ARMS CONTROL
A Skeptical Appraisal and a Modest Proposal

Robert E. Osgood
ARMS CONTROL
A Skeptical Appraisal and a Modest Proposal
EXAGGERATED EXPECTATIONS

In the last two decades nuclear arms control has come to be regarded throughout the world as the centerpiece of East-West relations; yet, by any objective standard its actual effect upon East-West relations—let alone upon global international politics—has been distinctly less than that of political and military developments in central Europe, Indochina, Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf, or even Africa and Central America. The so-called arms race has had a major impact on East-West relations, but the impact of arms control upon the arms race has been far less than either its advocates or critics claim. Great popular hopes are invested in arms control as the preeminent instrument of peace and security, but its actual achievements do not justify these hopes, any more than its failures justify the disillusionment or alarm they have generated.

Now, as strategic arms negotiations are being revived in the wake of the détente they were supposed to sustain, arms control carries a great burden of political and diplomatic expectations. The prospect that current arms negotiations in Geneva will result in an agreement that fulfills these expectations, however, is not promising. Just when nuclear arms control has been assigned its most important role as the agent of postwar peace and security, the technical and political difficulties of actually reaching a beneficial arms agreement have become more formidable.

This paradox does not arise from the diminished utility of arms control in the nuclear age—indeed, the postwar record of arms control is better than the prewar record. It arises, rather, from the contrast between the limited utility of arms control and the extraordinary hopes and expectations that arms control will prove to be a cure for the anxieties of the nuclear age. For reasons more profound and numerous than can be examined here (the growth of Soviet nuclear strength must be considered a major factor), these anxieties have persisted and apparently grown, at least in the intensity of their political expression. Remarkably, this trend has continued despite the waning of serious crises, diminishing active fears of a nuclear surprise attack, and fewer alarms about a dangerous military imbalance since the first two decades of the cold war.

Although opposition to deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons (INF) on European soil failed to stop deployment, it did reveal the new capacity...
of political activists to mobilize nuclear anxieties among an enlarged security-conscious public. In anticipation of, and response to, this phenomenon Western governments turned to the "dual-track" expedient of arms negotiations as the indispensable sanction for any major defense program, especially one based in Europe. They encouraged anxious publics to find relief for their anxieties in arms control, which they identified with the classic mission of disarmament—to prevent war by stopping the arms race and abolishing weapons—rather than with the limited objectives postulated by the classic arms-control theory of the 1960s, which was simply to make the existing nuclear balance safer and cheaper. Both East and West have ritually invoked this mission in describing the goals of arms negotiations. The rationale of disarmament is reflected in U.S. criticism, from both the Left and Right, of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) on the ground that they merely sanctioned the arms race and in the U.S. and Soviet adoption of nuclear reductions as the prerequisite of an arms agreement, as though reductions were good in themselves.

LIMITED REALITIES

Public hopes and expectations invested in arms control have risen dramatically in the nuclear age. An unprecedented number of arms agreements, such as the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, lend credence to these hopes and expectations. Yet these agreements were feasible precisely because they had nothing to do with classic disarmament goals and because they did not directly or substantially impinge upon the military balance between the superpowers.

Relief from nuclear anxieties and hope for peace depend primarily on the prospect of a comprehensive agreement that directly affects the structure and composition of opposing nuclear forces. Yet the problems in reaching this kind of agreement are enormous, and the obstacles to such an agreement remaining beneficial as well as enduring are immense. These problems and obstacles arise from some basic facts of international politics and modern military power that precede the nuclear age and would exist even if nuclear weapons had not been invented. These facts should not be confused with the allegations of those who attribute the problems of arms control to the military-industrial complex, the blind parochialism of the armed services, and the like, although such factors play a role. Rather, they are intrinsic to the politics of armed adversities in the twentieth century:

—Armed adversaries, anxious not to give each other even a marginal military advantage, are bound to be very cautious about committing themselves to formal restrictions that would impede military adjustments to unpredictable political contingencies and the dynamics of the arms competition.

—This caution is heightened by the difficulty of estimating military strength when some weapons have never been employed and when new weapons and weapons improvements are rapidly developing and becoming obsolete, as during the last century.

—Asymmetries in the structure and content of armed forces and in geographical and political circumstances complicate the difficulty of measuring and equating the components of military power with either the precision or equity that a treaty requires. They also mean that any military equilibrium that underlies an agreement must be a balance of imbalances and trade-offs, which compounds the difficulty of reaching a mutually acceptable bargain.

—Armed adversaries, in addition to overcoming the technical and political obstacles of equitably defining the precise relationship of their military forces, must present their proposals in simple and appealing terms in order to elicit domestic and foreign support. Consequently, arms talks have increasingly come to be a theater for playing public sentiment to national advantage, and easily grasped standards of equality and symmetry (often static and inflexible measures of relative power) tend to be used if there is sufficient political pressure for an agreement. Yet such agreements may lose in enduring relevance and support what they gain in initial acceptance when the real, dynamic facts of the military balance become apparent.

—These factors mean that the most feasible—perhaps the only feasible—arms agreement is one that codifies, through freezes or ceilings on weapons, an existing military balance, which both sides prefer to formally unconstrained competition. Yet the terms of such an agreement may soon become unacceptable, since even the most comprehensive agreement tends to rechannel arms competition into weapons not included in the agreement, and technological innovations tend to upset any agreed balance.

—Democratic signatories tend to preserve treaties even when they have become obsolete, whereas authoritarian states have more leeway to stretch or suspend violations of a treaty's terms. This phenomenon, and the fear of it, fosters insecurity and tension, which may lead democracies to resort, belatedly, to extreme and destabilizing spurs of rearmament.

—In order to retain the confidence of democratic, open societies, formal agreements restricting a wide range of advanced technology must have adequate means of verification. The diversity, mobility, concealment, and multipurpose nature of modern military technology, and its fusion with civilian technology, have greatly complicated the problem of verifying compliance with treaty terms and have weakened confidence in the reliability of arms agreements. Although advanced electronic technologies, such as satellites and eavesdropping devices, have facilitated verification, the development of dual-use (nuclear or conventional) weapons, multifunction components (for example, space sensors), mobile ballistic and cruise missiles, and electronic counterdetection devices (such as encrypting missile tests) have greatly impeded reliable verification except by intrusive on-site inspection.

It is also true, however, that several basic features of the nuclear age have eased the difficulties in reaching useful and enduring comprehensive arms agreements.

—The essentially bipolar nature of the East-West military balance eases the task of reaching and sustaining a mutually satisfactory arms agreement, although the special security needs and anxieties of the United States' European allies as well as British, French, and (to a lesser extent) Chinese independent nuclear forces complicate the task.
The reduction of nuclear forces or arms expenditures was never the objective of arms control in the classic view of the 1960s.

An arms agreement is further facilitated by the great diversity of military technology, the rapid rate of technological innovation, and high levels of nuclear weapons on both sides, which have produced a rough equivalence of military strength and a fairly stable military equilibrium in long-range strategic forces. (The significance of the large Soviet superiority in medium-range nuclear weapons is diminished by the fact that effectiveness of NATO’s deterrent posture does not require numerical equality.)

Paradoxically, however, these same features of military competition that facilitate arms agreements diminish the need for such agreements. For these are preeminently the features that deter armed conflict between the opposing blocs and enable them to sustain a mutually satisfactory military equilibrium, based on continual unilateral adjustments within an overall competition and a level of forces such that no unilateral gain by one side is likely to be decisive. Thus, the very features of the so-called arms race that stimulate the demand for arms control are features that objectively have indispensably contributed to the most protracted and stable period of peace between major adversaries and their allies in the history of international relations.

FROM SALT TO START

The discrepancy between the expectations and limitations of arms control reflects a corresponding discrepancy between popular fears and the objective dangers of the arms race without arms control. The history of SALT I and II illustrates these discrepancies at work.

From the American perspective, which it was widely and erroneously believed the Soviets shared, SALT I and II were constructed on the basis of the classic postwar arms-control belief that the best guarantee of East-West peace lay in consolidating mutual deterrence. Consolidation, it was believed, depended on making a rational nuclear first strike impossible by keeping the retaliatory forces of both sides sufficiently invulnerable and lethal to deliver unacceptable damage on a second strike while leaving cities and national populations sufficiently vulnerable to be unable to escape such damage.

The principal function of arms control in this concept was to facilitate the consolidation of mutual deterrence—or “stability” of the nuclear balance—on the basis of parity in second-strike capabilities for “mutual assured destruction” (later dubbed MAD by its detractors)—so as to reduce the risk of war in a serious political crisis. Subsidiary functions were to moderate the arms competition, make it more predictable, and limit the destructiveness of war if deterrence should fail. However, the reduction of nuclear forces or arms expenditures was never the objective of arms control in the classic view of the 1960s. Stability was the overriding objective. Arms reductions would not necessarily foster a stable state of MAD. Indeed, substantial reductions might be destabilizing because they would narrow the margin of redundancy, which provides a cushion of security against violations of an agreement or changes in the military balance that are not restricted by that agreement.

In subsequent years—particularly, the mid-1970s and afterward—this more comprehensive concept of nuclear strategy and arms control was modified in theory and practice, but the central objective of military strategy and arms control continued to be deterrence by mutually assured destruction. This was the conceptual basis of the SALT I agreement of 1972, which contained these two elements:

1. Most important was the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which limited the deployment of strategic defense systems to the national capital and one military site in each country so as to prevent them from degrading the effectiveness of nuclear retaliatory strikes by either side.

2. Secondly, the five-year Interim Agreement to limit long-range ballistic weapons was intended to put a ceiling on existing military programs and, at least from the U.S. standpoint, to maintain invulnerable retaliatory forces by protecting them from increasingly accurate, hard-target kill missiles (notably, the Soviet SS-8).

The SALT II treaty of 1979 extended the ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) limits of the Interim Agreement to additional weapons systems, including MIRVed missiles (ballistic missiles with multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles). Although ratification of SALT II fell victim to the collapse of détente and particularly the invasion of Afghanistan, both sides have continued to observe its restrictions, including the fractionation provision limiting the number of warheads per MIRVed missile to ten. This adherence to the unratified SALT II treaty demonstrates that the superpowers can agree on comprehensive restrictions of their nuclear forces when these restrictions essentially freeze existing programs and both sides are sufficiently satisfied with the nuclear balance. However, the adherence to SALT II is a tribute to the force of democratic public sentiment, which regards an arms agreement as an end in itself (and, incidentally, convinces democratic governments that arms control is the price one must pay for defense programs).

Equally important, SALT I and II illustrate how briefly a comprehensive agreement can be expected to register a mutually satisfactory military balance, even when this agreement makes no substantial change in the existing structure and composition of forces. The abortive of strategic arms negotiations, which culminated in president Carter’s withdrawal of the SALT II treaty from Senate consideration for ratification, was due not only to the collapse of détente that followed Soviet intervention in Vietnam, Ethiopia, and South Yemen and the invasion of Afghanistan and, later, to Soviet opposition to INF deployment. It was also due to the fact that technological change and the rechanneling of the arms race undermined the military balance that the SALT agreements codified.

Adherence to the unratified SALT II treaty demonstratres that the superpowers can agree on comprehensive restrictions of their nuclear forces given the right conditions.
The United States signed the ABM treaty with the expectation that it would be followed by reductions in strategic offensive forces, which were expected to diminish the threat to the land-based leg of the U.S. strategic triad. Instead, because MIRVing was not restricted and because SALT I limited launchers, not warheads, the Soviets were able to multiply the striking power of their heavy throw-weight SS-18s and SS-19s so that they could destroy 90 percent or more of U.S. land-based missiles on a first strike. Against this hard-target capability the only politically and economically acceptable response the United States could agree upon—developing the MIRVed MX to be deployed in silos and, in a decade or so, the single-warhead, mobile Midgetman for deployment on air bases—would fall far short of restoring the pre-MIRV invulnerability of U.S. land-based missiles. Further, budgetary and technological constraints put even these deployments at risk. The official U.S. reaction to this predicament, although arguably excessive, was the alarmed discovery of a “window of vulnerability” and the decision greatly to augment defense expenditures in order to redress the growing nuclear imbalance.

At the same time, because SALT I limited only “strategic” missiles, the Soviets were free to deploy a disturbingly large number of medium-range SS-20s. This allowed the USSR to achieve a monopoly of accurate, mobile missiles in the European theater (including those placed in Asian Russia, which were able to reach the western U.S. as well). This monopoly, in its popular impact, fueled the INF deployment crisis.

Therefore, although it is arguable that SALT I and II moderated the intensity of the arms competition temporarily and in some respects, in other respects they stimulated the competition before they were a decade old. SALT I and II failed to confirm even the modestest claim for arms control: that it moderates the arms race and makes it more predictable. Furthermore, there is no evidence that these agreements advanced the overriding objective of arms control: to reduce the risk of war by stabilizing the military balance against the possibility of a rational nuclear first strike. Indeed, as the result of MIRVing, which increased the ratio of warheads to missiles and military targets, both sides became more vulnerable to nuclear first strikes, although the actual prospect of either side initiating a nuclear attack on the other—something close to zero—probably remained unaffected.

Some defenders of arms control contend that the moral of this story is to make better arms agreements—a view held by those who blame the deficiencies of SALT on the failure of one or both sides to pursue a MIRV ban seriously. Some reasonably conclude that, whatever the deficiencies of SALT, the United States has been better off with it than it would have been without it. Others blame the demise of strategic arms control on the excessive hopes for a global détente, promoted by the U.S. government in its search for public and congressional support of SALT. Each of these views holds an element of truth, but none validates the immediate claims, which have come to be taken for granted, for the necessity, feasibility, and utility of comprehensive arms agreements.

In the disillusionment with SALT following the collapse of détente, senator Henry Jackson’s criticism—that SALT merely sanctioned Soviet pursuit of nuclear superiority—gained salience. On the ground that SALT only sanctioned the continuing arms race, SALT opponents on the Left joined opponents on the Right in the late 1970s. For both Left and Right nuclear reductions became the standard of true arms control. The Reagan administration, charging that SALT I and II helped immobilize the United States in the face of an adverse shift in the nuclear balance, adopted nuclear reductions as the centerpiece of its strategic arms-control proposals. Accordingly, SALT was replaced with Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, or START. The Soviet Union’s adoption of reductions in its own proposals attests to the broad appeal of this new position. The basis of this appeal is simply that since nuclear weapons are dangerous, the fewer there are, the safer we shall all be. It is a striking example of the extent to which arms control has borrowed from disarmament in order to enhance its appeal.

Of course, U.S. government authorities and private defense experts are not so naive. For them, like the theorists of the golden age of arms control, arms reductions are not an end in themselves but useful only insofar as they enhance the stability of mutual deterrence—or, more narrowly, the effectiveness of the United States’ second-strike retaliatory capability. For them the overriding objective is to reduce the vulnerability of U.S. land-based missiles to the first-strike capability of the MIRVed Soviet land-based missiles. Their operational concept is that stability—that is, the confident constraint of nuclear first strikes—depends on reducing the ratio of warheads per launcher and per target. Accordingly, the reduction of warheads, not launchers, should be the central aim of arms control—but especially and indispensably those reductions that reduce the capacity of SS-18s and other strategic nuclear missiles to knock out U.S. land-based missiles in hard silos. This sophisticated conception of arms reductions, however, is not the basis on which either superpower proclaims the virtue of its proposals in the public arena.

The rhetoric of disarmament scarcely conceals the reality that each side wants only the kinds of reductions that favor its strategic objectives, that these objectives conflict with each other, and that it is much harder to achieve mutually satisfactory reductions than to limit existing programs, since reductions affect the military balance more substantially. However, when the language of aspirations conflicts with the logic of realpolitik, the latter may be the loser.

Under SALT I the Soviets were able to multiply their striking power so that they could destroy 90 percent or more of U.S. land-based missiles on a first strike.
In contrast with this vision is the U.S. government's proximate goal of strengthening strategic defense capabilities. The intention is to stabilize the familiar structure of deterrence by restoring some of the survivability of land-based missiles and of command, control, communication, and intelligence facilities (C3I) impaired by increased Soviet prompt hard-target kill capabilities. One might add to this goal the objectives of diminishing the dependence on nuclear retaliation and minimizing the danger of an ecological catastrophe called "nuclear winter."

To achieve either the proximate or ultimate goal, new defensive technologies must be so effective and affordable—at least for the United States—that they will be easier to deploy than for the adversary to counter. Bilateral restrictions on offensive nuclear weapons as well as on offensive weapons would obviously help to achieve this prerequisite. To achieve the ultimate goal of the Defended World, such comprehensive restrictions would be indispensable, as would agreements by the other nuclear powers to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

The proximate goal of stabilizing nuclear deterrence may be both feasible and desirable, conceivably even without Soviet cooperation. The Defended World goal is almost certainly not feasible, and it is probably not desirable either. These judgments differ from the common wisdom in two respects. First, they hold that arms competition in defensive and offensive weapons without arms control would not necessarily be destabilizing. Second, they hold that near-perfect shields against nuclear attacks for the superpowers and their allies would not make mutual deterrence more stable and less dangerous.

Even a cursory examination of the military and arms-control implications of the Defended World indicates that its desirability is no less questionable than its feasibility. Assuming that the nature of East-West relations was to remain essentially the same, the peace of the Defended World would still depend on a stable military equilibrium that deterred both sides from initiating war. The stability of this equilibrium would have to depend on the stability of the non-nuclear balance, the deterrent effect of the prospect of nuclear rearmament, and the effectiveness and reliability of the arms-control regime.

If the general assumption is correct that nuclear weapons have been a critical factor in keeping the peace in Europe, one must also assume that a non-nuclear balance would be critically less effective as the basis of extended deterrence. In any case, there is no chance that the European allies could be persuaded to accept the risk and cost of a nonnuclear defense (even assuming that they believed in the effectiveness of these weapons) in exchange for the security against nuclear attacks provided by defensive weapons. Yet, their cooperation in deploying SDI and in adhering to the arms restrictions that would be necessary to guarantee a Defended Europe would be indispensable. Perhaps the threat of nuclear rearmament could become a new deterrent, but since it would put a premium on rapid rearmament and a decisive first strike, it would also be highly destabilizing.

Moreover, maintaining a stable nonnuclear, defense-dominant structure of deterrence would place a tremendous burden on the arms-control regime. For both sides to have confidence in this regime it would have to guarantee that, despite advancing technology, all kinds of offensive nuclear weapons would remain impotent and obsolete. The development of dual-use delivery vehicles (for example, missiles and airborne in which nuclear and conventional warheads are readily interchangeable), the potential for turning defensive weapons in space and on land to offensive and counteroffensive use (by, for example, destroying satellites and sensors), the rapid rate of military technological innovation, and the growing fusion of civilian and military technology are only some of the present technological realities already impeding a comprehensive and enduring arms agreement. In addition, the problems of reliable verification and response to noncompliance would be many orders of magnitude greater than those the United States presently faces. The experience of much simpler and less radical arms agreements both in and before the nuclear age indicates that the arms-control regime of the Defended World would be dangerously fragile and ephemeral. Moreover, given the fact that its signatures would depend greatly upon it for their security, any breakdown would jeopardize the whole structure of mutual deterrence.

To meet the problem of developing an adequate nonnuclear defense against the superior conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact, U.S. spokesmen have proposed extending arms control to conventional forces. Yet there is no prospect that an arms agreement with the Soviet Union would provide NATO countries with a conventional military balance that they are not otherwise able or willing to achieve. Failure to reach the relatively simple agreement postulated in the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction negotiations, which contemplates only the most innoxious force restrictions, indicates the extreme difficulty of reconciling the asymmetries of geography, weapons, military structure, and military personnel of conventional forces in a treaty of mutual interest. The determinants of conventional fighting strength on land have always been so numerous, diverse, and hard to measure or equate that they make impossible an agreement between adversaries on a mutually advantageous balance. To burden arms control with the task of achieving balanced conventional force limits and reductions in the European theater—in addition to safeguarding a nonnuclear, defense-dominant strategic balance—merely compounds the unreality of SDI's ultimate goal.

This is not to say that the United States should be satisfied forever with a structure of deterrence, no matter how stable it may seem, that depends so heavily on the threat of mutual suicide and the accompanying prospect of a worldwide ecological catastrophe. Rather, the United States should look for ways to make deterrence both stable and less dependent on mutual vulnerability to nuclear retaliation. To this end there may be more promise of practical significance in a defense-reliant structure of deterrence that would interdict only 70 or 50 per cent, rather than nearly 100 percent, of incoming missiles. In such a partially defended world some nuclear weapons would remain as a tangible reminder of the awesome power of nuclear retaliation. However, they would be reduced and degraded to a level at which they were functionally obsolete as counterforce weapons, leaving nonnuclear defensive capabilities as the primary deterrent to the first use of nuclear weapons. If nuclear weapons were nevertheless used, there would be a compelling incentive to use them only as bargaining resources to terminate the war rather than as instruments of maximum destruction or victory; and the prospect that nuclear bargaining would lead to nuclear winter would be greatly diminished by their limited number.

A stable defense-dominant structure of deterrence would have to guarantee that all kinds of offensive nuclear weapons would remain impotent and obsolete.
The 70-percent solution, too, would incur formidable—perhaps insurmountable—problems. Perhaps time will show that technological developments, such as the substitution of conventional for nuclear weapons (including strategic missile defenses), which are even now taking place, will contribute to the practicability of such a defense-reliant structure. Perhaps not. As with the Defended World, the world of 70-percent defense is too remote and too susceptible to known and unpredictable technological variables to be of practical significance now. At most, it should be regarded as a hypothetical ultimate alternative to the present structure of deterrence, which holds nations hostage to mass devastation.

A REALISTIC ROLE FOR SDI

The proximate goal of making deterrence that depends on nuclear retaliation as safe and stable as possible calls for the most scrupulous examination of the role that the new ballistic missile defense (BMD) technology, which has developed so rapidly since the ABM treaty, might play. Perhaps this technology will not turn out to be sufficiently lethal, survivable, and affordable to be a cost-effective means of protecting land-based military targets. If not, the sensible course would be to phase out U.S. reliance on land-based missiles and concentrate on developing air- and sea-based nuclear forces, while moving toward mobile single-warhead strategic missiles and seeking the kind of offensive warhead reductions that would encourage the Soviets to move in the same direction. It is not unlikely, however, that in the next decade some of the defensive technology now under research or development will show promise of providing cost-effective—perhaps indispensable—supplements to offensive missiles. Land-based ABMs (and perhaps lasers) would probably be in the lead. Should this happen, the United States will have to choose between continuing to adhere to the ABM treaty, revising it, or abandoning it by withdrawal or abrogation.

In making this decision, the United States should consider the history of postwar arms competition, which does not support the premise that an arms race unconstrained by treaty restrictions is bound to be more destabilizing or even more expensive than the competitive technological advances that will inevitably occur under a formal arms-control agreement. Rather, this history has shown that technological gains achieved by either side are offset by the same or compensating gains of the other side, long before either obtains a decisive advantage that could destabilize deterrence. The intensity of the arms competition is occasionally increased by fears—typically, on the U.S. side, after a period of relaxation—that the adversary might achieve a decisive advantage if its weapons deployments are not offset; but this results primarily from political crises, not technological changes, as the ups and downs of U.S. defense efforts have shown. In the long run, the constraints on defense budgets—economic, bureaucratic, and political—are a steadying influence on the arms competition.

The dynamics of the arms rivalry have not driven the superpowers closer to the brink of total war. The evidence indicates that, whether because of or regardless of the arms competition, the superpowers have become more—not less—cautious and prudent. The evidence similarly indicates that developments in the structure and composition of the military balance—for example, advances in CPI and the mobility and concealment of nuclear weapons—have supported, rather than obstructed, this essentially political phenomenon. One can speculate that the fairly benign history of the postwar arms competition has resulted from the fact that it was only the United States that enjoyed a major technical superiority up to the mid-1980s. However, the possibility of the Soviet Union attaining a comparable superiority is unlikely and could arise only from massive neglect of the military balance.

The U.S. experience with the postwar arms competition may not, however, be relevant indefinitely. If the East-West balance is infused with strategic defense weapons and this offense/defense mix is unregulated by arms control, several questions must be asked in the interest of long-term stability: Would defensive antimissile technology prove to be a more destabilizing extension of the arms competition than previous extensions into ICBMs, cruise missiles, or submarine-launched ballistic missiles? Would extended-ballistic systems be so vulnerable as to induce a first strike against them? Perhaps a blinding attack against sensors in a serious crisis? Would one side gain such an effective defense of its population as to leave the other helpless against blackmail? Would limited attacks of attrition against vulnerable space-based systems, including satellites and sensors, become attractive for military or political reasons? If so, would such attacks lead to full-scale war on land or only limited exchanges in space? If both sides gained substantial protection of their military targets, would this be more likely to deter a first strike because of a mutual lack of confidence in the capacity to achieve military objectives and prevent unacceptable retaliatory damage, or would this induce a first strike because of mutual confidence that retaliatory damage could be confined to acceptable levels?

In answer to these questions one can, of course, construct imaginable worst-case scenarios, just as such scenarios were constructed about the consequences of introducing ballistic missiles and other weapons into superpower forces. Yet, in reality, worst cases in the nuclear age have a way of not materializing, partly because the superpowers are strongly disinclined to take risks, but also because the forces of the superpowers are fairly evenly matched and, by virtue of their quantity and diversity, provide assurance against either side obtaining a decisive advantage. Precisely because the superpowers anticipate worst cases, they take measures to prevent them from materializing.

The unique characteristics of an arms competition between offensive and defensive systems (and the accompanying countermeasures and counter-countermeasures) could affect deterrence in different ways. First, because of the enormous diversity and complexity of potential weapons and their interaction, both sides would be greatly uncertain that they could acceptably limit damage from a retaliatory strike. This suggests that an offense/defense arms competition would deter, rather than encourage, a first strike. Second, there is the remote possibility that in such a competition without arms control the defense would become so dominant over the offense and counterdefense measures that it would greatly reduce both sides’ dependence on the threat of nuclear retaliation. This prospect might be destabilizing, especially if the West does not take measures to establish adequate conventional forces for the defense of Europe against ground, air, and missile attack. However, because the process of adapting to
an unfamiliar structure of deterrence would necessarily be gradual and protracted, there is little likelihood that it would push the superpowers to the brink of war.

One should not conclude from these judgments that the United States can view with equanimity an offense/defense competition unconstrained by arms control or that arms control can contribute nothing to national security and international stability. Rather, the conclusions to be drawn are, first, that assuming that the proximate objective of U.S. military and arms-control policy is to make the existing structure of deterrence as stable as possible while holding open the option of an equally stable structure of deterrence more dependent on population defense, the United States should soon consider whether to adhere to the ABM treaty or whether to revise or abandon it. Second, the United States, when considering this choice, should not assume that extending the arms competition into strategic defense systems would necessarily be more destabilizing than the consequences of adhering to the ABM treaty.

Ironically, the principal practical significance of these conclusions may be that the United States can most effectively pursue national security through arms control if it is prepared to pursue it without arms control. This is because the United States is unlikely to secure a favorable arms agreement unless it can convince the Soviet Union that this is preferable to an unconstrained competition that the United States is otherwise prepared to undertake. In reality, the choice is not likely to be between arms control and no arms control. For better or worse, continual arms-control negotiations and occasional agreements have become a fixture of international politics. Consequently, it is all the more important to act upon the central tenet of classic arms-control thought: arms agreements should complement defense policy as an instrument of military security; they cannot be a substitute.

With this minimal, yet demanding, objective in mind, let us assess the present state of strategic arms negotiations and consider a modest proposal that might square the feasible purposes of SDI with a stable balance of deterrence.

2. A MODEST PROPOSAL

CURRENT OBSTACLES TO AN ARMS AGREEMENT

Current strategic arms negotiations, regardless of whether they result in an agreement, are intended to serve compelling domestic and international political purposes. However (for reasons I shall explain), if negotiations do not achieve important substantive results, the negotiating process will no longer yield political benefits and SDI will cease to be a lever in attaining an arms agreement—probably in the next three to four years. Therefore, whether from the standpoint of supporting President Reagan's SDI objectives or more proximate objectives, the United States needs a negotiable arms proposal. Present U.S. arms-control objectives represent a broad national consensus. Their implications for a negotiable proposal linking SDI and arms control are considered below.

The Reagan administration has four primary objectives for an arms-control agreement in the current negotiations:

(1) to make the strategic nuclear balance more stable; that is, to achieve an agreed structure of nuclear forces that will dissuade either side, in a serious political crisis, from striking first in order to gain a military advantage or to avoid being struck first;

(2) to achieve the kind of deep reductions in the nuclear striking strength of both sides that will enhance the stability of deterrence;

(3) to hold open the option of both sides deploying defensive systems that will support a stable structure of mutual deterrence based on protecting national populations from nuclear attack—the Defended World—rather than on the threat of mutual assured destruction; and,

(4) to reduce and limit the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons at roughly equal levels in a global context or to eliminate this class of weapons altogether.

Soviet arms-control positions are coming closer to those that the United States has taken to serve these objectives. For example, the Soviets have adopted the U.S. objective of reducing warheads on strategic missiles, and they have
dropped their insistence on zero deployment of Pershing IIIs and cruise missiles as the condition for limiting their SS-20s. Yet, as in previous arms negotiations, the convergence of Soviet and U.S. terms of agreement does not necessarily signify an approaching bargain; it may only represent a maneuver in the contest for influence in the market of public opinion. In fact, the present positions of the two sides offer little or no prospect of agreement. It should be easier for the United States and the USSR to find a basis for agreement on intermediate-range weapons than on intercontinental-range weapons, but in neither case are the technical problems of accommodation the basic obstacle to agreement.

**OBSTACLES TO START**

The obstacles to agreement on strategic arms reductions lie partly in the formidable intrinsic difficulty that impedes both superpowers from achieving asymmetrical nuclear force structures and reliably limiting the consequences of new technology (for example, mobile and dual-capable nuclear weapons, sea-based cruise missiles, and antisatellite weapons (ASAT) that could perform IMD functions). Yet, an agreement is also impeded by more fundamental conflicting military interests and policies:

-The Soviets have little or nothing to gain by accepting the deep reductions in SS-18 and other ICBMs warheads that the United States wants in return for the kind of reductions in bombers and cruise missiles the United States would be willing to make. Without a new agreement the USSR's relative nuclear striking power will not suffer, and its hard-target kill capability as well as its invulnerability will absolutely increase. In any event, the Soviet Union has no interest in limiting the offensive systems in which it holds a quantitative lead as long as it can expect to face defensive deployments in which the United States will have the lead. The Soviets are certainly as opposed to moving toward a military structure entirely dependent on national vulnerability to nuclear destruction. Their overriding interest is to prevent the United States from exploiting its potential defensive technological advantage in what the Soviets see as the "ceaseless dialectic" between the offense and defense in all weaponry.

To be sure, in the absence of an agreement the Soviet fixed-site MIRV'd land-based missiles, like those in the United States, will remain vulnerable to a first strike (although not so vulnerable as to permit the United States to succeed in a disarming strike that would limit Soviet retaliatory damage to an acceptable level). The Soviets are, however, in the process of reducing this vulnerability by deploying MIRV'd mobile and single-warhead ballistic missiles on land, more SLBMs and submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) at sea, and numerous air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) on new heavy bombers. The United States, on the other hand, has been unable to find a politically acceptable mode of deployment at an affordable cost to achieve comparable reductions in the vulnerability of the land-based leg of the U.S. strategic triad (the air, land, and sea forces).

-The Soviets would have an incentive to agree to the kind of trade-off in offensive reductions that the United States seeks—one that would substantially reduce their hard-target killing capability—only if they believed that these reductions were necessary to prevent the United States from exploiting its technological superiority in a formally unconstrained competition for strategic defense capabilities. The Soviets fear that in such a competition U.S. defense systems would reduce the vulnerability of U.S. land-based retaliatory forces, degrade Soviet retaliatory forces, and possibly, in the very long run, shield the U.S. population from unacceptable Soviet retaliatory damage. Just anticipating these possibilities greatly complicates Soviet defense planning and raises the prospect of comprehensive and costly competition in weapons technology in which the United States has an inherent advantage.

Yet as long as the United States adheres to the ABM treaty—especially a restrictive interpretation of it—the Soviets can minimize this risk. Although the United States can develop and test SDI components through its ASAT program and, to a lesser extent, by taking advantage of the gray areas of the treaty, the opportunities to advance SDI through circumvention of the treaty are not so great as to induce the Soviets to accept the SS-18 and SS-19 reductions the United States wants in return for an ASAT limitation or ban or tightening up of treaty restrictions.

—Consequently, under present conditions the United States has neither sticks nor carrots—no persuasive threat or concession—to achieve its arms-control aim of offensive warhead reductions. Soviet incentives in arms negotiations, for the time being, lie predominantly in the realms of propaganda and public diplomacy. The Soviet objective is to enhance congressional and allied constraints on the SDI program. They also seek, at the same time, to exploit the Reagan administration's commitment to a space shield in order to divide the United States from its European allies, which fear that the very rationale of such a shield will undermine the nuclear deterrence to which they attribute forty years of unequalled peace and security. By representing SDI as the decisive obstacle to an arms-control agreement that would reduce offensive nuclear weapons by 50 percent—General Secretary Gorbachev's first-stage proposal—the Soviets are not seeking a trade-off between offensive reductions and formal SDI restrictions; they are seeking, through the political process, restrictions on the scale of, and funding for, SDI. For this they hope to make no concessions while they proceed with their own substantial strategic defense program (and also their tactical ballistic missile defense, or ATBM, program), which raises the potential of a Soviet breakout or "creepout" into a full-scale, national strategic defense deployment.

**OBLIGATIONS TO AN INF AGREEMENT**

The obstacles to agreement on intermediate-range (or medium-range, in Soviet terminology) missiles are less formidable in technical military terms. This is because the comparative numbers of these weapons have much less impact on the overall East-West balance, since the same targets can be hit by both longer- and shorter-range weapons. In addition, they are not directly linked to the balance between offensive and defensive weapons, now that the Soviets have moved agreement on SDI as a condition for agreement on INF. Yet the real obstacle to an agreement limiting these weapons is political and symbolic, just as the decision to deploy INF was largely political and symbolic. The decision toemplace INF on European soil bore virtually no relationship to the
quantitative military balance with SS-20s. The large and growing numbers of SS-20s simply made it easier to persuade Western parliaments and publics to deploy some number of missiles for the overriding purpose of visibly coupling U.S. nuclear forces to the defense of Europe. (The underlying logic that INF missiles would potentially draw a Soviet attack, thereby compelling a U.S. nuclear response, was not a politically attractive argument.)

The Soviet proposal on medium-range missiles, presented by General Secretary Gorbachev, is to reduce these weapons to zero in Europe (but not in Asia) and, in a final stage, to eliminate all—including tactical—nuclear weapons in Europe. The proposal removes the ban on SDI previously held as a condition for agreement, but it introduces another condition: that the number of British and French nuclear warheads not be increased.

The most obvious political problem raised by this proposal is that a freeze on British and French nuclear forces, which would be increased by 1,200 warheads according to currently planned modernization through MBVIII, is completely unacceptable. Clearly, the British and French will stick to their oft-repeated refusal to negotiate an INF agreement any limit on these weapons, which they regard as independent strategic forces; and the United States will not—indeed, could not—negotiate any limit in their behalf. They have indicated that they might be willing to accept a limitation contingent upon the reduction of U.S. and French strategic nuclear weapons, but this condition simply reintroduces the linkage between an INF agreement and SDI through another step in the process. The Soviet proposal has, therefore, put the political burden for blocking an INF agreement on the British and French. Furthermore, it has set the stage for a conflict between these nations and other members of the alliance, which may be more interested in ridding Europe of medium-range nuclear weapons than in preserving British and French nuclear forces.

A more serious political problem raised by the Soviet proposal concerns the sensitive and potentially controversial question of decoupling (the separation of a U.S. strategic response from the defense of the European allies). Decoupling has always been a major Soviet goal. Moscow spared the allies from fighting the decoupling issue when it rejected the U.S. zero-zero option (the prohibition of all medium-range missiles in Europe and Asia), which Washington proposed in order to blunt popular European opposition to INF deployments, although a ban on these missiles would have run directly counter to the coupling rationale for deploying INF in the first place. Now that INF deployments are taking place, Gorbachev’s zero option proposal, by accepting half of that U.S. initiative, seeks to turn the West’s short-term political expedient against extended deterrence by playing the game over again. Once more, as before, Inf deployments, this option would leave Western Europe vulnerable to long-range and short-range nuclear weapons—not to mention the mobile Asian-based SS-20s—for which there are no European-based counterparts. At the same time, the Soviets manage to avoid the zero option although probably misguided—as a means of reviving the latent and residual anti-American sentiment that they so assiduously cultivated against INF. Even less acceptable than the Soviet proposal for a first-stage zero option is Gorbachev’s answer to Reagan’s ultimate SDI goal. By proposing to eliminate all nuclear weapons in the third and final stage of the arms agreement, Gorbachev raises the specter of Europe’s dependence on an entirely nonnuclear balance.

In the context of these political realities the Soviet proposal cannot be considered a serious attempt to reach an arms agreement in Europe. It appears far more like the opening gambit in a game of political warfare aimed at undermining NATO’s nuclear first-use strategy and fostering interallied frictions. If the Soviets truly wanted to reach an agreement, they would have proposed something like the original “walk in the woods” formula—no Pershing IIIs and equal numbers of NATO cruise missiles and Soviet SS-20 warheads—which the allies would have welcomed and the United States could hardly have rejected. But why should the Soviets want an agreement? Having lost their political battle to prevent any INF deployments, they have even less incentive to limit, let alone dismantle, their vastly superior nuclear forces in the European theater than when there were no Western counterparts to the SS-20s.

President Reagan’s response to General Secretary Gorbachev’s proposal has been to revive the zero-zero option by calling for the global elimination, within three years, of medium-range missiles. This may trump the Soviet zero option in the game of public diplomacy, but it is an unwelcome card from the standpoint of allied governments. When they made their displeasure clear, the United States hastily, but only partially, conceded them by adding the condition of a freeze on short-range INF (the Soviet SS-21, SS-22, and SS-25s). However, this concession to allied anxieties does not make a beneficial agreement more likely; it only makes a pernicious agreement less likely.

Now that INF deployments are in place, Gorbachev’s zero option proposal seeks to turn the West’s short-term political expedition against extended deterrence.

AN ARMS DEAL FOR THE EIGHTIES

Faced with these fundamental obstacles to a comprehensive East-West arms agreement, the United States can pursue four different courses:

1. The United States can adhere to its present arms-control positions. This will leave its land-based missiles vulnerable and give the Soviets a continuing opportunity to play the political and propaganda game in order to constrain the SDI program and foster U.S.-allied divisions. This will allow the Soviets to proceed virtually unconstrained (except for INF) to refugates, if the agreement to undercut them is maintained with expanded and modernized offensive deployments and with strategic and tactical antiballistic defense programs that will make U.S. ICBMs even more vulnerable and provide the Soviet Union with an exclusive potential for a BMD breakout.

2. In order to protect military sites and facilities and, in the longer run, national populations in the United States and Western Europe, the United States can unilaterally deploy terminal defense ABMs and, eventually, space-based systems, if and as they meet the postulated tests of survivability and cost-effectiveness. This course will incur the political costs (in Congress and allied relations) of abrogating or withdrawing from the ABM treaty and the military costs of intensifying the arms competition, with no assurance of a net security gain.

3. The United States can pursue its defense and arms-control objectives through a revised arms proposal, backed by persuasive sticks and carrots. In the category of long-range forces, this third course would essentially seek, under the threat of unilateral SDI deployments, (a) a review of the ABM treaty to permit additional
but limited deployments of land-based ABMs (with space-based sensors but no other space-based components) to protect military sites and facilities on land in the United States, Western Europe, and the USSR and (b) complementary offensive reductions that would reduce the vulnerability of ICBMs, in return for (c) a time-limited (perhaps ten-year) ban on the development, testing, and deployment of space-based systems. To supplement this ban it might be advantageous to add a limitation on ASATs to the system each side has tested, considering that the United States may have at least as much to gain by such a limitation as the USSR, due to the United States' greater dependence on satellites and its superior ASAT system.

(4) Alternatively, if the extension of ABMs does not seem to be cost-effective and survivable or if the Soviets adamantly reject a revision of the ABM treaty, the United States could rely simply on a tightening of the treaty restrictions and an ASAT development and testing limitation as the levers to achieve the desired offensive warhead reductions. Yet from the standpoint of providing an inducement to a suitable Soviet agreement on offensive warhead reductions, this course might be an inadequate carrot and no stick at all. Nor would it constitute a transition toward a more defense-reliant structure of deterrence.

As for medium-range weapons in the European theater, the U.S. position has been appropriately flexible on such matters as numbers of missiles (as long as they are limited equally on a global basis) and the mix of Pershing IIs with cruise missiles. This could be the basis for a proposal that would avoid the liabilities of the zero or the zero-zero option by limiting medium-range missiles to rough equality at a reduced number. Although such a proposal might be more likely to result in an agreement than the zero or the zero-zero option, this does not argue for proposing an agreement that would prove disadvantageous to the Alliance. The problems with the military balance in Europe—the great Soviet superiority in both conventional capabilities and all ranges of nuclear weapons—cannot be fixed by arms control in any case. Political objectives should therefore be foremost in INF arms negotiations, just as they were in the original INF decision. Since that decision was made the weight of European political anxiety has shifted away from fears of nuclear deployments to fears of decoupling through denuclearization.

If the United States maintains its stand on a global-based zero option, it can best hope to avoid the political damage of apparent unilateral nuclear collusion with the Soviets by attaching conditions that would nullify the Soviet advantage in short-range INF and require an adequate conventional balance to compensate for the elimination of nuclear weapons in the European theater. If this proves unacceptable to the Soviets, the West should not comply, for the result will be to return arms negotiations to the most significant negotiating area—strategic arms reductions—where the most important elements of the East-West military balance are at stake.

In this area the only third course postulated above—a revised strategic arms reduction proposal—promises to advance the stability of the nuclear balance while holding open the option of a "cooperative transition" to President Reagan's ultimate goal of the Defended World or something approximate to it. The present U.S. position will simultaneously fail to gain offensive strategic

reductions and inhibit the United States from preserving a viable land-based leg of the strategic triad. Only a revised position, designed to make SDI a lever for, rather than an obstacle to, a more stable strategic balance, will make arms control a complement to long-term military security requirements.

THE RATIONALE

The reasons for preferring this third course are as follows:

—If new and improved ABMs become sufficiently survivable and lethal in the next few years, they will probably be the only cost-effective and politically acceptable way of significantly reducing the vulnerability of U.S. land-based missiles, considering the cost and limited procurement of Midgetman, the political practical difficulties of deploying ballistic missiles in other mobile modes, the vulnerability of MX, and the unavailability of vast tracks of land for deceptive basing because of domestic political opposition.

—Revision of the ABM treaty to permit the deployment of ABMs in order to protect additional military sites (including CFIs)—but not additional cities—could enable both the United States and the USSR to achieve added protection against a disarming nuclear first strike without significantly diminishing the capacity of either to impose unacceptable damage through nuclear retaliation.

—The Soviet Union probably has at least as much interest as the United States in a limited expansion of ABM deployments because of the Soviets' greater dependence on vulnerable land-based missiles (about 70 percent of their strategic force), the fact that three smaller independent nuclear forces (British, French, and Chinese) are targeted against them, and the traditional emphasis they place on defensive forces (as demonstrated by their large, though vulnerable, air-defense deployments and their civil-defense program). Therefore, the legal expansion of ABM deployments could be a positive inducement to revision of the ABM treaty, supplementing the negative inducement posed in the absence of agreed revision by the prospect of U.S. unilateral INF deployments, including such space-based systems as kinetic-energy weapons targeted against boost-phase and midrange trajectories.

—Expanded ABM deployments might make it easier to negotiate mutually acceptable offensive reductions. The transition until one or both sides were convinced of the effectiveness of space-based systems, this might not occur for another twenty years or longer. It is not likely that the U.S. government could or should want to maintain
stalemate in arms negotiations for twenty years while sustaining SDI merely as a research program.

—Proposing the revision of the ABM treaty as a high-security imperative might enable the United States to engage the Soviets in constructive discussions instead of propagandistic exchanges about defensive systems. Soviet acceptance of serious negotiations about defensive systems would enable the United States to share responsibility for revising the ABM treaty instead of forcing it to bear the entire onus itself.

—The ten-year ban on space-based development, testing, and deployment of BMD—even if supplemented by an ASAT limitation—would sacrifice nothing in terms of research and little in terms of exploring, through development and testing, the feasibility of deploying such systems. At the same time, it would provide a real incentive to the Soviets to accept proposals for offensive reductions in return. The proposed agreement, therefore, by using strategic defense technology as both a stick and a carrot, would transform SDI from an obstacle to a lever for obtaining U.S. arms-control objectives.

—The same strategic and bargaining logic, one might reason, argues for revising the ABM treaty to permit some space-based weapons, such as kinetic-energy weapons designed to interdict boost-phase and midrange trajectories. However, there are advantages to drawing the line that separates permitted and prohibited SDI weapons so as to distinguish between land- and space-based weapons: the probable earlier development of cost-effective ABMs, the relative clarity of the distinction between protecting military sites and people, the difficulty of defining and verifying distinctions among space-based weapons, Soviet opposition to extending BMD competition into space-tested systems at this time, and the greater acceptability of land-based IMDs among U.S. allies. At the same time, the Soviets would know that if the agreed line was not drawn short of space-based weapons, the United States would not be bound to observe this line unilaterally.

—The proposed agreement, by banning space-based development and testing, would offset the popular political onus that the United States and Western Europe would otherwise suffer if they abandoned or sought to revise the ABM treaty.

—The proposed agreement would raise none of the questions posed by the prospect of substituting the defense of national populations for deterrence based on their destruction, since the immediate rationale would be the familiar one of making nuclear retaliatory deterrence more stable. Adhering to this familiar rationale would be particularly important in gaining allied support for an increase in the proportion of defensive to offensive systems. Concomitantly, the revision of the ABM treaty to permit the protection of military targets on land would enable and make acceptable the extension of ABM sites to Western Europe as a complement to antitactical ballistic missiles (ATBMIs), which have already attracted favorable consideration in allied countries—especially the Federal Republic of Germany.

—Revising the ABM treaty in the context of a time-phased ban on space-based testing and deployment of SDI weapons would help NATO cope with a potentially troublesome anomaly of ATBMs that it would otherwise face. ATBMs are, in principle, valuable as a counter to the greatly superior Soviet nuclear forces now aimed at vulnerable European military targets. However, any plan to deploy them may arouse popular opposition on the grounds that ATBMs, although not prohibited by the ABM treaty, are in fact a circumvention of the treaty (since the principal distinction between ABMIs and ATBMs is one of range, and the ATBM range can be increased), and also a provocative war-fighting measure that will stimulate the arms race. The Soviets, however, do not operate under the same prohibitions and have already developed and tested a first-generation ATBM, the mobile SA-X-12, which also has a capability against aircraft, cruise missiles, and some U.S. strategic missiles. (Although it is suspected that the SA-10 is being tested against a ballistic missile, the United States does not credit it with an ATBM capability.) Presumably concerned about the possibility of Western public opposition, the Soviets have denied charges that they are deploying any ATBMs and warned that Western development of ATBMs would contravene the ABM treaty. In reality, however, Soviet ATBM development and deployment will move ahead.

Soviet ATBMs, when added to superior Soviet nuclear and conventional capabilities in the European theater, are bound to accentuate the vulnerability of NATO's forward defense in Germany and further deprecate extended nuclear deterrence. Therefore, Soviet ATBMs may touch off a conflict in Europe between the demand for countervailing ABM protection of military sites and the longing for a ban on all BMD—tactical and strategic. Such a conflict would be especially bitter if the United States expanded its ABM deployments with or without Soviet agreement. It could be particularly corrosive if, at the same time, the Soviet proposal for eliminating all nuclear weapons in the European theater was to ignite a major strategic controversy in Europe, fueled by anti-military groups. A revision of the ABM treaty may prove to be the best way to defuse and resolve these contentious issues, since, one hopes, this would enable the allies to approach the issue of the limited extension of ABMs to Western Europe and in the United States on objective grounds of collective security and also provide the framework for clarifying the relationship of ABMs to ATBMs in such a way as to prevent either from becoming the source of another INF-type controversy.

—The potential bargaining leverage of SDI will soon diminish—if it has not already begun to do so—because of mounting budgetary constraints imposed by Congress and because of the growing realization that decades will pass before the United States knows whether the deployment of a full-scale layered space defense system to protect people is feasible. Moreover, the longer the United States adheres to the ABM treaty as the prerequisite for seeking strategic offensive reductions, the harder politically it will become to withdraw or threaten to withdraw from it.

THE PROBLEMS

This proposal, of course, is not without its problems:

—It will be difficult to formulate—let alone gain agreement on—the precise limits of expanded ABM deployments that, in combination with offensive
nuclear reductions, will override the incentives to strike first in the expectation of a degraded nuclear retaliatory response. This problem of the stable offense/defense mix will confront any transition toward a more defense-reliant structure of deterrence, whether with or without an arms agreement. If SDI is to be implemented in any form, this problem will have to be faced.

—The Soviets may gain a military advantage from the proposed revision of the ABM treaty for the reasons previously suggested. However, the Soviet gain in terms of the reduced vulnerability of its land-based military sites and facilities is not necessarily a U.S. loss in terms of U.S. objectives. Indeed, stability is supposed to depend on the invulnerability of both retaliatory forces in order to limit the risk of a Soviet preemptive attack. Furthermore, in the long run the limited expansion of Soviet ABMs may be the best protection against a Soviet ABM/ATBM breakthrough or creepout. The operational question, in any case, is whether the United States would be better off with the proposed agreement than without it, not whether the Soviets would gain something.

—It is not yet clear that land-based strategic (or tactical) defense weapons, including laser-beam weapons and long-range interception ABMs, will be sufficiently invulnerable and lethal to be stabilizing and effective or the most cost-effective way of protecting land-based strategic ballistic weapons and CPI facilities. Nor is it clear that efforts to preserve a sufficiently invulnerable land-based leg of the strategic triad will be an affordable and cost-effective alternative to an improved strategic “dual” in the long run. Consequently, it may be premature for the United States to pursue the proposed arms deal, even though the bargaining leverage of SDI is probably declining. It is not too soon, however, to begin engaging Soviet negotiators in a discussion of mutual interests in extended terminal-defense systems in the context of a trade-off of asymmetrical structural offensive military advantages. It can only help the U.S. bargaining position to let the Soviets know that U.S. adherence to ABM treaty restrictions is conditional. The best way to do this is through discreet negotiations that explore the prospect of an arms agreement based on the distinction between land- and space-based BMD as the alternative to unrestricted BMD competition.

—Faced with the convincing prospect of a U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty, leading to unrestricted arms competition in what the Soviets call “space strike weapons” (which include ABMs and ASATs), the Soviets might opt for the trade-off in offensive reductions that the United States seeks, coupled with a reaffirmation and tightening of the ABM treaty, an ASAT limitation, and explicit restrictions on space-based weapons beyond the research phase. That would be a deal the United States could hardly refuse, if only for political reasons; but it would also be a deal that would risk foreclosing indefinitely the SDI options. Some strategists and arms-control specialists would consider this a risk worth running; others would welcome the foreclosure; few (outside the upper echelons of the Reagan administration), however, would argue that the United States ought to forgo a stabilizing reduction of offensive weapons in order to preserve the option of unilateral abrogation of the ABM treaty.

—it will be difficult for the United States to threaten credibly unilateral strategic defense deployments and withdrawal from the ABM treaty without incurring the political disapproval of its NATO allies and Congress. Success, therefore, will depend upon engaging the Soviets in purposeful secret negotiations while publicly making it clear that the United States, for compelling security reasons, cannot indefinitely adhere to the present terms of negotiation if these prohibit both offensive reductions and the extension of strategic defense deployments. This position should be easier to sustain in Congress and abroad if the U.S. government indicated that it linked revision of the ABM treaty to a time-limited ban on space-based testing and deployment in the context of a larger bargain.

—Once the treaty-sanctioned line between permitted and prohibited BMD is drawn between weapons based on land and in space, it will be harder to go beyond that line if and when space-based weapons are determined to be survivable, cost-effective, and affordable. On the other hand, if present ABM treaty restrictions are regarded as the sacrosanct centerpieces of all the good things arms control is supposed to provide, it will still be harder to deploy any BMD unilaterally. Therefore, to preserve the full range of SDI options the United States must insist that the proposed ABM treaty revision be time-limited, transitional, and reversible; but the United States must also accept Moscow’s insistence that revision of the treaty does not alter the USSR’s opposition to all other SDI options.

—Some who are loyal to President Reagan’s vision and do not wish to see it tarnished by associating SDI with a program designed merely to protect nuclear retaliatory forces will argue, not implausibly, that banning development of a full-layered defense, if only for ten years, in favor of ground-based terminal defense, would undermine support for the SDI program. Yet, even if this could be proven true, it does not follow that the SDI program would be safer from political opposition if the United States made the first transitional step contingent on a survivable and cost-effective layered defense with a space-based component. It is highly doubtful that the Reagan administration’s present arms-control objectives would be advanced during the period of waiting for such a transition. Moreover, bilateral agreement on any transitional step that entails a revision of the ABM treaty and a different mix of offensive and defensive weapons would constitute formal East-West sanction for the key structural change upon which other transitional steps will depend. In any case, it should be obvious that the Defended World, if it (or an approximation of it) is attainable at all, will not be achieved in one climactic agreement but only in a series of agreements over a long period of time. The nuclear powers must learn to live with a more defense-reliant structure of nuclear deterrence before they can be prepared to undertake cooperatively the radical leap toward a structure of deterrence based primarily on mutual assured defense.

—European allies may react to any proposed revision of the ABM treaty (regardless of an accompanying ban on space-based weapons) either negatively, in order to prevent the extension of ABMs and avoid the issue of European deployment, or positively, in order to acquire equal protection and offset Soviet medium-range missiles. Correspondingly, the allies might seek a ban on ATEMs rather than open up a new area of arms competition, even though such a ban (or more likely, a moratorium) would concede Soviet superiority in ATEM developement. Accordingly, U.S. pursuit of a Soviet agreement to a revision
of the ABM treaty would put the United States in the perceived position of engaging in superpower collusion at the expense of European security. Public opinion would then force allied governments to choose between, on the one hand, accentuating their greater vulnerability (as compared to the United States) to nuclear war and further degrading extended nuclear deterrence by opposing ABM and ATBM deployments and, on the other hand, overriding public sentiment by cooperating with the United States in deploying strategic and tactical defenses for the protection of Europe.

How European governments weigh these alternatives will depend on a number of technological and economic considerations but also on the nature and impact of the strategic controversy that the Soviet arms proposals for the European theater may precipitate. Surely, continued U.S. commitment to the zero-option will impede European acceptance of an ABM treaty revision and an ATBM program. At the same time, the United States must avoid incorrectly anticipating European reactions and finding itself, as in the INF deployment crisis, bearing the political burden of promoting deployments in behalf of European security that are opposed by important segments of European opinion. Avoiding this danger argues for the most intensive efforts of exchange views between the United States and its allies at official and private levels.

CONCLUSION
It may seem contradictory to argue for an arms-control proposal on the grounds that it is the best way not only to stabilize the present nuclear balance but also to hold open the option of achieving a radically new, nonnuclear balance, when one regards the latter objective as both infeasible and undesirable. Yet just as advocates of the former objective should suspend final judgments about the wisdom of eventually moving toward the Defended World, so advocates of the latter objective should be receptive to the possibility that making the Undefended World safer may be the necessary condition for transforming it. If President Reagan's vision is vindicated, it will be vindicated partially by a more balanced mix of nonnuclear defensive and nuclear offensive strategic and tactical weapons. However, this will never happen without first achieving the proximate objective of stabilizing both direct and extended deterrence on the basis of nuclear retaliation to aggression. Arms control may contribute to both goals if it is managed by those who respect the limits of its role and the conditions of its success.

An expert on American foreign policy, Robert E. Osgood has served on the Senior Staff of the National Security Council and as a member of the Policy Planning Council of the Department of State. He is currently codirector of the Security Studies Program at SAIS.