

World & Nation

Deterrence

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The 72-page report originally was supposed to be given to the bishops last November, but the Bernardin committee asked for more time to finish the report, saying it wanted to assess the impact of the December Washington summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The two leaders signed a treaty to destroy all their intermediate-range nuclear missiles within three years and moved toward an agreement to reduce their long-range strategic weaponry by as much as 50 percent.

The bishops' committee said summit results "have raised cautious hopes among the most seasoned observers of superpower relations that an authentically new opportunity for redefining the political relationship of the world's two major military powers may be at hand."

But the report also stresses "the fragile hold we have on our common nuclear future" and calls for a greater sense of urgency in negotiations on a full range of arms issues, including conventional arms escalation and nuclear proliferation.

It urges the superpowers to take advantage of the "new opportunity" of their improved relations not only to "restrain the nuclear

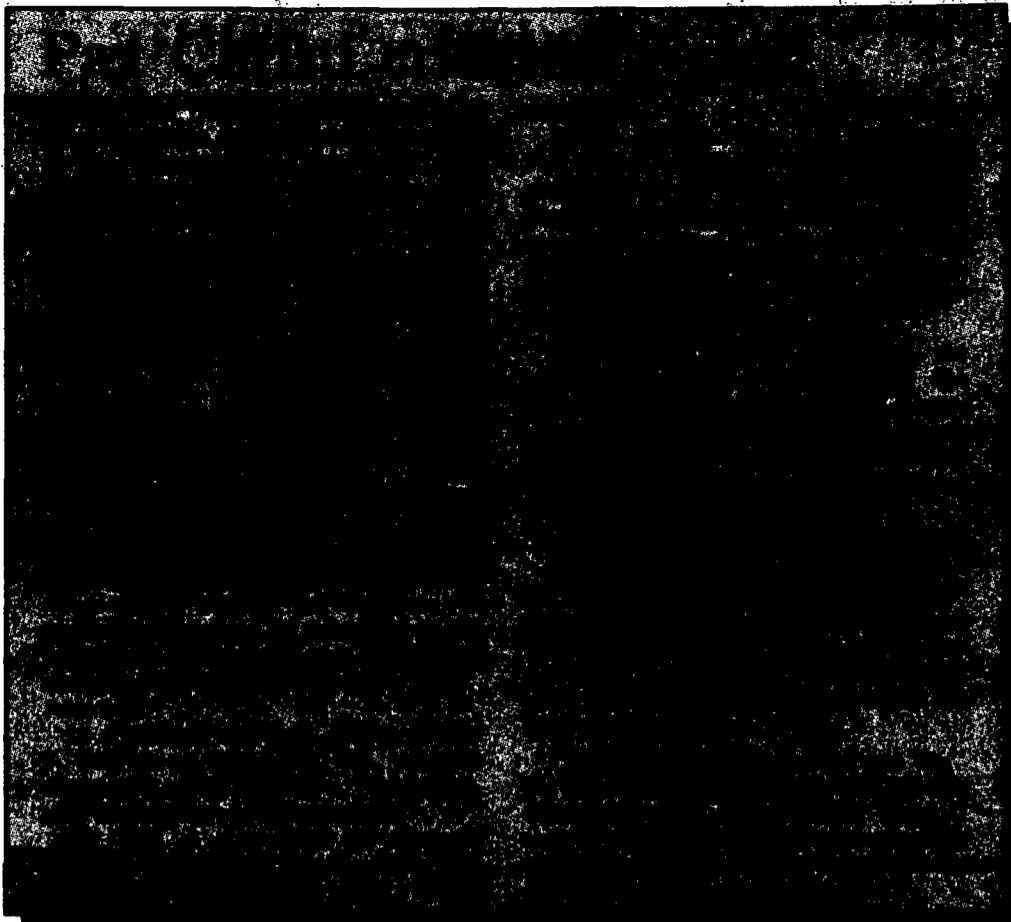
competition" but also to "decrease the hold of bipolar politics on others in the international community."

The report says that "the most intractable issues between the superpowers for much of the last 15 years have been their involvement in regional conflicts from the Horn of Africa to Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf to Nicaragua and Central America."

While the report is devoted primarily to the issues of deterrence and arms control, which the committee was formed to evaluate, it says that those issues have to be part of a broader vision.

"It would be a narrow view of the challenge of the present moment if the wider political context of the superpower relationship were ignored," the report says. "Arms control can be a catalyst to an improved political relationship; and changes in the political context of superpower relations can open the road to new steps in controlling weaponry."

In addition to Cardinal Bernardin, members of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Moral Evaluation of Deterrence are: Archbishops Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala., Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, and John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis; Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Norwich, Conn.; and Auxiliary Bishops Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit and Angelo Acerra of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services.



Ad hoc committee focuses on morality of Strategic Defense Initiative

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — Backers of the multibillion-dollar Strategic Defense Initiative have tried to "capture the moral high ground" with their goals, but their argument limps badly, says a report released April 14 by a national committee of Catholic bishops evaluating U.S. nuclear deterrence policy.

"The moral character of SDI cannot be determined apart from" hard ethical questions about the initiative's high costs, uncertain technological feasibility and probable risks to nuclear stability, the committee said.

It disputed optimistic Reagan administration views that all the technological breakthroughs needed to put SDI in place will be forthcoming. A number of high-level scientific studies have reached far more pessimistic conclusions, the committee noted.

The Strategic Defense Initiative, often dubbed "Star Wars," is a plan Reagan announced in 1983 to develop a space-based system of defense against nuclear missiles. Originally described as a total defense system that would make nuclear deterrence unnecessary, the plan has since been modified to refer to a form of partial defense that would enhance rather than replace nuclear deterrence.

The bishops' committee challenged the money being spent on the program — some \$5 billion in the last two years alone — "in a time of continuing budget deficits and in a decade which has seen deep cuts in programs for the poor at home and abroad."

It said the questions about the cost, feasibility and risks of SDI — particularly the risks in transitional stages of deployment, — lead to a conclusion that any movement

toward deploying the space-based defense system is unacceptable at present.

For now SDI should be maintained only "as a research and development program," the committee said, calling for careful moral analysis before any future changes in that posture.

Fully 20 of the report's 73 pages are devoted to SDI, which the committee called "the most significant change by far in the area of technology and policy" since 1983.

The report says that the SDI program particularly needs moral analysis because its supporters "all have made the claim that SDI constitutes a superior moral policy to that of deterrence as we have known it in the nuclear

age."

It says the president introduced the program as one whose goal was to make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete," transcending the nuclear threat of mutual destruction and the moral dilemmas associated with nuclear deterrence.

The report observes, however, that "the case made for the moral superiority of SDI is primarily an 'ethic of intention'.... But the complexity and the stakes of the policy debate on SDI require that the moral argument be pressed beyond.... An 'ethic of consequences' should be used to test the 'ethic of intention.'"

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