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Our New Arms Strategy

"As now interpreted by a lot of people, the whole concept of 'assured destruction' has become a menace. The concept is that we can and must wait until the Soviets have broken the back of American strategic power, meanwhile relying on our own power of 'assured destruction' — which will simply mean the power to retaliate by killing a lot of Russian women, children and other civilians.

"Any President would have to be a criminal lunatic to go in for that kind of retaliation after the back of America's power has already been broken. The blueprint is all the crazier, since the Soviets will also retain a far greater reserve of destructive power than the United States, and they can therefore much surpass the United States in civilian homicide if they want to do so."

The speaker above quoted was the present Secretary of State, and the time was nearly four years ago. The belated quotation seems justified, even essential. This is because the impression has somehow got around that the basic strategic concept of this country is now being changed behind Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's innocent, unwitting back.

The impression is nonsensical, and not just because innocent and unwitting have never been adjectives that could be sensibly applied to any part of Dr. Kissinger. The truth of the matter is that Dr. Kissinger saw the need for junking the old strategic concept of "assured destruction" long before the actual junking was taken in hand at the Defense Department.

Because of the obvious defects in the old concept, so vividly described by Dr. Kissinger himself about four years ago, the work of defining and implement-

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ing a saner strategic concept was begun by James Schlesinger, shortly after he became Secretary of Defense. This was of course about a year ago. By now, results are beginning to be visible, but they are difficult to summarize because of the mythology that anti-defense lobby has wreathed around all these problems.

Take "first strikes." Nowadays, we Americans cannot possibly hope to regain our long-lost capability to destroy all of the Soviet Union's nuclear power with one swift first strike. The Soviet nuclear strategy, meanwhile, is forthrightly based on the need to strike first, if they ever strike at all, because of the immense advantages that striking first obviously confers in war.

Americans cannot be so forthright, because of the mythology.

Thus the revised U.S. strategic concept barely requires a U.S. capability to "initiate the use of nuclear weapons in the event of a sudden, massive assault on U.S. interests." In plainer terms, we have to be able to persuade the Kremlin that we may just possibly hit Russia in this dire manner, if the Kremlin goes far enough to hit us in other ways — for example, by cutting

the oil jugular of the whole west that now runs through the Persian Gulf.

Unless surrender is preferred, it is hard to think of any logical alternative to the foregoing new concept. The steps needed to implement the new concept are also being taken—but here again we run into difficulties created by the fashionable mythology. "Counterforce" is now a dirty word, although "counterforce" merely means killing the enemies' weapons instead of killing enemy civilians.

In this latter restricted sense, the United States is now going over to a "counterforce mode." In other words, to begin with, the thoroughly nasty and unforgivable targeting of the period of "assured destruction" is also being mercifully junked. The new aim is to cripple Soviet strategic power, rather than to destroy the Soviet urban population.

This is not an easy change of targeting systems, for practical reasons arising from the shocking upset in the overall Soviet-U.S. balance of power that is now taking place. Urgent improvements in U.S. missile accuracy and power of U.S. missile warheads are both needed in the near future. A beginning is also needed on a much more powerful U.S. missile, nearer to the Soviet's SSX-18.

All these things are now provided by the new U.S. defense budget, in a small way, but with enough time in hand to have all these things in place before the Soviets deploy their immense panoply of new more powerful missiles. Yet that rather obviously leaves some problems concerning the next round of SALT, which will be examined in a further report.