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THROUGH THIN & THICK: THE A.B.M. DEBATE

“There is a kind of mad momentum intrinsic to the deployment of all new nuclear weaponry. If a weapon system works—and works well—there is strong pressure from many directions to procure and deploy the weapon out of all proportion to the prudent level required.”

The sentiment is familiar but the occasion for it is relatively new. In his mid-September speech to a group of editors and publishers, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara—whose words these are—outlined present American nuclear policy in order to locate with precision the problems attendant on an anti-ballistic missile system (A.B.M.). Mr. McNamara is opposed to a massive A.B.M. system; the Joint Chiefs of Staff and many Congressmen are arguing hard for it.

In order to make the bases of his position most available to the interested public, Mr. McNamara found it useful to redefine many terms in the debate. Nuclear deterrence, the foundation of U.S. military strategy, “means the certainty of suicide to the aggressor—not merely to his military forces, but to his society as a whole.” “First-strike capability” does not mean merely the ability to strike first, but the ability to knock out the military forces that are designed to retaliate. Neither the U.S. nor the USSR has a first-strike capability; neither “can attack the other without being destroyed in retaliation.” Since this is the case, Mr. McNamara argued, both nations would benefit from sound agreements to limit and cut back both offensive and defensive nuclear forces. Were the U.S. to deploy at this time a heavy A.B.M. system, it would encourage the USSR to increase its offensive capabilities. And—the most significant point—even a heavy A.B.M. could be penetrated by a strong offensive system.

Mr. McNamara argued that there is, however, reason to develop a “thin” A.B.M. system which would be capable of knocking out a limited number of incoming nuclear missiles, whether deliberately or accidentally aimed at the U.S. The advantages of this system are that it would guard against accidental military intrusions; that it would provide, for years, protection against a possible Chinese attack; that it would not spur the USSR to divert major resources to an even

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heavier A.B.M. and nuclear weapons system.

The concepts which support Mr. McNamara's position have been under consistent attack. One private organization that has much prestigious support, the American Security Council, has editorially stated that Mr. McNamara's judgment here is not shared by "professional military men or the technical-industrial community that has developed America's instruments of national defense," and that the thin A.B.M. line he proposes "would not provide a healthy margin of strategic superiority but could become an invitation to nuclear catastrophe."

In assessing the merits of each side of the argument it would be well to keep in mind some of the interesting reversals in the debate. As Jack Walker reminded us in the April, 1967 issue of *Worldview*, not only the Air Force and the Navy but distinguished civilian intellectuals have markedly shifted the balance of their arguments in passing from the 50's to the 60's. There is, however, little doubt that most citizens will rally, as they always have, to the call for more arms. Many will readily agree with Senator John Pastore that

the question of an extended A.B.M. "is a matter of survival and not the trigger to constitute an arms race." It is possible that they may balk at the price of a heavy A.B.M. system—40 billion dollars against 5 billion for a thin A.B.M. And if that sum is added to the 26 billion dollars currently being spent on the war in Vietnam, the total burden may sound excessively high. The Secretary of Defense quite correctly disposed of this argument, however. The decision should rest not on the question of money, which is not the primary problem, but on the value of the proposed A.B.M. shield. But how, in such an area, can the ordinary citizen decide? Where, if he has political weight, should he bring it to bear?

The basic positions are relatively simple. Those whose opinions will not flow from an intimate grasp of the technical issues will rest their judgments on the trust they place in the leading spokesmen for each position and on their own assessment of how the resources of our country should be employed. Given the terms of the present A.B.M. debate, Mr. McNamara seems to be leading from strength. J. F.

in the magazines

"What is happening today to the Soviet man? Is he becoming less a Stalinist and more a Khrushchevite or Titoist? Is he becoming less a Communist and more a democrat or liberal? How do the changes come about? . . . Questions like these, says Lorand B. Szalay in "Soviet Domestic Propaganda and Liberalization" (*Orbis*, Spring 1967) "relate to an historically little understood dimension of the Soviet system, namely, the Soviet man—his attitudes, opinions, beliefs, as well as the changes he has undergone under the influences of the Soviet socio-political environment." Thus he has attempted "to analyze recent trends in Soviet propaganda in relationship to its target, the Soviet citizen."

"In view of our fundamentally pragmatic, utilitarian approach," Szalay notes, "it is especially difficult for us to understand people with an abstract-doctrinaire approach toward life. Political ideologies are alien to American thinking in any case, and it is hard for Americans to conceive the process of indoctrination which attempts to organize and control human life on the basis of a single abstract theory such as Marxism-Leninism. When this theory is applied to the environ-

ment, a new world is built. In this new world, things and events acquire new and different meanings. These meanings do not derive from natural experiences, but from strict definitions, by a 'logical' formulation of their roles and places determined by the ideology."

Of course, this writer concludes, "the extent to which Soviet domestic propaganda does indeed manage to maintain and promote the integrity of a closed Soviet world outlook, eliminate inconsistencies, and argue away the contradictions of political reality is an open question. Nevertheless, we may conclude that it shows considerable flexibility in overcoming and taking advantage of the difficulties which emerge in the changing domestic political situation. Many tactical shifts in content and emphasis are performed within the framework of the Marxist-Leninist ideology without sacrificing fundamental doctrines. Although the logic and argumentation used in Soviet propaganda frequently appear from the outside to be artificial, inconsistent, or even an insult to intelligence, they seem to be well adapted to the indoctrinated strata of the population. In a political situation characterized by less reliance on open force and suppress-