

Editorial

Fear transforms into protest

Several soldiers run through a city park, away from the center of the blast. When the bomb detonated, they were close enough to that center to lose their sight. Their melted eyeballs run down their faces and onto their uniforms.

Images like this one from John Hersey's *Hiroshima* have haunted Americans for almost 40 years. This year, those images have moved many Americans to action.

According to *Newsweek* magazine, nuclear-freeze resolutions have been approved by 33 city councils, 10 county councils and legislative bodies in 11 states. This week protests across the country may involve as many as 10 million to 20 million people in 650 communities and on 350 college campuses, according to Ground Zero, the non-partisan group that has organized the effort.

Obviously, a good number of Americans are worried that nuclear war is a real possibility, not just a rhetorical device to use against the Soviet Union. Many believe it is no longer an issue to leave to the decision-makers, and rightly so.

Ronald Reagan told reporters Tuesday that protestors must remember he is the only American with "all the facts necessary to base a decision" on the armament issue.

"Therefore, I would ask their trust and confidence, that feeling as sincerely as I do, that . . . they would allow us to take the actions we think are necessary to lessen this threat," he continued.

In other words, Reagan is asking for blind faith. But remember, this is the man who has taken money from the poor, cut aid to education, proposed substantial increases in the defense budget and made numerous erroneous statements at press conferences. And he's asking for our

trust on an issue as far-reaching and possibly devastating as nuclear armament. If ever there was an issue Americans should be involved in, it's this one.

Congressmen and senators are involved, and their plans vary. Chief among them is a nuclear freeze proposal sponsored by Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.). Also drawing support is a proposal by Sens. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) and John Warner (R-Va.), to increase U.S. nuclear forces and then negotiate balanced reductions with the Russians.

Rep. Morris Udall (D-Ariz.), has suggested an exchange of U.S. and Soviet students to safeguard against sneak attacks. These students would include the children of government leaders on both sides.

In a *Newsweek* poll conducted in mid-March, 51 percent saw their chances of surviving a limited nuclear war with the Soviet Union as being "poor"; 38 percent believed their chances would be "just 50-50." Only 9 percent thought their chances would be "good."

People seem to be running scared, but instead of just running, many are beginning to channel their energy into protest.

On these two pages, syndicated columnists William Rusher and Richard Cohen examine the anti-nuclear movement. Mark Dahmke, a former UNL student and a computer consultant, discusses an alternate plan for defense.

Read their comments and suggestions. Examine the issue. Your involvement could make the difference between peace and holocaust.

Shields ideal model, not swords

Editor's note: Mark Dahmke, author of the following opinion, is a member of the Citizen's Advisory Council on National Space Policy, a group formed to advise the president. A former UNL student and a computer consultant, he is also a consulting editor for *BYTE* and *Popular Computing magazines*.

Mutually Assured Destruction, appropriately referred to as MAD, has been the dominant strategy of the superpowers for more than 20 years. That means in the event of an attack launched from either the United States or the Soviet Union, the result would be the all-out destruction of both societies. That is, our response to an attack would be to commit suicide.

Considering the human element and the fallibility of our machines, I am amazed that we have survived this long. To any dispassionate onlooker, the solution to the situation would be to install defensive weapons and to assure survival, rather than assuring destruction.

Recently, I attended a Space Development Conference sponsored by the L-5 Society, a national organization to promote space development. There, I met retired Lt. General Daniel Graham, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. He started Project High Frontier with private funds, in an attempt to find "a technological end-run" around the growing Soviet missile threat. His plan calls for a layered defense, involving a few short-term,

ones.

The first layer is a system of non-nuclear anti-missile defenses around our missile silos, costing about \$1 billion. This would take about two or three years to complete and would make a first strike more difficult for the Soviets.

The next layer would consist of 432 orbiting satellites. Each satellite would carry a number of non-nuclear heat-seeking projectiles that together could destroy 95 percent of all ballistic missiles launched in the event of an attack. The ring of satellites would cost about \$10 billion to \$15 billion (consider the \$100 billion cost of the MX missile plan), would use current technology and could realistically be in place by 1989. The placement and maintenance of the satellites is made feasible by using the space shuttle.

This system is not an instant cure. It will not solve the theater nuclear weapons problem in Europe. However, it does reduce the chance of an all-out first strike, and it costs only a fraction of what more missiles will cost. The real advantage is that we would be shifting to a defensive "survival" strategy.

Unfortunately, the system does make a pre-emptive strike more likely during the time it would take to install it. If the Soviets believed we would soon have a defensive system, they might decide to launch an attack while they still had the opportunity. We would therefore have to invite the Soviets to build a similar defensive system. We

might even offer them some of the technology required to build it.

In the long run, such defensive systems could mean the end of nuclear proliferation and the dismantling of an offensive weapons system that we hope never to use anyway. Considering the cost of the new systems, it starts to look very cost effective.

According to the 175-page report from Project High Frontier (which is currently being studied and considered by the White House and members of Congress), the layered system could close the window of vulnerability, shift us away from MAD and help to open up space development for private industry.

Amazingly, the Pentagon is not space happy. It doesn't have plans to put nuclear weapons in orbit. In fact, we may have to drag the Pentagon into the space age.

I agree with Michael Getler of the *Washington Post* when he wrote that Project High Frontier "would take advantage of a U.S. edge in space technology, use equipment already in development, not require new American nuclear weapons, and is not based on attacking missile silos in the Soviet Union."

It should be noted that this system is not based on killing large numbers of Russians. At the conference, science writer Jerry Ponnelle, said: "The best world model I can envision is one where everyone has a shield and no one has a sword." Project High Frontier can give us that shield.

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