

McNamara, A Late 20th Century Man

By Marquis Childs

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WHATEVER THE END of the race between reason and suicide, the speech that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara delivered in San Francisco to the United Press International editors will be a bench mark of sanity. What he is undertaking may be impossible. That is to construct a limited antibal-
listic missile system against the threat of China in the '70s while preventing the headlong rush of the military, the munitions makers, the snipers and the criers of doom in Congress, the politicians looking for an emotional issue, into a new and perhaps final round of the nuclear arms race.

In a telling phrase he speaks of the "mad momentum" intrinsic in all nuclear weaponry. It is just this mad momentum that with the full backing of the President, McNamara is opposing. He puts the cost of a limited ABM system at \$5 billion. The cost of an expanded system is for a starter \$40 billion. And that would be only a start, since pressures would follow for deep shelters and the whole apparatus of a beleaguered, garrison state.

In spite of his limitations on the side of political understanding — perhaps even because of those limitations — McNamara is a man of the late 20th Century. He knows that in the nuclear age there is no absolute security. An expanded ABM system would merely cause the Soviet Union to put greater effort into a nuclear offensive. That offensive, McNamara is saying, could never under any circumstances be sufficient to destroy America's capacity for a retaliatory second strike. In just the same way America's offensive can never prevent a Soviet second strike.

HERE IN ROBERT OPPENHEIMER'S phrase are the two scorpions in a bottle — two blind giants locked in combat on the vast stage of mankind's future. Therefore, the heart of McNamara's speech is an appeal to the Soviet Union for talks that would at first limit and later reduce both offensive and defensive strategic nuclear forces.

The most persuasive argument of those who would rush into a heavy ABM system is that the Soviets have for several years been assembling such a system apparently intended to protect Moscow and possibly also Leningrad. But the background of this development, put alongside an earlier controversy here at home over the ABM, is revealing, and McNamara might well have gone into it if his carefully reasoned speech had not without it run longer than he liked.

built up for an ABM system known as Nike-Zeus. The principal prophet and propagandizer for Nike-Zeus was Lt. Gen. Arthur G. Trudeau, chief of development and research for the Army beginning in 1958 until his retirement in 1962. Trudeau's view very nearly prevailed. Today the Nike-Zeus system is considered obsolete, having been replaced by Nike-X. If the United States had started the Zeus system the billions going into it would probably today be written off. That is the tragic history of so many defense billions—the early warning line is a noteworthy example—in an age of incredibly swift technological change.

But the Soviets, judging by intelligence reports, are installing an equivalent of the Zeus system. Why should they, with the ever-mounting demand of the Soviet people for a share of the good things of life, be spending billions on an obsolete system that will not in any event be an effective defense? The answer from those with the greatest knowledge is simply: "Their General Trudeau won."

THROUGHOUT McNAMARA'S carefully reasoned analysis of the nuclear dilemma is the pervading sense of its fantastic complexity and of the difficulty of conveying the real meaning of this complexity in terms of the total death of a society and a people to the average individual. With the absolutes of secrecy in a totalitarian state, the citizen must be a fatalist who learns early to ask no questions. In our own country the overwhelming horror of the threat is hardly conceivable and this with its complexity induces a kind of apathy and indifference. That, in turn, breeds a response to emotional political appeals, "Well, let's let 'em have it and get it over with."

In the end, says Secretary McNamara, the root of man's security does not lie in his weaponry. In the end the root of man's security lies in his mind. What the world requires in the 22d year of the atomic age is a new race toward reasonableness.

This is the man of the late 20th Century. Whether he can convince men with their minds made up out of the last century is the undetermined X of the years ahead.