

CHARLES BARTLETT

McNamara Visit to Moscow Studied

The Russians show such marked reluctance to face the full implications of their plans for an anti-missile defense that the remarkable step of a mission to Moscow by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara is being contemplated.

Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin met last week with U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson on President Johnson's proposal that both nations agree to postpone the costly construction of ABM systems. Kosygin did not close the door on the idea but he dwelt at length upon the difficulty of dissuading his people from any practical step to increase their security.

Kosygin had previously dropped a public hint of his government's negative reaction to the ABM moratorium at a press conference in London. A few days later a Pravda columnist came out with an indorsement of the Johnson proposal but Soviet officials took prompt pains to notify Westerners that the piece had been written without official sanction.

McNamara's eagerness to go to Moscow is inspired by signs that the Russians are badly hung up on the ABM question. It is a crucial aspect of the military-civilian struggle over the allocation of resources. Its sensitivity was indicated by the sudden demotion of the commander of Soviet air defense, Marshal Sudets, after he disclosed last April that the ABM system exists only in the model stage.

One of McNamara's prime missions has been to poke realism into the illusions that begird the facts of nuclear life. His plain talk persuaded the West Germans that they do not need nuclear weapons to survive. He has managed

thus far to keep Congress from rushing into the deployment of a \$40 billion ABM net.

The urgent need for realistic talk in Moscow is evident in the confused public debate over whether the ABMs can supply Soviet cities with complete protection against enemy attacks. Two significant Soviet generals asserted flatly on Feb. 20 that they could. One said that missiles fired at the Soviet Union would never reach their targets.

Marshal Chuykov, head of civil defense, straddled the issue when he spoke Feb. 23 on Army-Navy day. He said an opportunity exists "to exclude completely or to cut down considerably" the losses from a missile attack. But the defense minister, Marshal Malinovsky, was even more restrained when he spoke the same day. He said the defense forces insure the destruction "of any aircraft and of many rockets of the enemy."

It is inevitable that the Kremlin would be gripped by this debate because security has been the keystone of Soviet foreign policy since Khrushchev's ouster. All the past adventurism has been sublimated to diplomacy aimed at stabilizing relations with the rest of the world. The success of this diplomacy has made the Russians more sensitive than ever to the Sword of Damocles represented by American nuclear superiority.

The injection of McNamara into the Moscow debate would be unconventional but illuminating. No one else can expound as convincingly the doctrine of "Assured Destruction Capability," which means simply that the United States intends to preserve her potential to inflict unacceptable

destruction in the face of any foreseeable kind of missile screen.

No diplomat can argue with as much force that a total defense against missiles is impossible despite the advances in radar and computers or point as knowledgeably to the multiple means by which penetration will be facilitated after the screen is up.

The divergences in Moscow are better understood by examining the ones in Washington. The Joint Chiefs argue that a missile screen must be built because it will cut down American casualties if the Soviets fail to adopt more sophisticated methods of penetration. McNamara argues that their penetration methods will inevitably be adapted to the challenge of the screen, just as ours will.

But McNamara may not secure an immediate chance to impress the Soviets with the futility of their ABM plans. A visit by him to Moscow would be embarrassing to the Russians as long as the war is on. Peking would loudly claim that the Russians and Americans were conspiring against Ho Chi Minh.

The State Department has little taste for the McNamara mission. Its officials are wary of interlopers in East-West negotiations. They argue that Malinovsky, McNamara's counterpart in Moscow, is not a member of the Politburo so he would not be meeting with the leaders who will make the decision.

But Kosygin told Thompson that his government is prepared to hold discussions on the issue and perhaps in the course of these, McNamara will have the opportunity to make his case.

© 1967