

WHY BALLISTIC MISSILE "DEFENSE" IS NO JOKE AND A BAD JOKE

So we don't die laughing

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In the ambit of policy and rhetoric, the anti-ballistic missile program --otherwise known as "Stars Wars" or so-called Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD), is certain to have a prepotent role in the present U.S. Administration and a deleterious impact on ordinary people here and abroad. For us, therefore, BMD will be a prime rhetorical, political, and security challenge in the years ahead, in the domain of living standards, international security and nuclear disarmament. For this reason, it is important to consider the foreign and domestic policy context in which BMD is being advocated.

The present administration believes unabashedly in U.S. world hegemony to promote the interests and markets of its global corporations: asserted unilaterally; unencumbered by treaties or international obligations; threatened potentially by any other nations that may oppose US dominance and authority-- all nations are potential present or future "rogue states"; advanced and defended by economic power; and ultimately enforced by threat or use of overwhelming destructive military force, including nuclear weapons. In the words of the Pentagon document, "Vision 2020", the U.S. must use the full dimensions of space to enforce US global interests. In this perspective, China is considered to be the major long-term threat to U.S. power and interests.

Domestically, while full implementation of the Administration's BMD concepts could cost upwards of \$250 billion and rob domestic human programs of essential funds, It is being promoted as a bona fide and necessary remedy for the manufactured threat of "rogue" states and for the huge and otherwise unmitigated threat of nuclear weapons, which, according to President Reagan in 1983, "would render nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete". Its claim of a beneficent and moral goal of making nuclear deterrence and nuclear weapons obsolete, will be bolstered by the worthy steps of taking nuclear warheads off of "hair-trigger" alert and reducing our huge nuclear overkill. Overall, as demonstrated in the 1980's, such claims and actions will have powerful salience in public opinion and politics, which will greatly amplify the challenge of opposing BMD.

Basis for BMD support

Given that the putative goals and feasibility of BMD is a scam and a fraud, what is the basis for its wide support? In reality, support for BMD, by politicians, military and security decision-makers, and citizens, arises from a wide variety or combinations of motivations, rationales, or hidden agendas, despite the huge cost, dangers, past failures and unproved system. These include---

- **political gain**, signifying strong support for "defense" and U.S. impregnability and fearing the appearance of being "weak on defense"
- **financial gain**, as a huge boondoggle for the troubled aerospace industry (e.g. Boeing, Raytheon, TRW etc.)
- **rhetorical and propaganda gain**, to convey the dangerous world in which the U.S. must survive, surrounded by rogue states and other potential nuclear enemies, to replace the former USSR, and to shield and distract the public and themselves from the real overwhelming danger of nuclear arsenals.

- **illusions and wishful thinking**, based on ignorance of the overwhelming advantage of nuclear offense vs defense, of the power of nuclear weapons even individually, of limits of technology and "American know-how", and of potential error.
- **"grasping at straws"**, being confronted by the potential catastrophe of nuclear weapon use, i.e. "even though unproved, something may be better than nothing".
- **hidden agendas** of political leaders, strategists and security establishments, who believe that BMD could play a key role in --
 - obstructing arms control negotiations or abrogating treaties (e.g. as in the Reagan administration)
 - providing a bargaining chip in negotiations (e.g. as in the Reagan administration)
 - convincing public opinion that nuclear weapons no longer pose an overwhelming danger and thereby countering, neutralizing, and diverting the movement for nuclear abolition
 - psychological "warfare" -- convincing allies or enemies that BMD is effective (even if it is not), and thereby reassuring friends and threatening enemies, with respect to the nuclear dangers
 - bankrupting and bringing down a potential enemy (e.g. China), as some believe occurred with the USSR
 - providing an offensive threat or deterrence, by threatening the possibility of a successful first-strike or pre-emptive attack
 - actually carrying out a pre-emptive/first strike, e.g. vs China or Russia
 - Launching and establishing the weaponization of space

Effects of implementation of BMD initiative

Aside from the benefits claimed by BMD advocates, the unarguable long-term deleterious effects include:

- Huge costs, pre-empting resources greatly for human needs
- Aggravation of US relations with Russia, China and other nations
- Increase in nuclear arsenals by Russia and China and renewed nuclear arms race
- Major damage to arms control process and negotiation
- Abrogation of treaties (ABM and Outer Space) and reversing treaties (NPT, START)
- Ending nuclear or weapon free sanctuary of outer space (full weaponization and battlefield)
- Permanent nuclear arsenals, forever.

Short of full weaponization and domination of space, which is the real primary goal of BMD, it is unlikely that the "expert" advocates of the national security establishment truly believe that BMD is workable or its purpose achievable, as advertised. They never did during the entire Reagan phase. But in the context of their view of the mission of the United States to dominate and control the world politically, economically and militarily, BMD is a necessity.

Conclusions which must become public convictions

Based on common sense standards for an acceptable "remedy", BMD flunks on virtually all counts. It is implausible and it has not been studied objectively. Its effectiveness remains unproved despite 50 years of experiments and promotions and it is most unlikely to work against most probable forms of threat. It is extraordinarily costly. It would kill arms control, threaten or abrogate treaties, produce a new arms race, and generally worsen international tensions.

Aggressive promotion of BMD is the peddling of a modern "snake oil" nostrum* for the abiding danger of nuclear weapons. Acceptance and support of this quack remedy by political leaders is based on ignorance or self-delusion. and wishful thinking or ulterior self-serving motives, or a hidden agenda.

What needs to be done?

While BMD is now being aggressively promoted as an ultimate and necessary "remedy", despite failure to consider alternative "treatments", such as a commitment and progressive steps to nuclear abolition, we must educate the public, opinion leaders and elected officials on the realities of BMD described above**. The key points include:

- We should unabashedly refer to BMD as a hoax, scam and fraud, i.e. a "snake oil" nostrum (unequivocal derision is appropriate, if backed by our expertise, analysis and the known effect of dangerous quack remedies).
- The real objective of BMD is to confront, challenge and intimidate China and to produce full U.S. militarization of space and U.S. military domination of our planet from space.
- The "blowback" of BMD would be a reduction in human security from huge cost burdens and the promotion of a new nuclear arms race, nuclear proliferation and international tensions.
- The only valid remedy for the untreatable effects of nuclear weapons use is "Primary Prevention", which would include:
 - **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty** ratification and operation, to inhibit the spread or new forms of nuclear weapons
 - **De-Alerting** nuclear weapons, to prevent accidental or inadvertent use
 - **Deep reductions** in nuclear weapons worldwide
 - **Abolition** of nuclear weapons by verifiable, enforceable, worldwide convention, to eliminate the the lethal agents

Consider going to Washington, DC on June 10, 2001, with others Pennsylvanians, to join a national demonstration at the White House against BMD, to say **"Stop the Star Wars Fraud"** (transportation will be available - contact the Thomas Merton Center).

Help to organize and join a public demonstration in Pittsburgh this Fall against BMD to show political leaders and the Administration that people at the grass roots oppose BMD and want their voices heard.

* Dictionary definitions: **snake-oil**- "a worthless preparation fraudulently peddled as a cure for many ills"; **nostrum**- "medicine whose effectiveness is unproved and whose ingredients are usually secrets; a "quack remedy".

** To be well-informed, read the definitive study of BMD rhetoric by University of Pittsburgh Professor Gordon Mitchell, [Strategic Deception: Rhetoric, Science, and Politics in Missile Defense Advocacy](#)

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