ANALYSIS

THE 1972 ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILE TREATY: WHEN STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL UNDERCUTS U.S. EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND ASSURANCE GOALS

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The consequences of Washington's long-standing opposition to defending the United States against strategic missiles launched by other than "rogue" states include its corrosive impact on extended deterrence and assurance for allies. Under the prevalent U.S. "balance of terror" approach to deterrence, Washington has for decades expected any more than rudimentary strategic missile defenses to *destabiliz*e deterrence and to be a primary cause of a "spiraling" arms race. This approach to deterrence was codified in the 1972 U.S.-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which was designed to preserve continuing U.S. and Soviet homeland vulnerability to missile attack, thus supposedly ensuring deterrence stability and ending the arms race. An unintended consequence of this homeland vulnerability codified by the ABM Treaty is the degradation of the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent for allies and their assurance.

In Washington, the ABM Treaty was described as the "crown jewel" of arms control. Yet, its effect was to perpetuate an approach to strategic deterrence based on unmitigated societal vulnerability that now undermines the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent. The legacy Cold War arms control ideology and underlying approach to strategic deterrence continues to constrain U.S. strategic missile defense programs and goals, and to undermine extended deterrence and allied assurance by intentionally leaving the U.S. homeland vulnerable to Russian and Chinese missiles.

The ABM Treaty is a useful case study of how the unintended consequences of U.S. arms control enthusiasms now work to call into question the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and assurance commitments to allies.

A Slow Crawl Toward a Missile Defense System

In the 1960s, the "balance of terror" was the predominant guiding principle of U.S. strategic nuclear deterrence declaratory policy under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. It emphasized deterrence via a survivable U.S. nuclear retaliatory capability after an opponent's first strike, and generally rejected active defenses to protect against a nuclear attack.[1] Secretary McNamara believed that the Soviet Union adhered to a similar approach to deterrence and thus, if the United States deployed a homeland missile defense system, the Soviet Union would react by increasing the number of its nuclear warheads to sustain its retaliatory capabilities. McNamara was convinced that U.S. deployment of missile defense

[1] Keith Payne, *The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2008).

would thereby simply instigate a mechanistic "action-reaction" arms race.[2] This would put the United States on the unaffordable side of the economic curve because the cost of an interceptor was more than the cost of an offensive missile (the value of defended area was unimportant in this calculation). This was referred to as a disadvantageous "cost exchange ratio," which contributed to Washington's rejection of strategic missile defense.[3]

NATO allies at the time worried that a U.S. homeland defense system would make it possible for the United States to "retreat" to "fortress America" in the event of a Soviet invasion of Europe.[4] Consequently, several allies also expressed opposition to U.S. strategic defenses. Yet, at the same time, U.S. homeland vulnerability to Soviet nuclear retaliation was the basis for the inevitable question of whether the United States would risk its own destruction by using nuclear weapons in the defense of allies, i.e., U.S. vulnerability led to doubts about the very basis of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

Russian President Putin has most recently expressed this same doubt about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent: "The Europeans have to think: if those with whom we exchange such [nuclear] blows are obliterated, would the Americans get involved in such an exchange, on the level of strategic weapons, or not? I very much doubt it."[5] Ironically, the U.S. "balance of terror" approach to strategic deterrence stability, deliberately enshrined by the ABM Treaty, made it difficult for some allies (and apparently some Russian officials) to believe in the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence—thereby undermining the assurance of allies.

The United States essentially abandoned its strategic missile defense deployment program in the 1970s; yet, the Soviets continued to build up their strategic offensive arms.[6] Despite this evidence that the arms race is not a mechanistic "action-reaction" process as believed by Secretary McNamara, many in Washington continued to label missile defenses as "destabilizing." Not even the Reagan Administration, committed to rendering offensive

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[2] Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Before United Press International Editors and Publishers, September 18, 1967, available at https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP70B00338R000300100105-8.pdf/. See also, David Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge, and Keith Payne, *The "Action-Reaction" Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2021), pp. 31-38, available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf.

[3] Matthew Costlow, "A Curious Criterion: Cost Effective at the Margin for Missile Defense," *Information Series,* No. 537 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 21, 2022), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/matthew-r-costlow-a-curious-criterion-cost-effective-at-the-margin-for-missile-defense-no-537-october-21-2022/.

[4] Robert C. Watts, "A Double-Edged Sword: Ballistic-Missile Defense and U.S. Alliances," *Naval War College Review,* Vol. 73, No. 1 (Winter 2020), available at https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8093&context=nwc-review.

[5] "US wouldn't rescue allies in nuclear war – Putin," *RT,* June 7, 2024, available at https://www.rt.com/russia/598987-us-allies-nuclear-war-putin/.

[6] "Soviet spending has shown no response to U.S. restraint—when we build they build; when we cut they build." In Testimony of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown before the U.S. Congress, United States Senate, Committee on the Budget, *The Federal Budget for 1980*, 96th Congress, 1st Session, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 14.

missiles "impotent and obsolete,"[7] was able to gather the political support needed to free itself of the Treaty restrictions—despite Moscow's violation of it.[8]

Missile defense opponents criticized the Reagan Administration's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program as destabilizing[9] and charged that it was impossible to pursue arms control and strategic missile defense at the same time.[10] These concerns were echoed in allied capitals at the time.[11] The United Kingdom and France also worried that U.S. strategic missile defenses would spur Soviet missile defense and thereby undermine their own nuclear forces. After some serious efforts by the George H. W. Bush Administration to develop a limited strategic missile defense program, Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS), the Clinton Administration showed no interest in advancing even rudimentary U.S. homeland missile defense. Subsequently, after the United States emerged victorious from the Cold War, few worried about resurgent great power antagonisms and the homeland missile defense program languished.

The First Gulf War and Iraqi use of short-range rockets and ballistic missiles, the proliferation of these (and then more advanced) systems to hostile states, and their potential to disrupt alliance cohesion led the United States to focus its limited efforts on the development and deployment of regional (or theater) missile defense systems. Congress became much more supportive of these systems than it ever was of homeland defense efforts.

Yet, international developments, particularly the proliferation of missiles, were intruding upon the deterrence and arms control paradigm that deemed homeland missile defenses undesirable. Ultimately, the George W. Bush Administration gathered sufficient political support to withdraw from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and initiate a homeland missile defense "test bed" based on the rationale that rogue states were acquiring offensive strategic missile capabilities and might not be reliably deterred by traditional U.S. deterrence policies—making missile defense against their limited capabilities a prudent necessity.[12]

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[7] Ronald Reagan, *Strategic Defense Initiative Address to the Nation*, March 23, 1983, available at https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagansdi.htm.

[8] See Ronald Reagan, *Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Soviet Noncompliance with Arms Control Agreements*, March 10, 1987, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, available at https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/message-congress-transmitting-report-soviet-noncompliance-arms-control-agreements-0.

[9] Cited in Mark W. Davis, "Reagan's Real Reason for SDI," *Policy Review* (Palo Alto, CA: The Hoover Institution, October 1, 2000), available at https://www.hoover.org/research/reagans-real-reason-sdi.

[10] McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan, Robert McNamara, and Gerard Smith, "The President's Choice: Star Wars or Arms Control," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Winter 1984/85), passim.

[11] Aaron Bateman, "The secret history of Britain's involvement in the Strategic Defense Initiative," *The Space Review*, February 1, 2021, available at https://www.thespacereview.com/article/4116/1.

[12] George W. Bush, "President Announces Progress in Missile Defense Capabilities," *Press Release*, December 17, 2002, available at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/12/text/20021217.html.

As early as 1991, President Richard Nixon's former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger observed that, "Limitations on strategic defense will have to be reconsidered in light of the Gulf War experience; no responsible leader can henceforth leave his civilian population vulnerable."[13] In 1998, the Baroness Margaret Thatcher stated that "[t]he preservation of this Cold War relic [the ABM Treaty] is bizarre, and I am somewhat baffled when spokesmen for the United States government describe it as the cornerstone of strategic stability."[14] She considered Ronald Reagan's original decision on the SDI to be "the single most important of his presidency."[15] The problem this "cornerstone of arms control" spurred for extended deterrence and allied assurance was becoming increasingly obvious, if largely ignored, in Washington.

The ABM Treaty, Theater Missile Defense Systems, and Unintended Consequences

Even though the ABM Treaty was negotiated with the objective of severely limiting strategic missile defense development and deployment, the U.S. interpretation of the Treaty's restrictions affected the U.S. theater missile defense program at a time when allies grew increasingly exposed to adversaries' ballistic missiles. For example, due to the Treaty-based limitations on radars, the United States would not build certain radars to provide theater-range interceptors with the best possible data while the ABM Treaty was in force, thus decreasing the potential for theater missile defense systems on the basis of a Treaty that was not intended to limit theater defenses. As the need for theater missile defenses became more obvious, the United States started to press against its interpretation of arms control restrictions that originally had nothing to do with theater missile defense systems.

The Clinton Administration's general rejection of strategic missile defense in favor of maintaining the ABM Treaty contributed to its cancelling GPALS in December 1993.[16] GPALS was also opposed by many in Congress who desired to reap the post-Cold War "peace dividend" and, with a few exceptions, maintain the ABM Treaty. The new administration also discontinued the Bush Administration's Ross-Mamedov talks on missile defense cooperation with the Russian Federation. These talks, named after U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Dennis Ross and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy Mamedov, were aimed at creating opportunities to cooperate on missile defense and overcome the specter of the "balance of

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[13] Kissinger's observation is particularly intriguing given his role in bringing about the ABM Treaty. "A Sea Change in U.S.-Soviet Relations," *The Washington Post*, 12 April 1991, p. A-13.

[14] Margaret Thatcher, *Special Issue: A Speech by the Rt. Hon. the Baroness Thatcher LG OM FRS, Deterrence is Not Enough: Security Requirements for the 21st Century (December 3, 1998)*, *Information Series,* No. 518 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 23, 2022), available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/518.pdf.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Donald Baucom, "The Rise and Fall of Brilliant Pebbles," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 184, available at http://highfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/The-Rise-and-Fall-of-Brilliant-Pebbles-Baucom.pdf.

terror." The Russians were highly receptive to the idea. In his 1991 speech to the United Nations, President Yeltsin went so far as to say:

> I think the time has come to consider creating a global defence system for the world community. It could be based on a reorientation of the United States Strategic Defense Initiative, to make use of high technologies developed in Russia's defence complex. We are ready to participate actively in building and putting in place a pan-European collective security system – in particular during the Vienna talks and the upcoming post-Helsinki-II talks on security and cooperation in Europe. Russia regards the United States and the West not as mere partners but rather as allies.[17]

The Ross-Mamedov talks were reportedly progressing well when the Clinton Administration effectively cancelled them,[18] contributing to acrimony in a relationship between the two countries that would continue for years. A part of the problem was that the Russians who supported missile defense cooperation with the United States and advocated for it in Russia became marginalized after the Clinton Administration decided instead to preserve the ABM Treaty as an important component of "strategic stability."[19] The United States did not prove to be a reliable partner, and the Russian officials would remember.[20] Andrei Kortunov, President of the Moscow Public Science Foundation, stated years later that, "However, some Western actions and attitudes, for example, the NATO expansion, START II, as well as U.S. activities in the BMD area, particularly including U.S. discontinuation of the Ross-Mamedov talks, substantiate the position of those in Moscow expressing a fairly high level of acrimony and suspicion."[21]

The Clinton Administration also tried to expand the scope of the ABM Treaty in a manner that would have affected theater missile defenses. The Administration argued for a formal "demarcation" distinguishing strategic from theater missile defenses. The subsequently negotiated demarcation agreements named the Soviet Union successor states Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan parties to the Treaty in addition to the Russian Federation. These agreements (depending on which version would end up being accepted) could impose limits

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[17] United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand and Forty-Sixth Meeting*, January 31, 1992, S/PV.3046, p. 46, available at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/RO%20SPV%203046.pdf.

[18] Ambassador Henry F. Cooper, *Global Defense: Return from Indifference to Rational Assessment?*, Prepared for the conference on Expeditionary Missile Defense, The Strand Palace Hotel, London, March 26, 2001, pp. 4-5, available at https://highfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Cooper-NATO-010326.pdf. See also, "'Cold Peace' or Cooperation? The Potential for U.S.-Russian Accommodation on Missile defense and the ABM treaty," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 16, Issue 2 (1997), available at https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ucst20/16/2.

[19] *Remarks by President Bill Clinton On National Missile Defense*, September 1, 2000, available at https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-09/remarks-president-bill-clinton-national-missile-defense.

[20] Wayne Curtis Weldon, *America's National Security*, U.S. House of Representatives, Congressional Record (Bound Edition), Vol. 146 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2000), Part 13, pp. 18059-18066, available at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRECB-2000-pt13/html/CRECB-2000-pt13-Pg18059-6.htm.

[21] Andrei Kortunov, Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, 105th Congress, First Session, March 13, 1997, p. 13, available at http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/BMD/documents/ABM130397.pdf.

on theater missile defense interceptors to be compliant with the ABM Treaty, thus subjecting them to restrictions originally not intended by the Treaty itself.[22] This meant that the United States would be limited in designing its theater missile defense systems to shoot down this class of regional missiles.[23]

The Clinton Administration tried to amend the Treaty without congressional approval, but while congressional opposition to strategic missile defense remained strong, theater missile defenses had considerable support, partly due to the advancement of regional ballistic missile threats. Mindful of its institutional prerogatives, the Senate compelled the Administration to submit the memorandum of understanding between the United States and the Russian Federation for advice and consent.[24] The Administration's effort became obsolete by events as it ran out of time and regional missile challenges became more pressing.

The ABM Treaty and Extended Deterrence

The vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to strategic missiles ensured by the ABM Treaty degraded the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and thus U.S. assurance goals, and its impinging on theater missile defense constrained the potential for defending key regional targets. With regard to the former issue of credibility, for example, during a 1996 discussion of U.S. support for the security of Taiwan, a Chinese official suggested that U.S. extended deterrence could not be credible. He argued that, "In the 1950s, you three times threatened nuclear strikes on China, and you could do that because we couldn't hit back. Now we can. So you are not going to threaten us again because, in the end, you care a lot more about Los Angeles than Taipei."[25] This was a variation of a decades-old problem the United States faced with respect to its extended deterrence credibility and assuring allies and partners. French President Charles de Gaulle famously doubted that the United States would be willing to trade New York for Paris during discussions about U.S. credibility in the face of a Soviet threat to the U.S. homeland.[26] Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev similarly challenged the U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk regarding the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent in Europe when the Soviet Union could retaliate against the U.S. homeland. Rusk was

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[22] One of the later proposals stated that interceptors tested with velocities of less than 3 km/sec would be considered Treaty-compliant; they could not be tested against targets with velocities over 5 km/sec and ranges over 3,500 kilometers. In a final form, the Clinton Administration also banned space-based theater missile defense. See Amy Woolf, *Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Demarcation and Succession Agreements: Background and Issues*, *Congressional Research Service Report,* No. 98-496, April 27, 2000, pp. 12-13, 20, available at https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/98-496.pdf.

[23] Ibid., p. 12.

[24] Ibid., p. 8.

[25] Barton Gellman, "U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in '96," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/21/us-and-china-nearly-came-to-blows-in-96/926d105f-1fd8-404c-9995-90984f86a613/.

[26] U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation: President's Visit," in, Charles S. Samson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Volume XIV, Berlin Crisis, 1961–1962 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), available at https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v14/d30.

reduced to replying that Moscow should fear that Washington might foolishly be self-destructive.[27] Years later, Henry Kissinger explained that allies should *not* expect the United States to do something so foolish.[28] This problematic credibility of extended deterrence was codified by the "cornerstone of arms control," the ABM Treaty, and remains given the continuing absence of U.S. homeland defenses against Russian and Chinese strategic missiles.

A 1994 study on this subject pointed out that absent homeland defenses, "the United States could find itself paralyzed from responding forcefully to extreme proliferation problems, thereby undercutting the credibility of U.S. diplomatic efforts and all military counterproliferation options; missile defense may be critical to U.S. and allied decisions to project power in response to proliferation or aggression by a regional bully."[29] Since 1994 this problem for the United States and Asian allies has worsened because adversaries' missile and nuclear capabilities have grown, most notably with North Korea detonating its first nuclear device in 2006 and advancing ballistic missile capabilities, including launching a solid-fueled intercontinental-range ballistic missile.[30]

The ABM Treaty intentionally codified the vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to Soviet strategic missiles. At the time, this was deemed necessary to end the "spiraling" arms race and ensure deterrence "stability." As noted, however, this supposedly "stabilizing" vulnerability degraded the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and thus U.S. assurance goals by cementing the question of whether the United States would risk intercontinental nuclear war, and thus its own destruction, in support of a distant ally in jeopardy. Some U.S. and allied officials find the credibility of that commitment to be suspect given the risk to a fully vulnerable U.S. homeland. Washington's continued willful perpetuation of unmitigated homeland vulnerability to Russian and Chinese missiles—a legacy of the thinking behind the ABM Treaty—magnifies the coercive power of their limited nuclear threats. As the 2023 *Strategic Posture Commission Report* observed, adversaries limited coercive nuclear threats to the U.S. homeland are designed to "dissuade and deter the United States from defending or supporting its Allies and partners in a regional conflict; keep the United States from participating in any confrontation; and divide U.S. alliances."[31] The Commission pointed out that countering these types of threats to provide deterrence credibility could well require missile defense capabilities beyond the rudimentary system intended to protect only against

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[27] Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 228. See also, Arnold Beichman, "How Foolish Khrushchev Nearly Started World War III," *The Washington Times*, October 3, 2004, p. B 8.

[28] Henry Kissinger, "The Future of NATO," in, *NATO*, *The Next Thirty Years*, Kenneth Myers, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8.

[29] Keith Payne, et al., *Proliferation, Potential TMD Roles, Demarcation and ABM Treaty Compatibility* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, October 1994), p. 3, available at https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA344594.pdf.

[30] Soo-Hyang Choi and Kantaro Komiya, "North Korea fires ICBM after condemning US 'war' moves," *Reuters*, December 18, 2023, available at https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-south-korea-says-2023-12-17/.

[31] Madelyn Creedon and Jon Kyl, et al., *America's Strategic Posture* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2023), p. 63.

rogue missile threats.[32] This is hardly a new observation, but benefits from the bipartisan makeup of the Strategic Posture Commission.

In addition to undermining U.S. credibility and freedom of action, an adversary's missiles aimed at U.S. allies can disrupt U.S. alliances in several ways. For example, during the First Gulf War, Saudi Arabia reportedly waited four days to request U.S. intervention in Iraq following the fall of Kuwait, partly due to the Saudi lack of confidence that the United States would be able to shield it from a ground and air, including a missile, attack.[33] That it ultimately did so was, in part, thanks to the deployment of a U.S. Patriot theater missile defense system to the region.

During the time leading up to the U.S. 2002 withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Washington's continued commitment to the Treaty undoubtedly slowed U.S. theater missile defense capabilities and effectively prevented the United States from deploying a homeland missile defense system—even as U.S. leaders recognized that missile threats were becoming more unpredictable and necessitated the development and deployment of theater-range capabilities.

Since the Clinton Administration's failed endeavor to set demarcation limits, theater defenses have demonstrated their great value many times over. Considerable opposition, however, continues against U.S. homeland missile defense capabilities beyond those designed against rogue states—despite an increasingly severe strategic nuclear threat environment. The United States continues to accept virtually unmitigated vulnerability to Russian and Chinese strategic ballistic missiles, even as it struggles to stay ahead of North Korea's missile and nuclear program. The arguments for remaining so vulnerable harken back to the Cold War notions of cost, stable deterrence and arms control instability.

Post-ABM Treaty Missile Defense and Allied Cooperation

In its December 2001 ABM Treaty withdrawal announcement, the Bush Administration pointed to risks stemming from ballistic missile proliferation in the hands of terrorists and rogue states.[34] The Administration's missile defense policy explicitly stated that, "The defenses we will develop and deploy must be capable of not only defending the United States and our deployed forces, but also friends and allies."[35] In withdrawing from the Treaty upon six months' notice, as provided for in the Treaty's language, pundits and proponents of arms control argued at the time that "America's friends and allies would react with horror" to

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[32] Ibid., p. 63.

[33] Michael W. Ellis and Jeffrey Record, "Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense and US Contingency Operations," *Parameters*, Vol. XXII, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 11-12, available at https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA246696.pdf.

[34] The White House, *ABM Treaty Fact Sheet*, December 13, 2001, available at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011213-2.html.

[35] Office of the White House, *National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-23*, December 16, 2002, available at https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nspd/nspd-23.pdf.

withdrawal, which "would complicate any efforts to build a missile defense."[36] None of this came to pass.

The Bush Administration kept allies informed and sought to explain the merits of missile defense and the decision to withdraw.[37] While some U.S. allies, long accustomed to the U.S. rejection of homeland defenses under a "balance of terror,"[38] reportedly opposed the development of even a limited U.S. homeland defense system, the United States was able to establish robust missile defense cooperation programs with numerous allies and partners.[39] Japan, for example, was one of the first states to embrace missile defense cooperation with the United States.[40] This has included the joint development of the *Aegis* sea-based missile defense system that became the focal point of allied cooperative missile defense efforts.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's immediate response to the withdrawal announcement was, "… I fully believe that the decision taken by the president of the United States does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation."[41] Within a month of the ABM Treaty formally ending in June 2002, representatives of 10 allied countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Australia, Japan, and NATO Secretary General George Robertson, issued statements supporting the U.S. missile defense program.[42]

Under U.S. leadership, allied governments became convinced of missile defense as a net positive and international cooperation has since flourished. A NATO study completed in 2005 concluded that missile defense for Alliance populations and territory is needed and technologically feasible.[43] NATO developed an Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence Program, and a missile defense command and control "backbone" to which national missile defense assets can "plug in." NATO's *2022 Strategic Concept* identifies missile defense as an integral part of its force posture—stating that "NATO's deterrence and defence posture

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[36] Ivo Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "Unilateral Withdrawal From the ABM Treaty Is a Bad Idea," *Brookings Commentary*, April 30, 2001, available at https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unilateral-withdrawal-from-the-abm-treaty-is-a-bad-idea/.

[37] Lynn Rusten, *U.S. Withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, January 10, 2010), p. 4, available at https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswmd_casestudy-2.pdf.

[38] "U.S. Steps up Missile Defense Marketing Abroad," *Arms Control Association*, September 2002, available at https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-09/us-steps-up-missile-defense-marketing-abroad.

[39] Stephen Rademaker, "America's Cooperative Approach to Missile Defense," *Remarks to the American Foreign Policy Council's 2004 Conference on "Missile Defenses and American Security,"* December 17, 2004, available at https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/39920.htm.

[40] Watts, "A Double-Edged Sword: Ballistic-Missile Defense and U.S. Alliances," op. cit., pp. 64-65.

[41] Terence Neilan, "Bush Pulls Out of ABM Treaty; Putin Calls Move a Mistake," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2001, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/13/international/bush-pulls-out-of-abm-treaty-putin-calls-move-a-mistake.html.

[42] *The Administration's Missile Defense Program and the ABM Treaty*, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 107th Congress, First Session, July 24, 2001, available at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg74505/html/CHRG-107shrg74505.htm.

[43] Peppino DeBiaso, "Missile Defense and NATO Security," *Joint Forces Quarterly,* Issue 51 (4th Quarter 2008), p. 50, available at https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/jfq/jfq-51.pdf.

is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities."[44]

At this point, some allied countries face particularly hostile adversaries and U.S. theater missile defenses are an important component of their assurance. However, with regard to homeland defenses, U.S. policy continues to harken back to the ABM Treaty and Cold War "balance of terror" thinking. Continued opposition to strategic missile defenses effective against even limited Russian and Chinese missile threats remains, with the consequent questionable credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence commitments that follows from the intentional vulnerability of the U.S. homeland.

U.S. and allied missile defenses have not appreciably caught up with expanding offensive missile threats. This is by Washington's conscious choice at the strategic level. As adversaries' capabilities continue to advance, an inadequate U.S. ability to defend its homeland against even limited Russian and Chinese missile threats will continue to fan doubts about the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, including among opponents and allies. In Europe, these concerns are likely strengthened by Russia's numerous nuclear missile threats and extensive missile use in Ukraine. Since February 2022, Russia has attacked Ukraine with more than 7,400 missiles of various types.[45] The casualties from these attacks would be much higher absent the measure of protection provided by Western theater defense systems.[46]

Conclusion

Wartime experience now underscores the importance of missile defense systems for both the protection of people and assets, and the credibility of extended deterrence—yet, more than two decades since the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Washington remains under that Treaty's shadow and its underlying Cold War rationale. The homeland missile defense system remains severely limited and is not intended to address the Chinese or Russian limited missile threats that undermine the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence efforts. This credibility problem will grow as adversaries continue to advance their missile programs, aggressive agendas and coercive threats. Expanded U.S. defenses capable of addressing such coercive missile threats would, finally, move Washington beyond its Cold War thinking regarding missile defense and the corresponding ABM Treaty, and provide a

[44] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, p. 6, available at https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/.

[45] Liliana Oleniak, "Number of Russian missiles launched at Ukraine since February 2022 counted," *RBC-Ukraine*, December 28, 2023, available at https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/number-of-russian-missiles-launched-at-ukraine-1703755020.html.

[46] The first of two recent large attacks reportedly cost Russia over $1.2 billion. See "Today's Massive Attack on Ukraine Cost Russia Over $1.2 Billion," *Kyiv Post*, December 29, 2023, available at https://www.kyivpost.com/post/26109; and Eero Epner, "'Human Life Has No Value There': Baltic Counterintelligence Officers Speak Candidly About Russian Cruelty,"*Eesti Ekspress*, October 2022, available at https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/120083694/human-life-has-no-value-there-baltic-counterintelligence-officers-speak-candidly-about-russian-cruelty.

potentially critical level of societal protection against limited threats, strengthen extended deterrence, and contribute to the viability of U.S. alliances.

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