

## **Take a Stand: Question National Missile Defense**

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Last September, President Bill Clinton announced he would not proceed with deployment of the proposed, "limited" national missile defense (NMD) system. Citing concerns raised by nongovernmental organizations, independent scientists, concerned congressional members, and key U.S. allies about unproven NMD technologies and the adverse impact of NMD deployment on U.S. arms control and non-proliferation goals, Clinton said he would leave any deployment decision to his successor.

At the time, the estimated \$60 billion price tag for this "limited," 250-interceptor ground-based system was not a major factor in the President's decision. However, the economics of national missile defense will likely re-emerge as a key variable in decisions on President George W. Bush's even more grandiose national missile defense schemes. During the 2000 Presidential campaign, George W. Bush, said the Clinton-Gore approach to NMD was "flawed" because "the system is initially based on a single site" and because it rules out sea- and space-based NMD options. In its first months in office, the Bush Administration has emphasized its support for a more extensive array of missile defenses "to protect all 50 states and our friends and allies and deployed forces overseas . . . at the earliest possible date."

However, it will take some time for the new administration to present a specific blueprint or cost estimate for more ambitious land-, air- and sea-based missile defenses. Once it does — perhaps as soon as June — the Bush plan will be subjected to tough questions from NMD skeptics, as well as supporters who favor one or another NMD plan.

### **The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations**

This year — as last year — a wide-ranging group of nongovernmental organizations led by the Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers are preparing to counter U.S. government proposals on NMD. The 16-member Coalition includes the Arms Control Association, Union of Concerned Scientists, Council for a Livable World, Lawyers Alliance for World Security, and it works with like-minded organizations such as Economists Allied for Arms Reduction. The Coalition meets regularly in Washington D.C. to share information, develop strategy and coordinate the activities in order to focus attention on several key issues relating to national missile defense:

? Can NMD work as designed? While it is technically feasible to "hit a bullet with a bullet," it is not clear whether national missile defenses can reliably defeat incoming missiles, which may be equipped with decoys in real-world setting. The groundbased NMD system is still far from proven as the spectacular 2000 flight-test failures showed.

? Is NMD cost-effective? With the addition of possible sea- and space-based systems, the cost of President Bush's NMD could be well in excess of \$100 billion. The U.S. taxpayer has already spent more than \$120 billion over the life of the ballistic missile defense program, without deploying a workable system.

? How will NMD deployment affect U.S. relations with our allies and with Russia and China? Our Western allies are skeptical of NMD and worry that Russia will respond by withdrawing from existing, verifiable arms control arrangements while China will accelerate its nuclear force modernization program. Deployment may set off a dangerous action-reaction cycle that could undermine global non-proliferation efforts.

? Is NMD the most effective response to emerging missile threats? Given the many years before any workable NMD system can be deployed, the Bush Administration would also be wise to resume talks to verifiably freeze the North Korean long-range missile program.

A net assessment of NMD makes it clear that national missile defense deployment will not increase, but would instead decrease, overall national and international security.

### **The Coming Debate:**

President Bush says he may propose modifications to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty to allow for development of an American NMD system. But if Russia does not agree to these modifications, Bush has said he would withdraw from the ABM treaty. Bush has also said he will propose unilateral reductions of deployed strategic nuclear weapons and possibly de-alert some U.S. forces. Bush's proposal for missile defenses with offensive strategic force reductions will be attractive to many, including some supporters of nuclear disarmament, as well as those who are disdainful of arms control and who advocate a unilateralist national security strategy based on robust missile defenses.

Although no one thinks a U.S. first strike is likely, military planners and political leaders of Russia (and the United States) respond to capabilities, not just intentions. A U.S. push for national missile defenses outside the framework of existing treaties is likely to undercut the possibility of permanent, deep reductions in U.S. and Russian nuclear weaponry, and could foreclose the possibility of removing these missiles from their current, dangerous hair-trigger alert status.

Moreover, there is no reason why missile defenses and offensive reductions need be advanced at the same time. The need to respond to the threat of a mistaken nuclear launch from Russia is clear and immediate, as is the response itself: dealerting and reductions. But there is no NMD system to deploy, and there may not be for a decade or more. Thus pushing NMD now, when there is no prospect of a workable system, only serves to undercut more promising paths to global security.

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