



CONGRESSMAN'S REPORT

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Preparing for Peace--II

Are We Headed for a New Arms Race?

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life.

--John F. Kennedy

Congressmen are elected to cast votes for their constituencies. Since 1961 I have cast several hundred in each of the four Congresses in which I've served, and I expect to do the same in this, the 91st Congress. Most are important votes; a few are trivial. But in each Congress there are two or three which are more than important; they represent crucial national decisions with long-term implications for the future of the country and the world.

I believe historians will record that one such vital decision was made on a vote we will be taking in the House of Representatives in the next few months. These critical votes are never easy, and this one is particularly hard because it involves scientific, military and political judgments of the greatest complexity.

The issue is: *Should the United States spend the many billions of dollars necessary to construct an anti-ballistic missile defense system?*

At the present time I'm convinced the right answer to that question is NO. But the vote I cast will not be "my" vote; it will be the vote of the 540,000 people I represent. In this report I'm going to try to set forth my reasons for coming to this tentative conclusion. If you agree with me, please let me know. If you disagree, say so and show me where you think my logic fails.

SHAPE OF THE DEBATE

Intelligent, well-informed national political leaders, including President Nixon, Senator Richard Russell, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and others sincerely believe and argue that construction of this complicated and expensive system is important to our national security. They are supported by a number of competent and respected scientists.

But other national political leaders -- equally intelligent and informed -- believe the ABM would be a colossal mistake. They include Senators John Sherman Cooper, Stuart Symington, Mark Hatfield, Charles Goodell, Edward Kennedy and many more. And they are supported by an even larger assemblage of eminent scientists, including *all* the top science advisors to Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson.

As your Congressman I have devoted a great many hours to reading the arguments, meeting with scientists, debating with my colleagues, and honestly searching for the right answers. And ultimately, with your help, I will participate in this great decision.

Here is what advocates of the ABM contend:

** Our lead in nuclear weapons is being threatened by a new Russian buildup, including a small ABM system around Moscow.

** Unless we have an ABM system by the mid-1970s, the Russians will have the capacity to hit us with a surprise "first strike", destroying our capacity to retaliate.

** It is better to "err on the side of strength."

** The Chinese are less rational than the Russians. In spite of certain retaliation they might be tempted to attack the United States.

I have weighed all these arguments and have reached these basic conclusions:

** If there were some feasible way to *guarantee* or make highly likely our ability to shoot down a nuclear attack, I would support it regardless of very heavy costs.

** In this nuclear age such security is most probably not attainable.

** If we build the ABM, *we still run risks*. In my judgment, the risks of nuclear war will be *greater*, not *less*.

** The best hope for America and the world is to reject the increasing militarization of our society (and, indirectly, the Soviet society), to turn back from arms races and adventures like Vietnam, and to give more attention to our own desperate problems before the frayed fabric of our own society begins to unravel completely.

ONE PIE -- MANY TAKERS

In [my first newsletter in this series](#) I described the opportunities and choices that lie ahead for the Nixon Administration, the Congress and the country if and when the

Vietnam War ends. The resources now going into that effort can be re-directed in various ways. They can go into the solution, or at least the alleviation, of our many domestic problems. Or they can go into new armaments and, just possibly, a new arms race over which we will have little control.

The other day Senator Russell said, *"There would be little merit to a course that would win a war against poverty in our backyards if we jeopardized the security of our very home."* And Rep. George H. Mahon, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, struck a similar note when he said, *"The social programs are all right, but if we don't have adequate defense what good are they?"* I think we can anticipate from these comments that a very strong case will be made for feeding a large slice of our post-Vietnam fiscal pie -- maybe all of it -- to new military programs.

Many defense programs have been deferred because of Vietnam -- new bombers, tanks, missiles, helicopters, attack submarines -- the list is long. But far and away the most controversial, and the most frightening in terms of a possible arms race with the Soviet Union, is the anti-ballistic missile known originally as the Nike-X, then the Nike-Zeus, most recently as the Sentinel, and now -- using the name assigned it by President Nixon on March 14 -- as the Safeguard. Current estimate of first-phase cost: \$6 - 7 billion (the equivalent of another 10% tax surcharge for one year). Like the Hydra of Greek mythology, this is a program that just won't die; you cut off one head and it grows two more; you disprove one reason for its deployment and it comes up with three more.

THE 'BALANCE OF TERROR'

The anti-ballistic missile is the product of a fear held by military planners for nearly a quarter-century -- a fear born on September 8, 1944, when the first German V-2 rocket streaked into London. No defense was ever devised for that weapon, which hit 1,115 targets in England over the next six months. Although by present standards it was exceedingly primitive, with a range of only 190 miles, it marked the beginning of a new era in warfare.

A weapon for which there is no defense -- this is a new and alarming situation. For arrows man built shields; for bullets, armor plate; for bombers, anti-aircraft guns and interceptors. When the stakes were heightened with the advent of atomic and hydrogen bombs, we built complex surveillance systems, such as our string of early-warning radar units in northern Canada. But for missiles, traveling at 15,000 miles an hour, there has been no defense until now.

Yet this has been a remarkable period in many ways. For approximately 10 years two great nations have had the means of destroying each other. Neither has had any defense from attack.

Each has had to rely on the threat of retaliation as a substitute for defense. In simple terms we have said to the Russians:

"We know that if you so decide you have the ability to kill 100 million Americans any day you choose, and there is no way we can stop you. But you must realize that even after you make such an attack, we will have the absolute power to strike back, killing 100 million or more of your people. And there is nothing you can do about *that*!"

And the Russians have said the same thing to us. So over the past decade we have seen our two countries build ("deploy") huge complexes of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), burying many of them in the ground (such as the 18 Titan missiles circling Tucson) and reinforcing them with so much concrete (called "hardening") that they are secure today from almost anything except a direct hit.

To the surprise of nearly everyone this unusual, defenseless situation (often called the "balance of terror") may have tended to make for a more stable world. How is this possible?

We should recall what happened in October, 1962, when President Kennedy learned that the Russians were installing medium-range missiles in Cuba. Although members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff urged him to go to war, he knew this could mean a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union; instead, he merely imposed a quarantine on Cuba and gave Premier Khrushchev an opportunity to halt his actions without losing face. His words were firm but not inflammatory. Faced with the possibility of a nuclear showdown, Khrushchev backed off. No one claimed "victory."

One wonders how that confrontation might have come off if neither nation had possessed a nuclear arsenal. Might a conventional war have started? One wonders, too, whether the existence of this "balance of terror" hasn't contributed to a moderating of positions in Berlin, the Middle East and elsewhere.

ENTER THE ABM

Into this picture comes the ABM -- the product of years of struggle by both countries for an almost impossible scientific breakthrough. Their goal: a missile that could track, hit and kill another missile. The Russians have actually built a small ABM system around Moscow. We started work on early stages of the Sentinel in 1967.

How successful have the scientists been in developing a defense against missiles? A measure of the effectiveness of Russia's ABM can be found in statements of our military leaders that they could destroy Moscow easily, in spite of it. And obviously one of the most serious questions raised about our proposed system is: Will the Russians be able to get through it as easily as we can through theirs?

An even bigger question is: if we build an ABM system, what will the Russians do in response? And if they respond, what kind of anti-anti-ballistic missile will we have to build *next*?

HOW IT WORKS

As an old Buck Rogers fan I'll have to admit that the Nike-Sentinel-Safeguard ABM system seems pretty slick. It involves highly complex, electronically-aimed radars which can spot an enemy missile about 4,000 miles (15 minutes) away, other radars which can guide our ABMs, and two kinds of defensive missiles.

The missiles include the *Spartan*, which carries a thermonuclear warhead (H-bomb) to be exploded in outer space, releasing neutrons and X-rays to melt and fuse incoming warheads, and the *Sprint*, an extremely fast rocket, also carrying a nuclear warhead, designed to destroy incoming warheads at the last minute in the atmosphere.

Unfortunately, the means an enemy can employ to cancel out our ABM system are pretty slick, too. They range from decoys to protective shields to nuclear explosions designed to black out our radar pictures.

Perhaps an even simpler device is merely to build enough additional ICBMs -- or warheads on existing missiles -- to cancel out our defensive weapons. That would allow the remainder of the enemy's missiles to get "home free."

Of course, all of this costs money. Whether it costs more to build a defensive system than an offensive response to it is a current argument among the scientists. I don't know the answer. But I think it should be obvious, even from this brief explanation, that deploying an ABM at this point might provide us about as much security as the Maginot Line did for the French.

WHAT ARE WE REALLY TALKING ABOUT?

There is an understandable reluctance on the part of the ordinary citizen -- or congressman -- to oppose a Presidential decision on national defense. "After all," the argument goes, "he is our President, and only he has all the facts."

Similarly, there is a natural reluctance to oppose the advice of our top military leaders. Most of us assume they know more about "these things" than we do, and therefore are better able to judge what measures are needed to provide for our defense.

This line of thinking is especially persuasive when the arguments of the President or his military advisers deal with matters that are highly technical and scientific, loaded down with the language of science and mathematics -- so involved, so complicated so specialized as to defy common, everyday "horse sense."

Now let me say that I am not one of those who lightly oppose the decisions of the Pentagon or the White House on military matters. Nor do I join those who make blanket denunciations of our "military men" and "military minds." The American military system has produced its share of aggressive, bellicose types, but it has also produced many men of breadth and conscience, men like Dwight Eisenhower, James Gavin, David Shoup and George Marshall. So it is not an easy thing to assess the recommendations of our nation's military and civilian leaders -- and then oppose those recommendations.

Yet we must keep in mind that our military chiefs can be wrong and our President, acting on their advice, can be wrong. A fine President who had "all the facts" and the very best of intentions led us into a tragic escalation in Vietnam. A great general, who thought he had "all the facts," advised President Truman that we could safely cross over into North Korea without bringing the Chinese into that war; it turned out to be a disastrous mistake. Our history reveals many other errors of this kind.

What I have learned in my years in public life is that, on the big questions:

-- You get all the expert advice you can -- military, scientific and diplomatic -- and listen to it carefully.

-- But never surrender your own independent judgment. If a proposition doesn't seem to meet simple, common sense tests of logic, be wary of it, regardless of the experts.

* * * *

Now, with this in mind, let's look at the main arguments being used by the advocates of a U.S. ABM system. The first one goes like this:

Unlike the Russians, Red China's leaders are so irrational that the certain prospect of nuclear annihilation is not enough to deter them from taking a good nuclear whack at the United States.

President Johnson gave this as his *major reason* when he made the original decision to start the Sentinel program in 1967. It is a curious argument which won't stand a close look. Here is what it says:

** We have 5,000 nuclear warheads. The Russians have 1,000. Six or eight years from now the Chinese just possibly *might* have 20 or 30.

** Knowing we will retaliate, the Russians with 1,000 missiles won't attack us, but the Chinese, with 20 or 30, will go right ahead. They will willingly sacrifice the lives of hundreds of millions of their people -- probably including the leaders themselves.

This line of argument made so little sense that President Nixon abandoned it as *the justification*. Yet curiously he continues to cite the Chinese threat as one of his three reasons for going forward with the ABM

Consider this paradox: Everyone agrees that the Chinese could not afford to direct *any* of their few precious warheads at our missile silos; they would have to aim squarely at our *cities*. But President Nixon has moved the ABM *away* from the cities (thus flatly contradicting the basis of the Johnson decision) and now wants to protect our *missile silos*. What kind of defense is this?

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The second argument for the ABM goes something like this:

While more rational than the Chinese, the Russians might be willing to sacrifice the lives of 50-100 million of their citizens in order to advance the cause of communism.

President Nixon said we need an ABM system to protect a portion of our land-based ICBMs from destruction by the Soviets in a first strike. It would guarantee our deterrent.

But wait a minute. This country has three separate systems to deliver nuclear bombs. First, we have 1,054 ICBMs emplaced *on land* throughout the United States. Second, we have 656 missiles, each with multiple warheads, aboard 41 nuclear-powered *submarines* moving about undetected for months at a time under the seas. And finally, we have 646 intercontinental *bombers* capable of delivering another 2,500 nuclear bombs to the Soviet Union.

Let's take the gloomiest possible view -- that the Soviets would really attempt to knock out our retaliatory forces in a first strike. If they used *all* of their 980 ICBMs against our land-based ICBMs, they wouldn't have enough to destroy them, *assuming 100% accuracy in hitting their targets*. (We assign only a 50% reliability to our own missiles.) And even if they were to continue building ICBMs, the likelihood that they could expect to knock out *all* of our land-based retaliatory forces in a first strike is almost nil.

But here is the crusher. No matter how big are their ICBMs (Secretary Laird thinks their new missiles have 20-25 megaton warheads; the Central Intelligence Agency reportedly believes they're only 5 megatons) or how evil are their intentions, the Russians can't use their missiles on our nuclear submarines. And with over 4,000 warheads poised aboard those subs we will continue to possess a retaliatory force of immeasurable strength the capacity to produce something like 4,000 Hiroshimas.

In other words, even if they could knock out all of our land-based missiles -- and somehow catch all of our bombers on the ground -- the Russians would know that a first strike from them would produce a rain of thousands of nuclear warheads upon their cities within the hour. Taking the most pessimistic view (from our standpoint) our second strike would result in the deaths of 50 - 100 million Russian citizens.

To put that in some context, historians tell us that it was the loss of 20 million people in World War II that prompted many of the convulsive actions of the Soviet Union in the years following the war -- tying up all the countries of Eastern Europe into a Communist bloc which would create a buffer between Russia and Western Europe. The trauma of that bloodshed -- roughly 50 times the loss we suffered in that same war -- has surely played a major role in forming Soviet foreign policy ever since. Are we now to assume that this same country would deliberately sacrifice the lives of 50 - 100 million of its citizens -- possibly including the leaders themselves -- in order to achieve some kind of "victory" for the cause of communism?

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Another main line of argument is this:

The Russians, while building gigantic missiles to knock out our striking force, want us to build a defensive system to reduce the effectiveness of their nuclear striking force, thereby saving them from themselves.

You might think I made that one up. But the truth is that proponents of the ABM system, including Secretary Laird, have gone to great lengths to convince us that the

Russians really have no objection to our ABM plans. They even quote Premier Kosygin as defending us from criticism on this score. In other words, they argue that building an ABM will enhance our relations with the Soviet Union and probably slow down the arms race.

Is this believable? In the next breath Secretary Laird tells us those new super-size Soviet missiles are "positively" intended as first-strike weapons. Let's see. We are to believe that a nation which is spending billions on gigantic nuclear weapons to hit us in a first strike wants us to build a system to prevent them from hitting their targets?

I thought about the Kosygin quote (he said, for example, that defensive systems are not the cause of the arms race) until I realized that if he had taken exactly the *opposite* position (denouncing a U.S. ABM system) *that* would be cited as a reason for our going ahead. (After all, you can't trust the advice you get from your enemy.)

* * * *

And finally we come to this argument:

In an international crisis our hand would be strengthened if it were known that in a nuclear exchange we would lose no more than 40 million of our citizens.

Here we get to the heart of the question. In building an anti-ballistic missile system we should ask ourselves: What are we trying to achieve diplomatically? How will this add strength to our foreign policy? If the answer makes sense, if it represents a gain worthy of the price, perhaps we should proceed. If it doesn't make sense, if it represents little or no gain, then obviously we ought to drop the whole thing.

In my three earlier statements I dealt with the arguments for the "thin" ABM system President Nixon has said he wants to build. With such a system it is assumed that the United States would lose 100 million or more people in a nuclear exchange. But most of the proponents of the "thin" system admit privately that they hope it will be expanded into a "thick" (\$40-60 billion) system to protect the cities. And since this is an important question that is inherent in *any* ABM deployment, I thought we ought to think through just what we would gain *diplomatically* from a total defensive missile system.

Let's suppose our "thick" system is now in place. What kind of protection will this give us? And what strength will this add to our bargaining position?

Even the most ardent supporters of the ABM acknowledge that, without any Soviet response in the development of new penetration aids, we would lose 20 - 40 million Americans in a nuclear war. Does this strengthen our hand? Can our diplomats talk tougher knowing that, instead of losing 100 million Americans, we will lose only 20 - 40 million?

Here is where common, everyday "horse sense" may carry more weight than all the "expert" counsel coming to us from a strictly military point of view. Does such a hypothetical reduction in casualties buy us any bargaining power? Could our President or Secretary of State knowingly gamble with the lives of 40 million Americans any more recklessly than he could with the lives of 100 million? If the answer is no, then what are we buying with the ABM?

THE THREAT OF AN ARMS RACE

We are being told that deploying the ABM will not start an arms race. But surely history gives us ample evidence that adversary nations always seek to keep up with each other. A study of the arms programs of Germany, France, England and other countries prior to World Wars I and II reveals the most precise and unvarying local-step relationships between and among them. Even the slightest upturn in Germany's defense budget was reflected in the same upturn in England's, and vice versa. Are we to assume at this late date that all the laws of the past have been repealed and that henceforth our enemies and potential enemies will let us steal the march on them?

It is surprising to me to see how often, in the highest places, this kind of naivete is displayed. Consider this statement by the founder of a Pentagon-employed "think tank" who favors the ABM:

"Here is what I deem to be the critical factor: most of the studies of performance of heavier deployment now possible of ABM defenses against major Soviet attacks -- *assuming that the Soviets do not make a major increase in their offensive forces in response to our improved defense* -- have shown that fatalities in the United States might be reduced from a figure in the range of 80 to 120 million down to perhaps 20 or 30 or 40 million." (Italics mine.)

Now who, in his right mind, can assume the Soviets will *not* make a major increase in their offensive forces in response to our improved defense? And if they do, *won't we have an arms race?*

In the same seminar another ABM advocate, a former member of the National Security Council, argued that our defensive missile system "might convince the Soviet leaders of the folly of challenging us further in the arms race and make them turn to

less threatening forms of competition." I'd like to know when, in all human history, a nation, locked in an arms struggle with another nation, decided it was going to give up the struggle. On the contrary, if there is one consistent lesson in history, it is that there is virtually no limit to what nations will spend to save themselves from defeat -- even more than their entire Gross National Product for periods of time. Europe's unpaid debts from World War I testify to that.

To assume that we can build a defensive system and not have our potential enemies attempt to overcome our defense with new and more costly forms of offense would seem to be terribly unrealistic. It would seem more realistic to assume that all the old rules pertaining to power struggles are going to continue to operate.

OUR MOST URGENT NEED -- ARMS LIMITATION

Surely, the greatest need of the United States today is not for a new anti-missile system, but for initiative in negotiating a reduction of the arms race. I'm sure this belief is shared by many leaders in the Soviet Union. Robert McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense, put it this way:

"It is futile for each of us (meaning the U.S. and the Soviet Union) to spend four billion dollars, or forty billion dollars, or four hundred billion dollars -- and at the end of all the spending, at the end of all the deployment, and at the end of all the effort, to be relatively at the same point of balance on the security scale that we are now."

Remarkably, the Soviet Union has shown interest in arms limitation talks. I am told its leaders were ready to start talking as early as last December. Yet we still haven't given them any real response, any real attention. Instead, we're giving priority to building an ABM system!

The argument is made that our decision to build the ABM will strengthen our bargaining position. Surely Russia's leaders know this is something we can do anytime we decide to; we have the technology, and we have the resources. What more do we gain by signing huge contracts to electronic firms to start building it?

NO WAY TO AVOID SOME RISK

There was a time when the United States could feel quite secure, protected by two oceans and great distances from all serious adversaries. But that time has passed, and there is no way to bring it back. Building a "thick" ABM won't do it; building a "thin" one certainly won't.

The truth is that, no matter which course we follow, we're going to face considerable risk. What we must decide is which set of risks is greater.

Without an ABM there's always the threat, however remote, of an accidental launch by another country. But what's to protect us from an accidental launch of our own -- one that would trigger a "nuclear response?"

With an ABM we face the risk of a world armed to the teeth, "up tight," nervous and "trigger happy."

Is nuclear war inevitable? If it is -- with all the horror that implies -- then I suppose we should do everything we can to limit the damage, knowing there is no way to save ourselves from horrendous loss. Doing so, we must anticipate that the Soviet Union will increase its offensive forces (the same thing both of us have done in the past) to restore its strategic position. And thus, what began as an act of defense will result in even greater force being directed against us -- just possibly converting a grievous loss to a monumental catastrophe.

On the other hand, if we hope that nuclear war can be avoided -- and I trust we all share such hope -- then it seems to me that efforts to limit damage are a step in the wrong direction. Instead of reducing the chances that Americans will die in some future nuclear war, they are likely to provoke further escalation of the arms race, thereby *increasing* our chances for nuclear annihilation.

A TIME FOR COLD WAR RHETORIC?

There has been a distressing element in much of the pro-ABM debate in recent weeks. This is an apparent return to the old rhetoric of the "Cold War," a portrayal of the world as two armed camps ready for war. I suspect that such a world-view, taken as a guide for our foreign policy, might turn out to be self-fulfilling.

Recently Senator Russell said that if nuclear war should come and the human race had to start over again with "another Adam and Eve," he wanted them to be *Americans*.

Americans? In a world of 3 billion unburied dead, what's an "American?"

WE HAVE A 'WAR' HERE AT HOME

I certainly think we should be alert to developments and be prepared to do whatever is prudent and rational to defend our country. I think we ought to continue scientific research on the missile defense problem. But I feel quite strongly that deployment of *either* a thick or thin system would be a grave mistake at this time.

Why? Well, last month I spent two days in New York City as a guest of Mayor Lindsay. With a small group of rural, suburban and western congressmen I took a close look at the staggering problems of that great city. I saw Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant at close range. And frankly, I'm frightened by what I saw.

We are one country, and most of us live in big cities. The blight, misery and crime of the nation's biggest population center ought to be a warning to all of us. If New York can't be governed, or made livable, then all of its cancers eating out from the center will someday reach the rest of us. What New York has may be merely an advanced case of deterioration already at work in the rest of the country. Unless we turn some of our attention, and some of our money, toward our own very serious problems at home, we may find, not just New York, but the entire country becoming ungovernable and unlivable.

There are, indeed, risks in any course we take toward Russia or China. But there are also extremely serious risks involved in this "war" we have here at home.

The senator asks what good it is to win a war against poverty and jeopardize the security of "our very home." Well, I ask, what good is it to have the most expensive security system ever devised if behind that wall of security American society is destroying itself?

With reason and restraint I believe we can avoid war and solve our most pressing problems. But with a panic emphasis on the need for "security" we might well accomplish neither. In the last 15 years we have spent *\$23 billion* on missile programs which were deployed and then *abandoned*. Already our defense spending is running 10% *over* all the individual income taxes paid by the citizens of this country. And in the third quarter of this year the United States will pass the trillion-dollar mark in military spending since the end of World War II. Looking at this record, it is my judgment that a decision now to start building an ABM system will eventually cost us more than Vietnam and leave us *nothing* to add to our "war effort" here at home.

NEXT -- OUR DOMESTIC CHOICES

As I indicated at the start of this series, I hope you will share your views with me on each of these subjects. I happen to believe that arms limitations should have greater priority than arms deployment, that our domestic "war" is more pressing than any prospect of war with Russia or China. Perhaps you see these matters differently. Let me know what you think.

In my [next newsletter](#) I will explore the various alternatives we might pursue in dealing with some of our domestic problems, assuming we *don't* get into a new arms race.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard Beale". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the "e" in "Beale".