

A thorough reappraisal is particularly appropriate today, when both the major powers face the question of whether or not to take a significant new step in the arms race, whether to produce and to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system. The deployment of such a system would be an enormously costly undertaking, which, in the end, would probably lead, as the ballistic-missile race did, to ever-mounting defence budgets without any permanent increase in national security or international stability.

There are those who will argue that it is not just a question of the two major powers agreeing not to deploy ABM systems in relation to each other. They point to the need for protective measures against the looming threat of Communist China, with its potential nuclear capability. But I suggest that the day when North America or Europe should be genuinely concerned about a nuclear attack by China is still many years in the future. Moreover, it is my view that fear of possible ultimate developments should not deter us from a course of action which offers promise of substantial benefits in the immediate future. If the result of the kind of re-assessment I have mentioned were a tacit understanding by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to refrain from the development of ABM systems - and so prevent a new dimension of escalation of the arms race -, the dividends in terms of reduced tension and enhanced international stability would place us all in a much better position to examine the vital political issues which still divide us and which so largely determine our prospects for reducing armaments. Furthermore, to drop the development of ABM systems would remove a major reason announced for continuing underground testing, about which I shall have something to say a little later.

We accept the inevitability of change in international relations and institutions. The world does not stand still. So any balance of power which now exists is not permanently assured. The elements of the nuclear equation do not remain constant. New factors emerge and old ones change. The major powers are continually refining and improving (I apologize for the use of these two words) their nuclear weapons. Within the present decade, two additional nations have emerged as nuclear powers. Other potential candidates are now weighing the advantages and the disadvantages of joining the nuclear club. Moreover, the number of states capable of developing their own nuclear weapons is constantly increasing; my own country could manufacture them without too much difficulty any time it desired to do so. We now face - not as an academic problem but in a very real and urgent form - the dangers of proliferation. These dangers are upon us. Surely the further spread of nuclear weapons will increase the risk of nuclear war and the insecurity of all nations. It could add a new and threatening factor to historical, ethnic and territorial disputes existing between nations. A decision by one country to acquire nuclear weapons would almost certainly generate strong pressure on others to take similar action. International relations would thereby be made more complicated and more dangerous. Agreements on arms-control measures would become more difficult to achieve and any prospect of progress in this field would recede into the far distance. Moreover, there would be a greater risk of nuclear war breaking out as a result of human error flowing from defective control arrangements or through the action of irresponsible elements into whose hands - and there would be more of these hands - the weapons might fall.