

A Survival Matter

Despite Senator Fulbright's characteristic misgivings, there is ample justification for President Johnson's reported decision to go ahead with the building and deployment of a so-called thin or limited antiballistic missile system.

In terms of economic cost and defensive effectiveness, there is a large body of argument against the value of such a system. But our country cannot afford to gamble on the matter; it cannot afford to rely solely on the deterrent force of its considerably superior power, as of today, in the field of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The Red Chinese now are building up a nuclear arsenal of sorts, and in the early 1970s—especially if the Red Guard mentality still obtains—they may have enough missiles and madness to try to heap atomic devastation on the continental United States. That is one of the factors that explains why

Chairman Russell of the Senate Armed Services Committee and many other knowledgeable Americans have been quick to hail the move to create a national ABM line whose initial "thinness" could be fattened rather quickly, if necessary.

This move, of course, might have been averted if the Russians had shown any interest in our government's efforts to put a freeze on ABM development. The Kremlin, however, has turned a deaf ear to American proposals for such a freeze. It has proceeded, instead, not merely to narrow the gap between its ICBM arsenal and ours (including missiles with multiple warheads) but perhaps also to establish an expanding system of defense against such missiles.

In the circumstances, it seems a simple act of sanity—if anything may be regarded as sane in an arms race—for America not to let itself be left behind in this deadly field.