

Background

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U.S. Should Defy Chinese–Russian Attack on Missile Defense

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During their meeting in Beijing on May 23, 2008, Chinese President Hu Jintao and new Russian President Dimitry Medvedev issued a joint statement criticizing the establishment of a global missile defense system. Specifically, the statement said that such defenses are “not conducive to the maintenance of strategic balance and stability.”¹

This statement was a not-so-veiled criticism of the United States and its allies, which are cooperating in fielding missile defense systems, and should be seen for what it is: an attempt to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its allies. Its ultimate purpose is to advance the joint Chinese–Russian agenda of a multipolar world by challenging the U.S.-led alliance. It is a challenge against which the U.S. and its allies must stand together.

Beyond criticism of the U.S. and its allies, however, the joint statement represents a fundamental misreading by the Chinese and Russians of the requirements for stability in today’s and tomorrow’s world. It is a misunderstanding that, if allowed to persist, will greatly increase the risk of large-scale destruction—including destruction of China and Russia. Under these circumstances, the U.S. must engage in aggressive diplomacy with China and Russia to convince both countries that their attack on U.S.-led missile defense and the prospective strategy that stands behind it is both wrong and dangerous.

Meeting the Chinese–Russian Challenge to the Alliance

It is clear that China and Russia see it as in their immediate self-interest to undermine the solidarity of

Talking Points

- The Chinese–Russian joint statement of May 23, 2008, criticizing global missile defenses represents a challenge to the U.S. and its allies.
- The statement is based on the erroneous assumption that a posture of mutual vulnerability to nuclear attacks will lessen the risk of war in a multipolar world.
- This erroneous assumption creates huge security risks not only for the U.S. and its allies, but also for China and Russia.
- Given that missile defenses will contribute to, not undermine, stability in a multipolar world, the U.S. should continue its ongoing cooperative programs with allies such as the Czech Republic, Japan, and Poland to construct a global missile defense system.
- The U.S. needs to undertake a diplomatic initiative to convince both China and Russia that defensive systems will serve their interests as well as those of the U.S. and its allies.

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the relationships between the U.S. and its allies, including countries in Asia and Europe. The condemnation of missile defense in the joint statement must be seen in this broader context. China and Russia want to drive wedges between the U.S. and its allies such as the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, Japan, and South Korea because they see these relationships as an obstacle to their ambitions for regional hegemony—for Russia, in Europe, and for China, in Asia. Missile defense cooperation is the most tangible and visible aspect of alliance solidarity in recent months.

If the U.S. and its allies buckle under Chinese and Russian pressure, they should expect repeated efforts to serve the same general purpose in the context of other issues. These other issues are likely to include further expansion of NATO, the settlement of diplomatic recognition of Kosovo, the evolution toward a more balanced security relationship between the U.S. and Japan, and concerted U.S. and South Korean military cooperation to counterbalance North Korea if it ultimately proves unwilling to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

This means that missile defense cooperation between the U.S. and its allies has political implications that go beyond the added security provided by missile defense systems. The issue is becoming a fundamental test of alliance solidarity. The Chinese and Russians are all but certain to view the abandonment of missile defense cooperation between the U.S. and its allies as proof that they can use the tactic of driving wedges in the alliance to advance to the next step of their already successful policy of creating a multipolar world.

The sequence of actions that the Chinese and Russians are contemplating is all too predictable. If, for example, Poland abandons missile defense cooperation with the U.S., the Poles should anticipate that Russia will take both positive and negative actions to draw them back into its sphere of influence. These actions could range from offering advantageous energy deals to threatening to target Poland with military forces in order to obtain commitments from

Poland to limit the scope of NATO and bilateral U.S.–Polish security cooperation. China would likely use Japan's abandonment of missile defense cooperation with the U.S. to convince the Japanese that the U.S. cannot assure the protection of energy routes.

Avoiding this predictable sequence of actions by China and Russia to divide the U.S. from its allies requires a response that demonstrates to all concerned that the effect of such attempts will be the opposite of what is intended. First and foremost, this means continuing missile defense cooperation. In the broader context, it requires the allies to strengthen their bonds.

Even in a multipolar world, this positive coalition dynamic is the key to countering potentially aggressive behavior by China, Russia, and other non-*status quo* powers. The goal of this approach is to demonstrate to China and Russia that their attempts to drive wedges will not cause the U.S., China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Russia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom to act as individual powers. Rather, the U.S. and its allies are prepared to continue to collaborate and work together.

Nuclear-games exercises designed and conducted by The Heritage Foundation have shown that the preservation of the U.S.-led alliance is just as important in maintaining peace and stability in today's multipolar world as it was in the bipolar world of the Cold War.² Alliance de-formation in a multipolar world can cause unpredictable swings in the balance of power. The credibility of the alliance structure is essential to stability and peace.

Multipolarity and Implications for Stability

China and Russia have been pressing for a multipolar world structure for over a decade. Having succeeded, neither can afford to ignore the resulting security implications. This new multipolar world also includes India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan. It may include a non-state actor that has acquired nuclear weapons. In the future, Brazil,

1. BBC, "Chinese Agency Carries Text of China–Russia Joint Statement," May 23, 2008.
2. Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games: An Exercise Examining Stability and Defenses in a Proliferated World* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005), pp. 28–30, at <http://www.heritage.org/upload/NuclearGames.pdf>.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey may be added to the list. Although it is not their intention today, Japan and South Korea may become separate power poles considering the nuclear option.

In this context, it is quite disturbing that the joint statement makes clear that China and Russia believe it would be destabilizing if any power in this multipolar structure were to take steps to defend itself. By implication, the joint statement asserts that the posture of mutual vulnerability (known as mutually assured destruction, or MAD) that applied to the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War can be applied to the world of today and tomorrow. This is obviously nonsense. It is analogous to claiming that the dynamic that applies to two scorpions in a bottle will pertain to 20 scorpions in a bottle.

It is time for China and Russia to face the implications of the dangerous circumstances they have helped to create. Is China really comfortable remaining completely vulnerable to a nuclear attack by India while it is possible that a nuclear-armed Pakistan, perhaps under false pretenses, may launch a strike at India in the name of China? Is Russia really comfortable remaining completely vulnerable to a nuclear-armed Iran if Iran decides to make a concerted effort to foment an Islamic revolution in areas of Russia?

The Defensive Option

In reality, the multipolar world is a frightening Hobbesian place, and it will be a completely chaotic place if each power continues to remain completely vulnerable to possible attacks by the others. Given the power of the weapons in question, it is a formula for unimagineable levels of destruction.

It is too late to return to the unipolar world that immediately followed the end of the Cold War.³ The purposeful policies of China and Russia, along with the quiet acquiescence of others, including the Clinton Administration, have made that impossible. Therefore, it is necessary to search for ways to avoid a nuclear catastrophe.

At the heart of a security structure for a multipolar world are the twin principles of non-aggression and self-defense.

- The principle of non-aggression, applied across a multipolar world, would have the state powers adopt national security and military strategies that are fundamentally defensive in purpose. This does not mean that any nation's military will consist entirely of defensive forces. At the tactical level, offensive forces will be necessary to serve defensive strategic purposes. This principle would also have state powers work to deny non-state actors the ability to launch offensive strikes, particularly with nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
- The principle of individual self-defense would have each state apply its military strategies and capabilities to defending its territory, people, institutions, and infrastructure against attack. The principle of collective self-defense would permit allies to assist each other in fielding the military forces and conducting the necessary operations to meet these same defensive goals.

Taken together, these two principles, if applied properly, will result in what is described as a damage-limitation strategy.

Columnist Charles Krauthammer has proposed an approach for the U.S. that has much in common with a damage-limitation strategy.⁴ This past April, Krauthammer asserted that the era of nonproliferation is over. The extent to which this assertion is true is the extent to which the Chinese and Russian drive toward multipolarity has been successful.

A policy of creating a multipolar world is essentially incompatible with non-proliferation. Krauthammer proposed that the U.S. rely for its security on defenses that were rejected during the Cold War. Those defenses, he argued convincingly in the hypothetical instance of an Iranian attack, would serve to limit dramatically the likelihood that Iran would achieve the destruction it seeks. In the context of the alliance structure, the same calculations would pertain to U.S. allies around the world.

China and Russia and a Defensive Strategy

The question arises, therefore, whether China and Russia are willing to reconsider their reliance on

3. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 5 (Winter 1990/91).

4. Charles Krauthammer, "Deterring the Undeterrable," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2008, p. A27.

retaliation-based deterrence to provide for their security and to adopt less aggressive and more defensive policies and postures. If they are thinking clearly, both countries will reconsider their current policy of relying on MAD to intimidate and coerce others, cease their criticisms of efforts to field missile defenses and other defensive systems, and get about the business of fielding their own systems in conjunction with broader defensive policies.

In the event that China and Russia do opt to adhere to the principles of non-aggression and self-defense, the U.S. should be prepared to offer them appropriate assistance, including the coordinated fielding of missile defense systems.

The Chinese and Russians mistakenly believed that the unipolar world that emerged after the Cold War posed a threat to them. The result of that mistaken belief and drive for multipolarity is a world that is *more* threatening to them and everybody else than it was in the 1990s.

China and Russia should not compound the mistake they have made by attempting to apply Cold War concepts of deterrence and stability to circumstances in which they will not work. The U.S. has no greater diplomatic task today than to convince China and Russia of the dangerous path on which they are putting the world with policies derived from their May 23 joint statement.

To this end, the U.S. and its allies should agree to:

- **Continue** with their existing plans to cooperate in the development and fielding of missile defense systems. This includes the U.S.–Japan Joint Program to outfit Japanese Aegis ships with missile defense systems. The U.S. and its allies should also permit the fielding of 10 ground-based missile defense interceptors in Poland and a missile defense radar in the Czech Republic.
- **Undertake** a diplomatic initiative with China and Russia to convince the two countries that missile defenses will serve their own security interests. This should be done in bilateral security discussions in which the U.S. explains to both China and Russia that the U.S. supports a policy of non-aggression and points out the risks to themselves that result from a posture of vulnerability, including U.S. preparedness to respond to acts of aggression.

- **Reaffirm** the twin policies of non-aggression and the right of self-defense. Missile defenses, because of their inherently non-aggressive purposes and their unique abilities to provide for defense, are the tangible elements of a policy that serves to advance these principles. This reaffirmation should be in line with a military posture that includes strategic defenses. Public statements should make clear that the mix of offensive and defensive forces that the U.S. military will field is meant to serve fundamentally defensive (“damage limitation”) purposes.

Conclusion

China and Russia, with the acquiescence of other nations, have been playing a very dangerous game over the past 10 years. The result is a world that is and will continue to be more dangerous than it would be had the unipolar world structure continued. Given this history, China and Russia have a special responsibility to prevent the multipolar world they have worked to create from leading to disaster. Their current policies, as made evident by their recent joint statement, are incompatible with this responsibility.

These two powers need to recognize that the more defensive strategic policies that have been formulated by the Bush Administration, including support for missile defense, are the best hope for maintaining peace under very tenuous circumstances. Instead of using multipolarity to further aggressive postures emphasizing nuclear weapons, and instead of seeking to keep others vulnerable, China and Russia should support the move toward non-aggressive defensive postures.

In the absence of Chinese and Russian cooperation, the United States and its allies should be prepared to go their own way. They should do this not to pick a fight with either country, but because it represents the best hope for peace under the present circumstances that China and Russia have brought about.

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