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Reactions to Certain US Ballistic Missile Defense Programs

Submitted by the
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The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and NSA.

Concurring:

Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
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Director of the National Security Agency

Abstaining:

The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAMS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the immediate and longer term foreign reactions to a US decision to deploy ballistic missile defenses.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The US will within the next year or so announce a decision to initiate deployment of ballistic missile defenses, either:
 - a. A small program, along with such other defensive measures as a fall-out shelter plan. This program would be intended and officially described as a defense against a light, unsophisticated ballistic missile attack, or
 - b. A much larger program, together with other defensive measures more extensive than those envisaged under the smaller program. This larger program would be clearly intended to provide a substantial, but not complete, defense against a Soviet strategic missile attack.
2. Either program could be subsequently expanded.
3. The US will not have an initial operational capability under either program until the early 1970s.

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DISCUSSION

1. Most countries would make no distinction between the two assumed programs. They would not believe a US claim that it was deploying such costly ballistic missile defenses simply to guard against a minor threat; they would look on the smaller program as merely the first stage of a larger one. Accordingly, immediate reactions would be influenced more by the decision to deploy than by the size of the program.

2. In the non-Communist world, initial reactions to the US decision would depend to some extent on how the program was publicly presented. If it were announced as a logical development in the US military effort and as a response to Soviet progress in the ABM field, and especially if there were prior consultations with friendly governments, reactions in general probably would be mild and not unfavorable. There would be, nevertheless, some unfavorable reactions, but we believe that these too would be generally mild, of short duration, and unlikely to have a significant effect on the relations of these countries with the US.¹

I. THE USSR

3. Any such program would certainly be reported fully in US news media, particularly the military-industrial trade journals. In addition, the purpose and nature of the program would be described in public announcements and in news reports attributed to official sources. Thus, the Soviets probably would correctly estimate the general capabilities of either of the assumed programs, but they would be unlikely to accept official US explanations that the smaller program was intended primarily to counter the type of threat which may eventually be posed by Communist China. The Soviets almost certainly would see any US program for ballistic missile defenses as a move to reduce the effectiveness of their strategic attack forces and would take into account its effect upon their strategic position.

4. In assessing the significance of the US decision, the Soviets would be influenced by the value which they attach to ballistic missile defenses and, to a degree, by the status of their own program. The magnitude of the Soviet ABM effort points to a strong desire to obtain missile defenses rapidly. We believe that the Soviets have no such defenses operational at present, but we know that they are pushing ahead with their R and D effort. They have made, moreover, a stronger attempt in the last year or so to convey the impression that they have succeeded in developing effective ABM systems. If the Soviet program were progressing well at the time the US decision is announced, they probably would take a calmer view of the US move than if their program were lagging. It is possible that they would see the US announcement as having been precipitated by recent Soviet claims in the area of missile defense.

¹ See footnotes to paragraphs 12 and 15 for the reservation, of the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State.

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5. The Soviet assessment would go beyond the military significance of the US decision and consider as well political motivations. The Soviets would first of all view the decision as evidence that the US was intent upon maintaining its strategic position vis-a-vis the USSR. While they would recognize that their own ABM program had contributed to the US decision, they would judge that the US in this instance was willing to see, or at least saw no way to avert, a continuation of the arms race. Further, it is conceivable that they would view the decision as a move to force them to make military expenditures which would keep their economy under strain. They might even interpret it as a sign that the US considered nuclear war somewhat more likely in the longer term, particularly if the announcement came at a time of crisis in, for example, Vietnam. Associated expenditures for a shelter program would probably strengthen the voice of those advocating this interpretation. The Soviets would be likely to interpret the coupling of the US announcement with a disarmament proposal for, say, reducing strategic delivery vehicles as part and parcel of a scheme designed to restrict their strategic capabilities.

6. In the propaganda field, the Soviets almost certainly would charge the US with reducing the prospects for disarmament, and probably would accuse the US of seeking to increase its capabilities for nuclear war. Over the longer term, however, the Soviets probably would stress two propaganda lines: one, that the concept of "Fortress America" was again gaining ascendancy in the US; the other, that Soviet missile defenses were superior to those of the US, and that the latter could not cope with a Soviet strategic missile attack.

7. In their military planning, the Soviets probably have already taken into account the likelihood that the US would develop an ABM capability. Nevertheless, they would feel compelled to respond to the US move in several ways. Programs which they would consider include: improving the penetration capabilities of their strategic ballistic missile systems; expanding their ICBM and SLBM development programs beyond present plans; adopting targeting concepts consistent with a smaller number of key targets, whose defenses they would seek to saturate; placing greater emphasis on strategic bomber systems and cruise missile submarines, in order to complicate the US defenses; seeking to develop space weapons; and finally, intensifying work on their ABM program. It should be noted, however, that the Soviets will probably undertake some of these advanced weapons programs even if the US implements no ballistic missile defense program.

8. Alternatively, it is possible that, in view of internal Soviet policy debates stemming from the resource demands of the military, the US decision might increase pressures on the Soviet leaders to stabilize some aspects of arms competition. In this context, a simultaneous new offer on arms control might have some prospects. We rate the chances of a positive Soviet reaction, however, as low.

9. In any event, we believe that the US decision to deploy ballistic missile defenses, by itself, would not significantly worsen US-Soviet relations. Nor

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would it be likely to have any direct or basic effect on Soviet policies in existing problem areas, i.e., Vietnam or Berlin. And we believe that the US decision would not change any of the key determinants of Soviet policies toward Western Europe or Communist China.

II. COMMUNIST CHINA

10. The Chinese missile and nuclear programs are in such early stages of development that the US decision would have little immediate impact on them. We have estimated that the Chinese could not have an ICBM strike capability until sometime after 1970. Meanwhile, the Chinese would be likely to persist in their efforts to develop a shorter range nuclear capability and proceed to experiment and explore in the field of advanced weapons. If in time, however, the Chinese would come to judge the US ballistic missile defenses as highly effective, they might make only a token deployment of any crude ICBM or submarine-launched ballistic missile system which they might develop, while continuing R and D on more sophisticated systems. We believe that the US decision in itself would not cause the Chinese to develop a submarine-launched cruise missile fleet to threaten the US, a program which they might in any event undertake.

11. In the political field, Peking would exploit those exaggerated impressions of China's military strength which would arise from the public discussion of the smaller program as a defense against China. At the same time, the Chinese almost certainly would claim that the US was stepping up its efforts at "nuclear blackmail." The US decision, however, might increase the anxieties of the Chinese leaders that the US intends ultimately to attack China.

III. WESTERN EUROPE

12. We believe that West European reactions to the US decision would be generally mild.² There would be some initial, unfavorable public commentary,

² The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that this net judgment is overly reassuring concerning the adverse reactions which could be set in motion, in varying degrees, in official circles in France, Germany, and England.

If Western Europe should remain without ballistic missile defenses, while both the US and the USSR were deploying them, important elements in Europe would come to feel that constraints to the initiation of nuclear war had diminished, that latent apprehensions over US judgments in the use of its weapons might be justified, that the multibillion dollar US expenditures for home defense reflected a further diversion of US strategic interest and support from the NATO alliance, that possibilities for security arrangements outside the transatlantic framework should be reopened, and that Europeans should in any case disengage themselves from any involvement in US-USSR confrontations outside of Europe.

These reactions would occur in a political context which could generate greater claims in Bonn for an increased strategic role, greater conviction in Paris that it could succeed in disrupting existing NATO ties, and greater pressures in London to move away from political support of the US in favor of a more independent role in East-West relations.

While these problems may not be insurmountable, the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that they would be of greater significance in both the short and longer term than this estimate allows.

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stemming primarily from concern over a possible intensification of the arms race and a further diminution of the prospects for East-West detente. This concern would probably be heightened by Soviet political reactions and, particularly, by fears that the USSR would make drastic responses of a military nature; misconceptions about the limitations and military significance of ballistic missile defenses might add to these fears. The announcement of the decision might be used in some quarters as proof of a shift in US policy toward a "Fortress America" concept, and in others as evidence that the US was beginning to think nuclear war more likely over the longer term. There would also be, however, a large amount of apathy regarding the decision, since most West Europeans of all political leanings regard the likelihood of general nuclear war as remote. In addition, if adequate explanations were given by the US in advance or at the time of the public announcement, unfavorable reactions caused by such attitudes could be dampened.

13. Those West European officials who assert there already is a growing divergence between US and West European strategic interests would probably cite the US decision as further justification of their position. If the US announcement of the smaller program emphasized defense against Communist China, critics of US policy would allege that increasing American involvement in Asia would, sooner or later, compel the US to reduce its commitments to Western Europe. De Gaulle and his supporters would assiduously propagate such views. On the other hand, those governments and officials who favor close relations with the US and continue to place their trust in US willingness to defend Western Europe against a Soviet attack would probably support the US decision. They would regard the deployment of ballistic missile defenses as enhancing American capabilities to deter the USSR. They would probably see no lessening in the ability of the US to inflict unacceptable damage on the USSR, even if the Soviets responded by strengthening their offensive missile forces or intensifying work on their ABM program. Over the longer term, we see little likelihood that the West Europeans would conclude that improved US defenses weakened the deterrents to the outbreak of nuclear war. In general, we believe that the deployment of ballistic missile defenses by the US would not be a major factor in US-West European relationships in the foreseeable future.

14. The UK would probably be interested in acquiring missile defenses, but it would not be prepared to spend much money on a deployment program until a highly effective system was available. Although the West German Government would also support the US decision, Bonn would probably be disquieted by the contrast between a nascent US strategic missile defense and its own defenselessness against Soviet missiles. Some West German officials might argue that the risks of general war would no longer be shared equally with the US, and they would be encouraged in this argument by de Gaulle. Thus, the already growing West German desire for more influence in the nuclear strategy of the Western Alliance might in the longer term be further strengthened by the US decision. These same West German officials might even express a

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desire to acquire missile defenses, but the majority view in the government would probably be against such a step, at least until there was convincing proof that such defenses would actually be effective against the Soviet threat to West Germany.

IV. ASIA

15. Asian reactions to the US decision probably would be mixed, but generally mild.³ Since most Asians are more concerned with the Chinese Communist threat than with that posed by the USSR, the fact that the US rated the Chinese nuclear threat as requiring an "anti-Chinese" ballistic missile defense would tend to heighten fears of Communist China in some quarters. On the other hand, some Asians would be likely to view the US decision as further evidence of a continuing US policy to contain China. At the popular level, there would be even more apathy about the US action than in Western Europe, and any unfavorable public reactions probably would be short-lived. Those Asian governments and officials who now support most US policies would accept the US decision, and those who do not would oppose it. We believe that, on balance, the US decision would have no basic or significant effect on US relations with the Asian nations.

16. Over the longer term, as Chinese strategic capabilities became more apparent, India and Australia might wish to obtain ballistic missile defenses from the US, but high costs would probably discourage them. The geographic situation of Taiwan would make its defense against ballistic missiles most difficult; nevertheless, the GRC might seek to acquire such defenses. The Japanese, although not presently as concerned as some other Asians that China poses a military threat to them, might develop an interest in obtaining ballistic missile defenses.

V. OTHER AREAS

17. We believe that most of the Latin American and African governments and their peoples would not react strongly, if at all, to the US decision. They would probably see the US move as another manifestation of American military power. In general, however, any US action implying that Communist China had the capability to attack the US with ballistic missiles would considerably upgrade China in the opinion of the Latin Americans and Africans.

VI. POSSIBLE THREATS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

18. There are, at present, no countries other than the USSR and Communist China which might acquire missile forces which could attack the US and which might have the motivation to do so. The possibility will always exist,

³Taking into account the negative considerations adduced in paragraphs 15 and 16, the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes the net assessment reflected in this sentence may be overly reassuring.

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nevertheless, that the Soviets or perhaps the Communist Chinese would attain a highly influential relationship with some radical rebel government in the Western Hemisphere, such as was the case with Cuba in 1962, and exploit this relationship to establish missile bases threatening the US.

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