

STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

August 11, 1977

Dr. Henry W. Kendall  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
1208 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Dear Dr. Kendall:

Thank you for your letter of July 29th and for inviting me to join in your Declaration on the Nuclear Arms Race.

I am certainly sympathetic to the thrust of your effort and am generally associated with these kinds of views. However, more often than not I have regretted signing petitions and similar statements, and as an alternative would prefer to use my own devices, media of expression and contacts in articulating my views, even when, as in this instance, there is very little indeed to quarrel with. However, please let me give the matter a bit more thought, and I will respond further if I can make an exception.

My main observation at this time is that it is really quite futile to attempt to influence the Executive branch directly through the public media. On the other hand, in this case particularly, it may be Congress that needs to be educated about the issues and about the extent of public support for an arms-control-oriented policy approach. If you accept that logic, you may wish to reconsider whether to emphasize the specific recommendations you make under part III. There is some danger that you will become embroiled in the details of such proposals to the detriment of your principal effort and to the goal of sustaining support for other initiatives being forwarded by the Administration.

For example, I, myself, would have put more specific stress on mutually agreed limitations on missile-test firings, rather than rely on that outcome as a by-product of your recommendation 2. Conversely, I would want to scrutinize the detailed wording (not at all the spirit!) of that recommendation 2 before espousing it in a formal public declaration. Nothing would be a greater setback to the building of mutual confidence in the reliability of arms control agreements, than to have them so ambiguously worded that they lead to confusion of intention, disillusion and rejection later on. The problem of defining what would constitute a "field test of a new Soviet weapon" is a formidable one, and there ought to be no intrinsic ambiguity about the ground rules of steps we may unilaterally announce.

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You might wish to stress even more than you do that time is running out for verifiable strategic arms limitations: the technologies that are just now coming to fruition are precisely those that might negate the observability of the force levels on both sides. While I view the qualitative aspects of the arms race as more serious than the quantitative, a global context in which numerical verification has become doubtful may doom other efforts at dampening the pace of new technologies. It may just illustrate the point that I could not endorse your recommendation 2 without some (possibly difficult) formula or other source of reassurance that mutual observability would be sustained under its terms.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

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