

NUCLEAR OPTIONS STRESSED BY U.S.

Schlesinger, Explaining the
Missile Strategy Anew,
Calls Flexibility Key

By JOHN W. FINNEY
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WASHINGTON, Jan. 24—Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger offered a new explanation today of the Administration changing nuclear strategy, emphasizing that its objective was to give the President greater flexibility in choosing possible targets in the Soviet Union.

At a news conference at the Pentagon, Mr. Schlesinger discussed at length what he had first disclosed officially in a speech on Jan. 10—that the United States had begun re-targeting some of its strategic missiles so that they could strike at Soviet military installations as well as cities.

The change, he said today, does not mean a significant alteration in the present list of targets. For, he said, does it necessarily imply an expansion or improvement in the present arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Rather, he said, the objective is to give the President "greater flexibility and selectivity" to use the present system to attack either Soviet cities or military targets. These would be bases, airfields or missile concentrations.

This explanation was considerably different in emphasis from the one he gave in the Jan. 10 speech he delivered before the Overseas Writers Club, a group of foreign-affairs correspondents.

The speech was widely interpreted at the time as suggesting that the Administration was moving from the prevailing concept of mutual deterrence, based on retaliatory attacks force strategy, or one of striking at military targets. It was largely to counter such interpretations that Mr. Schlesinger spoke today.

Mr. Schlesinger said at his news conference today that the Administration was not seeking to develop "a major counterforce capability"—although he held open that possibility if no permanent arms limitation was reached with the Soviet Union.

He also acknowledged that even before the change in strategy, which was ordered by the Administration last summer, some missile warheads were targeted to strike Soviet military installations. The present "hypothetical mix" of weapons aimed at cities and military installations is "quite ample," he said, and the Administration has no intention of directing warheads away from urban targets.

Increase in Deterrence Seen

What is needed, he said, is improved command-and-control abilities as well as conscious changes in thinking on strategy so that the President can choose more readily among nuclear options.

Mr. Schlesinger also made clear he hoped the explicit statement that there had been a change in such thinking would have a further deterrent effect on the Soviet Union.

"By changing our targeting doctrine and explicitly doing so in view of deficiencies that have been discovered in the pre-existing doctrine," he said, "we feel we are enhancing deterrence and consequently we reduce the risk of war."

Mr. Schlesinger sidestepped a question on whether the Administration intended to develop more accurate missiles and larger warheads that could be regarded by the Soviet Union as "missile silo killers." Rather, he offered the observation that the size and character of the American nuclear force would be "primarily paced" by the force structure developed by the Soviet Union.

He expressed hope that the Soviet Union would show re-major counterforce capability and would agree to a limitation on strategic arms in the discussion that resumes next month in Geneva. The Soviet leaders, he observed, have demonstrated "a measured degree of prudence when they arrive in a position which is fraught with risk for them."

During the 70-minute news conference, Mr. Schlesinger, commenting on Vietnam, said that on the basis of the present evidence, including that showing a reduced infiltration rate from the North, he did not expect an all-out North Vietnamese attack in South Vietnam.