The currently emerging debate on the desirability of the U.S. undertaking to deploy an anti-ballistic missile defense system (A.B.M.) threatens to become the next national defense issue to have an impact on national elections. In the past we have all become familiar with real or alleged "bomber gaps," "missile gaps," and "conventional gaps." The basis for all these "gaps" was a deep fear that potential enemies would subject us to nuclear blackmail, or that our own failure to develop other kinds of military forces would require us to respond to any emergency with an all-out nuclear attack.

In an earlier essay, I pointed out how our obsession with nuclear war had encouraged us to discount the significance of conventional war. I want now to turn to an examination of how specific groups in the U.S. have changed their positions in recent years on the subject of defensive weapons. In doing so I have borrowed the term used in 1960 by Henry Kissinger to describe the shifting arguments of the Air Force and Navy.

Kissinger pointed out that the Navy, in launching its political offensive in 1949 for the authority to build super-carriers, had attacked the strategic bombing concepts of the Air Force (then tied to the massive B-36 bomber) as "immoral," because the Air Force planned to attack only economic, industrial, and civilian targets. Carrier operations would be more precise, argued the Navy, and would conform more closely to Western attempts to distinguish between combatant and noncombatant targets. In the 1950's, of course, the Navy came up with the Polaris missile system while the Air Force developed the Atlas, Titan, and Minuteman. Because the Navy weapons were slightly less precise, it followed that the Polaris was somewhat more suitable for use against cities; the Air Force missiles, conversely, would be more useful against enemy missiles. So, in a sense, the Navy and Air Force each turned in the late 1950's to using the arguments used by the other in 1949—a process Kissinger described as a "stately minuet." A similar reversal of positions has accompanied the new debate over the A.B.M.

It is generally forgotten now that in the early 1950's, there were two distinct schools of thought as to how best to react to the emerging threat of a Soviet bomber force capable of launching a nuclear attack upon the U.S. by flying the "polar routes" across the northern regions and Canada. The principal arguments were advanced, on one hand, by the Air Force [primarily the Strategic Air Command (SAC)] and, on the other hand, by distinguished civilian intellectuals who saw some hope of defending the U.S. SAC adherents argued that no matter how much was spent on defense, it would be impossible to guarantee success; the Soviets could, if they wished, easily overcome the effort and could get enough bombers through the defense network to inflict unacceptable damage upon the U.S. Instead of wasting enormous sums of money on such a foolish effort, so the argument went, the U.S. should strengthen and enlarge SAC's ability to retaliate with a devastating nuclear attack on the Soviets. SAC's greatest need, then, was for more bombers, more advanced bases spaced around the periphery of the Soviet bloc, and a strengthening of the will to use the U.S. bomber force.

The other side of the argument was advanced by civilian study groups, principally Project Lincoln, which concluded that the U.S. would be well advised to develop semi-automatic evaluation and alerting systems, the associated early-warning radar nets, vastly improved communications systems, interceptor forces, the bases for the interceptor aircraft, and a new type of international command that would embrace the Canadians and the Americans. Backing up all of these, moreover, should be a civil defense system that would indeed be effective if all the other ar-

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arrangements provided enough warning time for the populace to take cover. Given the technological capabilities of that time, these defense proposals were indeed ambitious, involving detection, tracking, interception, and destruction of enemy aircraft as far north as possible of the populated areas of Canada and the U.S.

In many respects, the debate of the early 1950's was quite acrimonious. SAC adherents, for example, seemed to many to epitomize the worst aspects of military desires to prolong arms races through the development of larger and larger arsenals of offensive weapons. The SAC answer to military problems seemed to be merely that it should drop "big bombs" on all offenders. To the SAC people, the defense advocates seemed to be pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp that would have the dangerous effect of reducing the U.S. ability to retaliate (through a reduction in bomber appropriations) while providing an insufficient offset with an ineffective defense system. Given the fact that the debate occurred in what has become known as the "McCarthy era," it was easy to become quite heated about motivations. After prolonged discussion, and numerous committee meetings within government, the issue was resolved in favor of building the defensive system. The casualties of this skirmish, however, were indeed extensive. The people who advocated the new defensive systems were also those who had earlier opposed the decision to develop hydrogen bombs, and the outcome of all these arguments was the residue of bitterness which culminated in the Oppenheimer affair.

Now comes 1967 and another "stately minuet" which once again finds the positions reversed. This time the military leadership, on the basis of a unanimous position on the part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wants to proceed with some sort of A.B.M. system for the U.S., in the face of evidence that the Soviets have begun the deployment of an A.B.M. system of their own. The opposing arguments, advanced this time by civilian circles both inside and outside the government, largely echo the old Air Force assertions of the '50s; no matter how much we spend, so it is said, we cannot develop an effective defense against ballistic missiles. If both we and the Soviets deploy A.B.M. systems, each of us will have to build larger and more sophisticated offensive weapons, and the result will be only the same amount of national security but at enormously higher cost. The only solution, so it is argued, is to convince the Soviets that it is useless to waste their rubles on a useless system.

As in the 1950's, there are complicating factors which will tend to make the debate a more intensive one. The U.S. is diligently pursuing a policy of detente with the Soviets while they are deploying an A.B.M. system, rapidly increasing the buildup of their ICBM force, and providing a good bit of the wherewithal for the forces opposing the U.S. in Vietnam. The day-to-day costs of the current war, moreover, have increased the pressures upon the Johnson Administration to find something to cut out of the defense budget. The U.S. finds itself attempting to reverse a diplomatic position taken during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. We drew rather firm distinctions at the time between "offensive" and "defensive" weapons and, at least by implication, approved the latter.

The purpose of this essay is not to advocate at any length a particular resolution of the emerging debate on the A.B.M. I would argue, though, that it is dubious that the Soviets can be persuaded to abandon their historic reliance upon defensive weapons. It is equally dubious that the best time to call a halt to an arms race is when the defense shows some signs of overtaking or neutralizing the offense. In short, I reject the idea that thermonuclear weapons have become "ultimate," i.e., that it will never be possible to devise an effective defense against them. And the neutralization of ICBM's, moreover, ought to be an attractive objective. Yet the nuclear obsession seems to have imbued too many otherwise discerning individuals with an unreasoning fear of the unknown.

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