

# Weinberger fights for the Strategic Defense Initiative

*Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, in a series of recent interviews, has vigorously defended the administration's Strategic Defense Initiative, and given a comprehensive picture of his own view of Soviet strategic policy and of arms control. We publish first excerpts from his press conference April 10, announcing the publication of the 1984 edition of Soviet Military Power.*

**Q:** Mr. Secretary, what message do you want this book to give to members of Congress who continue to slash away at your defense budget?

**Weinberger:** . . . We've heard a great deal about whether our percentage of defense budget increase should be 3.5% or 7% or what, and those aren't very relevant considerations when you're faced with a [Soviet] build-up of this kind. That is not a one-year phenomenon, but has been going on for 22 or 23 years and shows no signs whatever of slackening in any material or any real sense.

You can't decide that because you did 7% last year that it's all right for us to do 3% this year, or something of that kind. You have to look at the needs and necessity. . . . This book . . . has a great deal of comparative data, and we hope that what seems to me to be the inevitable and unfortunate lesson will be drawn from it, and that is that we have to make, all of us, all the NATO allies and ourselves, all nations interested in preserving their freedom, have to make very large and what are clearly very unwelcome efforts, to regain a sufficient degree of military strength to be able to feel that, with some confidence, we have deterrence. Deterrence, unfortunately, is not a static thing. It's a dynamic thing. It changes as the Soviet capabilities change, and they change very rapidly. . . .

## First strike a 'real threat'

*ABC television's "Nightline" program interviewed Weinberger April 8 on the Soviet Military Power report.*

**Q:** You say in the report that the Soviets recognize the grave consequences of nuclear war, but you've said publicly many times that they think nuclear war is winnable. How do you reconcile that?

**Weinberger:** They certainly seem to think it's winnable. They're working on, for example, a re-firing capability—a second and third strike out of the same launchers. They have very large investments in civil defense, and in hardening their missile silos, and in protecting their governmental centers and their command-and-control centers, and things of that kind that would indicate that what they're planning to do is to have the capability of having a first strike and trying to absorb the retaliatory strike, and strike again.

**Q:** The report says that the Soviets consider a pre-emptive strike the most favorable circumstance if it comes to nuclear war—and they practice for that.

**Weinberger:** That is correct.

**Q:** Do you think that's the real threat?

**Weinberger:** I think that is certainly one of the threats, the idea that they would make a first strike and do it without warning and without notification and perhaps without bothering to declare war. These are all of the things that we obviously hope are not going to happen, they are all of the things that we hope we can prevent by our deterrent strength.

**Q:** But now the Soviets say, look at our [U.S.] cruise missiles, our nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, our two new generations of ICBMs, our new strategic bomber—we're just playing catch-up ball.

**Weinberger:** That can only be believed by someone who believes that the Korean airliner was shot down because it was a spy ship with 269 men, women, and children spies aboard. It's just not a credible kind of argument. . . . 'I think it can be done'

*Weinberger was interviewed April 8 by David Brinkley and other journalists on ABC's "This Week" program.*

**Q:** What is, in your opinion, the chance that a system like this would work—a system that will knock down enemy missiles long before they reach us?

**Weinberger:** Oh, I think it can be done. I don't have any doubt about it, but we can't do it now. There are a lot of things we can't do now or we thought we couldn't do when we first started on them, including going to the Moon and all the other things that we've done. I don't have any doubt that we can do it. What it takes, however, is a commitment, a resolve, and a recognition of what an enormously better world it would be if we could do this. That's why I don't understand why there's not just hesitancy, but strong opposition to even thinking about it or trying to do it. If you could do it you would have . . . as the President has said, removed the threat of these terrible weapons from the face of the earth.

**Q:** Isn't a lot of the objection based on the assumption that if we seem to be succeeding in this, some enemy might feel it necessary to strike us *before* we get it up, in place, and deployed?

**Weinberger:** The same argument would apply to the fact that the enemy sees us now regaining our military strength. There's always going to be a risk, in fact, and that's the whole essence of deterrence. With this system, you can preserve the peace by eliminating the threat of these weapons, which would certainly improve the world and give it a great deal more hope. It's a matter of whether it's better to destroy people or destroy weapons. Well, the President we've elected is trying to destroy weapons, and I think that it's a very noble purpose and I am delighted that we are embarked on it.

**Q:** If you're delighted and if that is the moral thing to do, what are we doing sticking with the ABM treaty, which really formalized the United States' resolve to base our security and our theory of deterrence on the vulnerability of our citizens?

**Weinberger:** I've never been a proponent of the ABM treaty. I've never been a proponent of the Mutually Assured Destruction or the MAD theory—the idea that both sides stop doing anything about their defense and that if both sides were tremendously vulnerable, everything would be all right. The real problem with that is, among other things, that the Soviets haven't adhered to the basic concept. They are doing a very great deal to try to defend themselves and they have in place the one system permitted by that treaty. But they are also, and have been now since 1967, working on this precise initiative which the President thinks we should embark on, and if they should get it first, it will be a very, very dangerous world. . . .

### **The Soviet war-winning strategy**

**Q:** Aren't you saying when you emphasize the Soviet defensive measures that the Soviet Union is embarked on a war-winning strategy?

**Weinberger:** They *do* believe in war-winning strategy and they *are* embarked on it. All of their doctrine, all of their writing, the offensive nature of their weapons, the volume

and number of their weapons, their civil defense preparations, the hardening of their targets—*everything* that they're doing indicates that they think clearly that a nuclear war can be fought and won, and *we don't*. We have always said that a nuclear war cannot be won and therefore must not be fought. . . .

**Q:** You say that the [strategic defense] system may not absolutely work, although you say that's the goal. What if a few missiles get through? How many Americans die?

**Weinberger:** I don't know how many die, but the important point is not to have to have any [die] at all when you have deterrence, and you're dealing with trying to stop that; and if you have strategic defense, that's another means of trying to stop it. But if the Soviets get strategic defense and we don't, it would be very much like a world in which the Soviets had a nuclear weapon and we did not. You can't allow the Soviet Union with its offensive capabilities and its offensive world strategy to proceed on a path like this with any safety at all. That's half the reason to do it. The other half is, it's a very noble objective in and of itself—if we can succeed in it—and nobody knows that we can't. . . .

**Q:** Why not do it through arms control?

**Weinberger:** You have a very definite example of why not to do it through arms control. You have numerous treaties that the Soviets have signed and violated. You have an ABM treaty which was based on the idea that neither side would do anything about their defense, and here the Soviets have been working along vigorously trying to develop this kind of a defense. So, if you're willing to trust the fate of the world and the United States to your hopes that maybe the Soviets this time would be able to keep a treaty, well, frankly, I'm not, and the responsibilities I have don't permit me to do so.

I didn't say that we shouldn't *try* to get arms reduction. I didn't say we shouldn't try to get a verifiable agreement. But I'm not talking about the kind of verification measures we had before. I'm talking about better verification measures—measures that allow us into the Soviet Union to see if they're keeping their treaty. . . .

**Q:** Mr. Secretary, you said that you thought the situation might be that the Soviet Union developed a system of defense against missiles and we did not. Suppose we both wound up with it, where would we be then?

**Weinberger:** We'd be much better off. In fact, as the President said, we would be willing to cooperate with them. It's good for us to have a firm, reliable defense against these kinds of missiles. Then you would indeed have a situation in which it would be very clear that there would be no use for nuclear weapons. That would not make an end to war, but it would be a vast improvement if we could free ourselves of this terror that has been with us all these years. . . .