

**The Honorable Caspar W. Weinberger  
at the Oxford Union Debate, London, England  
Monday, February 27, 1984**

**To Resolution: "This House resolves that there is no moral difference between the foreign policies of the US and USSR."**

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor indeed to have the opportunity to be here tonight and to participate in this debate, and I welcome the opportunity and have looked forward to it for a long time. I was warned that one of the greatest perils that I faced here tonight was the unremitting and preternatural chill of this building. You have, in a very friendly way, eliminated that threat and given us a nice warm television studio in which to discuss these critically important matters.

One of the advantages of speaking last is, of course, self-evident. One of the penalties is that so many of your points have been made so many times. The fact that a good point has been made, however, is no reason for not responding to it. So if you hear some familiar comments or some things that have preceded me, it will simply be an endorsement by me of the excellence of your speakers and of the quality of the debate.

It does seem to me that if we are to debate the moralities of the two systems, we should look at Soviet definitions and our definitions and perhaps not devote too much time to the Official Secrets Act or things that don't seem to have any direct bearing upon the moralities of our two systems under discussion. Indeed, there was a time when I thought perhaps I had come in on the wrong evening, and the subject was, more or less, "Resolved: That Christopher Columbus went too far."

The Soviet definition has always been that moral policy is what advances the Soviet state, that moral policy is what helps the cause of communism. Brezhnev said it many times and, indeed, it is part of the litany. It is a moral system which turns the definition of the word "moral" upside down, as far as we are concerned.

Our view of morality is basically that policy is moral if it advances certain basic principles and rights—something that we mentioned to you in a letter that we sent about 200 years ago and which says that "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And some of our other basic principles, of course, are that all of our power and all of the power of government springs from the consent of the governed, that all of our policies—foreign and domestic—must be supported by the people. If not, then the policies have to be changed until they are supported by a majority of the people.

In order to secure that informed consent of the governed, we have the utmost freedom of speech and press and religion, as Mr. Thompson has quite properly and generously acknowledged, and we have all of the other human and civil rights that are guaranteed

by our Constitution. And, guided by these principles, our foreign policy not only reflects but actually is based upon our political system—as, indeed, I think we have to grant, is part of the foreign policy of any country.

It cannot stand alone as a separate entity. It has to be based upon the mores and morals and the principles of the political system which gives it life. And I think, therefore, that all of this has to be taken as very substantially at contrasted variance with the Soviet policy, where the policy is made by one, or at best a very few men. That policy never has any chance to be challenged or vindicated by public discussion such as this or by any of the process of debate or discussion. It's a policy and a morality, if you like, that totally forbids any questioning of that policy, at the risk of very considerable peril to the questioning individual.

That's why the Soviet system, as we have heard many times tonight, cannot possibly stand, cannot possibly tolerate or accept the first glimmerings of freedom of association or freedom of speech in Poland, but has to stamp them out and stamp them out as vigorously as possible, with two divisions stationed in Poland, and with puppet rulers of Poland who know that they will be changed if they display any life at all of their own.

Our foreign policy, we think, is basically moral if it enables all to enjoy these three unalienable rights of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And we have tried to demonstrate that in a number of ways over the years. We have fought in two world wars, not just to ensure our safety but also the survival of our allies and of the cause of freedom. And we've welcomed political refugees from every continent, every country, and continue to do so, regardless of their beliefs. And whenever life, of course, is threatened by earthquake or famine or flood or any natural disaster, American aid goes out, usually the next day, if we can put it together.

Again, it isn't a question of whether this furthers our policy or not. It isn't the question of whether it, as in the other side, helps the Soviet cause. It's because we think it's the morally right thing to do. We never used our power to try to conquer. We have used our power to try to help others.

Grenada was mentioned tonight. There are significant differences between Grenada and Afghanistan. In Grenada, we had a situation which international law has recognized—since the beginnings of its first statement—and that is the right of government to try to protect its citizens, wherever they may be. There were about 1,000 medical students of the United States in Grenada. They were under a 24-hour curfew in which they were told, and we were told, that they would be shot if they were seen on the streets. And we had very fresh and verdant in our memory a most unwelcome saga—of 420 days I believe—in which American citizens were held hostage by the most repressive government the world has seen since possibly the Middle Ages.

We felt that we had no alternative, particularly when the neighboring states—which Mrs. Charles, the Prime Minister of Dominica, said, quite correctly, were all of one family—urgently pleaded with us to do what we did.

The important thing, however, is that we left. We did what had to be done. We freed the American citizens, we freed the government there from the domination of a very bloodthirsty regime, and we left. Now, in Afghanistan, four years ago, the Soviets came in with troops that now number 115 to 125 thousand. They are still there. They show no signs whatever of departing, and so I think there is a very considerable difference between the two as we try to deal with provision of the unalienable right of liberty.

There is another interesting example of it. When I have the privilege of visiting our forces in various parts of the world, I am struck, first of all, by their enormous morale, in which they feel they are doing something worthwhile not just for themselves but for others. Mostly that's because the others in the areas where they serve have made them feel enormously welcome.

I particularly noted an example at Fulda Gap, which divides East and West Germany, as you know. And, here, our observation towers face East because it is essential, we feel, that we be apprised of any kind of movement toward the line that would indicate an interference with the basic mission that not just the United States but NATO has of trying to protect the freedoms of the people in West Germany. But the observation towers on the other side face East, too, and they face East for a very different reason. They face East to contain and keep in and prevent anyone coming to the West.

That, I think, is a significant moral difference, and a moral difference that is again exemplified by the freedom of people within the United States to come and go as they wish and the "freedom" of people within the Soviet Union—particularly the thousands of Jewish citizens who would like to emigrate and who are absolutely not only permitted to do so, but are subject to—and their families—to enormous harassment if they either escape or make the effort. So you have another moral difference there involving liberty.

I think it's a highly moral act when we emerge from World War II with total and complete military supremacy and with a monopoly of the nuclear weapons and we did not use this to blackmail the world. We did not use this to secure domination. Instead, we proposed through the Baruch Plan to offer this system of nuclear weapons to the world in order that it could be dismantled. We offered to ensure that we would not only give up these nuclear weapons, but then, when that was not accepted, what we did was then try to help rebuild the economies of our Allies and our former enemies. It was not a morality which touched on whether or not it advanced the cause of communism, but a morality based on what we thought was the right thing to do in helping to advance the basic principles under which our country was founded.

Now, we've heard a fair amount tonight about the American troops who have been here 39 years. We indeed have a very large number of people at home who would be perfectly delighted with the suggestion that they be brought back, and would welcome it.

The other critically important difference between these troops and the troops in the Warsaw Pact is the fact that the troops who are here—by invitation of NATO, and by invitation of the host country, and who have been here a very long time—are here for a very specific purpose of trying to do what the troops in the Fulda Gap are trying to do:

To join with people to protect and preserve their own freedoms, because they have been invited by the regularly chosen, legitimate governments of these countries to do that. There's quite a difference between that and the Warsaw Pact troops, who are there because they are imposed on those countries.

I don't know that there are very many Gallup Polls in Poland, but I would be very surprised if there were one that would give overwhelming approval for the two divisions of the Soviet Union that have been there for a very long time—a little longer than 39 years.

So that there is that kind of difference. The Warsaw Pact is held together with force, with intimidation, and with threat, and the Soviet troops don't leave. They entered to keep those countries in thrall, and they've done that in Poland and in Czechoslovakia and, indeed, wherever the first glimmerings of liberty might arise, because the Soviet Union is so constituted that it cannot possibly accept any of the glimmerings of liberty, any of the things that you and I, fortunately, have always been able to take for granted and we hope always will be. We, in fact, take them so much for granted that we sometimes denigrate their value. But the slightest attempt to exercise any of those things in the countries bordering on the Soviet Union—or farther away—has to be stamped out at once, because it is the kind of heresy that the Soviet Union and its system is totally unable to tolerate.

Unalienable rights, pursuit of happiness— Well, we have tried for several decades to be of assistance to the people either less fortunate or those who urgently desire it. For nearly three decades—and this has been pointed out, I think, at least twice tonight—we have given far more economic aid than any other country. You might be interested in the exact figure. It's slightly in excess of 300 billion dollars, and it's economic aid, not military aid. Last year we gave twice as much as any other country and ten times that of the Soviet Union.

I mention this with a certain sense of pride, of course—not to confirm the fact that, as was said earlier, America is big, but the fact that this a moral act, an act of, I think, unselfishness and altruism that is important that it continue. And it's important that it continue not because America wants thanks or gratitude or because we seek to make sure that the recipients do the kinds of things that we think are right, but because we think it is right that they be helped.

That has been done and it will continue to be done. But every year there is a lot of opposition to it at home. There are a lot of people who say that it is time that America be selfish, and that it's time that America think about itself only, and that we should be much more interested in balancing our budget than in pouring out this treasure. And yet it has continued, and that economic aid, to a very considerable extent, has gone, it's gone to all of the Third World. It takes the form of the World Bank and AID, and medical and technical assistance, Peace Corps and education assistance, and so on.

Coming back to foreign policy: We think that this is an integral part of it, but we think you can't have a moral foreign policy if the people cannot control it, if the people cannot

change it.

We've heard many instances tonight of the problems that individuals have with individual aspects of American foreign policy. I had a lot four years ago, and I expressed them very vigorously, and I was not jailed. I was able to do that, and I was able to be of some help in assembling a group of people who turned out ultimately to be a majority, and those foreign policies were changed, a great many of them.

And it is entirely possible, within our system—and, indeed, there are eight gentlemen trying very hard tonight, and they will for the next six months—to change the existing foreign policies of America. They will oppose them in a legal, legitimate way, and, if they succeed, they will change those foreign policies. A lot of the things that you express dissatisfaction with tonight will probably be a lot worse, but you will have an opportunity for those changes to be made.

Now, you can doubt that we really cannot, literally, do anything—we can't send a soldier anywhere, we can't spend a dime or a nickel or a shilling—that is not approved by our Congress. If Congress disapproves, for example, then all of the 52 trainers that we have in El Salvador—and that's all we have in that country—will have to come home within 24 hours.

So, this is not a foreign policy which is based upon what helps the United States or the United States' view of what helps it. It's foreign policy that's based on consent of the governed, and the opportunity and the ability of the people to change it at any time they wish, in an orderly, recognized, constitutional process.

And it has been changed repeatedly. In fact, I am frequently told in some of the NATO meetings I attend that one of the problems with America is "You have no continuity with the past." And, of course, the other way to phrase that is that we do not feel we should be condemned to the errors of the past. But one way or another, the individuals have the right to make that change.

Now, who among the Soviets voted that they should invade Afghanistan? Maybe one, maybe five, men in the Kremlin. Who has the ability to change that and bring them home? Maybe one, maybe five, men in the Kremlin. Nobody else. And that is, I think, the height of immorality, because it means that no matter what faint glimmerings of public opinion may sometimes stir in the Soviet Union—as they have stirred rather vigorously in Poland—would be not tolerated, would be stamped out, and that would be not only the end of the glimmerings but the end of the people who raised it.

Q: Sir, you have rightly condemned the puppet states controlled by the Soviet Union, but is it not true that your country also controls—in, for example, the whole of Latin America—many corrupt and puppet governments? Surely, the question we are asking you to address yourself towards tonight is, What is the difference, if any—and I suspect there is no difference, as do many, many people in this country—what is the difference between your puppet regimes and the regimes of the Soviet Union?

A: The difference is very clear. American support of any regime—puppet or otherwise—can be changed. It can be changed overnight by the vote of our Congress, by the vote of our people, and whatever support was given to whatever regime must cease. And that cannot be done in the Soviet Union. You have a system in the Soviet Union that forbids any kind of exercise of public will, or public opinion, or any kind of change.

So, I do not accept for the moment the assumptions in your talk, any more than I accept for a moment the assumptions in your very eloquent earlier presentation that the real course for Britain is isolationism.

I think that it is important to bear in mind that, whether or not you do have agreement with our course in Latin America—and bear in mind that what we are seeking in Central America is enormous economic assistance that can enable those countries to rid themselves of the terrible poverty that had made them such an inviting target for communism of the Libyan and Cuban and Soviet character—that it is essential to give people an opportunity to exercise their own judgment and their own will. But if our people disapprove of it, if our people think that we are making the error that you think we are making, something can be done about it and that cannot be done in the Soviet Union and that I think is the significant difference in morality.

The ability of people to participate in and control their own government and their own foreign policy is, I think, the highest form of morality.

Q: Please excuse me for intervention. Do you think that an immoral act becomes less immoral because we have the choice to do it or not? And do the people who are tortured and killed and terrorized by those regimes think it is a more moral act because Congress approves of it and not some general?

A: The point is that, whether you think it is moral or not or whether anyone else thinks it's moral or not, it is capable of being stopped and changed by the will of the people, and that cannot be done in the Soviet Union. You have locked in acts which may or may not be considered to be immoral by others, but nothing can be done about them. And in our country and under our system, it is possible to make those changes.

I'd like to discuss just a moment here a couple of the things that Mr. Thompson raised. He said that we aren't really discussing how it would be for people to live in the Soviet Union, and we aren't really discussing internal conditions in the Soviet Union. It seems to me we are. We have to, because it is those conditions which give rise to a foreign policy and give rise to the ability to judge the moralities of that policy. These are some of the ways you judge it. And if it cannot be changed, it cannot possibly be considered moral.

Deterrence, he said, in the United States—as, I gathered, with some kind of substantial criticism—is a dynamic concept and keeps changing. Indeed, it has to, because deterrence is the very difficult equation by which we try to get inside the Soviet mind and find out what it is that would deter the Soviet Union from making an attack. And we think the system that has preserved the peace between the superpowers for nearly 40

years is a deterrence that is based upon the acquisition not of military superiority, not of overwhelming military strength, not of a monopoly of any one system over the other, but of a degree of strength that will indicate to them that the retaliatory capability is such that it would profit from nothing to launch an attack.

It's a very difficult equation to cast. It's not an equation in which I am allowed much room for error, and indeed it is dynamic and changing because the Soviets have changed so many times themselves.

Q: Perhaps I will still make the point, despite the fact that it's rather old now. You talked about the American people having a choice, the American people having the choice that, if they didn't like the foreign policy of your government, they could do something about it, they could put you out of office. That assumes, sir, that they know what's going on. That assumes, in the case of Nixon and Vietnam, that they knew how many people were dying. That assumes that they knew the reasons for the Americans being in Vietnam, and they knew what was going on. They didn't, sir, and your system, perhaps, is based upon deceit as much as it is anything else.

A: On the contrary, they did know what was going on. They did put an end to it, and they put an end to it precisely when it was concluded by the majority of the American people that this was an enterprise in which they felt they should no longer engage. And they did end it, and they ended it very quickly. And that can be done, and we have a system that permits that.

Now, Mr. Thompson also made the point— I think I'll make a couple more of my own points, and then we'll see if there's time for yours. Mr. Thompson made the point, Why are these missiles now here? Why have the cruise missiles come to Britain? Why have the Pershings come to Germany? For a very good reason. Because the NATO organization, to which we all belong, unanimously asked to have them in 1979, and repeated it time after time.

I've gone to, I guess, four meetings of NATO a year, and there's never been a time during the three years that I've been attending those meetings that there hasn't been an effort made to cancel, change, revise, and repeal—in some way end—the 1979 dual-track resolution. And they all failed.

Three countries where the missiles are to be deployed or are being deployed have voted on this within the last year—Britain, Germany, and Italy. In each one of those situations, the vast majority of the people voted for candidates and parties who stood for the deployment of these missiles. This is not an immoral act to place these missiles here. You ask why they are here? They are here because the people through their regularly constituted governments wanted them.

You may not like this decision. You have the opportunity—by whatever necessary political work there may be, and I assume and I hope that all of you here will want to engage in that, on one side or the other—you have the opportunity to change that policy. In the Soviet Union, that cannot be done. And, for a further reason as to why they are

here, they are here because there are now 380 SS-20s, with three warheads each, looking down the throats of Europe, able to destroy any city in Europe or in Asia, and they constituted, until last December, a total, complete, and very dangerous monopoly.

There was an effort made to do something about that, short of deployment. It was quite a long time ago. It was almost a year and half ago. It's pretty well forgotten. It was called "the zero option," and it was something the President of United States urged very strenuously on the Soviet Union. Very simply, it was, "We will not deploy any cruise or any Pershings if you will take out the SS-20s and bring us back to the situation we were in prior to 1977." The Soviets did not wish to discuss this provision, although we tried and raised it many times in Geneva.

I, myself, cannot think of a more moral policy than one that says, "Take out all of one category of weapons." The President went further in START Talks. We have proposals on the table which we are urgently seeking to negotiate that would provide for major reductions of a verifiable kind, on both sides, so as to bring us down near parity, so that this terrible equation of deterrence could be maintained at vastly lower levels. I think that's a moral set of proposals, and the Soviet Union will not discuss them. And it's very hard to negotiate when there's nobody across the table from you.

So I think that we are talking about here— Mr. Thompson again said in his very eloquent talk: "What is this quarrel all about?" It's really very simple. The quarrel is all about freedom—individual, human, personal freedom—and whether or not we are allowed to exercise it—our children, our descendants for many generations, as you and I have for all of our lives—or whether that's to be blocked by the imposition of a system that—without any deterrence, without any troops, without any military preparations—would hardly be much interested in respecting a proposal that the fractured part of Europe—East and West—come together, draw into itself, and ask please to be let alone from nuclear weapons.

That's what it's all about. It's all about personal freedom. It's about whether or not we can continue to live as we have chosen to live, and whether or not we could have any sort of hope for that continuing in the future.

It was a surprise to me, and I think would be to many, to learn that it was the menacing Western posture which has led to all of the deployments that have taken place in the Soviet Union in the last 23 years. The West felt quite menaced indeed when the Soviet Union, following its morality of what is best for Soviet communism at any given time, joined with Germany in the early days of World War II and was perfectly willing to fight on the side of Germany, and signed treaties that came close to discouraging many in the West from even attempting opposition.

It was a source of, I think, gratification to many of us when the error of their ways was seen not through informed public discussion within the Soviet Union—but when their ally turned on them, and attacked them, and we went to their assistance because we thought that it was the proper moral thing to do and the right thing to do and that it was obviously something that would help the West and our ourselves and everyone else.

And, so, what we have to do, I think, is to ask who it was who put in the SS-20s. Where did this menace come from? It didn't come from our menacing posture. There were zero intermediate-range weapons on the NATO side and now there are 380 on the other, and there are something like 12 to 14 [NATO weapons] going in since December. But where do they come from? Is that a menace that led them to go first with the SS-20s? I doubt it. I doubt it very much. Deterrence is perhaps a difficult and, you will say, a risky equation on which to base the peace of the world.

I agree. I don't know of any other at the moment, but we are working on one. I know there has been a lot of laughter about it, and a lot of people who will think that the attempt to develop a thoroughly reliable strategic defensive system should only be referred to as "Star Wars." Indeed, the brother of the man who took us to the moon calls it that frequently at home. And I think this is rather a denigration of what is, basically, I think, a plan, a hope, a possibility that can remove the shadow of these terrible weapons from the Earth, if we are able to do it.

We will turn all of our technology and all of our science and all of our academic thought and everything else that we have in the way of resources to try to develop this. And if we can do it, surely it is better to defend people instead of avenging them. Surely it is better to develop weapons that go after weapons rather than people. And that is moral policy—a policy which undoubtedly will have to survive a great deal in the way of opposition and people who will talk about the advantages of MAD—the mutually assured destruction policy—which was designed to ensure that both sides could destroy each other, following which you were somehow safer.

It was based on two assumptions: that nobody would really do anything about defensive systems, and that both sides would remain roughly equal on offensive systems. But the Soviets have been doing something about strategic defense initiatives—not sneering at them as "Star Wars"—but working at them carefully and very thoroughly since 1957, and they've come a long way with it. I ask you to imagine the world if they developed that kind of a system, destroyed deterrence, and we did not have it. Then I would be very surprised to see any of us—certainly myself included—here tonight.

So, I think we have to make sure that we understand, when we talk about what are the moral aspects of this and when we point out that there are moral problems that many of you have with aspects of our defense policy, that the critically important thing is, What can you do about those policies? Can you change them? If you are convinced they are wrong, can you do something about them? You can here, you can at home, you can't anywhere else. And so I would think that the place in which you can do something about it is a far more moral sort of system.

I accepted your very kind invitation, Mr. President, to come here tonight because I believe in a free society. The most important—the most critically important—thing is ideas. Ideas have consequences, and it is only in gatherings such as this that we can have ideas, that we can learn new things, and that we can see again how ideas can become laws and policies and decisions. So if you truly conclude that there is no moral difference

between the foreign policies of the Soviet Union and the United States, of course you have a right to act on that belief. But you have some responsibilities, of course, too.

Great Britain could walk out of NATO tomorrow. If you told us to take our soldiers out of Great Britain, they would be gone within a day or two. American tanks would certainly not roll in the streets, as the Soviet tanks have rolled in Budapest and Kabul and Prague when some suggestion was made that maybe the Soviet soldiers, either incoming or there, were not all that welcome. Unlike your counterparts in the great universities of Eastern Europe, you live in a nation that freely joins and can freely leave any alliance that it wishes. And that, ultimately, I think, is the great moral difference that any European must surely perceive.

You have the freedom of choice, and you can make a difference. And your opinion—with your right to express it and try courses that a majority, which you will be able to try to put together in your country, wants—that is a freedom which I hope we will always have, because it's the freedom that enables us to change policies that we may think are immoral on an individual basis.

The ultimate immorality is if you can't do anything about it at all.

Tonight, you'll exercise that freedom. You'll make a choice, and I rest my case on your liberty to walk out either door and not have anything happen thereafter—have no intimidation, no threats, no arrests.

I ask you to consider whether, in the other system, you and your families could have been here. Or, if you felt it was safe for your family to come here tonight and express the things on either side—the things I am saying, the things Mr. Thompson has said so eloquently, or many others—if you think that is a moral system. So I urge your opposition to this motion, so that you can come again.