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## Reykjavik: The Breach and Repair of the Pure War Script

by

*Hugh Mehan and James M. Skelly*

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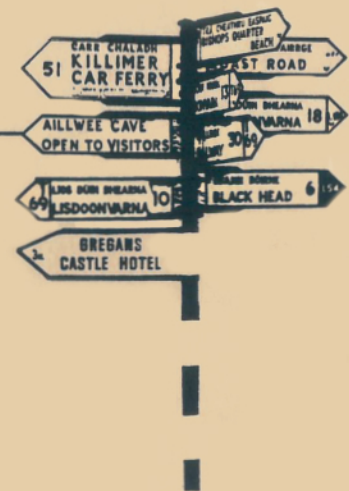
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International Society

Ballyvaughn, Ireland

August 9-16, 1987





**Reykjavik: The Breach and Repair  
of the Pure War Script**

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The conference held at Ballyvaughn, Ireland, in August 1987 was the beginning of an on-going international intellectual interchange on topics related to the discourse of peace and security and international society. It will include annual meetings, the second to be held in summer 1988, again in Ballyvaughn. Sponsored by the University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, the conferences are intended to foster general inquiry into these scholarly topics and to stimulate research and teaching that incorporates these perspectives at University of California campuses. This year's series of working papers comprises the writings which seventeen authors submitted to their colleague-participants in preparation for the 1987 conference. Some have been updated somewhat before publication here. Some have been published elsewhere and are reissued here by permission. The Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation hopes that these working papers will help to interest even more scholars in pursuing these lines of thought.

James M. Skelly  
Series Editor

These papers are available at the IGCC printing and mailing cost of \$2.50 each. For air mail delivery to an address outside North America, add \$2. California orders add 6.5% sales tax.

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## Reykjavik: The Breach and Repair of the Pure War Script

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Men define situations as real and they are real in their consequences-- W. I. Thomas

U.S. President Reagan met Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev at Reykjavik, Iceland in the fall of 1986. At this meeting, the two world leaders made significant proposals to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of their countries.

Normally, neither citizens nor researchers have access to events as they unfold in high level and secret negotiation sessions such as these. Usually, we only have carefully crafted pronouncements to the print and electronic media, reports to investigative panels, and accounts to interested people who were not present (e. g., allies). What made the period immediately following the Reykjavik meetings interesting is that representatives of both sides spoke so soon--often informally, and perhaps because of an unexpected extra session--without full consultation with and approval by the heads of the delegation. As a consequence of the unanticipated manner in which this summit proceeded, we have been able to gain a glimpse "behind the scenes"--to that period of time in which the informal and private backstage version of events becomes congealed into the formal and public frontstage version of events.

What, then, happened at the conference? Who proposed what to whom? When? What was agreed to? Not agreed to? For example, did the Soviets and the Americans agree to eliminate all offensive nuclear weapons or all ballistic missiles? Was the ABM treaty to be adhered to? For 8 years? For 10 years? Was SDI testing allowable under the ABM treaty? Was the issue of verification agreed on or even discussed?

Answers to these questions are not clear, because representatives of both sides told a different story about the proceedings and the agreements. Our purpose in this paper is to present these differing and competing definitions of the situation, first to show that the rough and confusing definitions of the situation became smooth and refined following the conference, and second, to suggest that the stabilization of meaning took a particular trajectory -- in the direction which dominated U.S.-Soviet relations prior to the conference.

Before analyzing the events at Reykjavik and its aftermath, we must establish two points: First, political action such as the Reykjavik summit is discourse (and, therefore, can profitably be studied by a certain type of discourse analysis); second, the historical context in which the Reykjavik summit transpired.

### **International Relations as Discourse**

The study of international relations is rendered difficult for a number of reasons: (1) activities seldom takes place in the confined space so helpful to students of social life in families, schools, hospitals, courts; (2) we do not have direct access to the participants (governmental officials, defense intellectuals, members of the opposition, nuclear strategists) and their routine daily work conducted *in situ*. Without access to the kinds of evidence necessary for an ethnographically grounded argument, it is difficult to answer the question so central to an informed analysis, i. e., "What's going on here?"

Students of international relations have adopted a number of strategies in the face of these problems. Some have conducted interviews with high ranking officials in an attempt to get closer to the decision-making process (e. g., Kull, 1987). Others provide accounts of personal experiences (e. g., Cohn, 1987) or analyze historical documents, biographies, and official records. More recently, selected speeches and news coverage have been analyzed for the pragmatic and metapragmatic devices which sustain a political position or process (Gumperz, 1982; Molotch & Boden, 1985; Verschueren, 1985; Chilton, 1985; Van Dijk, 1985; Chick, 1985).

In this paper we adopt a different approach, one which depicts international relations as a discourse or a conversation. Public political discourse, we are proposing, is similar to the discourse which routinely occurs in face-to-face encounters and literary texts. In political discourse, as in face-to-face interaction and literary texts, verbal performances are calculated for active perception and require attentive reading and response. Verbal performances in political discourse, like verbal performances in face-to-face interaction or literary texts, are often organized in anticipation of response from others. In the case of political discourse, reaction is anticipated in subsequent press coverage, or T.V. talk shows, laws, policies, or treaties. In the case of literary texts, reaction is anticipated from book reviews and critical surveys. In both cases, the reactions to verbal performances have a defining influence on subsequent works (Voloshinov, 1986: 95), which reminds us that actions, and subsequent actions, are interdependent and mutually constitutive.

The participants in political discourse are simultaneously speakers in a spatio-temporal "here and now" and in a socio-historical space and time. These "voices" (Bakhtin, 1981) address multiple audiences simultaneously, e. g., the interviewer in a press conference, members of the

opposition political party, electoral constituencies to be placated, and people in the enemy camp. Like dialog in the other modalities mentioned above, political discourse inevitably orients itself to previous performances, often taking its point of departure from the discourse of others, or sometimes from the discourse of the same performer voiced at an earlier time. Public political discourse, like printed or verbal performance, engages in ideological colloquy of a large scale. It responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses, and seeks support.

Thus, in the way we conceive it, discourse in the political arena, as in other arenas of everyday life, does not passively reflect or merely describe the world. Instead, the choice of certain ways of talking constitutes different versions of the world and influences actual practice and the ways in which people think. Furthermore, this constitutive conception of political discourse does not separate the world and the language used to report it as if there was a part of the world where "real" action or policy takes place and another part of the world in which inconsequential discussions of those consequential actions took place. Public political discourse, then, is not merely talk or simply rhetoric. As we use the term, discourse encompasses ways of speaking, ways of thinking, and ways of acting.

Given our "constitutive" or "constructivist" conception of political discourse (see Mehan 1983 for more detail), the issue becomes: how do researchers capture discourse for investigation and study? Recognizing the difficulties in gaining access to key political actions, we have adopted the strategy of mapping the consequences of disruptions in the routines of political life. The approach has the following logic: From time to time, the normal routine of social life is disrupted. This rupture or "breach" (Schutz, 1962; Garfinkel, 1963) in the normative order provides researchers with an opportunity to gain insight into the normally invisible workings of that normative order.

We are proposing that the events at Reykjavik were one such breach or "critical discourse moment" (Chilton, 1987). The "normative order" in Soviet-American relations at the time of the conference contained two main propositions: the Soviet Union poses a threat to the United States and nuclear weapons are the most effective deterrent to that threat.<sup>1</sup> At this meeting, the

<sup>1</sup> Kaldor (1987: 74) neatly summarizes the U.S. construction of the Soviet threat and the equivalent Soviet construction of the U.S. threat as a fundamental conflict of systems:

The orthodox Western view of East-West conflict holds that it is a conflict of political systems, between freedom and totalitarianism; totalitarianism is considered inherently expansionist, and it is claimed that only the presence of American nuclear weapons prevents, if not outright Soviet expansion, then at least sinister political blackmail. A parallel is drawn with the situation in Europe in 1939; appeasement does not work and must never be repeated.

The official Eastern version holds that the East-West conflict is a conflict between social systems, between capitalism and socialism, and capitalism is inherently



two world leaders proposed to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of their countries. Just as any move in an "ordinary, everyday" conversation is subject to counter or responding moves, so, too, in the nuclear conversation, Reagan's and Gorbachev's moves were countered in the discourse which occurred in the aftermath of the meeting, for example, by the Allies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Department of Defense, the press, and nuclear arms specialists. We will argue that these responses were calculated to restore the basic tenets of U.S. policy toward the Soviets after the unwitting challenge to its supremacy posed by the Reykjavik proposals.

### **Pure War Culture**

Having proposed that aspects of U.S.-USSR relations can profitably be studied as discourse, we will now place the Reykjavik summit in historical context. This involves characterizing the rationale for nuclear weapons in the U.S. and the perception of the Soviet Union as a threat to the United States. The combination of these principles composes "Pure War Culture."

### **Deterrence**

The theoretical rationale for nuclear weapons in the U.S. since the end of World War II has been the deterrence of the Soviet threat. A fundamental premise of this rhetoric is the idea that nuclear weapons are designed to deter the Soviet Union from launching an attack on the U.S. or its allies. Nuclear weapons are able to play this peace-keeping function because both nations are mutually assured of each other's destruction should either launch an attack on the other. A fundamental principle of deterrence is retaliation. If one side uses nuclear weapons, then the other side will respond; the response will be so devastating in cost of lives, damage to political machinery, the economy, and the environment that it would not be worth the price. In short, the possible cost of retaliation is greater than the benefit of aggression.

While the language of deterrence dominates the discourse of the nuclear arms debate today, it established its preeminence only after fending off competitors. Ever since the U.S. began developing atomic bombs during the Second World War, there has been considerable controversy about the strategic vision required to justify the existence of nuclear weapons in our society. From the outset of the Manhattan Project the development of the bomb was a matter of

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expansionist. The massive Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe, the buffer zone protecting the Soviet Union from the West and backed by Soviet nuclear weapons, is a way of preventing a global war started by the United States and West Germany. The memory of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 is invoked to explain the need for preparedness.

debate among scientists. Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard, who would later crusade for disarmament, advocated this build up (Weart & Szilard, 1978: 94 - 95). Neils Bohr argued against his colleagues, saying that the long-range dangers would outweigh the short-term disadvantages (Jungk, 1958: 344 - 347).

The line of argumentation that prevailed was oriented toward Hitler's Germany. An evil enemy--Hitler and national socialism--could be eliminated by atomic bombs. This justification was bolstered by reports from refugee scientists reporting that Hitler was also working on a bomb (Falk, 1982); it was, therefore, in the national interest to secure and use atomic weapons before Germany did. By the time the bomb was to be tested at Alamogordo (July 16, 1945), however, Hitler had been defeated. With his defeat, the original reason for constructing the bomb lost its grounding. A new justification was required; it was found in our continuing war with Japan.

Our knowledge about the reasons the U.S. actually used the bomb over Japan remains cloudy (Bernstein, 1983); different leaders endorsed it for different reasons. Surely, there was some conviction at the time that using the bomb would end the war quickly on American terms, thereby saving lives, especially American lives. Also present were various ideas about the postwar context. Ending the Pacific War without Soviet help would give the U.S. more latitude in shaping the future of the region. Truman's secretary of state, James Byrnes, spoke for many anti-communists in the government when he said the use of the bomb would go a long way toward inducing overall Soviet deference to U.S. leadership in the post-war world. The vengeance motive can not be overlooked; remembering Pearl Harbor by punishing enemies, especially non-white enemies, who were portrayed in governmental publications, the media, and even children's comics as evil, was a potent force in the equation. The vengeance motive can not be discounted, especially since bombing large Japanese cities did not meet any compelling military need. National survival was not at stake. Even the outcome of the war was patently clear, and dropping the atomic bomb achieved no more than saving a few weeks time.

While we may argue about which of these accounts was the "real" justification for bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one thing is certain: our war against Japan, a country which had already bombed U.S. assets, provided the rationale for continuing to develop and use the atomic bomb after the defeat of Hitler.

There is another dimension to the development and use of atomic weapons in the U.S.: bureaucratic momentum. There simply were no strong voices raised against the idea of exploding the bomb once the machinery for its development and use had been set in motion. "The impetus to go forward came partially from the bureaucratic momentum associated with assembling at high cost such an elaborate project" (Falk, 1982: 193; cf. York, 1975; McNamera, 1987). History has shown us how difficult it is to stop a large-scale project once it is well underway, especially one as expensive and elaborate as the Manhattan Project.

The development of atomic weapons then, is another example, a horrendous one to be sure, of bureaucratic imperative -- the slow and inexorable incremental change in social organizations organized in the bureaucratic mode. Once started on a path, bureaucratic organizations seem to take on a life of their own, redefining goals, making new means-ends linkages, or detaching the means to obtain goals from the goals themselves, developing new rationales.

After the war was over, the debate about the place of the bomb in our society continued. There was a brief political resolve to remove nuclear weapons from the scene, notably the "Baruch Plan" (Baruch, 1946)--phased international control of nuclear capabilities and technologies. But these voices of internationalization were shouted down by those of national interests. In essence, these voices asked: why give up a military advantage? Deterrence theory emerged as the justification for nuclear weapons during this brief period of uncertainty.

### **The Soviet Threat**

Brodie (1946), one of the first nuclear weapons theorists to provide a basic outline of a theory of the bomb, argued that the potential destructive force of atomic weapons meant they could never be used; therefore, the only viable function for atomic weapons was as a deterrent. But, who were they to deter? We no longer had an enemy--Nazi Germany and Japan had both been defeated.

Nathanson (1984) argues that during this time of uncertainty the U.S. constructed the Soviet Union as a threat to the U.S. He describes the way in which ambiguous Soviet behavior in the period immediately after WW II was interpreted unambiguously as a threat to U.S. national security and the security of other Western nations. He argues that the social construction of the Soviets as a threat rationalized the further development of the atomic bomb. Originally envisioned as a weapon to eradicate a godless menace, and then to avenge the invasion of our country by a hated enemy, the bomb became transformed into a device that allowed the U.S. to play the role of world power while avoiding the entangling consequences of central government. Atomic weapons enabled the deeply held republican convictions of American citizens opposing standing armies and strong central government to be kept intact while the U.S. positioned itself in world politics through alliances that placed military bases on allies' soil.

In short, Hitler may have provided the initial justification for the Manhattan Project, but once the development of atomic and nuclear weapons was underway, it generated its own momentum, adopting new rationales quite effortlessly. In each case, the rationale was focused on an enemy, first Germany, then Japan, and most recently, the Soviet Union. Whatever the appraisal of the Hiroshima decision, there is enough evidence to show that it didn't take much for the U.S. in 1945 to leap across the nuclear threshold. Once the decision was made, the

developmental process went forward with new confidence and few regrets--one more demonstration of American military and technological prowess at the expense of a hated enemy. The public seemed to have adopted this account--believing at the time that the bomb brought the war to a speedy end, and thereby saving (American) lives.

The rhetoric of deterrence, then, makes nuclear weapons the centerpiece of U.S. national security because they have been perceived as sufficient to deter the Soviet Union's aggressive impulses. It is because the U.S. possesses nuclear weapons, is capable and ready to use them, that the Soviet threat is neutralized.

### **The Characteristics of Pure War Culture**

Deterrence theory, bolstered by the perception that the Soviet Union poses a fundamental threat to the United States, transformed the orientation of American society and the military within it toward war and engendered a new definition of society itself. Before atomic weapons, "the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars" (Brodie, 1946: 74 ). The presence of atomic weapons now makes the purpose of the military to avert wars (Brodie, 1946: 74). Compared to conventional war, in which designated armies engage in battle until one side wins and the other loses, nuclear war, if fought, would be a total war. An enemy's society, not simply military targets, would be deliberately destroyed.

Instead of an army that is mobilized only after the outbreak of hostilities or upon a threat of them, the imminent possibility of nuclear war requires the full-scale mobilization of the armed forces at all times, even before hostiles or a threat. Constant mobilization, in turn, transforms society from a condition in which periods of peace alternate with periods of war fought by citizens who are part-time soldiers into a condition of war preparedness with standing armies always in readiness (Skelly, 1984). Thus, treating nuclear weapons as deterrents leads to the constant mobilization of a state's resources. These resources are aimed more at national security and less at social services, which relegates the social agenda (e. g., poverty, medical care, population expansion, education, etc.) to a secondary status in political discussions.

Because the threat of destruction is more imminent, more immediate, more permanent with nuclear weapons, the conditions for political decision making are affected. The speed with which missiles can be launched and hit targets reduces the time for political debate, decision making, and negotiation.

The technical sophistication of nuclear weapons systems engenders a fear that information about them will be stolen. Research, development, testing, and deployment of weapons is, as a result, shrouded in secrecy. The generation of secrecy, like the speed of

nuclear war, suppresses the conventions of politics and reduces the possibility of negotiated decision making (Oxford Research Group, 1986).

The potential speed of nuclear strikes, veils of secrecy, and constant military mobilization establishes "pure war" (Virilio & Lotringer, 1983) -- in which the distinction between peace and war is blurred, civilian and military collapses, noncompetitive contracts replace competitive bids. It is because they transform civil society into a national security state or a state of pure war -- and not just because they possess such awful destructive power -- that nuclear weapons pose such a threat to civilization.

As horrible, frightening, and potentially catastrophic as nuclear weapons are, the policy of deterrence which organizes their (non)use has consequences. A certain stability (fearful and often frenzied to be sure) is generated. A predictable world results. We have these terrible weapons, but won't use them; they have these terrible weapons but won't use them. Pure War Culture, then, is at once a culture of fear and of relative certainty.

### **Reykjavik: The Breach**

"The nuclear Regime is a system of talk. The deployments that really matter in this semantic field are those not of warheads but of meaning" Manhoff (1986).

Confusion characterized the close of the Reykjavik negotiations. The public was treated to a flurry of competing definitions of the situation. Representatives of both sides gave accounts of the conference; they were contradictory. The Soviets and the Americans told different stories about the proceedings and the agreements. Representatives of the American side offered conflicting accounts.

Our purpose in this section of the paper is to present these differing and competing definitions of the situation. In the next section we will show that the rough and confusing definitions of the situation were smoothed and polished in the weeks following the conference. Repairing the rupture in the Pure War rhetoric is reasserting the primacy of deterrence and the reality of the Soviet Threat.

The following scenario has been constructed by juxtaposing two texts generated immediately after the conference ended; they are: Mikhail S. Gorbachev's speech on Soviet television 14 October 1986, and the U.S. Proposal as provided by the U.S. State Department on 17 October 1986.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A scenario which departs from our reconstruction is to be found in the "Report of the Defense Policy Panel of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, January and February, 1987. The Panel's scenario has Gorbachev offering to reduce strategic nuclear weapons by 50 percent in five

In the first session, General Secretary Gorbachev made proposals about the ABM treaty and the reduction of nuclear arms. Gorbachev initially proposed that both sides comply with the ABM treaty for *an indefinite period*, and proposed to reduce *offensive nuclear weapons* by 50 percent in 5 years and by 100 percent in 10 years.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps taken aback by the range of these proposals, President Reagan made a counter-proposal which did not mention withdrawal from the ABM treaty, but, instead, concentrated on research, development, and testing permitted under the treaty. Concerning arms reduction, Reagan proposed to reduce *strategic nuclear weapons* by 50 percent in five years and *offensive ballistic missiles* by 100 percent in ten years.<sup>4</sup>

On the second day of the conference, Gorbachev responded to the initial U.S. proposal by offering that neither side withdraw from the ABM treaty for 10 years, and addressed the R&D

years and all intermediate nuclear missiles by 100 percent while the State Department has Gorbachev offering to reduce offensive nuclear weapons. Concerning the crucial final session, the Panel has Secretary of State Shultz offering total elimination of offensive ballistic missiles and "nearly agreeing to all nuclear weapons" while the State Department has the U.S. offering reductions in "offensive ballistic missiles." Thus, the Panel's assessment of the situation is closer to the Soviet's version than it is to the State Department's or the White House's.

Discrepancies among various official political accounts are both a topic and a resource for investigations of the nuclear arms debate and political discourse more generally, for they point out the difficulties which accrue to researchers who must rely on "official documents" in their research and show the tenuous nature of "objective" evidence" in this field of study.

<sup>3</sup> "There was a whole package of important measures that was put on the conference table by us . . . here we were speaking about the actual elimination of nuclear weapons in a relatively short time. This had to do with a [sic] offensive weapons and I stated our willingness to agree to reduction of these weapons by 50 percent in the first five years. And in doing this, nuclear weapons--land-based, submarine-based and air-based nuclear weapons--would be reduced by 50 percent. In order to facilitate this agreement, we made a large concession by removing our previous requirement that this nuclear equation would include intermediate American missiles--intermediate--and the European missiles. We were also prepared to take into account the concern of the United States about our heavy rockets. We were considering the nuclear weapons in the context of a full elimination, as we had proposed on January 20 of this year. . . . we firmly stated that it was necessary to comply with the ABM treaty of 1972 without any time limit. Moreover, in order to strengthen the regime of this treaty we proposed to the president that we undertake mutual commitments on both our parts, the Soviet Union and the United States, not to use our right to withdraw from the treaty for at least 10 years, until we finally eliminated the nuclear weapons." Mikhail S. Gorbachev, speech on Soviet Television October 14, 1986, as translated by Cable News Network and recorded in the *New York Times*, October 15, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Both sides would agree to confine themselves to research, development and testing, which is permitted by the ABM treaty for a period of five years, through 1991, during which time a 50 percent reduction of strategic nuclear arsenals would be achieved. This being done, both sides will continue the pace of reductions with respect to the remaining ballistic missiles with the goal of total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles by the end of a second five-year period. As long as these reductions continue at the appropriate pace, the same reductions will continue to apply. At the end of the 10-year period, with all offensive ballistic missiles eliminated, either side would be free to deploy defenses. "Initial Proposal," as provided on October 17, 1986, by the U.S. Department of State, in the *New York Times*, October 18, 1986.

issues by saying testing of anti-ballistic defense is limited to labs. Gorbachev now offered to reduce *strategic offensive weapons* by 50 percent in 5 years and by 100 percent in 10 years.<sup>5</sup>

In the final, unscheduled working session, Sunday afternoon, the U.S. picked up the Soviet issue about withdrawal from the ABM treaty, agreeing to a 10-year time frame, while insisting that research, development, and testing of strategic defense (SDI) be permitted. In addition, Reagan now offered to reduce strategic offensive arms by 50 percent in 5 years and offensive ballistic missiles by 100 percent in 10 years.<sup>6</sup>

This is where the conference ended. When all was said and done, the only fact that we can be sure of is: there was no agreement. While we are able to piece together a sense of the proceedings from post-summit commentary,<sup>7</sup> we do not know, however, *why* the two sides could

<sup>5</sup> "The USSR and the United States would undertake for a period of 10 years not to take advantage of the right of withdrawing from the ABM treaty and during this period to adhere strictly to all its provisions. Testing of all space elements of anti-ballistic defense in space are prohibited except research and testing in laboratories. Within the first five years through 1991, strategic offensive weapons will be reduced--of the two sides will be reduced. During the second five years of this 10-year period, the remaining 50 percent of strategic offensive weapons of the two sides will be eliminated. Thus by the end of 1996, the USSR and the United States--the strategic weapons of the U.S. and the USSR will be totally eliminated." Gorbachev speech, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> The USSR and the United States undertake for 10 years not to exercise their existing right of withdrawal from the ABM treaty, which is of unlimited duration, and during that period, strictly to observe all its provisions while continuing research, development and testing, which are permitted by the ABM treaty. Within the first five years of the 10-year period (and thus through 1991), the strategic offensive arms of the two sides shall be reduced by 50 percent. During the following five years of that period, all remaining offensive ballistic missiles of the two sides shall be reduced. Thus by the end of 1996, all offensive ballistic missiles of the USSR and the United States will have been totally eliminated. At the end of the 10-year period, either side could deploy defenses if it so chose unless the parties agree otherwise. "Revised Proposal," U.S. Department of State, above.

<sup>7</sup> The following are typical of retrospective re-interpretations of the events at Reykjavik:

At that meeting, the two leaders agreed on reductions in U.S. and Soviet long-range INF missiles to an equal global ceiling of 100 warheads on such missiles. To reach this ceiling, both sides would completely eliminate longer-range INF Missiles from Europe and the Soviets would deploy no more than 100 warheads in Asia, balanced by an equal number of warheads of U.S. missiles on our territory. The two sides also agreed on some general comprehensive data exchanges, on-site observation, on-site inspection. The major remaining issue in the INF area was SRINF. In the strategic offensive area, both sides agreed to 50 percent reductions to equal levels of 1600 missiles and bombers carrying no more than 6000 warheads. One major dispute remained in START area -- that of sublimits. We proposed sublimits . . . within the 6000 warhead aggregate:

4800 warheads on ballistic missiles

3500 warheads on ICBMs

1650 warheads on heavy and highly MIRVed ICBMs

In the defense and space area the two leaders agreed that for 10 years, both sides would confine their strategic defense programs to research, development, and testing activities

not reach agreement. It is not even clear if both sides were talking about the same weapons systems, even though "significant reductions" were being called for by both sides.<sup>8</sup> The Soviets insisted that President Reagan had agreed to scrap all nuclear weapons by 1996 as the Kremlin said Gorbachev had proposed.<sup>9</sup> The White House at first denied the Soviets' assertions,<sup>10</sup> but eventually conceded the point.<sup>11</sup>

### **Defining the Situation: Success or Failure?**

These accounts present the details of the negotiations. Other commentaries characterized the results in terms of success or failure. There were also some arguments about the reasons for the success or failure.

permitted by ABM treaty -- while disagreeing about which specific activities would be permitted and which prohibited during the 10-year period. The Soviets wanted to restrict the testing of space-based systems (i. e., SDI) to the laboratory, a restriction which the U.S. side judges would effectively kill SDI.

From notes taken by Mehan at: Michael Safford, "Current Arms Control Negotiations and their Consequences" lecture presented to IGCC 1987 Summer Seminar on Global Security and Arms Control, July 1987. Cf. Paul H. Nitze, "The Nuclear and Space Negotiations: Translating Promise to Progress." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Current Policy No. 910.

<sup>8</sup> The Soviet category seems to include "land-based, submarine-based and air-based nuclear weapons;" it presumably includes not only ballistic missiles, but also four other key categories: bombers with gravity bombs or air-launched cruise missiles [ALCMs, nuclear capable U.S. fighter aircraft, seaborne cruise missiles [SLCMs]. The U.S. is moving to deploy nuclear armed cruise missiles, perhaps 170 aboard 132 bombers and as many as 758 in attack not ballistic missile submarines and aboard surface ships. In electing to make promises about "ballistic" missiles," the U.S. confined its offer to fast delivery systems.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander A. Bessmertnykh, Soviet deputy foreign minister, said that at first Reagan proposed to eliminate only ballistic missiles by the end of the 10-year period. When Gorbachev told him that the Kremlin also advocates abolition of bombers with nuclear payloads and similar weapons, Bessmertnykh quoted Reagan as having said: "Apparently we misunderstood you. But if that's what you want, all right." Then he quoted Reagan as having told Gorbachev: "If we are agreed then that at the end of the 10-year period, all nuclear weapons are to be eliminated, we can refer this agreement to our delegations at Geneva so that they can prepare a treaty you can sign when you visit the United States." *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> "There can be absolutely no doubt as to the proposal that we left on the table in Iceland. It was that the two sides would destroy roughly one-half of all their nuclear weapons over a five-year period, reaching a level of 1000 delivery vehicles and 6000 warheads on each side. In the succeeding five years, the two sides would destroy all remaining ballistic missiles. The idea of destruction of all nuclear weapons was discussed but was never formally tabled by the United States side." Dan Howard, deputy White House spokesman, *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> "In the final hours of heated negotiations at Reykjavik, President Reagan went significantly beyond the carefully prepared arms control proposals he had brought to the Iceland summit. . . . Now, belatedly, the White House has said that it has no quarrel with the Soviet version of events--that Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev did discuss the total elimination of nuclear weapons at the summit." Robert C. Toth, *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1986. The Defense Panel, which published its report later, also agrees with the Soviet version of events.



The first characterizations of the outcomes at Reykjavik were provided by American Secretary of State George Shultz; President Reagan, as he bid farewell to General Secretary Gorbachev outside of Hofdi House; Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev; and Georgi Arbatov, advisor to Gorbachev; before they left Iceland:

Reagan (to Gorbachev): "I think you didn't want a summit."

Gorbachev (to Reagan): "Well there is still time."

Reagan: "No there isn't."<sup>12</sup>

Shultz: "There is a great sense of disappointment, at least at this meeting. A tremendous amount of headway was made, but, in the end, we couldn't quite make it. We are deeply disappointed at the outcome."<sup>13</sup>

Gorbachev: "This has been a failure and a failure when we were very close to an historic agreement."

Arbatov: "Arms control reached a dead end."<sup>14</sup>

These representatives of the U.S. and the Soviet sides immediately characterized the events at the conference in negative terms, e. g., as a "failure," a "disappointment."<sup>15</sup>

Here we have entered the breach, with even the American president and secretary of state adopting a perspective which raises questions about the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence. Characterizing the summit as a failure implies that the negotiators were disappointed at not reaching an agreement on arms reduction. We must watch as time goes on for the definition of the situation to change from the goal of arms reduction to protection and retention of deterrence.

### Laying the Blame

No agreements were reached at Reykjavik. Tantalizing proposals were made, but in the final analysis, no concrete agreements were reached. Much of the discussion immediately after

<sup>12</sup> As quoted by Bernard Weintraub, *New York Times*, October 16, 1986, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Secretary of State George P. Schultz, News Conference, Reykjavik, Iceland, October 9, 1986, as recorded in the *New York Times*, October 10, 1986, p. 6, and *Face the Nation*, October 19, 1987, transcript, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> George Schultz, as quoted in *Newsweek*, October 20, 1986, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the meetings, the summit was also characterized as a failure by the American Press. "Deadlock." "A Blow to Superpower Relations and no Date for a New Summit" screamed the headlines of the October 20, 1986, *Newsweek*. The lead article concluded with this assessment: "The impromptu Iceland summit ended in a frustrating stalemate." *Time* concluded: "Star Wars Sinks the Summit," October 20, 1986.

the conference focused on reasons for this failure. In the immediate aftermath of the conference, both sides blamed the other for the collapse of the talks.

Many commentators saw the events at Reykjavik in a sinister light, as a "trap," or a "ploy" to ensnare an "unsuspecting" president into eliminating all nuclear weapons on both sides. Richard Pipes, former director of East European and Soviet Affairs for the National Security Council, sounded this theme, portraying the summit as merely the most recent in a long series of attempts to abort SDI.<sup>16</sup> Paul Nitze, Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Arms Control, said Gorbachev only had propaganda goals in mind for the conference, and his proposals were not to be taken seriously.<sup>17</sup> British Defense Secretary George Younger said that he believed the Reagan Administration was lured into a meeting as part of a Soviet ploy to avoid the summit scheduled for later in the United States. The arms control proposal made by the Soviets at Reykjavik was "ill defined" and "hastily patched up" and he praised Reagan for refusing to accept it.<sup>18</sup>

Other commentators blamed the failure of Reykjavik on the Reagan Administration because it went to the conference ill prepared and poorly advised. The Defense Policy Panel of the House Armed Services Committee, which held hearings to investigate American actions at Reykjavik, declared that the Reagan Administration didn't consider the full military impact of reducing missiles because the NATO allies, arms control experts or Pentagon leaders were not consulted adequately. As a result of "very slipshod . . . very shoddy" and ultimately "bizarre processes," the Reagan Administration nearly blundered into an arms agreement with the Soviet Union that would have been unacceptable to the U.S. allies. Once the decision to go to Reykjavik was made, the panel said "no new ideas were developed, no fallback positions were discussed."<sup>19</sup> The panel acknowledged that Reagan's attempt to seize an opportunity for progress "may in the long run be to his credit" even if he failed. "The more obvious conclusion is that the process moved too fast--progress went too far, overshot its mark and yielded the United States nothing but the appearance of confusion and frustration."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Paul H. Nitze, "The Nuclear and Space Negotiations: Translating Promise into Progress." *Current Policy* No. 910, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> "Reykjavik and American Security." Report #25 Defense Policy Panel of the Committee on Armed Services. House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 1987.

The U.S. administration focused its attention on the Soviets' position on SDI as the reason there were no substantial agreements. We have the following versions of how the Soviet Union sabotaged the summit:

We came to Iceland to advance the cause of peace, and though we put on the table the most far-ranging arms control proposal in history, the Secretary General rejected it.<sup>21</sup>

Here, the president is blaming the Soviets for refusing the U.S. proposal. The secretary of state claimed that the Soviet side was responsible for a failure to reach an agreement. They achieved this objective by "seeking a change in the ABM treaty":

. . . the president was ready to agree to a 10-year period of nonwithdrawal from the ABM treaty, a period during which the U.S. would do research, development, and testing which is permitted by the ABM treaty. And, of course, after which we would be permitted to deploy if we chose . . . . As we came more and more down to the final stages it became more and more clear that the Soviet Union's objective was to kill off the SDI program. And to do so by seeking a change--described by them as strengthening, but a change--in the ABM treaty that would so constrain research permitted under it that the program would not be able to proceed at all forcefully.<sup>22</sup>

That is, the "sticking point" is portrayed by the U.S. as the USSR's novel interpretation of the ABM treaty--one that would preclude the testing and development of SDI. The Soviets' novel interpretation reveals their underlying motive, namely, their desire to kill off SDI.

The president seems to have insisted that research, testing, and development on space-based systems continue and insisted that these activities were allowed by the ABM treaty:

While both sides seek reduction in the number of nuclear missiles and warheads threatening the world, the Soviet Union insisted that we sign an agreement that would deny to me and future Presidents for 10 years the right to develop, test and deploy a defense against nuclear missiles for the people of the free world. This we could not do and will not do.

So late this afternoon I made to the General Secretary an entirely new proposal: a 10-year delay in the deployment of SDI, in return for the complete elimination of all ballistic missiles from the respective arsenals of both nations.

So long as both the United States and the Soviet Union prove their good faith by destroying nuclear missiles year by year, we would not deploy SDI. The General

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald Reagan, departure address, Keflavik Air Base, Iceland, October 12, 1986, in the *New York Times*, October 13, 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Secretary of State George Shultz, news conference, Reykjavik, October 9, 1986, in the *New York Times*, October 10, 1986, p. 6.

Secretary said he would consider our offer, but only if we restricted all work on SDI to laboratory research, which would have killed our defensive shield.<sup>23</sup>

This version implies the USSR squashed the negotiations by insisting that research on SDI be confined to the laboratory,<sup>24</sup> which, according to Secretary of State George Shultz, was a "last minute" addition to the negotiation:

There was a great deal of bargaining back and forth on language that would express an agreement. And it was in the course of one of the iterations of that language that the confinement to the laboratory appeared. And that is where we ran into trouble.<sup>25</sup>

For the Soviets, the failure of the summit lay in the commitment that the U.S. side had for the development of SDI. General Secretary Gorbachev is vehement on this point:

It would have taken a madman to accept Reagan's position on Star Wars. The U.S. came to this meeting with empty hands. The President of the United States did not have permission to reach an agreement and the talks collapsed.<sup>26</sup>

Gorbachev claimed that the summit was a failure because Reagan is a puppet of hawkish elements in the administration, and not able to act on his own.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Reagan, departure address at Keflavik Air Base, Iceland, October 12, 1986, in the *New York Times*, October 13, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense, a member of the U.S. negotiating team, who is more explicit in laying the blame on the Soviets. According to a summary of a news briefing by Perle right after the conference, the Soviets insistence on adherence to the ABM treaty did not limit SDI testing to the laboratory:

The Russians put forward two demands. They wanted a pledge that the 1972 ABM treaty would continue to remain valid for a 10-year period, in effect delaying "Star Wars" deployment for 10 years . . . .The Russians also said that both sides should strictly adhere to treaty terms. They did not say this meant only laboratory research.

Perle's account differs from others in two respects: (1) the Soviet proposal delays the deployment of SDI, yet Reagan said that he was willing to delay that deployment; (2) while the Soviets insisted upon adherence to the ABM treaty, they did not preclude field testing or deployment because they did not say that in so many words. Michael R. Gordon, the *New York Times*, October 15, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Gorbachev, television address, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Victor P. Karpov, chief Soviet negotiator, reiterated Gorbachev's position a few months later in Geneva, blaming the U.S. for failing to respond to Soviet proposals:

The United States is blocking the agreement by pursuing SDI and has added to arms control difficulties by exceeding the limits set forth in the SALT II agreement. *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1986.

In sum, the Soviet side blamed the American side for the breakdown in negotiations for wanting to go beyond the limits of the ABM treaty, while the American side blamed the Soviets for wanting to "kill" SDI. By calling the events at Reykjavik a "failure," both sides were implying that they were seriously considering arms reduction and had considered, at least for a tantalizing moment, the highest aspirations of the peace movement.

### **Repairing the Breach**

It did not take long for the work to repair the breach in the deterrence script to start. The basic tenets of the Pure War Script were protected, in part, by transforming the apparent failure of Reagan at Reykjavik into a success.

#### **The Administration's Response: Refiguring Failure as Success**

The U.S. Administration seemed confused about the achievements of the summit. Were they a success or a failure? Within 24 hours of characterizing the summit as a failure for not achieving an agreement on arms reduction, the administration began to re-present the summit as a success. In his address to the nation on the evening of October 13, President Reagan claimed that "we are closer than ever before to agreements that could lead us to a safer world without nuclear weapons,"<sup>28</sup> while other participants echoed the upbeat assessment.<sup>29</sup> In fact, it began to seem as if agreements on INF, nuclear testing and 50 percent cuts in strategic forces had been all but signed--held up only by the disagreement over testing of strategic defense elements.

During the first phase of the repair in the rupture of the rhetoric, the meaning of Reykjavik was transformed from a failure (because there was no agreement on arms control) to a success

<sup>28</sup> President Reagan's address, October 13, 1987.

<sup>29</sup> Secretary of State George Shultz: "It is true to say that there was a tremendous amount of movement in many important areas -- not simply arms control, but, as the President said last night, in others as well. So it was a productive meeting. You have to assess the Reykjavik meeting as one that produced really tremendous advances. And so our assessment is very positive, and apparently that is the assessment of the Soviet side as well."

Sen. Richard Lugar, (R) Indiana: "The President emphasized the ball game is still on. In other words, the negotiations continue, and the need for unity, in terms of our negotiating posture as we table those proposals at Geneva or wherever we can now, is essential. He sees it as great progress, and the ball is pushed further down the field a good bit, so we have some opportunities."

Sen. Robert Dole, Majority Leader: "Everything is still on the table. It's going to stay on the table. To me, that's good news. I think when you read yesterday's headlines about the collapse or a failure, I think many people thought it was over. My view is it's not over at all."

Shultz, Lugar and Dole as quoted on the *MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*, October 14, 1986, Transcript # 2882.

(because arms control agreements were so imminent). In the next phase, we will see the readers of the Pure War Script refigure the meaning of success. Reykjavik becomes a success because Reagan did not "trade an arms control bird in the hand for a strategic defense bird in the bush."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, by saying "no" to arms reduction in exchange for limiting testing on SDI, Reagan was characterized as having "strategic vision":

. . . the most important moment of Presidential decisiveness since President Harry Truman picked up Stalin's gauntlet and committed the nation to a policy of containment. And he gave the nation a clinic in leadership: With his mind on future generations, not the next election, he spurned the short-term applause that comes automatically to any President who signs any arms control agreement.<sup>31</sup>

The president's actions were successful because he avoided a trap either (a) by being strong ("flying into a rage")<sup>32</sup> or (b) by being stubborn on Star Wars.<sup>33</sup> In both versions of this argument, Gorbachev was portrayed as insincere in his proposals; as we will see below, they were only a ploy to embarrass the president, divide the country and crack the NATO alliance.

#### **The Allies' Response: Lack of Consultation, Weakening the Alliance**

West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited Washington within a week after Reagan returned from Iceland. Before leaving Bonn, he said in effect: You did not consult us in your rush to agreement and you ignored our security problems to boot. His defense minister, Manfred Woerner, who was originally scheduled to attend a meeting of the NATO nuclear planning group in Scotland, travelled along with Kohl instead so as to demonstratively drive home the same point:

According to Woerner (and many NATO experts), the withdrawal of Pershing 2 and Cruise missiles would not only leave a grievous gap in the deterrence

<sup>30</sup> William Safire, *New York Times*, October 20, 1986, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> George Will, *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1986, Part II, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> ". . . the President quickly saw through the Soviet ploy and flew into something approximating a rage when he realized that he had been led into a trap. As soon as it became clear that the Soviet concessions on reducing strategic missiles were a ploy to kill SDI, the talks broke down . . . nothing has been irretrievably lost, except the Soviet chance to steamroll the United States into surrendering its strategic defenses." Richard Pipes, former Director of East European and Soviet Affairs for the National Security Council, *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1986.

<sup>33</sup> "The failure to agree at Reykjavik is not a failure for arms control. What happened at the summit was that the Soviets failed to kill the Strategic Defense Initiative as a serious weapons-development program. The cause of arms control has not been hurt by Reykjavik because the bargain that might have been struck would have been no bargain at all for Western security." Colin S. Gray, president, National Institute for Policy Study. *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1986.

spectrum, but also expose Western Europe to the threat of shorter-range systems.<sup>34</sup>

Kohl, upon being welcomed by Reagan upon his visit to Washington--the first by an Allied leader after Iceland--urged the U.S. to build on what he called the major steps taken to arms control at Reykjavik but stressed such deals should be struck "without endangering our security." Spokesman Freidhelm Ost said Kohl told Reagan that he is in favor of a proposal to abolish medium range missiles in Europe but sought assurances that such a deal would not leave West Germany vulnerable to Soviet short-range weapons or attack from vastly superior Warsaw Pact conventional forces. "The German government accepts the 50 percent reduction but thinks the discussions in Reykjavik for greater reduction could be a danger for Western Europe."<sup>35</sup>

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher followed Kohl to Washington to press Reagan to drop his proposal to eliminate all strategic ballistic missiles within 10 years. Just talking about it, in her view, "weakened the tangible link between European and American security."<sup>36</sup>

British Defense Secretary George Younger, reinforcing Prime Minister Thatcher's point, said his Government could go along with the removal of all medium range missiles from Europe as Reagan and Gorbachev tentatively agreed to at Reykjavik. And he described the reduction of USSR and U.S. weapons by up to 50 percent as:

practical and well worth going for. But the chief European concern is that once you go beyond 50 percent it is absolutely vital that other arms components must be brought in. We need satisfactory answers in the areas of conventional, chemical, and biological weapons. Europeans are happy to discuss deep cuts, provided that those discussions take other areas into account.<sup>37</sup>

After conferring with President Reagan, West German Chancellor Kohl met with French President Francois Mitterrand. They declared that any U.S.-Soviet agreement to remove intermediate-range missiles from Europe must be accompanied by a reduction in Soviet conventional forces:

<sup>34</sup> Josef Joffe (Foreign Editor, *Sddeutsche Zeitung*, Munich) *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1986.

<sup>35</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1986.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Hunter, *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1986.

<sup>37</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1986.

If one were to aim for a solution that would remove missiles without at the same time including the Soviet Union's enormous advantage in conventional forces . . . the thesis that wars should not be possible would be restricted.<sup>38</sup>

Mitterand added:

I am by no means hostile to considering the "zero option," but I am waiting to hear in what context it would be.<sup>39</sup>

### **NATO Response: Fear of Conventional Forces and Short-Range Missiles**

NATO's Nuclear Planning Group, which met in Scotland almost immediately after the Reykjavik mini-summit, reflected the European concern that removal of the so-called U.S. "nuclear umbrella" would leave the Western European nations in a difficult position--either forced to increase spending on conventional defenses (which they have been reluctant to do), or to do without a deterrent to what are considered the superior non-nuclear forces of the Soviet Union and its allies.

British Defense Secretary George Younger told the meeting that the Allies should not allow the impression to grow that the defense of Europe was possible without nuclear weapons: "The transition to a world without nuclear weapons will be protracted, difficult, and dangerous." Seconding Younger's view, Lothar Ruehle, the West German State Secretary for Defense, is said to have voiced concern about the "massive military threat" posed by the Soviet Union's conventional forces. The meeting amounted to a reminder that European concerns must be taken into account in the superpowers' efforts to reduce their arsenals of long-range and short-range missiles.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Response of the JCS: Converting to Conventional Weapons Is Infeasible**

After Reagan returned from Reykjavik, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed the impact that the reductions in nuclear weapons would have on military forces. Adm. William Crowe, Jr., alluded to this study in his testimony before the Defense Policy Panel. The study says that the "zero-zero" option discussed at Reykjavik implies extremely far reaching and extremely expensive changes in the defense capabilities of the United States and its Western allies. These changes are so drastic that the JCS reported it is infeasible to implement them within the next ten years. Eliminating both sides' ballistic missile forces would force the United States and its allies to rely on

<sup>38</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1986.



Cruise missiles for strategic deterrence. But Cruise missiles, unlike ballistic missiles, are extremely vulnerable to sophisticated air-defense systems--which means the U.S. would need more Cruise missiles than it has now and would need a vastly improved air-defense system to counter the Soviet cruise-missile force. Those changes would cost billions more than the United States is currently spending on its strategic missile force. Furthermore, the United States doesn't have enough ship yards to convert its submarine launchers from ballistics missiles to cruise missiles by 1996.<sup>41</sup>

The JCS position, through its criticism of arms reduction, illuminates one important dimension of the Pure War Script. A reduction or elimination of INF does not lead to an overall reduction in military forces or military spending. To the contrary, reductions in nuclear forces require increases in conventional forces and increases in military spending in order to deter the Soviet Threat.

### **The Response of Former Planners: The Proposals Undermine Deterrence**

The summary report from the House Defense Policy Panel hints at "dangers" had the Reykjavik proposals actually been agreed upon: "the process moved too fast--progress went too far, overshot its mark, and yielded the United States nothing but the appearance of confusion and frustration."<sup>42</sup> The threats that Reykjavik posed to the Pure War Script were explicitly stated by former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft in his testimony before the panel. He characterized President Reagan's proposal to eliminate all U.S. and Soviet ballistic missiles as "dangerous" because "it cast a doubt on the structure of deterrence." "Fundamentally, the problem is that whatever the abstract benefits are, they have struck at the policy of strategic deterrence, which has been the bedrock of policy toward the Soviet Union for 40 years."<sup>43</sup>

James Woolsey, a former undersecretary of the Navy and a former U.S. arms control negotiator, was also opposed to phasing out all ballistic missiles over the next ten years. Given the Soviets' development of mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles and an alleged record of having violated terms of the 1979 strategic arms limitation pact, Woolsey, in his testimony before the Defense Policy Panel, said the elimination of all ballistic missiles in the foreseeable future

<sup>41</sup> "Reykjavik and American Security." Report #26, Defense Policy Panel, Committee on Armed Services. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>42</sup> Defense Policy Panel, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Defense Policy Panel, op. cit.

would expose the United States to unacceptable risks: "I believe that a proposal of that sort is unsound, unwise, and irresponsible."<sup>44</sup>

Both Woolsey and Scrowcroft are making some of the often-unstated assumptions of the Pure War Script explicit, specifically, that removing INF from Europe would weaken the NATO alliance and challenge the basic premises of deterrence. Woolsey is also stating assumptions about the nature of the Soviets; they can't be trusted and they will go to war.

Simon Ramo, an advisor to the Department of Defense on SDI, and chief scientist in the development of the U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile, raises questions of trust and verification:

Can we reach a stable future pattern for strategic weaponry--one that will last for years, deter nuclear war, and be tolerable in cost? One future scenario that surfaced at the Reykjavik summit meeting, the elimination of all ballistic missiles, should be dismissed immediately. No U.S. President could persuade Congress and the citizenry to believe, even if he did, that the Soviet Union would not hide such weapons. Verification systems certainly could be installed that would preclude the secreting of a thousand of these weapons. But Moscow surely could hide 10 and probably more from any verification system. Surprising as it may seem to some Americans, the Soviet Union can expect us also to cheat. In practical fact, then, the lowest quantity of weapons that we could realistically agree on would be somewhat higher than we each would assume the other might plan to conceal. We might find ourselves comfortable with a verification system that is capable of keeping the level of warheads at thousands, rather than at the present tens of thousands. Disarming down to 10 percent of present forces would be a fabulous accomplishment . . . both nations then could put in place defense systems at reasonable cost with the ability to shoot down 90 percent of incoming missiles. An installed defense system should be embraced by each side as an added security measure, not opposed.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Return to Deterrence: Rescuing The Pure War Script**

The proposals made at Reykjavik sent shock waves through the defense planners of the U.S. and the West. Members of the Pentagon, NATO, House, Senate, and former administrations sounded an alarm about the consequences of removing nuclear weapons from Europe. The following summarizes the reactions by these voices in the nuclear arms debate to the Reykjavik proposals :

1) If the U.S. and the Soviet Union remove nuclear weapons from Europe, then the U.S. will have to rely on conventional weapons to defend the West against the Soviets. This is dangerous because the Soviets and the Warsaw Bloc have a numerical superiority. Furthermore, the use of conventional weapons is more expensive than the use of nuclear weapons.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1986, Pt. II, p. 7.

Therefore, either we should not eliminate nuclear weapons in Europe or the U.S. and its Allies should achieve parity in conventional forces with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. In short, perhaps it is better to retain the certainty of the nuclear deterrent than rely on the uncertainty of a conventional weapons imbalance, chemical or biological warfare.

2) If the U.S. and the Soviet Union remove nuclear weapons, then our alliances, specifically NATO, will be challenged. Nuclear deterrence is the glue that holds NATO together, therefore, eliminating nuclear weapons is dangerous because it might shatter the alliance. Perhaps it is better to retain the certainty of the nuclear deterrent than the uncertainty of a non-nuclear alliance.

3) If nuclear weapons are removed, issues of trust, cheating and verification are raised. To guard against the possibility of hidden weapons, it would be smart to retain a small stockpile to guard against the uncertainty of cheating.

4) If the Soviet Union and the U.S. eliminate nuclear weapons, China, France, England will still have them. Other nations are developing nuclear weapons; some of these, such as Pakistan, Israel, and especially the "terrorist" states (Syria, Libya) are unstable, untrustworthy, and unpredictable. Eliminating nuclear weapons will leave the U.S. weakened against such forces; therefore, it is better to retain nuclear weapons as an insurance policy against unpredictable states.

These reactions are similar in that they all voiced opposition to the arms reduction proposals made at Reykjavik. In their opposition, they did not address the proposals head on; instead, they shifted the grounds of the argument to its underlying assumptions, notably the role of deterrence in countering the Soviet Threat. The reactions are also similar in that they were couched in a language of particularism (the U.S. vs. the USSR) and decontextualized rationality (Wertsch, 1986); the issues are those of strength, balance, defense. There is no discussion of the destructive consequences for humanity and civilization, the moral or ethical basis of nuclear weapons.

In short, by raising questions about the role of nuclear weapons in international security, the proposals made at Reykjavik threatened the policy of deterrence. Speakers of the Pure War Script worked to repair the rupture in this rhetoric by dismissing the Reykjavik proposals. By rebuffing challenges to some of the fundamental assumptions underlying Pure War Culture, belief in the primacy of nuclear deterrence in countering the Soviet Threat is being reasserted.

## Conclusions

It has been our purpose in this paper, and the purpose of our project more generally (Cicourel et al., 1987; Nathanson, 1984; Skelly, 1984; Wertsch, 1986; Mehan & Wills, 1987), to map the discourse of the nuclear arms debate. From a stance outside of yet intimately acquainted with the debate, we are trying to chart the flow of nuclear discourse, describe the kinds of interactions that occur among competing voices, and specify the moves that are successful in convincing or silencing opponents.

In line with that overall goal, we have traced some of the moves in the debate about nuclear arms precipitated by the proposals for disarmament made at the Reagan-Gorbachev mini-summit. This "critical discourse moment" or "breach of the normal form" of nuclear discourse which was in place before the conference has provided us with an opportunity to gain insight into the normally invisible workings of U.S.-Soviet relations. More specifically, this line of inquiry has revealed the modes of representation and grounds for legitimating key positions about nuclear arms. More generally, it has illustrated the power of treating international relations as discourse or conversation.

### Power in Language

While the general claim that the relations of power and territory among nations are essentially realized in language is certainly true, the special status of nuclear weapons reinforces the point strongly. "Nuclear weapons exist to be talked about, not to be used" (Talbot, 1984: 5). They are built to be deterrents of war, not instruments of war. The nuclear regime is of necessity, then, a system of talk. Nuclear war takes place in a semantic field, not on a battle field. "The deployments that really matter are those of meaning not warheads" (Manhoff, 1986).

We can see Manhoff's point played out in the aftermath of Reykjavik. The relations between the U.S., the Soviet Union, and other participants in the "Cold War" take the form of a conversation, albeit on a broader scale than the one we think of when two or three people get together for a chat. As we have seen in our investigations of the Reykjavik summit, the moves of the "U.S. President" provoke a response from the "Soviet General Secretary," which in turn, engenders a response from the "NATO allies," "the JCS," etc. Quotation marks are placed around "NATO allies" and the others to indicate that these are simultaneously speakers in immediate events (e. g., across a conference table, in a news conference) and speakers in a broader socio-historical sense (e. g., the Soviets debating the U.S., the "Cold War lobby" being attacked by "the liberal left"). These "voices" (Bakhtin, 1981) respond to moves made in the conversational past and project possible future moves to others. This process is essentially

dialogic. Even though people may not be in the same room at the same time, they are still mutually influencing and reciprocally reacting to each other.

The moves that speakers in nuclear discourse make are aimed at defining the reality of the situation. The reality, the "social fact," being defined concerns the relations among the superpowers in the cold war and the place of nuclear weapons in that system of relations. For speakers of the "Pure War Script," nuclear weapons are endowed with a special meaning; they are necessary to deter the threat of an evil enemy and retain stability among the superpowers. The meaning of objects is not inherent in them; there is not a single reality referenced by the words in a language. The Pure War meaning of nuclear weapons has been established by and through the enactment of a wide range of cultural conventions and political practices.

### **The Politics of Representation and Oracular Reasoning**

What made the Reykjavik proposals interesting is that they opened what had previously been a closed text on U.S.-Soviet relations. Multiple and competing definitions emerged during this period of uncertainty. These voices called for new definitions, including nuclear disarmament and a world without nuclear weapons. They argued against those calling for retention of the existing balance of forces.

In the aftermath of the conference, we have witnessed an example of the "politics of representation" (Holquist, 1983), a situation in which many ambiguous meanings were competing sharpened into one in which a single stable meaning is prevailing. The voices arguing for retention of the existing set of relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union shouted down the voices of disarmament and elimination. The reassertion of the dominant position in the nuclear arms debate demonstrates that the ability to control the conversation is equivalent to being able to dictate reality (Molotch & Boden, 1985).

By raising questions about the role of nuclear weapons in international security, the proposals made at Reykjavik threatened the dominant position in the nuclear arms debate. The very idea of the Reykjavik proposals, not even their eventual implementation, raised challenging issues, all of which turned on the question: what would a world without nuclear weapons be like? If the proposals were implemented, the answer is: we would have a world of uncertainty. Would the Soviets attack Western Europe with conventional weapons? Would the U.S. defend its European allies? What would happen to NATO? The Warsaw Pact? Would the Germans call for reunification? Would the U.S. try to rescue Poland? Afghanistan? What happens to the defense industry? Weapons labs? Suddenly, the predictability of U.S.-USSR relations was up for grabs. In the face of that uncertainty, the discourse closed around the relative certainty of the Pure War Script.

Speakers of the Pure War Script have been deflecting challenges ever since Reykjavik by reasserting the self-evident facticity of two fundamental assumptions: first, there is a Soviet Threat; second, nuclear deterrence is the best way to defend against this threat. The recitation of those propositions stops the argument cold. The exact nature of "The Soviet Threat" is left unstated, which makes it an unassailable assumption in the Pure War Script. Threat is not defined, either as invasion or subversion. Evidence that the Soviets would actually invade Western Europe is neither called for nor provided. Johann Galtung (1987), when pressing NATO military strategists and officials for evidence of Soviet aggressive intentions, says he gets two kinds of answers. "Liberals" say there is no evidence, but we must be on guard anyway. "Conservatives" also say there is no evidence, but then add: that shows how subtle and deceitful the Soviets are, because they are able to hide their intentions so cleverly from us. In either case, merely raising the spectre of The Soviet Threat is sufficient to stop the debate.

The closing of the text around the prevailing frame of reference illustrates how proponents of a belief system (readers of a cultural script) act in time of uncertainty. "Oracular reasoning practices" (Mehan, 1987) resist change or modification in cultural scripts. The conviction of basic beliefs is reasserted by warding off counterevidence. Meaning is transformed. The definition of Reykjavik was first refigured from "failure to achieve arms control" to "success in negotiating for arms reductions" and then "success in defending deterrence." The stability, sense of cohesion, and legitimacy provided by the fear of the other and the fear of nuclear war rebuffs challenges, thereby working to close the Pure War Script.

Nevertheless, the text is still open. The breach in the Pure War Script has not been completely repaired. As of this writing, an INF agreement has not been signed. However, the power of these paradigm-sustaining practices leads us to make two predictions: (1) Either the Reykjavik proposals for eliminating intermediate nuclear forces will not be translated into a treaty; (2) or, if the proposals for INF reduction are ratified, then we will see countervailing actions. For example, other classes of weapons will lock onto targets currently under the control of INF, conventional weapons will be expanded, the French-German or British independent systems will be augmented.<sup>46</sup> Any or all of these moves will continually elaborate and sustain the current system of Pure War arrangements between the U.S. and the USSR.

<sup>46</sup> The NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Brussels in May 1987, gave a strong indication of that line of thinking. A West German Defense official was quoted as saying that the United States will place cruise missiles on surface ships off Western Europe to compensate for any missiles removed from Europe. A senior U.S. arms control official was quoted as saying, "It may be necessary to add more nuclear missiles than are removed, depending on the details of the new agreement." *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1987. A similar line of thinking has been expressed concerning conventional weapons. West German General Wolfgang Altenberg, chairman of the NATO military committee, told the NATO Defense Planning Committee that the Atlantic Alliance would have to spend more to develop credible conventional forces to offset the

## The Mediation of Human Activity By Social Scripts

In addition to illustrating the specific modes of representation and grounds for legitimating key positions about nuclear weapons, our analysis of Reykjavik sheds light on the general relationship between ways of talking, ways of acting, and ways of thinking. Discourse embodies a set of practices and organizes cognition. Adherence to the "Pure War Script" has had implications for the way in which "we" (the American people, the U.S. government) act toward Soviets and toward proposals to reduce nuclear arms.

One of the basic propositions of the Pure War Script is: The Soviets are a threat to U.S. security. That proposition has entailments for governmental and everyday practice: we need to defend ourselves; therefore we need weapons systems. For the reasons mentioned early in this paper, the U.S. government has chosen to employ nuclear weapons as the deterrent to that threat. That choice has become a second basic premise of the Pure War Script; it, too, has consequences for real-world practice. That assumption has led to the development of weapons factories, weapons testing labs, non-competitive defense contracts with selected corporations, clandestine operations, and a veil of secrecy shrouding those activities. In short, the construction of a way of thinking has generated a script for action which is continually elaborated in the discourse and practices of international relations and national politics.

Thus, we find recapitulated in the domain of international relations a finding which has been well documented in other domains of social life: human action is mediated by interactional scripts and cognitive schemas.

### The "Work" That the Pure War Script Does

The final point we wish to make concerns the contribution of our discourse analysis of nuclear issues. What does a discourse study of Soviet-U.S. relations provide that other forms of analysis omit? In short, the answer is: it lets us see better. By peering into the breach caused by Reykjavik, we see systems of relations beneath the surface which we do not normally see.

On the surface, nuclear deterrence contains the threat of war, the threat of Communist expansion. (A parallel observation can be made about the Soviet side: nuclear deterrence contains the threat of Capitalist expansion.) Beneath the surface, we find deterrence to be less a concept for avoiding war, and more a world-ordering concept (Kaldor, 1987). It contributes to the maintenance of the existing systems of relations in the world, including the national security state within the United States and the Soviet Union, the alliance between the U.S. and its Western

superior Soviet-led Warsaw Pact if the superpowers agree to reduce nuclear weapons in Europe. *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1987.

European allies, and the alliance between the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies, each with the superpowers in charge. Looked at from beneath the surface, the Soviet Union and the U.S. need each other, and the conflict between them, to keep the structure of society, Eastern and Western Alliances in tact. As horrible, frightening, and potentially catastrophic as nuclear weapons are, the policy of deterrence which organizes their (non)use contributes to a predictable world. The U.S. has nuclear weapons but won't use them; the Soviets, too, have these weapons but won't use them. So, deterrence policy organizes our life to be potentially catastrophic and anxious, but relatively certain and stable.

The Pure War Script, with its "imaginary war" (Kaldor, 1987) and the anxiety it induces, then, becomes a mechanism for upholding the political hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union (Kaldor, 1987: 75). It works to keep other issues off the table, out of the realm of political debate: e. g., disarmament, "the social agenda" (poverty, medical care, population expansion, pollution), European governance (more independent from either the U.S. or the Soviet Union).

The Second World War left us with two legacies: the bomb and the idea of the bomb (Smith, 1987). Until we change our thinking about nuclear weapons and their place in international relations, it doesn't matter whether INF weapons are removed or are left in place. Significant changes in existing U.S.-Soviet relations can not be made without politics and negotiation. And politics and negotiation require trust. The original social construction and continual reproduction of the Soviet Threat on the U.S. side (and the equivalent Soviet construction of the U.S. Threat on the Soviet side) repels that course of action. Until the two fundamental assumptions of Pure War Culture are addressed directly and made a topic for serious political discussion, the current nuclear regime will be left intact, whether or not INF are reduced or eliminated.



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