

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Los Angeles World Affairs Council Luncheon in California (Excerpts)

April 10, 1987

Unfortunately, too, the Soviets are still trying to stifle the Strategic Defense Initiative. I've made some very forthcoming proposals about not deploying strategic defenses for a period of time, while we and the Soviets negotiate on a cooperative transition to a new kind of strategic balance, one that deters by protecting human lives instead of threatening them. Mr. Gorbachev himself recently criticized the balance of terror as a strategy for keeping the peace and urged that nuclear doctrines become truly defensive. Well, I agree with him. Peace based on strategic defenses that can absorb and blunt an attack, coupled with radical reductions in offensive missiles-that is the safest course of all.

Nuclear Weapons

[The question could not be heard from the podium. Mr. Haddad repeated it as follows:]

Thank you. The gentleman describes himself as a high school student, and he's afraid of a lot of things he's hearing about today-afraid of bombs and afraid of the possibility of war and so forth and afraid of not being told the truth. What would you say to a young high school student?

The President. Tell you the truth. We have a system of deterrence right now that is called mutual destruction. And what it is-the nickname for it is the MAD policy, mutual assured destruction-that we and the Soviet Union try to keep within range of each other, and this includes our NATO allies, who look to us for that nuclear umbrella-it's part of the NATO alliance-and the idea that we both have such horrible weapons of such power that if either one pushes the button, then there is a retaliation, and the retaliation would be so severe and so great that the other side

would have no gain out of their assault.

Well, to me, I think that's, first of all, immoral. And I think that we're violating what was a moral principle even in war previously. We used to meet in Geneva the countries of the world-and have rules of warfare in which we protected the noncombatants from being victims of warfare-that you did not injure or did not attack and endanger noncombatants, the innocent. Now we are assuring our safety with weapons that were designed to wipe out everyone, including the noncombatants. I think it's immoral, and that's why we're promoting SDI. I came up with that idea, and I submitted it to the joint Chiefs of Staff one afternoon at my office and said: Is it possible that we could research and find a weapon that could destroy those missiles before they reached their target, as they came out of the silos? They said they thought such a thing could be done, and we embarked on that program. We've made great breakthroughs; it shows great promise.

And I have also said, and said to Mr. Gorbachev, that if and when we have established that we have such a defensive weapon, in return for the elimination, ultimately, of all nuclear weapons we'll share it with them. We'll share it with anyone, so that we all have a defense in case some day there comes a madman like a Hitler. And we all know how to make those weapons, so we can't be sure that some day someone won't try. But if we all have a foolproof defense-but I think it calls for doing what we're doing right now-negotiating, even piecemeal, in trying to get a reduction and start on the path leading to ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Haddad Thank you, sir.