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Letter from a Danish Supporter to Geraldine Ferraro

Geraldine Ferraro

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Mrs. Geraldine Ferraro  
1725 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515  
USA

Dear Mrs. Ferraro,

I take the liberty to write to you in order to send you the enclosed letter from professor Anderson, University of Minnesota, to Congressman Paul Simon and the reference to the "First-Strike capability"-statement by Caspar Weinberger.

According to Robert Aldridge (author of The Counterforce Syndrome and First Strike! The Pentagon's Strategy for Nuclear War) the USA will have a perceived first strike capability by 1988 - and according to professor Johan Galtung of the University of Berlin, the US President and Secretary of Defense can (technically) order a first strike attack with strategic nuclear weapons on the USSR all alone, without having to inform or ask other members of the Administration, Congress, Prime Minister Thatcher, Chancellor Kohl or other people.

I think I ought to inform you of that and to send you the enclosed papers.

I wish you all the luck in the world in beating Reagan/Bush (i.e. Reagan/Weinberger, maybe after all).

Yours sincerely,
November 26, 1982

The Honorable Paul Simon
Member of Congress
227 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Simon:

I appreciate very much your letter of October 19 and am sorry it has taken me so long to respond. I am glad to hear that you have requested that the Government Accounting Office begin an annual review of the defense budget request. It has been clear that there has been too little well supported "loyal opposition," and at the same time I read in Franklin Spinney's report "Defense Facts of Life" that in the Pentagon often "honest criticism gets confused with disloyalty." At the same time some people, even the President, confuse blind loyalty with patriotism.

As a loyal oppositionist, here is a summary of my view of the Administration's strategic program, including Dense Pack:

I have gradually come to see clearly that the Administration's "nuclear war-fighting" strategy means FIRST STRIKE, a preemptive attack aimed in one blow at destroying the Soviet nuclear assets. Here is why: Two major technical problems with fighting a nuclear war have been pointed out this past year in articles in Science. 1) EMP. The electromagnetic pulse effect casts a great deal of doubt on the effectiveness of command, control, communications and intelligence following a major nuclear attack, and even following a minor one well placed. 2) Dust. Following the first attack, there will be enormous amounts of dust in the air. Science, (Sept. 25, 1981) pointed out that the Air Force discovered the effect of dust when one of their jets flew through the plume of Mt. St. Helens and two of the engines quit. This effect was seen again when a Boeing 747 almost crashed near Jakarta last spring. Conclusion: You can't fly jet aircraft during a nuclear war with mushroom clouds all over the place. Not B-1s, not cruise missiles, not any kind of jet aircraft.

A third factor is strategic: Both sides talk in their literature about "decapitation attacks," strikes on the command headquarters. An obvious idea; if you can destroy the command posts in the first wave, possibly no further attacks can be ordered, certainly fewer than if you don't attack command posts.
The logical military conclusion of all of this is that you really can't know what you will be able to do after the first warheads explode. You better prepare to hit all of the other side's nuclear forces before he can get any of them off the ground or water. Thus, use Navstar satellites (which must be assumed destroyed in the first wave) for midcourse correction of Tridents. Rely on the optimistic statements about very accurate guidance systems on the MX missiles. But, because of the missile flight times of 15 to 30 minutes, the Soviets may still be able to launch on warning of our attack. This problem is partially solved by placing Pershing II missiles in Europe where the flight time to targets in Western USSR is cut to 5 to 7 minutes. As a final step, develop an ability to track Soviet submarines.

Robert Aldrich, in his book Counterforce Syndrome, has detailed all of this.

The military logic is appealing: The current doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) says that we will threaten the other side with an attack which, if carried out, will destroy us as well as the attacker. It is like having a pistol to protect one from burglars, which if fired kills both the attacker and the attacked. In such a case, we would easily decide to get rid of such a weapon. But the US and SU have not been able to do so. The theoreticians within the Reagan Administration have recognized this dilemma and have proposed to resolve it by developing a nuclear war-fighting strategy. Understanding of the three factors I mention above indicate that waiting for the other side to strike first really doesn't resolve the MAD doctrine. Also, it is our policy to hit the Soviet Union with a nuclear attack if they threaten our "vital interests" with a conventional attack. Unless such an attack destroys virtually all of the Soviet nuclear capability in the first blow, it is suicidal. Nuclear war fighting can only mean FIRST STRIKE. Two very competent people have told me that in a meeting for military engineers held at Mitre Corporation in Bedford, Mass. in October 1981, Richard de Luer told the audience that "of course the MX and the Trident are not deterrent weapons; they are preemptive strike weapons."

While giving a presentation to Air Force Secretary Vern Orr and about 15 of his staff in June 1981, one of the colonels asked me: "Don't you think we would be safer with first-strike capability because the Soviets would fear loss of their military equipment?" If I could feel safer, it could only be because I was sure that the Soviets neither had first-strike capability nor were liable to get it for a long time. But if that is true, it undercuts the argument given publicly for the MX. One must conclude that the military does indeed want the MX as a preemptive strike weapon, in which case the basing mode, Dense Pack or whatever, has no significance. I see it as necessary to the Air Force only because they have spent so much of their verbal capital convincing people that the Soviets are about to strike.

It is interesting to note that the argument for Dense Pack--fratricide--was use by us several years ago as one of the many reasons that a first strike attack on the Minuteman makes no
sense. An attack on a Minuteman silo must use several warheads if the kill probability is to be high. But the first one to go off is likely to destroy the others before they can destroy the silo. Therefore only the accuracy of the first warhead counts, thus markedly reducing the kill probability over what would exist if there were no fratricide. In June 1981, while in the Pentagon, I found the Air Force people arguing against the importance of fratricide. Thus, I was most surprised nine months later to learn that they use fratricide to justify Dense Pack.

More fundamentally, the Joint Chiefs themselves have undercut the argument that the Soviets may attempt a first strike on the Minutemen. To my surprise, I found the following sentences in the 1983 Military Posture Statement on page 21 in the upper right corner:

"Analyses project that a Soviet strike against US missile fields could destroy a major portion of the US ICBM force if the US chooses to ride out the attack before responding. However, the Soviets would still have to contend with the US SLBM force--secure and survivable at sea--and the manned bombers that had been launched for survival at the first confirmed warning of attack."

The Soviet leaders would have to assume that we would ride out the attack and not launch on warning even though the Minutemen have been designed from the beginning to be launched very quickly. They would have to trust us completely, even though in past years the Annual Report of the Secretary of Defense has stated that we would not say whether or not we would launch on warning. Having known this for many years, it has been a continual puzzle to me as to how the DOD could have convinced so many people that the Soviets may strike the Minutemen. The Joint Chiefs add a second fundamental problem for the Soviet leadership. They would have to assume beyond a shadow of a doubt that we would not respond with our submarines and bombers. Through the above statements, the Joint Chiefs have shown why the MX is not needed as a retaliatory weapon. Its only use can be in a FIRST STRIKE.

A major argument against a Soviet first strike on the Minutemen has been that there is great uncertainty. In the Spring 1982 issue of Strategic Review, General Robert T. Marsh states:

"To the extent that uncertainty discourages a first-strike decision, it is fortunate that uncertainty abounds in this dangerous world wherein the strategic balance rests on mutual deterrence."

Yet, he goes on to say that we must take into account the capability of the adversary, implying that there is a chance the Soviets could succeed even in the face of great uncertainty.
Until a few months ago, I felt that uncertainty of the outcome of an untestable mass attack—a first strike—would be sufficient to stay the hand of any potential attacker. But now I am not so sure. Last August I was asked to review a paper by the Director of Strategic Analysis of the BDM Corporation, Dr. Estes. The theme of his paper was that the discussion of missile vulnerability has raised the issue of uncertainty to major strategic importance, implying that it hadn't been and that it should be. He goes on to say that if it is accepted that we should take into account uncertainty in our own force assessments, we should likewise take into account the uncertainties the Soviets would face in their strategic planning. In October, I received two papers from a former Air Force Col. Kane, indicating that he had been trying for years to get the senior planners to understand probability and that computer simulations cannot be trusted for guidance in strategic planning, but may be quite misleading. There is a real yearning for certainty in an uncertain world. Thus statements such as "the Soviet SS-18 has a 93 percent kill probability against the Minutemen silos." There is absolutely no way to arrive at such a statement. If one had tested many first strikes, the most one could give would be a range of kill probabilities based on a certain pre-stated level of confidence. Without tests, such probability statements are either lies or ignorance.

The generals know that you can't fight a nuclear war. Gen. David Jones said so upon his retirement. General Marsh, in the abovementioned issue of Strategic Review acknowledges the same in the last paragraph of his rebuttal. After reading William Sherer's article "With Enough Shovels" I became increasingly convinced that the civilian leadership is taking a path that the military leadership would not advise. If they have convinced themselves and almost everyone else that the Soviets may strike first at our land-based ICBMs, they must conclude, believing also in our superior technology, that we could do the same to them and ought to obtain that capability. In such an environment, uncertainty gives way to certainty—only then can one believe that we could limit our losses to an acceptable level by striking first. As Franklin Spinney commented, "honest criticism gets confused with disloyalty." In such an atmosphere, the most bizarre and hawkish views prevail.

Very sincerely yours,

[Signature]
J. Edward Anderson
Professor