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FROM PRESIDENTIAL PLAN TO PROTECTION: NEXT STEPS ON MISSILE DEFENSE

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President George W. Bush, in a May 1 speech at the National Defense University, boldly declared his intention to assure Americans an effective defense against ballistic missile attack. In outlining his decision to deploy a missile defense system, the President made clear that America will no longer bind itself by outdated policies and Cold War fears. He signaled his intent to move beyond his predecessor's framework, to consider near-term defenses against limited threats, and to couple missile defense with reductions in nuclear weapons. He will also dispatch key Administration officials to consult with other states and "to seek their input on all the issues surrounding the new strategic environment." Such initial steps are critical; they will enable the missile defense program to progress rapidly and lead ultimately to a more secure world.

The President should be lauded for his leadership. The threat of attack from rogue states is clear and growing. The next steps also will be critical to turning his directives into concrete actions so that political forces within and outside his Administration do not undermine the effort.

The President's Plan. President Bush used his speech not to announce specific decisions regarding the type of missile defense system America would deploy, but to signal how he plans to proceed. For example, the President:

- **Affirmed his commitment to field an effective missile defense system.** During his campaign for

office, President Bush specifically pledged to Americans that he would field a missile defense system. Opponents of missile defense criticized his objective as unrealistic, both in terms of technology and in terms of cost.

But as the President made clear in his speech, he considers it not only possible but imperative to develop and deploy a missile defense system, beginning with near-term options that draw on established technologies: "We will evaluate what works and what does not... [and] build on our successes."

- **Indicated that his program will not be limited by the Clinton Administration's self-imposed restrictions.** The President wants a defense that will "protect the United States, our deployed forces, our friends and allies"—one that is capable of intercepting missiles in all phases of flight. Such a system was not the goal of the Clinton Administration, which limited testing and deployment to the extent that U.S. capabilities now lag behind the rapidly evolving threat.

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- **Outlined a “credible deterrent” that couples missile defense deployments with reductions in nuclear weapons.** This will require moving beyond the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with the former Soviet Union. Critics of missile defense view it as antithetical to reductions in nuclear weapons. The President believes that missile defense must not be held hostage to the process of reducing nuclear arms. The Defense Department cannot develop and test, let alone deploy, effective missile defenses if the United States continues to observe the technological constraints found in the ABM Treaty. The President made it clear that this defunct treaty will no longer be an obstacle to his effort to eliminate U.S. vulnerability to missile attack.

The Next Steps. Implementing the President’s missile defense plan will require several concrete steps.

1. **Develop specific plans for deploying a layered, global missile defense system that enables near-term limited defenses.** The President has asked the Secretary of Defense to identify options for fielding a layered system to protect U.S. allies, U.S. forces overseas, and U.S. territory from missile attack. The options that allow the deployment of limited defenses against near-term threats, the President noted, are likely to include “already established technologies that might involve land-based and sea-based capabilities to intercept missiles in mid-course or after they re-enter the atmosphere.” Noting that intercepting missiles early in flight is also important, the President pointed out that advanced sensors and interceptors may provide such capabilities and that he may need to request additional funds from Congress to support such a program. Critical to his effort will be ensuring that the defense bureaucracy fully supports his plan. The tendency of the bureaucracy, unless instructed otherwise, will be to continue designing missile defense around the requirements of the ABM Treaty. Recognizing this, the President will need to abolish the Pentagon’s current system of treaty compliance reviews.
2. **Develop a strategy for coupling missile defense deployments with offensive nuclear reductions.** The President believes missile defenses should complement a restructured, smaller nuclear force. His aides should submit specific recommendations for simultaneous restructuring of the U.S. nuclear force and fielding of elements of the missile defense system. This will require implementing a diplomatic initiative to secure Russia’s cooperation.
3. **Formally end enforcement of ABM Treaty restrictions.** The President acknowledged that the ABM Treaty was designed for a very different strategic environment. To enable a fully effective missile defense, the President’s likely development, testing, and deployment program will involve steps that are inconsistent with the treaty’s terms. A timetable for deploying the various elements of his program will be needed, and the President will need to decide whether to announce that the United States is formally withdrawing from the old treaty early in the process or to make that announcement six months before the program officially violates the treaty’s terms, according to the treaty’s requirements. Either way, at some point, the Administration will have to be prepared to order the Pentagon to end its treaty compliance reviews.

Conclusion. President Bush has listened to the majority of Americans and honored Congress’s intent in the National Missile Defense Act of 1999 by announcing his commitment to deploy missile defenses. He demonstrates his willingness to do so responsibly by consulting with other nations. Implementing his plan, however, will require making sure that bureaucratic resistance and politics do not derail the process. Only through leadership and executive attention will a missile defense system be deployed that protects Americans from attack and increases security worldwide.

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