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SCHLESINGER'S BLUFF

Any law enforcement officer will confirm that you should never point a gun at a criminal unless you are prepared to use it. Bluffing with weapons, loaded or unloaded, is a risky business.

Yet this is precisely what Secretary of Defense James Schles inger did recently when he called a breakfast meeting with repor ters and allowed himself to be quoted as saying that the United States could "conceivably" be the first to use strategic nuclear missiles against the Soviet Union.

The rationale for this saber rattling was explained as a desire to worry the Soviets about the "unpredictability" of Ameri can use of nuclear weapons. The real reason was probably a desire to reassure the millions of Americans who have been alarmed by reading this month's Reader's Digest in which former Secret ry of Defense Melvin Laird stated that the Soviets now "can outfire us in destructive [nuclear] power by two-to-one."

Secretary Schlesinger's policy of "speak loudly but carry a little stick" may mislead some Americans, but it won't fool the men in the Kremlin. They know that Schlesinger was only bluffing with empty threats on whch he cannot deliver and will never try.

If Secretary Schlesinger should ever be so irresponsible as to push the button for a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union, it would be suicide for the United States. New satellite warning systems provide almost instantaneous notification of any missile
launch.

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If Schlesinger's missiles were heading toward Russia, Brezhnev and Company certainly are not going to sit quietly and wait for them to hit. The Kremlin will surely launch its own missiles capable of killing some 150 million Americans, and Schlesinger's missiles will hit only empty holes. The Soviets might even be tempted to preempt if they think that Schlesinger is irresponsible enough to threaten the use of our nuclear forces.

Secretary Schlesinger has said time and time again that the United States is not seeking a disarming capability against the Soviet Union, and. that our missiles have neither the yield nor the accuracy for a first-strike. Unless you have the capability to disarm the other side, it makes no sense to strike first, and it would be suicide to launch a partial-disarming strike against a more powerful enemy force that would still have enough missiles remaining to wipe out our cities.

Schlesinger should retract his dangerous bluff, and instead issue the credible warning that, if the Soviets ever launch a first-strike against us, then we will launch a retaliatory strike immediately up_pn our receiving triple proof of their launch through our satellite warning system, our over-the-horizon radar, and our BMEWS radar.

Most Americans think that this is now our strategy, but there is plenty of evidence in statements by both Kissinger and Schlesinger to make the Soviets doubt our will to retaliate. It is important to make our policy clear well in advance of any war plans the Soviets might be tempted to make.

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