arcane world of nuclear strategy during their work together on the Senate Intelligence Committee. Both took alarm at the Soviet Union's buildup of larger ICBMs during the early and mid-1970's. They also learned about emerging optical technologies used by American spy satellites and about high-tech infrared sensing equipment that provided detailed information on Soviet missile tests. By Codevilla's account, both men came to believe that these satellite technologies made space-based ballistic missile defense a real possibility, and that missile defense would be "the most effective way of dealing with Soviet missile superiority."[90]

Wallop and Codevilla developed a particular concept of missile defense, following Codevilla's chance encounter with Maxwell Hunter, a Lockheed Corporation aerospace engineer, at a conference on strategic defense in 1978. Hunter had worked on missile defense projects for Lockheed since the late 1960's, searching for a technologically feasible means of defending U.S. missile silos from nuclear attack. He had completed a confidential study (the "Halloween Paper") on October 31, 1977, arguing that space-based laser "battle stations" could be used to defend the U.S. Minuteman force. Hunter suggested that lasers were particularly well-suited to ballistic missile defense, because light traveled from point to point almost instantly. With sufficient power, he claimed, lasers positioned in outer space could disable Soviet missiles in the earliest stage of their flight – before they left Earth's atmosphere, picked up speed, and released their warheads.[91]

Hunter convinced Wallop and Codevilla that a system of orbiting lasers offered the best hope of defending the United States against Soviet ICBMs. In the summer of

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[90] Angelo M. Codevilla, *While Others Build: The Commonsense Approach to the Strategic Defense Initiative* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 58-66.
[91] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 114-122.

1979, Codevilla drafted an article outlining a plan for space-based laser defenses, which Wallop then submitted for publication in the journal, *Strategic Review,* under his own byline. The article appeared in the fall 1979 issue.[92]

Wallop's proposal called for a constellation of orbiting "battle stations" very similar to those envisioned by Hunter in his Halloween Paper. According to Wallop, these battle stations would be armed with infrared lasers powered by "the rather simple process of burning chemical fuel (chiefly hydrogen and fluorine)." Wallop acknowledged that these exotic devices would require complex optical, remote sensing, and computer systems if they were to track, target, and "kill" Soviet missiles in flight. Nonetheless, he confidently asserted that the necessary components were "within reach of existing technology" or had already been developed, needing only minor adaptation before they could be applied to missile defense. According to Wallop, "an all-out effort on the scale of the Manhattan Project" could produce "a full-fledged defense ... well before the close of the 1980's."[93]

Wallop's scientific claims were wildly inflated. A Pentagon analysis of his *Strategic Review* article later found that he had presupposed technological advances that might or might not occur. Even assuming that the necessary technologies could be developed, the Pentagon study estimated that an effective defense based on the systems Wallop described would require the deployment of 1,444 battle stations at a cost of $1.5 trillion.[94]

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[92] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue,* 123.
[93] Malcolm Wallop, "Opportunities and Imperatives of Ballistic Missile Defense," *Strategic Review* (Fall 1979): 18-21.
[94] Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue,* 124.

Despite the speculative nature of their missile defense proposal, Wallop and Codevilla were able to secure millions of dollars in federal funding for research into chemical laser technology. They arranged a series of informal briefings by employees of the defense contractors who would produce the various laser, optical, and tracking components for their proposed laser battle stations.[95] Pentagon officials warned that these briefings were highly unrealistic, but some senators who attended were clearly impressed. The Senate Armed Services Committee allocated $68 million for laser research in 1979. Wallop failed to secure an increase of $160 million for laser research in 1980, but his "laser lobby" of Senate allies pressured President Carter's defense secretary into initiating a multi-year study of space-based laser defenses. Additionally, the Department of Defense shifted the focus of its existing laser research program to align with Wallop's missile defense concepts, as outlined in his *Strategic Review* article.[96]

Wallop was able to present his ideas to Ronald Reagan during the 1980 presidential campaign. He sent Reagan a draft of his *Strategic Review* article and later discussed it with him at a social event hosted by Nevada Republican Senator Paul Laxalt. During the conversation, Reagan agreed to take up ballistic missile defense as a campaign issue, but his political advisors, John Sears and Michael Deaver, subsequently convinced him to abandon the idea. Reagan had already committed himself to a massive strategic modernization program, and his advisors worried that if their candidate spent too much time discussing nuclear weapons, he might be perceived as a warmonger.[97]

Even after Reagan's election, Wallop and Codevilla were unable to secure an increase in research funding for their missile defense plan. The Pentagon proved resistant

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[95] Ibid, 123; Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 126-7.
[96] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 124.
[97] Ibid, 100; 124.

to a proposal conceived by two men with no technical expertise, and Wallop lacked a seat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, which controlled the defense budgeting process. Wallop's personal overtures to Reagan proved unfruitful, and when the president's Defense Science Board completed the laser study commissioned by the Carter administration, it found that chemical laser technology was not yet mature enough to merit a major defense emphasis. By 1982, Wallop and Codevilla had exhausted all of their avenues of appeal and were forced to admit defeat.[98]

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Lieutenant General Daniel Orrin Graham and his "High Frontier" organization comprised the second major camp of missile defense advocates. A West Point graduate from the class of 1946, Graham spent most of his Army career serving in the Cold War hot spots of West Germany, Korea, and Vietnam, before finding a niche in Army intelligence. He spent the period from 1963 to 1971 working as a military analyst "on loan" to the CIA's Office of National Estimates (ONE) and served as the Deputy Director of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) from 1971 to 1973. From 1973 to 1974, Graham served as the Deputy Director of the CIA, before taking over as Director of the DIA in August 1974. He relinquished his post and retired from government service on January 1, 1976.[99]

A staunch political conservative, Graham worked as a consultant to Ronald Reagan's 1976 campaign to unseat President Gerald Ford, a fellow Republican.[100] He also served as a member of "Team B," a panel commissioned in 1976 by CIA Director George H.W. Bush to provide an independent assessment of the Soviet nuclear threat.

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[98] Ibid, 129-131; 143-4.
[99] Daniel O. Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior* (Fairfax, VA: Preview Press, 1995), 19-98.
[100] Ibid, 101.

Established at the urging of defense hawks on President Ford's Foreign Intelligence Advisory board, who felt that the CIA had underestimated the danger posed by the Soviet nuclear buildup, Team B was stacked with anti-Soviet hardliners. The panel's December 1976 report reached predictable conclusions, arguing that the Soviet Union's new ICBMs posed a grave threat to the United States, and that if the United States did not make a concerted effort to regain nuclear parity, the Soviet Union would soon achieve the ability to prevail in a nuclear war.[101]

Through his work on Team B, Graham developed a very pessimistic view of the United States' ability to deter a Soviet nuclear attack. In his memoirs, he writes that it was "quite clear" that the Soviet Union was "not about to accept" the vulnerability that stemmed from Mutual Assured Destruction. Instead, Graham argues, the Soviet leadership had built up a nuclear arsenal "adequate to decimate" the U.S. ICBM force and "destroy all our major cities if U.S. retaliation should occur." Meanwhile, "the United States, deeply committed to Mutual Assured Destruction," had developed weapons "to kill millions of Soviet citizens who could do it no harm, [only to] find that its own military forces, as well as its citizens, [were] becoming ever more vulnerable."[102]

In 1976, Graham began searching for a way to extricate the United States from MAD. In his memoirs, he praises Ronald Reagan for "expressing his doubts about the wisdom of the Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine" during the 1976 presidential campaign, and for challenging the military to come up with a better solution

[101] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 83.
[102] Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior*, 103; 109-123.

to the nation's nuclear security dilemma. Graham recalls, regretfully, that "[i]n 1976, I couldn't come up with anything better, and I didn't know anyone who could."[103]

Graham subsequently encountered someone who claimed to have discovered a way out of MAD. In 1979, he enlisted the help of Angelo Codevilla in developing the manuscript for *Shall America Be Defended?: SALT II and Beyond*, a comprehensive indictment of President Carter's proposed arms control treaty with the Soviet Union. By 1979, Codevilla was already deeply involved in own his work with Senator Wallop, trying to build congressional support for a space-based strategic defense system employing chemical lasers. *Shall America Be Defended* consists largely of Graham's military analysis of the superpower standoff in Europe, but its advocacy of "active defense, the destruction of attacking missiles in flight," hints at Codevilla's influence.[104]

As a consultant to Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, Graham convened an informal "group of strategic thinkers" to evaluate the potential of space-based missile defenses to "end run the MAD doctrine." By Graham's account, the retired military officers and scientists on his panel agreed that the United States' advantage over the Soviet Union in aerospace and computer technology "provided an opportunity ... to change our strategy" from the offensive deterrence of MAD to a strategy "emphasizing protection."[105] Graham presented these ideas to Reagan in February 1980. He found a sympathetic audience in the presidential candidate, who had already expressed his own distaste for MAD. However, like Senator Wallop, Graham was thwarted by Reagan's political advisors, who had persuaded their candidate to shelve the issue of strategic

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[103] Ibid, 102-3.
[104] Graham, *Shall America Be Defended?: SALT II and Beyond* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1979), 122-4.
[105] Idem.

defense for the duration of the 1980 presidential campaign.[106] Frustrated but not defeated, Graham spent the next three years pressuring the new Reagan administration to pursue a ballistic missile defense system based in outer space.

In the spring of 1981, Graham published an article in *Strategic Review*, outlining his own plan for a space-based missile shield. Graham's proposed system would rely upon small, highly maneuverable space vehicles, each with a single human pilot. These vehicles would spring into action upon warning of a Soviet attack, intercepting and destroying Soviet ICBMs with projectile weapons.[107] In his memoirs, Graham admits that "the technology aspects" of this plan were "not very sound."[108] He subsequently revised his proposal to emphasize unmanned orbital weapons batteries, which would engage Soviet missiles with guided kinetic energy weapons – so-called "hit-to-kill" devices.[109]

Graham delivered a presentation on his ideas at a May 1981 national security conference in Washington, DC. There, he met Karl R. Bendetsen, a former undersecretary of the Navy who took interest in Graham's imaginative missile defense plan.[110] Using his own connections to deep-pocketed Republican financiers, Bendetsen helped Graham raise enough money to found the High Frontier organization, a non-profit educational charity that would promote Graham's strategic defense concepts. Bendetsen also recruited long-time friends of President Reagan to staff a special study group, which would draft a policy paper on missile defense and present it to the president. The study

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[106] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 132-3.
[107] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 126-127.
[108] Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior*, 117.
[109] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 127.
[110] Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior*, 114.

group included several wealthy businessmen, as well as Dr. Edward Teller, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb.[111]

Completed in November 1981, the High Frontier policy paper echoed Graham's earlier proposal for a system of unmanned orbiting weapons platforms.[112] The panel condensed its recommendations into President Reagan's preferred "mini-memo" format (issue presentations could be no more than four paragraphs and a maximum of one page long[113]) and presented it to Reagan on January 8, 1982. The brief report stressed that the United States could only defeat the Soviet nuclear threat by exploiting high technology, and it urged the president to appoint a task force to determine which specific technologies would be required for the construction of a space-based missile defense system. According to the High Frontier panel, the United States could produce such defenses with an effort akin to the Manhattan Project, protecting the American population and replacing the pernicious doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction with a strategy of "assured survival."[114]

Graham did not attend the meeting with President Reagan. By his own account, he was not invited.[115] In November 1981, Graham and Edward Teller had become locked in a major dispute over which technologies were best suited for use in a space-based missile defense system. Graham favored kinetic-energy interceptors using "off the shelf" technology, but Teller impressed the other members of the panel with talk of an experimental X-ray laser he was developing in his work at the Lawrence Livermore

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[111] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI,* 145-9.
[112] Ibid, 151.
[113] William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Back Yard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 193.
[114] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 153.
[115] Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior*, 140-1.

National Laboratory in California. Teller touted the X-ray laser as a revolutionary technology capable of protecting U.S. population centers, while Graham stressed the importance of protecting U.S. missile silos, first and foremost. Graham's unwillingness to compromise on his approach to missile defense alienated the rest of the panel, and he soon found himself ostracized from the group he had helped to found.[116]

Graham subsequently produced his own version of the High Frontier study, publishing it in March 1983 with the help of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. Graham's *High Frontier: A New National Strategy* called for a multi-layered defense against Soviet ballistic missiles, which would be deployed incrementally, first addressing the United States' most immediate vulnerabilities, then expanding to provide a more comprehensive defense against the Soviet missile threat. Initially, Graham's plan would provide "point defense" for American missile silos, guarding against a disarming first strike by large, multiple-warhead Soviet ICBMs. This system would fire "a large number of small conventional projectiles" to destroy incoming warheads at a distance of "about one mile" from each silo. The second stage of Graham's plan called for the construction of "a multiple vehicle, orbiting system," using "off-the-shelf hardware," to destroy Soviet missiles with kinetic energy "kill vehicles."[117]

Graham claimed that his elaborate plan could be enacted with remarkably little government expenditure. He estimated that the point defense system could be purchased for between $2 and $5 million per silo, and that the "spaceborne" system could be procured "at a minimum cost of some $10-15 billion." According to Graham, the cost of implementing his proposal compared "favorably with the Apollo Moon-landing program"

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[116] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue,* 134-135.
[117] Daniel O. Graham, *High Frontier: A New National Strategy* (Washington, DC: High Frontier, 1983), 7-8.

and could not, therefore, be "characterized as unrealistically expensive." Additionally, Graham predicted that the entire missile defense system would be "ready for deployment in 1990."[118]

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Edward Teller led his own campaign to promote space-based missile defenses, proposing a strategic defense system based around the experimental X-ray laser he had helped to conceive in his work at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Although the X-ray laser was an entirely new technology when Teller began promoting it in 1980, the physical device used to generate the laser beam was an outgrowth of one of Teller's earlier inventions: the hydrogen bomb.

Teller had played an important role in the United States' nuclear weapons research programs since the 1940's. He worked on the Manhattan Project, which produced the first atomic bombs, powered by the process of nuclear fission. Teller also led the team of scientists that developed the first fusion bomb – a two-stage fission/fusion device incorporating a heavy hydrogen isotope within its fusion stage. Successfully tested in November 1952, Teller's hydrogen bomb increased the explosive yield of nuclear weapons nearly a thousand-fold. (The initial "Ivy Mike" test on November 1, 1952 yielded 10.4 megatons, compared to the 13 kiloton yield of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.)[119]

Teller's X-ray laser drew its power from the detonation of a small hydrogen bomb, the only energy source potent enough to generate an X-ray laser beam. The X-ray laser was more powerful than other lasers, due to the shorter wavelength of X-rays

[118] Ibid, 7-9.
[119] Ronald E. Powaski, *March to Armageddon: The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race, 1939 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 53.

compared to infrared, visible, or ultraviolet light. The device used to produce the beam was also relatively small, compared to chemical laser devices. This suggested to Teller that a fully-developed version of the X-ray laser might have applications in space-based strategic defenses.[120]

In February 1981, Teller traveled to Washington, DC, to brief members of Congress on the military potential of the X-ray laser, dubbed "Excalibur" by the Lawrence Livermore scientists. By coincidence, Karl Bendetsen happened to be recruiting members for the High Frontier panel at roughly this time. Bendetsen invited Teller to join the group, inaugurating an ill-fated partnership between Teller and Daniel O. Graham. The two clashed repeatedly over the practicality of Graham's space-based kinetic energy weapons and over the role strategic defense should play in U.S. nuclear strategy. Graham argued that any strategic defense system should be tailored to protect the United States' nuclear arsenal, first and foremost. Teller disagreed, claiming that his Excalibur device could provide a comprehensive defense for American population centers – a more admirable goal, in his opinion.[121]

At meetings of the High Frontier Panel, Teller spoke glowingly of the X-ray laser, making sweeping claims about its potential for thwarting a large-scale Soviet attack and describing the experimental laser as if it were already a proven technology. According to Teller, a fully-developed version of Excalibur would consist of a small hydrogen bomb surrounded by metal rods, which would produce X-rays when saturated with energy from the bomb's nuclear blast. Excalibur devices would be kept onboard submarines or in other protected locations and would be "popped up" into space on their own rockets in

[120] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue,* 127-9.
[121] Ibid, 127-9; 132-5.

the event of a Soviet missile attack. Once in orbit, they would train their laser-generating rods on incoming Soviet ICBMs and self-detonate to destroy the missiles with powerful beams of X-ray light.[122]

The other members of the High Frontier panel accepted much of what Teller told them. Although Teller did not attend the panel's January 1982 meeting with President Reagan, other panel members argued forcefully for the full-scale development of his Excalibur device. Reagan responded by tasking White House Science Advisor George A. Keyworth II to set up a special commission to evaluate the military potential of X-ray laser technology.[123]

Teller and Keyworth were close friends (Teller had personally recommended Keyworth for the job of White House Science Advisor), but in private conversations with other White House officials, Keyworth dismissed the X-ray laser as a long-term research project that would have to meet significant technical challenges before it could be used as part of a defense against ballistic missiles. Keyworth also omitted Teller from the expert panel established to evaluate the X-ray laser. In June 1982, when the panel interviewed scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory on the status of X-ray laser research, the scientists undercut Teller's optimistic claims about the Excalibur device. Even with an additional $150 to $200 million in research funding, the scientists estimated that a weaponized version of Excalibur could not be produced until the mid-1990's – assuming it could be produced at all. In the fall of 1982, Keyworth's panel determined that the X-ray laser was not yet a viable military technology. Teller insisted that the

[122] Ibid, 134-5; Bendetsen letter quoted on p.135.
[123] Ibid, 136-7.

panel review the X-ray laser again, but in February 1983, Roy Woodruff, director of the Livermore Lab's nuclear programs, gave an even more pessimistic assessment.[124]

As the independent panel was undertaking its multiple studies of Excalibur, Teller attempted to secure a personal audience with President Reagan so that he could explain the X-ray laser's potential to the president directly. Teller's efforts to pressure Keyworth into setting up such a meeting failed, but he was able to force the issue by arranging a June 1982 television appearance on William F. Buckley, Jr.'s PBS program, *Firing Line*. During the interview, Teller claimed that he had made significant discoveries in anti-missile technology, which could help to restore the strategic balance between the United States and the Soviet Union. He complained that although he had "tried ... to get action" from the Reagan administration to explore these promising new developments, he had "not had a single occasion" to speak with the president in person.[125]

This public shaming strategy paid off. Teller received his audience with Reagan on September 14, 1982, at a meeting that also included Vice President George H.W. Bush, National Security Advisor William Clark, Attorney General Edwin Meese, George Keyworth, and Sydell Gold, a nuclear policy expert from Reagan's National Security Council. In his memoirs, Teller recalls that despite his best efforts "to present the information about the developments in defense … and to emphasize the timeliness" of pursuing research on strategic defense, "Ms. Gold injected so many questions and caveats that I felt discouraged about the conference."[126]

Nonetheless, Teller was able to convince Keyworth to establish another panel to investigate the issue of strategic defense – this time including Teller among the

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[124] Ibid, 139-141.
[125] PBS, *Firing Line*, June 15, 1982.
[126] Teller, *Memoirs*, 530.

participants. Predictably, the panel's January 1983 report to President Reagan spoke favorably about the X-ray laser's potential to protect the United States from a Soviet nuclear attack. Teller also provided a set of draft remarks for inclusion in President Reagan's 1983 State of the Union address. Unsolicited by Reagan, the remarks called for the replacement of the "anachronistic doctrine of MAD" with a doctrine of "assured survival," facilitated by "new and revolutionary" strategic defense concepts. Karl Bendetsen provided the draft remarks to George Keyworth and Reagan speechwriter Anthony Dolan, but Reagan did not use them in his State of the Union address.[127]

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Although their scientific claims were easily refuted, the missile defense advocates were able to make more convincing arguments for their proposals on ethical grounds. Prior to the emergence of the nuclear freeze movement as a major political force, the advocates of missile defense touted their proposals in pragmatic terms, appealing to the ethics of necessity. However, as the religious proponents of the nuclear freeze became increasingly vocal in their critique of U.S. nuclear policy, the missile defense advocates began to mix appeals to traditional morality with their appeals to pragmatism.

In his 1979 *Strategic Review* article, ghostwritten by Angelo Codevilla, Malcolm Wallop advocated the construction of strategic missile defenses as a means of ensuring the United States' national security. He sought to undermine the credibility of MAD – a "delusion," in his opinion, which "appealed to the messianic streak in the American ethos" by promising to make war between the superpowers unthinkable. According to Wallop, the Soviet Union had "never shared" the United States' commitment to "the MAD phantom." Nuclear war was not "unthinkable" for Soviet leaders, in practical or

[127] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 145-6.

moral terms, and the Soviets had developed "a rational war-fighting strategy" to prevail in a nuclear conflict, if necessary. Wallop warned that although the United States had tailored its own nuclear arsenal to meet the requirements of MAD, building weapons suitable only for "inflicting damage upon the enemy's society," the Soviet Union had built a new generation of "missiles unambiguously capable of a rational military act – that of largely disarming the United States."[128]

To counter the Soviet Union's purported nuclear superiority and ensure that the Soviets would not undertake the "rational military act" of initiating a nuclear war, Wallop urged his fellow policymakers to turn their "attention to the realistic task of affording maximal protection for our society in the event of conflict." The best way to do this, he argued, was to construct space-based strategic defenses employing his preferred technology, the chemical laser. Wallop claimed that strategic defense held "the promise of barring nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles of mass destruction from the arena of war," potentially saving "millions of lives," if war were to break out between the superpowers. According to Wallop, strategic defense would enable the United States to transition away from its strategy of "Assured Destruction" to a strategy of "Assured Protection," giving the U.S. "an enormous strategic advantage" over the Soviet Union. In light of all the practical benefits he ascribed to space-based strategic defenses, Wallop asked, "[W]hat responsible American official could counsel rationally that the United States deliberately forfeit the opportunity of effective defense?"[129]

Daniel O. Graham initially promoted his own proposal for space-based strategic defenses on similar grounds. Like Wallop, Graham rejected MAD, viewing it, at best, as

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[128] Wallop, "Opportunities and Imperatives of Ballistic Missile Defense," *Strategic Review* (Fall 1979): 13-15.
[129] Ibid, 13-15; 20-1.

a rhetorical disguise for the United States' pursuit of nuclear superiority. In his autobiography, Graham writes that MAD was "an acceptable notion so long as the balance of nuclear power heavily favored the United States and destruction would obviously *not* be 'mutual.'" MAD "lost its validity when we deliberately allowed the Soviets to match us" and it "became downright scary" when the United States allowed the Soviet Union "to surpass us in nuclear strike weaponry."[130] Graham's advocacy of strategic defense can thus be seen as an attempt to shift the advantage in strategic nuclear capabilities back to the United States, where, in his opinion, it rightfully belonged.

In arguing against the "suicide pact" of MAD and in favor of strategic defense, Graham attempted to dispel the widespread (and commonsense) belief that nuclear war would be apocalyptic, regardless of any attempt to mitigate its effects. In his 1979 book, *Shall America Be Defended,* Graham sought to counter the "educated incapacity" of U.S. leaders to comprehend the strategic implications of nuclear weapons. Dismissing "the gospel of nuclear terror" and the "sophomoric" tendency to characterize nuclear weapons as "apocalyptic," he argued that nuclear weapons should be treated like other forms of weaponry. "Carthage," Graham wrote, "was finished off by plows, followed by soldiers who spread salt." Nuclear weapons were not the first devices capable of inflicting wholesale destruction, and although "the world's nuclear arsenals have a combined yield of several tons of TNT for every man, woman, and child in the world," Graham maintained that it was "physically impossible to distribute these weapons' effects in a way that would achieve anything close to the end of mankind or even of any large nation." Accordingly, Graham urged Americans to "put aside loose terms such as 'total

[130] Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior*, 103.

destruction,' [and] 'nuclear holocaust,' ... and consider just what nuclear weapons can do."[131]

Graham claimed that the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal, constructed with a rational war-fighting strategy in mind, could allow the Soviets to prevail in a nuclear conflict. To counter the growing Soviet threat, he advocated a shift toward a more pragmatic American nuclear strategy, suitable for surviving and winning a nuclear war, if one broke out. According to Graham, such a strategy should include the pursuit of "active defense, the destruction of attacking missiles in flight."[132]

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By 1982, with the nuclear freeze movement reaching its political zenith, the missile defense advocates felt compelled to address the moral claims of nuclear freeze proponents – particularly the movement's religious supporters. Groups such as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops condemned the policy of offensive nuclear deterrence because it threatened to annihilate innocent civilians. Their solution to this ethical problem was to halt the nuclear arms race, paving the way for negotiations that would eventually lead to nuclear disarmament and the end of MAD. The advocates of missile defense dismissed this plan as utopian and unrealistic. They argued that in negotiating a mutual agreement with the Soviet Union, U.S. officials would be placing their country at the mercy of Soviet leaders who were already girding for nuclear war. The missile defense advocates claimed to offer a more pragmatic solution to the nuclear dilemma. They placed their trust in technology and not in the Soviet leadership,

[131] Graham, *Shall America Be Defended*, 108-9.
[132] Ibid, 122.

promising to withdraw the United States from the irrational policy of MAD through the rational means of strategic defense.

On October 16, 1982, Angelo Codevilla presented a paper, titled "Justice, War, and Active Defense," at a conference sponsored by the American Catholic Committee, a conservative group opposed to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' anti-nuclear stance. Codevilla, himself a devout Catholic, argued that a strictly moral approach to making nuclear policy was misguided and potentially dangerous. Although "each of us is morally responsible ... for the direction in which we push our country," he claimed, questions of nuclear strategy "are not soluble in moral terms alone." Codevilla acknowledged that "a lively moral sense and moral reminders are of great assistance to prudent men trying to do the best they can," but he maintained that prudence should be emphasized first and foremost in U.S. national security planning.[133]

Codevilla sought to refute the NCCB pastoral letter's condemnation of nuclear weapons as inherently evil. Like Daniel O. Graham, he asserted that Carthage "was erased from the face of the earth by fire, sword, and the plow" – not by nuclear weapons. Citing the example of Carthage, as well as Nazi Germany's "murder of six million Jews wholly without weapons of mass destruction," Codevilla argued that the "amount of destruction which men inflict on one another" is "unrelated to the weapons used." It was therefore wrong, he claimed, to dismiss nuclear weapons as inherently evil and to assume that "justice and morality must be sought" by banning them.[134]

Codevilla also attempted to discredit the NCCB pastoral letter's endorsement of the nuclear freeze, making his case on explicitly moral grounds. According to Codevilla,

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[133] Codevilla, "Justice, War, and Active Defense," in Lawler, *Justice, War, and the Nuclear Age*, 84-5.
[134] Idem.

the Catholic bishops' goal of "reducing the number of nuclear weapons" held by each superpower to "only a few hundred at most" would have both "irrational" and "immoral" implications. It would encourage the targeting of civilians, he suggested, by making it impossible for the superpowers to threaten each other's military and industrial capacities credibly. Codevilla argued that this would preserve the policy of MAD, violating the Catholic Church's own prohibition against "the intentional, willing mass destruction of centers of population." As a more realistic means of escaping MAD, he proposed the construction of space-based strategic defenses, suggesting that they offered the prospect of "ending the era ... during which nuclear offensive forces were thought to be dominant." "On what moral ground," Codevilla asked, "could we hesitate to do so?[135]

Daniel O. Graham also took on the moral arguments of the Catholic bishops, in an incendiary November 2, 1982 letter to Archbishop Bernardin. Graham reiterated his previous assertion that nuclear war need not be apocalyptic, this time arguing the point in religious terms. He accused the authors of the NCCB's draft pastoral letter of seeking to "maximize" the public fear of nuclear weapons by promoting the "lie" that "creation itself can be destroyed" by nuclear war. He further alleged that the bishops' pastoral letter "approaches blasphemy" by suggesting that nuclear weapons threaten "the sovereignty of God over the world." To the contrary, Graham projected that a "nuclear strike on an undefended Western World" would most likely kill "150 million Americans" and provoke an American retaliatory strike that would kill "10-20 million Russians." Although he acknowledged that such events would be "horrendous to the Christian mind," Graham contended that the "percentage of the human race" killed in such an exchange would be "lost in the margin of error in counting only Indians and Chinese."

[135] Ibid, 84; 97

As such, Graham concluded that nuclear weapons could "absolutely not destroy the world."[136]

Graham also claimed that Archbishop Bernardin and his colleagues could "have no moral argument with a piece of insensate machinery such as a nuclear weapon," because "a man is no more dead run through by a bayonet than incinerated by a nuclear bomb." He argued that the bishops' support of the nuclear freeze was not only misguided, but dangerous, because it threatened to place "an overpowering preponderance of offensive nuclear power in the hands of" the "most implacable foes of God Himself, his Church, and mankind – the leadership of Communist Russia." The bishops' real quarrel, according to Graham, should not be with nuclear weapons, but with the strategy of MAD – a "failed and basically immoral concept," which the nuclear freeze would only help to preserve. Instead of supporting the nuclear freeze and placing themselves "in tacit alliance" with the Soviets, Graham urged Bernardin and the other "princes of the Church" to support his High Frontier concept. By endorsing a defensive alternative to MAD, which would require no "cooperation on the part of the sworn enemies of God, the Church, and human liberty," Bernardin could, by Graham's accounting, "be a shepherd who leads his flock, not follows them."[137]

Graham made other explicitly moral arguments in his 1982 *High Frontier* proposal. Touting the United States' "technological, economic, and moral means" to transcend the "horrendous" and "perpetual balance of terror" institutionalized as Mutual Assured Destruction, Graham called for the "concrete rejection" of the "permanent threat by the United States and the Soviet Union to heap nuclear devastation on the cities and

[136] Daniel O. Graham, letter to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA12450.
[137] Idem.

populations of each other." He argued that the United States should abandon the "immoral and militarily bankrupt theory" of MAD, which "relied at its core on the capability to annihilate civilians." As an alternative to MAD, Graham espoused a policy of "Assured Survival" for the United States and its allies, made possible by space-based strategic defenses.[138]

According to Graham, "[s]hould the Soviet Union wish to join in this endeavor – to make Assured Survival a mutual endeavor," the United States would "not object," because the U.S. had "no interest in the nuclear devastation of the Soviet Union." However, because the Soviet Union would have to put its own missile shield in place, the moral implications of Graham's *High Frontier* proposal were difficult to distinguish from those of MAD. Graham admitted that "[s]paceborne defense" was "not a panacea" and would "not mean that our nuclear retaliatory capabilities can be abandoned and neglected."[139] The United States would not be giving up its own offensive nuclear weapons, under the *High Frontier* plan. Although Graham did not fully explore the implications of this point, it followed, logically, that until the Soviet Union could field its own strategic defenses, the United States would hold a decisive advantage, replacing the "balance of terror" with a preponderance of terror favoring the American side. In fact, Graham's own characterization of *High Frontier* as a "technological end-run on the Soviets" suggested that the Soviet Union might not be able to match the United States' strategic defense capabilities for quite some time, if at all.[140]

High Frontier's implicit threat to the Soviet Union was particularly grave, in light of Graham's stated plan for space-based defensive systems to replace a "great deal of the

[138] Graham, *High Frontier*, 13-14.
[139] Ibid, 15.
[140] Ibid, ix.

counterforce, damage-limiting function of our strategic forces" and "broaden the options for strategic retaliatory systems." According to Graham, this could make cruise missiles "a more attractive option in a new strategic setting."[141] However, because the only alternative to counterforce targeting was countervalue targeting – the training of nuclear missiles on civilian population centers – the de-emphasis of counterforce targeting meant a de facto *re-emphasis* on the targeting of civilians, regardless of the "strategic retaliatory systems" used. Graham's own claims aside, *High Frontier* would not obviate the "permanent threat by the United States ... to heap nuclear devastation on the cities" of the Soviet Union.[142] If anything, it would increase the threat to Soviet cities, by negating the Soviet Union's nuclear deterrent and retaliatory capabilities and re-focusing the United States' own nuclear targeting on the destruction of Soviet population centers.

Still, by emphasizing defensive weaponry over offensive weaponry, Graham's *High Frontier* proposal appeared to offer a morally superior alternative to the United States' existing nuclear strategy. In his introduction to the *High Frontier* manifesto, science fiction author Robert Heinlein asserted that "High Frontier is as non-aggressive as a bulletproof vest … so utterly peaceful that the most devout pacifist can support it with a clear conscience – indeed must support it … as it tends to stop wars if war does happen" (sic). Taking on the anti-nuclear movement directly, Heinlein declared that "[a]ll who supported GROUND ZERO" – a 1982 event organized by anti-nuclear activists – "should support High Frontier." Graham picked up on this theme himself, in the executive summary to his *High Frontier* proposal:

> The High Frontier concept would ... convert or confuse some of the conventional opponents of defense efforts and technological innovations. It is harder to oppose

[141] Ibid, 10.
[142] Ibid, 14.

> nonnuclear defensive systems than nuclear offensive systems. It is impossible to argue effectively for a perpetual balance of terror if it can be negated by new policies.[143]

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If a space-based defense against the Soviet missile threat was technologically unworkable, and a missile shield – even if one could be built – would do nothing to change the United States' unethical reliance on nuclear deterrence, the idea of strategic defense nonetheless provided a powerful rhetorical weapon for use against the nuclear freeze movement. As Daniel O. Graham observed, it was difficult to oppose a plan that promised to defend the United States against a Soviet nuclear attack and free the United States from the moral turpitude of MAD. The fact that strategic defense could not actually do these things was irrelevant. The political utility of strategic defense was very real.

Edward Teller was particularly explicit in touting the political utility of space-based missile defenses. In a July 23, 1982 letter to President Reagan, Teller suggested that announcing a plan to build the X-ray laser "may … constitute a uniquely effective reply to those advocating the dangerous inferiority implied by a 'nuclear freeze.'"[144] Although he had great difficulty convincing Reagan's advisors of the scientific merit of his X-ray laser, Teller's effort to convince the administration of its political benefits may have been more successful. Of the major missile defense advocates, Teller had the longest-running individual relationship with Reagan, dating back to Reagan's years as Governor of California. He had even given Reagan a personal tour of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, in 1967, showcasing the lab's work on anti-missile

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[143] Ibid, 10.
[144] Edward Teller, letter to Ronald Reagan (July 23, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, CF OA415.

systems.[145] This human connection may have increased Reagan's willingness to consider Teller's strategic defense proposals, despite their highly speculative nature.

Reagan read Teller's July 23, 1982 letter, as it was forwarded to him by White House Science Advisor George Keyworth. In an accompanying memo to Reagan, Keyworth took no position on the X-ray laser's viability as a strategic defense, commenting only that Teller was "well-founded in his general concerns" about an "entrenched bureaucracy" that had failed to act on "this and other new advances in nuclear weapons technology." Keyworth also revealed that he had spent "several hours of discussion" with Teller, in which Teller had expressed "his deep concern about the implications of the 'nuclear freeze' movement and the Administration's ability to proceed with restoration of an adequate defense." Reagan forwarded Teller's letter, along with Keyworth's explanatory memo, to his National Security Advisor, William Clark. On the front of Keyworth's memo, Reagan scrawled a handwritten note instructing Clark to "take this seriously and have a real look."[146]

In the following months, Reagan's national security staff investigated the issue of strategic defense, consulting with Teller, specifically. In his memoirs, Teller recalls that Admiral James Watkins, the Chief of Naval Operations and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with him in January 1983, discussing "[t]he work on the x-ray laser" over lunch. "After our luncheon," Teller writes, Watkins "convinced the Joint Chiefs to

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[145] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 132-3.
[146] George Keyworth, "Letter from Edward Teller," memo to Ronald Reagan, with enclosure (July 29, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, CF OA415; Ronald Reagan, note to William P. Clark, handwritten on George Keyworth, "Letter from Edward Teller."

support a long-term shift in policy when he pointed out that strategic defense was both militarily and morally sound."[147]

Teller later received an invitation to attend a White House reception scheduled for the evening of March 23, 1983 – the night Reagan was to unveil his Strategic Defense Initiative. Teller gives no indication that he knew in advance about Reagan's plans to announce SDI, but he remembers that the president's "wonderful words moved me deeply. ... Not only would such a system provide a humane alternative to retaliation, but also, by making the success of a first strike uncertain, it would add to the stability of peace."[148] As Teller had predicted in his July 1982 letter to President Reagan, the Strategic Defense Initiative would also "constitute a uniquely effective reply to those advocating ... a 'nuclear freeze.'"[149]

[147] Teller, *Memoirs*, 530-1.
[148] Ibid, 531-2.
[149] Edward Teller, Letter to Ronald Reagan, July 23, 1982.

Chapter 3

Stopping the Freeze, Stealing Its Fire

President Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative surprised all but a few of his closest advisors. Advance publicity for Reagan's March 23, 1983 televised address suggested that it would contain a renewed appeal for increased defense spending and an explanation of the president's most recent budget request to Congress. Reagan's address did begin that way, commencing with what journalists had come to call "the standard threat speech"[150] – a warning about the dangers posed by the Soviet Union's military buildup and a reassertion of the administration's intent "to rebuild America's defenses" after "years of neglect and mistakes."[151]

However, toward the end of his address, Reagan departed from previous rhetorical tropes, adopting several themes from his anti-nuclear critics. The president told Americans that he had become "deeply convinced that the human spirit must be capable of rising above dealing with other nations and human beings by threatening their existence." In language similar to that of the NCCB's draft pastoral letter, he argued that although nuclear deterrence had "worked ... for more than three decades," America faced the "necessity to break out of a future that relies solely on offensive retaliation for our security." Reagan denounced the superpowers' reliance "on the specter of retaliation, on mutual threat" as "a sad commentary on the human condition" – a secular characterization of what the Catholic bishops had called an "objectively ... sinful situation." He suggested that it would be "better to save lives than to avenge them" and

[150] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue,* 37.
[151] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security," March 23, 1983.

that "current technology" might allow the United States to "intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil." The president then called upon "the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete."[152]

His newfound nuclear abolitionism notwithstanding, Reagan continued to repudiate the nuclear freeze. Acknowledging the sincerity of those who "seriously believe that a nuclear freeze would further the cause of peace," he maintained that the nuclear freeze "would make us less, not more, secure and would raise, not reduce, the risk of war."[153] Reagan advocated the continuation of his strategic modernization program, but he skirted many of the moral concerns that this policy had previously raised by proposing a "technological end-run" on MAD – to use Daniel O. Graham's wording.[154]

Reagan's proposal also avoided the moral ambiguities inherent in negotiating mutual agreements with the Soviet Union. Although the Catholic bishops argued that the United States was partly to blame for perpetuating the "evil" of the nuclear arms race,[155] Reagan continued to hold the Soviet Union at fault. He accused the Soviets of building "a massive arsenal of new strategic nuclear weapons" that exceeded anything they "could possibly need ... to deter an attack." In contrast, Reagan characterized his own expansion of the United States' nuclear arsenal as a purely reactive measure. The Strategic Defense Initiative would not require the United States to give up anything in negotiations with an

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[152] Idem; for quote from Catholic bishops second draft pastoral letter, see Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb,* 90.
[153] Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security."
[154] Daniel O. Graham, *High Frontier,* ix.
[155] Quoted in Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb,* 89-90.

aggressive adversary, and it would not imply any moral equivalency between the United States and the "enemies of freedom."[156]

Reagan had issued his strongest moral critique of the Soviet Union just two weeks prior to his announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative. During a March 8 address to the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, he described the Soviet Union as "an evil empire" – in fact, "the focus of evil in the modern world." Reagan claimed that while the Western world placed its "faith in God and the freedom He enjoins," the atheist Soviet Union practiced the inversion of this faith, in which "the only morality they recognize is that which will further their cause." "Marxism-Leninism," Reagan alleged, "is actually the second-oldest faith, first proclaimed in the Garden of Eden with the words of temptation, 'Ye shall be as gods.'"[157]

Reagan never mentioned Satan by name, but his religious audience could not have missed his thinly-veiled comparison of Marx and Lenin to the Biblical figure who spoke "the words of temptation." Nor could they have puzzled over which historical figure the president had in mind when he compared Soviet leaders to "other dictators before them," who were "'always making 'their final territorial demand,'" and who, "if history teaches us anything," cannot be pacified by "simpleminded appeasement or wishful thinking."[158]

Reagan framed the Cold War as a holy war, casting a potential nuclear war with the Soviet Union as the extension of that holy war to its apocalyptic extreme.[159] He urged his audience to "pray for the salvation of all those who live in that totalitarian

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[156] Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security."
[157] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals," in Ronald Reagan, *Speaking My Mind,* 168-180 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).
[158] Idem.
[159] G. Simon Harak, "One Nation, under God: The Soteriology of SDI," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol.56, no.3 (Autumn 1988), 512.

darkness" – those who would be on the receiving end of any U.S. nuclear strike. Nonetheless, the president reminded the assembled faithful that until the Soviets "discover the joy of knowing God ... while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all people on the earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world."[160]

Reagan's subsequent announcement of a plan to defend the United States against Soviet nuclear missiles tempered this apocalyptic rhetoric. It placed him among the ranks of the nuclear abolitionists – his continuing effort to expand the United States' nuclear arsenal notwithstanding. SDI also placed Reagan in a position to criticize the nuclear freeze movement for not going *far enough* in the direction of disarmament. The nuclear freeze proposal would halt the arms race, but it would also leave the morally repugnant policy of Mutual Assured Destruction in place. In contrast, Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative promised to transcend MAD entirely.

Under Reagan's new plan, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger could tout the need to "maintain and ... modernize our deterrent forces" while promoting SDI as "the only hope we have of leading mankind away from the constant threat of nuclear holocaust." In a paper presented at an October 1985 conference on strategic defense, Weinberger stressed that SDI was "right, morally and militarily," a policy that was "not only prudent" but also "far more in keeping with our democratic ideals than a mutual suicide pact." The defense secretary argued that SDI was "noble and straightforward," because its aim was "to destroy weapons that kill people." It was therefore "far more idealistic, moral, and practical than the position taken by those who still embrace the

[160]Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals," in *Speaking My Mind*, 168-180.

mutual assured destruction (MAD) theory that defenses must be totally abandoned." The nuclear freeze, with its emphasis on halting new arms deployments, fit neatly into this category.[161]

SDI also promised Americans a greater degree of security than the nuclear freeze could offer. Although the nuclear freeze would put a stop to the arms race, it would leave the superpowers' existing nuclear forces – and the threat of a Soviet nuclear attack – in place. It was possible that the implementation of a nuclear freeze could serve as the first step toward a series of negotiated arms reductions, but SDI promised a complete end-run on the Soviet missile threat, shielding the United States from nuclear attack without requiring the U.S. to negotiate away its own missiles. In a February 1, 1984 statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary Weinberger explained that "[i]f we can get a system which is effective and which we know can render their weapons impotent, we would be back in the situation we were in ... when we were the only nation with the nuclear weapon and we did not threaten others with it."[162] "If properly planned and phased," Weinberger claimed, SDI "would actually strengthen our present deterrent capability" and "could make a major contribution to the prevention of nuclear war, even before a fully effective system is deployed."[163] Under Reagan's plan, Americans would be doubly secure, protected by SDI's anti-missile umbrella and a fully-stocked nuclear arsenal. Americans could also feel morally secure in the knowledge that their own peace-

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[161] Caspar W. Weinberger, "The Vision of Strategic Defense," in *The Strategic Defense Debate: Can "Star Wars" Make Us Safe?,* edited by Craig Snyder, 87-95 (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).
[162] Quoted in Harak, "One Nation Under God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol.56, no.3 (Autumn 1988): 509-10.
[163] Weinberger, "The Vision of Strategic Defense," in Snyder, *The Strategic Defense Debate,* 93.

loving nation would never initiate a nuclear war, and that the American nuclear arsenal served only to ensure peace.

The Strategic Defense Initiative offered Americans something resembling the "free security" described by C. Vann Woodward in his 1960 essay, "The Age of Reinterpretation."[164] According to Woodward, Americans enjoyed "a remarkable degree of military security" during the early part of their history, "based on nature's gift of three vast bodies of water interposed between this country and any other power that might constitute a serious menace to its safety." The Soviet nuclear threat, as projected by ICBMs that could quickly cross those oceans, had ended "the age of free security."[165]

The Strategic Defense Initiative would cost billions of dollars and would certainly not be "free" in the pecuniary sense, but its physical manifestations would remain "out of sight" and "out of mind" – orbiting the Earth in the vast silent vacuum of space. Protected by SDI's invisible umbrella, Americans could go about their daily lives as if the threat of nuclear annihilation had never existed, free of any visible reminder of the Soviet nuclear threat or of the technological marvel that protected them from it. More importantly, SDI would free Americans from the morally corrupting policy of Mutual Assured Destruction.

By proposing the Strategic Defense Initiative, Ronald Reagan offered to restore what Woodward characterized as "[t]he national myth that America is an innocent nation in a wicked world." Woodward explained:

> That which other nations had of necessity to seek by the sword and defend by incurring the guilt of using it was obtained by the Americans both freely and innocently, at least in their own eyes. They disavowed the engines and

[164] C. Vann Woodward, "The Age of Reinterpretation, *The American Historical Review*, LXVI, No.1 (October 1960), 1-19.
[165] Ibid, 2-3.

> instruments of the power they did not need and proclaimed their innocence for not using them, while at the same time they passed judgment upon other nations for incurring the guilt inevitably associated with power.[166]

SDI offered to restore this national myth. It promised to deliver security that was free from the uncertainty of negotiating with one's enemies, free from the threat of annihilation by the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal, and free from the ethical stain of Mutual Assured Destruction. In short, SDI promised everything that the nuclear freeze could promise, and more.

President Reagan and his advisors were quite aware of the Strategic Defense Initiative's potential to undercut the nuclear freeze movement. Gerold Yonas, who served as Reagan's chief scientific consultant for SDI from 1984 to 1986, later explained that the anti-nuclear movement of the 1980's was one of "several factors that influenced many of us to become involved in the [SDI] technologies study." According to Yonas, it was impossible to "work on weapons and be unaware ... of the strong, vocal, and broadly based freeze movement in this country that is calling for a halt to all further production and testing of nuclear weapons, or of the Catholic bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace that expressed 'profound skepticism about the moral acceptability of any use of nuclear weapons.'"[167] "The opposition to the MX and the freeze movement were very close to succeeding," Yonas told *Los Angeles Times* reporter Robert Scheer, in a September 1985 interview. "All of us working in the weapons game were aware of that whole business ... including the anti-nuclear movement in Europe," and "the Catholic

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[166] Ibid, 7-8. Harak relates SDI to a similar mythology enshrined in "American Civil Religion." See Harak, "One Nation Under God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol.56, no.3 (Autumn 1988): 497-527. See also Bjork, *The Strategic Defense Initiative*, 21-40.

[167] Gerold Yonas, "The Strategic Defense Initiative," in *Weapons in Space,* edited by Franklin A. Long, Donald Hafner, and Jeffrey Boutwell, 73-4 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986).

bishops' pastoral letter, which at one point said nuclear weapons were immoral." "There was a lot of frustration," Yonas explained.[168]

The political utility of strategic defense became apparent to Reagan and his advisors as early as 1980. During the presidential race that year, Reagan's friend and close advisor, Martin Anderson circulated a memo urging the candidate to adopt missile defense as a campaign issue. Anderson had previously arranged a visit by Reagan to the headquarters of the North American Aero-space Defense Command (NORAD), an early-warning facility housed deep within Colorado's Cheyenne Mountain. In his memoirs, Anderson recalls that Reagan became "deeply concerned" when he learned that the United States had no means of defending itself from Soviet ICBMs, NORAD's elaborate early warning systems notwithstanding.[169]

Following the NORAD visit, Anderson drafted a memo suggesting that Reagan incorporate "an anti-ballistic missile system" into his plans for strategic modernization. Anderson noted that "such a system concentrates on defense, on making sure that enemy missiles never strike U.S. soil. And that idea is probably fundamentally far more appealing to the American people than the questionable satisfaction of knowing that those who initiated the attack against us were also blown away." Thus, a plan for strategic defense would respond to Americans' fears of vulnerability to a Soviet missile attack – concerns Reagan himself had expressed during his visit to NORAD – and it would provide Americans with a morally superior alternative to retaliation, in the event of an attack. To reap the maximum political benefit from an emotionally-charged issue,

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[168] Robert Scheer, "Scientists Scramble; 'Star Wars': A Program in Disarray," *The Los Angeles Times,* September 22, 1985.
[169] Martin Anderson, *Revolution: The Reagan Legacy* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 83.

Anderson suggested that Reagan frame his strategic modernization plan, including a proposal for missile defense, as a strategy "to attain and maintain world peace." "In fact," Anderson added, "if properly formulated, the policy should become known in the press as 'Reagan's Peace Plan' or some such nomenclature."[170]

Reagan's peace plan never materialized. During the 1980 campaign, Reagan's top advisors, William Clark and Michael Deaver, kept missile defense off of their candidate's agenda, fearing that an additional defense-related proposal might make Reagan look like a warmonger.[171] Deaver subsequently reversed his opinion, however. In his autobiography, former Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin recalls a March 26, 1983, conversation in which Deaver explained his "view of SDI." According to Dobrynin, Deaver saw SDI "as a campaign issue because it held out hope to American voters that the nuclear threat would be neutralized, blunting Democratic attacks on Reagan as a warmonger."[172]

Two of President Reagan's other advisors – those most directly responsible for selling the idea of strategic defense to Reagan – pitched the concept in moral and political terms. In his own memoir, *Special Trust,* former National Security Advisor Robert C. MacFarlane recounts his role in persuading Reagan to propose a plan for strategic defense. MacFarlane writes that the House of Representatives' December 1982 vote to deny the president's funding request for the MX missile "prompted me to step back ... and consider whether there might not be another approach" to regaining nuclear parity with the Soviet Union. At the time, MacFarlane was serving as deputy to National

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[170] Idem.
[171] Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue,* 101.
[172] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986),* 529.

Security Advisor William Clark. He explains that, after the defeat of the MX missile in the House, he sought "a way to exploit [the United States'] comparative advantage in high technology" to circumvent "an emergent Soviet capability to launch a first strike." MacFarlane recalls that he tasked John Pointdexter, Clark's military deputy on the National Security Council, to "get an update on the current state of the art in defensive systems." Pointdexter then "went to Admiral James Watkins, then Chief of Naval Operations" to seek his expert advice. MacFarlane writes that Watkins, who received his master's degree in mechanical engineering, possessed a "rock solid ... knowledge of physics and the state of the art" in missile defense. Nonetheless, the admiral "was more motivated by moral considerations than military ones," in supporting strategic defense, as a policy.[173]

In fact, MacFarlane, Pointdexter, and Watkins all had "moral considerations" on their minds as they tried to salvage President Reagan's strategic modernization program. MacFarlane had personally assumed much of the responsibility for organizing the White House's response to the nuclear freeze movement and the Catholic bishops' pastoral letter, chairing weekly meetings of a working group established for that purpose. The idea for this working group emerged in the spring of 1982. On April 26, MacFarlane's immediate supervisor, William Clark, circulated a memorandum proposing the formation of a special group to coordinate the White House's public affairs strategy for arms control and defense issues. Responding to Clark's memo on April 28, White House Chief of Staff James A. Baker III suggested that MacFarlane and White House communications assistant David Gergen co-chair the group, which would help to plan the administration's

[173] Robert C. MacFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cardell & Davies, 1994), 223-4; 226-7.

response to the nuclear freeze movement.[174] Subsequent memos exchanged by two aides in the White House Office of Public Liaison, William Triplett and Red Cavaney, identify MacFarlane as the sole chairman of the working group. Triplett's memos from August 13, August 19, and October 26, 1982, and from January 5, 1983, describe the meetings of "Bud MacFarlane's Nuclear Information Policy (i.e. anti-freeze) Group."[175]

On April 30, two days after James Baker suggested that MacFarlane co-chair the working group, Cavaney wrote to MacFarlane to inform him about "the beginning of our research efforts into private sector resources" to mobilize a coalition "supportive of our position vis-à-vis [the] nuclear freeze." Cavaney expressed a special interest in assembling "a fundamentalist/evangelical religious coalition" to oppose the nuclear freeze, "much like the Catholic Church has mobilized its membership" in support of the freeze. He suggested "Pat Robertson of the 700 Club … as a good candidate to head this group," which would include a "powerful coalition … between the College Republican Organization and the Campus Crusade for Christ."[176]

In July 1982, when President Reagan received Edward Teller's letter touting the rhetorical utility of strategic defense, he urged his National Security Advisor, William Clark, to "have a real look" at the issue. It is likely that Clark passed this message on to his deputy, Robert MacFarlane, who had taken the lead in the White House's public relations effort to counter the nuclear freeze movement.[177] MacFarlane's own statements indicate that by December 1982, when the House of Representatives voted to deny

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[174] James A. Baker III memo to William P. Clark (April 28, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA6390.
[175] William Triplett memos to Red Cavaney (August 13, August 19, & October 26, 1982; January 5, 1983), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA7437.
[176] Red Cavaney memo to Robert C. MacFarlane (April 30, 1982), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, OA6390.
[177] Ronald Reagan, note to William Clark (on July 29, 1982 memo from George Keyworth to Ronald Reagan).

funding for the MX missile, he was already convinced of strategic defense's political value. In an interview with diplomatic historian Gregg Herken, MacFarlane explained that strategic defense appealed to him for several reasons, including "the east-west political dynamic, congressional politics, trends in domestic thinking, and arms control strategy."[178] "The politics of deploying ICBMs in the United States was becoming too difficult," MacFarlane told Donald Baucom, the official historian of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (an agency established to manage Reagan's SDI program). The Reagan administration had to "find a way to outflank the freeze movement," if it was to gain approval for the MX.[179]

Admiral Watkins was also concerned about the anti-nuclear movement, particularly its Catholic component. Watkins told Baucom that he began to worry about the effects of "a very visible and vocal segment" of the Catholic Church hierarchy criticizing "the arms race and American nuclear policy" – particularly when Catholic sailors and officers began to quit their assignments.[180] Watkins was an observant Catholic himself, but he strongly disagreed with the bishops' statements. Addressing the graduating class of Marymount College in Arlington, Virginia on August 22, 1982, Watkins asserted that, "faced with an obvious and overt threat of military aggression, a nation has the right – and its leaders have the concomitant moral obligation – to maintain its own military strength at the level necessary to deter war. In such circumstances, the possession of military strength per se, provided always that that strength is not itself used

[178] Gregg Herken, "The Earthly Origins of Star Wars," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (October 1987), 24-5.
[179] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 181-3.
[180] Ibid, 186-7.

for aggressive purposes, is not inherently evil but is, rather, a positive good." On the specific topic of nuclear weapons, Watkins stated:

> [Nuclear] weapons, terrible and terrifying as they might be if used for the wrong purposes, do exist – just as, and because, the threat exists. That is the reality with which I must deal. It is my responsibility to deal with it, in a world in which good and evil also both exist – a world where my options are anything but clear. I may not always be happy about or comfortable with the usually limited options available to me. But I do have the responsibility for choosing between those options, and I must make those choices as a moral man.[181]

His personal beliefs aside, Watkins recognized the substantial impact that the Catholic bishops and the nuclear freeze movement were having on public opinion. As he explained to Reagan biographer Lou Cannon, the ethical debate over nuclear deterrence "was important in that the American people thought mutual assured destruction morally distasteful – and it was a political loser."[182]

Upon hearing of Watkins's enthusiasm for missile defense, Robert MacFarlane arranged to meet the admiral. MacFarlane and John Pointdexter met Watkins at his home in the Washington, DC, naval yard in early January 1983, discussing the issue of strategic defense over lunch. MacFarlane writes that following the meeting, he "asked Jim Watkins to determine whether his counterparts in the Army, Air Force and Marines agreed on the wisdom of a serious effort to investigate an effective strategic defense. He reported back very quickly that the Joint Chiefs were indeed in full agreement with the idea."[183]

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[181] James Watkins, "We Are a Moral People: A Message to the Class of 1983," *Shipmate* (January-February 1983), 19-20.
[182] Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 327.
[183] MacFarlane, *Special Trust*, 227-8.

Watkins also met with Edward Teller on January 20, 1983.[184] Teller recalls that after their meeting, Watkins "convinced the Joint Chiefs to support a long-term shift in policy when he pointed out that strategic defense was both militarily and morally sound."[185] Army General John Vessey, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, elaborated on the Joint Chiefs' reasoning in an interview with Lou Cannon. According to Vessey, "[r]elying totally on the idea that you would destroy the other side is not moral, and it's not very logical. ... It leaves you with two unacceptable alternatives. Not only do you wipe out the population of the Soviet Union, but you have a fair chance of wiping out your population as well."[186]

MacFarlane, Pointdexter, and the Joint Chiefs framed the issue of strategic defense in moral terms when they presented it to President Reagan. As MacFarlane describes it, the presentation was essentially an act, designed to play upon the very real moral beliefs of a president who himself happened to be an actor. "Reagan had been appalled by the grotesqueness" of Mutual Assured Destruction, MacFarlane writes. The president was "concerned by the realization that we had no defense against nuclear attack," and he firmly believed his own apocalyptic rhetoric:

> He was convinced that we were in fact heading toward Armageddon, the final battle between good and evil. "I'm telling you, it's coming," he would say. "Go read your Scripture."

"Working together," MacFarlane writes, "John Pointdexter, Jim Watkins and I arranged for the [Joint] Chiefs to signal their support for a strategic defense" at a February 11, 1983 meeting. MacFarlane describes the carefully staged performance:

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[184] Specific date from Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 202.
[185] Teller, *Memoirs*, 530-1.
[186] Quoted in Cannon, *President Reagan*, 328.

> When it came time for Admiral Watkins to speak ... he stressed how much had changed in the area of defensive technologies and stated his belief that a significant investment was warranted to explore whether, within five to ten years, defensive systems could give us the ability to deal with an attack. That was my cue. I intervened, deliberately underscoring the significance of what Watkins had said and the possibility he offered of moving away from the post-war strategy of deterrence.
>
> "Mr. President," I said, "I believe that Jim is suggesting that new technologies may offer the possibility of enabling us to deal with a Soviet missile attack by defensive means."

By MacFarlane's account, Reagan reacted exactly as the various players in the staged presentation anticipated:

> "I understand; that's what I've been hoping," he [Reagan] responded.
>
> Then he proceeded with a very canny querying of all the other service chiefs, endeavoring to record and assure himself of their complete corporate support. In turn, the five Chiefs – Vessey, the Navy's Watkins, the Army's John Wickham, the Air Force's Charlie Gabriel and the Marines' Bob Barrow – voiced their support for the idea that the time had come to increase our investment in defensive systems.[187]

In these passages, MacFarlane depicts Reagan as an honest, yet credulous commander in chief, easily led by his civilian and military advisors to support a policy on moral grounds, although the policy itself was clearly conceived with political considerations in mind. Nonetheless, MacFarlane's statements in later interviews reveal Reagan's calculated political use of the Strategic Defense Initiative to undercut the moral claims of the nuclear freeze movement. MacFarlane told SDIO historian Donald Baucom that president expressed a desire to "break something new" in his March 23, 1983 speech on defense, just five weeks after his initial February 11 meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. MacFarlane suggested that Reagan's eagerness to announce the Strategic Defense Initiative stemmed from his political advisors' strong urging to do something about the

[187] MacFarlane, *Special Trust*, 228-30.

growing nuclear freeze movement.[188] MacFarlane also told *New York Times* reporter Hedrick Smith that "Reagan's view of the political payoff was sufficient rationale" for announcing SDI in his March 23 speech, even if the policy was not yet fully formed. The president was "terribly excited" about "providing the American people with an appealing answer to their fears – the intrinsic value of being able to tell Americans, 'For the first time in the nuclear age, I'm doing something to save your lives. I'm telling you that we can get rid of nuclear weapons." According to MacFarlane, Reagan "wanted to get it out, and he was less worried about the details – such as changing the strategic doctrine or how it would affect the Allies. He didn't worry about those things."[189]

In fact, the lack of detail in Reagan's proposal proved to be one of its greatest strengths. If Reagan had attempted to explain exactly how a missile defense system would work, he would have confronted an impossible task. The technology to intercept and destroy ICBMs in flight simply did not exist. Instead, Reagan proposed a research program that promised, at some point in the future, to defend the United States against Soviet missiles and rid the world of nuclear weapons. The U.S. government would spend more than $70 billion on SDI, from Reagan's announcement of the program until its cancellation by President Bill Clinton in 1993.[190] This taxpayer funding supported a host of exotic research projects, including Edward Teller's chimerical X-ray laser. None of these projects yielded even a marginally useful defense against the strategic missile threat, but Reagan's pledge to pursue such a defense was sufficiently appealing to sustain

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[188] Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 192-5.
[189] Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game: How Washington Works* (New York: Random House, 1988), 609.
[190] Gordon R. Mitchell, *Strategic Deception: Rhetoric, Science, and Politics in Missile Defense Advocacy* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 87; Jonathan S. Landay, "Pentagon Hit for Hiding Spending on 'Star Wars,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 5, 1995; Les Aspin, "The End of the Star Wars Era," Department of Defense news briefing (May 13, 1993). http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/offdocs/d930513.htm.

SDI, politically. More importantly, as an integral part of Reagan's nuclear program, SDI placed the president's opponents in a difficult position. To argue against SDI on scientific grounds was to deny the potential of American technology to defeat the Soviet missile threat – a politically dubious proposition, in a nation that prided itself on scientific ingenuity.[191] To argue that SDI was strategically or ethically undesirable was to place oneself among the advocates of the repugnant MAD doctrine.

In his autobiography, Daniel O. Graham recalls the "curious problem" that strategic defense presented for nuclear freeze advocates: "Their popular strength depended upon their ability to create hate and fear of nuclear weapons. … Yet they stood in frantic opposition to a non-nuclear defense that could prevent such weapons from hitting their targets." Graham writes that SDI led "the pacifist movement" to form "a peculiar alliance" with certain Pentagon officials who opposed the program – not unlike "the odd alliances that existed between bootleggers and the Women's Christian Temperance Union," which "[f]or utterly opposite reasons … both fought hard to preserve Dry Laws." According to Graham, "Ban-the-Bomb spokesmen delighted in quoting the Bomb builders as to the difficulties of defenses, and imagined Soviet countermeasures. ...The anti-SDI Pentagon people insisted that a defense that could not stop *every* warhead was useless [and] the peace-movement spokesmen echoed that lunacy." Ironically, Graham observes, "the peaceniks had come to love the Bomb."[192]

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[191] See Bjork's discussion of SDI and American "technological optimism" in Bjork, *The Strategic Defense Initiative*, 71-3.
[192] Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior*, 150-1.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the nuclear freeze movement, during the mid-1980's, cannot be solely attributed to President Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative. SDI did, however, undermine the credibility of the nuclear freeze at a time when the movement was already beginning to lose its sense of purpose. Following the June 1983 passage of the nuclear freeze resolution in the House of Representatives, it became clear to the leaders of the freeze movement that the resolution was hopelessly watered-down, and that members of Congress were exploiting the proposal to further their own political agendas. In many cases, these agendas ran counter to the principles of the nuclear freeze movement itself.

Even ideologically committed congressional backers of the freeze resolution admitted it would do little to change the Reagan administration's policies. Maryland Democratic Congressman Parren Mitchell stated frankly that the freeze resolution "did not mandate anybody to do anything. It was a powerless piece of legislation ... but it was a vehicle by means of which the people could speak to this Congress and to the President and to the rest of the nation and say that we want at least a freeze."[193] California Democratic Congressman Leon Panetta, who later served as White House Chief of Staff under President Clinton, commented that "[w]hether you are a hawk or a dove or something in between ... when you go back home ... you can say anything you want about this resolution."[194]

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[193] Parren Mitchell, April 28, 1983 House of Representatives floor statement, quoted in Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze*, 261.
[194] Adam Garfinkle, *Politics of the Nuclear Freeze* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1984), 199.

Wisconsin Democratic Congressman and future Clinton defense secretary Les Aspin's remarks to a reporter from *The New Yorker* describe the political horse-trading that frustrated many nuclear freeze activists. Aspin, then a powerful member of the House Armed Services Committee, stated that he and other supporters of the MX missile "wanted [the 1983 vote on the MX] to come up a little bit after the freeze vote." Aspin reasoned that following the vote on the freeze resolution, a vote on President Reagan's defense budget, and a vote on Reagan's unpopular nomination of arms control opponent Kenneth Adelman to head the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, liberal members of Congress "will then have voted three dove votes. The usual pattern of this place is that people begin to get a little uncomfortable if they've gone to far one way and start looking for a way to pop back the other way."[195]

Disillusioned nuclear freeze organizers shifted their strategy to focus on the 1984 elections, hoping to promote a more freeze-friendly Congress and possibly facilitate an upset of Reagan in the presidential election. At the December 1983 convention of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, the nuclear freeze movement's main organizational body, national coordinator Randy Kehler announced the formation of a new Political Action Committee (PAC), the Freeze Voter. According to Kehler, "Freeze voters around the country" were "really feeling an appetite for getting involved in the political process."[196] Yet this strategy, funneling the nuclear freeze movement's limited resources into a conventional PAC, placed the movement in direct competition with hundreds of other lobbies, many of them funded by business groups or other interests with far more money to spend on influencing the political process. Even the Freeze Voter's strategy of

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[195] Elizabeth Drew, "A Political Journal," *The New Yorker,* June 20, 1983.
[196] Steven Pressman, "Nuclear Freeze Groups Focus on Candidates," *Congressional Quarterly,* May 5, 1984.

sending its own volunteers to canvass for freeze-friendly candidates had little effect on the outcomes of key congressional races.[197]

The nuclear freeze movement's impact on the 1984 presidential race was even more disappointing. Freeze activists found themselves campaigning for Democratic candidate Walter Mondale, who supported a host of new nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons delivery systems, including air- and ground-launched cruise missiles, the Pershing II Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile, the eight-warhead TRIDENT II missile, stealth aircraft, and the "Midgetman" mobile ICBM (a program cancelled in 1992, a year after the breakup of the Soviet Union). Mondale's support for the nuclear freeze was tepid, at best. During his October 21, 1984 debate against President Reagan, the Democratic candidate stated that he would "not agree to any arms control agreement, including a freeze, that's not verifiable." Mondale stressed that he did not "trust the Russians" on such matters and he would not enter into any arms control agreement unless the United States could "tell every day" that the Soviet Union was complying.[198]

Mondale and his vice presidential running mate, New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro even avoided mentioning the nuclear freeze by name. The word "freeze" did not come up at all during the October 7 presidential debate, and Ferraro seemed reluctant to use the term during her October 11 debate against Vice President George Bush. When questioned directly on Mondale's support for a "freeze," Ferraro endorsed what amounted to a temporary test ban: "a challenge" to the Soviet Union, "in the nature of temporary, mutual, verifiable, moratoria to halt testing in the air, in the atmosphere, that would respond (sic) with a challenge from the Soviet Union, we hope, to

[197] Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent*, 244-6.
[198] Walter Mondale, remarks at October 21, 1984 presidential debate, archived by the Commission on Presidential Debates, http://www.debates.org/pages/trans84c.html (accessed March 30, 2008).

sit down and negotiate a treaty." Vice President Bush did use the term "freeze" during the debate, condemning the nuclear freeze proposal, specifically.[199]

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace had a similarly negligible impact on the outcome of the 1984 presidential election. Released in May 1983, the pastoral letter argued that nuclear deterrence was "not an adequate strategy as a long-term basis for peace" and should be viewed as "a transitional strategy justifiable only in conjunction with resolute determination to pursue arms control and disarmament." The letter repudiated the strategy of flexible response, stating unequivocally that "[n]on-nuclear attacks by another state must be resisted by other than nuclear means." The pastoral letter also condemned the nuclear arms race as "one of the greatest curses on the human race" and "an act of aggression against the poor." Although it did not endorse any specific arms control proposal, the bishops' letter echoed the language of Randall Forsberg's *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race,* advocating "immediate, bilateral, verifiable agreements to halt the testing, production, and deployment of new nuclear weapons systems."[200]

The Reagan administration had always been concerned about the political impact of the pastoral letter, but Reagan easily won the Catholic vote in 1984, beating Walter Mondale 55 percent to 44 percent, in this key demographic. This was a significant improvement over Reagan's margin of victory in the 1980 Catholic vote, which ranged from one percent to seven percent, depending on the poll. More importantly, Reagan

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[199] October 7, 1984 presidential debate transcript, archived by the Commission on Presidential Debates, http://www.debates.org/pages/trans84a.html (accessed May 30, 2008); George H.W. Bush and Geraldine Ferraro, remarks at October 11, 1984 vice presidential debate, archived by the Commission on Presidential Debates, http://www.debates.org/pages/trans84.html (accessed March 30, 2008).

[200] National Council of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response,* reprinted in Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb,* 185-276.

won the overall presidential contest by a landslide. He trounced Mondale in the popular vote, 59 percent to 41 percent, and won the Electoral College vote by a staggering 525 to 13 vote margin.[201] The nuclear freeze issue was largely irrelevant to the outcome, because Reagan had so completely co-opted the freeze movement's anti-nuclear rhetoric with his SDI proposal.

The political utility of SDI was particularly evident during the October 21 presidential debate. Throughout the debate, Reagan touted SDI as the means to achieve his "ultimate dream ... the elimination of nuclear weapons in the world." Although he acknowledged that the Strategic Defense Initiative was only a research program and that no defense against ballistic missiles yet existed, Reagan repeatedly alluded to what life would be like if his "dream" became a reality. "[I]f such a defense could be found," he asked, "wouldn't it be far more humanitarian to say that now we can defend against a nuclear war by destroying missiles instead of slaughtering millions of people?" To demonstrate his commitment to world peace, Reagan even offered to share SDI technology with the Soviet Union, so that both superpowers could join in his effort to "once and for all get rid ... of these nuclear weapons and free mankind from the threat."[202]

Mondale had no effective counter to this utopian rhetoric. Nothing he could have proposed would have been as sweeping, comprehensive, or morally satisfying as Reagan's fantastic "dream." The fact that the president's claims lacked any sound basis in science was irrelevant. More than anything, it was the ethical appeal of the Strategic Defense Initiative that mattered.

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[201] Low estimate of the 1980 Catholic vote margin taken from White House data in Dole, "Ethnic/Catholic Strategy," memorandum to James A Baker III, et al. (undated). All other data taken from Pomper, *The Election of 1984*, 64-5; 68-9.

[202] Ronald Reagan, remarks at October 21, 1984 presidential debate.

Reagan capitalized on SDI's moral gloss by challenging Mondale to reject Mutual Assured Destruction. "Mr. Mondale seems to approve MAD," Reagan asserted, "meaning, if you use nuclear weapons on us, the only thing we have to keep you from doing it is that we'll kill as many people of yours as you'll kill of ours." Reagan then asked Mondale to clarify his own position on the issue:

> Mr. Mondale, could I ask you to address the question of nuclear strategy then? The formal doctrine is very arcane, but I'm going to ask you to deal with it anyway. Do you believe in MAD, mutual assured destruction, mutual deterrence as it has been practiced for the last generation? [203]

Mondale's reply was predictably conventional:

> I believe in a sensible arms control approach that brings these weapons down to manageable levels. I would like to see their elimination. And in the meantime, we have to be strong enough to make certain that the Soviet Union never tempts us.[204]

Given the circumstances, this was all one could have expected from Mondale, or, for that matter, from any opponent of President Reagan's nuclear policies. Unless one was willing to match Reagan, fantastic claim for fantastic claim, acquiesce to MAD, or argue for the United States' unilateral disarmament, there was little to offer, in the way of a rejoinder to SDI.

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By proposing the Strategic Defense Initiative, Ronald Reagan co-opted the rhetoric of the nuclear freeze movement, taking up the mantle of virtue and reversing the relationship that had previously existed between himself and his anti-nuclear opponents. Prior to Reagan's announcement of SDI, the nuclear freeze movement had played the role of the ethically principled critic, condemning Reagan for perpetuating the nuclear arms

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[203] Idem.
[204] Walter Mondale, remarks at October 21, 1984 presidential debate.

race and Mutual Assured Destruction. By adopting a proposal for space-based missile defenses, Reagan took on the role of the peace-loving nuclear critic. His Strategic Defense Initiative went far beyond the nuclear freeze movement's call to halt the nuclear arms race, promising the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Ironically, the nuclear freeze movement found itself promoting MAD, because its own proposal would do nothing to change the dynamic of offensive nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although Reagan openly advocated the expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, he was able to justify his strategic modernization plan as a temporary measure, necessary to preserve America's security until his missile shield could be put in place. Reagan thus reordered the ethical terms of debate. He appealed to the public's traditional moral sensibilities to win their support for a policy that, on its face, ran counter to those sensibilities – a policy that adhered to the Machiavellian ethics of necessity and served to ensure Reagan's own political success.

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