

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

13 SEP 1982

The Most Reverend Joseph L. Bernardin
Archbishop of Chicago
155 East Superior Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Dear Archbishop Bernardin:

I appreciate greatly the opportunity to comment on your draft pastoral letter on peace and war. You have undertaken an important project which is certain to influence thinking in the United States and around the world. As our nation's Secretary of Defense I am reminded daily of America's vital role in promoting peace—a real peace wherein freedom and prosperity can grow free of violence or coercion. In our democracy, however, all our citizens must share in the task of securing peace.

It is in this context that your pastoral letter is of such importance. I am particularly pleased that your committee's draft pastoral letter directly recognizes and supports the right to legitimate self-defense and the "responsibility to preserve and pursue justice." I was also heartened by the statement of Pope John Paul II to the Second Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly, that "...in current conditions, deterrence based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable." America's foreign policy rests on the pursuit of justice and, together with our Allies and in accordance with the United Nations Charter, we seek to maintain and enhance peace with freedom through deterrence and negotiations.

To evaluate the morality of the defense and deterrent policies of the U.S. and its Allies requires that we understand why the Western democracies have entered into collective security arrangements as provided for by the Charter of the United Nations. Disregard for the principles of the United Nations Charter—in particular, disregard for the principle of non-violent resolution of international disputes—poses the gravest danger to peace in the world today. The massive Soviet military buildup of the last fifteen years is made more ominous when we see the Soviet Union use its power to stifle political, economic, and religious freedom internally and to impose similarly oppressive regimes on other nations, either directly or indirectly through proxies. The adherence of the Western democracies to the United Nations Charter stands in stark contrast to Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

Drawing on the terrible lessons of World Wars I and II, the Western democracies banded together to institute a policy of peace through deterrence. During the 37 years since the end of World War II, the threat to peace has not diminished, yet the sovereignty and freedom of those democracies have prevailed because they have remained resolute in their posture of deterrence. Given these fruits of our long-standing policies, and given the horrible consequences which could accompany war—especially a nuclear war—the burden of proof must fall upon those who would depart from the sound policies of deterrence which have kept the peace for so long. For this reason, I am concerned that the draft pastoral letter fails to do justice to the efforts by the United States and its Allies to maintain the peace through deterrence and negotiation. I would like to share with you some thoughts on these issues.

In particular, I would like to reiterate why U.S. (and NATO's) nuclear policy has evolved as it has and why the "marginally justifiable deterrent policy" sketched in the pastoral letter would mark a dangerous departure from the policies which have kept the peace. The U.S. and its Allies maintain nuclear forces not to coerce, not to conquer, but to deter aggression and to prevent war. We have made clear that we would not use nuclear weapons

except in response to aggression. we recognize that nuclear weapons are qualitatively different from conventional arms, and that their use would represent a fundamental change in the character of warfare.

Our goal remains deterrence of conflict, and for this our policy is one of "flexible response." We and our Allies structure our conventional and nuclear forces so that no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the style or intensity of attack, no matter what the risk calculus, the Soviet Union could not achieve the object of its aggression. In such a situation, the Soviet Union would have absolutely no incentive to initiate an attack. In the event that deterrence fails, we would seek to halt aggression and to end conflict at the lowest level of destruction possible. We recognize that there is considerable uncertainty as to whether the intensity of conflict would escalate, but the fear that a Soviet attack could escalate to major nuclear retaliation remains a powerful deterrent to war.

However, the threat of major nuclear retaliation as the sole nuclear response to any and all aggression is fundamentally unsound for military as well as moral reasons. The Soviets could well regard a NATO threat to retaliate massively with nuclear weapons in response to a major Soviet conventional attack or limited nuclear attack as not credible. Only a policy which presents them with a credible continuum of response can effectively deter aggression at all levels. That is what flexible response is all about. Everyone responsible for the employment of U.S. nuclear forces believes that the use of any such weapons would be a most dreadful step requiring decisions at the very highest level. But this does not mean that the U.S. and NATO should abandon the policy of flexible response-nor turn away from means to control escalation should the use of nuclear weapons begin. Deterrence would not be enhanced by adopting policies which may suggest to a potential aggressor that aggression would not be countered by an appropriate and effective response.

Similarly, Allied and American leaders and most strategic experts have, over the years, doubted that a pledge to refrain from the first use of nuclear weapons would reduce the risk of war. Were NATO to forego the possibility of a nuclear response to armed aggression, the Warsaw Pact might conclude that the risks of the conventional attack against Western Europe were acceptable. Indeed, confidence that the Allies would not respond with nuclear weapons would permit the Soviet Union to concentrate its forces in a way that would make victory in a conventional war achievable. Whether or not one could have faith in a Soviet no first use pledge, a pledge by NATO would increase the chances of war which, in turn, increases the chances of nuclear war.

Military power is not the only means by which we maintain the peace, and if all nations were to live by the United Nations Charter, it would not be nearly so central. Through diplomacy we seek to enhance the chances of peace and through ongoing negotiations on arms control and disarmament we seek arms limitations. We are under no illusion that limitations on arms alone will prevent international violence, but we recognize that, particularly in the nuclear age, we can enhance our security through negotiations. Toward this end there has been progress although the road is not easy.

I find most troubling the draft letter's implication that the policy of deterrence itself should be forsaken if complete nuclear disarmament is not imminent. The truth is that the continued safety and security of all nations requires that we maintain a stable military balance even as we negotiate reductions. The path from deterrence to disarmament will not be easy nor certain. You are correct in saying that arms control must go beyond mere acceptance of the status quo, and, for that reason, President Reagan has taken dramatic initiatives in the area of arms reductions. In Geneva we are negotiating the total elimination of intermediate range nuclear-armed missiles in Europe, and at the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks we seek to reduce by one-third the number of strategic ballistic missiles. Compared to past efforts these are dramatic, achievable, and meaningful reductions. They will reduce the risk of war and set the stage for further progress. The President has also set forth new proposals to lower the risk of accidental war and to reduce conventional forces in Europe. The draft pastoral letter is, I believe, greatly weakened by failing to discuss the real opportunities before us in the area of negotiations.

But these opportunities will elude us forever if the Soviet Union comes to believe that the democracies lack the will to maintain a stable military balance. In your draft letter, you say: "Not only should development and deployment of new weapons cease, the number of existing weapons must be reduced in a manner that reduces the danger of war." I would suggest that given the threatening nature of Soviet forces, modernization of aging and vulnerable U.S. systems at this time is necessary to lower the risks of war even as we move toward reductions.

The draft pastoral letter fails to capture the true nature of the shift in the nuclear balance over the last ten years, especially the element of unilateral restraint which marked U.S. policy in the 1970s, despite the major Soviet buildup. We have shown restraint to such a degree that all three legs of our strategic Triad of deterrent forces now face either vulnerability or old age, or both. This weakens our deterrent posture, and it weakens our ability to negotiate real arms reduction agreements with the USSR. The President has made clear that no nuclear weapons system is excluded from possible arms limitations, but clearly we must modernize our forces as we negotiate.

Again, because of the magnitude and complexity of these issues, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your draft letter.

Sincerely,

Casper W. Weinberger

Copy to:
The Reverend J. Bryan Hehir