

(Mr. Meiszter, Hungary)

the present deployment of armament systems the maximum time available to ascertain false signals has already shrunk to 6-10 minutes. In the case of the envisaged SDI, that safety margin would further shrink to seconds. And no mention has yet been made of the following: the space shuttle's launch sequence required some 10,000 lines of computer programming. The "Star Wars" software programme would likely run into tens of millions of lines. And it is hardly imaginable that a programme of several tens of millions of lines could be prepared without any error here or there, which might cause unpredictable "ricochets" in the execution.

However, it is not only the moment of execution that is pregnant with dangers. The transition period, in which the United States envisages a combination of offence and defence, could last 10, 20 or 30 years. In the opinion of many specialists, this period would be far more dangerous and unstable than anything we have lived through so far. It is only natural that the United States, unless it gives up its plan, will force the Soviet Union to develop a similar or counter programme. In either case, the whole period of development, as it is full of extremely complex and uncertain details, would be characterized by temporary advantages on the part of one or the other, in one field or another. Since we cannot expect even a minimum of confidence in a period of a new arms race that is forced upon the Soviet Union, any temporary advantage of one party would be considered by the other party as a direct threat to its security. The permanently changing destabilization would, therefore, become the rule. And that is the real and, unfortunately, the imminent danger.

What are the consequences to be drawn from the tragic incident of Challenger with respect to the Strategic Defence Initiative?

First, what is to be learned from the space shuttle disaster is that the entire human race is cramped in a spaceship, and the decision-making time for correcting mistakes has been cut to seconds.

Second, the tragedy should remind the world that despite the most systematic precautions, accidents are possible when dealing with high technology.

Third, the space shuttle Challenger reminds us once again that we are at the mercy of machines, of an arms race still not under control, at risk in a matter of seconds.

The great question is simple: Where is the point of no return? But the answer is difficult. Nevertheless, it must be found, accurately and without much further delay. When I say "point of no return", I do not mean something to be defined in time. I do not believe it could or should be defined that way. The only practicable definition lies in the process itself. The question, therefore, is whether the process has already reached the point of no return. In my view the line of division is to be found between prevention and cessation. The process, I believe, is reversible as long as prevention is still feasible. The history of disarmament and arms limitation talks provides us with examples for the differences of difficulty between those two phases. One should only recall the obstacles in the way of actual arms reduction and disarmament measures, or remember how many years there have been talks about the withdrawal of some 11,500 and 6,500 soldiers respectively, with a "safety margin" of around 1 million men behind each party.