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FOREIGN AFFAIRS MEETINGS

I hope to have a chance to talk to you before the meetings at Chequers on 8 and 9 September. Here are one or two brief comments on the papers, all of which I have now had a chance to read.

Foreign Policy: Britain's Global Interests and Priorities

The first sentence of this paper, defining the purpose of all foreign policy, is delightfully British. Scandinavians and other Northern Europeans, with their sense of mission to make the world a better place for everyone to live in, would find it shockingly callous and insular. Frenchmen, with their notion of a "civilising mission" would find it pedestrian and inadequate. It would not be recognisable to Russians or Americans, except for the sternest isolationists in the US. Nevertheless, it is probably the definition which suits our national temperament best!

In the section headed "National Tasks" I would like to have seen a little more about those of our dependent territories where there are no specific problems. We tend to forget that we still have about half-a-dozen colonies in the Caribbean, some in a state of under-development which does us little credit. We equally have a residue of responsibility for the small and weak independent states of the Eastern Caribbean. In this area, we, the French and to a lesser extent the Dutch, cannot afford to pass the political and economic buck entirely to the Americans.

I also think that this section dismisses Northern Ireland too cursorily. In my experience, our inability to bring to a satisfactory conclusion what amounts to a civil war on our own territory, is becoming increasingly embarrassing to our friends and allies and is reducing our authority and influence elsewhere in the world. Easier to say this however than to think of a solution.

Para 20 on the distribution of resources is important. I think in particular of the BBC External Services and the British Council. I have served in about a dozen foreign countries in the last 35 years and am in no doubt that the BBC External Services are the most influential radio broadcasts in the world, far more so than anything

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which the United States, the Soviet Union, France or Germany can produce. The BBC's influence, particularly in the Third World, is so great that it can be very damaging, as I know to my cost from Iran. However, across the board, there is no question that the external services are not only a major British national asset, but a major Western asset as well. The British Council serves an analogous purpose, although its impact is confined to our national interest. The positive influence of these two organisations is out of all proportion to the trifling sums of money which the Government pays for them. At a time of financial stringency, it is false economy to apply the doctrine of "equal misery" to them. The damage to our interests far outweighs the value of the derisory savings gained from percentage cuts in their budgets.

East/West Relations

I think this is rather a good paper. I agree with the general line of argument and with the "action programme". Again, I believe that the most effective contribution which Britain can make is through the transmission of information, ie the BBC External Services.

The Middle East

I am attending a meeting in the FCO on 5 September of Middle East Ambassadors to discuss the paper. I will have more to say after this meeting.

I will not add to the burden by commenting in detail on the papers on Arms Control, Western Defence Strategy etc. But I commend, if you have time, the attached article by George Ball. It is heretical but it contains important insights and, in my view, much wisdom.



A.D. PARSONS
31 August 1983

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The Cosmic Bluff

George W. Ball

NATO's nuclear strategy is founded on illusion—with a large component of self-deception: the dubious hope that America's nuclear threat will permanently deter the Soviet Union from attacking Western Europe with conventional forces. That threat—the pretense of a winning hand in a transcendental poker game—is becoming every day less persuasive. The Soviets know as well as we that, should our bluff be called, whether by accident or design or the momentum of actions and reactions that escape the control of both sides, the president would face two unacceptable options. He could either precipitate mutual catastrophe or capitulate.

Once the Soviet leaders conclude that no president would be likely to adopt the disastrous first option, our cosmic bluff will have lost its deterrent force.

Although the Soviets can never be absolutely certain whether a president would authorize the use of nuclear weapons to repel a conventional assault, they might become sufficiently skeptical to test the issue, influenced in that decision by the mood of America as they perceive it. They know that no president would make the nuclear decision in a vacuum; he would be sensitive to a public opinion that is now imposing a steadily more powerful constraint. Without question, the recent awakening of Americans to the dangers of nuclear weapons is creating a new political fact—a fact with major implications for our strategic calculus.

Such awakened interest in, and concern for, the military use of the atom are long overdue. When the H-bomb was first devised only the technically sophisticated could comprehend its implications. Foreign to the experience of most Americans, it seemed sinister, almost supernatural, fit only for the speculation of a small elite who—following the age-old pattern with mysteries—took over the management of nuclear weapons and enveloped them with a sacerdotal mystique. Except for a conscience-stricken group of dissenting scientists, only a few questioned the metaphysics of the new priesthood.

That widespread detachment endured for many years. So long as Americans regarded the danger of nuclear war as remote and unreal, most were content to leave nuclear weapons to academic experts, military theorists, and science-fiction writers. Indeed during the brief Indian summer of détente, when America and the Soviet Union ceased to shout at each other, fears of a cataclysm largely disappeared. But that mood shifted with the Carter administration's

overstated reactions to Soviet overreaching, and it abruptly changed when the Reagan administration showed its penchant for anti-Soviet vilification and the political exploitation of fear.

The result was to shock many Americans—though not in the direction intended. Instead of persuading our countrymen to demand new and more sophisticated nuclear weapons it led thousands to reclaim the issue of nuclear policy from the elite and test it against their own values and pragmatic wisdom. Conditioned to the pervasiveness of violence, the American public intuitively recognized that, unlike medieval days, conflicts are no longer conducted under formalized rules as though they were jousting matches. Today a nation on the receiving end of a nuclear barrage will not feel honor-bound to reply with weapons of the same limited yield; it will respond with whatever brutal force is necessary to achieve its objective. No chivalric codes or papal bulls limit nuclear combat, and Americans instinctively mistrust the romantic fantasy that leads to such artificial confessions as "controlled escalation" (which is implicit in "flexible response"), a "limited nuclear war" (an oxymoron), or a "winnable nuclear war" (a contradiction).

Despite the pronouncements of the scholastics the public intuitively seems to understand that nuclear warheads are not weapons. A weapon is an instrument that can be used to achieve a political objective in the Clausewitzian sense of war as an extension of diplomacy. But the public knows that nuclear weapons are not usable for that

purpose; they can only facilitate mutual suicide. For, unlike some professional tacticians, the public instinctively knows that nuclear warheads—however fired or launched—differ not merely in degree but in kind from conventional weapons and that there is no way to reconcile that fundamental difference or make them interchangeable. Conditioned by sickening pictures of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many are now showing their abhorrence of nuclear malignance by opposing even civilian power installations.

That revulsion, which is not limited to Americans, has enveloped nuclear weapons in a rigid taboo.¹ Any nation

that first broke that taboo by using the H-bomb would suffer universal condemnation. The United States would attract the most violent invective because it already bears the taint of original sin from the two bombs we dropped on Japan.

Today the public's sprouting concern at even the remote prospect that the button might be pushed is expressing itself in the demand for a nuclear freeze. This is less a procedural proposal than a metaphor expressing a pervasive unease—an unease now given religious and institutional expression in the pastoral letter of the American Catholic bishops. That cannot be dismissed as a transient phenomenon; it is rapidly spreading throughout our society and is here to stay. Indeed the polls report that perhaps as many as 60 percent of Amer-

icans endorse the freeze. People are increasingly upset by Washington's insistent harping on new missiles, and its monotonous insistence on America's superiority. Their anxiety is heightened by indications that some at high governmental levels believe in protracted or even winnable nuclear wars, and by gnawing suspicion that our current

¹In an article in the June issue of *Commentary*, "Bishops, Statesmen, and Other Strategists on the Bombing of Innocents," the veteran scholastic Albert Wohlstetter seems oblivious of the taboo or of the ways public alarm could rule out a neat, well-mannered nuclear war directed at military targets.

leaders would rather build more weapons than negotiate arms-control agreements. In a more tranquil time, less filled with bombast, the public could watch television pictures of the president riding off into the sunset on his ranch and discount as pure symbolism the ubiquitous warrant officer toting the legendary box of codes. Few could envisage the president ever pushing the button. But in the current noisy atmosphere people are not so certain.

It is against this background of the public's swelling participation in the nuclear debate that we must assess the views and behavior of our governmental leaders.

Although some leaders of the American administration repeat, as a litany, their belief in a Marxist-Leninist blueprint for world conquest, there seems little likelihood that the Soviet Union would deliberately push into Western Europe either to spread the communist faith or for territorial aggrandizement. If a Soviet invasion should ever occur—which I doubt—it would be far more likely to result because turmoil in Eastern Europe persuaded the Soviet leaders of the tactical necessity of moving their line of domination farther to the west. On the other hand, war might develop from clashes of interests elsewhere in the world—for example, in such a sensitive but important place as Berlin, or, even

more likely, in the Middle East where the expanded presence of Soviet advisers in Syria and of our marines in Lebanon is transforming a regional conflict into a phase of the East-West struggle.

In such tense parts of the world—and there are others—a confrontation neither side wishes or anticipates might occur through inept diplomacy, marked by threats and counterthreats that the competing parties felt required to carry out or else lose prestige. It seems safe to predict that the next war, should one break out, will almost certainly be caused by ill-considered diplomatic or military moves—such as brought on World War I—rather than by a deliberate aggression—such as that which produced World War II.

But, however war might start, one can be sure that the Soviets would marshal all their propaganda resources to play on the fears of civilian populations both in Europe and America. Thus just at the point when NATO's conventional defenses might be proving inadequate and the president was facing the decision to use nuclear weapons, the Kremlin would be threatening to respond to such use with an ugly nuclear reprisal. The public's frenzied reaction in the face of this threat would subject any president to excruciating moral, intellectual, and emotional torment.

If the American people interpreted the Soviets' rhetoric as a serious threat to launch ICBMs against their country, the president would be subjected to a shrill crescendo of domestic outcries demanding a prompt end to the European war. If, on the other hand, the Kremlin—as it might well do—concentrated on threatening to wipe out Europe's cities rather than on blowing up America, European leaders would themselves be imploring the United States not to use its nuclear weapons. In the face of such a Soviet threat and the inevitable atmosphere of frenetic anxiety on both sides of the Atlantic, I cannot believe that any president would break the nuclear taboo.

That conclusion is reinforced by my own experience during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when I served as a member of the executive committee (the so-called EX-COM) that advised President Kennedy. At no time during that agonizing fortnight, when it seemed that the members of our small group aged ten years, did the president consider the possibility of launching a nuclear attack; nor did any of us believe in our hearts that the actions we were considering would trigger a Soviet nuclear reprisal. We could not, however, free our minds

of the awful possibility that if we made even the slightest mistake, we might start our country up an escalator that could lead to a nuclear exchange. Fully sensitive to that possibility, President Kennedy chose the least provocative response available—the declaration of a naval quarantine. But even that decision was made with anguish.

That brings me, of course, to my central thesis: pushing the nuclear button may be easy to contemplate in a war game or in an academic seminar, but a president with imagination would, in real life, find such a decision too agonizing to make. Does anyone believe that any president—whoever he might be—would deliberately adopt a course that could lead toward nuclear destruction for himself, his country, and even civilization? I doubt it.

Yet should one rule out even the remotest possibilities? Presidents are fallible. Few come to office with a deep comprehension of the implications of nuclear bombs, and in their innocence they may find themselves surrounded by advisers who believe their own metaphysics—who have been enthralled by the conceptual fantasy of controlled escalation. So one cannot totally foreclose the possibility that a president, under pressure to act quickly, might impetuously give the authorization to launch or fire some low-yield nuclear weapons.

At that point I could see the Western alliance breaking apart like a melon. Terrified Europeans, bitterly regretting that they had abdicated control of their fate, would turn their resentment against the United States, while demanding that their governments stop the war.

In all probability they would panic even before the president assumed for himself—and for America—the onus of breaking the taboo and firing as much as a single tactical weapon. With the Soviets fiercely threatening to destroy Europe's major cities if America used even battlefield nuclear artillery, would the peoples and governments of Europe willingly let America precipitate an escalating nuclear exchange? They would find little comfort in the promise that we would, in retaliation, destroy much of the Soviet Union.

Consider also the reaction in the United States if the president directed the use of even a few tactical weapons. No matter that they might produce only local devastation; the shock would be much the same as if he had authorized massive megaton missiles. Our breaking the taboo would produce a far greater trauma for Americans than anything imagined by the nuclear priesthood, for the effect would be multiplied by a corrosive sense of guilt, as though we had, by once again unleashing the nuclear monster, branded ourselves with the mark of Cain. One could envisage irresistible domestic pressures on the president to bring our boys home from Europe in a hurry, and to stop the war by a settlement even on Soviet terms.

If many Americans are disturbed that conditions have required us to submerge our democratic practices and entrust the nuclear decision solely to the president, consider the reaction of Europeans, who have given a foreign leader authority to turn Europe into a nuclear charnel house. Their sense of powerlessness contributes to the excesses exhibited by many European peace advocates—excesses brought to open, and all too often irresponsible, expression when

they hear the man who commands the nuclear button hurridly denouncing the Soviet Union. It is fear of our government's recklessness, more than any other factor, that has encouraged the recent efflorescence of European peace movements. The psychology books are filled with the traumas induced when people realize that they have no voice in their own destiny; thus many join street demonstrations as a therapeutic experience.

Few thoughtful Europeans believe that if the United States restricted its nuclear initiatives to tactical weapons, the Soviets would gallantly limit themselves to a low-yield response and that a protracted nuclear war might then occur. But even granting the unreal assumption that such a sequence of events might take place, it is the last thing Europeans would want. The devout wish shared by all in Europe is that their nations should never again become battlefields, with their cities and villages destroyed in a war whose devastation this time would be multiplied many times over by nuclear blast and fallout.

Since the United States cannot realistically guarantee to Europeans that, after a limited effort of conventional combat, we would respond to a Soviet advance with strategic nuclear weapons, our constant reassurances have become more ritualistic than valid. But is it right to encourage NATO to base its strategy on dubious assumptions?

I recognize the heresy implicit in that question for, according to the true gospel, the efficacy of our nuclear arsenal depends on keeping the Soviets in a state of uncertainty. So long as they continue to believe that we might use our nuclear weapons to counter a conventional attack, the Soviets will be hesitant to put that issue to the test. Thus any suggestion that the arsenal would not be used destroys the deterrent.

Under the discipline of this logic, any expression of skepticism violates a "gentlemen's agreement" with our allies. President de Gaulle, with his scorn for such inhibitions, long ago ignored that agreement and, on September 15, 1959, expressed doubt that Europe could count on the American nuclear arsenal once the Soviets had acquired missiles capable of reaching United States soil. But since Western leaders were accustomed to De Gaulle's impie-

ty, they merely sighed and shrugged. What else would one expect of the general?

Henry Kissinger was treated with far less tolerance when, at a conference in Brussels on September 1, 1979, he straightforwardly explained the American dilemma. "One cannot ask a nation," he said,

to design forces that have no military significance, whose primary purpose is the extermination of civilians and to expect that these factors will not affect a nation's resoluteness in crisis. We live in the paradoxical world that it is precisely the liberal, humane, progressive community that is advocating the most bloodthirsty strategies and insisting that there is nothing to

worry about as long as the capacity exists to kill 100 million people.

Thus, he observed,

...the European allies should not keep asking us to multiply strategic assurances that we cannot possibly mean or, if we do mean, we should not want to execute because if we execute, we risk the destruction of civilization. Our strategic dilemma isn't solved with reassurances. There is no point in complaining about declining American will or criticizing this or that American Administration for we are facing an objective crisis that must be remedied.

Kissinger's speech sent waves of anger and shock through the Western community, but was his offense after all so heinous? He had merely pointed out what many believed but were afraid to say. The emperor was naked and mere ritual words of reassurance were no substitute for clothes; if he continued without clothes the emperor might catch pneumonia.

Today, with intensified public concern over the nuclear problem, Kissinger's speech has even more relevance than at the moment it was given. It is time for us all—Europeans and Americans alike—to recognize that such comforting phrases as "extended deterrence" could prove a dangerous trap. Indeed, we should frankly ask ourselves whether the self-deception in which we are indulging ourselves may not subject us to far

greater jeopardy than would frankly facing the cold realities.

The burden of the scolding accorded Henry Kissinger was that his realistic words might persuade the Soviets that they could attack Europe without facing a nuclear onslaught. But would public discussion of an American president's probable reaction encourage the Soviets to think more adventurously? I doubt it. The Soviet leaders will make their own appraisal. On the other hand, our continued reliance on a nuclear deterrent that is becoming less and less convincing could lead to a dangerously false sense of security.

How then should we deal with Europe's anxieties? As with so many other aspects of transatlantic relations, history and geography must be consulted,

and in this case they have combined to produce a European state of mind quite distinct from that in America. Until the advent of the H-bomb and devices for hurling it across the ocean, we Americans had no fear of enemy action against the continental United States. No foreign power had violated our mainland since the British burned the White House in 1814, and we regarded our homes and families as safe from external attack. But the arrival of nuclear warheads and intercontinental delivery systems changed all that. Now most of us would like nothing better than to return to a day before the invention of the H-bomb when the American people were free from menace.

Not so the Europeans, for they have had a quite different experience; in this century alone their soil has been scarred and their cities destroyed by two devastating wars—wars that occurred only twenty years apart. So they constantly ask themselves: why, since the end of World War II, have they enjoyed almost forty years of peace? And they invariably come up with the same answer: their happy deliverance has been due to a controlling new element that did not exist in Hitler's day—the H-bomb. Without the restraining menace of that instrument of terror, World War III, it is contended, would already have taken place.

Such a facile conclusion reflects more hope than logic; it is, as I see it, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* thinking—or as the logicians would put it—an almost classic example of induction with insuf-

ficient, and indeed imperfect, enumeration. It is not true that modern Europe has suffered a regular cycle of major wars; indeed most European nations enjoyed a hundred years of relative peace between Waterloo and Sarajevo, and there is no reason to believe that without the H-bomb Europe would have been subjected to another major war during the last four decades. During World War II the Soviets lost 20 million lives, to say nothing of millions who died from the war's indirect effects, and the oppressive sense of that catastrophe is still a brooding reality for the Soviet people, notwithstanding their inability to express themselves politically.

One can argue—though I would not—that when the Soviets failed to demobilize after the Second World War and thus retained an impressive conventional superiority, they were deterred from Western adventures primarily because America then had a practical monopoly of the nuclear bomb. But that conclusion rests on shaky assumptions and a dubious oversimplification. Major events rarely have single causes; there were many reasons why the Soviets did not choose to attack, and to attribute their forbearance solely to the H-bomb is quite unwarranted. If one insists on identifying a new element that did not exist in 1914 or 1940 I would point not to the bomb but to the alliance arrangements that guaranteed American might on Western Europe's side; the alliance itself has, in other words, served as a persuasive deterrent.

Not, of course, that we dare take the future for granted. In assuming that because there has been peace for almost four decades the balance of nuclear terror has now put an end to war, many Europeans are behaving like the man falling from the top of a fifty-story building who announces when he passes the tenth floor that "everything is going well." Rather than breaking the cycle of war, the nuclear bomb has merely assured that, if a major war occurs, its devastation will be on a scale beyond the most sanguine dreams of civilized man. Thus it has placed both Europeans and Americans in unprecedented jeopardy.

Still it will be hard to induce Europeans to free themselves of the nuclear mystique, since unquestioned faith in the benign effects of the bomb provides their political leaders with a convenient excuse for avoiding full responsibility for their own defense. Since their big, brash brother overseas is protecting them with a nuclear umbrella, they like to think that they are assured of defense on the cheap through capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive means.

From the outset European leaders took comfort that, behind the shield of overwhelming nuclear superiority, they could relax with only a limited commitment of effort or resources. Then—after Europe had become more prosperous in the middle 1960s—they reluctantly agreed to the rationale of "flexible response" and the added cost of conventional defense that it implied.

Today the basic conditions under which we designed the concept of flexible response have been critically altered. America no longer has overwhelming nuclear superiority and such superiority can no longer be bought, at any price. Nor do the two sides between them have 6,000 warheads; today they have closer to 50,000, and are planning on more; that greatly enhances the dangers of an accidental nuclear disaster.

It is a human failing to avoid thinking about a problem over which one feels one has no control, and it is important to remember that the Europeans gave up a large measure of sovereignty when they entrusted a critical element of their defense to the United States. Yet few are eager to take it back. Though there is talk of secret understandings, at least with the United Kingdom, the nations of Europe—so far as has been publicly stated—are not insisting on a veto over the use of the intermediate-range missiles to be located on their territory, even though their own people may bear the brunt of retaliation if those missiles are launched.

Instead of being dismayed by such abdication of control, some European leaders seem to draw comfort from the fact that the American president, and not they, would have to make the decision to use nuclear weapons. They prefer to avoid that awful responsibility, presumably hoping that their lack of control over the nuclear weapons on their soil might provide them immunity from Soviet blackmail. Yet no one can regard such a situation as healthy.

All this may help to explain the contradictions apparent in European reactions. It is wrong to conclude from the recent German and British elections and their aftermath that European public opinion is more fully reconciled to the official NATO line. The German elections largely turned on domestic economic issues while the British Labour Party committed suicide from a surfeit of inanity. Thus in spite of the apparent subsidence of the nuclear issue, the Western European people are badly split between those fiercely cherishing the dream that nuclear warheads have made war impossible and others who increasingly fear that an American decision to use nuclear weapons—even in their least destructive form—might lead to the obliteration of all they seek to preserve.

That suggests, it seems to me, the increasing recklessness of basing the defense of the West on a balance of nuclear terror between the two superpowers. Such a macabre equilibrium is far from a permanent guarantee against devastating war; it is at best merely a means of buying time. If we do not use that time to develop political arrangements with our adversaries that capitalize on the common interest in survival and on other interests shared by men and women of diverse views, we shall only postpone the ultimate catastrophe.

In the long run we must fix our compass on prudent and rational coordinates, which we are clearly not doing. It is mischievous nonsense to haggle—as is now our major preoccupation—over the emplacement of Pershings and cruise missiles in Europe; in view of the overwhelming strategic arsenals available to both sides that issue is tangential shadow play. All the targets at which the newly installed weapons will be aimed can in fact be covered by existing weapons, including submarine- and air-based missiles. Instead we should, together with our allies, soberly rethink the strategic plans of the Western alliance and take the hard measures necessary to create an effective conventional strategy.

That is, however, only the military aspect of the much larger problem of maintaining security and peace. It is no longer enough that Europeans should believe in America's military commitment; if the alliance is to flourish they must also have trust in our political leaders, confident that they are accurately appraising the Soviet leadership and conducting relations with the Kremlin in a manner designed to maintain the peace. The thermometer of that confidence has fluctuated over the years. It reached perhaps its highest point in 1972 when President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger formalized the arrangements for détente. Since then, however, Europeans have seen the United States veer sharply away from the spirit that then prevailed, while they themselves have stayed more or less steady on course. Having lived for centuries with the troublesome Russians on the same continent, Western Europeans quite

naturally regard their dealings with the Soviet Union as a continuum of long-standing relationships, particularly with respect to trade; in addition, the West Germans see détente as not merely a luxury but a working necessity, an essential prerequisite to arrangements that ease the heartbreak of a divided people.

Today many Europeans fear that America's current cold war obsession will curtail progress in ameliorating relations with the East. Seriously confused by the vacillation of the Carter administration and its tendency to overreact wildly, they are increasingly upset when the current administration irrationally contravenes Theodore Roosevelt's admonition to speak softly but carry a big stick; instead it snarls loudly at the Soviet Union while proclaiming that our stick is a fragile twig.

Nothing could do more for the alliance than for our government to lower its voice and show itself capable of diplomacy—which would require it to abandon its doctrinal obsession. Since dogmas are rigid by definition, they preclude compromise; thus ideology negates negotiation. Someone should tell our present leaders that the argot of their pronouncements, the tags and slogans that passed for wisdom three decades ago, are no longer appropriate. Stalin has, after all, been dead for almost a third of a century, and it has been twenty-seven years since the Twentieth Party Congress. The old stereotype of a relentlessly evangelical Soviet Union, which the administration seems to have exhumed from the cellar, distorts current reality.

The Soviet Union is not driven solely or even principally by ideology. The Kremlin is not, as administration leaders seem to believe, so fanatically determined to spread its pernicious doctrine over the world that it will run all risks, including immolation, to achieve that objective. Today—and this is a paradox—it is the president and his colleagues who seem doctrinally driven, attacking the Soviet Union with religious fervor as an "evil empire" and Soviet communism as the "focus of evil" just at a time when much of the gas has been escaping from the Soviets' own ideological balloon.

For the Soviets are today far more preoccupied with their own domestic problems than with world revolution. They are, in fact, just what one might expect of a people who fell on the Byzantine side of the cultural divide and whose customs, attitudes, methods, and manners have been deeply touched by the Mongol invaders of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. They are boorish in manners, greedy, cruel, and devious, beset by old demons of doubt and envy, still fearful of a vengeful Germany and

the possibilities of encirclement by the West in concert with China, and bitterly envious of America. Their anxiety is that of the parvenu desperate to achieve recognition—in this case as a superpower in the same category as the United States. Above all else, they are cautious—prepared to exploit any available opportunities to extend their influence—as they have done in Africa, South Yemen, and Afghanistan—but only at minimum cost and risk.

Though we and the Soviets have differing values, we share one overwhelming common interest: neither wants to be destroyed in a nuclear catastrophe, and that should provide a basis on which to build easier relations. At the same time we should begin systematically recasting the alliance strategy for the defense of Europe. For far too long we have been content with a strategy that, in case of Soviet aggression, would force us to choose between capitulation or disaster. To avoid that choice—though the hour is late—we should resolutely undertake to build a deterrent that can survive a test of wills—an adequate conventional force in Europe.

That does not mean, of course, that we should cease to deploy sufficient nuclear power to discourage the use of nuclear weapons by the other side; but even for this purpose we would do far better to rely on submarine-based missiles than on weapons emplaced on the soil of nations that do not control them—a situation tailor-made to produce political and psychological tensions.

The incremental economic burden required to raise NATO's strength to a level required to discourage Soviet attack and to defend Europe if an attack occurs is, as General Bernard W. Rogers, the commander of both the NATO and US forces in Europe, has pointed out, quite manageable. Attaining such a level, he suggests, would require both that NATO countries meet their current force goals (which they are now doing only to the extent of about 70 percent) and that NATO budgets should be increased in real terms by 4 percent a year as against the pledged—but largely unmet—present commitment of 3 percent. It would presumably also require some forward re-deployment of forces and the use of new high-technology weapons that would give NATO tactical advantage on the Central European front. None of that, however, should excessively strain the resources of NATO members. After all, the NATO countries together have nearly four times the gross national product—and hence the economic

might—of the Soviet Union. So, though I recognize that any alliance is inherently hard to galvanize into effective common action, the question is not one of economic capacity but of political will.

To generate that requisite political will requires facing reality, which will clearly not be easy. Those who exhibit the greatest reluctance contend that the alliance could not survive a frank acknowledgment of the truth; NATO has, they argue, lasted well beyond the normal life span of alliances only because the United States has provided its European members with a nuclear umbrella. Were NATO now forced to depend solely on conventional means to resist conventional attacks, America's commitment would no longer provide the glue to bind the alliance together.

But that thesis is far from persuasive. Conventional weapons differ from

nuclear warheads not only in that their destructive potential is limited, but also in that NATO would, if attacked, unquestionably use them. Thus NATO forces adequately armed with today's conventional weapons would provide a far more enduring deterrent to a Soviet conventional attack than the mere potential threat that the president might authorize a nuclear response. Whether we like it or not, the deterrent value of our nuclear weapons will steadily diminish as mounting public concern decreases the likelihood that any president would ever use them unless the Russians used them first. Meanwhile Europe should feel reassured rather than disturbed by recognition of such presidential restraint; if the Soviets ventured westward, the use of our nuclear arsenal would not protect Europeans from destruction, it would merely assure the devastation of their homelands.

The conclusion that we should, therefore, build an effective NATO conventional defense does not mean that we

should furl or throw away our nuclear umbrella; we shall continue to need it to deter a nuclear attack. What it does mean is that we should no longer rely on it to stop the Soviets from attacking with conventional weapons.

Unhappily such acceptance of reality will not be easy. Not only do many Europeans fail to understand the full deterrent effect of modern conventional weapons, which can wreak destruction far beyond that known in any previous war, but they have become habituated over three decades to relying blindly on our nuclear shield; and such hardened habits of thought cannot be easily

altered. Indeed many Europeans may, as McGeorge Bundy points out,² suffer agonizing withdrawal symptoms as we begin to demythify the bomb. But they can no longer counter with the old excuses; although some NATO countries are suffering economic problems even

worse than ours, they are still in far better economic shape than the Soviet Union.

To preserve the vitality of the alliance, Americans must prove that we can and will help to build an effective conventional defense, not merely by words but by committing increased resources to match the Soviets' conventional might.

Obviously we can neither change the solidified thought patterns of European leaders overnight nor quickly build up NATO's defensive strength to the point required. But we can make it clear that a new political fact—rising public recognition of the dangers and contradictions of current policy—is increasingly challenging the assumptions of our nuclear strategy. Meanwhile, we must stop indulging the naive assumption that we can assure world peace by building more and more nuclear weapons until we turn even outer space into a lethal parking lot. That way lies ultimate catastrophe.

Leaders of democracies are ill-equipped to play the kind of cosmic poker in which we are now engaged; for, unlike those of totalitarian states, they have too many kibitzers looking over their shoulders. Morality and reason both demand that we devise a more congenial game that will not leave us to face a choice of appalling evils.

Although we should promptly begin to redesign European defense arrangements from dependence on nuclear warheads to reliance on strengthened and modernized conventional forces, that does not mean that we should now announce—or try to negotiate—a “no-first-use” policy. Even though that should be possible at a later date, we would do well to postpone such a step until an adequate conventional defense is firmly in place. Meanwhile, we should gradually raise the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons until it ceases to have meaning. That is the only prudent course available to us—and it will not remain available forever. □

²The New York Review, June 16.