

# How to Build an International Consensus for Missile Defense

By Hans Binnendijk

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration can make a quick decision on national missile defenses or it can make the right decision. There is time to build a new national consensus on missile defenses that could be supported by allies and agreed to by Russia.

Without such a national consensus, support for missile defenses will eventually dissipate under the crush of high costs, technological problems and allied opposition.

To build a national consensus, the administration should set up a bipartisan commission, akin to the Scowcroft commission on the MX missile, to review options and recommend a missile defense architecture that meets the threat, minimizes the cost, embraces available technology and maintains strategic stability with Russia.

As a starting point, the commission should consider a multi-layered architecture using the first phase of the existing plan (to build midcourse interceptors) as an insurance policy and relies on

boost phase interceptors as the primary line of defense. This concept would draw on elements of both the U.S. and the Russian proposals. Space-based sensors would enhance the efficiency of both defensive layers.

Boost phase interceptors can be made available within a decade by adapting emerging theater missile defenses and exploiting other technologies. They could be deployed on land, at sea or possibly in the air near threatening states such as North Korea and Iran.

They would not threaten Russia's or even China's deterrent force because the interceptors' location would place their missiles out of range. Cooperation with Russia would be important but not vital for these deployments.

Technical problems such as assured early detection, fast interceptors and detecting the missile in its plume can probably be solved.

An insurance policy is

needed for the United States in case some missiles penetrate this first line of defense. One site with 100 midcourse interceptors should be adequate to deal with any warheads that leak through the primary defenses. It could also deal with a small accidental launch from either Russia or China.

This architecture also envisions development of space-based infrared satellites placed both in high and low earth orbit to ensure that the two layers of interceptors receive early and accurate information on missile launches. No weapons have to be deployed in space.

America's allies should warm to this proposal. A boost phase system would protect Europe against intermediate and longer-range missiles launched from the Middle East, and Japan would be better protected against North Korea's No Dong missile. Concerns about decoupling U.S. and European security should be put to rest.

Such an architecture could well soften Russia's objections to the ABM Treaty amendments that would be required. Russia should have no objection to either boost phase defenses deployed to their south or 100 midcourse interceptors that would have no effect on their deterrent. Russia, too, is threatened by the proliferation of regional missile capabilities, and the boost phase system would protect it as well.

Russia has suggested cooperation in developing a boost phase system, and the United States could pursue such suggestions vigorously without relying too heavily on Russian technology or on Russian territory for deployment.

China will oppose this missile defense proposal at first because today it has only about 20 missiles that can strike the United States, and even the proposed midcourse insurance policy might negate that force. However, Beijing has missile modernization plans that are already under way and will al-

low it to retain its deterrent under this NMD architecture.

There are those who want a more robust system. But overreaching could divide the Atlantic alliance and possibly drive Russia and China together in a true strategic partnership.

There is time to establish a commission on missile defenses, consider this proposed architecture and develop a national consensus. The threat is real but the timing of its evolution is vague and can be influenced. The United States needs to continue missile talks with North Korea and press Russia to discontinue support for Iran's missile programs.

*The writer holds the chair in national security and technology at the National Defense University and was previously special assistant to the president for defense policy and arms control. He contributed this comment, which does not represent the views of the U.S. government, to the International Herald Tribune.*