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Nike Start May Hinge On Talks With Russia

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The United States probably will delay a start on an anti-missile system until it discusses with the Soviet Union a possible agreement to prevent a new round in the nuclear arms race.

This was strongly indicated yesterday by American officials who declined to be otherwise identified.

They said that the John-

son Administration probably would hold off a budget decision on the Nike-X ABM system until sometime in January, or even until February, pending a diplomatic exploration with the Kremlin.

The Soviet Union already is beginning deployment of an ABM system to stop incoming American missiles in case of war. A similar American system to protect this country against Soviet missiles would cost \$30 billion or more over a period of five years.

The American officials who discussed this new diplomatic move said they hoped to find an answer to what they termed the frightening prospect of a new and massively expensive round in the arms race which, in the end, probably would not alter the balance of power between the world's two nuclear giants.

Just how the diplomatic approach will be made was not disclosed but several channels are readily available.

American and Soviet arms control experts are currently meeting at the United Nations. The new American ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jewell E. Thompson, will arrive in Moscow the first week in January and will have access to the top Kremlin leaders. And the 18-nation U.N. disarmament subcommittee will reconvene again in Geneva on February 21.

President Johnson is known to have been agonizing over

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Nike Start May Depend On Russians

the ABM problem ever since American intelligence reported that the Soviets were deploying such a system.

Word of this was first made public on Nov. 10 by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. He reportedly is loath to ask a go-ahead on construction of the Nike-X, the American ABM system long under development, and would prefer to increase offensive missile strength on the theory that the best defense is a strong offense.

But Congressional pressures to start Nike-X, backed by a united Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon, make it difficult to hold off much longer if indeed the Soviets are going ahead. Administration officials differ on how far the Soviets have yet gone but none disputes the intelligence reports that some sort of deployment is under way in European Russia.

The massive spending necessary for a Nike-X system would add to the Presidential budget woes for the next fiscal year and for several years afterwards.

Conferences With Johnson

The decision to delay appears to have been the result of Presidential conferences with McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and other top officials over the past few weeks.

The officials who spoke yesterday said that a maximum effort ought to be made to see if the two nations can avoid going down the costly ABM route, especially if the end result would be no change in their rival power positions.

They pointed out that the idea of a mutual freeze on offensive and defensive weapons had been raised at the Geneva talks as far back as January, 1964. But they said that the American suggestions for such an across the board freeze did not bring much response.

Question of Separation

Other sources have indicated that there never was any effort to bring about a freeze on ABMs alone. Whether the new effort will be to separate the ABM problem from that of offensive missiles was not clear yesterday.

The most the officials would say was that the United States would like to somehow amend its previous Geneva proposals to give special emphasis and urgency to the ABM problem. But they added that the problem of these defensive missiles, nuclear tipped as are the ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles), cannot be separated from the control of offensive weapons.

And control of both ABMs and ICBMs would require mutual inspection within both nations, something the Soviet Union has always rejected as equivalent to espionage.