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## *Democrats Can't Get Past Cold War Mentality*

# **Refuting Democrat Criticisms of Missile Defense**

Until recently, Senate Democrats appeared to be progressing in their thinking about missile defense. Just two years ago, 42 of 45 Democrats (93 percent) voted for the National Missile Defense Act of 1999. That bipartisan bill, [P.L. 106-38; see Record Vote Analysis #51, 3/17/99], sponsored by Senators Thad Cochran and Daniel Inouye, called for deployment, as soon as technologically possible, of an effective National Missile Defense (NMD) system. By amendment, the United States was required to continue negotiations with Russia aimed at reducing each side's nuclear forces.

Given that recent history, it is surprising to find Senate Democrats opposing President Bush's new vision for deterrence. This post-Cold-War strategic approach calls for deployment of effective but limited defenses as the United States reduces its nuclear weapons arsenal — that is, merely implementing the legislation supported by all but three Democrats two years ago. Instead of praise, four Democrats (Minority Leader Tom Daschle, and Senators Biden, Levin, and Reed — all of whom voted for the 1999 legislation) within hours of President Bush's speech, held a press conference to criticize the President's plan as unworkable, strategically destabilizing, and too costly. Specifically, Democrats argue that a missile defense system:

- Must be 100-percent effective to ensure deterrence;
- Will spark an arms race;
- Unilaterally deployed, will undermine international cooperation;
- Is too costly; and
- Does not address all possible threats.

Each of the arguments the Democrats make is either specious, internally inconsistent, or outright incorrect. And each reflects outdated Cold War thinking rather than an appreciation of today's strategic environment. Why have the Democrats reversed themselves, reverting to the tired, old Cold War arguments they used during their filibusters of 1996 and 1998 missile defense bills that were similar to the 1999 legislation they supported?

## **1) Democrats Say: Missile Defense System Must Be 100-Percent Effective**

Democrats argue that we cannot build a missile defense system that will be 100-percent accurate. Effectively, they are saying that because it cannot be 100-percent effective, the United States should remain 100-percent vulnerable to ballistic missile attack. In Senator Kerry's words, "missile defense is only a response of last resort, when diplomacy and deterrence have failed. And given that no missile defense system will be 100-percent effective, we must not set aside the logic of deterrence that has kept us safe for 40 years" [*New York Times*, 5/3/01].

This demand for 100-percent effectiveness completely ignores the point of deterrence through defense. The missile defense system need not be 100-percent perfect to deter an attacker. A system that is likely to intercept incoming ballistic missiles will create uncertainty about the effectiveness of a strike, thereby deterring aggression. At the same time, missile defenses reassure a nation's citizens, reduce damage should a rogue state strike the United States, and give the United States greater freedom of action in responding to international crises amid threats from various missile-armed countries.

The Democrats' argument tries to couch deterrence as a choice between deploying either offensive or defensive capabilities. But defenses will enhance deterrence. And an absence of ballistic missile defenses creates an incentive for proliferation and for rogue states to gain a nuclear capability.

During the Cold War, the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction held that the specter of mutual annihilation would deter the Soviet Union — the only adversary at that time with thousands of sophisticated strategic nuclear weapons — from launching nuclear weapons against the United States. According to this view, the best way to ensure such vulnerability, and hence deter a missile attack, was for each country to forgo missile defense.

But today the threat to the United States and our allies comes not from thousands of sophisticated nuclear weapons in the hands of one country, but from perhaps dozens or hundreds of nuclear weapons under the control of a handful of rogue nations run by unpredictable leaders, such as North Korea's Kim Jong-Il and Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Additionally, the threat of an accidental launch remains a valid concern. Correctly, the Bush Administration is exploring all options for intercepting such missiles before they hit our homeland.

## **2) Democrats Say: Missile Defense System Will Spark an Arms Race**

On the one hand, Democrat critics demand 100-percent effectiveness from a missile defense system. On the other hand, Democrats would oppose deployment even if a system could accomplish this. They argue that a perfect system will cause an arms race, driving countries to build more and more nuclear weapons to overwhelm the defense. In the words of Senator Kerry, "If you can't shoot down 100 percent of them [missiles] you haven't gotten rid of Mutual Assured Destruction. And if you can, you set off an arms race to develop a capacity that can't be touched by a missile defense system" [*Washington Post*, 5/2/01]. This argument is lacking in logic — how do you overwhelm a perfect

defense? But, beyond that, how do the Democrats reconcile these arguments with their resounding support for the 1999 Missile Defense Act, which called for deployment of “effective defenses” as soon as technologically possible?

Contradictions aside, this argument is better left to the dustbin of Cold War thinking. Today, most countries’ missile programs have nothing to do with U.S. efforts on ballistic missile defense (BMD). They are driven by regional and domestic considerations. Often in the case of proliferators, weapons of mass destruction are being pursued as a tool for blackmail and for the prestige derived from membership in the “nuclear club.”

For example, China was building and modernizing its strategic offensive nuclear forces even when the Clinton Administration showed no interest in building a missile defense system. Russia, on the other hand, is reducing its offensive nuclear force independent of U.S. actions. According to a 1999 National Intelligence Council document, “Its [i.e., Russia’s] strategic force will remain formidable through and beyond 2015, but the size of this force will decrease dramatically — well below arms control limits — primarily because of budget constraints” [“Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015,” 9/99, p. 8]. Further, despite these reductions, Russia knows its strategic nuclear arsenal containing thousands of nuclear weapons can already overwhelm a limited U.S. missile defense system. What incentive would an economically constrained Russia have to add to an already effective nuclear weapons arsenal?

Moreover, the arms race argument itself validates the need for a robust missile defense system. A layered system is designed to intercept different types of ballistic missiles attacking at different trajectories, and serves as a backup should the missiles get through the defenses at an earlier stage. Such a capability will likely enhance deterrence by leading rogue nations to conclude that nuclear blackmail won’t work, and that launching nuclear weapons won’t achieve their goals.

Finally, the Democrats’ arms race argument ignores the very important arms control aspect of President Bush’s strategic vision, which commits the United States to *reducing* its nuclear arsenal in the hopes of setting an example for other countries also to show such restraint.

### **3) Democrats Say: Unilateral Deployment Will Undercut Global Cooperation**

For some, the 30-year-old Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty prohibiting the (then, two) superpowers from building a nationwide defense should remain the “cornerstone of strategic stability.” Democrats charge that “the heart of the matter [in President Bush’s speech] was an unequivocal, unilateral statement” to deploy an ABM system, which Democrats fear would jeopardize the ABM Treaty and treaties limiting offensive nuclear arms [news conference to discuss missile defense, FDCH political transcripts, 5/2/01].

President Bush's speech merely related his plans to deploy missile defenses as soon as the technology is ready and in cooperation with allies and others with common threats — that is, simply complying with what is stated in the 1999 Missile Defense Act.

And despite Democrat charges of unilateral action, more than one-half of President Bush's speech was devoted to the cooperative nature in which he plans to pursue missile defenses:

- **New Policy Includes Increased Cooperative Efforts:** “Today’s world requires a new policy, a broad strategy of active nonproliferation, counterproliferation, and defenses. We must work together with other like-minded nations to deny weapons of terror from those seeking to acquire them. We must work with allies and friends who wish to join with us to defend against the harm they can inflict. And together we must deter anyone who would contemplate their use.”
- **Create a New Framework, and Further Reduce Our Arsenal:** “We need a new framework that allows us to build missile defenses to counter the different threats of today’s world. . . . This new framework must encourage still further cuts in nuclear weapons.”
- **Consult with Allies:** “I’ve made it clear from the very beginning that I would consult closely on the important subject with our friends and allies who are also threatened by missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Today, I’m announcing the dispatch of high-level representatives to Allied capitals in Europe, Asia, Australia, and Canada to discuss our common responsibility to create a new framework for security and stability that reflects the world of today.”
- **Reach Out to China and Russia:** . . . “We’ll also need to reach out to other interested states, including China and Russia. Russia and the United States should work together to develop a new foundation for world peace and security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. . . . We may have areas of difference with Russia, but we are not and must not be strategic adversaries. Russia and America both face new threats to security. Together, we can address today’s threats and pursue today’s opportunities. We can explore technologies that have the potential to make us all safer.”
- **Work With Congress:** “When ready, and working with Congress, we will deploy missile defenses to strengthen global security and stability.”

By holding onto their Cold War arguments, Democrats fail to understand that the Cold War is over. Long gone are the days of a monolithic Soviet Union; in fact, the Soviet Union with whom we signed the ABM Treaty no longer exists. Nuclear threats today are from a number of volatile countries with unpredictable leaders. Mutual vulnerability, long considered the basis for deterrence, is no longer relevant to current threats. The Bush Administration is beginning a dialogue with allies, and Russia and

China, on how to move to new strategic relationships. Russia was fairly positive about the President's overture, with President Vladimir Putin expressing his opinion that, "this creates a good basis for a positive dialogue" [*Washington Times*, 5/5/01].

The purpose of a treaty is to enhance U.S. national security. The ABM Treaty fails on this count. And when arms control treaties no longer serve as a tool for U.S. security, the United States should remove itself as a party to that treaty. In fact, Article XV of the ABM Treaty provides each party the "right to withdraw . . . if it decides that extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this Treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests." Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ABM Treaty encourages a hostile relationship — forgoing defenses in favor of leaving our populations vulnerable to strategic nuclear attack — hardly a suitable foundation for building more positive relations between the United States and Russia.

#### **4) Democrats Say: Missile Defense is Too Costly**

Critics long have argued that a limited, ground-based missile defense system would cost too much. Senator Biden recently claimed that fundamentally different systems would be needed to defend against other threats, such as accidental launches. He said, "one will cost you \$80 billion to \$100 billion. The other will cost you half a trillion dollars" [*Hardball* with Chris Matthews, MSNBC, 5/1/01].

But even if a missile defense system cost \$100 billion to design, deploy, maintain, and operate over 15 years, this represents only about two cents out of every dollar spent on national defense. [The figure assumes a stable \$310 billion defense budget over 15 years.]

All of the research efforts of the past decade will be tapped in deploying a missile defense system. According to the President:

"In some cases, we can draw on 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. We also recognize the substantial advantages of intercepting missiles early in their flight, especially in the boost phase. The preliminary work has produced some promising options for advanced sensors and interceptors that may provide this capability. If based at sea or on aircraft, such approaches could provide limited, but effective, defenses" [Remarks by the President at National Defense University (NDU), 5/1/01].

Second, the Democrats' cost argument points up yet another contradiction for those who oppose missile defense: spending billions of taxpayers' dollars on research and development is perfectly fine, but spending billions on actually deploying a system that can deter and defend against ballistic missile attacks is not worth the cost. These same critics of deployment will proudly detail their support for missile defense research and development, as Senator Biden stated: "That's why I voted for over six and a half billion dollars on research so far. We'll spend another billion and a half this year. We absolutely should do that." But he goes on to clarify his position that, "I am prepared to spend billions, and I have already

voted for billions of dollars in this research area, but until we have something that is going to ensure that we are less likely to be struck by a nuclear weapon than more likely, I sure in the devil don't want to go out with a sense of bravado and deploy that thing" [*Hardball*, 5/1/01].

By focusing only on the narrow, direct costs of the program, Democrats fail to address the total national security equation. For instance, what would be the cost to U.S. leadership and our ability to act in regional crises without missile defenses? What would be the cost to replace a city obliterated by a nuclear weapon? How does one quantify the extraordinary human toll? These equally important global and human costs to U.S. security defy hard-nosed calculations, but they are potential costs, nonetheless.

## **5) Democrats Say: Missile Defense Does Not Address All Possible Threats**

Critics also claim the debate over missile defense needs to be seen in the larger context of the whole array of threats to our national security. According to Minority Leader Tom Daschle, "While no priority is greater than protecting our nation from all threats, we have a responsibility to combat those threats the Pentagon tells us are most likely and most immediate. Attack by ballistic missile ranks very low among them" [news conference, 5/2/01]. This deference to military opinion is unusual for most Democrats who often propose cutting defense spending to pay for increases in domestic spending, despite dire warnings and pleas for more defense dollars from military advisers.

The Democrats further argue that since a suitcase can carry a nuclear weapon, we should not deploy BMD. This argument ignores the fact that missile defenses are not designed to defend against all forms of terrorism. U.S. expenditures to counter terrorism amounted to \$8.4 billion in FY 2000, with \$1.45 billion appropriated to counter terrorists' involvement with weapons of mass destruction [Congressional Research Service, *Terrorism Briefing Book*, p. 3].

President Bush's recent speech merely echoes U.S. intelligence warnings over the past 10 years: "More nations have nuclear weapons and still more have nuclear aspirations. Many have chemical and biological weapons. Some already have developed the ballistic missile technology that would allow them to deliver weapons of mass destruction at long distances and at incredible speeds. And a number of these countries are spreading these technologies around the world" [Remarks at NDU, 5/1/01]. But just because missile defenses cannot defend against all terrorist threats doesn't mean we should ignore the very real and growing ballistic missile threat to the United States and our allies. Without ballistic missile defenses, we guarantee a missile will hit its target. There are many incentives for hostile countries to want ballistic missiles, but none more compelling than the lack of defenses.

While rogue nations today do not have a ballistic missile that can hit the United States, it is not for lack of trying. Because it will take several years to deploy a missile defense system, prudence dictates moving forward as President Bush has outlined, with the goal of protecting the United States and our allies from current and future ballistic missile threats.

President Bush has offered a way forward with a plan that merely enforces the law that all but three Senate Democrats supported just two years ago. One wonders why Democrats are criticizing, rather than applauding, the President.

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