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NUCLEAR DOCTRINE AFFIRMED BY U. S.

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Schlesinger Calls First Use of Atom Arms Possible

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WASHINGTON, July 1—Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger affirmed today that the United States had not renounced the possible first use of nuclear weapons if faced with defeat in a conventional war.

Contending that nuclear weapons represented an important deterrent, Mr. Schlesinger said, "If one accepts the no-first-use doctrine, one is accepting a self-denying ordinance that weakens deterrence."

He chose a breakfast meeting with a group of reporters to clarify United States policy. Some confusion has arisen since President Ford, at a news conference last week, was asked a question that Mr. Schlesinger observed was based on the "false premise" that the United States had consistently disavowed the first use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Ford was ambiguous in defining policy. In the opinion of some Pentagon officials, Ron Nessen, the Presidential press secretary, has contributed to the confusion by some of his statements.

Policy Called Consistent

Going back for more than 25 years, Mr. Schlesinger said, "the United States has consistently refrained from disavowing the first use of nuclear weapons." During that period, he observed, first the Russians, then the Chinese were pressing for an international declaration committing the nuclear powers against first use.

The basic American policy remains unchanged, he said. But he noted that since the doctrine of massive retaliation in the nineteen-fifties, there has been a gradual evolution in policy to "raise the nuclear threshold" through increased conventional military capabilities, thus, he said, reducing the threat of immediate recourse to nuclear weapons.

The hope, he said, is that the United States will not be driven to use of nuclear weapons. But, he said, "under no circumstances could we dis-

vow the first use of nuclear weapons."

His emphasis was on possible first use of tactical weapons, thousands of which are stationed in Western Europe. For the United States even to hint that it would refrain from using the weapons, he said, would have "a devastating effect" on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which, he said, depends psychologically and militarily on nuclear weapons.

Under the new doctrine of selective strikes against Soviet military installations, Mr. Schlesinger also did not foreclose the possibility of first use of strategic weapons although he described this as a "very, very low probability."

Mr. Schlesinger, as did Mr.

Ford last week, took issue with assertions by former Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird that the Soviet Union had violated provisions of the 1972 agreements limiting defense and offensive strategic weapons.

While some ambiguities have arisen about Soviet actions, Mr. Schlesinger said, "as yet there is no demonstrated proof of Soviet violations of the agreements."

The Russians, he said, have been "inclined to poke a little more in the gray areas than we would prefer," such as in the deployment of larger intercontinental missiles. But overall, he said, they have been respectful of the broad outlines of the agreement, "not only in the letter but also in the spirit."