

Remarks

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The Honorable Hubert H. Humphrey
International Affairs Seminar
Macalester College
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Begin

The problem of controlling armaments is nothing less than the problem of achieving world order -- and all that obstructs the establishment of a universal system for the peaceful settlement of conflict.

~~We know there are many kinds and levels of arms control problems. We know there is more than one arms race going on in this world.~~

~~But we know, too, that there is one arms race which overhangs and overshadows all the others: the strategic nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States.~~

~~We are, and we have been since the Soviet Union's initial rejection of the Baruch Plan, reluctant participants in this arms race.~~

~~But we have done what we had to do: we have stayed ahead in the race we tried very hard to avoid. We have stayed ahead not only for our own security and defense, but also because of our responsibilities and obligations to other free peoples.~~

~~But "staying ahead" in the nuclear race is a highly relative concept in the late sixties. The fundamental political fact is that both sides now possess the means to inflict "unacceptable damage" on the others.~~

~~We have kept our nuclear deterrent highly credible.~~

~~But we have kept it under lock and key -- unusable except by decision of the President of the United States.~~

~~We have surrounded it with elaborate devices to guard against accident or misunderstanding: the hot line between the White House and the Kremlin, for example, is always open.~~

~~And despite the dangers and the terrors of this arrangement -- or perhaps because of them -- the policy of deterrence has worked. It is a stark fact that there has been no nuclear war. No man, woman or child has been a victim of nuclear arms since 1945.~~

~~But in our search for a more stable international environment, the United States has done more than maintain a credible deterrent force of strategic weapons.~~

We have negotiated patiently and seriously -- in Geneva and New York, in Moscow and Washington -- for ways to curtail production of nuclear weapons materials, to limit the means of delivery of nuclear bombs, to end nuclear testing, to prevent another upward spiral in the accumulation of nuclear weapons.

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We have insisted only that the world be able to verify somehow that agreements made will be agreements kept.

In all of this there have been many false starts, much disappointment, and nerve-wracking frustration. ~~And who knows this better than Bill Foster?~~

It stands to the great credit of the American government -- and to the skill of our tireless negotiators -- that patience with perseverance has prevailed. We have kept at the job of trying to limit and reduce arms whenever we had someone else to talk to -- a rather basic prerequisite for productive negotiations.

But patience and hard work have reaped their rewards. We have not been standing still. In fact, it is only the immensity of the problem as a whole -- and the awesome nature of strategic nuclear weaponry -- that obscures a series of dramatic achievements.

In the past eight years:

- Total disarmament has been achieved in Antarctica;
- Testing of nuclear weapons has been banned in three environments;
- The rise of atmospheric contamination has been halted;
- Outer space has been ruled out for nuclear weapons;
- Latin America has been quarantined against atomic arms;
- A curb has been placed on the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons technology through the non-proliferation treaty;
- Work has started on securing a second environment -- the seabed -- from encroachment by weapons of mass destruction; and
- We have offered to move toward regional arms control in Europe;
- We are seeking to negotiate a program of Regional Arms Control in the Middle East;
- In order to insure and verify the integrity of Arms Control Agreements, we have developed an elaborate and effective system of detection, inspection and surveillance;

So if an enormous job remains to be done, we are not starting from scratch. ~~Due in large measure to the man we honor this evening, impressive strides have been made.~~

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We now stand at a critical moment -- a rare opportunity to break the upward spiral of strategic weaponry which has dominated U.S. - Soviet relations since the dawn of the atomic age.

We have had reason to believe for many months that the Soviet leaders are willing to begin bilateral negotiations over the control of offensive and defensive strategic weapons. Only the tragic Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia kept these talks from beginning last fall.

I have no illusions about the difficult nature of these negotiations. When responsible leaders of great nations approach their vital security interests, they do so with great caution. I know our leaders will not agree to anything that endangers our national security. And I make the same assumption about the Soviet leaders.

But I also assume that the Soviet leaders would not lightly enter into these talks with us. If that assumption is wrong, of course, all bets are off.

But we must believe, until their actions demonstrate otherwise, that the Soviets understand the compelling reasons for ending the nuclear arms spiral -- a process which is not only expensive and dangerous, but one which has become meaningless in terms of securing for either side a decisive military advantage.

We must pray that the Soviet leaders see the futility and folly of pursuing further a course which cannot possibly add either to their security or to ours, but which will instead lead all mankind closer to the brink of nuclear disaster.

It is, therefore, vitally important that we understand the urgency of beginning these bilateral talks as rapidly as possible.

I do not agree that these negotiations should await progress in settling more general political problems. The imperative of our present circumstances -- that of preventing the next round in the nuclear arms race before it is irreversibly launched -- cannot await the solution of political disputes many years in the making, and that will be many years, if not generations, in solving.

It is especially important that prior to the negotiations we exercise great restraint in word and action on matters relating to strategic weapons.

It is primarily for this reason that I have opposed the decision to proceed with a modified deployment of the anti-ballistic missile system. I remain unconvinced that the security of our second-strike forces required such action at this time.

More than this, however, there remain severe questions about the efficacy of the Safeguard system in comparison to other steps which might be taken to protect our ICBMs or to strengthen our Polaris fleet -- steps which would avoid moving to the next level of nuclear weapons technology.

My concern for restraint in word and action prior to U.S. - Soviet negotiations also causes me to regret very much those statements imputing to the Soviets a commitment to achieve a first-strike capability in strategic nuclear weapons.

In a world where our Polaris fleet is constantly on station, in a world where ~~we have proceeded very far in the development of multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles~~, I do not believe the Soviets could seriously delude themselves into thinking a first-strike capability was possible.

These statements, moreover, necessarily arise from a series of assumptions of long-term Soviet behavior, assumptions which by their nature can be neither proven nor disproven at this time and which remain, to say the least, a matter of considerable debate among our intelligence community.

Secretary Clark Clifford, for example, reached quite different conclusions as to the Soviet strategic posture less than three months ago. And Secretary of State Rogers clearly ~~raised doubts about the reliability of these forecasts of a Soviet first-strike capability~~ ^{contradicted} when he stressed the negotiability of the Safeguard system in any future arms control talks.

These forecasts of Soviet strategic intent -- statements which depart markedly from earlier U.S. pronouncements -- can only raise doubts in the Soviet mind about our strategic objectives. And we know from the past that doubt or uncertainty on either side about the strategic goals of the other has been a principal stimulus to the nuclear arms spiral.

A far more prudent course, in my opinion, would be one which avoided raising spectres of massive Soviet strategic commitments until we have determined through direct talks their actual willingness or unwillingness to decelerate the arms race. Then we will not have to speculate on such critical matters. We will know.

I trust we are wise enough to understand that within the Soviet government, as within our own, are found widely varying opinions and beliefs on the issue of strategic weapons. We must, it seems to me, be exceedingly careful not to erode through ill-considered statements or decisions the influence of those Soviet leaders who may be advocating a more rational policy of controlling the strategic arms race -- those men who now seem to favor bilateral talks with the United States. For we can never doubt the Soviet Union's capacity to propel the arms race to new and more dangerous heights if saner and more rational heads do not prevail -- just as the Soviets cannot doubt our ability to do likewise.

we possess almost four times the number of deliverable warheads (4200 to 1200)

I believe notice that Secretary Laird is now trying to back away from his earlier statements.

in his first press conference last week in Washington

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That is why our efforts must be directed toward beginning the negotiations as promptly as possible and in an atmosphere as conducive as possible to meaningful progress.

Let me also observe at this juncture: I would hope that our government would enter into these bilateral talks with a truly comprehensive proposal, one that raised all major issues for negotiation and which did not unilaterally restrict the flexibility and freedom of our negotiators.

Some people cannot conceive of the possibility that the two nuclear giants could ever reach an enforceable agreement to halt the arms race. These people may be right.

But even great powers with different values and different political and social systems share at least some areas of common interest. Manifestly the first area is a shared interest in survival.

Perhaps this does not respond to the highest ambitions of our hearts and minds. Perhaps it is no great compliment to the human race that it took nuclear weapons to teach us that lesson. But survival is an excellent place to start. It establishes the fact that the great powers today stand, in the most fundamental sense, on common ground. And from this, much that is sane and good can flow.

No doubt bilateral arms control talks with the Soviet Union will be difficult. No doubt they will take some time. More likely than not, they will have their ups and downs. But given the terrible risks to which the U.S., the Soviet Union and much of the world's populations will be exposed if the arms race proceeds unimpeded, we have the obligation -- in the most profound sense of the word -- to try.

Whatever we do has an element of risk -- Isn't it time to take some risk for peace?

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In all of this there is expectation -- possibly premature but pregnant with hope for a world where the cold war is but a memory -- where arms races are behind us -- where peaceful engagement and reconciliation are the order of the day, East and West.

I think I know as well as any man just how hard it will be to get from here to there.

I know how many powerful traditions must be confined to history's junkyard -- and how much new history must be made.



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