

Letters to the Editor

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Nuclear Strategy: The Obsolete Deterrent

To the Editor:

Your call for a "national debate" over changes in United States nuclear strategy [editorial Jan. 15] is a worthy call. Even though the possibility of nuclear war between the superpowers seems more remote now than it has for a long time, the strategic shifts which Defense Secretary Schlesinger has described are important—not only for the people of the United States but also for our allies and for international security and stability generally.

One prerequisite for any "national debate" on this important subject will be development of a fuller understanding of the new strategic nuclear balance which exists between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and of the trend or tendency of that balance. Things are not what they used to be when the U.S. had superiority over the U.S.S.R. Changes over the past several years look like this:

'73	1,054	656	442	1,527	628	140
'72	1,054	656	455	1,527	560	140
'71	1,054	656	505	1,510	440	140
'70	1,054	656	550	1,300	280	150
'69	1,054	656	560	1,050	160	150
'68	1,054	656	545	800	130	150
'67	1,054	656	600	460	130	210
'66	904	592	630	300	125	200
'65	854	496	630	270	120	190
'64	834	416	630	200	120	190
'63	424	224	630	100	100	190
	U.S.A.			U.S.S.R.		
	ICBM	SLBM	Long Range Bombers	ICBM	SLBM	Long Range Bombers

Source: *The Military Balance for 1973-1974*
The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London.
The New York Times/Jan. 25, 1974

The consequences of this striking change in the balance are debatable in detail, but at least two points stand out clearly:

¶ All future U.S. Presidents will be confronted, whether they like it or not, with possibilities which will include the Russians' going for the option of fighting a nuclear war. They have the forces for it, and Soviet military

writers have stressed the need to be prepared for this option. A President who ignores these realities would be gravely remiss.

¶ The old strategy of "mutual assured destruction" now appears obsolete. "Mutual assured destruction" held hostage a major portion of the Soviet population, and it deliberately guaranteed to the Soviet Government the ability to kill a major portion of our own population. When the U.S. held substantial nuclear superiority over the U.S.S.R., that may have been entirely appropriate; now that the balance of forces has changed to our disadvantage, a different strategy for deterrence is called for, if indeed deterrence is to continue to be effective.

One further comment: It is not a "new Nixon strategy" which, in the words of the editorial, "requires enormous numbers of new, highly accurate warheads." The contrary is the case: It is the enormous numbers of new, highly accurate warheads which require a new strategy. And the driving forces behind the development of those enormous numbers of warheads had so many roots and branches that—as Herbert F. York pointed out in the November 1973 *Scientific American*—in retrospect it is difficult to see how the multiple-warhead proliferation could have been stopped or slowed. Of course, if the arms race as a whole could be slowed or stopped, that would slow or stop the further numerical growth of new, highly accurate warheads.

Meanwhile, we are where we are—both Russians and Americans—and the old strategy of holding our respective populations hostage seems to me not only insufficient but also unnecessarily risky, given the new strategic balance. The world is more secure with the President having an option to respond to a possible attack with something less than an all-out nuclear spasm directed against the Soviet people.

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New York, Jan. 15, 1974

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