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To Build or Not to Build Our Anti-Missile Dilemma

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 14—

Like street gangs headed for a face-saving rumble, the United States and the Soviet Union are at the brink of a tragic and costly new atomic arms race.

It's a race neither side really wants. It started for reasons neither clearly understands. It will be fought at enormous cost on both sides, and it will probably end with the combatants having gained nothing.

For its part, the United States is trying to avoid a race to deploy ballistic missile defense systems by initiating a face-saving mutual agreement. It appears to be the only alternative between an astronomically expensive new arms race and a dangerous upset in the East-West strategic balance.

EFFORTS PRESSED

Already U.S. officials are seeking to talk the Russians out of going into full-scale deployment of an anti-missile system. The efforts will continue next month when disarmament talks renew at Geneva.

Until these efforts are given a chance, President Johnson has decided to hold off production of the U. S. Nike X missile system, estimated to cost \$3 billion to \$30 billion. In recent months the stresses and strains over his decision have been a source of more stress and strain within the U. S. government than nearly anything except Viet Nam.

PRESIDENT'S WORDS

The President's decision to hold off building the system was reflected in his State of the Union message this week. "We have the duty to slow down the arms race between us, in both conventional and nuclear weapons and defenses," he said. "Any additional race would impose on our peoples, and on all mankind, an additional waste of resources with no gain in security to either side."

Intelligence sources say Russia has deployed an anti-missile system around Mos-

cow, and has built a sophisticated anti-aircraft system at Leningrad, which can be modified for missile defense. These sources believe the U.S.S.R. is going through the same agonizing process that the United States is following in deciding whether to go ahead with a full-scale system.

The Defense Department has also conceded that the Russians are building ICBMs at a faster rate than has been estimated. They have increased from 300 last May to estimates of 400 to 450 now.

When the United States reaches full deployment of the nuclear-tipped missiles now operational, it will have some 1,000 Minutemen, 54 Titan IIs, and 656 submarine-launched Polaris missiles.

U. S. SUPERIORITY

This gives the United States unchallenged ICBM superiority. Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara says there is no question they can reach their targets. Moreover, the secretary, convinced that the best defense is a strong offense, will ask Congress next month for funds to begin development of the Poseidon missile.

But the fact remains that the United States has no defense against the most awesome weapon ever invented by man—the nose cone of an ICBM plunging down from space at 18,000 miles per hour.

Instead of defense per se, the country relies upon its massive offensive capability—the unquestionable power to absorb a first strike and still launch an attack sufficient to reduce the Soviet Union to rubble.

The Russians' movement toward deployment of an anti-missile system has been widely interpreted here as an attempt to at least give the world the impression that they are strategically equal to or ahead of the United States.

AMERICAN FEARS

If such an impression is unchallenged, it is feared, the U.S.S.R. might be encouraged to attempt more excursions

such as their placing missiles in Cuba.

Surprisingly, and for reasons such as this, the State Department is probably more in support of building the Nike X than is the Defense Department. Some of state's military experts believe the Russians decided shortly after they were forced to withdraw their missiles from Cuba to develop an anti-missile system.

Even though the Russians apparently have not made a final decision on building their anti-missile system, there is reason to believe they will.

They have invested far more than the United States in development of fallout shelters and have erected an extensive anti-aircraft system.

Neither the Soviet government nor the Russian people have forgotten the U-2 incident of 1960.

PUBLIC PRESSURE

If there are domestic pressures on Soviet leadership to go ahead with building an anti-missile system, they cannot approach those which will be exerted on the U.S. government.

Surveys in recent years show that a majority of Americans believe that this country already has an anti-missile system. This will un-

doubtedly change during the coming months, for missile defense will be one of the most spirited issues before the Congress.

Sen. Richard Russell (D.-Ga.) and Rep. Mendel Rivers (D.-S. C.), chairmen of the armed services committee, have made it clear they will attempt to get the Nike X program going.

The decision has been held off so far because McNamara has been able to successfully argue that a deployment decision would be premature. He concedes that no foreseeable defensive system could give complete protection against the kind of saturation attack the Soviet Union is capable of launching.

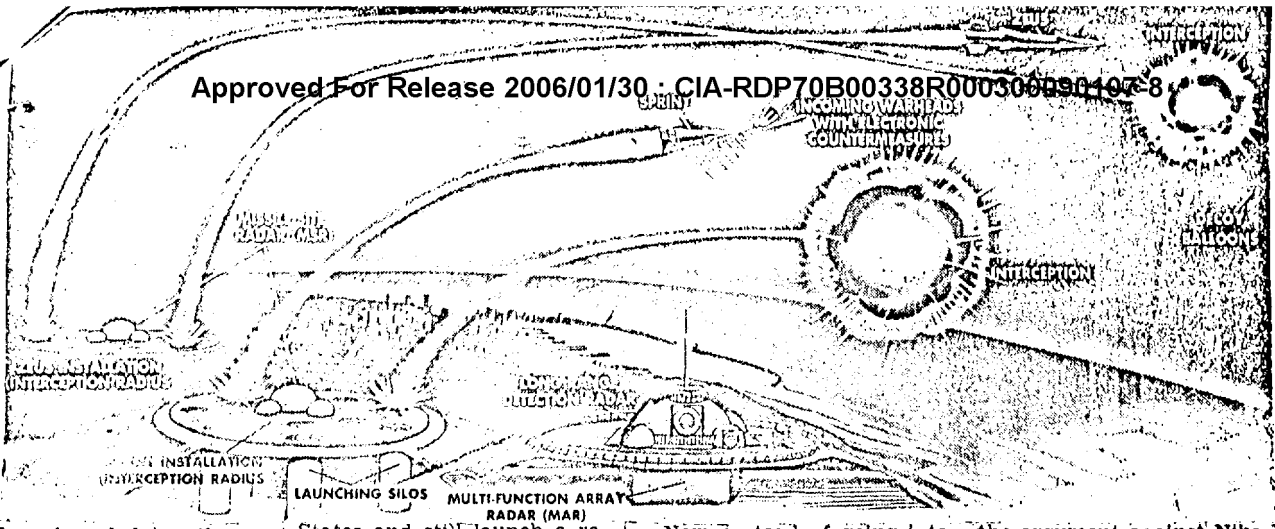
GROWING SUPPORT

His opposition in Congress has been largely confined to those who oppose him on virtually everything. But now that the Soviet Union is moving toward a similar system and China has tested a missile-launched atomic weapon, many middle-of-the-road congressmen are expected to line up on the side of Nike X.

Anticipation of furious debate was probably the reason the Johnson administration chose to reveal in early November that it has evidence of Soviet anti-missile development.

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By acknowledging the apparent Soviet effort and announcing plans to deploy the Poseidon missile, the Administration may have blunted the argument for building the Nike X, which has cost some \$2.3 billion in research and development so far.

Apparently for Soviet as well as domestic consumption, high government officials have also publicized the desire for an agreement with the Soviet Union to stop the race.

DEFENSIVE AIMS

Presumably, some direct contacts already have been made. There have even been reports that McNamara might go to the Soviet Union for talks on a "freeze" on defensive missiles.

The chances of any such agreement with the Viet Nam war in the background are highly questionable. Yet State Department sources point out that the war did not deter the United States and the U.S.S.R. from agreeing on the treaty banning weapons from space.

Optimists even see hope for agreement on a treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons to nations which do not possess them now. They see a significant shift in the Soviet position in recent months.

Some of this thawing of the Soviet position has been attributed to the demise of the multi-lateral force which the United States proposed as a means of giving its NATO allies a role in strategic defense.

Those most opposed to building the Nike X to defend American cities and missile sites say if the Soviet Union is building a bona fide anti-missile system, its intentions may be purely defensive.

According to this argument, the U.S.S.R. is stepping up its ICBM force and working toward a missile defense to enable the country to withstand its first strike from the United

States and still launch a retaliatory attack.

The opposing thesis is that the Soviet motivation is offensive. As this argument goes, Russia hopes to develop offensive strength to destroy all its targets in the United States, then intercept the missiles.

OFFICIALS PUZZLED

However, the argument which seems to have more followers in the government here is that Russia would attempt to give the illusion anyway that it is on par with the United States strategically and would use this in whatever way it could for political leverage.

U.S. officials are puzzled as to where the Soviet Union is getting the money. Though the Soviet Union's gross national product is less than half that of the United States, it has been spending about 80 per cent as much as the U.S. in space science and exploration.

If the Soviets do decide to go ahead with their anti-missile program, U.S. sources predict, it will be paid for by a cutback in farm programs and consumers goods.

The economic burden of building an ultra-sophisticated missile defense would have a major impact on the U.S. economy as well.

One can see without much imagination a never-ending stream of mayors, governors, and congressmen pressuring the White House and the Pentagon to extend the defense system to their area.

CALL FOR A START

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, as they have for the last several years, are recommending getting started with an operational missile defense system.

A few years ago they wanted to go ahead with the Nike Zeus system. Developments since then have shown that the United States would have been disastrous.

Now, instead of going into full-scale deployment, the top military leaders are advocating a very "thin" system, which would cost \$3.5 to \$5 billion over a five year period.

Admittedly, the only kind of enemy attack it could handle would be an accidental strike or an attempt at some sort of nuclear blackmail short of all-out atomic war.

Should the White House and Congress approve this, the first operational hardware would be in place about 1972, at the earliest. Presumably the first targets to be defended would be areas where American ICBMs are hidden in silos.

COST IN BILLIONS

A thicker system, capable of defending against a "primitive" kind of attack which China might be able to launch several years from now would cost about \$10 billion over five years.

Estimates are that a full-scale national defense, which might save as many as 100 million lives from an all-out Russian offensive would cost \$20 billion to \$25 billion, possibly far more.

It would include an extensive fall-out shelter system in addition to missiles.

The tragedy of it all is that either country would retain the ability to reduce the other to a wasteland.

Only an accident or an irrational enemy could start such an exchange. The United States believes today that the Soviet Union is a rational enemy, it aware of the insanity of an atomic war.

RED CHINA PROBLEM

China is another matter; yet Peking has shown great ability to act rationally while talking irrationally. Its passion to become a nuclear power has made it more likely that the United States will build Nike X.

Another significant change in the United States is that

the argument against Nike X on technical grounds has largely disappeared. Even the most stubborn skeptics have come to conclude during the last several months that it is possible to identify warheads amidst a cloud of decoys and shoot them down.

From all appearances, the Soviet Union has come to the same conclusion.

HOPE FOR WAY OUT

Underground nuclear tests in both Russia and the United States during recent months have been directed at developing anti-missile warheads.

It is to be hoped that the world's super powers will find a way out during the first months of 1967. If they do not, an arms race on a chilling new scale will be irreversibly under way.

If the war in Viet Nam prevents the United States and the Soviet Union from discussing this rationally, that will be the greatest of all the tragedies the fighting in Southeast Asia has caused.