



THE U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE DECISION AND ITS NON-PROLIFERATION IMPACTS

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Paper presented by:

Daryl G. Kimball, Executive Director, Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers

This month the international community will assess progress and discuss additional steps to stem the tide of horizontal and vertical nuclear proliferation at the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). These are not good times for non-proliferation.

Recognizing that they have made little or no tangible progress on Article VI since 1995, the United States and the other major nuclear weapon states will enter the 2000 NPT Conference touting their record and their activities on nuclear arms reductions over the last decade and argue for a "balanced" NPT Review. However, it is essential that all states make it clear that in the last five years there has been little progress toward fulfilment of Article VI obligations and the specific items agreed in the Principles and Objectives document. Much of the progress achieved in the last decade stems from policy decisions and agreements reached in the early half of the decade. Here is a brief overview of the status of key Article VI-related objectives:

START II still has not been implemented, and START III negotiations have been stalled for years. Both Congress and President Clinton have embraced a shortsighted policy requiring Russia to ratify the START II agreement before the U.S. will reduce its nuclear force levels or engage in START III negotiations. The U.S. still deploys approximately 7,200 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia still deploys 5,900, with thousands more in "strategic reserve."

U.S. and Russian nuclear forces remain hair-trigger alert postures, prolonging the possibility of accidental nuclear war. This means that over 4,000 nuclear weapons could be launched within minutes. Russia's eroded nuclear command and control systems and early warning mechanisms increase the possibility of "accidental" or unintended nuclear war.

The U.S. and Russia continue to incorporate nuclear weapons into their military plans as a deterrent to nuclear, chemical, biological, or even conventional military

threats. These policies undermine security guarantees extended to non-nuclear NPT states parties. In 1997, President Clinton approved a new nuclear doctrine that reportedly widens options for using nuclear weapons against rogue states in order to deter the acquisition or use of weapons of mass destruction. In 1998 and 1999, the U.S. tried to persuade NATO to endorse the possible use of nuclear weapons against chemical and biological weapons proliferators. Russia has adopted a similar nuclear weapons policy position.

The CTBT has been signed by the 155 other nations, but it has not yet been ratified by the U.S., Russia, or China and not signed by India or Pakistan, blocking entry into force. Due to a failure of leadership by President Clinton and a strong, pro-nuclear core of Treaty opponents, the Senate rejected the Treaty last October. The Senate rejection likely means that the U.S. will not ratify until late 2001 or much later.

The failure of the U.S. and other nuclear weapons states to make better progress toward disarmament gave Indian leaders a convenient (though self-serving) rationale to conduct nuclear tests in 1998 and to flirt with deployment of its nuclear weapons.

Enter National Missile Defence: To make matters worse, the U.S. is pursuing a national ballistic missile defence (NMD) system with an aggressive, multibillion-dollar research, development, and testing program. President Clinton is scheduled to decide this year whether to endorse deployment of national missile defence that, in its first phase, is designed to detect, intercept and destroy a small number of missiles fired at the United States. Republican supporters of missile defence advocate more costly, space and sea-based missile defences.

The President has said that his decision will be based on four criteria: the readiness of the technology, the impact of deployment on arms control and relations with Russia, the cost of the system, and the threat. On each of these counts, the case for deciding to deploy is weak at best. A decision to deploy the proposed "limited" national missile defence would diminish overall U.S. and international security, increasing rather than reducing nuclear dangers.

The Effectiveness of the Technology: Even advocates of missile defence admit it is one of the most complicated technical challenges ever attempted. A global system of satellites, radars, communications relays, booster rockets and interceptors all must work with each other almost perfectly for the defence to have a chance of success. However, at most three of 19 scheduled intercept tests will have been conducted by the time President Clinton is scheduled to make his decision. The first limited test hit its target, though questions remain as to whether it was truly successful; the next, more complicated test failed. With so few tests planned before the deployment decision, there will be insufficient information to determine whether the system is reliable and effective. Even if the system works as designed, missile defences can be made useless by means of other delivery systems. The sword is always mightier than the shield, even if that sword is a

fishing trawler loaded with a chemical agent sailing into San Francisco Bay.

The Threat: For forty years, the United States has lived with the threat of attack by missiles armed with chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. Russia's arsenal of thousands of nuclear warheads on long-range missiles could still destroy the United States in under an hour. However, missile defence advocates do not claim the defences they propose could deal with a large Russian attack. They cite instead new threats to justify a first phase of missile defence: from North Korea, which recently froze its meagre ballistic missile testing program; Iran, although experts are divided on whether its nascent missile efforts will be able to threaten the U.S. within 10 years; and Iraq, which is currently under international sanctions that sharply hinder its ability to develop new missiles. If the U.S. deploys a missile defence in an attempt to counter a handful of missiles North Korea might build, it could exacerbate tensions with heavily armed Russia and instigate a vigorous Chinese build-up. Even further, it is unclear why these countries would commit an almost certainly suicidal attack on the United States.

The Cost: The United States has spent more than \$120 billion on theatre and national missile defence, without fielding a single effective system. In February 2000, the Clinton Administration allocated \$12.7 billion for national missile defence in its five-year budget, \$2.2 billion more than the previous year. Most estimates suggest the first stage of the Clinton proposal, designed to intercept at most two dozen warheads, would cost dramatically more. The Pentagon estimates it would cost \$26.6 billion to build and maintain a single-site system with 20 interceptors in Alaska; the Clinton Administration forecasts a need for two sites and 250 interceptors by 2010. New satellites add another \$14 billion. Meanwhile, many missile defence supporters call for even larger and far more expensive programs that could cost \$150 billion or more.

The Impact on Arms Control: U.S. deployment of a national missile defence could severely damage international security by ending the chance for verifiable reductions in the Russian nuclear arsenal. The proposed U.S. system would violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which forbids nationwide missile defence. U.S. officials are seeking Russian agreement to modify the Treaty to allow "limited" national defences. However, if the U.S. proposes far-reaching changes that create fears in Moscow of a new American offensive threat, reaching agreement may be extremely difficult. The U.S. reticence to reduce its arsenal below 2,500 may also block the chance for agreement. If agreement is not possible, and the U.S. decides to abrogate or withdraw from the ABM Treaty, Russia has threatened to withdraw from the START nuclear arms control process. Regardless of a U.S.-Russian agreement to modify the ABM Treaty, China believes that U.S. missile defence plans seek to undercut the Chinese deterrent. In response, China would likely step up plans to expand and improve its limited long-range nuclear arsenal.

Alternatives: Since the development of long-range missiles, the United States has successfully depended on a broad and effective set of overlapping policies and

programs to prevent missile attack. The primary defence against missile attack has always been deterrence—the threat of military retaliation. Because it is impossible to hide the point of origin of a missile launch, any attacker would be subject to an immediate counter strike.

Hand in hand with the stick of deterrence goes the carrot of diplomacy. North Korea, the state most often cited as a threat, recently agreed to halt its flight test program while negotiating with the United States. The START nuclear arms reduction process is reducing the threat to the United States by sharply cutting the number of Russian nuclear-armed missiles. U.S. aid and expertise is helping Russia downsize its nuclear arsenal and control its massive stocks of the fissile material used for nuclear weapons.

Another line of defence is denial. The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) limit the proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction that might be delivered by these missile systems. The Australia Group and the Nuclear Suppliers Group are informal arrangements of industrial countries that seek to prevent respectively the spread of chemical and biological weapons material and technology, and nuclear weapons technology and material. The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) helps slow the spread of missile technology and equipment. More can and should be done to strengthen these efforts, especially to control missile proliferation.

A small number of countries seek to evade these agreements. North Korea, Iran and Iraq could develop a limited capability to attack the United States within 15 years, using inaccurate missiles with small payloads. Rather than an unproven missile defence, the combination of strong and active diplomacy, a capable deterrent and continued denial strategies is far more effective response to this potential threat. In the end, the most powerful defence is to reduce the demand for missiles and missile technology by resolving the regional and international tensions that drive it.

Conclusion: The chief reason for my mission here is to communicate that it is vital that U.S. allies and the international community recognize that this decision is not simply a decision about U.S. national security. They must insist that U.S. missile defence plans do not reinforce recent unilateralist U.S. foreign policy actions — symbolized by the Senate's recent failure to ratify the CTBT — which would weaken global efforts to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is vital that U.S. allies and the international community insist that the United States work cooperatively with other nations to ensure that U.S. strategies on national missile defences do not increase nuclear dangers by reigniting a nuclear arms race, and to continue to observe its commitments under the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

*This paper is largely based on portions of Pushing the Limits: the Decision on National Missile Defence, a Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers/Council for a Liveable World Education Fund report by Stephen Young. The Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers is an alliance of 17 U.S. and London-based non-governmental organizations working for a practical, step-by-step program to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear dangers. Each member of the Coalition does not necessarily support every statement in this paper.