

ADMIRAL ZUMWALT'S ADDRESS AT THE
INDUSTRIAL WAR COLLEGE, FORT MCNAIR, WASHINGTON
D.C. 26 MARCH 1975

SUBJ: CRITICAL EVALUATION OF U.S. STRATEGY AND POSTURE

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure to be here. I acknowledge the gentle thrust under that introductory compliment, and would report that I did acknowledge the great debt of gratitude I had to the Army for having contributed so much to the logistic support of the Navy in Vietnam. I left a picture of myself, a huge impressive looking picture, which when you opened it, showed a very small body on the shoulders of a huge Army General--which was, I think, kind of symbolical of the way in which we operated out there as a band of brothers.

Today is an interesting time for us to consider the strategy of the United States and the implications for the future; and I think that in order for it to be meaningful, I'd like to go through two phases--the bad news and the good news. The bad news is everything that has happened and the good news is to talk a little bit about the future.

In order to get a perspective with regard to our situation, I think it's important to go back to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, just a little over 12 years ago, and then move forward from there. If you'll recall that, at that time, while the man who is today the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union was lying to the President of the United States about it, the Soviet Union was embarked in this operation of installing missiles on the sneak in Cuba; an operation designed to greatly increase the megatonnage

that they could bring to bear and to greatly reduce the warning time that we would have -- a kind of a desperate effort to readjust the strategic superiority which we had had for many years (whatever that means) and which we had used so effectively and the Soviets had seen us use so effectively. And when they were caught with their missiles down and we stood eye-ball to eye-ball, as Mr. Rush suggested, until they blinked, you can be very sure, as I was, who was working at the time for a member of the excom of the National Security Council, that they did so after making the rational calculation that they had no alternative. We reckoned that they were outpointed on the order of 4 to 1 in the strategic field, and after they had concluded that that didn't have any honey in it and dropped down the totem pole and looked at the balance in the conventional side, again, they found themselves unable to bull their way through to Cuba. They didn't much like their military options elsewhere around the world. They nevertheless tested our resolve by sending their ships all the way to the screen and then having found us firm, did the only rational thing that sensible leadership can do, they accommodated; and we gave them a graceful and a face-saving way in which to accommodate. Now the Soviet emissary at the time let it be known that they would never again be caught in that predicament, and they embarked upon three programs. The first of these was a tactic--the test ban. The second was to commence the largest strategic construction program in history--which goes on to this day. And the third was to commence the second largest

26 March 1975

maritime construction program in history, one which is exceeded only by our own WW II Maritime expansion. I was the Director of Arms Control in the office of the Secretary of Defense at that time. We had been trying to negotiate a test ban with the Soviets for many months and were totally checkmated. In the fright of that Cuban missile crisis, within a matter of days we began to receive interesting little signals here and there about how we might break through the impasse. Within a matter of weeks it was clear that we could get a test ban on terms favorable; and within a matter of very few months we had one. Now this was a tactic on the part of the Soviet Union, a period of detente, which Secretary Kissinger has written we have one of every decade. We visualized it in the arms control business as a contract between ourselves and someone we didn't trust and someone who didn't trust us; but as nevertheless the first of a series of contracts which somewhere down the road might lead to meaningful arms control arrangements. We already had the hot line, we were talking at that time about the ban on weapons of mass destruction in space and on the seabeds, both of which have come to pass. We were talking about the non-proliferation arrangement which has now become a treaty ratified by most of the nations of the world. And we were already talking about what we then called "a separable first-stage disarmament" agreement--something that has subsequently become known as "SALT".

The Soviet building program went forward at an impressive rate. At that period, again in the fright of the Cuban missile

26 March 1975

crisis, the conventional wisdom within this land was to articulate to the Soviets through speeches by the President, by the Secretary of Defense that there was absolutely no incentive for the Soviets ^{to go} / beyond the 1054 Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles that we then had--they had 350. And that we were building ours with a combination of throw-weight and accuracy that would make it literally impossible for us to destroy Soviet missiles in a first strike and that they ought to do the same. The Soviets proceeded to build and build and build. They built huge missiles, they built them with meggatonnage rather than kilo-tonnage; they have been frank to say in their negotiations with us that if they can get a war-winning capability, they will. When Mr. Nixon came to power after having declined to take the SALT initiative that Mr. Johnson was exploring and then circled all around it and decided to embrace it, the Soviets had not yet overtaken us, but they did and by the time we got them to the negotiating table to sign in May 1972, they had gone to 1618 inter-continental ballistic missiles--a 60% advantage over the United States. They were given, you'll recall, the right to destroy 20% of those, retaining only a 40% advantage if they wanted to exercise their option, which they have to build up to a 33% advantage in seabased missiles, a 34% advantage in strategic submarine hulls, de facto they had a 300% or more advantage in throw-weight and in megatonnage, de facto, not under the agreements, we had a modest advantage in bombers and at the time about a 100% advantage in

26 March 1975

MIRVs.

In the anti-ballistic missile side and the defensive side where we were ahead, the Soviets were delighted to give us parity and a treaty. In the offensive side where they were ahead, they insisted on it being acknowledged. You can go to any length you want to to fuzz it up, but that's what they've got-- superiority. They demanded it and they got it.

Now this was put to the American people on a reasonably fair basis. It was described by the President as just the best we could get, with the Soviets having being building and the United States having failed to build. It was cited by the Secretary of Defense and those of us who were members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as something that only made sense if you recognized that we were out-built; that if we didn't want to be in that predicament at the end of SALT II, we had better be funding the President's strategic programs. The Congress was delighted to pass the Jackson Resolution, which said to the Executive Branch, don't come back again until you've got essential equivalence and then the Congress proceeded to cut the President's strategic budgets each year until the situation came to pass again that it was impossible for the United States in round two to demand equality. We had failed to demonstrate to the Soviets that we were going to have parity without a treaty, and therefore, they demanded that that be acknowledged in any arrangement. And when Mr. Nixon went to Moscow in June and July 1974, he faced

26 March 1975

in my judgment, two alternatives. One was to sign permanent inferiority and the other was to fail to sign and accept de facto inferiority. And he chose that latter, less worse alternative. By the time of Vladivostok, the Soviets faced a President who had a stronger political base. They were, in my judgment, a little worried about how well they were doing. Why? Because one thing they have to fear is that the natives will become sullen in the United States. They watch us like a fever chart through their Abartov Institute, through Dobrynin's contacts in the Administration and on Capitol Hill; and they did not want to drive the American people to the point of demanding another course. And so the deal was improved somewhat, and it was announced that we had essential equivalence achieved at Vladivostok--2400 vehicles each, 1320 MIRVed missiles each. Yet if you looked at the fine grain of that, it's quite clear that the Soviets have been given a 4 to 1 de facto advantage in megatonnage. When they finish their deployment, they will have a 2.7 fold advantage in MIRVs. Those numbers are like the numbers that we used to back the Soviets down in the Cuban missile crisis. So when someone says to me, "What is strategic superiority, what do you do with it?" I say that the answer is it is the obverse of strategic inferiority which is what we have, and what you do with it is what we did to the Russians when we had it. We backed them down when our vital national interests are at stake.

Turning now to the conventional military balance, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, you'll recall that we had finished restoking the fire with regard to our conventional power. We had survived that very dangerous period--pre Korea when the famous NSC 68 document, the Gaither report, was described as opening up the the gates to hell and looking inside. We had managed to survive that war by hanging on by our teeth in Korea and had learned our lesson temporarily and then when Mr. Kennedy came to power, the conventional forces were strengthened.

By 1964 the great debate was in full swing with regard to Southeast Asia. My own position at the time was that it was a very bad place in which to get involved --that we had no vital national interest there, we did not have an ally in South Vietnam, and that we could make the decision not to get ourselves involved, on a rational bases. Nevertheless the decision was made to get involved. We were driven from the level of expenditures about equal to the aid that the North was receiving from China and Russia to where, for their expenditure of never more than 3 billion dollars a year, we expended first 10, then 20 then finally 30 billion dollars a year for bombs, bullets and attrition aircraft and operating expenses. We were consuming, while they, at the margin, were investing in defense hardware. So through a combination of the erroneous decision to get involved and a very bad strategy, we found ourselves with those two huge programs the Soviets had set in train after the Cuban missile crisis designed probably to overtake us in the '80s, facing the

26 March 1975

the cross-over point in the '70s. I was one of those who felt that having gotten involved, having made ourselves allies of the South, - having seen 17 million people cast their lot with us, recognizing that our allies all around the world were watching our performance as an ally in this area, that it was important for us to bring ourselves out of that war on terms honorable. And I therefore strongly supported the strategy for removal of our forces--that is one which did it on a gradual basis while giving the South Vietnamese the opportunity to survive. It's a matter of great personal regret to me that the Congress of the United States has, in what seems to be almost a death wish, set out retroactively to correct the mistake of 1964 instead of going on and improving the deal that was made in 1973; and by making it statutorily impossible for U.S. forces to come to the assistance of South Vietnam; they provided the positive certainty to the North that they could get away with the strike; and by cutting off the aid to the South, they have over the last year ground that military machine to a halt, as for lack of spares, ammunition and gasoline, they are being defeated by the conscious policy of the Congress of the United States.

Now the consequences of the huge expenditures for that war will not be played out for years in my judgment. I was one of those who has been suggesting to the Congress and publicly for about 4 years now that in the case of our maritime capability,

26 March 1975

if one viewed it in the light in which it should be measured-- that is our capability to do our mission as opposed to Soviet capability to do theirs--that we were falling behind. Their job is an easier one than ours. As a maritime nation, we are the center of a great maritime alliance, we're a world island. We must reinforce our allies and our own forces overseas, we must bring in our oil, 30% today, 50% by 1980 from the Middle East, Japan 90%, Western Europe 80% today. Even if we believe in returning to the womb and being isolationist, we must bring in that oil and the 69 of the 72 resources which our Department of Commerce judges critical. There is simply no way for us to survive as viable economic entity unless we can bring in the goods to keep that economy going; and that means we've got to be able to use the seas in war. The Soviet Union on the other hand--a land power--able to defeat its principal enemies, China and European NATO, across land lines; able to be a good ally to its client states by invading them whenever they need it, across land lines of communications in the WARSAW Pact, is able to survive without the use of the seas. Their fishing fleets bring in produce. They need grain from time to time when they can outmaneuver us out of it, but with a little belt tightening, they can get by fine without the use of the seas. And viewed in that light, their job is the easier one. In wartime they must merely cut, whereas

we must use. And when one runs through the war games, it's quite clear that viewed in that light, the odds are that we cannot control the seas today; and the odds are that the Soviet Union can cut those sea lines. Now that, just as their strategic superiority presents the rhetorical question, "So what?" Does this mean that we will have a conventional war? I think the odds are quite high that we will not. Does it mean that we will have that strategic nuclear war? Again, I think the odds are quite high that we will not.

Let me examine for you the ways in which the Soviet Union has used this superiority. The first crisis with which I had to deal when I came to office was the Jordan crisis of September 1970. In this crisis the Soviet Union, having in mind those two curves, having in mind that the perceptions ought to have begun to change, decided I think to initiate a probe. The Syrian army invaded Jordan. Three things went wrong with the Soviet calculation: the Jordanian army fought better than had been expected; the Israelis moved their forces northward and were clearly ready to play a role; and the United States mustered its power, including the reinforcement of the Sixth Fleet with a third carrier task force and with Marines embarked on USS GUAM. And this calculus of factors led the Soviets to conclude, "not yet." They received a relatively savage dressing-down from us at the time. They promised the Syrians they would replace their losses

26 March 1975

in exchange for their acquiescence to withdrawal. The arming and the re-training of the Syrians went forward. The continuation of a conscious Soviet foreign policy to arm all the Arabs continued. Their training of the Arabs in Egypt and Syria was so skillful that, as you know, they achieved strategic surprise which fooled not only Israeli intelligence, but our own. And on Yom Kippur day of October 1973, they began the attack which very nearly unhorsed Israel. Only the massive airlift and sealift of supplies made it possible for the Israelis to turn it around. We began the mustering of the greatest amount of force we could assemble there, given our commitments in Southeast Asia. Our Navy having dwindled from 976 ships to by that time 524--a 47% reduction--could only muster 65 ships on the scene in the eastern Mediterranean and they faced the Soviet fleet of 98. Now it's true that when one runs down the inventory, we had 3 aircraft carriers there and their first true aircraft carrier was not yet out of the Black Sea. Incidentally in your life time, in my judgment, you'll see a larger Soviet carrier fleet than we have, but it wasn't there at the time. Those three aircraft carriers had not a single U.S. Air Force aircraft that could come to their assistance, because there was not a single allied airfield, nor single allied aircraft willing to join us at our side. Only the fact that this government brutalized the government of Portugal and got the Azores--something that we will never be

26 March 1975

able to do with the present regime--made it possible for the airlift to get here; and our ships in the eastern Mediterranean were naked and there was unanimity within the Department of Defense that had we had to go to war in the eastern Mediterranean we would have been defeated at that time.

Now the announcement was that a great victory had been scored for detente. As I read the ultimatum that the Soviet Union delivered to us--an ultimatum which didn't even read Dear Mr. President, just Mr. President; an ultimatum that sounded very much to me like one I had helped Paul Nitze draft in the Cuban missile crisis, I had very great difficulty accommodating that with the description of the great victory for detente. I saw the long-term Soviet objective being one of the Suez Canal open without restrictions on their warships. I saw the long-term pay-off for their Soviet foreign policy, the oil embargo followed by the quadrupling of the oil prices which they exhorted the Arabs to do. I saw the prospect of a billion people in 30 nations facing starvation, with all of the wonderful opportunities that gave the Soviets to radicalize those regimes. And I saw the so-called "prosperous free world" flirting with everything from a radical solution--in the case of Italy and Portugal--to the certainty of additional catastrophic defense reductions in the case of the United States. So I had very great difficulty seeing the great

victory for detente.

Since that time the pace of events has quickened. As I mentioned, by Congressional decision we were turning South Vietnam over to the North. In Portugal we're seeing events play themselves out with a frightening drift to the left, one which portends already the prospect of Soviet operations out of Portugal; fishing fleet negotiations going on at the present time; Soviet warships off the coast of this NATO ally to ensure that their internal events play themselves out without any interference by the United States; millions of dollars of Soviet money flowing into Portugal to fund the left; an effort already to stamp out the Mao Communists while the Soviet Communists seek to prevail. This is the process which the Soviets visualize can go forward under the umbrella of their strategic and conventional military superiority. The ability to let these events play themselves out like a subtle mosaic changing color; the United States relatively supine with its military inferiority and the people, quite obviously, preoccupied with other things.

That completes the bad news. Let me see if I can give you some good news. The first point I would like to make is that when I was a young Lieutenant, in 1947 or 1948, I had the opportunity to spend the day with General George Marshall, who was then between his Secretaryship of State and his Secretaryship of Defense. This was a time at which the Soviet Union was on the march across Europe and we had overnight literally disarmed

26 March 1975

ourselves, under the impetus of popular opinion, and I was somewhat discouraged and I spoke, in the infinite wisdom of a wise Lieutenant, to General Marshall about this and when I got all through, he said to me, "Young man, don't ever forget that this country has great reserves of strength whenever it decides to muster them." And I think that that's the problem that we face when one asks what are the implications for strategy in looking forward. There is a persuasion in this country at the present time that is so preoccupied with the reduction of defense, the absenting ourselves from overseas commitments, that it is driving at an ever quickening pace; and we have not put forward any rationale for how our kind of world can survive in that kind of a scene.

In a similiar period, the period that General Marshall was speaking of, great men were already at work trying to adapt a strategy to the mood of the people; and it played itself out in terms of the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, the NATO Alliance, the creation of the bilateral treaties around the world, the re-creation of armies--our own and others--moving back into the vacuum that had been created; and there was an articulation of what needed to be done that brought the people around; and there was a presentation of a bipartisan foreign policy, which with the great courageous support of Senator Vandenburg, made it possible for us to begin to face our problems on a bipartisan basis. This, in my judgment, is what we're going to have to see

in the years ahead. We've got some things going for us. Our strategic systems are after all something to be feared. True the Soviets can kill a larger percentage of Americans by far than we can kill Soviets. They can destroy a larger fraction of industrial capability than we can destroy of the Soviet's, but they are rational people and they do have to fear that inscrutable occidental mind which invaded Cambodia when it wasn't calculated to do so; which invaded Laos when it wasn't calculated to do so; which laid the mines in Haiphong and bombed Hanoi when it wasn't calculated to do so. And so there is a certain berth that they are going to have to give us. Second, there is Communist China whose interests for the next 10 to 12 years will, I think, clearly parallel our own; and something we're going to have to use as a nearly a de facto ally in the years ahead while we're sorting out our own rationale and approach to the world outside. Third, we're going to have to link all of the tools of power of this great United States of ours together. Our military incapability is a great weakness, but our technology and the controls we put on it is a great strength. Our food outflow and the controls we put on it is a great strength. Our capability to provide informed advisory support and the controls we put on it is a great strength. And we have going for us that greatest weapon of all the knowledge and the strength of a free and open society which is after all in competition with a closed society, one which is ruthless, efficient can do its long term

26 March 1975

planning much better than the United States can, but which still crushes the individual spirit and that is a great weakness.

And so I say that in thinking about military strategy in the years ahead, while the United States has made for at least the decade in the future an inchoate decision to become inferior, we've got to realize that it is a subset of a much larger set of tools which if we weave them together can give us a combination of power and policy that will at least slow greatly the rate of Soviet progress around the world. But the sine qua non of all this, if it's going to be put together, is for leadership in both parties in the Executive Branch and on Capitol Hill to begin to level with the people, to give them the facts, to tell them the kinds of things that they say to me in the Tank, that they say to me at the White House, rather than fuzzing it up as we have for these last 5 or 6 years.