

letters

Physics Today nuclear war survey

I read with great interest the outcome of your survey (July, page 52) on, among other items, how to prevent a nuclear holocaust. You did not ask me, but if you had, I would have suggested: "In case of war, surrender!"

I think that recently the situation has changed to such an extent that while in the past surrender was, or would have been, wrong, this is now not necessarily so. Two reasons have convinced me of this:

It is true that it was a blessing for mankind that Hitler was defeated and probably also that Japan was defeated. However, nowadays our lives no longer depend on heroes who are prepared to sacrifice theirs. It is the survival of Mankind that is at stake right now. How is it that while most of us are ready to hand over our money if threatened at gunpoint, many proudly proclaim: "Rather dead than red!" I think, by the way, that they mean: "Rather you dead than me red!" But even that is no longer an option. Present-day nuclear potential is ample enough to exterminate mankind; certainly in the long term. The amount of plutonium available right now is measured in thousands of tons. The long-term fatal dose is nano- or even picograms. Its decay time is some 25 000 years. What hope is there for Mankind under these circumstances?

The second reason for me to opt for the "coward's solution" is that the present Russian threat is not quite as bad as, for example, Hitler's. While life under Russian supremacy is far from enjoyable, one could not honestly consider it as a threat to collective survival. Hitler wanted to kill all Jews; this was a real threat to the survival of the Jewish race. It is true that the absence of a democratic government might open the way for a madman like Hitler, but today the survival is threatened by armaments, not by Communistic doctrine.

I think many would agree with me but fear that if the Russians knew that we would not "stand firm" they would occupy Western Europe. Well, I don't think they would, but what is much more important is that we have seen in the past (Vietnam) that it is not always

possible to simply stop a war if that is what is wanted by the public or even by the president. It is therefore preferable that it is understood in time by everybody that it is the survival of Mankind that is of predominant importance.

HENK WIND

Founex, Switzerland

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More on free publication

Yuval Ne'eman's letter in July (page 13) pleads the case of David Bergman under the guise of freedom of the press. I have tolerated your political leaning so far with regards to a specific ethnic group but it appears that PHYSICS TODAY is becoming a political forum to plead the case of Jewish scientists in the world. Ne'eman, who does not have any regard for human rights of others, is now trying to influence the policies of a private corporation through your publication. His appearance on television to defend the attacks of the Iraqi Nuclear reactor was deplorable. Your journal has written pages about Sakharov, but not a single word deploring the brutal murder of an Egyptian physicist who was a victim of Israeli terrorists in Paris a year ago. PHYSICS TODAY should deal only with the scientific aspects of physics and some other journal should tackle the political aspects and grievances of people like Ne'eman. If you want to be concerned about matters like this, then give every ethnic group an equal opportunity at air their views, otherwise stick to physics alone. I want to emphasize that I have no Arab leaning in this matter.

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Despite Yuval Ne'eman's contrary opinions, I cannot help but believe that Schlumberger-Doll has extended more intellectual freedom to David Bergman than Israel has to Iraqi nuclear research. "Pre-appeasement" sounds softer than "pre-emptive."

DENNIS E. WILLEN
Houston, Texas

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