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Missile Defense Defending America or Building Empire?

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Executive Summary

The rationale for missile defense put forward by its advocates is often a “doom and gloom” picture: America and its citizens are defenseless against the threat of ballistic missiles, and missile defense is supposed to protect the American people. The administration’s vision of missile defense is not just a global system that protects the United States against long-range missiles but a global system capable of engaging all classes of ballistic missiles to protect U.S. forces deployed worldwide, U.S. allies, and other friendly countries. Thus, the purpose of missile defense is extended well beyond protecting America and Americans.

Ultimately, the real rationale for missile defense is to protect U.S. forces so they can engage in military intervention throughout the world to enforce a *Pax Americana*—a strategy of empire by another name. But

such a strategy is simply the old Cold War strategy run amok and without a Soviet enemy. And it ignores the obvious: the result will be increased resentment of and animosity toward what is perceived by the rest of the world as an imperialist America.

A better alternative—especially given the post-September 11, 2001, realities of the al-Qaeda terrorist threat—is for the United States to adopt a more restrained foreign policy. A more prudent security strategy would recognize that U.S. security would be better served by not engaging in unnecessary military deployments and interventions that fuel the flames of vehement anti-American sentiment.

Given such a strategy, a limited land-based ballistic missile defense system designed to protect the U.S. homeland makes sense. After all, that is the primary responsibility of the federal government.

Is missile defense primarily about defending the U.S. homeland against possible ballistic missile attacks, or is it intended to support the use of U.S. military force—including preemption—throughout the world?

Introduction

The new national security strategy put forth by the Bush administration (now commonly referred to as the Bush Doctrine) claims that “new deadly challenges have emerged from rogue states,” including a “greater likelihood that they will use weapons of mass destruction against us.” One of the responses to this threat is the “development of an effective missile defense system.”¹

At the same time, the new strategy claims that the United States must “stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends.”² In fact, because of the “inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons,” a preemptive attack policy is explicitly endorsed: “To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”³

Given that the Bush Doctrine calls for acting “against such emerging threats before they are fully formed,”⁴ a fair question is, Why does the United States need a missile defense against rogue states? The simple and obvious answer is that preemption may fail or may not be undertaken, so missile defense may be a necessary hedge to help protect the United States. Less obvious is the more important question of how missile defense supports a strategy of preemption. Or put another way, Is missile defense primarily about defending the U.S. homeland against possible ballistic missile attacks, or is it intended to support the use of U.S. military force—including preemption—throughout the world?

Rogue State Threat

By definition, rogue states are hostile (or potentially hostile) countries that are trying

to develop long-range ballistic missile capability and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). According to the Pentagon, the extant and emerging threat to the United States, friends, and allies includes

- 12 nations with nuclear weapons programs,
- 28 nations with ballistic missiles,
- 13 nations with biological weapons, and
- 16 nations with chemical weapons.⁵

Those nations are not named, but among the “usual suspects” is what is now known as the “axis of evil”: North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. Those three countries were named by President Bush in his January 29, 2002, State of the Union address as constituting “an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” He said that “by seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.”⁶

North Korea

Long before North Korea’s “surprise” announcement that it was pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program (in violation of the Agreed Framework between North Korea and the United States of October 1994 in which North Korea agreed to freeze and dismantle its existing suspect nuclear weapons program),⁷ the Central Intelligence Agency acknowledged that North Korea was “capable of producing and delivering via missile warheads or other munitions a wide variety of chemical agents and possibly some biological agents” and had “produced enough plutonium for at least one, and possibly two, nuclear weapons.”⁸ But even if the North Koreans have nuclear weapons, they do not have the long-range delivery capability to strike the United States.

According to the National Intelligence Council: “North Korea has hundreds of *Scuds* and *No Dong* missiles and continues to develop the longer range *Taepo Dong-2*, which will enable the North to target the United States. In May 2001, however, North Korean Leader

Kim Jong-il unilaterally extended the North's voluntary flight-test moratorium in effect since 1999 until 2003, provided negotiations with the United States proceeded.⁹ To date, there have been no further flight tests.

Furthermore, North Korea's postulated capability to build a ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States is based on a two-stage *Taepo Dong-2* missile "believed to consist of four *No Dong* engines clustered together as the first stage, and a single *No Dong* as the second stage."¹⁰ Not only is such a missile at least five times more likely to fail than a single-stage *No Dong* missile (itself far from reliable),¹¹ but it also sounds like something the Wile E. Coyote cartoon character would think up in his ever-futile quest to catch the Roadrunner. And North Korea's ballistic missiles may be intended more for political and propaganda purposes than as usable military weapons. According to Joseph S. Bermudez, a leading expert on North Korean missile programs, the August 1998 missile test of the *Taepo Dong-2* "made America wake up and pay attention to them [North Koreans], which is one of the things they desperately want. They want to be perceived as a powerful nation."¹²

Iran

The CIA reports that "Iran, a Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) States party, already has manufactured and stockpiled chemical weapons—including blister, blood, choking, and probably nerve agents, and the bombs and artillery shells for delivering them."¹³ Iran's interest in chemical weapons is most likely a direct result of Iraq's using chemical weapons against Iran during their 1980–88 war. Iran is actively seeking dual-use biotechnical materials, equipment, and expertise—ostensibly for civilian uses but with potential biological warfare applications—and might have small quantities of biological agents and perhaps a few weapons. Again, however, this is likely a response to the perceived threat from Iraq. It had been previously thought that Iran's nuclear program was in its early stages of development with

few overt indicators of nuclear intent.¹⁴ But much like North Korea, Iran appears to have caught the United States and others by surprise. It is now thought that Iran's capabilities to produce enough enriched uranium that could be used for nuclear weapons are more advanced, but Iran denies such ambitions and the country is not believed currently to have any nuclear weapons.¹⁵

Much of Iran's ballistic missile technology comes directly from North Korea—the Iranian *Shahab-2* medium-range missile (800 to 900 miles) is considered a version of the North Korean *No Dong* missile. Iran has also enlisted the aid of Russian scientists for its ballistic missile program.¹⁶ But projections that Iran could develop within 10 years an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of striking the United States are likely overstated.¹⁷ And it is not at all clear that Iran's intentions are aimed directly at the United States. According to Gary Samore, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London: "There is a big difference between Iranians trying to cover the region, and developing a system that will allow them to attack the U.S. I don't think the Iranians have yet made a fundamental decision about developing an ICBM capability."¹⁸ And Clyde Walker, director of the Missile and Space Intelligence Center in Huntsville, Alabama, states, "Iran went into this [ballistic missile] business because they got clobbered by Iraq."¹⁹ So Iran's concerns and aspirations appear more regional than international, and its military capabilities—even if it acquires nuclear weapons—are not a direct challenge or threat to the U.S. homeland.

Iraq

Prior to deciding to take military action against Iraq, President Bush claimed, "I believe Saddam Hussein is a threat to the American people."²⁰ But the bulk of the evidence indicates that Iraq was not a direct military threat to the United States.

Before UN Security Council Resolution 1441 was adopted on November 8, 2002,²¹ Iraq had refused to allow UN weapons

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inspectors into the country as required by Security Council Resolution 687 since December 1998. In all likelihood, Iraq used the ensuing period to reconstitute its prohibited WMD programs. According to the CIA, Iraq “has attempted to purchase numerous dual-use items for, or under the guise of, legitimate civilian use. This equipment—in principle subject to UN scrutiny—also could be diverted for WMD purposes.” The CIA believed that “Iraq has probably continued low-level theoretical R&D associated with its nuclear program. A sufficient source of fissile material remains Iraq’s most significant obstacle to being able to produce a nuclear weapon.”²² An assessment of Iraq’s WMD capabilities by the International Institute for Strategic Studies concluded that

- Iraq does not possess facilities to produce fissile material in sufficient amounts for nuclear weapons,
- it would require several years and extensive foreign assistance to build such fissile material production facilities, and
- Iraq could, however, assemble nuclear weapons within months if fissile material from foreign sources were obtained.²³

And, according to the most recent UN weapons inspection reports (just prior to the U.S. decision to take military action against Iraq), there is “no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear related activities in Iraq.”²⁴

Iraq may still have had a small force of operational short-range *al-Husayn* missiles (an extended-range version of the Soviet *Scud-B*). Although Iraq may have had the infrastructure and know-how to reconstitute its *al-Husayn* program, attempts to develop medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles have never gotten beyond the design or initial development stages.²⁵ Therefore, any Iraqi capability to attack the United States was far from certain and likely well into the future. The NIC concluded that “although Iraq could attempt before 2015 to

test a rudimentary long-range missile based on its failed Al-Abid SLV [space launch vehicle], such a missile almost certainly would fail.”²⁶ In fact, according to the NIC, “Iraq is *unlikely* to test before 2015 any ICBMs that would threaten the United States, even if UN prohibitions were eliminated or significantly reduced in the next few years.”²⁷

It is also important to emphasize that the Iraqi *al-Samoud 2* missiles that UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix ordered to be destroyed were short-range missiles.²⁸ The UN-proscribed range limit for Iraq’s ballistic missiles was 150 kilometers. The *al-Samoud 2* has been tested to a range of 183 kilometers and may be capable of flying 193 kilometers. Thus, while the *al-Samoud 2* may indeed have been a violation of UN-imposed limits, it was hardly a direct threat to the United States.

Undoubtedly, some of Iraq’s motivation for seeking to acquire WMD and ballistic missiles was to deter any U.S. military action against the regime in Baghdad. But both the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency concur that regional power considerations were also a large factor. According to former DIA director Vice Admiral Thomas R. Wilson, “Saddam’s goals remain to reassert his rule over the Kurds in northern Iraq, undermine all UN restrictions on his military capabilities, and make Iraq the predominant military and economic power in the Persian Gulf and the Arab world.”²⁹ And according to the NIC, “*Baghdad’s goal of becoming the predominant regional power* and its hostile relations with many of its neighbors are the key drivers behind Iraq’s ballistic missile program.”³⁰

Thus, the direct military threat posed by Iraq was less ominous than the rhetoric might have suggested. Indeed, according to Admiral Wilson:

Years of U.N. sanctions, embargoes, and inspections, combined with U.S. and Coalition military actions, have significantly degraded Iraq’s military capabilities. Saddam’s military forces are much smaller and weaker than those he had in 1991. Manpower and

equipment shortages, a problematic logistics system, and fragile military morale remain major shortcomings. Saddam's paranoia and lack of trust—and related oppression and mistreatment—extend to the military, and are a drain on military effectiveness.³¹

That Iraq's military was not a match for the U.S. military was borne out in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Even the vaunted Republican Guard was decimated by U.S. airpower and ground forces.³² In fact, the only real resistance put up by the Iraqi military involved smaller-scale guerrilla and other unconventional tactics.

The New National Security Strategy and Iraq

It should be abundantly clear that the Bush administration's policy toward Iraq is the new national security strategy in action. This is evidenced by the president's October 7, 2002, remarks in Cincinnati, making the case to the American people for military action against Iraq. Among other things, the president said:

- "We are resolved today to confront every threat, from any source, that could bring sudden terror and suffering to America."
- "The Iraqi dictator must not be permitted to threaten America and the world with horrible poisons and diseases and gases and nuclear weapons."
- "The danger is already significant, and it only grows worse with time. If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons today—and we do—does it make any sense for the world to wait to confront him as he grows even stronger and develops even more dangerous weapons?"
- "America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evi-

dence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof."

- "Knowing the designs and deceptions of the Iraqi regime, we have every reason to assume the worst, and we have an urgent duty to prevent the worst from occurring."
- "Saddam Hussein must disarm himself—or, for the sake of peace, we will lead a coalition to disarm him."³³

Operation Iraqi Freedom was the actualization of the president's rhetoric that the goal is to take action against the threat before it is fully formed. Given the new national security strategy and U.S. action against Iraq, the logical extrapolation is that a similar course of action would be pursued against other emerging threats.³⁴ According to Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton, "In the aftermath of Iraq, dealing with the Iranian nuclear weapons program will be of equal importance as dealing with the North Korean nuclear weapons program."³⁵

The implication is that, if potential threats are eliminated before they materialize, rogue states will never acquire the capability to attack the United States, nor will they be able to pass such capability on to terrorists. But if that is the case, then the need for a missile defense system that could potentially cost hundreds of billions of dollars³⁶ could theoretically be obviated. Such potential savings are especially important in light of the fact that the Pentagon has already spent more than \$100 billion³⁷ since President Reagan challenged the technical community to render nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete in 1983, but an operationally effective missile defense is still to be proven.³⁸

To be sure, missile defense can still be justified even with a strategy of preemption on the basis that preemption may not always be successful, the United States may not always be able to preempt, or deterrence could fail. But is there a rationale for missile defense that goes beyond its being a hedge or insurance policy against such events?

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The Real Reason for Missile Defense

The need for missile defense is often based on a “doom and gloom” picture painted by its advocates. For example, James Anderson at the Heritage Foundation states that “ballistic missiles are capable of destroying life and property on a massive scale. . . . Yet our country remains naked to these missiles.” He further states that “*every American already is a hostage to the threat of missile attack.*”³⁹ When President Bush announced that the United States would withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, he said that “the ABM treaty hinders our government’s ability to develop ways to protect our people from future terrorist or rogue state missile attacks” and that “defending the American people is my highest priority as Commander in Chief, and I cannot and will not allow the United States to remain in a treaty that prevents us from developing effective defenses.”⁴⁰

More recently, CIA director George Tenet responded in the affirmative when asked on Capitol Hill whether North Korea currently has a missile capable of hitting the West Coast of the United States.⁴¹ The doomsayers were quick to proclaim that Americans are defenseless against the dire threat posed by North Korea’s two nuclear warheads.⁴²

In other words, the purpose of missile defense is supposed to be to protect the American people. But the rhetoric conceals the real reason for missile defense. According to the Missile Defense Agency, the Department of Defense organization responsible for developing a missile defense system, “The fundamental goal of the planned BMD system is to defend the forces and territories of the United States, its Allies, and friends as soon as practicable.”⁴³ Thus, the purpose of missile defense is extended well beyond protecting America and Americans.

That is why the MDA is pursuing a layered missile defense system “capable of engaging all classes of ballistic missile threats.”⁴⁴ The direct threat to the U.S. homeland is posed

by ICBMs, which are currently possessed by only the United States, Russia, and China.⁴⁵ Because of its militarily secure geostrategic position, other types of shorter-range ballistic missiles do not pose a threat to the United States—but are threats to foreign friends and allies. Perhaps the clearest indication that defending the United States is not necessarily the primary objective of a future missile defense system is this statement by the MDA about the threat: “The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic and cruise missiles that could deliver them pose a direct and immediate threat to the security of *U.S. military forces and assets in overseas theaters of operation, our allies and friends, as well as our own country.*”⁴⁶

That is also the reason for wanting to develop a space-based boost-phase intercept capability. Boost phase is defined as the portion of a missile’s flight from launch to breaking free of the earth’s gravitational forces. Depending on the range of the missile, boost phase lasts between three and five minutes. For longer-range missiles, the rocket will actually exit the earth’s atmosphere into outer space; for shorter-range missiles, the rocket will reach only the fringes of outer space.⁴⁷ Because of the dynamics of missile flight and the relatively short engagement time for intercept, the best way to achieve boost-phase intercept is from space-based platforms that can shoot downward at a launching missile rather than from the ground shooting upward. The MDA fiscal year 2004-05 budget estimate does not specify how much money will be allocated to space-based defense, but it does state that the agency “will initiate a space based Test Bed development to determine the feasibility of exploiting the inherent advantages of intercepting threat missiles from space” and “begin developing a space-based kinetic energy interceptor in FY04, with initial, on-orbit testing to commence with three to five satellites in Block 2008.”⁴⁸ It had previously been reported that MDA proposed to spend \$54 million on space-based kinetic energy kill vehicle concepts and was seeking \$634 million for directed-energy weapons, including research and development of a space-based laser.⁴⁹

To be sure, there are many operational advantages to being able to intercept a missile in its boost phase—for example, a single effective shot could kill a missile carrying multiple warheads before any decoys or countermeasure could be deployed. If the missile were carrying a chemical or biological weapon, the debris would most likely fall on the country that launched the missile. But the other reason boost-phase intercept is wanted is because a space-based capability would inherently provide global coverage well beyond defending against only those ballistic missiles that directly threaten the United States. According to the Heritage Foundation’s Commission on Missile Defense, “A missile defense system should be global in nature” and “the fastest and least expensive way to build a global missile defense system would be to begin by building sea-based defenses and then to *follow them as soon as possible with space-based defenses*.”⁵⁰

American Empire

So it’s not really defending America against ICBMs—missiles that rogue states currently don’t have and aren’t likely develop or deploy for perhaps a decade or more—that is driving the push for missile defense. Rather, **the real rationale for missile defense is to protect U.S. forces so they can engage in military intervention throughout the world.** Such thinking is not set forth in the new national security strategy, but it is explicit in a document many consider a “blueprint” and inspiration for the new strategy, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses* by the Project of the New American Century published in September 2000. Ordinarily, such a report might be dismissed as just another Washington, “inside the beltway” policy exercise. But many of the project participants are now in influential positions either inside the Bush administration or as advisers to the administration:

- Stephen Cambone is director of program analysis and evaluation at the Pentagon and was previously the staff

director for the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization and the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, both chaired by now–secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld. Cambone is also the leading candidate to be the first under secretary for intelligence at the Defense Department.⁵¹

- Eliot Cohen directs strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University and serves on Rumsfeld’s Defense Policy Board.
- Devon Cross is a member of the Defense Policy Board.
- I. Lewis Libby is the chief of staff for Vice President Cheney.
- Paul Wolfowitz is deputy defense secretary.
- Dov Zakheim is under secretary of defense (comptroller) and chief financial officer for the Pentagon.

According to *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*:

- “[The United States must] develop and deploy *global missile defenses* to defend the American homeland and American allies, and *to provide a secure basis for U.S. power projection around the world.*”
- “Effective ballistic missile defenses will be the central element in the exercise of American power and the projection of U.S. military forces abroad.”
- “The failure to build missile defenses will . . . compromise the exercise of American power abroad.”⁵²

Thus, the real ballistic missile threat is the shorter-range missiles (like Scuds) that rogue states already have. According to the NIC, “The threats to the U.S. homeland, nevertheless, will consist of dramatically fewer warheads than today owing to significant reductions in Russian strategic forces.” So the ballistic missile threat against America is actually decreasing. Conversely, the NIC states that “short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, particularly if armed with WMD, already

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pose a significant threat overseas to US interests, military forces, and allies.” Furthermore, “Emerging ballistic missile states continue to increase the range, reliability, and accuracy of the missile systems in their inventories—posing ever greater risks to US forces, interests, and allies throughout the world.”⁵³ At most, only two potentially hostile countries (Russia and China) possess ballistic missiles capable of striking the United States. The Pentagon, however, claims 28 threat countries (without naming them specifically) with ballistic missiles,⁵⁴ but those missile systems are all short or medium range.

Why the great concern about ballistic missiles that cannot reach the United States? Because

weak states operating small arsenals of crude ballistic missiles, armed with basic nuclear warheads or other weapons of mass destruction, will be in a strong position to deter the United States from using conventional force, no matter the technological or other advantages we may enjoy. Even if such enemies are merely able to threaten American allies rather than the United States homeland itself, America’s ability to project power will be deeply compromised.⁵⁵

So missile defense is arguably more about the ability to use conventional offensive force throughout the world than about defending the American homeland.

And the purpose of conventional force superiority around the globe is to “preserve and enhance this ‘American peace.’”⁵⁶ Of course, the new national security strategy is not quite so blunt and states that “the presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitments to allies and friends. Through our willingness to use force in our own defense and in defense of others, the United States demonstrates its resolve to maintain a balance of power that favors freedom.”⁵⁷ Indeed,

the new national security strategy calls for making the world “better” by “expanding liberty” throughout the world on the basis of American values of “political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity.”⁵⁸ Regardless of how it is dressed up, that is a strategy of American empire. And, ultimately, that is what missile defense is all about.

But what never seems to occur to advocates of a strategy of empire⁵⁹ is that the result will be increased resentment of and animosity toward what is perceived by the rest of the world as an imperialist America. It is popular to think that other countries and people hate the United States for “who we are.” In his address to a joint session of Congress and the American people after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President Bush said: “Why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government. . . . They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”⁶⁰ To be sure, radical Islamists may have a deep-seated hatred for the United States. But the reality that is largely ignored is that U.S. policies and actions are significant factors in triggering terrorist attacks; those factors go beyond any hatred of America, its culture, and its values.⁶¹

That anti-American animosity is fueled more by “what we do” than by “who we are” is reinforced by various polls taken around the world. For example, the Zogby International “Ten Nations Poll” (five Arab, Muslim nations; three non-Arab, Muslim nations; and two non-Arab, non-Muslim nations) shows that people generally like America but “incredibly low marks are given everywhere for United States policy toward the Arab nations and toward the Palestinians.”⁶² Another Zogby poll “found that Arabs look favorably on American freedoms and political values, but have a strongly negative overall view of the United States based largely on their disapproval of U.S. policy toward the region.”⁶³ And consider this

anecdotal evidence of how Egyptian youth have reacted to the U.S. military action in Iraq: "In interviews around Cairo, young Egyptians repeatedly described their reactions in conflicting terms. They love American culture but are horrified by the U.S. war in Iraq. They said they felt betrayed by a country they looked up to for its ideals of freedom, democracy and fairness."⁶⁴

Those views are not confined to Arab or Muslim countries that might somehow be inherently predisposed to dislike the United States. As Dartmouth College professors Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth point out: "Washington also needs to be concerned about the level of resentment than an aggressive unilateral course would engender among its major allies. After all, it is influence, not power, that is ultimately most valuable."⁶⁵ A poll conducted for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States showed that "a majority of people surveyed in six European countries believe American foreign policy is partly to blame for the Sept. 11 attacks."⁶⁶ And the results of a Gallup International poll of 36 countries showed that in 23 countries (9 of which were Western European countries and included Great Britain) "more people think U.S. foreign policy is negative rather than positive in its effects on their country."⁶⁷

But the obvious conclusion is lost on American policymakers and strategists of empire: the United States needs to stop meddling in the internal affairs of other countries and regions, except when U.S. national security interests are directly threatened—that is, when the territorial integrity, national sovereignty, or liberty of the United States is at risk—or it becomes necessary to prevent the emergence of an expansionist hegemonic power. As Richard K. Betts of Columbia University points out:

It is no longer prudent to assume that important security interests complement each other as they did during the Cold War. The interest at

the very core—protecting the American homeland from attack—may now often be in conflict with security more broadly conceived and with the interests that mandate promoting American political values, economic interdependence, social Westernization, and stability in regions beyond Western Europe and the Americas.⁶⁸

A Different Strategy and Missile Defense for the 21st Century

The strategy of empire is simply the old Cold War strategy run amok and without a Soviet enemy. A better alternative is for the United States to adopt a more restrained foreign policy—sometimes called minimalist realism, off-shore balancer, or balancer of last resort. This is not a call for isolationism or "Fortress America" but simple recognition that the United States does not have to be the world's policeman (or armed social worker) and intercede in the myriad problems and conflicts that arise around the world. Whereas empire seeks to impose U.S. will and dictate outcomes, it is more prudent and realistic to recognize and accept that even a country as large and powerful as the United States cannot control what happens everywhere in the world.

More important, the United States does not *need* to control outcomes everywhere and on every issue. In the post-Cold War world with no strategic peer competitor and no would-be hegemonic power on the horizon, the United States is in a unique, secure geostrategic position. Friendly neighbors to the north and south and vast oceans to the east and west make a large-scale conventional military attack highly implausible. And the vast U.S. strategic arsenal serves as an effective deterrent against the use of nuclear weapons by any hostile nation. So every problem, crisis, and conflict in the world is not a

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direct threat to vital U.S. security interests. Put another way, U.S. security no longer depends on an expansive, forward-deployed defense perimeter. And instead of being an intervener of first resort, the United States should be the balancer of last resort and step in only when its vital interests are at stake. The most vital interest, of course, is the homeland.

Such a change in security strategy and policy is even more appropriate, given the threat of terrorism. As Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute points out: "Making that change would have been wise even before the events of September 11. The terrorist attacks on America have given added urgency to the need to adjust Washington's security policy. . . . We cannot afford the distraction of maintaining increasingly obsolete and irrelevant security commitments around the globe."⁶⁹ A changed national security strategy would come directly to grips with the fact that, since terrorist attacks are virtually impossible to deter, prevent, or mitigate, U.S. security would be better served by not engaging in unnecessary military deployments and interventions that fuel the flames of vehement anti-American sentiment.

Given such a strategy and to the extent that a missile defense is technically feasible, proven to be operationally effective (via realistic testing, including against decoys and countermeasures), and affordable, a limited land-based ballistic missile defense system designed to protect the U.S. homeland makes sense.⁷⁰ After all, that is the primary responsibility of the federal government. But it is not the responsibility of the United States to protect friends and allies, especially when many of them are wealthy enough to pay for their own missile defense if they think it's important for their own security.

The truth is that the ballistic missile threat posed by rogue states is relatively limited. And any defense expenditure—including spending on missile defense—must be commensurate with the threat. Therefore, a limited threat—albeit potentially destructive—deserves only limited public resources to counter it. The vast

U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal would likely serve as a strong deterrent against any intentional attack. But a limited and truly "national" missile defense system would be a good backup—or insurance policy—against the low likelihood of an accidental or unauthorized launch by a nuclear power or if deterrence failed against a rogue state.

Conclusion

It would seem that the Bush administration and advocates of missile defense have successfully used rhetoric about needing missile defense to protect Americans who are defenseless against ballistic missile attack to justify increased spending and a planned initial deployment at Fort Greely, Alaska, in 2004.⁷¹ But in reality missile defense is about defending U.S. forces deployed in an ever-expanding security perimeter around the world, ostensibly to defend freedom.

Pursuing such an expansive global missile defense to support a strategy of empire would not only be expensive and technically difficult and complex—indeed, building any missile defense system will be the most technically complex and challenging weapon system ever—but downright dangerous.

No weapon system is 100 percent perfect. Missile defense will not be any different. Therefore, no missile defense system can guarantee that all incoming warheads will be destroyed. As a result, a global missile defense to protect friends, allies, and U.S. forces abroad may provide a false sense of security. Policymakers pursuing a strategy of empire and willing to take preemptive military action might be emboldened to engage in risky military interventions overseas. If adversaries feel they have nothing to lose (and are armed with long-range ballistic missiles and WMD), they might decide to launch an attack against the United States (although they would otherwise be deterred from doing so if not provoked by a U.S. attack).⁷² Given a less than perfect missile defense, the possibility of a warhead getting through would be

very real. A potentially catastrophic attack on U.S. soil (a failure of the first magnitude in U.S. national security policy) could thus result from unneeded U.S. military action against a country that would not have directly threatened the United States if it had been left alone.

Ultimately, the global missile defense sought by the administration is a shield for a quixotic crusade using military force to build a safer and better world based on American values. But that strategy will have the perverse effect of making the United States less secure by sowing the seeds of hate and vehement anti-American sentiment under the guise of expanding liberty. Such actions could result in more terrorist recruits and terrorist violence. And a missile defense, no matter how effective, will not protect Americans from terrorists using easier and cheaper means to inflict mass casualties—witness 9/11.

Notes

1. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, www.whitehouse.gov/asc/ass.html, p. 13, accessed April 4, 2003.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
4. *Ibid.*, p. iv.
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60. "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html, accessed April 1, 2003.

61. This is clearly the case with Osama bin Laden. According to Peter Bergen, one of the few Western journalists to interview bin Laden: "What he condemns the United States for is simple: its policies in the Middle East. Those are, to recap briefly: the continued U.S. military presence in Arabia; U.S. support for Israel; its continued bombing of Iraq; and its support for regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia that bin Laden regards as apostates from Islam." Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 223.

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63. Karen DeYoung, "Poll Finds Arabs Dislike U.S. Based on Policies It Pursues," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2002, p. A13.

64. Emily Wax, "In Egypt, Anger at U.S. Displaces Admiration," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2003, p. A25.

65. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July–August 2002): 32.
66. Associated Press, "Europe Polled on Why 9/11 Happened," CBSNews.com, September 4, 2002, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/08/28/september11/main520058.shtml, accessed April 2, 2003.
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68. Richard K. Betts, "The New Threat of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January–February 1998): 41.
69. Ted Galen Carpenter, *Peace & Freedom: Foreign Policy for a Constitutional Republic* (Washington: Cato Institute, 2002), p. 12.
70. This does not mean that providing missile defense for U.S. forces should be completely ignored. But investments in so-called theater missile defense systems should be directed toward supporting expeditionary forces sent to a theater of operations rather than forward-deployed forces. For a more complete analysis of theater missile defense requirements, see Charles V. Peña, "Theater Missile Defense: A Limited Capability Is Needed," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 309, June 22, 1998.
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72. This is exactly the situation described by CIA director George Tenet. In a letter to Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.), chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, Tenet states:
- "Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or CBW [chemical and biological weapons] against the United States."
 - "Should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions."
 - "Saddam might decide that the extreme step of assisting Islamist terrorists in conducting a WMD attack against the United States would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him."
- "CIA Letter to Senate on Baghdad's Intentions," *New York Times*, October 9, 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/10/09/international/09TTEX.html, accessed April 4, 2003.

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