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THE BIGGEST NEWS STORY

The most dramatic news event of the last decade is not any political election, not exchange visits of foreign heads of state, not Watergate, not space flights, not theVietnam War, not even New York City's impending default. It is the shift in the stra tegic balance of power from the United States to the Soviet Union.

A decade ago, the United States had a nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union of eight to one. Today, the Soviets have clear superiority. Russia even has a navy with twice the combat ships we have.

Yet, despite its overriding importance to our political inde pendence and economic future, the dramatic decline in American military power is treated as a non-event by the national news media. Even the unmentionable escalation in venereal disease rates is more discussed than the new American military inferiority. The question is, why don't we hear, see, or read about it in the news?

Although some people explain this silence in terms of an alleged anti-defense pro-disarmament bias of the press, it is more probable that there are other causes.

The first explanation is the compulsion of the news media to report only news that happened today -- not yesterday, not last week, and certainly not last year. The media are highly competi tive in reporting the latest scoop, and they hate stale news like the devil hates holy water. However, the shift in the strategic

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balance is not reportable as something that happened in a day or a week. The long lead-times of sophisticated weapons make it an event that can be seen only from the long view of a year of five years or ten years.

If you were to plot on a graph the statistics of the steady, ten-year U.S. decline md the consistent, ten-year Soviet in creases in nuclear striking power, you would find that they pat tern into two straight lines which form a big X. Time is on the side of those who use it, and the record is clear that the Soviets are using it.

The second reason is the way Defense Secretaries use bureau cratic doubletalk to conceal their failure to keep up with the Soviets. For example, their favorite phrase "we have retained the option" translates into "we are doing nothing now and won't even make a decision until some time in the future."

The third explanation is that our news gathering facilities are geared to report what <u>is</u> happening -- and they do not easily adapt to the challenge of reporting what is <u>not</u> happening.

The big news about the shift in the strategic balance is that we have not added ICBMs or nuclear submarines to keep pace with the Soviet building program. How do you report on missiles and submarines that are no built? Non-productions and non-launchings simply don't make good pictures on television.

The result is that the American people are left in almost total ignorance of the most important news event of the decade the shocking change in the relative strength of the two nuclear super-powers.

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