

# White House Weighs Expanding Sentinel Defense

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 12 — The Johnson Administration is postponing a decision on whether to use the planned anti-Chinese missile defense system to protect United States missile sites against Soviet attack.

The purpose is to keep the door open to East-West disarmament measures.

To keep the domestic advocates of an anti-Soviet ballistic missile defense at bay, the Administration is cloaking this postponement in considerable semantic confusion.

At a relatively small additional cost, the "thin" antiballistic missile defense system that the Administration has decided to build against the emerging Chinese missile threat could also be adapted to protect at least some of the Minutemen intercontinental missile sites against Soviet attack.

The anti-Chinese system, now given the name of Sentinel, will be designed to provide "area defense" for the entire United States, using relatively long-range Spartan missiles to intercept any incoming Chinese missile warheads in space.

The defense Department has maintained that the Sentinel system would be incapable of contending with a massive missile attack such as the Soviet Union could launch, but it has raised the possibility that the system could provide additional protection for the deterrent force of Minutemen missiles.

Thus, the elaborate radar system required for the Sentinel system could also be used to track incoming Soviet missiles.

Then, by adding the relatively short-range Sprint missiles around the Minutemen bases, it would be possible to provide some "point defense" for the missile deterrent force against Soviet attack.

But the Administration finds itself caught between foreign and domestic political considerations in deciding how far to go in openly promoting the Sentinel system as a defensive move against the Soviet Union.

If it openly gives an anti-Soviet purpose to the Sentinel system, the Administration is fearful that it will complicate chances for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and a missile "freeze" agreement with the Soviet Union as well as provoke another upward spiral in the nuclear arms race.

But if it does not utilize the

Sentinel system, then the Administration will run into criticism on the domestic front from members of Congress concerned about the growing size of the Soviet intercontinental missile force.

This political dilemma, according to officials, explains in large measure the ambiguity in the Administration's public position on whether the Sentinel system will be given a secondary role as a defense against Soviet missiles.

When the decision to build the Sentinel system was announced in September, the Administration left the impression that it planned an anti-Soviet role for the Sentinel system.

Thus Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, in outlining the subsidiary "advantages" of the Sentinel system, said in a speech Sept. 19 in San Francisco:

"The Chinese-oriented ABM [antiballistic missile] deployment would enable us to add as a concurrent benefit a further defense of our Minutemen sites against Soviet attack, which means that at modest cost we would in fact be adding even greater effectiveness to our offensive missile force and avoiding a much more costly expansion of that force."

Mr. McNamara was more emphatic in assigning an anti-Soviet role to the Sentinel system in an interview a week later with Life magazine.

Noting that the Russians "have been building up their strategic missile forces," Mr. McNamara said:

"We had no choice but to take some additional steps to maintain the adequacy of our own deterrent. We considered a number of alternatives—adding more missiles, a new manned bomber, or even a new strategic missile system.

"We reached the conclusion that one of the most effective steps we could take, and the

one least likely to force the Soviets into a counterreaction, was the deployment of an ABM system which would protect our Minuteman sites, so that our own deterrent is not diminished."

Administration officials hint that the McNamara interview was hastily prepared and inadequately coordinated before being cleared for publication, with the result that it went too far in seeming to give an anti-Soviet motivation to the Sentinel decision.

The Defense Department then sought to clarify the situation in a speech by Paul C. Warnke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs on Oct. 6 in Detroit.

Emphasizing that the Sentinel system was directed against Communist China, Mr. Warnke said that the proposed ABM deployment "poses no possible threat to the Soviet deterrent," does "not signify in any way a change in our attitude toward the Soviet Union" and "need lead to no acceleration of the Soviet-American strategic arms race."

He emphasized the Administration's continuing interest in reaching agreement with the Soviet Union for a limitation on the numbers of offensive and defensive nuclear missiles.

Then last week, in testimony before a Congressional Joint Atomic Energy subcommittee, Paul H. Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Dr. John S. Foster Jr., Director of Defense Research and Engineering, suggested that for the present at least no anti-Soviet role was intended for the Sentinel system.

"The deployment of the Sentinel permits us any time within a year to make a decision on whether or not we want to defend the Minutemen silos," Mr. Nitze said.

"You have not yet [made

that decision?]" Representative Craig Hosmer, Republican of California, asked.

"No, we have not taken that step, no," Dr. Foster replied.

But then today, in response to inquiries, the Defense Department seemed to return to the original suggestion that an anti-Soviet purpose was planned for the Sentinel system.

Asked to clarify the seemingly contradictory statements, the Defense Department offered the following statement:

"The Sentinel system planned includes the use of Sprint missiles around certain Minutemen sites. The decision as to when the incremental defense for Minutemen should be deployed does not have to be made at this time."