

British, Not Consulted on ABM, Contend U.S. Spurs Arms Race

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LONDON, Sept. 20—Britain was only notified, and not consulted, about an American decision to build a new nuclear defense system that key British officials believe will do immeasurably more harm than good.

Irritation at being left out contributed to the sharpness of British protests, which include the complaint that the new anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system may require America to break the 1963 limited nuclear test ban treaty.

U.S. sources today rejected as far-fetched the belief that the United States will have to conduct high-altitude nuclear tests in order to perfect the \$5 billion "thin" ABM system which is intended to guard against attacks from China in the 1970s.

But it is conceded that Britain received only formal advance notification that U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was going to announce the controversial decision on Monday.

This lack of consultation has led key officials to question the value of the new Nuclear Planning Group, a seven-nation NATO committee that was formed in 1968 to consult on just such questions as the ABM.

British sources note that the Nuclear Planning Group will meet next week in Ankara, Turkey. Aggrieved Britons ask why McNamara felt he could

not wait a few days to consult with his counterparts from Britain, West Germany, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

British arguments officially and unofficially against the ABM include the following:

Developing even a limited ballistic defense system will widen the gap between the United States and Europe, creating a new individual contrast between a partially protected America and a Europe wholly exposed to nuclear attack.

Defense analysts are not persuaded by the American reply that the ABM system would be a form of prudent insurance against China. Critics reply that the decision to go ahead owed far more to Moscow than Peking.

• Building the ABM could require the United States to violate the test-ban treaty since only atmospheric tests could assure that the new system really worked. In 1961, the Soviets conducted high-level tests that yielded information needed for an ABM. Americans reject this and say that even if more tests were needed they could be conducted underground.

• The American decision will encourage a new arms

race, objectors say, and lessen chances of getting a nonproliferation treaty at Geneva.

The ABM decision came during a troubled time in Anglo-American relations. Last week, Congress deprived British shipyards of a chance to bid for construction of seven U.S. Navy minesweepers.

As a result, Defense Minister Denis Healey was reportedly given rough treatment by Cabinet colleagues who felt the minesweeper decision jeopardized an agreement that the United States would help Britain meet the foreign exchange costs of 50 U.S.-made F-111 fighter-bombers.