

6 arguments against NMD

1. TECHNOLOGY

The first argument against NMD is the technology itself. It is currently believed, as it was in the Reagan administration, that it is impossible to create the necessary technology within the next few decades. One must be cautious in using this argument, however, for fear that the "lumbering behemoths of the apocalypse" (also known as the billion dollar corporations) will retort that the necessary funding can prove otherwise. The New York Times quotes Nira Schwartz, an ex-engineer of NMD, as stating that NMD is "not a defense of the United States, its a conspiracy to allow them to milk the government. They are creating jobs for themselves for life." The lack of technology is seen as no setback to the corporations, who profit with billions of dollars, assuring the Pentagon that increasing funds can make this dream a reality. However, is the recreation of an arms race and current insecurity worth the outcome which is only profiting Boeing, Raytheon, TRW and Lockheed Martin?

2. ACTUAL THREAT

In reality, no country has initiated the deployment of ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States. North Korea, a feared "rogue state" is years away from developing a reliable Ballistic Missile system that could deliver any warhead to the United States, and has stated that any attempt to do so would be foolish. North Korea's current need for support from the international community, and more importantly its action and interest toward the reunification of Korea, seriously undermine the possibility of it launching any kind of attack. In the meantime, North Korea has even halted its missile flight testing, in an agreement with the US to loosen trade sanctions. As for Iran, experts believe it is unlikely that it could begin testing long range missiles within the next 15 years. Iraq is even less of a threat, with most of its missile infrastructure destroyed since the Gulf War. Iraq is also under severe sanctions, which limits its capability to acquire missiles and subsequent technology from other nations.

3. COSTS

One hundred and twenty-two billion dollars have been spent on Theater and National Missile Defense since World War II. Furthermore, the Pentagon believes that it would cost the American people 26.6 billion dollars to maintain a single missile defense site in Alaska, with 4 billion dollars in annual maintenance fees. Each ballistic missile test conducted by the US has cost over 100 million dollars, mostly resulting in failures. In total, the US has wasted 5.6 trillion dollars in nuclear arsenals. In fact, if all the dollars spent on nuclear weapons since 1945 were stacked one on top of another, it would reach the moon and almost back again. That is an alarming amount of money for one of the least likely threats to US security!

4. AGGRAVATING FRIENDS AND FOES ALIKE

The NMD system faces grave international opposition from almost every country.

It is viewed as an effort by the United States to enhance their offensive capabilities. According to the Chinese top arms control negotiators, US efforts to deploy NMD will risk collapsing the whole architecture of China's arms control and nonproliferation agreements with the West. China has even discussed considerations to expand its nuclear forces to compensate for the proposed US defense system. The possible consequences of the NMD may result in a renunciation of previous undertakings in China, barring nuclear or chemical weapons proliferation and nuclear testing. Similarly, Russia has threatened to stop reducing its nuclear arsenals if the deployment of NMD becomes a reality.

5. UNDERMINING INTERNATIONAL LAW

The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) was one of the first steps in ending the Cold War, by reaching an agreement to downsize the number of anti-ballistic missile systems. Although both the United States and Russia have violated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in prior years, it is still a valuable and significant treaty that serves as the backbone for arms reduction and future disarmament. The slightest indication of NMD construction would violate the treaty, alienating international ties and most likely refueling the arms race.

Currently, the NMD has placed Russia and the United States on a 'collision course' over the issue. Russia and China rightfully have grave concerns over the deployment of NMD, which contradicts the 1972 ABM Treaty, but they should be encouraged not to join the arms race into space. The only way for the United States to deploy the system without violating the treaty would be to gain Russia's agreement in amending the treaty. Russian policy experts are dissatisfied with the amendment proposals and view the ultimatums set by the United States as unacceptable.

6. COUNTERMEASURES

One of the easiest countermeasures to NMD is submunition. The firing of hundreds of submunitions at the end of the boost phase would overwhelm the NMD system, rendering it useless. Another countermeasure can be achieved by designing indistinguishable decoys (as simple as foil balloons) to be released along with the warhead. This would require the defense system to launch an interceptor at each target in the hopes of hitting the actual warhead. This high-altitude countermeasure marks yet another disastrous flaw in the defense system. Finally, a third alternative would be to encase the warhead in a liquefied nitrogen cooled shroud, which would cool it to temperatures that would reduce its visibility to infrared sensors on the interceptor. These are few examples of countermeasures that could easily be deployed by other states to overwhelm or deceive any defense system.

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★ adapted from the article by Soulafreda Valassis & Felicity Hill
"NMD: Nationalistic Militaristic Domination?"