
Reagan's latest nuclear strategy.

COME AND GET US

ADMIRAL KIMMEL and General Short thought they

The first is the administration's fixation on deep reductions in ballistic missile warheads as the only measure of merit in strategic arms control. The portion of the START draft treaty currently agreed upon provides for sharp reductions in the ballistic missile forces of both sides, land- and submarine-based, and its liberal counting rule for bombers encourages a shift of forces toward bomber

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posed to ban mobile ICBMs. If that happens, we may not be able to deploy a survivable ICBM at all. If the agreement does not ban ICBMs—and if we cancel our own mobile Midgetman for budgetary reasons but deploy MX in its garrisons—then the Soviets would have two survivable ICBMs and we would have nothing comparable. The new Soviet SS-25 ICBMs will be out on road-mobile launchers and their SS-24s will be on trains deployed on their rail system in peacetime. (They do not have American-style “public interface” problems.) The United States, under these circumstances, could well have only one vulnerable “mobile” ICBM, on trains parked in garrisons, and some equally vulnerable silos.

Most administration experts and even opponents of the mobile Midgetman will privately admit most of these points. They offer really only one argument against the program: cost. Indeed, in order to make their case stronger, some Midgetman opponents have not been able to resist fiddling with the cost figures. For example, the press recently reported that mobile Midgetman, based on actual bids, will be more than \$4 billion cheaper than the Air Force’s original estimates. And the original cost estimates made by the office of the secretary of defense had been much higher even than the Air Force’s. (It is common in the Pentagon to overestimate the cost of what you want to kill.) The House Armed Services Committee estimates, on the other hand, that over the next 15 years mobile Midgetman would total under five percent of our spending on strategic programs. The real question is whether it is worth five percent of our strategic budget over these years—probably on the order of \$30-plus billion—to have at least a portion of our ICBM force clearly able to survive a Soviet surprise attack.

OF COURSE, there’s always SDI, as the administration never fails to point out. Some advocates of early SDI deployment recently have been working, with the MX rail garrison supporters, against mobile Midgetman because they see it as a competitor to SDI deployments. This is roughly analogous to the Pit Bull Breeders’ Association campaigning against locks on doors. And this breed may be toothless: the “Phase I” SDI deployment now being pushed—space-based kinetic energy interceptors and ground-based exo-atmospheric interceptors—is not designed to deal well with the threat presented by Soviet submarine-launched ballistic missiles, especially if they fly low. At some point we may need defensive systems to help protect our strategic forces, in order to give our aircraft a few extra minutes to escape their bases even against an attack by such ballistic missiles, or by fast or stealthy Soviet submarine-launched cruise missiles. (Defending garrisons for MX trains would be much more demanding, since the trains take hours to escape, not minutes.) But defenses against these sorts of systems are not a top priority of U.S. defensive efforts.

Do we want our ICBM vulnerability to continue to be the obsessive issue that it has been in our politics and arms

control negotiations for the last 19 years, or do we want to fix the problem? Do arms control supporters such as Democratic candidates Mike Dukakis and Jesse Jackson (who support the administration position on terminating mobile Midgetman) really want to see a future reprise of the SALT II debate of 1979, with a “window of vulnerability” being a real and immediate problem instead of a distant and theoretical one?

THERE MAY BE ways to achieve ICBM survivability other than mobile Midgetman. One technically respectable suggestion is to use a modern version of the old concept of a shell game for MIRVed ICBMs: multiple shelters for each Minuteman or MX. This is probably feasible within a properly drafted START treaty. It is also cheaper, with modern techniques such as hardened missile canisters, and would require less land than it would have a decade ago when the cumbersome MX “race-track” system was contemplated for deployment in Utah and Nevada. It would, however, be necessary to face the political problem of acquiring new land on which to put the shell-game shelters. And it would require us first to decide on a survivable ICBM program and then to design our arms control stance to protect it. The Reagan administration has not demonstrated this sort of sequential reasoning.

Of the solutions that the administration is now seriously considering to protect U.S. ICBM survivability, neither MX trains in garrisons nor early SDI deployment of the type now planned nor both together will solve the problem. As for “deep cuts” in ballistic missile forces, in the absence of a truly survivable ICBM they make the problem of providing strategic stability worse, not better.

Indeed, our ICBM vulnerability could well lead military leaders, particularly in the face of the Soviet SLBM threat, to recommend a day-to-day posture of launching our ICBMs based only on warning—without being able to wait for any confirmation of an attack by verifying that there have been nuclear detonations. Such a posture would seriously risk nuclear war by accident and, as the secretary of defense’s recent commission on deterrence put it, would be “a reckless gamble with fate” that should be “banished from our long-term strategy.”

Without a survivable ICBM, such as mobile Midgetman, the administration and those who support it on this issue are on the verge of leaving behind them as their principal strategic legacy a new kind of triad: vulnerability, wishful thinking, and a hair trigger.

**BRENT SCOWCROFT, JOHN DEUTCH,
AND R. JAMES WOOLSEY**

Brent Scowcroft was a national security adviser from 1975 to 1977; John Deutch was undersecretary of energy from 1977 to 1979; and R. James Woolsey was undersecretary of the Navy from 1977 to 1979. They swear they really did write it together (see article on page 19).