

# Mission to Moscow

By James Reston

President Nixon's mission to Moscow at the end of June has raised two new controversies in Washington: first, whether his new approach to the targeting and control of nuclear weapons is sound; and second, whether he should go to Moscow on such an important mission in his present weakened political position at home.

The second question is easier to answer than the first. The nuclear arms race is not going to stop while the Congress and the courts decide whether to impeach and convict the President and his men. These trials could go on for months or even years, and by the end of them, the arms race could get beyond rational control.

Accordingly, the President is obliged to do whatever he can to reach even limited understanding with the Soviet leaders. He may be under political pressure to reach agreements that would make him look good at home for a while, but he is not likely to put his own political interest ahead of the nation's security—and his Cabinet and the Congress would probably bring him down if he tried.

The question of what the President hopes to negotiate in the way of a nuclear arms agreement with Russia is more complex, and in the opinion of Ambassador Gerard Smith, who negotiated the first strategic arms agreement for the United States in 1972, more dangerous.

Ambassador Smith is concerned about what he calls "the change now being developed in U.S. strategic targeting policy," that is, a counterforce policy aimed not at knocking out Soviet urban-industrial targets but at hitting Soviet missile sites in a possible limited nuclear war.

He doubts that nuclear war, once started, can be limited and fears that a change in U.S. targeting policy in the middle of the SALT II talks might confuse and hamper progress toward even partial agreements.

"The time has passed," he says in an analysis circulated in the Congress, "when any sane leader could consider nuclear war of any sort as anything but a potentially terminal event for his nation. Wars have a dynamism of their own, and nuclear war, no matter how it started, is most likely to end in the mutual destruction of both sides."

Secretary of Defense Schlesinger takes a different point of view. In "Defense Department report FY73," he says:

"Not only must our strategic force structure contain a reserve for threat-

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ening urban-industrial targets, the ability to execute a number of options, and the command-control necessary to evaluate attacks and order appropriate responses; it must also exhibit sufficient and dynamic countervailing power so that no potential opponent or combination of opponents can labor under any illusion about the feasibility of gaining diplomatic or military advantage over the United States."

This is obviously a subject of such complexity, usually written in jargon of such density, that even the anxieties of the experts are far from clear.

For example, Senator Henry Jackson of Washington seems to fear that the President might ask too little from the Soviet Union in order to get a short-range political advantage at home, whereas Ambassador Smith seems to think that Mr. Schlesinger may be expecting too much from the Soviet Union and raising fears that would block compromise and get us into a new "counterforce" race with the U.S.S.R.

"Entering a counterforce race . . ." he says, "would also be a waste of resources that are in short supply. Certainly U.S. strategic forces should be kept up to date for their deterrent mission, but I question whether the security of the United States would be increased by entering into or even by 'winning' a 'counterforce' race. . . ."

Whatever the logic of these contradictory arguments, it is fairly obvious that all participants consider the controversy fundamental to the security of the American people, and second, that the American people, haven't the vaguest idea of what the issues are or even that the controversy is going on.

In this situation, a strong case for the President's mission to Moscow can be made, but it would be helpful if he would clarify his new targeting policy and the issues for decision before he goes to the Soviet capital.