

December 15, 1965

Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner  
Dean, School of Science  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Dear Jerry:

I appreciate your taking the trouble to educate me about the ABM problem. Your views are very persuasive, particularly about the risks of built-in escalation from a tactical to a foolhardy attempt at strategic defense. Comments like the enclosed editorial are convincing support for your caution.

The key is plainly the fallout shelters. I am worried that they might indeed be adopted in the effort to bolster the ABM system. In the context of the nuclear stalemate they are a critical aggressive weapon, since their absence represents a self-inspecting concession to mutual deterrence. For the ABM to have a sub-strategic utility we would have to ask

- (1) Technically, can a system without fallout shelters be put together that adds any useful security against tactical or accidental attacks;
- (2) Politically, can such a system be stabilized at this level as a matter of domestic policy; and would the U.S. and U.S.S.R. be able to persuade one another of these intentions.

I agree with you about these difficulties.

But the mere technical possibility of ABM will mean irresistible pressure for its adoption in the absence of a political settlement. A three-year moratorium on deployment may be all one could hope for; without the budgetary pressure of Viet Nam, would Johnson be able to put it off at all?

Can you communicate such subtleties to the Russians? Or are they not the real target of your committee's arguments.

If you could let me have a copy of your committee's report, it would be as much a courtesy and may save you some bother in answering rhetorical questions.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

WIESNER, J.