PS1 for 6/2/88#LET'S CLIMB THE ALPS!

Even though Jack Kemp has dropped out of the presidential race, he is still almost the only political leader who comes up with original ideas that are worth discussing. His latest is ALPS, his plan for an Accidental Launch Protection System.

Protecting human life against fatal accidents is something that Americans spend enormous funds for, enthusiastically and generously. We require office buildings and hotels to install sprinkler systems to guard against fire, and we build land-costly medians to prevent highway accidents.

These sums are spent for life protection. They are over and above the large sums we spend for damages after mishaps occur, such as for fire insurance on our homes and accident insurance on our automobiles.

So, how come we have spent no money to protect ourselves against an accidental launch of deadly nuclear missiles? Obviously, an accident is possible; Chernobyl is dramatic proof of that.

An accident could occur in many ways: a computer malfunction, an illiterate misreading the signs, maintenance or safety personnel misjudging the warning signs (such as in the recent Los Angeles skyscraper fire), or an unauthorized launch by a man gone berserk.

An ""accident'' could even result from a terrorist attack. Who knows what some wild man will plan? We've seen plenty of 20th century examples of suicidal attacks that seem totally irrational to us.

At the present time, the American people have no protection whatsoever against a nuclear Chernobyl. Congressman Jack Kemp (R-NY) asks the ultimate question: why not, and what are we going to do about it?

His solution for this precarious national predicament is the Accidental Launch Protection System (ALPS). It would protect our nation against accidental and unauthorized ballistic missiles.

ALPS is a two-layered ground-based defense system consisting of elements that have already been developed as part of our Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program. ALPS would use current technologies capable of deployment by the mid-nineties.

ALPS would consist of two interceptor missiles (ERIS, the Exoatmospheric Reentry Intercept System, and HEDI, the High Endoatmospheric Defense Interceptor), a ground-based radar, and a ground-based surveillance tracking system.

Kemp recommends that the initial ALPS site be the unused ABM site at Grand Forks, North Dakota, which is fully permissible under the 1972 ABM Treaty. We did have a functioning ABM there, but it was closed after one-day's operation under a Congressional amendment sponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA).

Kemp urges building a second ALPS site at Washington, D.C. This second site was permitted under the 1972 ABM Treaty, then disallowed under the 1974 Protocol, then apparently permitted again under last December's U.S.-U.S.S.R. agreement which refers to the ABM Treaty ""as signed in 1972.''

Thus, Kemp's ALPS would be in compliance with the 1972 ABM Treaty. While it is downright silly to concern ourselves about compliance with a treaty that the Soviets have already so massively violated, Kemp's plan would stay within the ABM Treaty's strictures in order to keep the debate focused on the real issue of protecting the American people against an accidental launch of deadly nuclear missiles.

Kemp's ALPS proposal will be offered as an amendment to the FY 1989 Defense Authorization Act. It would require the Secretary of Defense within 120 days to provide Congress with a plan (which could include options) for early ALPS deployment as an integral element of a strategic defense system.

Kemp believes that the urgent need for ALPS is demonstrated by a

dramatic lesson in the Persian Gulf. When the (BF)USS Stark(end BF) was attacked there last year, its defensive system was not operating, so 37 American sailors died under the Exocet missile attack.

However, when the (BF)USS Wainright(end BF) was attacked in the same area a few weeks ago, our defensive technology was functioning, and none of the attacking missiles hit our ship.

ALPS would be a vital insurance policy against an accidental or unauthorized launch of ballistic missiles (which can deliver nuclear or chemical weapons), whether launched by the Soviet Union, by a radical third power, or by a terrorist group. ALPS would also give us hands-on knowledge and experience in developing a defensive system as part of our strategy for deterrence.

The Pentagon's latest report on ""Soviet Military Power'' describes the major Soviet ABM modernization program at its Moscow site, plus the increasing evidence that the Soviets are working toward a nationwide territorial defense as well as a space-based strategic defense. ALPS would start to close this ABM Gap, that is, the huge Soviet advantage in deployed ABM capabilities.