

Speech file

Speech to be delivered in Chicago before the National Military-Industrial Conference, on April 25, 1960.

THE SOVIET MILITARY THREAT IN THE 1960s

I am very grateful to this gathering for the invitation to discuss with you the subject of the Soviet Military Threat in the 1960s. I accepted, it, however, with some hesitancy because of my present status as a retired officer. I have always felt that the spokesmen for military matters should preferably be the responsible civilian and military leaders currently on the job. There is a certain danger in hearing from an alumnus of the Armed Forces. Inevitably he has been cut off since retirement from additional experience and new information which might otherwise have modified the prejudices and predilections which he carried with him into civil life.

On the other hand, in extenuation of my presence here, the basic factors in the military situation are of long duration. They have been with us, wholly or in part during the last decade and are likely to continue along predictable lines into the next decade. The factors which I have in mind generally relate to two situations; those which bear on our ability to deter or to survive in general atomic war and those which serve to deter or win in military situations short of general atomic war.

The Soviet military threat is inevitably a relative matter. It depends upon the effective military strength of the Soviets and their allies in relation to that of the United States and our allies. If an imbalance of strength arises in favor of

the Soviet side, we can be fairly sure that the latter will exploit that military strength in one way or another. At a minimum it will use the threat of force to gain its ends, probably with increasing boldness and at rising levels of provocation. Our leaders must then oppose these provocations with the consciousness of a military inferiority which cannot but weaken their confidence and will to resist. On the other hand, if the scales of military power tilt in favor of the Free World, it is unlikely that our side will deliberately use military force aggressively to gain our objectives. However, military strength in being will give our leaders a powerful argument to support our search for peaceful solutions at the international council tables. At a minimum there is need of an equilibrium of atomic strength between East and West through which these forces will tend to cancel each other out and leave the adjudication of issues to means less destructive to humanity.

At this point let me record an apology. I am afraid that it is impossible to conduct our discussion without the use of a few terms belonging to the military jargon of the Pentagon. Their use is justifiable, I believe, ~~not~~ only if there is no other way to express the same idea with clarity and brevity. Unfortunately, there are occasional instances when lay terms are not adequate. For example, it will be hard to develop our discussion without referring to a first-strike capability. This refers to the ability of a nuclear bomber or missile force to destroy an enemy target system by a surprise first blow without receiving a crippling counter blow in retaliation. A second-strike

capability indicates the ability of an atomic bomber or missile force to absorb a first strike and still inflict unacceptable damage upon the enemy in retaliation. Obviously, the second force must be larger and better protected than the first, whereas the first must be sure of the location of the enemy counter-force targets. By counter-force targets I mean those made up of the opposing atomic bomber-missile force and similar military objectives rather than the cities, industries and other non-military targets of the enemy. So much for ~~the dull subject of~~ definitions, now to get on with the business.

A consideration of the Soviet military threat of the 1960s falls naturally into three time periods; first, the condition of the threat today; next, a projection of that threat through the period 1960 to about 1965 and thereafter the threat in the last half of the decade. In all cases the threat is measurable in terms of the relative military strength of the Communist and the Free World Blocs with particular attention to the leaders thereof, the Soviet Union and the United States.

What is the Soviet military threat today as we enter 1960? The unhappy fact is that our military strength is declining in relation to the Soviets'. This decline results from the fact that we have continued too long to place reliance on a strategy of Massive Retaliation based primarily upon the delivery of atomic weapons in manned aircraft. We have stood pat on a strategy which looked good after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but which lost any justification shortly thereafter. We have not adapted our military posture to the changes which have been taking place since

World War II and which should have been reflected years ago in our military preparations.

Among the important changes which have occurred is our loss to the Soviets of the ~~technological~~ lead in many important military and scientific fields. Not so long ago, in our national planning we assigned top priority of our ~~national~~ efforts to the maintenance of technological superiority over the Soviets. I think the records show, gentlemen, that in many important areas we have lost that lead.

How has it come about? The Soviets have simply devoted relatively greater efforts than we to their military forces and in so doing they have shown careful selectivity in using their resources. Although they are a nation with a Gross National Product less than half of our own and although their standard of living has been estimated at about one-third of ours, they have been spending at least as much as we on military matters. And they have more to show for their work in the fields where they have concentrated their efforts. Reasonably certain that we would not use our preponderant bomber strength in a first strike, they deliberately declined to try to match us in bombers and threw their efforts into missiles instead. They leapfrogged into the missile lead and avoided expending large resources on obsolescent manned aircraft. Thus, at the start of this decade, they are achieving, if they have not already achieved, equality with us in atomic destructive power. But the significant point is that their delivery means will be primarily the missile whereas ours for a long time will be primarily the bomber.

As a consequence of this Soviet progress in atomic weapons and long-range missiles, it makes no sense for the United States to continue to place major reliance for maintaining the peace on weapons of massive destruction. During the time that we had a ~~monopoly~~ ^{virtual} a substantial superiority in atomic weapons, many of our leaders ~~had~~ felt confident that our possession of these weapons would allow us to police the world, that by their use or even the threat of their use we could impose a Pax Americana.

Yet even in this period of ~~monopoly~~ ^{virtual}, we saw a proliferation of limited wars and many instances of Communist aggression which our atomic superiority was unable to prevent. Now in 1960 the Soviets have just as good atomic weapons as we and in all probability their means of delivery will soon be better than ours. At the same time they have developed a strong air defense for the Russian homeland as well as ~~air-raid~~ ^{fall-out} shelters for the civilian population. By these latter measures, they are creating an effective defense to neutralize our bomber strength while they build a powerful offensive missile force for which the United States has no defense.

As a consequence, the United States' superiority in manned bombers is a dwindling asset. Our planes are exposed to surprise missile attack on fixed air bases known to the enemy. The effect of their numerical superiority is reduced substantially by their increasing vulnerability. Nevertheless, I would say that while the Soviets in a first strike today could damage our retaliatory forces seriously, a surprise attack could hardly hope to be so effective as to prevent our forces

from responding with a powerful retaliatory blow. In other words, the Soviets do not have a reliable first-strike/^{capability}now. Thus, it appears unlikely at this moment that the Soviets would deliberately embark on general atomic war - the atomic stand-off is still with us.

This discussion of strategic nuclear forces, however, is only half of the problem. The other half relates to the so-called limited war or conventional forces available to the respective power blocs. Here the situation is vastly different. The United States and its allies have deliberately accepted inferiority in conventional ground forces and their supporting services. They have adopted the defeatist attitude that Communist manpower cannot be met on the ground and hence we must rely upon weapons of mass destruction. Actually, this["] inevitable inferiority in manpower is a myth, but it is one which has been carefully fostered and perpetuated. We have acted as if it were true and allowed our ground forces to dwindle. While the ratio of 175 Soviet divisions, the strength of their Army, to 14 American divisions, the strength of our, is hardly a true measure of relative ground strength, nonetheless, it is suggestive of the relative effort and attention paid to that kind of military strength which is essential to cope with situations short of general atomic war. And in an atomic stalemate, that is the form of warfare most likely to occur.

So much for the present. Now let us consider the next four or five years during which time our military posture will be largely controlled by the 1960 defense budget and those immediately preceding it. It is unhappily true that in the next

few years there is only a limited number of things that we can do to remedy the decline in our military strength which is now becoming all too apparent. This fact arises from the long lead-time of modern weapons systems. Thus, the funds of the 1960 budget, which is about to be submitted to Congress will not put new major weapons in the hands of our forces for three, four or five years in the future. Only by adopting heroic measures and crash programs in selected areas now can we hope to undo or redo the effects of past budgetary decisions. ^{In the absence of such measures} ~~Otherwise~~ / by projecting forward the effects of these past ^{budgetary} actions, it is fairly easy to predict where we will be in 1964 or 1965.

This next five-year period is the critical time in which we pay the consequences of the so-called missile gap. By this term I refer not merely to the ~~Soviet~~ ^{Soviet} probable/superiority in numbers of operational missiles, but also to their protection, concealment and overall effectiveness. These defensive attributes make the Soviet counter-force hard to find and hence to strike. Our strategic atomic forces on the other hand have no such compensating advantages. Although we are now awakening to the missile danger, it is unlikely that we can match the Soviets in numbers of operational missiles between now and 1965. It is certain we cannot match them in concealment and hence in protection from attack. Although our Navy is pressing the development of the Polaris submarine-launched missile and the Air Force is ^{now} showing interest in giving mobility to its land-based missiles, it will take several years to have reliable weapons of these new types. We will still be largely dependent upon first generation missiles and manned aircraft, although these aircraft will have

been cut back considerably to pay the increasing price of the missiles.

missile defense

Soviet defensive measures can be expected to continue to improve in the next five years. We know nothing about anti-missile developments in the USSR, but we can be sure that they are leaving no stone unturned to develop a missile defense. Such an attitude would contrast sharply with the sales resistance of responsible officials in the United States to the Niki-Zeus anti-missile system which has been ready for production for the last two or three years. The Soviets can be expected to continue to improve the defense of their civilian population whereas we have not yet shown serious interest in civil defense. Thus, both in the offensive and defensive aspects of the missile gap I am afraid that the United States will be at a serious disadvantage to the USSR in the years under consideration, 1960-1965.

Now for the other side of the coin - the situation with regard to conventional, limited war forces. I see nothing to suggest that the current superiority of the Soviets in this vital area will be affected by anything the United States is likely to do. We could change the situation, but I see every sign that we will stand pat on what we have done or not done in the past. It is true that the lead time for the formation of limited war forces is not so great as for the strategic weapon systems. Thus, a timely decision now to strengthen ourselves in this vital area could produce results in about two years rather than the four or five required in the case of the strategic weapons. But as I

have said, there is no present indication that this will be the course which we will follow.

limited war program

In summary, it is fair to say that in the next four or five years there will be a dangerous imbalance of military strength in favor of the USSR. The Soviets will be superior to us in their ability to wage both general atomic war or limited conventional war. It may be, as I hope, that there will continue to be doubts and uncertainties in the minds of the Soviet war planners which will continue to discourage a deliberate choice of atomic war. However, it seems incredible that the Soviets will not capitalize in some way upon their overall war-making superiority. At a minimum they can be expected to exploit their strength in pressing hard on the soft spots about their boundaries. We may expect a higher level of aggressive provocation backed ~~and~~ by the use or the threat of the use of conventional forces under the shield of their preponderant missile strength. This situation is not inevitable but is nearly so. It can be improved, though only in part, by vigorous stop-gap measures taken now and by an intelligent use of increased defense budgets to shorten the duration of the period of danger.

The course of events in the last five years of the decade are more difficult to predict because they are out of range of the effects of current budgets. What will take place then will depend largely upon ourselves, provided of course that we have lived through the intermediate period of danger. The weapon systems which will be available to our choice are difficult to evaluate with accuracy. Progress in space will undoubtedly have

an important bearing upon our military preparations. I would expect space vehicles to become important primarily for military reconnaissance, mapping and early warning. The direct use of weapons from space vehicles is much more difficult to foresee. Chemical weapons may again come to the fore, particularly if there are agreed restrictions upon the use of atomic weapons.

But whatever the technological situation may be, the military objective of the United States should be to assure ourselves of an assured second-strike capability in general war forces and concurrently to develop strong limited war forces which, with the help of our allies, can offset the Communist strength on the ground. Both forms of military strength are essential to our security. Neither can do the job alone.

The Soviets on their side may be expected to pursue similar objectives. They will certainly want to retain and extend their present technological advantages. They will continue to improve their missiles in order to have at least a second-strike capability. They might hope that such a force under favorable conditions would ^{consequently} provide a first strike capability, but it will be very difficult to take out the enemy counter-force in this period when both sides will have plentiful long-range missiles concealed, hardened, dispersed and ^{hope} mobile. It will be almost impossible to score a surprise knockout. Neither side even with surprise can hope to wipe out all or most of the opposing missile force and escape a retaliatory blow. Particularly in our case, with the dearth of intelligence on Soviet missile sites and our national policy against a first strike, there is no reason ever to aspire to ~~anything~~ more than a second-strike capability.

Thus, by the end of the decade, we may reasonably expect that the atomic stand-off will be back again provided we have acted wisely in the meantime.

In conventional limited war forces the Soviets will certainly endeavor to maintain their present lead. This effort will not necessarily express itself merely in the maintenance of large numbers of forces but also in the modernization of their equipment. Very low yield tactical atomic weapons such as we have been developing up to the test moratorium offer great possibilities for the limited war forces of both sides. What effect the test ban will have in arresting this important development I cannot say. However, if we direct to the modernization of our limited war forces even a small part of the ~~technological~~ effort expended in the recent past on general atomic war forces, we can progressively close the gap with the Soviets. I am convinced that through intelligent planning and the proper use of our resources we can develop an effective offset to the present Soviet superiority - that is, if we are willing to pay the price.

Let us sum up then the prospects for the second half of 1960. I am assuming here as I have throughout my talk that there will have been no serious change in national attitudes and objectives - that the Communist world will remain unified in seeking world hegemony under Sino-Soviet leadership.

The second half of the decade offers us the possibility of restoring the balance of military power - at a price - which is inclining in favor of the Soviets as we enter this decade. But there are at least two new factors which will bear on the military

situation. The first is the course taken in disarmament and in the restrictions on the use and testing of atomic weapons. Action in disarmament may be expected to shrink military forces more or less proportionately to current strengths and thus not affect directly the relative balance of power. Restrictions on atomic weapons will redirect armament competition back into the conventional field where we are presently at a sharp disadvantage.

Another new factor of the utmost importance in the decade is the role of Red China. We run the danger of concentrating all or most of our attention on the USSR and neglecting the military potential of this new, aggressive world power. It would be quite possible for us to bind ourselves in obligations to the Soviet Union which would limit our military ^{flexibility} ~~capacity~~ and leave unneutralized the great potential strength of the Red Chinese. It would be entirely possible for the Soviet Union to use the threat of its own atomic weapons as a shield under which Chinese armies might operate with impunity on the ground. Such a strategy must have a considerable appeal to the Soviet war planners.

On the other hand, there is considerable uncertainty as to how Chinese expansion is regarded in the Kremlin. We can hope that the Soviets may feel little enthusiasm for a course of action which would result in greater strength on the part of their formidable ally. Nonetheless, we must bear in mind that the Communist power which threatens the Pacific area, southeast Asia and India is not directly the Soviet Union, but rather Red China. Our commitments of military aid to countries in the Far East - and we have many of them - are primarily obstacles in the

path of Red China. It is in this Pacific area that our ability to wage limited war may well be given the crucial test. Furthermore, it may be tested under conditions in which our atomic weapons are nullified by the threat of Soviet nuclear intervention. This is a thought for reflection when we consider reducing ^{the} military aid program to our allies bordering on Red China or when we approve another budget which continues to neglect the needs of limited war.

In closing let me restate my estimate of the Soviet military threat in 1960. We are entering 1960 with the military trends running against us. There is little to prevent the Soviets from having a substantial advantage over us, both in general and in limited war forces during the first half of this decade. Only by heroic measures taken now can we partially offset this threat. The second five years, if we survive, allow us time to reconstitute our strength. Our objective should be to use our resources to secure a small invulnerable long-range missile forces with an unmistakable second-strike capability. It must have the ability to cripple the Soviet Union even after a surprise attack.

At the same time we should discard the shibboleth that we cannot match Communism on the ground. We must match Communism on the ground if we are going to survive on ~~that~~ ^{the earth} element where, as men, we have our roots and our being. We should match the Communists not necessarily with United States manpower, but by a combination of allied manpower equipped with the most modern of conventional and tactical atomic weapons. We can restore the military balance if we have imagination, resolution and a willingness to sacrifice. The alternative is continued military inferiority to the Communists. Whatever doubts you may have about my

other remarks today, I hope that you will agree with me on this final point. There will be no living long with Communism as an inferior.

,DT/smf