

## **Rethinking National Missile Defense**

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The superiority of the United States nuclear capabilities is indisputable and recognized by all of the world's nations. This fact alone should be sufficient to provide an adequate deterrent to any nuclear strike against U.S. territory or that of its allies. The Bush administration, nevertheless, feels that deterrence alone is no longer viable and is pursuing a national missile defense system (NMD) with ground, sea, and air-based components that is excessive relative to the perceived threat and reckless in terms of maintaining strategic stability.

The tragic events of September 11, not to mention the 1993 World Trade Center and 1998 Oklahoma City bombings, are a grim example of the futility of such a system, as it has become more and more obvious that an anti-ballistic missile system will not protect American citizens from those who are determined to attack the continental U.S. Oddly though, the administration contends that 9/11 proves that the U.S. must develop a large scale NMD as part of its defense (Council for a Livable World 2001a). While it is true that in light of the terrorist attacks the U.S. must take steps to increase its security, the administration's claim that missile defense is now even more necessary is not only illogical, but it belittles the intelligence of the American public.

The consequences of deploying such a system could be dire, ranging from a mere increase in anti-American sentiment to a full-blown arms race like that of the Cold War years. Thus, the most critical factor to be considered is the extent to which this decision will affect international relations and security. The U.S. has come a long way in improving relations with Russia in particular. To upset this progress would jeopardize years of diplomatic efforts. Despite virulent international opposition to a U.S. defense system of this type, the Bush administration is persistent in its "go it alone" attitude. As a world superpower the United States has a responsibility to lead by example; but the willingness of the present administration to advocate the deployment of a NMD and thereby risk a renewed arms race sends the wrong message to the rest of the world.

On March 17, 1999, the United States Senate enacted the National Missile Defense Act of 1999 which dictated the policy to deploy as soon as is technologically possible an effective National

Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack (National Missile Defense 1999). Technology is the only criterion mentioned in the NMD Act, but other factor must also be taken into account. The Clinton Administration opposed the legislation for this very reason and suggested that the following four criteria must be considered: the existence of a significant threat that would warrant an NMD, the cost of developing an effective system, the existence of the necessary technology, and the question of whether the decision to deploy would put U.S.-Russian relations in jeopardy (Keeny 2000). While the issues of cost and technology warrant a brief analysis, the most significant criteria to be evaluated are the degree of the perceived threat of ballistic missile attack and the potential impacts on foreign relations resulting from the deployment of a massive NMD.

The cost of the proposed multi-tiered missile defense system is estimated at \$273 billion (Council for a Livable World 2001b). The most critical issue regarding the cost is whether or not a credible threat does in fact exist that would warrant this enormous expenditure. In the absence of such a confirmed threat, the system would be a colossal waste of American taxpayer's dollars.

The technology of developing a defense system must be proven beyond a doubt to be effective before the decision to deploy can be made. Is the technology available to develop and deploy a system capable of protecting the U.S. and its citizens from a ballistic missile attack? As of now, it is not. Most of the testing has been conducted under unrealistic circumstances, which creates bias in the test results and does not prove its effectiveness in the event of an actual strike. For example, the administration has claimed success in the capability of the system to overcome countermeasures such as decoy warheads used to confuse the radar guidance of the interceptor while the real warhead continues toward its target. A recent test proved this to be true (Smith 2002); however, the decoys were spherical while actual warheads are cone-shaped, which made it easier for the system to distinguish between the decoys and the test warhead. In a realistic circumstance, countries capable of developing countermeasures could easily make cone-shaped decoys.

Acts of terrorism continue to be the foremost threat facing U.S. national security, and as recent examples have proven, are committed without the use of ballistic missiles. Some intelligence sources claim that terrorist groups are indeed pursuing ballistic missile capabilities; however, none have yet achieved the necessary technology (Federation of American Scientists 2001). Developing a system to shield from ballistic missiles will only prompt would-be

attackers to focus their resources on finding a way around the system. The most feasible and inexpensive method of overcoming a missile defense system is to use vehicles other than ballistic missiles to deliver the warhead, which itself is relatively small. As we have seen in the past, explosives can be transported and detonated causing excessive damage by a variety of alternative methods, such as the truck used in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing or the small boat that nearly destroyed the USS Cole. September 11 proved that even commercial airliners can be turned into weapons. The danger of relying on a NMD for defense is analogous to the Maginot line used by the French to protect from German invasion during the early years of WWII. The defensive capability of the line was known to the Germans to be virtually impossible to overcome, so they simply devised a strategy for going around it (Perry 2001:40).

The only countries currently capable of striking the continental U.S. with ballistic missiles are Russia and China (Federation of American Scientists 2001). Given the consequences, such a strike would be highly implausible. The only condition under which an attack by either country would occur is in the event of a U.S. first strike on Russia or China, an equally far-fetched scenario. What then, is the threat the administration perceives as warranting a massive missile defense system?

It has been predicted that in the near future certain rogue nations (those labeled by the administration as bearing hostile intent toward the U.S.) will acquire intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of reaching the U.S. (Federation of American Scientists 2001). One must recall, however, that during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 the U.S. had the surveillance technology to detect the Soviet missile sites being erected in Cuba. It seems that after forty years of significant advances in surveillance and intelligence capabilities, the U.S. should be able to detect any ICBM development or movement long before a launch. Moreover, even if a rogue nation was able to develop a limited ICBM capacity without U.S. detection, it is almost inconceivable that the leader of such a nation would sacrifice his or her entire country to certain and total destruction by the U.S. for the mere chance of striking one or two American cities.

Using conventional precision guided weapons, such missile development sites could easily be destroyed if diplomatic negotiations failed to cease ICBM programs. The case of North Korea is an example of the success of diplomacy in persuading hostile countries to abandon missile programs. In 1999, former Secretary of Defense William Perry negotiated a moratorium on North Korea's Taepo Dong missile program (Berry 2000), which recently has been voluntarily extended

until 2003 (Federation of American Scientists 2001).

The most important factor to be considered is the ramification of NMD deployment on U.S. relations with the rest of the global community, especially Russia and China. While for the most part, Moscow's reaction to Bush's announcement to withdraw from the ABM Treaty has been relatively subdued, there has been vehement criticism within the Russian government. The former Russian Ambassador to the U.S., Vladimir Lukin, voiced his opposition in his statement on December 13, 2001: "The U.S. used our enormous help to conduct the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, then announced its position on ABM. It's a sign, and a bad sign at that" (Boyle 2001). Vyacheslav Volodin, Leader of the Fatherland All-Russia Faction in the Duma, argued on the same date that the Bush administration's decision is a reflection of a superpower that is trying to dictate its rules to the world (Boyle 2001). Does the threat of attack justify the potentially negative impact of a U.S. missile defense on foreign relations?

Continued U.S. commitment to arms reduction agreements is of critical importance to maintaining positive international relations. The decision to deploy an NMD system has significantly affected the status of two of the most important treaties signed by both the United States and Russia in the history of nuclear disarmament: the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). While the ABM Treaty has been outright abandoned by the U.S., the 1968 NPT would be undermined by an inconsistency on the part of the U.S. to reduce the world's nuclear arsenals. The area of concern lies specifically in Article VI of the NPT, which states: "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date" (U.S. Department of State 2001). If the deployment of a large-scale NMD were perceived by other nuclear powers to pose a threat to their deterrence capabilities, the result could be the proliferation of nuclear weapons arsenals in order to overwhelm a U.S. defense. Both Russia and China have warned that they would increase the size and technology of their nuclear arsenals if the U.S. deploys such a system (World Policy Institute 2000). The disregard for these treaties is inconsistent with our responsibilities as a world leader to ensure global security, and will not allow us to legitimately hold other countries to their obligations.

The sole purpose of the ABM Treaty was to limit missile defense deployment in an effort to maintain strategic stability during the Cold War. Some argue that provisions of the twenty-nine year old

document are outdated and, as Henry A. Kissinger claims, do not address the new national security environment, one that was not even considered, let alone anticipated when the ABM treaty was signed (Kissinger 1999). By that same logic, one could dispute the validity of the two hundred twenty-six year old United States Constitution, a concept unthinkable to those who ironically share Kissinger's view. Even though the Cold War has ended, the need for strategic stability remains critical to global security.

On December 31, 2001, the Department of Defense (DoD) submitted to Congress the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which outlines a proposed change in U.S. nuclear strategy. The report advises that nuclear weapons play an increasing role in military planning, proposes the development of new types of such weapons, and suggests the potential for resuming underground nuclear testing (Nuclear Posture Review [Excerpts] 2002). In addition, the NPR advocates the development of contingency plans for situations which would merit nuclear strikes against specific nations: Current examples of immediate contingencies include an Iraqi attack on Israel or its neighbors, a North Korean attack on South Korea, or a military confrontation over the status of Taiwan (Nuclear Posture Review [Excerpts] 2002). North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya have all been declared to be immediate, potential, or unexpected contingencies (Nuclear Posture Review [Excerpts] 2002). China and Russia are also mentioned as possible future targets; however, Russia is an unlikely candidate unless U.S. relations with Russia significantly worsen in the future (Nuclear Posture Review [Excerpts] 2002). More importantly, it reflects a willingness of the administration to consider nuclear weapons in a war fighting capacity rather than as the traditional deterrence capability only to be used in self-defense of U.S. interests. It must be noted that the NPR is not a change in U.S. policy, it is merely a proposal by the Defense Department. Unfortunately though, it exposed to the entire international community the hawkish attitudes within the DoD.

The insistence on developing a NMD despite international opposition coupled with the recent NPR is irresponsible and dangerous. By announcing the future deployment of a protective shield while pursuing a strategic policy that outlines plans for possible nuclear attacks on specific countries, the U.S. has put itself in a very vulnerable position. Those nations specified in the NPR will most certainly feel threatened and may in turn rapidly proliferate their arsenals in anticipation of a U.S. strike. Such nations could see the actions of the U.S. as an intention to attack indiscriminately and without fear of retaliation. Furthermore, being fully aware that the NMD will not be ready for deployment any time in the near future, a radical or suicidal

leader may take the earliest possible opportunity to strike the U.S. before its shield is erected. This is of course an unlikely situation, but unfortunately, it is one in which the administration has knowingly placed American citizens.

The threat of possible ballistic missile attack by a few hostile countries is simply not significant enough to risk the deterioration of our relations with the rest of the world. In addition, diplomacy has been shown to have desirable outcomes when applied to arms reduction. The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has helped Russia disable more than 4,900 nuclear warheads at cost of \$3.2 billion to the U.S. from 1992 to 2000, a fraction of the cost for developing missile defense (World Policy Institute 2000).

With respect to the cost criterion, the projected cost of the NMD is a large sum of money for a system that is unable to protect us from our top security concern of terrorism. Rather than allocating these funds to missile defense, the money would be better spent on increased anti-terrorism programs, not to mention any of the various federal programs lacking sufficient funding.

The technology criterion is also lacking. The technology must be proven to be effective; so far, it has not. According to former President Bill Clinton, this was the reason for passing the decision on to the current administration (Clinton 2000). Furthermore, simple countermeasures are able to confuse even the most sophisticated NMD, and are easily acquired by any country with access to ballistic missile technology (Krieger 2000).

The preservation of years of improving relations with Russia since the end of the Cold War is critical to maintaining global stability and security. It would be devastating, not to mention counter-productive, to regress to previous tensions and animosities. Russia, our former adversary warned that the deployment of an American NMD would undermine previous weapons reduction agreements and could result in a new arms race, not just with Russia, but possibly the rest of the world (Tyler 2001). It is for this reason that the U.S. must pursue diplomatic avenues to reduce the threat of missile attack through multilateral arms control agreements rather than simply erecting an unreliable and internationally criticized NMD.

In so much as the U.S. has a responsibility to defend its citizens, it also has a responsibility to stand by the promises made under international treaties. In this age of globalization, the U.S. cannot afford the isolation that would result from ignoring international obligations and the concerns of those in the global community. In conclusion, the Bush administration must consider the potential global impacts of the proposed National Missile Defense system, question

whether the massive scope of the system is warranted by the actual threat, and consider whether it is worth the risk of jeopardizing U.S. foreign relations and possibly the future security of our nation.

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**Statute Cited**

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