

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 15, 1983

Dear Cardinal Bernardin:

Permit me to offer you my heartfelt congratulations on your elevation to the College of Cardinals. This great honor and responsibility is a recognition of your own spiritual life, your leadership, and the importance of the position you occupy in the nation's largest archdiocese.

I have continued to reflect on the concerns of the Bishops concerning the role of nuclear weapons as a strategy to deter war and what this means for civilian populations. I was also pleased to hear about the discussion of January 7, which you and your colleagues on the Bishops' Commission had at the Department of State on issues addressed in your draft Pastoral Letter with representatives of U.S. agencies, including my deputy, Robert McFarlane, and Sven Kraemer of my staff. I understand it was possible to review our arms control efforts with you, and that Dr. Ronald Lehman of the Office of the Secretary of Defense provided substantial information at the meeting concerning U.S. deterrence and targeting policy, and our Public approach to this issue. I hope this may have allayed some of the concerns and cleared up some of the misunderstandings.

Clearly, the goal of the United States Government, and the purpose of its military strategy, is the prevention of war by demonstrating the attacker could not possibly emerge from a conflict in a position of net gain. This would clearly convey to any potential aggressor that he could not hope to achieve significant political and or military objectives through either a resort to nuclear aggression or by a threat to do so.

For moral, political and military reasons, the United States does not target the Soviet civilian population-as such. There is no deliberately opaque meaning conveyed in the last two words. We do not threaten the existence of Soviet civilization by threatening Soviet cities. Rather, we hold at risk the war-making capability of the Soviet Union its armed forces, and the industrial capacity to sustain war. It would be irresponsible for us to issue policy statements which might suggest to the Soviets that it would be to their advantage to establish privileged sanctuaries within heavily populated areas, thus inducing them to locate much of their war-fighting capability within those urban sanctuaries.

It is precisely because we do not want to make war upon innocent Soviet civilians -- or at all -- that we do not want to drive the Soviets into loading up their cities with offensive forces. Paradoxically, this is best avoided by using the kind of scholastic distinctions in our public expressions which then give rise to some of your concerns. However, recent public statements by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense and myself should make clear to reasonable men and women that Soviet cities and their populations are not the aim of a deterrent strategy developed to avoid war.

Additionally, the United States, does not announce its targeting strategy publicly and unequivocally, nor should we, for to do so would give the Soviets a decided advantage. Ambiguity in this sense is as much a moral as a practical imperative for responsible U.S. officials. Ambiguity in deterrence is constructive because it fosters doubt which hinders the opponent's choice of one or another course of aggressive action.

To the extent the United States is able to influence Soviet behavior substantially, the American choice is to urge the Soviet Union to devote its considerable, but not infinite, resources to the spiritual and material betterment of its population, rather than to continue its unparalleled military buildup. However, the best evidence we have indicates that, regardless of what the, United States has done, the Soviet leadership has devoted 13 to 15 percent of the Soviet gross national product or more to military expenditures, or more than twice our own rate. This is why we need both an effective deterrent and effective arms control.

I firmly believe that we have chosen the proper course in our deterrent policy, since it has deterred major war for an unprecedented period of time in the Western, history. Together with our broad arms control agenda, our deterrent gives every promise of doing so in the future.

Sincerely,

William P. Clark

His Eminence
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