

Deja vu All Over Again

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At the recent Helsinki summit President Clinton reaffirmed his commitment to the 1972 ABM Treaty, a U.S.-Soviet agreement severely restricting national defenses against long-range ballistic missiles. The Helsinki Joint Statement signed by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin refers to the ABM Treaty as "a cornerstone of strategic stability," and states that it is their "common task" to "preserve the ABM Treaty, prevent circumvention of it, and enhance its viability." In this vein, much of what was agreed at Helsinki will indeed severely limit the ability of any future President to revise the ABM Treaty for the purpose of deploying even a limited national missile defense.

When weighing the results of Helsinki, Congress should assess first whether the ABM Treaty has performed as advertised to the Senate in 1972, and second whether the approach to the ABM Treaty outlined at Helsinki makes sense for the post-Cold War period .

The first and most obvious finding of such an assessment will be that the ABM Treaty has failed to deliver on key claims made to the Senate by senior Nixon Administration officials in 1972. A review of three such claims demonstrates this failure.

First, a central claim made by then-National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger was that agreeing to limit missile defenses via the ABM Treaty would reduce Soviet incentives to deploy additional strategic offensive missile capabilities. The logic seemed reasonable at the time. With the ABM Treaty in place, the Soviets would not have to increase their offensive forces to overcome U.S. defenses and Soviet offensive arms racing could cease.

In reality, according to public figures, the number of Soviet strategic ballistic missile warheads increased from just under 2000 in 1972 to nearly 10,000 in 1990.

Second, Secretary of State William Rogers claimed before the Senate that by signing the ABM Treaty the Soviet Union was signaling its acceptance of mutual deterrence through mutual vulnerability, i.e., "mutual assured destruction" (MAD). This notion of Soviet MAD acceptance was the basis for the common refrain that the superpowers could now "stabilize" their strategic relationship around the ABM Treaty.

In reality, again according to public figures, the Soviet Union continued annually to spend more than six times the U.S. annual level for strategic defense procurement, and even significantly increased its spending following the ABM Treaty. From 1975 to 1985 alone the difference in U.S. and Soviet spending on strategic defense procurement amounted to approximately \$60 billion. This Soviet spending betrayed the official assertion that the Soviet Union had accepted MAD stability.

Third, Henry Kissinger explained, again to the Senate, that as a result of the ABM Treaty and the offensive limitations of SALT I it made possible, the Soviet Union had agreed to "freeze" its most fearsome strategic weapons, its "heavy" SS-9 ICBMs. The then-emerging U.S. fear was that these SS-9s, with their high-yield warheads, might pose a "first-strike" threat to the U.S. deterrent forces. Therefore, the claim that the Soviets had frozen their heavy ICBM arsenal was a powerful elixir. U.S. Ambassador Gerard Smith claimed in this regard, "There will be a commitment on their part not to build any more of these ICBMs that have concerned us over the years. That commitment will extend to not building such things as SS-9s." Amb. Smith, in fact, told the Senate that the Soviets were interested in agreeing to "a more definitive missile limitation," that would reduce the Soviet ICBM force. This "more definitive" agreement was said to be forthcoming in two-to-five years following the ABM Treaty.

This claim was the heart of the case for the ABM Treaty in 1972: if the U.S. was to give up an important defensive means of protecting its deterrent forces against missile attack, it was critical that the Soviet Union give up its missiles capable of threatening those forces, foremost, its heavy ICBMs. This was the deal struck according to Nixon Administration officials testifying before the Senate.

In reality, of course, no such deal had been struck. Soon following the ABM Treaty a new generation of Soviet heavy ICBMs even more lethal than the SS-9 appeared. The number of Soviet heavy ICBM launchers, according to the U.S. SALT I definition, more than doubled. And, more ominously, during the decade following the ABM Treaty the number of Soviet heavy ICBM warheads capable of threatening U.S. forces in a first strike increased by about 1000%. By 1983 the Scowcroft Commission, established to examine U.S. missile vulnerability reported, "The Soviets nevertheless now probably possess the necessary combination of ICBM numbers, reliability, accuracy, and warhead yield to destroy almost all of the 1047 U.S. ICBM silos, using only a portion of their own ICBM force." This was precisely the development Nixon Administration officials told the Senate in 1972 that the ABM Treaty would help preclude.

By the mid-1980s the ABM Treaty was a manifest failure as presented to the Senate. But never mind: the Treaty had become an arms control icon, and pointing to its failures was considered impolite knuckle-dragging. It should be noted, however, that the now demonstrably wrong-headed arguments used to justify the ABM Treaty circa 1972 were trundled out again to justify its veneration at Helsinki, i.e., it is the basis for deterrence stability and the Russians will walk away from offensive reductions without it. As baseball great Yogi Berra might say, this is *deja vu* all over again.

After twenty-five years we should cease veneration of the ABM Treaty not just because it failed to deliver on earlier promises, but because the world has changed. The Treaty perpetuates U.S. and Russian vulnerability to long-range ballistic missiles at a time when no one doubts that a prominent feature of the post-Cold War period is missile proliferation. The third-party missile threat

is here and now, and it will worsen-as evidenced by recent nuclear threats to Los Angeles by a senior Chinese military leader, Gen. Xiong Guangkai, reported Chinese testing of a new, mobile ICBM, North Korean development of the long-range Taepo Dong II missile, and Libya's expressed desire for nuclear- armed ICBMs with which to threaten New York. In this context, recommitting to a Treaty that virtually makes U.S. vulnerability a legal obligation was a mistake. As "rogue" missile threats grow the American people rightfully will demand protection.

Unfortunately, the Clinton Administration not only reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to the ABM Treaty at Helsinki, it undercut the possibility of future Treaty revision by endorsing the addition of three new parties to the Treaty beyond the United States and Russia, i.e., Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakstan. By introducing the many competing agendas and interests of multiple parties to the Treaty this "multilateralization" threatens to stymie any future attempt to revise it significantly, as otherwise is permitted under Articles 13 and 14. Cutting off the prospect for ABM Treaty revision through its "multilateralization" ultimately will not preserve the Treaty. It will constrain a future President to choose between continued American vulnerability to "rogue" missiles or withdrawal from the Treaty. Ultimately, that decision can only be for the latter; but this withdrawal route to national missile defense will be slow and politically tortured, possibly delaying protection beyond the time of great need. To cut off existing legal and practicable routes to Treaty revision in this new strategic environment, and in deference to a Treaty whose rationale is of the Cold War, is a bizarre and unnecessary choice. What to do? First the Senate must guard its constitutional prerogative of advice and consent over the ABM Treaty. Next it should reject "multilateralization." If that course is impractical, Senate approval should come only with amendments that preserve a clear route to Treaty revision-perhaps through weighted voting rights. As Congress considers these issues let us hope for the triumph of new thinking over archaic arms control political correctness.

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