National Missile Defense
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I am Lisbeth Gronlund, Senior Staff Scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

I am speaking to you today on an issue that gravely threatens the NPT and the non-proliferation regime as a whole. It concerns U.S. plans to deploy a nation-wide ballistic missile defense system, a possibility that has already caused consternation in the international community.

This presentation will focus on both some of the implications of U.S. actions, and some worthy alternatives to missile defense.

In brief, the United States maintains that new, emerging missile threats require the U.S. to deploy what it calls a "national missile defense." These new threats, according to assessments by the U.S. intelligence community, are developing from what some in the U.S. call "rogue" states, especially the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, and Iraq. Whether such threats will emerge depends in great part on the international community, regional security questions, and the health of the non-proliferation regime as a whole.

As has become clear in recent months, and in many speeches already made at this conference, the U.S. pursuit of national missile defense raises concerns around the globe, including close U.S. allies. The vote last year at the United Nations General Assembly, where only Israel, Albania, and Micronesia sided with the United States against a resolution calling for the ABM Treaty to be preserved and strengthened, further demonstrates the high level of concern.

Despite this opposition, many advocates of missile defense in the United States seem determined to go ahead. What supporters of U.S. missile defenses seem to fail to realize is that the pursuit of invulnerability implicit in national missile defense is more likely to increase rather than decrease threats to U.S. and international security.

Russia and China have both been very clear in their opposition to the planned U.S. national missile defense, despite Clinton Administration claims that its proposed system is a response to potential new threats and not to existing Russian and Chinese arsenals. In fact, regardless of the real or the stated goal of U.S. missile defense plans, as long as the nuclear weapon states rely on deterrence, Russian and Chinese officials must consider the possible implications of the US NMD for their deterrent. This means they must consider their capabilities to respond after a U.S. first strike. It is this calculation, virtually ignored in the United States, that drives much of the Russian and Chinese opposition to the program.

In fact, US documents recently made public by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, including US talking points on its proposed ABM Treaty modifications, acknowledge this basic problem. Perversely, these documents show that the United States seeks to reassure Russia that its deterrent will remain credible BECAUSE Russia and the United States will continue to maintain large nuclear arsenals under "any possible future arms reduction agreements" and because Russia will continue to operate its forces on launch-on-warning.
So it is clear that the security price for national missile defense deployment is very high. In fact, one possible outcome of the U.S. missile defenses is the end of the current non-proliferation and arms control regime as we know it. The START nuclear arms reduction process and the cooperative regimes to control the spread of missiles, missile technology and weapons of mass destruction could all be severely challenged, if not permanently damaged. In particular, the NPT itself could come into question. For the foreseeable future, Russia will likely seek to maintain enough nuclear weapons to overwhelm US defenses, with US plans to expand those defenses creating further pressure for Russia to refrain from reductions. Similarly, China may build up its forces substantially to maintain a deterrent capability. This upward dynamic will pressure the U.S. to maintain or increase its nuclear arsenals. The demonstration that the world’s main nuclear weapon states consider large nuclear arsenals a permanent element of their security, rather than moving unambiguously toward elimination of these arsenals, has been the single most important factor underlying nuclear proliferation over the last decade and will remain so for the future.

Finally, on technical grounds, despite advances in U.S. capability, truly effective missile defense is still more fantasy than reality. Cheap and effective countermeasures are available to overwhelm or circumvent missile defenses. Relying on a complex and untested large-scale missile defense system would not improve security from long-range missiles, nor provide any protection against threats from weapons of mass destruction on trucks, cruise missiles or ships. Countries pursuing the capability to threaten the United States could, and probably would, invest in such cheaper and more reliable alternatives.

What are the alternatives to missile defenses, for the U.S. and the international community?

The first step is to reduce the regional tensions that propel states to pursue ballistic missiles. Countries that chose to pursue missile technology do so for a reason. How can the spread of missiles and missile technology, which may appear inevitable but clearly is not, be stopped?

The most effective, sustainable, and mutually beneficial approach is to bring a halt to each country's pursuit of ballistic missile programs through cooperative international security steps.

This path is unlikely to be easy. Resolving the regional and international tensions that are the primary cause of all nascent missile programs will take time and intensive effort.

However, much in the same way that war between nations in the heart of Europe is now almost unthinkable, the international community must create the conditions that will end the demand for missiles and missile technology. In recent years, more countries have given up the pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles than are currently seeking them. Argentina, Brazil, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and South Africa have all renounced nuclear and/or missile technology and capabilities. This trend can and must be strengthened.

Toward this end, the international community should directly focus on those states and regions that are currently troubled by developing missile programs. This strategy must be pursued in a comprehensive, direct, and intelligent manner. Work in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, and East Asia must involve addressing the security concerns of all the involved parties. This will necessarily require the commitment of increased economic, military, and political resources to address these issues. The United Nations and the U.N. Security Council, along with regional bodies like ASEAN and the European Union, must participate directly in these efforts.

These efforts -- at reducing the demand for missile capability -- are not and should not be considered sufficient. Countries must not only work to reduce the desire for missile technology, they can and should do more to control and reduce the supply and spread of the technology, to share information about
existing programs, to increase efforts to highlight the current and potential missile threat, and to expand and take further political and legal initiatives to reduce existing levels of missile arsenals and control missile technology.

Toward that end, the international community must pursue a number of steps, some short-term, some long-term, that will address the potential missile threat. Those include:

One, the weapon states themselves should agree now on a verifiable no-increase agreement on their own holdings of ballistic missiles configured for military use. This ceiling should be progressively lowered.

Two, the international community should increase sharing of information on missile-related activities and capabilities. This could include an international launch notification regime and a global early warning system to monitor launches and provide real-time information to the international community.

Three, there should be greater efforts to share the benefits of space-launch delivery vehicles and satellites. With joint activities every nation can pursue and benefit from space technology, without adopting it for military uses.

Four, the international community should lay the groundwork for international sanctions and possible action against countries that use ballistic missiles in conflicts. The use of ballistic missiles should be delegitimized.

Finally, countries should begin work on a regime to reduce and eventually eliminate ballistic missiles entirely except for space-launch purposes. An important and visible step would be a missile flight-test ban, which would halt ballistic missile development. Such a regime would include a missile monitoring and safeguarding system.

A comprehensive missile control regime, going far beyond the current supply-side Missile Technology Control Regime, would necessarily involve a long time-frame. But much like the regimes to control weapons of mass destruction, such a regime would be an essential element of international efforts to prevent and reduce conflict.

One last issue must be mentioned in the context of U.S. missile defense plans. The control of outer space and the future uses of space, space-related technology, and civilian versus military uses of space are critical issues for the international community. Current U.S. proposals for missile defense provide grounds for some concern, but far greater alarm, however, stems from the plans of some U.S. officials -- in Congress and the military -- which would have the United States seek to dominate a militarized space.

Given the essential nature of outer space for communications, for efforts to learn about and protect the environment, and for exploration of the universe, this issue must be one the international community reaches a common understanding on, not one dominated by a militaristic competition where all will lose.

Unilateral security is not sustainable security. Instead, the international community should pursue create new initiatives and existing opportunities to control the spread of missiles and missile technology.

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