Such an attack — or even just the potential for such an attack — has a number of destabilizing consequences. As Lebow points out, "by directly threatening important command centers, they compress warning and response time, thereby intensifying the incentive to rely on LOW [launch on warning], LUA [launch under attack], or preemption."[133] In other words, the likelihood of an accidental or inadvertent nuclear war as the result of a "false alarm" or a mistaken assessment of the adversary's intentions is increased. Paul Bracken notes as an additional danger the likelihood of a move to "greater degrees of pre-delegated authority to use nuclear weapons."[134]

Finally, apart from the threat to strategic command and control, forward-deployed systems of this type threaten the survivability of the so-called "air-breathing" leg of the strategic triad (i.e., long-range bombers), by enabling a surprise attacker to hit air bases before the aircraft have had a chance to take off. RAND analysts Alan J. Vick and James A. Thomson note that "alert" Strategic Air Command (SAC) B-52 bombers (30 per cent of the fleet, the others being even more vulnerable) require six minutes of warning for the crews to run from their shelters, board the aircraft, and take off, while "optimally located, forward-deployed SSBNs can put weapons onto targets in less than six minutes." As a result, in their estimation, "Soviet SSBNs forward deployed to within 2,000 kilometers of the American coast would be able to attack several SAC bases simultaneously, destroying the alert force on the ground or within seconds of takeoff (by means of an area barrage of nuclear weapons exploded in the air)." When the time to actually transmit the warning and make the decision to order the aircraft into the air is taken into account, according to Vick and Thomson, "any SSBN within ten minutes flight time would threaten air bases. Indeed, two SSBNs (each equipped with sixteen SS-N-18 missiles, for example), 1,000 kilometers off each coast, would together be able to attack every air

133. Lebow, *op. cit.* note 130, pp. 179-180.

134. *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, pp. 244-245.