

A Comment On The Ineffectiveness Of The Nuclear Freeze Movement

I would herein like to evaluate three weapons systems that may be added, or are currently being added, to our strategic weapons profile: the MX missile, the cruise missile and the Star Wars strategic defense initiative. The nuclear freeze movement has argued against all three of these weapons systems with a vast array of arguments. I hope to show that many of these arguments are irrelevant to the question at hand, that they have proved counterproductive in the past, and that they may be counterproductive in the future unless those arguing against various nuclear weapons systems become more discriminating in the arguments they select to advance.

I have and will continue to support efforts aimed at controlling the nuclear arms race. I would like to describe why I have become disillusioned with the so-called nuclear freeze movement whose blanket arguments opposing various weapons systems, regardless of their merits, may ultimately prove instrumental in the acquisition of these systems.

I must admit that I am not an advocate of a nuclear-free world: I firmly believe that the nuclear genie is out of the bottle and that we must learn to live in a nuclear world. I even confess some admiration for those weapons of mass destruction whose frightening horrors have prevented a third world war during a forty year period of crises and heightened tensions. Although these terrifying weapons may have temporarily frightened the world into avoiding worldwide conflict, the situation cannot continue as is forever. The question of stability must be foremost in our mind, and we should view each weapons system as to how it affects the stability of this balance of terror. In a time of crisis, the opposing weapons systems must be configured in such a way as to allow time to defuse the crisis, and ideally the weapons systems should encourage a non military solution; such a configuration is stabilizing. However, if, in times of crisis, a weapons system demands rapid decisions and its rapid use is militarily advantageous, it increases the likelihood of nuclear conflict and is considered destabilizing.

When one argues against a particular strategic weapons system, it is crucial that one only uses arguments that relate to whether such weapons are necessary to the national security and to the stability of the nuclear arms balance; arguments involving cost (unless the costs are so high as to threaten national security), environmental damage, or social

concerns are secondary to matters of national defense. It is irrelevant if a particular weapons system is expensive if it is absolutely essential for one's survival. One may argue that it is not essential, but if it is essential cost considerations are without merit.

The three weapons systems mentioned above would have very different effects on the stability of the nuclear arms balance, a consideration seemingly absent (or treated as a secondary issue) from arguments advanced against these weapons systems by the nuclear freeze movement; their arguments largely involve secondary issues that have little bearing on national security issues.

In my opinion not only are these secondary arguments irrelevant, but they may ultimately prove counterproductive by aiding in the acquisition of the very weapons system that they oppose. Because it may seem counterintuitive to state that arguments against a weapons system may ultimately lead to the acquisition of that system, let me clarify this point. Imagine a situation where two arguments against a particular weapons system are advanced: the first argument concludes that the weapon is counterproductive to our security, and the second argument concludes that the system is too costly. Now if both of these arguments are given by the opponents of this weapons system, the advocates of this system will gain a significant advantage if they can dismiss the second argument, even if it is the weaker of the two. Contrast this situation with one where the opponents of the weapons system concentrate their efforts only on the first argument. Now the advocates must deal with this fundamental concern and public opinion will be directed toward the most important issue and not misled by secondary concerns.

A situation of this sort has already arisen in the case of the MX missile. The MX missile was originally planned as a system to protect our land-based deterrent from the debatable threat of a Soviet first strike. Over the years a number of schemes were evaluated that might protect our land-based deterrent from a disarming first strike. The plans included multiple protective shelters, dense pack, air mobile, buried trench, and a host of other ideas. However, the key point was that the program would protect our Minuteman missiles and their successors from a Soviet first strike. It was puzzling, then, to discover that the MX missile, which was to be protected from a first strike by one of these various schemes, was to carry ten times the megatonnage of the Minuteman III missiles, and possess greatly increased missile accuracy. If the MX missile was meant to survive a Soviet first strike, why did it look so ominously like a first strike weapon itself? This was and remains the only relevant argument

against the MX missile. It is a first strike weapon that markedly decreases the stability of the nuclear arms balance.

But to listen to members of the nuclear freeze movement and their supporters, it was quite a different story. The MX missile in the multiple protective shelter mode was going to cause environmental damage; water resource and road construction requirements were enormous; plant and animal species were threatened (Nucleus, Union of Concerned Scientists). Economic upheaval in Nevada and Utah became worrisome and the cost of the MX was staggering. These arguments only served to confuse the case against the MX. When the Reagan administration silenced virtually all of these arguments by deciding to place the MX missile in existing (hithertofore `vulnerable') Minuteman silos (thus confirming the notion that this is indeed a first strike weapon), the freeze movement found far less public support for the anti-MX fight. (As subsequent votes in Congress have shown, Congress now seems concerned only about the MX's cost). By failing to place proper emphasis on the only truly relevant argument against the MX, MX opponents inadvertently helped to place the MX missile in its most destabilizing configuration: a first strike weapon sitting in a theoretically vulnerable silo.

If we move from the MX missile to the cruise missile, we come to a weapons system that has generated far less controversy. The main argument against this weapons system has to do with its impact upon arms verification provisions of potential arms control treaties (due to the small size of the missile.) Although this is an important concern and deserves further study, I suspect that this is not the prime motivation for those that oppose the cruise missile: those favoring a nuclear freeze oppose any nuclear weapon, regardless of whether it increases or decreases the stability of the nuclear arms balance. I must challenge this head-in-the-sand outlook. Whatever arms control problems cruise missiles might pose, they bring a great deal of stability to the nuclear arms balance. These weapons can be launched upon warning (aboard B-52s) and recalled when the danger is over. They take hours rather than minutes to reach their target. Both of these considerations add stability to the arms balance. Rather than oppose nuclear weapons across the board, we should demand the replacement of destabilizing weapons (like ICBMs) with stabilizing ones. I do not wish to minimize concerns about the potential effects of the cruise missile on arms control prospects, but I would like to emphasize the favorable impact of these weapons upon stability concerns and believe that both of these issues must be considered in evaluating the cruise missile. It is conceivable that greater stability in

the nuclear arms balance may be worth a setback in arms control (although with insight perhaps both of these objectives could be realized).

The weapons system currently under public scrutiny is the Star Wars strategic defense initiative (SDI), and from my point of view, the debate is largely centered around issues that are secondary to those we should be concerned with. I state categorically that it is totally irrelevant whether we now believe the system will work -- our first concern should be "Do we want a Star Wars weapons system?" I frankly admit that I have not yet reached a resolution of this question, but I am sure that it should be answered. It is difficult to see how any scientist could oppose research on such a venture if the answer to the primary question is yes.

The arguments against SDI seem to be sound: (1) the system is potentially destabilizing, especially during the time when the weapon is being deployed, and (2) the system violates the ABM treaty in a way that would have a serious impact on all arms control efforts. The destabilizing aspects are very worrisome insofar as it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which we place weapons in space that effectively disarm the Soviet Union without the Soviets taking very aggressive measures to prevent this. Their countermeasures are almost sure to be destabilizing (e.g., massively increased weapon numbers to ensure successful penetration, antisatellite weapons). As to the ABM treaty, those who quickly dismiss it should recall that as crazy as the nuclear arms race has been thus far, we have also thus far successfully avoided a nuclear war. ABM has served us well by limiting the scope of arms growth that surely would have occurred in its absence. ABM also served to provide a theoretical framework for mutually assured destruction (MAD) -- a seemingly inhuman policy, but one that has succeeded in preventing superpower conflicts from growing into a global catastrophe. Any change to a different strategy (however well thought out), is bound to be dangerous and have at least some short-term destabilizing aspects.

Yet one argument in favor of SDI given by President Reagan is intriguing: it seems intuitively clear that it has to be 'better' to build defensive weapons rather than offensive ones. In fact, it also seems more humane. I find this a powerful argument, and for this reason am willing to give Star Wars a chance. I am opposed to the current deployment that this administration desires; it is totally absurd. We need time to work out stable ways of deployment and we need to study its potential impact on arms control treaties. (We also need a system that has some chance of working.) But I am willing to encourage a massive research program since I find my answer to the fundamental question to be "Yes, I want a Star

Wars system if it can be configured and deployed in a stabilizing fashion.

I feel that the scientific community should delimit the difference between research and development: we should strongly encourage research while discouraging development until the basic concerns described above are resolved. As to whether the system will ultimately work, only time will tell. As far as I know, SDI does not violate any fundamental laws of nature (such as the first or second law of thermodynamics or the Heisenberg uncertainty principle) and thus I feel that scientists should be cautious about stating what can or can not work (there were similar discussions on the ICBMs in the 1950s). Of course, if someone is aware of a fundamental limitation of the Star Wars system imposed by nature, I would be very interested in hearing about it! In the absence of this, we should all work toward methods that will decrease the likelihood of nuclear war, and if Star Wars can be configured in a stabilizing manner, it deserves our support.

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