EDITORIAL

Don’t change the housing system

The MIT housing system has for years held the distinction of treating incoming and continuing students as adults with the capacity to make their own decisions. In addition, MIT housing provides the unique supportive environment necessary for students in the rigorous world of the Institute. The Tech strongly supports the current system and urges both students and administrators to work toward maintaining and improving the existing process.

The largest threat to the current system is the Freshman Housing Committee’s report, issued two years ago. The report said, among other things, that all freshmen should be assigned to dormitories as opposed to an Institute-selected advising system.

The distinctions between the dormitories provide an opportunity for freshmen to give advice to one of a perceived plant from the dean’s office. Taking this power away from the students would change the role of the tutor from one of being a friend who can give advice to one of a perceived plant from the dean’s office.

Breaking down this power of choice would ultimately destroy much of the individual personality of the Institute houses. The differences between the dormitories provide an opportunity for students to choose an environment in which they feel comfortable. The support available in one’s living group is often the best, because it exists in an environment the student can choose as opposed to an Institute-selected advising system. The unique pressures and hardships associated with being an MIT undergraduate are best handled by a unique and supportive housing system, starting during the freshman year.

With arms control hot a topic of the month, many seem to believe that global treaties should exist in order to prevent the sanction of nuke arsenals. One columnist recently suggested that the United States might support a new international ban on all tactical nukes, just to prevent accidental launchings. Such a proposal would not only fail to achieve the goal of tightening of muke security, but would be destabilizing to the US defense strategy.

Instead of looking to keep them from being used accidentally as is absurd as it sounds. Why limit weapons, when the real culprit is communication, and communications, and control networks? If nations are left with smaller arsenals, won’t they be more inclined to loosen up on security measures to avoid being outmaneuvered in wartime? Nuke forces don’t need such a treaty, they need better telephones and stronger locks.

Tactical control treaties never work. As many people have noted, they are political obseque pieces that superpowers swap while engaged in cold wars. They have, as well, indicated that they would only be used in retaliation for a comprehensive tactical nuke ban. The Soviets, for instance, like this “prompt counterforce” doctrine. They use it to justify their existence.

What would happen if such a treaty were in place? If war occurred tomorrow, the troops would serve as a tripele for tactical nukes — by destroying, well-hidden nuclear weapons fired by soldiers at soldiers. Tactical nukes are cheap alternatives to massive troop buildings, and prevent the escalation of localized military engagements into city-against-city confrontations.

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Tactical nukes came close to being used in the Gulf War, and it can be argued that their constant presence in the theatre prevent Iraqi chemical and biological assaults. The Soviets, for instance, like this “prompt counterforce” doctrine. They use it to justify their existence.

Letters to the Editor

Keep the nukes, but safely

One of the first things to cause people to scream during the Soviet coup last month was the deplorable fear that the mechanisms by which Soviet nuclear weapons are fired would be compromised by the power struggle. The nukes, it turns out, were safe for the time. That fact has apparently not stopped a new arms control movement centered around lessening the threat of accidental release of nuclear weapons. How the movement’s advocates intend to achieve this goal, is, well, less clear.

Nuclear weapons — strategic nukes, weapons designed to destroy an opponent’s military potential (factories, cities, people), and tactical, or battle- field, nukes, are, of course, subject to control and safety measures, regardless of the nation that deploys them. Land-based strategic nukes are probably the most insulated from accidental use, mainly because permanent communication and control structures prevent goofs and confusion. Submarine-based and tactical weapons, often on the move and isolated from direct communication with the outside world, are the least secure. If war occurred tomorrow, land-based, strategic nukes might lie dormant, simply because the control pathways needed to fire them may be destroyed early on. In time of peace or cold war, however, strategic nukes stand the least chance of being used unnecessarily. Many tactical nukes, on the other hand, are more responsive but less secure.

Doomsday scenario, in which a massive strategic nuclear attack by the Russians is answered by an equal and opposite American response is not a very controversial issue. Strategic nukes are messy. Because they are targeted at civilians, their use would involve important moral dilemmas. They should never be used, and since the Sixties, the United States has said that they would only be used in retaliation for a similar nuclear strike.

Using nuclear weapons in response to other threats is a tougher issue. At the beginning of the nuclear age, the United States said that any conventional attack upon the United States would provoke a strategic nuclear attack. This “massive retaliation” doctrine was, however, too psychological to work, and we were left with a deterred. This change left a hole in US defense strategy.

If Soviet tanks, for instance, crossed into Western Europe, or North Korean troops stormed below the 38th parallel, US forces would be caught unprepared. Too weak to defend their positions, and unsupported by a massive strategic deterrent, they would be easily crushed.

This is where tactical nukes fall into place. The US military designed them specifically to keep them from being used accidentally as is absurd as it sounds. Why limit weapons, when the real culprit is communication, and communications, and control networks? If nations are left with smaller arsenals, won’t they be more inclined to loosen up on security measures to avoid being outmaneuvered in wartime? Nuke forces don’t need such a treaty, they need better telephones and stronger locks.

Arms control treaties never work. As many people have noted, they are political obseque pieces that superpowers swap while engaged in cold wars. They are a public sign of diplomacy and good faith, but are meaningless militarily, because they only limit pre-existing technologies in narrow fields of defense.

Reduction treaties are pacts against enemies;