

United States, critics charged that detente and the SALT process had been a ploy by the Soviet Union, which continued to modernize its strategic nuclear forces. Fears arose that the USSR was planning to fight and win a nuclear war and in a few years it would be able to use its SS-18 "heavy" Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) to inflict a successful first strike on America.⁴⁵ Moreover, Soviet activity in the Third World was seen as a violation of the supposedly implicit understanding that in exchange for ratifying parity through arms control, Moscow would behave and co-operate on other issues.

All of this made arms control particularly difficult for the Carter Administration which had come into office promising to achieve major reductions. Upon entering office President Ronald Reagan immediately adopted a hard line against the Soviet Union, commenting "both the current and the new Soviet leadership should realize aggressive policies will meet a firm Western response."⁴⁶ Reagan replaced SALT with the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in the early 1980s, as his government perceived the former as an "offer to trade an apple for an orchard."⁴⁷ Seeking to replace the long-standing policy of basing American security on the threat of retaliation, the Reagan administration launched the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in 1983 and the Soviet Union spent much of the rest of the decade responding to SDI.

In general, arms control during the Cold War can be said to have had four broad objectives: to reduce the risk of atomic war, to reduce the damage should war occur, to reduce the burden of defence expenditure and to provide a greater measure of strategic and political stability between states. Efforts to reduce or control arms failed, or did not meet expectations, not because such attempts were always at odds with the objectives of force building, but on the contrary, because nuclear force building had the very same four objectives. It was supposed to reduce the risk of war by providing a credible deterrent to opposing nuclear forces and, in the case of NATO, to conventional attack. While predictions about damage limitation were always suspect, both the Americans and the Soviets devised systems whose purpose was to limit damage should nuclear war occur, either by striking first or by executing more accurate and limited strikes. The nuclear arsenals and associated command, control and intelligence infrastructures were expensive, but at least in the beginning they were viewed as less costly than conventional forces. Finally, the nuclear balance of terror, based upon mutual deterrence, was seen as providing for a measure of stability between the superpower antagonists and also within their spheres of influence.

Not only did arms control efforts and nuclear force building appear to have the same

⁴⁵ See, for example, Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Can Fight and Win a Nuclear War," *Commentary* (64) (July 1977).

⁴⁶ Eureka College Commencement Address, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, (May 9, 1982), pp. 599-604.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 601.