

Deploying NMD: Not Whether, But How

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Some time before 2010, the United States will deploy a national missile defence (NMD) system designed to defend all 50 states against a small-scale missile attack. After years of debate, a political consensus now exists in America that such a limited system provides a necessary answer to the emerging ballistic-missile threat from the so-called rogue states of North Korea, Iran and Iraq. Every major presidential candidate in 2000, with the possible exception of Bill Bradley, favours NMD deployment. They differ only on the speed with which to deploy and on what should be done to mollify the concerns of Russia, China, and Europe.

The question with which US decision-makers are now struggling is not whether to build an NMD system but how to do so without making the United States less secure. The key to avoiding this danger is to make deployment decisions based on realistic assessments of both the state of missile defence technology and the nature of the threat. From the perspective of these two criteria, the goal of NMD deployment should be neither President Ronald Reagan's erstwhile dream of rendering nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete', nor the Clinton administration's more ambitious proposals for a defence against a technologically sophisticated threat consisting of dozens of missiles. The former system is impossible, while the latter cannot be built for many years to come. What known technology may enable the United States to do is to build a defence against precisely the threat it now faces: the possibility that North Korea and, perhaps, Iran and Iraq, will acquire a very small inventory of relatively crude (but effective) nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

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In short, the United States should build a limited NMD that is truly limited. Yet, even such a system poses two risks to the United States. One is that Moscow will respond by taking steps that raise the risk of nuclear war. The other is that the US Congress will reject a deal worked out with Moscow to modify the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to allow for NMD deployment. Avoiding these two risks requires astute diplomacy abroad and smart politics at home. On the international front, the United States needs to move quickly to strike a deal with Russia on modifying the ABM Treaty. On the domestic front, the Clinton administration needs to move quickly to begin building domestic political support for any deal it might reach with Russia. Only by pursuing this two-pronged strategy can the United States succeed in squaring the NMD deployment circle.

Why NMD?

It is tempting to dismiss the push for NMD as being driven purely by domestic politics in the United States. It is not. The political popularity of missile defence is long-standing. What has changed in recent years is both the strategic context within which NMD would be deployed and the nature of the threat confronting the United States. The Cold War has ended, easing fears that defensive deployments will inevitably trigger an offensive arms race and raise the risk of war. Instead, with the Soviet Union on the ash heap of history, the threat of a small-scale missile attack from lesser powers now looms larger than before. Aside from increasing in relative terms, the threat has also grown as a result of more recent advances by North Korea, Iran and Iraq in acquiring ballistic-missile technology.

A new and more cooperative strategic context

During the Cold War, a political consensus on missile defence developed around two propositions. First, missile defences that could protect against a large-scale attack would destabilise the strategic balance and raise the risk of war because they undermined each side's confidence in its nuclear deterrent. Second, the deployment of large-scale defences would trigger an offensive arms race as each side sought to prevent the other from making itself invulnerable to attack.

These two beliefs were codified in 1972, when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the ABM Treaty banning the deployment of strategically significant ballistic-missile defences, that is, defences capable of putting the reliability of the adversary's nuclear deterrent in doubt. The treaty recognised, however, that not all missile defences are strategically significant. Article III permitted each side to deploy an ABM system at two sites, each limited to 100 interceptors, to protect the national capital region and an ICBM field. This provision was modified in 1974 to limit each side to 100 interceptors at one ABM site. Although President Reagan challenged the consensus on the dangers posed by strategically significant missile defences, it soon became clear that no technological fix could protect the United States against a nuclear-missile attack of any appreciable size.

The United States and the Soviet Union negotiated the ABM Treaty in a hostile strategic context. Neither side trusted the other's intentions. Both feared the other would seek to exploit any military advantage. The end of the Cold War changed those assessments, and US–Russian relations became more cooperative and less antagonistic. Russia and the United States may not be allies, but they no longer are immutable enemies.

The consequences of the new, more cooperative strategic context that developed after the Cold War are most evident in the deep cuts the two sides have made and pledged to make in their nuclear arsenals. The first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) in 1991 limited the arsenals of the US and the Soviet Union to 6,000 accountable warheads (down from some 10,000–12,000 at the height of the Cold War). A follow-on START II Treaty signed in January 1993 would further cut US and Russian forces to 3,000–3,500 on each side. Finally, in March 1997, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin committed their respective governments to negotiating an additional reduction to 2,000–2,500 weapons each as soon as the Russian *Duma* ratifies START II. This is not to say that all distrust has dissolved between Washington and Moscow. Russian officials worry that the United States seeks to become a world hegemon, and they insist publicly that their willingness to agree to further arms reductions depends on the US foregoing NMD and adhering to the ABM Treaty. Still, the level of distrust between Moscow and Washington is far lower than during the Cold War. Worst-case assumptions about the other country's behaviour are no longer dominant – as the widespread cooperation and increased transparency spawned by the Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat-reduction initiative demonstrate. American nuclear scientists visit Russian weapons laboratories and vice versa, US technology helps safeguard Russian weapons and materials, and American dollars are funding the safe and secure disposition of an ageing nuclear stockpile.¹

It is this transformation in US–Russian relations that makes it possible to rethink the role of missile defence. There is now much greater scope for infusing military planning with more realistic assessments of weapons developments. At the very least, the role of missile defences in military policy – including possible modifications in the ABM Treaty – is a topic that must be open for discussion, even if (not yet) to mutual agreement. Russia and the United States have been undertaking precisely such a dialogue in the past few years. By 1997, they had reached an understanding on what type of theatre missile defences (TMD) could be deployed within the constraints imposed by the ABM Treaty.² In 1999, Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to try to negotiate further changes in the treaty to allow for a limited NMD deployment.

The changing nature of the threat

The improved strategic relationship between the United States and Russia makes a new dialogue over missile defence possible. The rising threat that the ballistic-missile programmes of other states poses to the United States makes it necessary.

Through the mid-1990s, the official view of the US intelligence community, as summarised in periodic National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), downplayed any new missile threat to the United States. For example, the November 1995 NIE noted that North Korea was developing a missile that might be able 'to strike portions of Alaska and the far western portion of the Hawaiian Island chain (more than 1,000 kilometers west of Honolulu)', but it regarded North Korea as 'unlikely to obtain the technological capability to develop a longer range ICBM'. The NIE gave even less credence to fears of a long-range missile threat from Iran or Iraq: 'Ballistic missile programs of other countries are focused on regional concerns'. Finally, the NIE argued that the United States would be 'likely to detect any indigenous long-range ballistic missile program many years before deployment'.³

The intelligence community's relatively benign assessment of the long-range ballistic-missile threat proved controversial.⁴ NMD proponents used the controversy to push through legislation creating the bipartisan Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States. Known more widely as the Rumsfeld Commission, after its chair, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, it concluded in July 1998 that 'the threat to the US posed by these emerging [missile] technologies is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates and reports by the Intelligence Community'. As a result, North Korea or Iran 'would be able to inflict major destruction on the US within about five years of a decision to acquire such a capability' and 'the US might well have little or no warning before operational deployment'.⁵

North Korea's surprise test of a long-range version of its *Taepo-dong 1* missile in August 1998 proved the Rumsfeld Commission's case. The test was not a complete success – the third-stage booster, apparently meant to launch a satellite into space, failed to ignite. But it did indicate that North Korea was developing the ability to build multi-stage missiles capable of travelling intercontinental distances. Faced with a far greater threat materialising much earlier than anticipated, the Clinton administration moved on the diplomatic front to dissuade Pyongyang from testing a follow-on missile system, the *Taepo-dong 2*. A three-stage version of the *Taepo-dong 2* is believed capable of delivering a several-hundred kilogramme payload anywhere in the United States.⁶ After the United States agreed in September 1999 to lift some of the economic sanctions it had imposed half a century earlier, North Korea announced it would halt its missile tests 'while the talks [with the United States] are underway'.⁷

Although North Korea's technological advances have been significant, it is important not to overstate the threat it, let alone Iran or Iraq, poses to the United States. It will still take many years for Pyongyang to deploy an operational missile capable of striking US territory. Even when it does, few, if any, of these missiles will be nuclear tipped. For now, North Korea's nuclear programme remains frozen, limiting its nuclear capacity to one or two weapons. Any decision to restart nuclear-materials production would not only

contravene the 1994 US–North Korea Framework Agreement, but it would also be readily detectable. Iranian and Iraqi efforts to develop long-range nuclear missiles capable of threatening the United States are even further off. For these reasons, the nuclear-missile threat to US territory will consist of no more than a handful of weapons for the remainder of this decade.

What NMD?

Because the US–Russian strategic context has moved from one of hostility to one of limited but real cooperation, the rising threat of a North Korean missile attack has made the political case for deploying a limited NMD irresistible. President Clinton acknowledged the political sea-change in July 1999 when he signed into law the National Missile Defense Act, a bill he had previously opposed. The law declared it to be ‘the policy of the United States 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’.⁸ In signing the law, the president declared that he would make a decision in summer 2000 on whether to proceed with development and deployment of a missile-defence system, based on the following four criteria: technological progress, the extent of the threat, overall cost and the impact of deployment on arms control.⁹

The current focus of NMD efforts contrasts with that of the 1980s in two crucial ways.¹⁰ First, it is far less ambitious. Unlike Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), it is not designed to, and is technologically incapable of, protecting the United States against a missile attack that consists of more than a few dozen warheads. Second, the planned system will not use the exotic, space-based technologies such as X-ray lasers and ‘brilliant pebbles’ that were commonly associated with SDI. Rather, the system will be ground-based and use ‘hit-to-kill’ technology to destroy incoming warheads by ramming into them.

The Pentagon has demonstrated the basic feasibility of the hit-to-kill concept. In October 1999 it launched a modified *Minuteman* ICBM from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. Some 20 minutes and 7,000 kilometres later, an interceptor missile fired from the Kwajalein missile range intercepted and destroyed the missile warhead 225km above the Pacific Ocean.¹¹ However, in a second test in January 2000 the interceptor missile missed the target. The mixed success of the first two tests underscores the difficulty of building an effective defence, even one that relies on largely proven technology.

The Clinton administration initially proposed deploying a hit-to-kill system consisting of 20 interceptor missiles in Alaska by 2003. In January 1999, it admitted that the initial development schedule was too ambitious, and it pushed the deployment deadline back to 2005. It subsequently increased the size of the interceptor force to 100 missiles. The goal of this Phase I system is to defend ‘all parts of all 50 states against the launch of a few tens of North Korean warheads, accompanied by basic penetration aids’.¹² The precise number of warheads the system is designed to defeat is classified, but it is believed to be much closer to ten than 100.

The administration envisions deploying a more advanced, Phase II NMD system in 'the 2010 to 2011 timeframe'. While this second-phase system would remain geared towards stopping just 'a few tens of ICBM warheads', it would expand US NMD capabilities in two ways. First, it would be designed to destroy missiles launched from 'various countries in the Middle East' as well as from North Korea. Second, it would be designed to defeat missiles armed with 'complex penetration aids'.¹³ To meet the threat posed by missiles launched from the Middle East – which would approach US territory from the north-east rather than the north-west as in the case of a North Korean missile launch – the United States will need to build a second interceptor site at Grand Forks, North Dakota, equipped with an additional 100 interceptor missiles. To be able to defeat more complex countermeasures, the United States will need to build more sophisticated ground-based radars, as well as a new space-based missile-tracking system.

The next major programme milestone comes in June 2000 when the administration holds a Deployment Readiness Review to decide whether to commit formally to deployment. At that time, the Pentagon is scheduled to have completed three of 19 planned tests. If the administration decides to proceed with deployment, official ground-breaking would come once the Alaskan soil thawed in spring 2001. Because site work in Alaska would violate the terms of the ABM Treaty, the administration will need either to get Russia's agreement to modify the treaty or to give formal notification six months prior to ground-breaking that the United States is withdrawing from the treaty.

Is NMD worthwhile?

The Clinton administration's hit-to-kill NMD system has won applause in political and military circles, but not everyone has been converted to the cause.¹⁴ Criticisms of the programme fall into six broad categories. Some of these criticisms are telling. Ultimately, however, critics overstate their case against a limited NMD system.

'Better policy responses exist'

Critics argue that the United States should rely on pre-emption and deterrence rather than missile defence in dealing with ballistic-missile threats. But both these strategies have shortcomings. Pre-emption is easy to urge but difficult to do. The political fall-out from a pre-emptive attack makes it tempting to strike only when proof exists that a state has become nuclear capable. But that raises the spectre that pre-emption will trigger what it seeks to avoid: a nuclear attack. Even if pre-emption does not trigger nuclear retaliation, there is no guarantee that the attack will destroy the target state's missile capability.

As for deterrence, it has formed the cornerstone of US security since the dawn of the nuclear age. There is no reason to believe that North Korea, Iran or Iraq are undeterrable. But the fact that deterrence has worked thus far does not mean it always will. Indeed, the new threats raise concerns precisely because these states are deeply hostile to the United States and its values. Should these

regimes collapse, they may strike at America. Finally, deterrence provides no antidote to the accidental launch of one of their missiles.

Ultimately, pre-emption, deterrence and defence are complementary strategies. They are not substitutes for one another.

'Missile defences are not a panacea'

Critics argue that the proposed NMD system will not protect the United States from the full range of threats. It cannot destroy ballistic missiles launched from ships because they follow a trajectory too low to be intercepted. Nor can the system protect against nuclear bombs smuggled into the United States or detonated on ships in US harbours. These shortcomings are significant because North Korea, Iran and Iraq would have an incentive to disguise their sponsorship by attacking in an unconventional fashion. The United States will be hard pressed to retaliate if it cannot determine who is responsible.

The critics' point here is well taken. To conflate the rogue missile threat and the rogue nuclear threat would be a colossal mistake. Even with NMD, the United States will need to track and foil unconventional attacks. But the fact that the hit-to-kill interceptor cannot defeat every nuclear threat is no reason to avoid trying to defend against any threats. An automobile airbag may provide no protection if the car is hit from the side, but that is no reason not to have airbags that do protect against head-on collisions.

'The system will cost much more than planned'

The Clinton administration estimated in January 1999 that deploying an NMD system with 20 interceptor missiles by 2005 would cost \$10.5 billion. If history is any guide, the actual cost will be much higher. Indeed, the programme's cost estimates have already begun to grow. In December 1999, the administration decided to increase NMD spending by \$2.2bn (roughly 20%) over the next five years. The additional money will be used to pay for more interceptor missiles, better early-warning radars and more operational testing.¹⁵ No one expects this budget increase to be the last.

Although the proposed missile defence is costly, it is not obvious that it is too costly. Many other weapons systems the Pentagon will acquire in the coming years, including the F-22 and the *Virginia*-class submarine, will cost much more.¹⁶ Nor does missile defence make an excessive claim on the defence budget. Even if the system's annual costs triple, the price tag will still be less than 3% of what the Pentagon spends each year. Should NMD ever be used to defend a major American city, this investment will look modest indeed.

'Missile defence provides little protection against accidental launch'

Proponents often portray the NMD system as a hedge against an accidental or unauthorised launch. But, as critics point out, it is not much of a hedge. Russia's command-and-control procedures make it likely that any accidental or unauthorised use would mean launching all the missiles on a submarine or an

entire squadron of ICBMs. Such an attack would easily overwhelm the US defence. China maintains its ICBMs unfuelled and without warheads, making the prospect of an accidental Chinese nuclear attack 'remote'.¹⁷ As a result, the only accidental or unauthorised launch the proposed NMD system has a reasonable chance of defending against is from a rogue state. Unlike Russia or China, these states are unlikely to possess more than a few ICBMs for the foreseeable future.

The limited utility of the hit-to-kill interceptor in dealing with accidental or unauthorised launches gives the United States good reason to try to shape Russian and Chinese reactions to the deployment of an NMD system. Should Russia or China respond by putting their forces on higher alert – or, in China's case, keeping missiles armed and fuelled – the increased risk of an accidental or unauthorised launch would swamp the benefits to be gained by protecting the United States against the other missile threats.

'The system will not work as well as advertised'

The hit-to-kill interceptor system reportedly is being designed to give decision-makers 95% confidence that the system will be 95% effective against a small-scale missile attack.¹⁸ Critics argue, with good reason, that this design goal is unrealistic. They point to the US military's experience with the Patriot, the only missile-defence system ever used in combat: 'Patriot, a theater defense system, had a perfect test record before the Persian Gulf War in 1991, with 17 successes in 17 intercept tests. Yet contrary to most media reports, it failed in most or all 44 of its attempts to destroy Iraqi Scud missiles, which behaved differently from test-range systems'.¹⁹

The hit-to-kill interceptor system is likely to fall short of its design goal for two reasons. The first is that the system is being developed too rapidly. In 1998, a panel of defence experts headed by retired General Larry D. Welch, a former Air Force chief of staff, described the compressed development schedule for missile defence as a technological 'rush to failure' – a conclusion it reiterated in November 1999.²⁰ The Pentagon concurred with the panel's call for more hardware, additional tests and better management procedures.²¹ If the Clinton administration decides in summer 2000 to move ahead with deployment, construction will begin before the military has fielded a complete system, let alone demonstrated that it can work under real-world conditions.

Countermeasures provide a second reason to doubt that the system will work as well as advertised. The US intelligence community believes that North Korea, Iran and Iraq 'probably' could develop basic countermeasures 'by the time they flight test their missiles'.²² Countermeasures obviously favour the attacker: 'Although only one effective countermeasure would be needed to defeat a US defense, that defense must be able to defeat every plausible combination of countermeasures'.²³

Although countermeasures provide a challenge to any NMD system, that challenge should not be overstated. Countermeasures are easy to sketch on paper but far more difficult to build. Contrary to claims that China or Russia

will sell countermeasures to North Korea, Iran and Iraq, Beijing and Moscow may conclude that it is against their interests to help these states build sophisticated missile forces. Doing so would increase the political pressure in the United States to build a greatly expanded NMD system, which in turn might threaten China and Russia's nuclear deterrents. At the same time, North Korea, Iran and Iraq face substantial resource constraints that could prevent them from conducting the operational flight tests that are needed to ensure that any countermeasures they acquire will in fact work. By raising the technological and financial challenges in this fashion, a defence may reduce the range and lethality of the attacker's missile force. And while countermeasures make it unlikely that any NMD will be leak-proof, even a porous missile defence can still be useful. A system that struck down one in two or one in five incoming warheads could still save one American city from nuclear annihilation.

Still the critics make two worthwhile points about effectiveness. First, it should not be sacrificed to meet an arbitrary deployment deadline. Because the goal is to deploy a system that has a chance of working rather than simply to deploy a system, the development schedule needs to be lengthened. Second, no one should be fooled into believing that NMD solves the problem of small-scale missile threats. Under the best of circumstances, missile defence will be only modestly effective. In that respect, it is an insurance policy with severe limits.

'Missile defence will decrease US security'

The most serious criticism levelled against the proposed missile defence is that it will upset the strategic balance, thereby decreasing rather than increasing American security. Russia and China both oppose US plans for a limited missile defence, as do most European countries.

Russia is the cause of greatest concern. It could retaliate against NMD deployment by refusing to reduce its nuclear arsenal further, by retaining its existing multiple-warhead missiles (banned under START II) and building new ones, and by putting its existing nuclear forces on higher alert (thereby increasing the chances of accidental launch). Russia might also retaliate by suspending work on bilateral programmes designed to keep Russian nuclear materials secure, and by selling nuclear and ballistic-missile technologies to rogue states.

But a hostile Russian reaction is by no means preordained. As the critics themselves admit, neither Phase I nor Phase II will threaten Russia's deterrent capability, even if they work as well as the Pentagon hopes. Rather, they emphasise the crucial role played by perception or, more correctly, misperception: 'Although Russian scientists understand that countermeasures would defeat the system, Russian policy makers may not have such confidence and are instead likely to wonder why the United States would pour billions of dollars into an ineffective system'.²⁴

Furthermore, military planners tend to make worst-case assumptions. Even if they have no need to worry, they will. Their chief fear will be the breakout

potential of the system. Once the United States develops the capacity to deploy 100 interceptors and opens the missile-production line, what is to stop it from expanding the system? Despite these fears, it is important to emphasise that the technology simply does not exist for the United States to develop a shield that would render the Russian deterrent impotent or obsolete. Moreover, Russia has more to gain from negotiating new limits on defences in a modified ABM Treaty than seeing the treaty abrogated because of its unwillingness to consider such limited modifications.

China's situation differs from Russia's for one reason: even a limited US missile defence potentially threatens its nuclear deterrent of 20 ICBMs. China might decide to put its missiles on higher alert but, like Russia, such a strategy only increases its insecurity. For this reason, China is more likely to respond to a US NMD system by deploying more of its own ICBMs and by developing more sophisticated countermeasures, both developments that are likely in any event as China continues to modernise its armed forces. But even a ten- or 20-fold increase in the size of the Chinese ICBM force would not alter the strategic balance. (Expansion of the Chinese missile force would not increase the probability of an accidental missile launch if the Chinese continue with their current command-and-control procedures.) Doing much more to close the numerical missile gap with the United States would only harm China's economy. Thus, despite claims by Chinese officials to the contrary, fears of a cold-war style arms race are exaggerated.²⁵

Far more likely, and at least as worrisome, is that China will retaliate against deployment of a missile defence by becoming more belligerent and less cooperative on a range of issues that matter to the United States. A particular possibility is that Beijing will refuse to cooperate on non-proliferation matters and become more inclined to sell nuclear and ballistic-missile technology to other countries. As with Russia, however, such a response is a double-edged sword. Current gifts can become future threats. As a result, China's response will depend on how it perceives the intention behind the US deployment and the overall state of US-Chinese relations, both matters over which the United States has some control.

Finally, critics worry about NMD's effect on Europe. European leaders have criticised the idea of missile defence, either because they fear how Russia will react or because they see it leading to a 'strategic decoupling' between the United States and Europe. Thus, French President Jacques Chirac warned of a destabilising counter-reaction to NMD deployment: 'If you look at world history, ever since men began waging war, you will see that there's a permanent race between sword and shield. The sword always wins. The more improvements are made in the shield, the more improvements are made to the sword. We think that with these systems we are just going to spur swordmakers to intensify their efforts'. Chirac concluded by mentioning not just Russia but also China and India as countries to worry about.²⁶ The fear of decoupling has been voiced by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who argued that there 'is no doubt that this [NMD deployment] would lead to split

security standards within the NATO alliance'. This split could undermine Europe's 'trust that the United States would protect our interests, that the United States as the leading nuclear power, would guarantee some sort of order'.²⁷

Both these concerns are overblown. The action–reaction dynamic can be forestalled if the deployment of missile defences occurs in a cooperative manner. Nor will a limited NMD system – one that might eventually be used to help defend Europeans – create any kind of differentiated security. On the contrary, if NMD deployment provides Washington with a degree of protection against possible blackmail or even outright attack, the US willingness to come to Europe's aid and defence should rise rather than fall. As Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has asked, 'Why would the United States be a better ally if it were vulnerable to North Korean missiles?'²⁸ But in worrying about how foreign capitals will react, the critics highlight the crucial problem: if US officials mishandle the diplomacy of deployment, NMD will make the United States less rather than more secure.

The US politics of missile defence

The diplomatic challenges raised by the deployment of an NMD system are daunting enough by themselves. But they come with equally daunting domestic political challenges. For all the agreement among Americans on the need to build missile defence, no agreement exists on how much weight to give to the concerns of other countries. At one extreme lie NMD enthusiasts who dismiss the concerns of foreign capitals and favour forging ahead with missile defence come what may. At the other extreme lie committed arms controllers who are hypersensitive to the concerns of others and who would give Russia and China a veto over the US decision to deploy a missile-defence system that contravenes the ABM Treaty. Although neither group constitutes a majority in Congress, or among Republicans and Democrats, each has the potential to shape (and derail) the political debate over missile defence.

Of the two political extremes, NMD enthusiasts are the more powerful. They are a vocal wing of the Republican Party, and in recent years they have succeeded in pushing missile defence to the forefront of the political agenda. They reject the premise of Bernard Brodie, William Kaufmann, Thomas Schelling and other intellectual fathers of the nuclear age that there are virtues to a MAD world of mutual vulnerability, believing instead that any American president who would leave the United States vulnerable to nuclear attack, whether accidental or intentional, is immoral. Their policy prescription is straightforward: the United States should move as fast as possible to translate Reagan's vision of a nuclear peace shield into reality. Questions of cost, feasibility and foreign reaction are of decidedly lesser importance than deploying a defence system, *any* system.

Ardent NMD enthusiasts rail against the ABM Treaty. Some believe the treaty is now defunct. Republican Senator James Inhofe declares that it 'shouldn't be in effect anyway. It was a 1972 treaty with the Soviet Union that

doesn't exist anymore, so I don't know why we're paying that much attention to it'.²⁹ Even some more moderate proponents of NMD, such as Condoleezza Rice, the principal foreign policy adviser to Republican presidential candidate Governor George W. Bush, refer to the treaty as 'a relic of a profoundly adversarial relationship' that no longer exists.³⁰ All believe that the Clinton administration's efforts to modify it are both dangerous and unnecessary: dangerous because the Clinton administration is likely to agree to constraints that will prevent the deployment of a full-scale missile defence down the road; unnecessary because Russia's ability to deploy strategic warheads will continue to decline, thus making it unlikely that Moscow will react to a US missile defence by increasing its offensive capacity. As Republican Senator Jon Kyl describes Russia's position on the START II Treaty: 'They can't comply with it. They've said that. Russian leaders have said it. Russian economists have said it. Our thinkers know it. I mean, it's a fact. So it doesn't matter as a practical matter whether they sign START II or not'.³¹

But the geostrategic analysis of NMD enthusiasts is reckless. Russia may no longer be a great power, but it knows that the status it does have rests on its nuclear arsenal. Fear of losing that remaining asset can be a powerful motivator for resource-mobilisation and allocation. In August 1945 Josef Stalin despaired that his victorious Red Army would become impotent and obsolete in the face of America's nuclear monopoly, and he embarked on a crash programme to address his country's shortcomings. Many in Russia's current élite similarly fear that US technological prowess will leave them with no claims to global standing. Their concern about the effectiveness of their nuclear deterrent is heightened because Russia relies almost entirely on ballistic missiles to deliver its nuclear weapons.

Whatever NMD enthusiasts lack as geostrategic analysts, they more than make up for with their influence on Capitol Hill. Simply put, they can wreck a president's best-laid plans. Their influence comes less from their number than from their zeal, demonstrated by the Senate's October 1999 rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). As the ratification debate on the test-ban treaty moved towards a close, 62 senators, including 24 out of 55 Republicans, signed a letter urging Majority Leader Trent Lott to postpone the vote.³² The postponement never came. Kyl, Inhofe and several others had converted many of their fellow Republicans to the anti-test ban cause, and threatened Senator Lott with retaliation if he postponed the vote.³³

As the Senate's rejection of the CTBT attests, committed arms controllers have been on the losing side of recent national-security debates. Missile defence is no exception. There were only 105 votes cast against the National Missile Defense Act in the House and only three in the Senate. No doubt these numbers overstate the scarcity of committed arms controllers on Capitol Hill. North Korea's test of the *Taepo-dong* 1 missile simply persuaded many of them that it was politically unwise to continue to argue against missile defence on grounds of principle. It did not turn them into NMD converts. Indeed, many of the traditional arms-control proponents agreed with Democratic Senator Edward

M. Kennedy who said that he voted for the National Missile Defense Act only because 'we must do more to decide whether a defence is practical and can deliver the protection it promises'.³⁴

If NMD enthusiasts regard the ABM Treaty as the obstacle to achieving American security, committed arms controllers see it as a bulwark against unchecked arms races and nuclear Armageddon. The Clinton administration itself insists that 'the ABM Treaty remains a cornerstone of strategic stability and the United States is committed to continued efforts to strengthen the Treaty'.³⁵ The great fear, then, is that tinkering with the ABM Treaty will be the death of arms control. As Democratic Senator Joseph Biden argues, 'The strategic arms control process, already threatened by the Russian *Duma*'s inaction on the START II Treaty, could collapse because of Russian concern and anger over missile defense'.³⁶

Just as NMD enthusiasts are reckless, so committed arms controllers are zealous when it comes to preserving the ABM Treaty. They consistently depict the hit-to-kill system which the Clinton administration plans to deploy as repudiating the treaty, even though it is clear that the system is consonant with the treaty's spirit, if not all its details. The proposed NMD system simply is not strategically significant. Nor are the Russians opposed in principle to the idea of a limited defence. They themselves continue to maintain the one missile defence site of 100 interceptors permitted to the Soviet Union under the ABM Treaty.

At the same time, the effort by committed arms controllers to preserve the ABM Treaty in its current form will simply help NMD enthusiasts to do away with it entirely. Arms-control proponents like to trumpet polls showing that the American public supports arms control. But they make too much of these findings. The polls also show that Americans like the idea of missile defence.³⁷ Should it come down to a contest between the ABM Treaty and missile defence, the American public almost certainly will choose missile defence, especially when NMD critics are forced to admit that the system poses no strategic threat to Moscow. The argument that the United States should leave itself defenceless against attack from Iran or North Korea out of deference to a treaty written in another era simply will not sell.

Even though committed arms controllers have been on the losing side of the missile-defence debate thus far, it would be a mistake to ignore them and their arguments entirely. They might make common cause (for different reasons) with NMD enthusiasts to sink a modified ABM Treaty. And political momentum might shift in their favour. Should a Republican capture the White House in November 2000, Democrats would be freed of the party pressure to support the administration. Indeed, technological setbacks, escalating development costs and threatening Russian and Chinese statements might give them incentives to attack a Republican president on missile defence.

The lesson here is that no president who wants to manage the politics of missile defence abroad can ignore congressional politics at home. Congress provides the authorisation and funding for any programme. Two-thirds of the Senate must consent to any modification of the ABM Treaty. And Congress has mandated language that precludes reducing the numbers of US nuclear

warheads below START I levels before the Russian *Duma* ratifies START II. As disastrous as it would be for the United States to proceed with missile defence while ignoring the reactions of Russia, China and Europe, it would be equally disastrous to cut a deal with Russia on ABM that is unacceptable on Capitol Hill. The result would be nothing less than the twenty-first century's equivalent of the Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles.

Managing the politics of deployment abroad and at home

The United States is poised to build a small-scale NMD system. The only question today is whether it will undertake deployment the wrong way or the right way. The wrong way is to set too ambitious a goal for NMD deployment and to pursue it with a verve and vigour that ignores the consequences for other vital US interests. That will produce a world that is more rather than less dangerous. The right way is to make it clear that NMD serves the limited goal of defending the United States against a small-scale missile attack, and to take the steps necessary to allay the fears of others concerning Washington's true intentions. It also requires efforts to build broad political support at home for such a course of action.

The starting point of this effort must be clarity about the purpose of proceeding with NMD deployment. That purpose is neither to embark on an ill-conceived transition from an offence- to a defence-dominated world, nor to defend against any and all missile threats – both real and imaginable. Instead, the purpose of NMD must be more limited – to defend the United States against the clearly identifiable missile threat that North Korea and, possibly, Iran or Iraq will pose over the next ten to 15 years. This means deploying a system capable of defending against a handful of missiles and nuclear warheads. There is no need to deploy more than the 100 ground-based interceptors that are currently called for under Phase I of the administration's NMD plans, although these will likely have to be based at two sites to provide adequate coverage against a geographically dispersed threat. This limited system must rely on proven technology and be confined to interceptors and radars that are fixed and ground-based. There can be no reliance on mobile, sea-based, air- or space-based components, the deployment of which would provide a potential base for rapidly deploying much more robust defensive capabilities. In short, the objective is to deploy a system that is technically feasible, and which addresses the threat facing the United States over the next ten to 15 years. Such a system will be consistent with the original intent of the ABM Treaty – which banned strategically significant defences.

It is on this limited basis that the United States should manage the diplomacy and politics of NMD deployment abroad and at home in a manner that adds to, rather than subtracts from, strategic stability and, hence, American security.

Managing diplomacy abroad

The key to managing the diplomacy of NMD deployment is Russia.³⁸ It is the other party to the ABM Treaty, it possesses many thousands of nuclear warheads, and it still sees itself as a nuclear superpower. US policy needs to

recognise that Moscow has legitimate fears about any NMD deployment, no matter how limited. The world looks much more threatening to Russian military planners than it did at the beginning of the 1990s. NATO's decision to admit Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic has pushed the alliance up against Russia's western border. NATO went to war against Serbia despite Russian objections and without United Nations approval. The Russian military is pressed for resources and embroiled in a costly war in Chechnya. On top of all that, the United States now seeks to change the rules of a decades-long nuclear relationship.

The first step in any US strategy for dealing with Russia is to avoid handing Moscow a *fait accompli* with the Deployment Readiness Review in June 2000. The easiest way to do this would be for President Clinton to leave a formal deployment decision to the next administration. Governor Bush provided Clinton with an opening for postponement when he indicated that he 'might even praise him' for deferring the decision until 2001, a sentiment also expressed by other moderate Republican leaders.³⁹ But if the Clinton administration believes postponement carries too many political risks for the eventual Democratic presidential candidate, it has a fallback option. It can commit to constructing a missile defence by an agreed date but postpone ground-breaking until 2002, which would provide for additional time to reach an agreement on modifying the ABM Treaty. Both approaches can be justified on the grounds that the Pentagon needs more time to develop the hit-to-kill system.

Whatever Clinton's decision in summer 2000, the United States needs to reassure Moscow that it is not seeking to change the core foundation of its nuclear relationship with Russia by deploying a limited NMD system. Clear official statements that the United States seeks only to address the missile threat from North Korea, Iran and Iraq will help. But Washington also needs to match its words with three practical deeds.

First, the United States must seek Russian agreement to modify the ABM Treaty to allow for a limited NMD deployment that preserves the treaty's ban against strategically significant missile defences.⁴⁰ Specifically, Russia and the United States will have to reach an understanding that a limited missile defence of this type is consistent with Article I(2) of the treaty, which bans the deployment of ABM systems for the defence of national territory. The agreed understanding would be that no defence system can be deployed that could provide a defence of national territory against the nuclear-missile potential of the other country. In addition, Article III of the ABM Treaty and the 1974 Protocol would have to be amended to allow for the deployment of no more than 100 ground-based interceptors at no more than two sites within the national territory of the signatory states. If necessary, the exact locations for the two sites could be specified as part of an amendment. An understanding would also have to be reached allowing the deployment of an ABM radar in Alaska, and the use of early-warning radars now located in California, Massachusetts, Alaska, Greenland and Britain. As is apparent, these modifications would be

consistent with the original intent of the ABM Treaty, by both continuing the ban on strategically significant defences and limiting each side to deploying fixed, ground-based interceptors at two sites (as was the case originally).

Published reports suggest that the Clinton administration is seeking modifications to the ABM Treaty along these lines in order to allow the deployment of up to 100 interceptors in Alaska. However, the administration insists that these treaty changes only represent a first phase, and that a second phase will be necessary to allow for the deployment of an additional 100 interceptors at a second site, as well the use of space-based sensors.⁴¹ The latter change suggests that the administration is seeking to build a defence system that far exceeds what is necessary to counter the likely missile threat in the next decade or two. Because the United States can always seek changes in the future if the threat warrants and technology allows, US interests are better served by concentrating on gaining Moscow's agreement to the modest treaty changes proposed here.

Second, to underscore the fact that the United States is not deploying NMD in order to acquire a first-strike capability, Washington should offer Moscow a deal that cuts offensive nuclear weapons significantly below currently anticipated levels. It should also take a number of unilateral steps to reassure Russia of its benign nuclear intentions. Specifically, regardless of whether the Russian *Duma* ratifies the START II Treaty, the United States should offer to begin immediate negotiations on a START III agreement that would incorporate key elements of START II (in particular its ban on multi-warhead land-based missiles) and reduce each sides' offensive force levels to 1,000–1,500 warheads. In addition, the United States should promptly and unilaterally reduce its nuclear arsenal to START II levels of 3,500 warheads and remove from alert all weapons it would destroy under a START III agreement. Combined with the offer to make deep cuts, these unilateral steps would send an unmistakable signal to Moscow that the United States is not seeking to undercut Russia's nuclear deterrent posture by deploying NMD. At the same time, deep cuts would not harm the US deterrent. With the Soviet Union dead and no similar successor state in sight, 1,000–1,500 nuclear warheads are more than sufficient to deter any country from launching a nuclear attack against the United States or its allies.⁴²

Third, Washington should invigorate US–Russian cooperation on nuclear and defence issues. In particular, the United States should accept Moscow's offer to form a joint commission to examine the threats posed by rogue states to both countries – not as an alternative, but as a complement to deploying NMD. In addition, the United States should offer to expand its current programmes for assisting Russia with its early-warning system. It should make permanent the temporary joint missile-warning centre set up at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in late 1999 to allay fears that a Y2K glitch might prompt an accidental nuclear launch. The US offer to assist Russia in completing two large early-warning radars in the south and west could be expanded to include financial and other assistance to help rebuild Russia's

entire early-warning network, which is today in serious and dangerous disarray.⁴³ Washington could even agree to give Moscow access to all its early-warning data on a real-time basis – thus providing Russia with the same information on possible missile launches the United States now has.⁴⁴

Would a proposal along these lines persuade Moscow to modify the ABM Treaty to allow both sides to deploy a limited, ground-based national missile defence? There is good reason to believe so. It would reduce the size of an arsenal Moscow can ill-afford to maintain while at the same time preserving its nuclear deterrent. Of course, the Russians might worry that the NMD system under development might lay the basis for a future system that is strategically significant. The technological and cost problems that critics routinely point to make the development of such a system improbable. But if the Russians judge that probability, however low, to be unacceptable, then it would serve their interests to negotiate modifications to the ABM Treaty that would permit a limited system but continue to bar construction of a 'heavy' defence. If they refuse to take this step, the United States is likely to withdraw from the treaty, leaving the Russians with no legal barrier to the construction of such a robust defence.

The recent changes in the Russian political landscape make it possible for Moscow to conclude a deal. It is encouraging that immediately after the December 1999 parliamentary elections, Russia's Prime Minister and likely future President Vladimir Putin called on the *Duma* to ratify the long-stalled START II agreement cutting US and Russian nuclear forces. He has already reached out to the communists to garner their support; while this has upset some of the more liberal members of his coalition, their options for opposition are limited. Putin's tremendous popularity gives him the kind of leverage Boris Yeltsin did not have since early in his first term. And Putin's incentives to reach a deal while Clinton is still in office is great, given the uncertainties about the next US president's interest in preserving the ABM Treaty.

What should the United States do if Russia rejects its offer? Should Moscow get a veto over deployment? No. If Washington demonstrates through both words and deeds that it is willing to go the extra mile to meet Moscow's real and perceived concerns, it cannot in the end allow Russia the final word on whether to deploy a missile defence. Even then, the end result will be better than would be the case if, as many NMD enthusiasts propose, the United States goes ahead with deploying a system without any regard for Russia's concerns. If only for that reason, it is worth the extra effort of trying to get Moscow on board.

What about China? The US offer to Russia should diminish Chinese fears as well. But given the small size of the Chinese ICBM force, Chinese military planners may see even a much smaller US missile force coupled with an NMD system as theoretically capable of denying their deterrent. To the extent Beijing feels this way, it can increase the size of its ICBM force. Given the remote possibility of an accidental Chinese missile launch, this increase should not threaten the United States. The bigger question then is whether the United

States would accept a large Chinese missile force as a logical consequence of its acquisition of a missile defence, or would interpret it as tangible evidence that Beijing seeks to challenge American primacy in Asia.

The potential that some Americans might interpret any change in China's nuclear arsenal as evidence of Chinese hostility towards the United States highlights how much any Sino-US nuclear rivalry hinges on mutual perceptions. For that very reason, the Clinton administration needs to actively engage Beijing as well as Moscow on missile defence. At a minimum, the United States should keep China fully briefed on the status of the ABM talks. It should also try to provide some 'strategic reassurance' in high-level political (not just military) talks with Beijing. US officials should use such talks to brief Chinese officials on the capabilities of the proposed American system as well as on the threat posed by countries acquiring long-range ballistic missiles (a threat that ought to concern Beijing as well). These talks would also provide a forum to explore the possibility of sharing US early-warning data with China. Finally, the administration (and NMD supporters) need to remember that how the United States handles other issues in US-Chinese relations will inevitably shape Beijing's response to NMD deployment.

Finally, there remains the question of Europe. To a large extent, European concerns about a US missile defence will evaporate if the United States can reach agreement with Russia. European capitals should understand that the missile-defence system which the United States seeks to deploy will have extremely limited capabilities; hence, it is not going to produce a 'strategic decoupling' of Europe and America. Nor are European objections to a US missile defence likely to be loud if Russia rejects a comprehensive proposal along the lines proposed here.

Managing the politics at home

Would two-thirds of the Senate agree to support an ambitious deal with Russia to modify the ABM Treaty? The Senate's rejection of the CTBT in October 1999 makes it clear that senate approval is by no means automatic. Any ABM deal has the potential to turn into a highly ideological and polarised debate pitting committed arms controllers against NMD enthusiasts. Indeed, the Republican hardliners who championed the defeat of the test ban now believe that if they defeat an effort to amend the ABM Treaty, the treaty itself will become null and void and the United States will be free to build whatever system it likes. It is equally important, however, not to exaggerate the obstacles on Capitol Hill. The United States has not returned to the pattern of the late nineteenth century when the Senate rejected every major treaty put before it. The defeat of the test ban had far more to do with the White House's cavalier treatment of the issue than with resurgent isolationism on the Hill. For three years the White House let the treaty languish. Nothing changed even after Majority Leader Lott called the bluff of Democratic senators and scheduled a vote. The administration did not shift into its famed 'war room' mode to push the cause of the test ban, and the president gave no speeches to the nation on its behalf. Indeed, the White

House took the issue so lightly that it apparently was surprised to discover a week before the vote that most Senate Republicans were committed to voting against the treaty.⁴⁵

The task facing Clinton, then, is to begin the hard work of building political support on Capitol Hill for a modified ABM Treaty. Although he is unlikely to be president when the treaty comes to a vote, what he does during his final year in office will go a long way towards determining whether the Senate ultimately gives its approval. If Clinton leaves the task of building Senate support to his successor, NMD enthusiasts will seize the opportunity to build a coalition that opposes any limits on building missile defences before anyone can offer an effective counter. A strategy for securing Senate support must, above all, be a 'centre-out' one. Although committed arms controllers and NMD enthusiasts will make the most noise, the winning votes lie with the great mass of senators in the centre. Pragmatic by nature, these senators favour building a missile defence and would prefer to do so without needlessly antagonising other countries. They are likely to rally around a policy that seeks to give America the missile defence it needs while seeking to minimise the diplomatic costs of doing so. The Clinton administration's success with NATO enlargement shows that a centre-out strategy can work.⁴⁶ Rather than framing the NATO debate in terms of creating a new collective security arrangement for the post-Cold War era, an approach that would have appealed primarily to senators on the left, the administration consciously framed the discussion in terms of how best to enhance NATO's role as a military alliance because that was the concern foremost in the minds of centrist senators.

In contrast, any strategy that focuses on the political extremes guarantees failure. As Jimmy Carter learned in his efforts to woo Senator Scoop Jackson over SALT II, persuading hardcore opponents to switch causes is a fool's errand. By the same token, a 'left-in' strategy that devotes Clinton's final year to attempting to allay the concerns of committed arms controllers is not likely to work – what it takes to mollify them will alienate moderates. Worse yet, it is unnecessary. Once Russia agrees to modify the ABM Treaty, the objections of most pro-arms control senators will evaporate.

To make a centre-out strategy work, the Clinton administration needs to do three things. First, it has to frame its policy to appeal to centrist senators. That means making it clear that its primary goal is to deploy a defence in a responsible way. The administration cannot suggest, as it sometimes does, that its highest goal is preserving the ABM Treaty 'as a cornerstone of strategic stability'. NMD enthusiasts will use that mistake to portray their cause as the only one that seeks to defend America against nuclear attack.

Second, the Clinton administration needs to move immediately to help senators understand the issues at stake and to elicit their concerns. It needs to bring senators into the negotiations with Russia by creating a Senate observer group that at a minimum consists of the chair and ranking members of the Foreign Relations, Armed Services and Intelligence Committees. The administration used a senatorial observer group to great effect on NATO enlargement.

Making senators part of the talks – something that did not happen with the test ban treaty – educates them about the issues, injects their views into the process, and inclines them to support the finished product. Members of Congress can also communicate American concerns to Russian officials. Thus, the administration should take up Majority Leader Trent Lott's suggestion to create a bipartisan congressional working group to discuss US missile defence plans with members of the Russian *Duma*.⁴⁷

Third, the Clinton administration needs to appoint somebody to work the issue on Capitol Hill. The State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Council are likely to be too consumed with day-to-day business to give the Senate the attention it needs. For example, on the day of the test ban vote, both Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defense William Cohen were in Maine rather than on Capitol Hill lobbying senators. In contrast, on NATO enlargement the administration appointed a special adviser whose job it was to work the issue on Capitol Hill and to make sure that the Senate's concerns were heard at the highest levels of the administration. To keep the point person from being drowned out by the established bureaucracies, it is critical that he or she be someone – as happened in the NATO enlargement case – with good ties to the White House.

None of these steps will guarantee the Clinton administration and its successor an easy time on Capitol Hill. Opposition to modifying the ABM Treaty has the potential to be strong and to come from both the left and the right. But if the White House fails to manage the domestic politics of NMD, it will find itself heading in a direction that it does not want to go – towards a deployment that will needlessly antagonise Moscow and Beijing and jeopardise American security.

Conclusion

Critics of missile defence have lost the debate. No amount of grouching about countermeasures or cost overruns can hide the fact that the political terrain has shifted dramatically since North Korea's August 1998 missile test. Both political parties are now on record as being in favour of building a missile defence. By 2010, the United States will operate at least one ground-based NMD site capable of providing the country with some protection against a small-scale missile attack.

That limited NMD system could make the country somewhat more secure in the face of a small-scale attack. Or it could make the country substantially less secure if steps are not taken to accommodate Russia's strategic concerns. In that respect, NMD proponents who insist that the United States should deploy a missile defence and let the chips fall where they may will destroy the benefits of their handiwork.

An NMD deployment that upsets the strategic balance would be doubly disastrous because such an outcome can be avoided. A deal that allays Moscow's strategic concerns, reduces the nuclear arsenals on both sides and permits the deployment of a limited NMD while preserving the ABM Treaty's

ban on strategically significant missile defences can be achieved. It will require realistic and farsighted diplomacy. And it will require a conscious and dedicated effort by the Clinton administration and its successor to build a political coalition that can get a modified ABM Treaty through the Senate.

No one should have any illusions about the difficulties of managing the foreign and domestic politics of missile defence. It will be difficult. But the United States can and should take steps that will enable it to deploy a limited national missile-defence system without upsetting the current strategic balance or jeopardising US security. To do anything less would leave the United States needlessly vulnerable.

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Notes

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