

**I. INTRODUCTION**

'Who is ahead?' is perhaps a crude question, but when applied to the strategic arms race, it is the one most often raised. For example, Secretary of Defence Weinberger states that the comparative data found in Soviet Military Power "highlight even more vividly the magnitude and the dimensions of the threatening challenge posed by Soviet force deployments".<sup>1</sup> Even if the other side is not judged to be ahead, it is typical that the need for new strategic weapons systems is explained on the grounds that these systems are needed to counter new developments on the other side, or to maintain the stability of deterrence.

An interesting recent example of this pattern was the use of the term "window of vulnerability" to describe the threat posed by the Soviet SS-18 and SS-19 missiles to the land-based Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) force of the United States. Shortly after taking office, President Reagan warned that "a window of vulnerability is opening", and alleged that it would "jeopardise not just our hopes for serious productive arms negotiations, but our hopes for peace and freedom."<sup>2</sup>

In 1983 the Scowcroft Commission, appointed to examine the claim that the Soviets were ahead in ICBMs and to resolve the controversies about the MX missile, refuted the more alarmist views but expressed continued concern about the Soviet strategic built-up. Pointing out that more than half of the Soviet ICBM's had been deployed since the last U.S. ICBM (the Minuteman) was deployed in 1980 the Commission commented:

"The Soviets now probably possess the necessary combination of ICBM numbers, reliability, accuracy and warhead yield to destroy about all of the 1,047 US. ICBM silos using only a portion of their ICBM force. The U.S. ICBM force now deployed cannot inflict similar damage even using the entire force."<sup>3</sup> The Scowcroft Commission recommended, therefore, the

<sup>1</sup> Soviet Military Power 1985, DoD, Washington D.C., p.5

<sup>2</sup> President Reagan, Press Conference, October, 1981

<sup>3</sup> Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces (the Scowcroft Commission), Washington, April 1983, p. 4