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Speeches, A Hold-Fast on Missile Deployment

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

A HOLD-FAST ON MISSILE DEPLOYMENT

After several years of relative stability, the Soviet Union and the United States are on the verge of major additional deployments of nuclear missiles. The pressure to proceed with the installation of these new systems is on in this nation and the indications are that it is on in the Soviet Union. It is on despite the fact that each nation can ill-afford the enormous expenditures of these deployments in the light of other national needs. It is on even though, for years, both nations have urged arms limitations as the better way to national security than the continuance of this appalling missile merry-go-round.

It should be noted, therefore, that during the last months of the Johnson Administration and the first months of the present Administration the Soviet Union apparently made three overtures which suggested a willingness to sit down and discuss a limitation on armaments of various types. In a similar vein, President Nixon has stated that he wants to replace the era of "confrontation" with the era of negotiations." He has made clear that he would prefer the "open-hand" to the "closed fist" in the relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Based on Secretary Rogers' press conference of April 7, I assume that Soviet probings for talks on armaments have received full consideration in the Executive Branch. It would be my hope that the President, on that basis and on the basis of the preparations which he has made since taking office, would now be ready to set a date certain to open U. S.-Soviet discussions.

I am not suggesting that armaments negotiations should be "linked" with a consideration of political differences and the host of other issues
which have separated the United States and the Soviet Union for many years. Panoramic negotiations of that kind may or may not be fruitful at some point in the future. In my view, however, first things should come first.

The first thing, in my judgment, is not to be found in the political issues of many years standing. Nor is the first thing to be found in arms reduction in a general sense which has been under discussion for two decades. Rather, the most urgent need is to curb the rising pressure in both countries for another major intensification of the deadly nuclear weapons confrontation.

The time to respond to Soviet overtures for talks or to take the initiative ourselves should be before not after the deployment of new nuclear weapons systems, for which the gears are now turning, has gained irreversible momentum in both countries. What is needed before all else are U. S.-Soviet negotiations which, confined to one question, may act to halt these gears promptly. What is needed, now, in my judgment, is the negotiation of an agreement to hold-fast on the further deployment of nuclear weapons in the Soviet Union and the United States.

If agreement on that single point can be achieved there would be created a climate of calm, as in the case of the aftermath of the Test Ban Treaty, which might help to bring about solutions of mutual interest to the more complex problems of arms-reduction as well as the resolution of political differences. At the least, the immediate result of an agreement to hold-fast on further nuclear deployments would be an immense savings of resources which would otherwise be diverted into new weapons systems in both countries over the next few years. Any initiative by the President in this connection, in my judgment, would be gratefully received, not only by the peoples concerned but by the peoples of the world.