

# IN DEFENSE OF DEFENSE

*Robert A. Gessert*

Confusion and a deep division within the American public over the value of an anti-ballistic missile (A.B.M.) defense system was reflected in the mid-summer vote in the Senate to authorize about \$900 million for expenditure in fiscal year 1970 for President Nixon's Safeguard A.B.M. system.

During the debate that preceded the Senate vote, public and religious presses carried many articles that presented forceful arguments against the Safeguard program. These seem to boil down to two principal issues of moral concern: it is alleged, first, that the Safeguard A.B.M. would introduce a destabilizing element into the strategic nuclear balance just at the time we are attempting to enter negotiations with the Soviet Union for limitation on strategic armaments; second, that deployment of the Safeguard system would be wasteful of national resources needed for pressing domestic problems.

This paper argues, rather, that: (1) the Safeguard A.B.M. system will help assure the stability of the strategic balance in the 1975 period by ensuring our deterrent capability; (2) in comparison with other ways of ensuring our deterrent capability, Safeguard is neither wasteful nor a stimulant to the arms race; and (3) judged on its merits, Safeguard is a good investment in security that should in no way jeopardize domestic programs that are judged on their merits.

*Strategic Balance.* Since the early sixties, the U.S. has committed itself to maintaining the kind of balance between the strategic forces of the Soviet Union and those of the United States that makes a first use of strategic nuclear weapons by either side virtually unthinkable.

There are many ways — political, diplomatic, and military — for the U.S. to convey its conviction that a first strike by the U.S. is unthinkable and hence plays no part in our strategic intentions. Since Russian planners must consider our capabilities as well as our intentions, we have exercised self-restraint, buying far less of strategic nuclear forces than we

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Robert Gessert is with the Research Analysis Corporation of McLean, Va. This article has been adapted from a background paper presented at the 1969 Conference on Christian Approaches to Defense and Disarmament in Amersfoort, Netherlands.

could have bought. The dollars allocated to our strategic forces have actually decreased by about fifty per cent over the past decade as we have completed acquiring the strategic nuclear forces conceived to be adequate. At present these are designed to ensure that we could absorb a Soviet attack and still have sufficient remaining weapons — from our Minuteman forces, from our Polaris/Poseidon submarine-launched forces, and from our B-52 manned bomber forces — to deal a retaliatory strike against the Soviet Union.

While each of these strategic systems could have limited first strike use under some circumstances, we have deliberately emphasized and purchased those system characteristics that make them useful primarily in the second strike or retaliatory role. Moreover, we have devoted considerable money and technology to assuring that none of these systems would need to be launched in a hasty response to uncertain signals that we were about to receive an attack. That is, we have made these systems as invulnerable as seemed necessary and feasible to assure, to ourselves and to the Russians, that they could be withheld until it was clear that a deliberate attack had been launched on us.

This is a highly stabilizing posture since it (a) minimizes the temptation toward preemption by either side by showing the Russians that we would not be moved to strike first in a crisis out of fear that we would lose the capacity to do unacceptable damage to them if we suffered the first blow, and (b) clearly warns them that we have a credible capacity to retaliate for any nuclear attack they may be tempted to make. By not emphasizing defensive systems, we have tacitly conceded to the Russians a fully comparable retaliatory capability to deter us from a first strike.

*The Future Situation.* The question now is why should we be considering any A.B.M. system that would limit either the capacity of the Russians to attack and destroy our strategic forces or limit their capacity to do damage to our population and industry. President Nixon's Safeguard system emphasizes the role of protecting a portion of our retaliatory forces; President Johnson's Sentinel system emphasized the role of protecting our cities against limited attack.

In proposing the new program, President Nixon and his advisors have been guided by developments

that began to emerge in the latter months of the Johnson Administration. Intelligence on rapidly developing Soviet capabilities — particularly deployment of more SS-9 missiles than had been expected — has convinced the Administration that our strategic retaliatory forces will need more protection in the mid-1970's than they now enjoy. In particular, the Minuteman component of our strategic forces, while now protected by hardening, will become increasingly vulnerable as SS-9 missile accuracies improve in the mid-1970's.

The present hardening of Minuteman silos is near the limit of what is economically feasible with present technology and it is adequate for the current generation of Soviet strategic missiles. By 1975, however, the advantages in reducing Minuteman vulnerabilities by hardening will have virtually disappeared if the Soviet SS-9 missile accuracy develops in the way that seems probable, and if the missile carries either individual or multiple warheads of the megatonnage that is now possible. The basic alternatives for recovering the relative protection of the Minuteman are to go to superhardening (which is exceedingly expensive and highly difficult technologically) or to go to an active defense of present Minuteman silos by means of an A.B.M. system.

Of course, another way of assuring survival of some number of Minuteman missiles would be to expand the size of the Minuteman force sufficiently to offset Soviet improvements in missile accuracy and increases in the size of their SS-9 force. This latter alternative is one that seems to be particularly conducive to an arms race since the immediate alternative available to the Soviets would be to further increase the size of their SS-9 force and so on in an expanding series.

On the other hand, if active, local defense of all or part of our Minuteman force can protect some percentage of it against a significant number of attacking missiles, the incentives for the Soviets to increase the size of their attacking forces are less compelling. Moreover, protection of our Minuteman forces by an A.B.M. system need not appear threatening to the Soviets at all since A.B.M.s to protect our Minuteman forces would have no conceivable role in a first strike against the Soviet Union. The same thing cannot be said for an increase in the size of our Minuteman forces, which the Soviets may believe under some circumstances could or would be used in a first strike against them. If, therefore, assurance of survival of a significant percentage of our Minuteman forces is needed, protection by an active defense, that is, by an A.B.M. system, seems much the preferable course from the Soviet view as well as our own to the other

alternatives available to us — principally that of increasing the size of our Minuteman forces.

The legitimate question still remains whether we need to protect Minuteman if we have the Polaris/Poseidon and B-52 forces for retaliation. In general, it is prudent to do what we can to protect each of these forces — independently — that is, whether or not the others have suffered a diminution of their protection. As Admiral Rickover has recently stated, there is no reason to believe that the Polaris force is now in danger of being knocked out in a Soviet first strike. However, the protection of the Polaris force depends on the concealment and mobility it enjoys by virtue of being a submarine-carried force. This protection is highly vulnerable to a technological breakthrough in submarine detection and tracking capabilities — capabilities the Soviets are known to be working on intensively. The B-52 force is, of course, highly vulnerable on airfields. The protection of either of these forces into the 1975 period cannot be taken for granted.

Moreover, from the point of view of national command and control, they suffer in comparison to Minuteman forces, one significant disadvantage that derives from the same characteristics that provide their protection: namely: their mobility and remoteness make communications with them more difficult and more vulnerable. When the limitations of the submarine and B-52 forces are combined with sober estimates of their future vulnerability as retaliatory forces, a feasible protection of the Minuteman force becomes highly desirable.

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*A Strategic Defensive Option.* Besides this basic argument for the protection of the stability of the strategic balance, there is another moral argument deriving from the nature of the responsibilities shouldered by the President.

At present, with almost no active defensive system, any attack by any number of nuclear forces against the U.S. presents the President with only the choice of responding by retaliating with a portion of our strategic offensive forces or doing virtually nothing militarily. If a light nuclear attack were experienced, this means, first, that the U.S. would have to absorb whatever damage that attack would inflict and, second, that we would be sorely tempted to respond in kind, opening an almost inevitable escalation to more attack and counterattack. If on the other hand, the President has an A.B.M. capability that could neutralize a limited attack or minimize its effect on the U.S. retaliation would be by no means inevitable. As Paul Nitze has emphasized, in a crisis the President

must have defensive options at his disposal as well as offensive or retaliatory ones.

In fact, on national security, political, and moral grounds, the President's first alternative should be a defensive one capable of reducing damage to the U.S. and saving U.S. lives and lowering the risk to enemy lives by reducing the temptation or the need to retaliate. The Sentinel system in particular was designed to provide this capability. Because the Safeguard system uses the same basic components, though in different configuration, it would also provide this defensive option at least to a limited degree.

Some opponents of the Safeguard system, while arguing on grounds of national security and morality, have anomalously urged instead a doctrine of "launch on warning." That doctrine attempts to make a virtue out of lack of a defensive option; it is the virtual equivalent of preferring a doomsday machine. Deliberately to choose to make "doomsday" possible is to ask the entire world to be willing to pay too high a price for an alleged — but far from clear — improvement in stability derived from making nuclear war "totally" unthinkable.

It is quite conceivable that the first few missiles to attack the U.S. in a future crisis may be the result of an accident, a desperate miscalculation, or an attempt by some other power to precipitate a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the USSR. To the extent that nuclear war is possible at all it seems basic to national prudence that we should have a capacity to defend ourselves against a limited attack. On the other hand, it is almost beyond credibility that a limited defensive capability would seriously endanger a Soviet retaliatory capability and thus destabilize the strategic balance of mutual deterrence. As Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Robert Seamans, has said, the Soviets would have no incentive to increase their offensive forces if we deploy a limited A.B.M. system unless they wish a capability — or the appearance of one — to launch a first strike on us.

*Competition with Domestic Programs.* It may still be argued that whether or not Safeguard enhances international stability and national security, domestic programs cry out for our attention and our resources with an urgency that supersedes any safeguard against an unlikely nuclear war by deliberate attack or by accident. Unfortunately, there is no objective scale in terms of which we can rank our national priorities or determine what is a reasonable trade-off between domestic and national security expenditures. No one can deny that the allocation of resources among the demands pressing on our national decision

makers is a vexing problem. Every national program must be looked at rigorously on its merits and in its total context.

Looked at in context, Safeguard actually represents a rather small relative claim on national resources. Whether measured by the Fiscal Year 1970 requested appropriation or by the anticipated five-year cost of about \$10.2 billion dollars, Safeguard would represent annually something under one-quarter of one percent of our gross national product (G.N.P.). On the average over the next five years, it would be about two to three per cent of the annual defense budget. There is no question that \$10.2 billion dollars is a large amount of money; but we must ask ourselves whether, in the perspective of the defense budget and our total gross national product, Safeguard represents a reasonable investment in international stability and national security in comparison to alternative programs that may contribute to the same goals.

During recent years, increases in the defense budget have been due almost totally to the Vietnam war. Between 1964 and 1970 the annual dollars spent for defense will have increased by about 55 per cent. However, contrary to experience during the Korean War, the annual percentages of the Federal Budget and the G.N.P. represented by these defense dollars have not grown; they have continued to run at about 40-50 per cent of the Budget and 9-10 per cent of the G.N.P. These have been fairly constant percentage levels since the end of the Korean War. There is nothing inevitable about these proportions, and we must always ask what they reflect about our national priorities. But to ask such a question does not prejudge the answer. It is a fundamental federal responsibility to provide for the common defense. Domestic tranquility and prosperity are also vital goals, but they do not depend so exclusively on federal wisdom, authority, and expenditures.

Finally, it is not so clear that we know either what money would become available as a result of foregoing expenditures such as those contemplated for Safeguard or what to buy with it. There is almost no evidence to make us believe that a dollar withheld from defense is convertible into a dollar that is available and useful for domestic programs. What does seem certain is that various programs, new or expanded, to deal with domestic needs will increasingly be proposed for federal funding. However, one of the more frustrating aspects of the national debate that alleges that Safeguard is a diversion of resources from high priority needs is that little that is desirable and feasible has yet been offered as federal programs to deal with our domestic problems. Protest against expenditure of funds for Safeguard has too frequently

appeared as a substitute for development and advocacy of constructive domestic programs. This is not, to be sure, an argument in favor of Safeguard, nor is it a confession that expenditure for Safeguard should be abandoned if "better" domestic programs were available. The fundamental point is that it is artificial — intellectually, economically, and politically — to allege that expenditure of resources on Safeguard denies us real opportunities to deal with our domestic problems.

## **other voices**

### **THE ROLE OF WORLD LAW IN ARMS CONTROL**

*As worldview goes to press, the U.S. and USSR have announced preliminary strategic-arms limitation talks to begin in Helsinki, Finland on November 17. Political commentators differ in their estimates of what the two most powerful nations hope to and can accomplish by participation in these meetings. But as attorney S. C. Yuter argues in the following article reprinted from the October issue of Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, their deliberations may be for naught if whatever agreement they reach is not made binding on all parties engaged in the arms race.*

Law is the backbone which keeps man erect. This is certainly true domestically, but law is sadly lacking in the international arena. It is dog eat dog when threats to national security are involved. Only the balance of terror has maintained the nuclear peace, and with the spread of nuclear weapons even the nuclear peace is threatened.

The only substitute for nuclear terror appears to be effective world law. A first step toward effective world law is to give legal effect to United Nations Resolution 2032 (1965): "... arrangements to ban effectively all nuclear weapon tests in all environments, taking into account the improved possibilities for international cooperation in the field of seismic detection. . . ."

In the absence of a universal test ban, no meaningful nuclear arms limitation agreement will be reached because the Soviet Union needs to be free to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system as a defense to the coming Chinese nuclear threat, and to be free periodically to "thicken" it to keep up with Chinese missile progress. Thus, to avoid entering a new and more

costly round in the strategic arms race, it is essential to bring mainland China within the scope of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. If China no longer conducts nuclear weapon tests it is most unlikely that she will be able to perfect an operational nuclear missile arsenal. In that case the Soviet Union might readily agree to a meaningful A.B.M. limitation agreement.

Much of the A.B.M. debate fails to take into account Soviet views of the coming Chinese nuclear threat. A principal argument against moving toward deployment of an A.B.M. system is that it might prevent a missile limitation agreement with the Soviets. But there is no reasonable ground for hoping that the Soviets will agree to a meaningful A.B.M. limitation agreement in view of their attitude about the Maoist Chinese threat. According to a 1967 article in "Literary Gazette," an important Soviet political-literary weekly:

"... 'the great strategic blueprint of Mao-Tse-tung,' Mao's projected 'Super Reich' . . . does not stop with the 'Maoization' of Asia. . . . 'China today, tomorrow the whole world' . . . is the formula.

"Peking has also decided that a third world war is inevitable for the realization of 'Mao's master plan.' Unless there is a global collision, during which (again by Mao's own admission) 'a third to a half of the world's population will perish,' his strategic blueprint cannot be fulfilled."

Some will argue that it takes one would-be world conqueror to know another one. But even if the Soviets are wrong about the long-term Chinese threat they no doubt believe that Maoism is a new Naziism, and they most certainly will not leave any stone unturned to prevent a duplication of their World War II disaster, in which more than twenty million Soviets were killed. Almost every family lost a father, husband or son.

Given this attitude about the Maoist Chinese, any hope for a meaningful A.B.M. limitation agreement is futile unless the coming Chinese nuclear threat can be removed.

President Nixon recognized this problem at his news conference on March 14, 1969 when he announced the plan to deploy the Safeguard A.B.M. system: "I would imagine that the Soviet Union would be just as reluctant as we would be to leave their country naked against a potential Chinese Communist threat.

"So the abandoning of the entire system, particularly as long as the Chinese threat is there, I think neither country would look on with much favor."

Not only is the Chinese nuclear threat blocking an arms limitation agreement, but, in view of the Chinese nuclear threat now perceived by India and ultimately