

On the Perils of Brandishing Our Nuclear Arsenal

To the Editor:

The furor caused by the questions asked about President Nixon's motivation in putting U.S. military forces on worldwide alert hides a far more important issue: the wisdom of the decision.

There is the general assumption, reflected in your Oct. 27 editorial, that because the President's diplomatic and military tactics seemed to succeed in their intended purpose they were justified. Nothing could be a more dangerous conclusion for Americans or the world.

In the nuclear age, the brandishing of nuclear weapons during a near-confrontation between the superpowers cannot be justified under any circumstances. There can be only one nuclear policy and practice which has a reasonable chance of preserving humanity from incineration: extreme restraint in even the threat of the use of nuclear weapons.

Most wars start not from deliberately planned aggression but from miscalculation and from escalation of retaliatory action. If, among the nuclear powers, extraordinary care is not

taken to avoid escalation or retaliation against what are thought to be threatening acts of the adversary, the chance of human survival is slim.

In the Middle East crisis, the perceived intent of the Soviet Union to move its own troops into the battle zone unilaterally, if the United States did not agree to a joint military action to end hostilities there, was no justification for putting the U.S. military forces on a worldwide "precautionary alert," including the SAC nuclear-bombing squadrons. This is the very opposite of the extreme restraint that was called for.

The maximum response that was justifiable would have been to alert the appropriate forces which might have been called upon to move into the area with conventional weapons.

Secretary Kissinger's attempt to reassure the American people about the objectivity of President Nixon's decision to take such escalatory action was not reassuring but alarming. He stated that before the President arrived at its meeting the National Security Council had reached the unanimous conclusion that such action should be

taken. In other words, there was not a single individual present and willing to state with conviction the arguments against the placing of nuclear bombers on precautionary alert, with inevitable public and international knowledge that this was being done. All members of the Council were ready to advise the President that the alerting of nuclear forces was a proper diplomatic and military countermove to the Soviet communications and actions.

The apparent success of the Nixon-Kissinger countermove on the international chessboard is almost certain to make the National Security Council members and their subordinates—not to mention the press and the public—conclude that the proper way to deal with the Soviet Government under conditions of possible confrontation is to be tough, to brandish our nuclear arsenal.

If this inference is allowed to become set in the minds of our policymakers, it bodes ill for humanity.

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