



Teller tells Italy: 'defensive weapons must be realized in Europe'

Dr. Edward Teller in an interview to the Italian magazine Epoca, published on Nov. 28, described the danger of a Soviet strike against the West if an anti-ballistic missile "shield" is not erected in time by the NATO allies. Here are excerpts from Dr. Teller's remarks.

Q: Dr. Teller, if the United States is relying, as it seems to be, on great defensive weapons, why do we need its missiles in Europe?

'If the Soviets have beam weapons before we do, or if theirs are better than ours, we are finished. If, however, we develop beam weapons first, the Soviets are not finished. This is the difference.'

Teller: We should rather start with the Russians. We have to understand them. Their communism is not very different from czarism. They feel surrounded, they fear the West, and in order to break the encirclement and the fear, they can't think of anything but dominating the world. But would a global Soviet regime be tolerable? No. So we must find some kind of defense . . . if the Soviets feel themselves stronger than us and secure about fighting us, their attack is inevitable. Therefore it is necessary to avoid giving them that sense of certainty. Otherwise, they will do everything to destroy us.

Q: Why the missiles in Europe?

Teller: The missiles mean little. I do not agree with the current idea that the threat of retaliation will prevent war.

Q: Would you tell us more about the kind of defense that you are thinking of putting in place?

Teller: . . . If Italy, for example, were not protected by this active defense and if the Soviet Union were to attack her in order to take over, 95 percent of the population would disappear. With the shield of active defense, only 10 percent would die.

Q: Do you call this an acceptable figure?

Teller: Considering the population of Italy, five or six million people is a horrendous loss, but it is not the end of the world.

Q: We should ask these five or six million Italians.

Teller: Why? Didn't millions of people die in other wars?

Q: Couldn't we put a stop to war?

Teller: This is what we are seeking to do. The second aim of the active defense is that function of deterrence, because it demonstrates that we are absolutely not willing to surrender and that if the Soviets attack us, we will be hard to kill. We are deploying the missiles where it is strategically wise to place them, and because defensive weapons are not yet ready. We are developing them, but there are too many obstacles of a political nature. The media does not help. Reagan spurred the scientific community and the media thought immediately of "star wars" in space. It is idiocy. . . . It is useless to deceive ourselves; as Reagan has said, today the Soviet Union is ahead of us. The only political tactic that we can use is deterrence. The significance of the missiles in Europe will be clearer within five to ten years, when we realize that it is exactly these missiles which have given us the way and the time to develop a general defense.

Q: Have you said this to the European governments?

Teller: I have preached for some time that we must have a program of collective research. Defensive weapons must be realized with Europe. This is not impossible. Naturally there will be some problems. But since I do not say that these weapons will be exclusively nuclear, but part nuclear and part non-nuclear, I do not see why we should not resolve them. Instead of constructing new offensive weapons, we

must build all defensive weapons.

Q: What is not convincing, Dr. Teller, is the purely defensive character of these weapons. What happens if the Soviet Union gains possession of similar weapons? At the end of 1977, Soviet publications were full of studies on lasers. Then all of a sudden, nothing more, which led one to believe that they had become top secret. Might it not be the case that the U.S.S.R. already has these weapons?

Teller: If the Soviets have them too, or if they have them before we do, or if theirs are better than ours, we are finished. If, however, we get there first, they are not finished. The difference is this. Certainly there are many risks. But you can't tell me that if the scientists of the free world go to work together, they will not be able to beat the Soviet scientists who work because they have to. If the idea prevails that we must depend on science, I believe that we will have peace. It is up to us to conquer peace. . . .

Q: Then these defensive weapons serve also for attack?

Teller: . . . Naturally, I can hit you in the head with a shield, but the shield should not, for this reason, be considered a weapon of attack. . . .

Q: How do you judge the opposition to you among scientists?

Teller: They are convinced that the only reasonable thing to do is to negotiate with the Soviet Union. This is an historic recourse. Why did Chamberlain do what he did? He was the

prime minister of Great Britain, he was not a Nazi, as their scientists are not communists. Why didn't France and Germany stop Hitler? . . . I insisted that the Italian, English and German, French and Japanese physicists get together and accept the idea of working for defense, something Hans Bethe would find more difficult to oppose, because then it would not be up to Ronald Reagan to decide; it would be up to the free world.

Q: If you were now in Germany, in England, in Italy, what would you do?

Teller: I would accept the missiles and at the same time I would ask to participate in formulating global strategy. . . .

Q: Does this global strategy you speak of really exist?

Teller: The American government has it. If I were Italian . . . I have no right to say what I would do if I were Italian. But as an American I can say that I would like to see the closest collaboration possible among all the allies, NATO, and Japan. . . . If we create and continue to create defensive weapons and at the same time, scientifically and economically, we seek to maintain the unity of the Western world, I believe that international relations will improve. Not within a few months, obviously, but in several decades.

Q: Do you ever feel a sense of guilt in this optimism?

Teller: No, never. Those who wanted to unleash the atomic bomb on Hiroshima have the sense of guilt.

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