

For an escape from the balance of terror

by General Wilhelm Kuntner

Austria's Gen. Wilhelm Kuntner was formerly head of the National Defense Academy in Vienna. Text abridged.

When U.S. President Reagan made his famous speech on March 23, 1983, calling for a new Strategic Defense Initiative for the United States, the first reaction of professional circles in the Western world was great astonishment and skepticism, from the scientific as well as the political-strategical standpoint. Although one was aware that the Soviets had been pursuing, for a long time and at great financial cost, a research and test program in this direction, many Western politicians, experts and media fell into an intensified, Moscow-controlled propaganda crusade against the American "Star Wars."

Accustomed to the supposed security of Mutually Assured Destruction, many people failed to realize that this security was becoming ever more insecure. The Free World must necessarily be concerned, not only at the fact that in this decade the number of nations possessing nuclear weapons, or even perhaps non-governmental, revolutionary groups, can be expected to increase; but also because the Soviet Union, through the increase in its numbers of intercontinental and medium-range missiles, through their improvement in accuracy and increase in megatonnage, may become capable not only of a first strike, but also of a third strike. The door will be wide open for Soviet blackmail in the interest of their "proletarian world dictatorship." To just continue the nuclear arms race would—as we have learned from the past—just bring more insecurity. To passively watch this development is nothing else than voluntary capitulation. It is perhaps time to look for a possible new strategy, which will neither threaten nor destroy the human race.

Against moral nihilism

Doubtless partly inspired by the anti-Americanism of the many European peace movements—whose activities thereby showed themselves to be counterproductive—Ronald Reagan and his advisers found themselves forced, for psychological reasons, to fight against the sort of moral nihilism which reacts to the doctrine of mutual destruction by refusing to see any difference between the two superpowers. The Americans, as a nation, as a society, have a well-defined system of moral values. They lost much of this moral prestige through

their adoption of the deterrence doctrine. With what disastrous moral indifference, the doctrine of a nuclear equilibrium based on a balance of terror, fear and revenge, draws the United States into the dark scenario of nuclear holocaust! No wonder anxiety and disgust is rising up worldwide against both superpowers and their arsenals. This symmetry of evil suppresses the distinction between the two giants, seems to put the ideology of tyranny on the same level with a social order based on freedom and fundamental human rights. The search for a new strategic future, not based on the deterrence



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of terror, finds in these considerations its deepest justification.

In the West we are beginning to recognize a commonplace truth: from a position of weakness one can hardly bring the Soviets to the negotiating table, and certainly not force them to make concessions. Only the Soviet concern that American innovation and productive capacity might leave them behind, was sufficient to bring them to the talks between Gromyko and Shultz.

Only wishful thinkers could be disappointed at the lack of clear results. The very fact that Moscow was ready to return to negotiation without having obtained its previously stated preconditions—dismantling of the NATO rearmament program and a stop to research on defensive beam weapons—is already a victory.

In the medium term we shall still have to live with the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, and, if significant reductions are achieved in the coming negotiations, we shall hopefully also survive.

In the long term—provided humanity survives to witness it—it will be possible through a rethinking of strategy to finally liberate mankind from the horrors of war. I will merely mention the fact that the development of beam weapons cannot only end the danger of human extermination, but also eradicate hunger and poverty from the Third World. Scientists more qualified than I will speak at this conference on the technical feasibility as well as the economic aspects and benefits of such systems.