

# Schlesinger and Debate on Nuclear Strategy

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Should the United States be able to fight a nuclear war as well as deter one? That question has been raised by Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, as he tries to stir up a national debate on future American nuclear strategy.

For 20 years, the strategy has been built around deterrence. Initially known as "massive" retaliation, it later came to be called "mutual assured destruction"—or MAD by its detractors.

For all the variations in name, the idea remained basically the same: if one side had enough nuclear power to absorb a surprise attack and still retaliate with devastating force, the other side would never dare attack. In effect, a position of mutual deterrence developed between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Schlesinger is not proposing abandonment of this deterrent strategy. But he wants to add a new idea, called a counterforce strategy.

## Limited Nuclear War

In essence, the counterforce strategy contemplates an ability to wage a nuclear war short of an all-out exchange between the two superpowers. Rather than attacking cities, as is envisioned under the strategy of mutual assured destruction, the two sides would be able to strike at military targets, such as airfields, production centers or even missile silos.

The rationale Mr. Schlesinger offers for this shift in nuclear strategy is that although the Soviet Union is deterred from an all-out attack on the United States, it might be tempted to strike at American military targets. In such a situation, he argues, the President should have some other option than retaliating against Soviet cities, knowing that in return the Soviet Union would be able to attack American cities.

Thus, Mr. Schlesinger concludes, the United States must be able to strike at Soviet military targets. He presumes the Soviet Union will have a similar ability if it does not already.

## Public Pronouncements

Mr. Schlesinger has chosen to herald this change in strategies with public pronouncements starting almost from the time he took over as Secretary of Defense last July. Before a group of reporters two weeks ago, he volunteered that there had been a change in strategies so that some intercontinental missiles were now aimed at So-



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James R. Schlesinger

viet military installations as well as at cities.

Then, last week, he announced a reorganization of the Pentagon's command and control system as part of the move "to develop a wider variety of strategic options for the President in crisis situations."

What Mr. Schlesinger, in his professional way of discussing nuclear war games, has yet to make clear is how this counterforce differs from the present abilities of the United States strategic forces.

As Mr. Schlesinger acknowledges, the United States has more warheads than it needs to destroy Soviet cities and industries under the strategy of massive assured destruction. For some years, the surplus has been aimed at Soviet military installations.

## Psychological Effect

In effect, therefore, the United States already has a counterforce ability, and the question arises as to what is new in Mr. Schlesinger's proposal.

Part of the answer given by associates of Mr. Schlesinger is that the well-publicized shift is as much psychological as it is real, as much name as fact.

The target of the Schlesinger publicity is the Soviet Union. The Schlesinger theory is that the way to deter the Soviet Union from a counterforce strike is to publicize that the United States can retaliate against Soviet military targets. Indeed, associates suggest that one reason Mr. Schlesinger is so intent on stirring up a debate on the subject is to underscore this message to the Soviet Union.

To an extent, this exercise is also linked to the arms negotiations with the Soviet Union. In the absence of an agreement, Schlesinger fears that the So-

viet Union, by marrying its larger missiles to advanced multiple warheads, could by 1980 have a greater counterforce ability than the United States.

## What Is New

Mr. Schlesinger is therefore trying to get across the message that if the Soviet Union does not agree to make the two nations basically equivalent in strategic arms, the United States is prepared to match the Soviet Union step for step in building up its counterforce weapons.

If only as a hedge against failure of the talks on strategic arms, however, the Schlesinger proposal does contemplate some changes in the present nuclear arsenal. It is at this point that his proposal becomes embroiled in controversy.

What is new about the Schlesinger counterforce idea is that it provides for development of more accurate missiles and warheads that would be able to attack Soviet missile silos. The Defense Department, for example, wants to develop such "silo killers" for the Trident submarine missile that on the last part of their trajectory could change course.

## Academic View

Academic strategic planners generally agree that the United States needs more flexibility than just a strategy of mutual assured destruction. While this suggests the need for some counterforce ability, most of the experts, including some on whom Mr. Schlesinger leans for advice, believe such flexibility should not extend to an ability to attack Soviet missile silos.

The reasoning is that "silo killers" destabilize the nuclear balance by raising fears that a nation is seeking a "first-strike" ability to knock out the retaliatory force of the other side in a surprise attack.

Mr. Schlesinger's response to this objection is that since both the United States and the Soviet Union have invulnerable retaliatory forces in their submarine-based missiles, neither side can acquire a first-strike ability.

In the nuclear balance, however, perceptions can be as important as abilities. Five years ago, the United States started off on an abortive multibillion-dollar program to develop a missile defense system because it thought the Soviet Union was seeking a first-strike ability against its land-based missiles.

## Argument of Critics

Similarly, it is argued by some critics of the Schlesinger proposal, the Soviet Union might be tempted to build up its own nuclear forces or to use them in a crisis situation if it thought that the United States, under the name of counterforce, was deploying "silo killers" capable of knocking out its land-based retaliatory force.

One suggested solution to the action-reaction cycle is to get rid of the land-based missiles, whose vulnerability makes both sides feel insecure. But this is a step that neither side is willing to take, partly because each now wants to use the land-based missiles as counterforce weapons.

Mr. Schlesinger has still not explained why he presumes that a counterforce attack, which with its radioactive fallout would probably kill millions of civilians, would not lead inevitably to an all-out nuclear exchange.

This, in turn, gets to a basic question of why must it be presumed that the present strategy of massive retaliation will not continue to deter any nuclear attack, including the use of counterforce weapons. It is around this question that the debate will revolve in the coming months.

## F.B.I. GUNFIRE HALTS FUGITIVE IN CAROLINA

CHARLOTTE, N. C., Jan. 21 (UPI)—Federal Bureau of Investigation agents wounded and captured a fugitive accused of three murders in Tennessee when the man fled a truck stop yesterday in a hail of shotgun blasts.

An F.B.I. agent, Joseph Zimmerman, was dragged a few feet when his coat got caught in the door of the car but he was not seriously hurt. The fugitive, Alvin Seagroves, stopped and surrendered to pursuing officers in a nearby residential area.

Mr. Seagroves, 27 years old, of Tracy City, Tenn., was

wounded in the left arm and leg. Mrs. Connie Meeks Nunnally and her young son, riding with the fugitive, escaped serious injury although Mrs. Nunnally reportedly suffered minor cuts from flying glass.

The police said that Mr. Zimmerman had approached the Seagroves car at a truck stop and identified himself. The suspect backed the car up and tried to run the agent down. Other agents then opened fire, blasting out much of the vehicle's front windshield.

Mr. Seagroves was being sought by the F.B.I. on a Federal unlawful flight warrant. Officers said he was charged with the Aug. 4, 1973, slaying of three persons at Tracy City and the wounding of his former wife.