

'These Days By John Chamberlain

McNamara Left-Handedly Admits Error

RIGHT AFTER the Republicans racked up some good gains in Congress at the polls, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara put in a big political stop-loss order. He journeyed all the way to the LBJ ranch to announce that there was "considerable evidence" that Soviet Russia was building and deploying an anti-ballistic missile system, and that he had a way to negate it.



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His suggested antidote was not to counter with an anti-missile missile system of our own, but to arm our Polaris submarines, at a cost of \$2.6 billion, with a bigger atomic missile, the Poseidon, which would be able to penetrate the new Soviet defenses. Presumably the present Polaris missile isn't good enough.

To anyone with a long memory, the McNamara performance amounts to an admission that a great mistake has been made by Administration policy planners. For ever since 1961 the Pentagon has been proceeding on the assumption that if the United States refrained from developing an anti-missile missile system, the Russians would refrain too.

Apparently we have made a terribly bad guess, and McNamara is left to pick up the pieces as best he can lest the whole business recoil upon the Democratic Party when certain nosy Republican Congressmen begin to ask questions.

THE IDEA that the way to keep the Russians from building an anti-missile missile was to let our own anti-missile program languish has been attributed to Professor Jerome Wiesner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Whether this was the Professor's own brainchild, or whether it was fathered by a score of people in the unilateral disarmament lobby, is a good question.

But Professor Wiesner served as President John F. Kennedy's special adviser on technology at the time that the decision was made not to go ahead with an anti-missile missile network. During this period Wiesner was arguing that "one of the potential destabilization elements in the present nuclear standoff is the possibility that one of the rival powers might develop a successful anti-missile defense.

"Weisner was all for keeping the so-called "NikeZeus anti-ballistic missile in a state of "research and development," not in deployment. It was anything to keep the Soviets from being

scared into putting on full steam ahead to develop and deploy an anti-missile grid that might negate the threat of the U.S. Polaris submarine.

The policy of not provoking the Russian bear in the anti-missile missile business has flopped by Secretary McNamara's own admission. To save face, the Secretary is falling back on the old football axiom, that the best defense is a good offense.

When Congress reconvenes, Secretary McNamara may well be on the hot seat when called upon to explain his post-election political stop-loss order.

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