

worldview

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ANOTHER LIVELY CORPSE

Among the commencement addresses that evoked wide and serious response this year, Secretary of Defence McNamara's was not the least. So strong, in fact, was the reaction in some quarters that it might be more accurate to say that he *provoked* response. Few responsible journals of opinion in France and England, for example, failed to comment on his speech—and frequently in highly critical terms. Yet a few short weeks after the address was delivered, C. L. Sulzberger, writing for the *New York Times* from London, asserted that its life had been short.

"The nuclear defense theory, based on counterforce rather than countercity strategy, and first enunciated by Secretary McNamara, produced confused reactions in Europe. It is now dead."

Granted that Mr. Sulzberger offers sound reasons for his judgment, we are nevertheless going to have this corpse on our hands for some time and it is very likely that it will on occasion show surprising signs of life. The fact that Mr. McNamara's thesis was rejected out of hand by high offices in Europe does not change the basic premises from which his argument derived.

Among the points he made in outlining current official views on the role of nuclear forces in the strategy of the alliance, two attracted particular attention:

First, "to the extent feasible, basic military strategy in a possible general nuclear war should be approached in much the same way that more conventional operations have been regarded in the past. That is to say, principal military objectives, in the event of a nuclear war stemming from a major attack on the alliance should be the destruction of the enemy's military forces, not of his civilian population."

Second, "limited nuclear capabilities, operating independently, are dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence, and lacking in credibility as a deterrent."

The first of these two points states an opinion that comes down heavily on one side of a debate

that has by now developed a respectable history, a debate between those who argue for "counterforce strategy" and those who favor a "stabilized deterrent." And this first point is intimately related to his second, for the "counterforce" strategy demands more than the "limited nuclear capabilities" which England and France now possess.

If logic and the demands of military strategy alone were to decide the case, Mr. McNamara would probably have won a number of new adherents, even in Europe. Not, surprisingly, however, the already complicated problem is further complicated by political questions, by questions of the prestige and status and power of America's allies. It does not seem quite as clear to them as it does to many Americans that the United States alone should be at the center of a centrally controlled campaign against hostile nuclear forces. There is even some expressed fear that if West Europeans were to trust themselves absolutely to the sheltering umbrella of U.S. nuclear forces they might be tying their fortunes to the U.S. in many ways that would, in time, prove distinctly disagreeable.

The present impasse, like others that have receded into history, may well be overcome by the advances of technology. It is, for example, becoming increasingly easier for Western Europe to construct a respectable deterrent of its own. The more possible this becomes the more likely is some compromise between the position outlined by Mr. McNamara and that occupied by his influential critics.

There are already urgent suggestions from within our government that we relax our stand on extending nuclear aid and information to France, and there is increasing discussion of a NATO nuclear force. But the most agreeable compromise that might be reached must still wrestle with the questions of "counterforce" or "countercity strategy." There is little reason to think that it will be easy to lay to rest such a lively corpse.