

Testimony of Robert G. Joseph
Before the
House Armed Services Committee
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on national missile defense and the ABM Treaty. It is a particular pleasure to appear before this Committee because of the leading role that it has played in advancing the understanding of the need for missile defenses, as well as in promoting sound policies and programs that are essential to achieving this critical national security requirement.

The views I will express are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or any agency of the United States Government.

There is substantial agreement on the emerging threat to the United States from long-range ballistic missiles. This is reflected in the unanimity of views in the Rumsfeld Commission and in the subsequent reassessment by the intelligence community last fall. The overwhelming majorities in both Houses of Congress that passed the National Missile Defense Act -- making it U.S. policy and law to deploy a national missile defense "as soon as is technologically possible" -- is further evidence of the growing consensus on the threat, both to U.S. forces and allies abroad, as well as to the American homeland.

As always, there are exceptions. In one case it has been suggested that three members of the Rumsfeld Commission were almost tragically hoodwinked into supporting the findings of the report. However, few would find this proposition to be anything other than preposterous, especially the members in question.

At the international level, Moscow and Beijing are fond of saying that the United States is exaggerating the missile threat but their position is very much tied to an active campaign to perpetuate American vulnerability to their own nuclear forces. As for those allies who have suggested that Washington is hyping the threat, I would that this criticism, when it does come, comes primarily from Europe and not from friends and allies in Asia. Undoubtedly, the North Korea TaepoDong missile that flew over Japan and the ongoing deployment of missiles opposite Taiwan have something to do with this difference in views. I will return to Russian and allied views but before I do, I want to make a few comments on the threat and the need for defenses.

The assessment in the Rumsfeld report emphasized two points of departure: first, foreign assistance is not a wild card but a fact. And, second, missile programs today do not follow the patterns set by the United States and the Soviet Union. They do not require high standards of accuracy, reliability or safety. As a result, they can move ahead more rapidly and with less likelihood of detection.

After conducting an extensive review across many compartmentalized programs, the Commission concluded "concerted efforts by a number of overtly or potentially hostile

nations to acquire ballistic missiles with biological or nuclear payloads pose a growing threat to the United States" and that this threat is "broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates by the Intelligence Community."

Perhaps most disturbing, the Commission found that countries like North Korea and Iran could threaten the United States within five years of a decision to acquire long range ballistic missiles - and that we might not know when such a decision was made. In other words, we might have little or no warning before deployment.

The Taepo Dong launch vividly validated the Rumsfeld findings. This test was followed by the release of a report by the National Intelligence Council that noted progress was made by states in Asia and the Middle East in developing longer-range missiles, including Iran's flight test of the 1300 km Shahab-3 and the Taepo Dong launch that demonstrated North Korea's ability to deliver small payloads to ICBM ranges.

So what conclusions can be drawn from the threat? First, I believe it is evident that the United States requires a comprehensive strategy to meet the challenges of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missile proliferation. We must support and lead international non-proliferation efforts, such as the Missile Technology Control Regime, to prevent and slow further spread of weapons of mass destruction and missiles. Such efforts are essential but, as is clear from the threat, they are not sufficient.

As a consequence, we must also pursue defenses to protect ourselves against the threat. This is a national security imperative. Most observers agree with this conclusion, at least with regard to theater missiles and theater missile defense. When it comes to longer-range missiles and, especially national missile defense (NMD), agreement breaks down.

The most popular argument -- the argument du jour against missile defense -- does not deny the growing capabilities of states like North Korea to attack the United States. Instead, it focuses on their intentions. Opponents of a national missile defense, even a limited defense, are increasingly fond of asserting that the United States does not need to defend against missile attacks because we can rely on deterrence through the threat of massive retaliation, and specifically the threat of nuclear annihilation.

In short, they would not dare strike our cities because they know if they did their countries would be obliterated. We have heard this assertion from many different sources, from former National Security Advisors to, ironically, many individuals who have long been associated with the nuclear abolitionist cause.

A number of recent press articles have clearly intended to raise doubts about the threat. Some have done so by first noting the many analytical and policy shortcomings of the term "rogue state." While this is something I certainly agree with, criticism of the term does not advance an understanding of the threat. These articles also argue that the word rogue does not equate to irrational - another point on which I certainly agree.

The conclusion of these articles, however, is something I reject. They add two and two

and come up with a perfect three. They assert that, because regimes like North Korea are rational and want to survive, they will be deterred by the threat of massive retaliation. This simply misses the point and is based on a dangerous misunderstanding of today's threat. It neglects the primary motivation of these states for investing billions of dollars of scarce resources in missile and WMD programs.

Our work at the National Defense University -- which includes extensive red teaming and case studies -- suggests that, although deterrence will be difficult to achieve, it remains our first line of defense. Our work also leads to the conclusion that deterrence of these contemporary threats is fundamentally different from the East-West deterrence of the past.

We deterred the Soviet Union principally through the prospect of massive retaliation and mutual assured destruction. We based our doctrine, force structure and arms control policies on the concept that -- as long as American and Russian cities were vulnerable to nuclear annihilation in a retaliatory strike -- neither side would be tempted to use nuclear weapons against the other in a disarming first strike.

Few today would advocate this same concept as a desirable basis for deterrence of regional states armed with weapons of mass destruction. The differences are apparent; we face a much more diverse and less predictable set of countries than we did in the Cold War. These states are governed by individuals that much more prone to taking risks than were Soviet leaders. That does not make them irrational -- only gamblers like Hitler and the Japanese militarists in the 1930s.

Moreover, the conditions that we valued for deterrence in the U.S.-Soviet relationship -- such as effective communications and agreed understandings -- are not likely to pertain with states like North Korea. In addition, these states see weapons of mass destruction as their best means of overcoming our technological advantages that they know will defeat them in a conventional conflict. WMD, and especially biological weapons, are becoming their weapons of choice to deter us from intervening in their regions to stop their aggression, unlike in the Cold War when we sought to deter the Soviets from expanding outward.

In this context, long-range missiles become particularly valuable as instruments of coercion to hold American and allied cities hostage, and thereby deter us from intervention. The tremendous disparity in our favor in both conventional capabilities and nuclear weapons stockpiles simply does not matter to this type of calculation. They need only hold a handful of our cities at risk. This is not irrational. In fact, it is very well thought out. If you cannot compete conventionally and you have territorial or political or religious goals that require the use of force, you must find a means of keeping the United States out of the fight.

Failing that, even if we do intervene, long-range missiles can retain their deterrent value. Under these circumstances, again in the calculations of regional adversaries, their missiles can reduce the risk of massive retaliation by the United States if they use

chemical and biological weapons in their regions, even against U.S. forces. This is what it's all about. It is not about North Korea conducting a first strike against us - that is a straw man being put up by NMD opponents as a debating point.

Deterrence of these new and different threats requires new and different concepts and capabilities. Cold War concepts do not apply. The threat of retaliation, while essential, is not sufficient. Denial capabilities such as passive defenses against chemical and biological weapons and counterforce measures to attack mobile and deep underground targets are central to deterrence. Perhaps most critical, the importance of missile defenses stand out in our research.

A second argument often heard against proceeding with national missile defense is that such a deployment, again even if very limited in scope, would be undesirable because the costs would outweigh the benefits. Several versions of this argument are made. Perhaps the most frequently heard is the assertion that NMD would threaten strategic stability, a phrase that clearly passes the focus group test but that obscures the underlying old think on which it is based.

What is being said is that we must continue to base our relationship with Russia on the same footing that we did with the Soviet Union. Those taking this view are usually willing to extend Mutual Assured Destruction to China and, although it is never stated explicitly, they are willing to extend at least partial vulnerability to states like North Korea. The problem is that partial vulnerability in a deterrence context is like partial pregnancy. I think that is why it is always left unsaid.

A third argument is that missile defenses are not technically feasible. The Russians, of course, have an operational ABM system with nuclear tipped interceptors that protect Moscow and a large portion of their territory against a Chinese-size threat. The recently deployed Israeli Arrow is conventionally armed. Although not hit to kill, it does demonstrate the feasibility of a national program based on interceptors with conventional front-ends. In other words, there are different approaches to missile defenses and I am confident that our scientific community is up to the task -- as they have always been in the past.

While independent reviews of the current program, such as that headed by General Welch, have emphasized the risks inherent in meeting the established deployment schedule, they have generally confirmed the soundness of the technologies being pursued. This is despite the fact that the U.S. approach has been the most technically challenging.

In fact, we have for ABM Treaty reasons ruled out the most promising and cost effective avenues to defense, including sea-based and space-based ABM systems. These are the capabilities that could provide for boost or ascent phase intercepts that offer the greatest potential for countering the missile threat as it grows quantitatively and qualitatively, including the introduction of countermeasures.

The fact that we have not pursued ABM sea- and space-based approaches and the fact

that we are now embarked on a very accelerated schedule to deploy even a modest land-based system is the direct result of deliberate policy choices.

In 1993, in what was declared to be an effort to strengthen the ABM Treaty, ongoing national missile defense programs were downgraded in priority and funding was significantly reduced. Programs such as space-based sensors were cutback; others such as space-based interceptors were killed. Even funding for ground-based interceptors and radars was slashed and essentially reduced to life-support levels. In short, we lost seven critical years -- during which time our most likely adversaries worked hard to acquire ballistic missiles to strike our cities.

Today, U.S. arms control policies -- based on Cold War precepts -- continue to create roadblocks that prevent us from moving forward to acquire capabilities that can strengthen deterrence against today's threats. There can be no better example than the positions we are taking in the ABM Treaty negotiations. Current policy is to preserve intact the central provisions of the Treaty while deploying a very limited -- but the Administration tells us, effective -- national missile defense against what it until very recently called the "rogue" missile threat.

The problem is that these two objectives are mutually exclusive. As a result, in an attempt to retain the ABM Treaty as the primary goal, the NMD architecture has become so contrived that it will have only a minimal capability against near term threats. While the official position is that we will go back to Russia to seek its permission to expand our defenses as the threat evolves, few see this as a serious prospect.

In an attempt to have it both ways, U.S. policy has had another equally unsubtle influence. For almost eight years, we have proclaimed the ABM Treaty to be the cornerstone of strategic stability with Russia in a way that has served to perpetuate Cold War suspicions and distrust. This has had two effects. First, along with other policies that Moscow has seen as directed at Russia, it has contributed to the reversal of political relations with Russia. Promoting MAD as official policy and at the center of our relationship has a very corrosive influence that necessarily imprisons us in adversarial box.

Second, if in fact the ABM Treaty and MAD do guide our relations, nuclear weapons become the most important currency, at least for a state like Russia that can ill-afford alternatives. We see this in Russia's declaratory statements and defense planning priorities, where nuclear weapons have become more prominent than ever in its security policy. This may help explain the total lack of progress made in the last seven and a half years in achieving further reductions in nuclear weapons.

How Russia will react to the deployment of a national missile defense is an important question. A number of U.S. and Russian officials have predicted dire consequences if we insist on amending the ABM Treaty or withdraw from the Treaty. In particular, some have predicted that deploying NMD will threaten the so-called fabric of arms control and lead to an end to further reductions in nuclear weapons.

Such predictions are inconsistent with Moscow's reaction to the Bush Administration proposals in 1992 that sought fundamental changes to the Treaty and the end of MAD as the foundation of our political relationship. The Russian reaction at that time was to sign START II and to explore cooperative means for deploying what President Yeltsin called the Global Protection System in a speech to the United Nations.

These predictions also ignore Russia's own approach to arms control, as seen most recently in the CFE experience. Here, the principle was clear. Russia assesses the value of arms control agreements in the context of its defense requirements -- a truly sound concept. When the security conditions change, it acts with determination to change the treaties. For the United States, the parallel to the ABM Treaty should be evident.

Although it will not like it, Moscow will most likely understand our position and will most likely not act contrary to its own interests. Arms control negotiations to reduce nuclear stockpiles are important to Russia.

To end the negotiations would end Moscow's best means to stay at perceived parity. The Russians, according to almost all assessments, will be compelled by economics to go to much lower levels of offensive forces, independent of arms control outcomes.

Yet, even at the lowest levels speculated for Russia in the future, a missile defense deployed to protect against a limited attack would not undermine Russia's nuclear deterrent. And this is the critical point: if Moscow knows that U.S. defenses will not undermine the Russian nuclear offensive capability, it will have what it requires.

The views of U.S. allies on national missile defenses and the ABM Treaty are more complex. A year ago, most would likely have argued that the political costs and risks would far outweigh the likely gains from deployment. Today, this calculation appears to be changing, at least somewhat.

Still, NATO allies continue to express concern about the possible Russian reaction and, in some cases, about what is described as the "de-coupling" effects of a missile defense that would protect the United States and not Europe. Making this latter point the German Foreign Minister has stated that confidence in the U.S. security commitment could be undermined if American cities were at less risk of attack than European cities.

This strained, counter-intuitive argument has it exactly wrong: U.S. credibility as an ally would be undermined if the United States were vulnerable to blackmail from weapons of mass destruction and long range missiles. On the other hand, if the United States could protect itself from this threat, its credibility would be strengthened.

Also significant, the concerns and in some cases objections of allies can be traced to their doubts about the seriousness of the U.S. commitment to missile defenses. This is not to say that allies would rush to support NMD if they thought we were serious. However, they question the depth of the Administration's commitment to deploy defenses and wonder whether or not this is just the next American initiative that will go unfulfilled but

in the process will upset the old framework to guide relations with Moscow without replacing it with a new structure. Moreover, the allies are not protected under the current architecture and have little to gain from supporting our missile defense deployment.

What is clearly required is American leadership. Without leadership of the type we had in 1983 in the INF context, we have been unable and unwilling to make the intellectual case in European capitals for missile defense. This failure can be explained, in part, by the internal contradictions in U.S. policy between the stated goals of deploying defenses and retaining the central provisions of the ABM Treaty. Any comprehensive approach to meeting the missile **proliferation** threat must reconcile these inconsistencies. In doing so, we will better protect against the growing threat and establish a more stable basis for our relations with Russia and others.

Thank you for your attention