

Ref 11/12/66

McNamara on Missile Defense

Secretary McNamara's recommendation that the United States develop and deploy the giant Poseidon missile as a provisional answer to a Soviet anti-missile program makes very good sense. Anticipating Soviet progress on the anti-missile missile, the Administration had already gone ahead with development of the Poseidon under the current defense budget "as an insurance program." Now intelligence reports indicating that Moscow is, in fact, deploying some anti-missile batteries heightens the need for the most rapid possible substitution of Poseidon for Polaris missiles on our 41 nuclear submarines.

The new U.S. missile would not necessarily inflict greater damage, but it would be specifically designed to nullify the anti-missile missile. With double the payload potential of the Polaris, the Poseidon would have room in its capacious nose cone for multiple warheads, decoys and electronic radar-jamming devices. The Secretary no doubt had these hush-hush jamming devices uppermost in mind when he said so categorically that "there is absolutely no question about our capability of penetrating the Soviet defenses with both our missiles and our aircraft."

Mr. McNamara is saying, in effect, that the best defense is a good offense and that this country possesses an increasingly sophisticated offensive capability equal to the Soviet challenge. He is also saying that the Poseidon route would be less costly in budgetary and foreign-policy terms than the production and deployment of the Nike-X anti-missile system. Although the Poseidon would cost \$2 billion to develop and at least as much to deploy, this contrasts with from \$20 to \$50 billion to install an anti-missile system with its accompanying network of fallout shelters. Politically, an all-out Nike-X program could have deeply unsettling effects on the broad trend of improving American relations with Moscow and would almost surely accelerate an already massive arms race.

The United States has wisely kept open the option of embarking on an anti-missile program at any time by carrying on continuing research and a limited development effort in this field. Secretary McNamara has indicated on earlier occasions that even if such a program is not necessary to maintain a strategic balance with either Moscow or Peking, it might be desirable as a means of limiting the destruction resulting from an irrational surprise attack. Thus, it is not inconceivable that some future Chinese leadership endowed with nuclear weapons might try to inflict nuclear damage on the United States without regard for our retaliatory capability.

It is fear of this quite as much as anxiety over the Soviet program that underlies current arguments concerning an anti-missile effort. The Secretary strongly implied at Johnson City that a relatively limited Peking-focused program had figured most prominently in his discussions with the President. But at the same time, he properly stressed that it would be "much too early" to think of such a program as necessary or inevitable. An operational Chinese missile system is, after all, still a long way off, and there is still ample time for diplomacy to avert the madness of an apocalyptic confrontation across the Pacific.