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# Defense Report

AUSA



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## **Opposition to Plans for Care of Mass Casualties — It Is Unbelievably Naive**

The Department of Defense is attempting to assure the availability of 50,000 civilian hospital beds in the United States to augment the very limited capacity of military hospitals to handle mass combat casualties. The defense planners remember that the relatively small war in Vietnam taxed military treatment facilities to the breaking point and they have learned, too, from the experience of the Israelis and Egyptians during their 1973 war. There in the Mid-east desert all the firepower of the modern mobile battlefield came together for the first time, causing personnel casualties far exceeding any experienced in such a short span of previous conventional warfare.

The action by the Defense Department seems only prudent and yet there is open opposition from religious leaders and from an organization of physicians who see this kind of planning as an open invitation to engage in nuclear war. The Catholic Archbishop of San Francisco has urged Catholic hospitals not to cooperate with the plan and Physicians for Social Responsibility is critical on the grounds that the plan “. . . marks a step in its (DoD's) strategy of bringing the United States to a state of military preparedness for waging limited nuclear war overseas.”

What these opponents have failed to ask themselves, of course, is how they would react to a situation in which the armed forces were incapable of dealing with mass casualties, whether they were inflicted in conventional combat or in a nuclear exchange. How would the archbishop and the doctors react to the sight of planeloads of injured being diverted from one city to another in search of available treatment facilities? They would be hardhearted indeed to react any way except with sympathy and they would, at that point, probably pitch in to help as best they could.

Opposition to nuclear war is understandable. No one wants it, most especially the military planners in the Defense Department. No one wants an all-out conventional war, either. But should they occur, mass casualties will result. If clergymen and doctors oppose war they should join in the process of assuring peace, by providing an adequate deterrence to war, not opposing a sensible action to alleviate human suffering should our efforts to maintain peace fall short.