Foreign Policy and Nuclear Weapons

U.S. Nuclear Policy During the Cold War

(1) "Massive Retaliation" (Eisenhower)

- Any conventional military attack by the USSR against any US ally would be followed by an immediate and massive nuclear retaliation by the US.
- Tried to get USSR to believe that the costs of military expansion would exceed whatever benefits it would derive – deterrence
- Also intended to place less reliance on conventional weapons and capability
- There was the problem of credibility: Would the US really risk nuclear holocaust on its homeland just to deter a conventional military attack on non-U.S. soil?
- Did the USSR believe the US was serious or bluffing?
- Any subsequent Soviet attack on a US ally would mark the failure of deterrence and damaging of the US position; either carry out the threat and face nuclear catastrophe or not carry out the threat and face a major blow to credibility and an invitation for further Soviet expansion
- The USSR never did launch an attack on U.S. soil or allies – perhaps because of American superiority;
- The U.S. had more than 600 B-52’s capable of delivering six hydrogen bombs
- Also, the U.S. had access to bases (in W. Europe) which could have a nuclear strike against the USSR take a lot less time than a Soviet attack against the U.S.
- Overall, the U.S. was superior in the quantity and quality in jet bombers, number of missiles, air defense and tactical nuclear weapons

(2) Flexible Response (Kennedy)

- A reaction to “Massive Retaliation” and the problem of credibility
- Also, based on the idea that tactical nuclear weapons and sizable (though kept at a minimal budgetary cost) could keep wars limited and prevented from escalating out of control, beyond a certain geographical area
- Any attack by the USSR on a US ally would be met in proportion to the nature of the attack; nuclear for nuclear, conventional for conventional
- Thus, the US would then have flexible/multiple options as to how to respond to an attack without causing nuclear catastrophe or a blow to US credibility

© Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) (Nixon-Bush I)

- Placed emphasis on both superpowers producing offensive ballistic weapons, while limiting or eliminating defensive, anti-ballistic (ABM) weapons
- Based on (1) The Soviet acceleration of an offensive missile build-up; consisting of SS 17,18, and 19 Missiles, along with “Backfire” and “Bear” long-range bombers
- The Soviets would also go on to deploy the SS-20 MIRV later in the 1970’s
- (2) the U.S. fear that the USSR was constructing a very “thick” Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) wall that could easily shoot down American ballistic warheads (the U.S. only had 1,710 warheads by the late 1960’s)
- To counter Soviet ABM systems, the U.S. came up with MIRV’s (Multiple Independently targeted Re-entry Vehicles); these were missiles that could carry and deliver multiple war-heads to multiple targets and that could, thus, break through Soviet ABM systems – the most common U.S. MIRV’s were known as Minuteman III ICBM’s
- Also, the U.S. deployed Poseidon missile a new SLBM that could also counter a Soviet defensive system – it carried MIRV’s
- Both sides were to be vulnerable to an offensive attack by the other
- Both sides would also produce a high quantity stockpile of offensive weapons
- That way, each side would have enough offensive weapons left over following a pre-emptive first strike to have a “second strike” retaliatory capability
- Second strike capability should be ample enough to inflict “unacceptable damage” on the other side (“unacceptable damage” = 50% of industry and 30% of population)
- With each side being vulnerable to a first strike and with each side having a large stockpile of 2nd strike capability weapons, each side would, thus, be deterred from launching a first strike
- Any first strike would lead to mutually assured destruction against that country
- This logic led to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty (aka, SALT I); a ban on all defensive-style ABM weapons, so as to make both sides vulnerable to a pre-emptive first strike
- SALT I also consisted of a five year period of limited deployment of offensive missiles – Minutemen and Titan ICBM’s, Polaris Submarines and SLBM’s, along with Soviet ICBMs, submarines and SLBM’s; a ceiling was placed on deployments of these weapons systems – the Soviets were able to produce and deploy MIRVs’ a few years later

Nuclear Weapons Policy during the Reagan-Gorbachev Years and the End of the Cold War

- Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI): Policy announced by the Reagan Admin. in 1983
- Based on the idea that a satellite, space-based missile defense system could be deployed
- This missile-defense system would be able to knock out all incoming Soviet ballistic missiles and, thus, save American lives and cities
- SDI would leave offensive nuclear weapons obsolete
- SDI would also create a new type of deterrence and at the same time, make it possible for the U.S. to reduce its offensive missile stockpile
- Problem: Lack of practicality – Could SDI be feasibly be deployed and be 100% efficient?
- Problem: SDI would undermine the MAD doctrine and, arguably, violate the ABM Treaty
- Some bold and encouraging U.S.-Soviet agreements to reduce offensive nuclear weapons were scrapped due to American insistence on keeping R & D on SDI
- 1987, The U.S. and USSR agree on and sign the INF Treaty (Intermediate Nuclear Forces); This eliminated all intermediate range offensive missiles in Europe
- 1991, U.S. and Russia sign START I (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks); Each side was limited to a total of no more than 1,600 ICBMs, SLBM’s, and long-range bombers
- Combined, these delivery vehicles were not permitted to carry more than 6,000 war-heads
- Dissolution of USSR caused problems for START; Former Soviet republics that were now sovereign states suddenly had these offensive stockpiles – Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine; agreement was reached to have these new states return these weapons to Russia with most of the returned weapons being destroyed
- 1993, START II; Reduced the total # of strategic warheads to 3,500 or less
- Also banned multiple war-heads
- U.S. and Russia agreed on deal for U.S. economic assistance to help Russia eliminate significant amounts of plutonium and weapons grade uranium
- Problem: There has been a large number of uranium and plutonium that has gone unaccounted for
- Have the Russians sold nuclear technology to rogue states, terrorist groups so as to obtain badly needed cash for the faltering economy?
- Or have uranium and plutonium plants been so poorly guarded that terror organizations have stolen these materials?

Nuclear Proliferation in the Post-Cold War/9-11 World

- Aside from the seven declared/de facto nuclear states, an additional 40 more states are either pursuing nuclear capability or already have it
- In some cases, states have developed nuclear weapons on their own
- However, most states have acquired the know-how, technology and perhaps capability from nuclear states – either intentionally or unintentionally
- Those nuclear states that have intentionally sold nuclear technology/capability have done to obtain badly needed economic assistance for poor economy or to curry favor with that state so as to balance against a large rival state
- Often, a nuclear state *unwillingly* provides nuclear know-how; businesses or individuals will sell nuclear technology/parts, etc. to aspiring nuclear states
- Aspiring nuclear states will also steal nuclear know-how, parts and components
- As stated earlier, the break up of the Soviet Union looms large; the collapse of the Soviet command and control structure, former Soviet nuclear weapons, components or materials may have been sold to aspiring nuclear states
- Also the strong possibility of Russian scientists, desperate to make a living, going to work for aspiring nuclear states so as to help them develop nuclear capabilities
- Non-nuclear states seek to become nuclear out of a combination of factors: security and prestige
- This expanded nuclear proliferation is a reflection of the growing multi-polar world, where more states will be able to effectively balance against larger rival powers and have more leverage over these larger rival states
- Example: U.S. policy toward Iraq and North Korea
- Counter view: It is useless to stop proliferation, as long as the will is there for states to become nuclear
- Thus, it is better for international weapons regimes (from IO’s) and the large nuclear states to control and regulate the spread – not stop it
- If states are able to have an equally balancing (and limited) capability, relative to their rivals in a region, then there would be a balance of power, greater utility and deterrence
- Nuclear weapons, due to their destructive capability can provide peace and stability – as long as there is an equal balance of power from state to state, region to region

- Irony: small nuclear states have greater utility over other small states and even large states, yet, large nuclear states do not have the same utility over the small nuclear states
- The worst danger of nuclear proliferation: terrorist organizations, with nothing to lose, obtaining weapons and, hence, having great utility over any large population of any state
- Terrorist groups, because they lack the conventional size and strength of large states, must resort to political terror to gain concessions and leverage over states
- What better way to inflict substantial losses on large, randomly targeted civilian populations by using nuclear weapons
- No better weaponry has the ability to inflict “political fatigue” and a lack of will on states than nukes