

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

July 30, 1982

Dear Clare:

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft Pastoral Letter on Peace and War prepared for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Your membership on the Board of Directors of the Pope John Paul II Center of Prayer and Studies for Peace surely gives you a special responsibility in reviewing this important document.

As a citizen, religious layman, and official, I am impressed by the document's attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ethical and technical issues involved in fostering the peace we all desire. In this light, it is important to affirm as a basis of American policy that we will never be the first to use any force, whether nuclear or conventional, except to deter and defend against aggression. As we make every effort to achieve arms reductions, trust, and reconciliation, we must continue to assure effective deterrence and defense and thereby to reduce the risks of war.

In this light, I have two major concerns with the Pastoral letter as currently written. First of all, I am troubled about what appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding in the letter concerning existing U.S. nuclear deterrence policy, and the comparison of that policy to the specific recommendations made in developing what the letter calls a "marginally justifiable" deterrent policy. Secondly, while the letter clearly calls for alternative approaches to current nuclear arsenals, it does so without presenting the reader who is concerned with issues of peace and war with any information about the very far-reaching efforts initiated by the United States to bring the world closer to peace and reconciliation.

Turning to the latter issue first, the United States has taken many steps in its efforts to reduce the world's military arsenals, as well as the causes and risks of war. This record is marked by our offers through the Marshall Plan to reconstruct both Western and Eastern Europe, by the Baruch Plan to control atomic weapons by the Open Skies proposal, and by the U.S. efforts in seeking effective nuclear test and strategic arms limitations.

In his recent address to the United Nations' Second Special Session on Disarmament, President Reagan reminded the world of America's sincere objectives and efforts and spelled out his broad agenda for peace. I hope and urge that every member of the Center of Prayer and Studies for Peace and of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as concerned clergy and laity, will take the opportunity to read this important statement carefully. (I have enclosed a copy.) By both building on, and drawing lessons from, past efforts (efforts which regrettably failed to stem an unparalleled buildup of arsenals on the Soviet side), the President outlined negotiation proposals that mark truly giant steps in the right direction. The essence of the President's approach is that we must achieve major reductions in arsenals, that these reductions must emphasize the most threatening and destabilizing systems, that the reductions should be to equal levels, and that the agreements negotiated must be effectively verifiable, to include cooperative and confidence building measures, which will help to overcome the mistrust that has existed between nations for far too long.

In the strategic arms reductions negotiations, we are proposing a one-third reduction in the number of warheads on the land- and sea-based ballistic missiles and a reduction in land-based missiles to fifty percent of current U.S. levels. A second phase would reduce the destructive potential of such missiles to equal levels lower than we now have and could include other strategic systems as well. In the current negotiations on intermediate range nuclear forces, the President has proposed the total elimination of such forces considered the most threatening by both sides, the land-based missile systems. He and our NATO Allies have offered to cancel plans for the deployment of U.S. Pershing I and ground-launched cruise missiles in exchange for the corresponding de-

struction of Soviet SS-20, SS-4, and SS-5 missiles. In the multilateral negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions the U.S. and its Allies are proposing major initial reductions in military personnel and a wide range of new verification measures. In the areas of 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, which would make such limitations truly effective in all of these ongoing negotiations and discussions, we are emphasizing the importance of substantial early reductions and of effective verification mechanisms.

I am troubled in reading the draft Pastoral letter to find none of these serious efforts described, or even noted in the text, even though they so clearly conform with many of the most basic concerns and hopes of the letter's drafters. I believe that as the Bishops' Conference reviews drafts of the letter, a presentation and study of these proposals might well lead to the Conference's strong support for them, support which would prove enormously helpful in making plain to the world our seriousness in these efforts.

My other major area of concern deals with the critical section of the draft Pastoral letter at IIIA (pp. 25-38), which addresses nuclear deterrence policy. In this section, the letter outlines, in its words, "what will be at most a marginally justifiable deterrent policy," and it concludes that it finds, itself "at odds with elements of current deterrent policy." I am concerned that the authors have seriously misunderstood current U.S. deterrence policy and see differences between their "marginally justifiable" policy and U.S. nuclear policy where such differences simply do not exist.

U.S. nuclear strategy is to deter Soviet attack and coercion of the U.S. and its Allies. For this reason, we need strong and credible deterrent forces. But should deterrence fail, our policy is to terminate any conflict at the lowest level that would protect U.S. and Allied vital security interests.

To deter effectively, we must make it clear to the Soviet leadership that we have the capability to, and will, respond to aggression in such a manner as to deny that leadership its political and military objectives and impose on it costs which outweigh any potential gains. This requires that we have the capability to hold at risk that which the Soviet leadership itself values most highly military and political control, military forces, both nuclear and conventional, and that critical industrial capability which sustains war. For moral, political, and military reasons, it is not our policy to target Soviet civilian populations as such. Indeed, one of the factors that has contributed to the evolution of U.S. strategic policy is the belief that targeting cities and population was not a just or effective way to prevent war. An understanding of this point appears to be seriously missing from the draft letter.

This being said, however, no one should doubt that a general nuclear war would result in a high loss of human life even though our targeting policy does not call for attacking cities per se, and seeks to avoid population centers as much as possible. It is for this basic reason that it is clear that U.S. policy is to deter nuclear war and all situations that could lead to such war.

This leads to the issue of U.S. policy with respect to the first use of nuclear weapons. The latter discusses in some detail the issue of the "controllability" of escalation and largely on this basis, argues for a U.S. policy of pledging no-nuclear first use. The arguments made concerning the "controllability" of nuclear war deserve serious attention and further study. But the problem of the risk of undesired and uncontrollable escalation is not contained by a policy of non-first use which is applied only to nuclear weapons. The escalatory danger exists as soon as major powers engage in armed conflict. For this reason, a fundamental principle of both U.S. policy and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is to maintain sufficient force to deter aggression and to employ force only in response to aggression.

This principle is a key to NATO's strategy of flexible response which, like our own national policy, is designed to prevent war by posing potential costs to an aggressor that far outweigh the gains he might hope to achieve by aggression. Given the enormous conventional military force of the Soviet Union, dropping this

proven strategy -- which has kept the peace in Europe for over 30 years -- would be dangerous, as a potential aggressor could conclude that the costs of aggression might be manageable. A pledge of no first use of nuclear weapons on the part of NATO could, in fact, lead the Soviets to believe that Western Europe was open to conventional aggression. Furthermore, such a pledge cannot be effectively verified and would not be effectively credible. As many Europeans have pointed out, deterrence would thus be undermined, and the risk of outbreak of war would be increased

As former Secretary of State Alexander Haig noted in his recent Georgetown University speech on peace and deterrence, a speech which directly addressed this issue:

“Flexible response is not premised upon the view that nuclear war can be controlled. Every successive allied and American government has been convinced that nuclear wars once initiated, could escape such control. They have, therefore, agreed upon a strategy which retains the deterrent effect of a possible nuclear response without making such a step in any sense automatic.”

With this possibility of a nuclear response as an integral element, the Alliance's present strategy is a much more credible and effective means to prevent any conflict. In effect, the very controllability argument which so drives the discussion in the draft Pastoral letter as written, would, if expanded to include the risks associated with escalation due to significant conventional conflicts support the existing U.S. and NATO policy.

On the subject of overall nuclear deterrence strategy, then, I find that the position recommended by the Pastoral letter is remarkably consistent with current U.S. policy, with one notable exception -- the issue of no nuclear first use. On that subject, I think that you can appreciate that we share the letter's basic concern about the risk of escalation, and for that reason (among others) feel that our current policy, which takes account of the full range of escalatory risk and the realities of the conventional balance in Europe is, in fact, a better and, wiser position than that suggested in the letter.

I hope the above comments will prove helpful to you, to the Center and to the Conference. I have highlighted some major concerns, gained after a careful reading of the 70-page draft document. I will surely have more thoughts on this document and on new drafts in the future, and you and your colleagues may well wish to address specific questions to me and my staff for further comment. Again, I welcome this opportunity to review the draft Pastoral letter, and I look forward to being in touch with you in the future. I will remain deeply interested in this effort.

Sincerely,

William P. Clark

Mrs. Clare Boothe Luce  
Shoreham West, Apartment 516L  
2700 Calvert Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC