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Statement - ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile]

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)

ICBM

(INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE)

There seems to be undisputed evidence that last year the Soviet Union tested an ICBM -- a bombastic missile of unknown accuracy but with a range of at least 800 miles -- far greater than that of anything we may yet have fired. Senator Henry Jackson, of Washington, chairman of the Military Applications Subcommittee of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, warned the Senate in January that "there is a danger" the Soviets may fire a 1500 mile ballistic missile before the end of the year.

The ICBM has been called the ultimate weapon. This type of rocket with a thermo-nuclear warhead, with a destructive capability of megatons (millions of tons of TNT), is the supreme instrument of offense. It arches so high (600 to 800 miles above the earth), and moves so fast (12,000 to 16,000 miles an hour), that, once it has been launched, defense against it will be nearly, if not entirely, impossible.

The German V-2, the small 200-mile range forerunner of the ICBM, bombarded London during World War II, and even the conventional explosives then used in the warhead caused thousands of casualties and blew whole buildings apart. Furthermore, there was no known defense against the German V-2. There is no known defense now against any of the ballistic missiles which might be developed, but
we all know that this ultimate weapon gives to the nation possessing
it the possibility of either controlling or destroying the earth.