I!S8 to the NEWS

by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618, **Alton, Illinois 62002**
Phone: **618-462-5415**

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SOVIET INTE TIONS?

Defense Secretary Harold Brown stated recently that the Soviets are building four new types of intercontinental ballistic missiles, but he doesn't know "why the Soviets are pushing so hard to improve their strategic nuclear capabilities."

At a Congressional hearing in February 1969, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird was asked why the Soviets were engaged in a massive buildup of strategic weapons, especially their huge 25-megaton SS-9 super-missile. He responded with a valid and commonsense explanation: "The Soviets are going for a first-strike capability. There is no question about that."

Our nation's top policy makers, who were then President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, did not agree with Melvin Laird's assessment of Soviet intentions. No one has ever revealed what sort of reprimand was administered behind closed doors, but shortly thereafter Laird changed his tune. The next time he was asked the same question, he meekly replied that it was not hi$ function to interpret Soviet intentions.

If it is not the function of the Secretary of Defense to interpret the meaning of a huge buildup by the Soviets of nuclear weapons that are capable of incinerating scores of millions of Americans, then whose is it?

President Nixon and Henry Kissinger admitted that the answer was beyond them. In the 1972 State of the World Report, issued under Nixon's name but admittedly written by Henry Kissinger, they "made it perfectly clear" with an unambiguous assertion: "We cannot know the intentidns of Soviet leadership."

The evidence is overwhelming that Laird was correct in his original explanation of why the Soviets are building huge strategic weapons. The

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megatonnage of their missile force is now estimated as at least ten times greater than ours. The Soviet SS-9, for example, has 25 times the megatonnage of our Minuteman missile.

But assuming that Defense Secretary Brown is truthful when he says he doesn't know why the Soviets are building four new ICBMs, then the only rational U.S. course of action is to base our defense on Soviet capabilities rather than on their intentions. That means building a defense posture superior to Soviet weapons, rather than speculating as to how they intend to use them.

The four new ICBMs that the Soviets are building all have a greater throw-weight than those they are replacing. Three have MIRV warheads.

Yet the U.S. response has been to ignore Soviet capabilities as well as intentions. In the last several months, Secretary Brown has halted production of our Minuteman III ICBM and terminated a related program to improve the accuracy of our Minuteman II. President Carter announced his surprise decision to halt pro duction of the B-1 bomber. Our Navy today has fewer ships than at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, and there are no plans for any significant additions.

If Defense Secretary Brown doesn't understand Soviet intentions, and has chosen to ignore Soviet capabilities, then our only recourse is to invite the American people to join the decision-making process.

One of the outstanding military writers in the country, Brigadier General Edwin L. Black, U.S. Army (Ret.), urged open public discussion in a recent article that won second prize in the annual Institute of Naval Proceedings Essay Contest. He suggests a review of our national strategy by the Nati.anal Security Council in private sessions to be conducted concurrently with a Congressional review in open hearings.

The synthesis could be a national policy that would meet our national security requirements of the coming decade, and also have the support of the American people.

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