



UNITED STATES SENATE
**REPUBLICAN
POLICY COMMITTEE**

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Leaving the ABM Treaty, Deploying Missile Defenses

President Bush and Americans See Eye to Eye on Missile Defense

We will develop and deploy effective missile defenses to protect America and our allies from sudden attack. And all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security.

– President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002

On December 13, 2001, President Bush served notice that the United States would withdraw from the ABM Treaty, as allowed under the treaty's Article XV. This treaty, a Cold War relic, has prohibited the United States from testing the full range of promising ballistic missile technologies, and has in part precluded the United States from deploying effective missile defenses against ballistic missile attack.

Since President Bush's announcement, an increasing majority of Americans support the deployment of a missile defense system to protect the United States, polls show, regardless of its impact on arms control treaties. And over the past several months, the growing support for missile defense has sharply increased, even when cost issues are introduced into the survey.

ABM Treaty Withdrawal

What do the American people think of President Bush's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty? A poll taken just days after President Bush's announcement found 58 percent of Americans support the President's decision, while 31 percent do not (11 percent were not sure) [*IPSOS/Reid Media Center*, 12/17/01]. That is, as the pollsters conclude, "nearly twice as many Americans agree with President Bush's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty than disagree."

As one would expect, an overwhelming majority of Republican respondents – 79 percent, or four in five asked – agree with the President's action. Yet interestingly, almost one-half of all independents polled (48 percent) and a large number of Democrats (41 percent) said they agreed with the President's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. Further, the number of Democrats who disagree with the President's decision don't even make up a majority, claiming only 46 percent of those asked (with 13 percent of Democrats not sure of their position).

The December 2001 poll shows a significant gain in support for the President's position. When asked in January of 2001 – prior to the President's announcement to leave the ABM Treaty – whether they would support or oppose a missile defense system if it broke an existing treaty with Russia, the results were split: 47 percent supported and 47 percent opposed such action (6 percent said they had no opinion [*ABC News/Washington Post* poll, conducted 1/11-15/01, released 1/17/01]).

The Public's View on Defending America From Ballistic Missile Attack

Consistent with similar statistics revealed by polling data over the years, 64 percent of Americans polled in March 2001 believed the United States already had a missile defense system to protect us against nuclear attacks [*CBS News/New York Times*, conducted 3/8-12/01, released 3/14/01]. Unfortunately, the reality is just the opposite — the United States cannot today defend itself against a ballistic missile attack.

In a Pew Research Center poll, conducted in collaboration with the nongovernmental Council on Foreign Relations in May of last year, 51 percent of Americans favored President Bush's call for developing a national missile defense system, while only 38 percent opposed such action. [For details on this poll, see RPC Paper, "Americans Support President Bush's Call for a National Missile Defense System," 6/29/01.] By October, Pew's pollsters found that 64 percent favor the development of a missile shield. Further, a growing number say the United States needs such a system right now. In October, 49 percent said we need national missile defense "right now," compared to an early September poll which found only 35 percent stating there was an urgent need for national missile defenses [Pew Research Center and the Council on Foreign Relations, "America's New Internationalist Point of View," news release, 10/24/01, p. 2; p. 6].

The cost factor does not seem to have an appreciable impact on respondents' answers. In fact, there is growing support for missile defense despite the cost issue. For instance, when asked in January 2001 if they would support or oppose a missile defense system if the cost estimates were to run from \$60 billion to \$100 billion, one poll found 57 percent supported, while only 37 percent opposed, moving forward with such a system (6 percent had no opinion) [*ABC News/Washington Post*].

Even when told that the United States has already spent \$60 billion on such a system, respondents in March 2001 still strongly supported building a missile defense system, by a margin of 67 percent to 26 percent [*CBS News/New York Times*]. In October 2001, another poll found 70 percent of respondents thought the government should spend the money necessary to build a defense system against nuclear missiles, while only 26 percent opposed such efforts [*CNN/GALLUP/USA Today*, conducted 10/19-21/01, released 10/22/01].

The American public clearly supports efforts to defend America from ballistic missile attack. Perhaps, in time, opponents will join the growing public support for missile defenses and follow President Bush's leadership on this critical national security issue.