

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

November 16, 1982

Dear Archbishop Bernardin:

I would like to take this opportunity to respond, on behalf of President Reagan, Secretary Shultz, Secretary Weinberger, Director Rostow, and other Administration officials, to the request for our views on the second draft of the Pastoral Letter recently prepared by the Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace for review by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Let me assure you that we have read these drafts with great interest and care.

As officials, citizens, and laymen, we share a profound interest in your answer to the question posed in the draft letter of "whether and how our religious-moral tradition can assess, direct, contain, and hopefully help eliminate the threat posed to the human family by the nuclear arsenals of the world" (p. 34). We note that in your attempt to answer this question, you are drawing upon "a broad spectrum of advisors of varying persuasions" to examine the nature of weapons systems, military doctrines, and consequences (p. 34). We recognize both the seriousness and the difficulty of the task you have set for yourself "in concert with public officials" to try "charting a moral course in a complex public policy debate" (p. 39). All must surely work together conscientiously if we are "to persevere in the long-term effort needed to move the world toward a stable and secure peace" (p. 10).

It is because of such objectives expressed by your Committee that at the time when the first draft of the Pastoral Letter was circulated earlier this year, we provided extensive commentaries in response to your request. I am enclosing copies of our prior correspondence for consideration by your Committee. We understood then that our comments would be fully considered by the Committee as it continued its important work. We commented in some detail because we recognized fully that while the issues are complex and involve serious moral dilemmas, "the possibility of peace must be continually protected and preserved in the face of obstacles and attacks upon it" (p. 21).

I believe we can agree that the purpose of any moral theory of defense is "not, in the first place, to legitimize war, but to prevent it" (p. 27), and this, of course, is what American deterrence policy is designed to achieve. I believe we can also agree that any proposed change in strategic systems or doctrines, as well as any recommendation, whether proposed by the U.S. Government or by your Committee, should be judged "in light of whether it will render steps toward arms control and disarmament more, or less, likely" (p. 59). We believe that our weapons systems (which are not designed to be "first-strike" systems), our deterrence posture (which is defensive), and our arms control initiatives (which call for deep and verifiable reductions) do conform to these objectives.

All page references are to second draft of the proposed Pastoral Letter.

Because we share an enormous sense of responsibility for the protection of our people and our values, we have welcomed the involvement of the Catholic Bishops in the effort to secure effective arms control and -to reduce the risks of war. We, therefore, regret all the more that the Committee's latest draft continues to reflect fundamental misreadings of American policies, and continues essentially to ignore the far-reaching American proposals that are currently being negotiated with the Soviet Union on achieving steep reductions in nuclear arsenals, on reducing conventional forces and, through a variety of verification and confidence building measures, on further reducing the risks of war. Thus, while the Committee's draft calls for alternative approaches to current nuclear arsenals and strategies, it does so without presenting the citizen who is concerned with issues of peace and war with any information whatsoever about the initiatives undertaken by the United States to bring the world

closer to arms reductions, peace, and reconciliation.

Previous Administration comments that were forwarded to you, such as my letter to a member of the Pope John Paul II Center for Prayer and Studies for Peace, Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, summarized a number of these arms control initiatives and sought to correct the prior draft's mistaken depictions of U.S. nuclear strategy. We find the virtual omission of these perspectives puzzling, in view of the stated purpose expressed in the Pastoral Letter that "our arguments in this pastoral must be detailed and nuanced" (p. 38), and that "this Pastoral Letter in its complexities be used as a framework in forming consciences," so as to "learn together how to make correct and responsible moral judgments" (pp. 87-88).

As with the Committee's first draft, I am especially troubled in reading the second draft of the Pastoral Letter to find none of the serious U.S. arms control efforts, including major initiatives and ongoing U.S.-Soviet negotiations, described or even noted in the text. Ours are not proposals for freezes on current high ceilings. Such freezes would remove incentives for achieving reductions and would, in any case, require extensive prior negotiations to reach agreement on what numbers and systems to freeze, and on how such freezes might be effectively verified. Ours are initiatives for reduction, or even elimination, of the most destabilizing systems. They involve new verification and confidence building measures designed both to build trust and to assure compliance.

Because these important initiatives and negotiations have again been ignored in the draft Pastoral Letter, although they so clearly conform to the hopes of all concerned with reducing the arsenals and the risks of war and promoting the path of peace, I would like to summarize them for you again. I do so with a renewed hope that the comments your Committee receives from U.S. Government officials in response to the Committee's requests will be carefully considered, just as your Committee asks that its draft letter "receive a respectful consideration" (p. 102) from others.

This Administration's arms control efforts include the following major initiatives:

In the U.S.-Soviet negotiations on strategic arms (START), which began on June 30, 1982, we are proposing to begin with a one-third reduction in the number of warheads on the land- and sea-based ballistic missiles and a reduction in the most destabilizing systems of all, the land-based ballistic missiles, to about one-half of the current U.S. levels. In a second phase, we propose to reduce the destructive potential of the remaining missiles to equal levels, lower than we now have, and we could include other strategic systems as well.

In the U.S.-Soviet negotiations on intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), which began on November 30, 1981, we have proposed to begin with the total elimination of the forces considered the most destabilizing and threatening by both sides, the land-based missile systems. We and our NATO Allies have offered to cancel plans for the deployment of U.S. Pershing and ground-launched cruise missiles in exchange for the corresponding destruction of Soviet SS-20, SS-4, and SS-5 missiles. Other elements of the balance could be limited subsequently.

In the multilateral negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR), the U.S. and its NATO Allies are proposing to the Warsaw Pact nations major initial reductions in military personnel to common ceilings and a wide range of new verification measures.

In the areas of limiting nuclear testing and chemical and biological weapons, the U.S. is actively participating in discussions in the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva to develop the verification and compliance procedures that would make such limitations truly effective. We are, of course, particularly distressed by the extensive and inhuman use by the Soviet Union and its allies of toxins and chemicals against the defenseless populations of Afghanistan, Laos, and Cambodia.

In all of our ongoing arms control negotiations and discussions, we are emphasizing the importance of substantial early reductions and of effective verification and confidence building measures. Your Committee will surely recognize that the Administration's nuclear reductions proposals clearly conform to the Pastoral Letter's recommendations for cuts in nuclear arsenals, and that the other multilateral efforts in which we are currently engaged conform closely with the Letter's call for efforts "aimed at reducing and limiting conventional forces and at building confidence between possible adversaries, especially in regions of major military confrontation, as well as those addressed to outlawing effectively the use of chemical and biological weapons" (p. 65).

I continue to believe that as the Bishops' Conference reviews new drafts of the Pastoral Letter, a clear presentation of these initiatives should lead to the Bishops' Conference strong support for them. As I noted in my comments on the first draft, such support would prove enormously helpful in making clear to the world America's seriousness in our efforts and would, in particular, add to Soviet incentives to agree to the reductions and verifiable limitations that we are seeking.

In urging you to assure that the Commission's future drafts include a description, and I hope support for, the important American arms control initiatives currently being negotiated, it also appears particularly significant to note that the deterrent posture upon which our nation's armed forces and our nuclear strategy are based is judged in the Pastoral Letter as being morally defensible. It is quite clear that the judgments cited in the letter as reflecting the views of Pope John Paul II and of the Bishops' Conference, support the continued requirement and morality of maintaining effective nuclear deterrent forces. This pastoral judgment is supported because, while nuclear deterrence is considered "unsatisfactory," unilateral disarmament is rejected, and we are urged instead to seek truly effective arms limitations agreements of the kind we are, in fact, currently seeking. I believe this is a fact of critical importance for conscientious clergy, laymen, and citizens to understand.

Let me explain further what I mean by the above. According to the Pastoral Letter, the Bishops state that "we do not advocate a policy of unilateral disarmament," and the letter, in fact, argues that if, in the face of independent U.S. initiatives for arms control, "an appropriate response is not forthcoming, the U.S. would no longer be bound to steps taken" (p. 63). Pope John Paul II is cited in his message of December 13, 1981, as stating that we must move, as we have, to the "reduction of nuclear armaments, while waiting for their future complete elimination, carried out simultaneously by all parties, by means of explicit agreements and with the commitment of accepting effective controls" (p. 47). Pope John Paul II is further cited, in his address to the United Nations' June, 1982, Special Session on Disarmament, as stating that "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" (p. 55). Cardinal Kroll is cited as stating for the Bishops' Conference that "it is of the utmost importance that negotiations proceed to meaningful and continuing reductions," and that "as long as there is hope of this occurring, Catholic moral teaching is willing, while negotiations proceed, to tolerate possession of nuclear weapons for deterrence as the lesser of the two evils" (pp. 53-54).

In recognition that our deterrent forces have the critical positive role of preventing war, the draft Pastoral Letter reflects the Bishops' conclusion that "as clearly unsatisfactory as the deterrent posture of the U.S. is from a moral point of view, use of nuclear weapons by any of the nuclear powers would be an even greater evil" (p. 58). In sum, as the letter says, "we have held that possession of nuclear weapons may be tolerated as deterrents, while meaningful efforts are underway to achieve multilateral disarmament" (p. 98).

As we negotiate seriously to achieve the steep reductions and the effective limitations we all want in the arsenals of war, it must be clearly understood that our military forces are armed and organized to deter attack and coercion and to prevent war. It is our policy, and that of our Allies, not to use any force, whether nuclear or non-nuclear, except to deter and defend against aggression. We must, therefore, assure that in view of the unprecedented Soviet military buildup of the last decade, and longer, our deterrent forces remain sufficiently strong and credible to assure effective deterrence.

The draft Pastoral Letter does not describe either the facts or the impact of the Soviet buildup which we face and which goes far beyond defensive needs. Neither does the letter describe any of the many past unilateral initiatives taken for arms limitation in the last decade by the United States, including reduction in our defense budgets, in real terms, and the eliminating or delay of important U.S. military modernization programs. These are important factors the Commission will need to take into account in its future assessments.

The draft Pastoral Letter reminds the reader that the Bishops' 1980 Pastoral Letter on Marxism described significant differences between Christian teaching and Marxism. The Letter also notes that the "fact of a Soviet threat, as well as the existence of a Soviet imperial drive for hegemony, at least in regions of major strategic interest, cannot be denied" (p. 77). The Letter recalls memories of repressive Soviet policies in Eastern Europe and recently in Afghanistan and Poland. It might have added Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central America as areas where the military power of the Soviet Union and its allies has increasingly expanded by force of arms. In this connection, the draft Letter importantly urges its readers to reject "romantic idealism about Soviet intentions and capabilities," and declares that "Americans need have no illusions about the Soviet system of repression, or about the lack of respect in that system for human rights" (p. 78).

It is important for the Bishops' Conference to know our decisions on nuclear armaments, and our defense posture are guided by moral considerations as compelling as any which have faced mankind. The strategy of deterrence on which our policies are based is not an end in itself but a means to prevent war and preserve the values we cherish: individual liberty, freedom of worship, freedom of conscience and expression, respect for the sanctity of human life, and the rule of law through representative institutions. As Americans, we are among the fortunate few in the world who enjoy these blessings.

These traditions and values are not shared by the Soviet Union, which subordinates all individual rights to the needs of a totalitarian state. Individual voices, including those who seek to worship freely and who raise concern about the preservation of peace, are uncompromisingly suppressed, both within the Soviet Union and in those countries to which it has extended its sway. While oppression is common to much of the world, in the case of the Soviet Union it has been wedded to military arsenals and a militant dogma that threaten peace and freedom everywhere.

We are confident that as the Bishops continue to study the problem of reducing arms, preventing war, and fostering genuine peace, you will also take note of the importance to this effort of building support for international standards of rights and law, such as those proclaimed in the United Nations Charter and in the Helsinki Agreement. As we work to reduce the risks and the causes of war, we have more than just an interest in preserving the traditions of freedom; we have a moral responsibility to future generations. As heirs to the tradition of freedom, we must carry the burden of its preservation and growth.

We believe that by sustaining effective deterrence and working for effective arms control, we will preserve the peace while protecting the fundamental values of Western civilization which you share. We would value opportunities to discuss these vital issues with you and your colleagues, and we ask that you consider and circulate our comments. As we continue our earnest efforts toward genuine peace, we believe that to turn our backs on a course that has kept the peace for over three decades of the nuclear age, would increase the risks of war and endanger the cause of freedom throughout the world.

Sincerely,

William P. Clark  
Enclosure

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