

Background

No. 1972
September 20, 2006



Published by The Heritage Foundation

The Enduring Features of the Debate Over Missile Defense

Baker Spring

Today, the United States has only an extremely limited capability to defend its people, territory, foreign deployed forces, allies, and friends against ballistic missile attack. At this point, U.S. territory is defended against long-range ballistic missiles by just 11 test interceptors, located in Alaska and California, with an operational capability. U.S. coastal areas are undefended against short-range ballistic missiles that could be launched from ships.

This vulnerability is dangerous because the threat of missile attack continues to grow, as demonstrated by North Korea's launch of a salvo of test missiles on July 4. U.S. missile defense capabilities still need to catch up with the threat. The shame is that these capabilities could have caught up to the missile threat by now.

The danger is compounded by a misguided perception in Congress, particularly among some supporters of missile defense, that the debate over missile defense is all but over and that the side backing missile defense has won. The facts do not warrant such complacency. The debate is not over.

Congress can better understand the current state of the debate over missile defense by reviewing an extensive report on missile defense that was released by the Independent Working Group on July 10.¹ The report assesses the shortcomings of the current U.S. missile defense capabilities and makes recommendations for how to improve U.S. missile defense capabilities in a way to catch up and eventually surpass the missile threat.

Talking Points

Congress needs to work with the Bush Administration to put a truly effective missile defense system in place, countering the arguments of missile defense opponents and overcoming the pressure to agree to ineffective missile defenses. Specifically, Congress should:

- Reject proposals for an ineffective missile defense system,
- Point out how the policy of vulnerability is destabilizing in today's world and how a damage-limitation strategy is the better alternative,
- Reject the charge that space-based missile defense interceptors will weaponize space,
- Dare missile defense opponents in Congress to vote for a resolution that finds that the deployment of effective missile defenses will make the U.S. too powerful,
- Continue with outside efforts from across America to demand that the federal government provide a missile defense, and
- Tie rhetorical support for missile defense to support for an effective missile defense system.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/bg1972.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies
of the
Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis
Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Along with this analysis and recommendations, the report examines why the missile defense debate has endured and how the opponents of missile defense have succeeded in slowing progress toward fielding an effective missile defense system. Specifically, the study examines the arguments that missile defense opponents continue to use. Missile defense proponents in Congress need to renew their efforts to counter these arguments if the U.S. is going to field an effective defense against ballistic missile attack.

Where the Debate Stands Now

Missile defense supporters in Congress understandably think that the debate is all but won. The Bush Administration has made dramatic strides in moving the nation's missile defense policy forward. In 2001, President George W. Bush put missile defense at the center of his policy for transforming the U.S. military.² Later that year, he announced that the U.S. was withdrawing from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with the former Soviet Union.³ The importance of this step cannot be overstated. The ABM Treaty, as long as it remained in place, would have blocked any prospect of an effective missile defense for the U.S. and severely limited the options for defending U.S. forces deployed abroad and U.S. friends and allies.

The Bush Administration has also established a policy goal to field a layered, global missile defense system.⁴ If fielded, this system would counter missiles in the boost or ascent phase, the midcourse phase, and the terminal phase of flight. Further, it would counter ballistic missiles of all ranges and

would protect foreign-deployed U.S. forces and U.S. friends and allies, as well as the people and territory of the United States. Theoretically, this system would counter a missile launched from anywhere in the world against any target in the world.

The problem today is that the actual missile defense programs in place are not consistent with the Bush Administration's established policy. Missile defense opponents have effectively shifted their tactics away from directly taking on the Bush Administration's missile defense policy to limiting the programmatic options. They have been effective in the debate over missile defense programs in large measure because of the enduring negative impact from the roughly 30 years that the ABM Treaty was in place. During that time, the treaty drove missile defense research and development down paths in the direction of ineffective defenses because it was designed to ensure that the U.S. would not field an effective defense against ballistic missiles.

In this regard, it is critical for Congress to recognize that the ABM Treaty imposed strict limits on development and testing activities, not just deployment options.⁵ Following U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, the easiest and earliest deployment options for those who manage missile defense programs in the federal government was to push to deployment those limited areas of development and testing that were permitted by the ABM Treaty. However, the easiest and earliest deployment options were far from the most effective options. Missile defense opponents, and even some proponents, in Congress and the bureaucracy have consistently fought the rapid exploitation of more

1. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and William R. Van Cleave, *Missile Defense, the Space Relationship & the Twenty-first Century: 2007 Report* (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2006), at www.ifpa.org/pdf/IWGREport.pdf (September 18, 2006).
2. George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President to Students and Faculty at National Defense University," The White House, May 1, 2001, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/05/20010501-10.html (September 18, 2006).
3. George W. Bush, "President Discusses National Missile Defense," The White House, December 13, 2001, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011213-4.html (September 19, 2006).
4. Lt. General Ronald T. Kadish, USAF, Director, Missile Defense Agency, "Missile Defense Program Brief to The Heritage Foundation," June 20, 2002.
5. Article V of the ABM Treaty prohibited the development and testing of ABM systems that could be deployed at sea, in the air, in space, or in a mobile launcher on land. Article VI of the ABM Treaty prohibited the testing of non-ABM systems such as air defenses in "ABM mode."

promising technologies. This is particularly the case regarding space-based interceptors for countering ballistic missile attacks.

For example, the Clinton Administration cancelled outright the Brilliant Pebbles space-based interceptor program in 1993, despite its promise. The Brilliant Pebbles program has yet to be revived. In 1997, President Bill Clinton used a line-item veto to cancel the Clementine II space probe.⁶ This system would have demonstrated the effectiveness of Brilliant Pebbles technology and advanced U.S. goals in space exploration. Its predecessor, the Clementine probe, was highly successful and very inexpensive for a space vehicle.⁷ The Advanced Technology Kill Vehicle (ATKV) program, which was developing lightweight and small kill vehicle technology from the Brilliant Pebbles program for use in surface-based interceptors, remains dormant. The teams of technologists that were advancing these more capable missile defense concepts have been disbanded and would now be difficult to reconstitute.

The opportunity cost of taking the path of least resistance in missile defense deployment is potentially very high for missile defense proponents. If the limited missile defense capabilities now in place prove insufficient to protect the American people when called upon to do so, missile defense proponents risk losing credibility with the American people. Therefore, it is in their interest to establish a clear position on the missile defense program that they want and force missile defense opponents to explain to the American people why they cannot have it. At best, proponents will attain the effective defense that they say they want. At worst, they will at least be in a position to explain to the American people how opponents thwarted attempts to provide the American people with an effective defense.

The Enduring Arguments of Missile Defense Opponents

Missile defense opponents have relied on a number of core arguments that have remained consistent and are still being used today. They are identified in the report of the Independent Working Group.⁸ What has changed is the object of these arguments. When the ABM Treaty and the policy of mutual assured destruction (MAD) remained in place, missile defense opponents directed their arguments against policies that were opposed to MAD and sought to move beyond the ABM Treaty. However, this policy-based opposition to ballistic missile defense has given way to seeking to undermine the most promising missile defense programs. The arguments are as follows.

Argument #1: Missile defense is ineffective and therefore wasteful.

During the Cold War, opponents talked about the ineffectiveness of missile defense in the context of achieving desirable security outcomes.⁹ Specifically, they argued that a policy to field a missile defense would lead to an arms race, provoke a hostile relationship with the Soviet Union, and increase the likelihood of nuclear war. Today, the argument against the effectiveness of missile defense is focused on the lack of capabilities in the systems themselves.¹⁰ The fact that these technological preferences are designed to produce failure has not deterred the opponents of missile defense. They are perfectly content to work to decrease the effectiveness of missile defense systems while at the same time decrying their ineffectiveness.

Having established a ready-made argument regarding the ineffectiveness of missile defense, opponents immediately turn to the question of wasteful spending. They propose a myriad of alter-

6. For the text of President Clinton's veto message, see *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 105th Cong., 1st Sess., 1997* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Books, 1998), p. D-42.

7. Pfaltzgraff and Van Cleave, *Missile Defense, the Space Relationship & the Twenty-first Century*, pp. i:58–i:66.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–86.

9. Robert S. McNamara, "Address Before United Press International Editors and Publishers," September 18, 1967.

10. For example, see Deborah Creighton Skinner, "Q & A: U.S. Missile Defense," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 3, 2006, reposted as "Q & A: U.S. Missile Defense and the North Korean Missile Launch," at www.cdi.org/program/document.cfm?DocumentID=3576 (August 24, 2006).

natives for the funds that would otherwise go toward missile defense, both inside and outside of the defense budget.¹¹ The tautological argument goes like this: Wasteful missile defense spending is inherently wasteful. This proposition, like all tautologies, is unassailable. It also lacks merit because it is true whether or not missile defenses can be made effective and not wasteful. It is designed to avoid the true state of affairs regarding the potential value of spending on missile defense.

Argument #2: Missile defenses are destabilizing.

During the Cold War, scholars theorized that a posture of defenselessness against nuclear weapons, particularly nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, was conducive to stability.¹² This was the foundation of the MAD policy. At the core of this theory was the determination that defenses would undermine the reliability of a retaliatory nuclear strike and thereby encourage first strike options. This theory became widely accepted during the Cold War and was codified in 1972 by the ABM Treaty.

Clearly, the opponents of missile defense continue to adhere to this theory.¹³ In a world where nuclear and ballistic missile proliferation is a reality, the adherents of MAD are assuming that a theory that was predominantly based on two-player models is readily adaptable to a setting that includes more than two “players” with nuclear-armed missiles. This is a dangerous assumption.¹⁴ Nevertheless, missile defense opponents remain strongly committed to MAD.

Part of the reason that opponents’ commitment to MAD remains strong is that this same group is strongly committed to the Cold War approach to arms control. Their driving assumption is that the pursuit of defenses will necessarily result in a leap-frogging arms race in which increments of defense will invite larger increments of offense and vice versa. The alternative notion that effective defenses could actually lessen the appetites for nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, particularly by would-be proliferators, is rejected. The argument also ignores the fact that shortly after President Bush’s announcement of U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, the U.S. and Russia entered into a treaty to reduce the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons on each side to between 1,700 and 2,200 each.¹⁵

Argument #3: Missile defenses will “weaponize” space.

Missile defense opponents are also likely to be among those advocating that the U.S. should not weaponize space. This argument inherently recognizes that the incentive to put missile defense interceptors in space is powerful because space-based interceptors will be the most effective defense.

The advocacy against the weaponization of space is based, first and foremost, on the assertion that space is not already weaponized. In their definition of weaponization, the advocates conveniently discount the fact that nuclear-armed ballistic missiles transit space. They use a variety of supporting arguments, from the idea of space as a weapons-free zone, to assertions that any U.S. attempt to dominate space would generate hostility and ultimately

11. For example, Senator Carl Levin (D–MI) offered an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill of 2002 to establish a preference in law for countering terrorism over countering ballistic missile attacks. See *Congressional Record*, 107th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 26, 2002, p. S6066.

12. For example, see Steven J. Brams and D. Marc Kilgore, *Game Theory and National Security* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), and Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

13. Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), pp. 75–95.

14. For a detailed examination of nuclear stability in a multi-player game setting, see Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games: An Exercise Examining Stability and Defenses in a Proliferated World*, Heritage Foundation Ballistic Missile Defense Technical Studies Series Study No. 4, 2005, at www.heritage.org/upload/NuclearGames.pdf.

15. Press release, “President Bush, Russian President Putin Sign Nuclear Arms Treaty,” The White House, May 24, 2002, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020524-10.html (September 18, 2006).

fail and that deploying space-based interceptors would instigate an arms race in space, to the claim that the U.S. does not need systems to counter other nations' space forces.¹⁶

Argument #4: Possession of missile defenses, along with its other military capabilities, will give the U.S. too much power.

This argument combines an extreme variation of the balance of power of theory with an assumption of moral equivalency in international relations. Supporters of this argument conclude that any military imbalance is unstable, regardless of the propensity of some to be more aggressive than others. They also see the moral purposes of all military powers as essentially equivalent, consistent with a view of moral equivalency between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, this group quietly welcomed Soviet acquisition of atomic and later thermonuclear weapons as an appropriate check on U.S. power.

The same notion applied to strategic defenses. An America kept vulnerable to Soviet nuclear threats was an appropriately restrained America. Following the Cold War, this group was generally horrified that U.S. power—particularly its military power—was essentially unequaled. Its members are openly nostalgic for the U.S.–Soviet standoff of the Cold War.¹⁷

Argument #5: Developing and deploying missile defenses is an inherently immoral pursuit.

The moral reluctance to support missile defense is a direct product of the MAD policy. Under MAD, any attempt to reduce the effectiveness of the enemy's retaliatory strike was posited to enable a

first strike. Thus, the moral logic of MAD is that any attempt at self-defense is an inherently aggressive act. The possibility that such vulnerability may actually invite aggression is dismissed. Further, the moral conundrum presented by a failure of deterrence is set aside. That conundrum is whether a retaliatory strike purely for the purpose of revenge is morally justified.

Despite these shortcomings, moralists argued against the pursuit of missile defense during the Cold War. For example, a committee of U.S. Catholic bishops, in an update to a 1983 pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, made a statement opposing President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.¹⁸ After the Cold War, the opposition from various church groups continued. For example, United Methodist bishops came out in opposition to President Bush's policy to field a missile defense system in 2001.¹⁹

Public Choice Theory and the Missile Defense Debate

The fact that the U.S. does not yet possess an effective missile defense system is not solely the product of the substantive arguments against it. Missile defense has been a casualty of how the political process works in a representative democracy. Economist Dr. James M. Buchanan explained this phenomenon in his seminal work on public choice theory.²⁰ The theory explains how the preferences of a clear majority, even over matters of great importance, are frustrated by a determined minority.

The product of the decades-long debate over missile defense in the U.S. is practically a case study in

16. For a description of the arguments against the weaponization of space, see Baker Spring, "Slipping the Surly Bonds of the Real World: The Unworkable Effort to Prevent the Weaponization of Space," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 877, May 10, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl877.cfm.

17. For a description of the arguments of those who were fearful of American power both during and after the Cold War, see John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians, Communism & Espionage* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003).

18. Peter Steinfels, "U.S. Bishops Oppose Anti-Missile Plan," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1988, p. A18.

19. United Methodist News Service, "Church's Leaders Oppose U.S. Missile Defense Plan," May 4, 2001, at http://archives.umc.org/umns/news_archive2001.asp?ptid=2&story={885897A9-E880-4EB9-8814-71B05C43BBB0}&mid=3365 (August 22, 2006).

20. James M. Buchanan, "Politics Without Romance: A Sketch of Positive Public Choice Theory and Its Normative Implications," in James M. Buchanan and Robert D. Tollison, eds., *The Theory of Public Choice—II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984).

the application of public choice theory. Consistent polling results leave no doubt that the vast majority of Americans favor the deployment of the most effective defenses possible against missile attack. According to April 2005 poll results obtained by the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, almost 80 percent of the American people want the government to field a missile defense system.²¹ This support, however, is relatively diffused. The minority, by contrast, are hardened opponents. The result is that political leaders have moved to embrace compromises that seek to satisfy both sides.

Public choice theory explains why missile defense programs have been hobbled even while missile defense proponents have been rather successful at the policy level. When the basic proposition has been put before the American people regarding missile defense, the majority sentiment in favor prevails. On the other hand, when the question turns to which kind of missile defense system to field, the determined opposition to those systems that are most likely to be effective prevails. Political leaders' search for compromise is satisfied by an outcome that embraces strong statements of principle in favor of missile defense in deference to the majority and simultaneously marginalizes the most effective option for missile defense in deference to the vocal minority.

This dynamic is reinforced by the fact that the opposition to more effective missile defense programs extends beyond those who are opposed to missile defense in principle. Public choice theory recognizes that the bureaucracy is a powerful political actor, particularly in an area as technical as determining the most effective missile defense options.

Most in the missile defense bureaucracy built their careers on pursuing the limited technological options for missile defense permitted by the ABM Treaty, namely ground-based defenses at fixed locations. Individuals working on these programs are generally among the majority supporting the

deployment of a missile defense system, but they are also quite reluctant to permit open competition between their programs and effective alternatives now permitted by U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. While their interest is parochial, it is strongly motivated. Finally, the bureaucracy is in a position in which its technical expertise and subsequent advice have a powerful impact on public policy. Political leaders in the executive branch and Members of Congress are poorly positioned to question, much less reject, the technical advice of specialists in the career bureaucracy.

The application of public choice theory makes it clear that the current lack of an effective missile defense is not primarily the responsibility of the Bush Administration. First, it is the product of a political process that makes it exceedingly difficult to reverse a deeply entrenched policy. The Cold War policies of MAD and arms control were undoubtedly the prevailing policies when President Bush took office in 2001. Because of the nature of the political process, full reversal of the earlier policies, particularly at the programmatic level, will take time. Second, public choice theory reveals that the problems associated with the political process are beyond the President's control. The political process does not always reward wisdom and commitment. Indeed, it frequently punishes them.

Successfully Pursuing an Effective Missile Defense System

Congress needs to work with the Bush Administration to put a truly effective missile defense system in place. The elements of an effective defense will include an array of sea-based interceptors to defend U.S. coastal areas against short-range ballistic missiles launched from ships and to defend U.S. forces abroad and U.S. friends and allies, such as Japan. Most important, it must include space-based interceptors that build on the technology pioneered in the Brilliant Pebbles program of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which was cancelled by the Clinton Administration in 1993. In combination

21. Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, "Final Topline as of April 12, 2005," at www.missiledefenseadvocacy.org/pdf/MDAANationalPoll-TOPLINEFINAL.pdf (August 22, 2006).

with the ground-based defenses for countering both short-range and long-range missiles that the Bush Administration is now putting in the field, this array of defenses would provide a robust defense against limited missile strikes.²²

With these programmatic goals in mind, Congress needs to recognize that it will have to challenge the opponents of missile defense directly. This will require taking on the opponents' specific arguments in the context of moving forward with the missile defense programs that they strongly oppose. It will also require that Congress overcome the pressure to settle for counterproductive compromises that are explained by public choice theory. It can successfully counter the arguments of missile defense opponents and overcome the pressure to agree to ineffective missile defenses by taking the following six steps.

Step #1: Reject proposals for an ineffective missile defense system.

A truly effective missile defense system is within reach. If the system that is ultimately deployed is ineffective, it will be because missile defense opponents and those in the bureaucracy with special interests have made it so. Missile defense proponents must insist that opponents cannot have it both ways. They cannot kill the options for effective defenses and allow only less effective defense programs to go forward while at the same decrying the system's ineffectiveness. Clearly, the opponents are pursuing a policy of failure by design, and they hope to tag proponents with the responsibility for fielding a less effective defense.

The appropriate response to proposals for a less effective defense system is to propose a truly effective one. This alternative system will include a wider array of sea-based interceptors and a constellation of space-based interceptors. The latter component is essential. In proposing this alternative, missile defense proponents in Congress should make it clear that those who do not support this alternative are

effectively opposed to providing the best possible defense to the American people, troops deployed abroad, and U.S. friends and allies.

Step #2: Point out how the policy of vulnerability is destabilizing in today's world and how a damage-limitation strategy is the better alternative.

The prevailing policy of the Cold War was that vulnerability to attack was stabilizing because it would not jeopardize the effectiveness of a hypothetical retaliatory strike. This policy, however, was based on two fundamental assumptions: a bipolar world of only two effective antagonists and antagonists that are rational actors keenly focused on maximizing their payoffs. Neither of these assumptions is as valid as it was during the Cold War standoff between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Today, the U.S. faces the prospect, if not the reality, of multiple antagonists and more independent friends and allies just among state actors. The purely descriptive list of antagonists includes China, Iran, North Korea, and Syria. The friends and allies of the U.S. that are now more likely to strike independent positions from the U.S. include Australia, Canada, European states (both individually and collectively), India, Israel, Japan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Taiwan. Under this circumstance, the opponents of missile defense are recommending, while not admitting it, that the U.S. multilateralize MAD. This means that any state with the means to impose large-scale damage on the U.S. and, for that matter, its friends and allies will go unchallenged in launching an actual attack. Analysis shows that the policy of multilateral MAD is quite destabilizing even if the various states are assumed to be rational.²³

MAD's lack of effectiveness relative to states or non-state actors that are irrational, in the technical meaning of that word, is all but beyond dispute.²⁴ For example, if Iran is committed to the destruction of Israel even at the cost of national suicide, a policy of vulnerability is clearly destabilizing. The

22. For a brief description of this overall missile defense system, see Pfaltzgraff and Van Cleave, *Missile Defense, the Space Relationship & the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 112–117.

23. Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games*, pp. 11–20.

24. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction*, pp. 39–77.

same is true of messianic terrorist organizations that come into possession of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. The threat of a retaliatory strike will have no deterrence value against them.

The better alternative under the circumstances of multiple antagonists and irrational actors is a damage-limitation strategy,²⁵ which uses a robust mix of offensive and defensive forces to lessen both the likelihood of an attack and the effectiveness of any attack that does occur. Missile defense proponents in Congress need to remind their colleagues and the American people that the Cold War is over and that its comfortable assumptions regarding stability are no longer applicable. In fact, any attempt to continue the MAD policy will be very destabilizing and will carry a much higher risk of an unimaginable level of human and physical destruction.

Step #3: Reject the charge that space-based missile defense interceptors will weaponize space.

As noted earlier, missile defense opponents have shifted tactics from opposing missile defenses across the board to focusing their efforts on opposing those missile defense programs that are likely to be the most effective. Therefore, their highest priority is to kill any prospects for deploying missile defense interceptors in space. They have taken the approach of charging that such a deployment will mean that the U.S. has broken an international taboo against weaponizing space. The implication of this argument is that the deployment of missile defense interceptors in space will be both highly dangerous and wildly provocative.

This argument is both factually incorrect and ignorant of the purpose of missile defense interceptors. It is factually incorrect because space is already weaponized insofar as ballistic missiles transit space. This is the reason that space-based interceptors will be so effective. They will already be located where the missiles fly. The missiles will be coming to the interceptors instead of the interceptors chasing after the missiles. It is ignorant of the purpose of space-based interceptors because

such interceptors are designed to protect the U.S. and its friends and allies against ballistic missiles that have already been fired, either in anger or by accident. The idea that for the U.S. to defend itself under this circumstance is somehow provocative defies common sense.

The debate over space-based missile defense may come to a head next year. It is anticipated that the Bush Administration will ask for initial funds under the missile defense budget to construct a space test bed. While this funding request by itself does not represent a serious program to develop and deploy space-based interceptors, it could serve as the vehicle for the fundamental debate over the option of deploying missile defense interceptors in space. At a minimum, missile defense proponents in Congress will need to ensure the approval of this request. Alternatively, they could propose directing missile defense funding to a larger program that revives Brilliant Pebbles technology and tests it in space. If an impending debate over space-based missile defense is to take place, it might be preferable to debate a truly substantive program rather than a more symbolic program.

Step #4: Dare missile defense opponents in Congress to vote for a resolution that finds that the deployment of effective missile defenses will make the U.S. too powerful.

Direct arguments that the U.S. is too powerful are generally made by foreign critics of the U.S. and leftist academics at home. While this view may be shared by missile defense opponents in Congress, they are reluctant to acknowledge this in open debate. Missile defense proponents should force them to take a clear stand on this proposition.

Missile defense proponents could offer a resolution as an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill next year (acknowledging from the outset that they will vote against it). The resolution could recite the statements of those who contend that the U.S. is already too powerful and describe how mis-

25. For a brief description of the damage limitation strategy, see Baker Spring, "Congress Should Back Bush Administration Plans to Update Nuclear Weapons Policy and Forces," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1890, October 28, 2005, pp. 2–3, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg1890.cfm.

sile defense will only make the U.S. stronger militarily. The resolution could conclude with a finding that the U.S. ought to forgo the deployment of an effective missile defense and leave its people vulnerable to missile attack specifically for the purpose of diminishing the excessive power of the U.S.

The resolution would force missile defense opponents in Congress to make a choice. They could choose to oppose the resolution, which is the more likely outcome. In this case, they would have chosen to abandon their liberal base of support and the argument that the U.S. is too powerful and that an effective missile defense system will exacerbate the perceived imbalance. On the other hand, they could support the resolution and take the stand of opposing missile defense in principle. While such a vote would consolidate their position with the liberal base, it would also tie them to a position that is not popular with the larger public. The outcome of this debate is all but certain to put to rest, at least in Congress, the contention that the best option for the U.S. is to diminish its power by refusing to field as effective a missile defense as possible for the American people.

Step #5: Continue with outside efforts from across America to demand that the federal government provide a missile defense.

The moral argument against missile defense is one that must be fought at the local level. Only individual Americans can determine that the judgment of the church leaders and other moralists who oppose missile defense is misguided. The good news is that the American people instinctively reject the notion that their own vulnerability to violent attack is somehow just. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, made this clear for all to see. While the American people are also willing to accept retaliatory and even preemptive steps to counter terrorists, first and foremost they demand that the federal government provide them with a defense. Arguments questioning the morality of the defensive response were and remain nonexistent.

Notwithstanding the legacy of the Cold War policy in favor of offensive deterrence, the American

people are not likely to accept the idea that the missile threat is somehow a special case—in other words, that a defense against terrorists is a moral imperative but a defense against missile attack is morally unacceptable. Evidence of this exists with the adoption of resolutions by a number of state legislatures in the course of the past 10 years appealing to the federal government to provide a defense against missile attack.²⁶ Such resolutions started appearing in 1997, with one adopted by the Alaska House of Representatives and Senate in May of that year. In the face of overwhelming public expressions of support for missile defense at the local level, it is entirely possible that church leaders and other moralists will reconsider their past pronouncements.

Step #6: Tie rhetorical support for missile defense to support for an effective missile defense system.

Public choice theory explains why the missile defense debate has resulted in a compromise in which support for missile defense at the rhetorical level is broad and yet only a less effective defense system is being put into the field. Missile defense supporters in Congress need to understand that this compromise will become increasingly dangerous to the missile defense cause. Missile defense opponents are all too willing to pursue the cynical political course of supporting missile defense at the rhetorical level for now while permitting only a feeble defense and later attacking the entire enterprise after its shortcomings are demonstrated.

True missile defense supporters in Congress need to go beyond demanding just rhetorical support for missile defense. True support for missile defense must be tied to commitments to back the best possible missile defense system at an affordable price. The true test of whether a Member of Congress supports missile defense is his or her willingness to endorse and fund a missile defense system that includes:

- Sea-based interceptors for protecting U.S. coastal areas against short-range missiles, including both ballistic and cruise missiles;

26. Pfaltzgraff and Van Cleave, *Missile Defense, the Space Relationship & the Twenty-first Century*, pp. a:1–a:6.

- Sea-based interceptors that use ATKV technology and existing vertical launch system canisters aboard Navy cruisers to achieve an ascent-phase capability, as well as a midcourse capability against intermediate-range and long-range ballistic missiles; and
- Space-based interceptors based on Brilliant Pebbles technology.

Conclusion

The debate over missile defense is not over. It has merely shifted from whether missile defense should be pursued as a matter of principle to whether deploying a missile defense will be effective in practice. While victory in the debate over the principle of fielding a missile defense was a necessary step forward, it is not sufficient. It must be followed by victory in the debate over fielding a truly effective defense for the American people.

This is not to say that the American people are demanding perfection from these systems. What they expect is that their government leaders will make an effort to field the most effective missile defense system possible at an affordable price. Currently, this is not what their government leaders are on track to provide. Space-based defenses in particular are being held back by the political process.

This is not a time to be complacent. On July 4, the North Korean government launched a salvo of test missiles, one of which had the potential to reach U.S. territory, sending a message that the date of America's birth could be the date of America's death.

—*Baker Spring is F. M. Kirby Research Fellow in National Security Policy in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*