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Russian Accommodation on Missile Defense and the ABM Treaty

Testimony By:
Dr. Keith B. Payne
President, National Institute for Public Policy
Faculty, Georgetown University
School of Foreign Service
National Security Studies Program

The Potential for U.S.-Russian Mutual Accommodation on National
Missile Defense and the ABM Treaty

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It is an honor to be here today. I appreciate the opportunity to summarize the findings of the U.S.-Russian study Dr. Andrei Kortunov and I have co-directed over the past two years. This study has been complicated and occasionally difficult, and it is a great pleasure at long last to have findings worth presenting. Before describing the study I would like to note for the record that the United States Institute of Peace sponsored the work with a \$42,000 grant to the National Institute in cooperation with the Moscow Public Science Foundation. The views and findings expressed in the study are those of the Russian and American authors, and are wholly independent of the U.S. Institute of Peace, the National Institute for Public Policy, or Georgetown University, which was not involved in the study.

The goal of our study was to examine a sensitive national security question on which the United States and Russia have sharply differing perspectives, that being the future of national missile defense (NMD) and the ABM Treaty. As we

initiated this study we hoped to drop the Cold War blinders that still seem to burden most thinking on the subject and identify a route to mutual accommodation on NMD and the ABM Treaty.

I would like to outline the basic U.S. and Russian interests that need to be accommodated, and summarize briefly how this study reached its primary conclusion that mutual accommodation should, in principle, be feasible. First, the U.S. interest in NMD is driven by the threats posed by the proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction. A significant number of countries are seeking or have already acquired chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, as well as advanced missile delivery systems. "Rogue" proliferant states (e.g., North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya) seek these capabilities at least in part to deter and coerce the United States.

The Gulf War taught the mistake of challenging the United States at the conventional force level. The lesson for rogue military and political leaders is that U.S. conventional power must be trumped by the capability to deter and coerce the United States with weapons of mass destruction and the ability to deliver those weapons reliably. In at least one case, that of North Korea, there appears to be a missile in development, the Taepo Dong II, intended to threaten U.S. territory itself. Rogue states themselves have declared that weapons of mass destruction and missiles offer them the potential necessary to deter and coerce the United States and its allies.

The U.S. answer to this emerging threat includes ballistic missile defense. The Bush and Clinton Administrations refocused U.S. missile defense efforts away from the large Soviet and now Russian missile capabilities and toward the emerging and far more limited missile threats from regional powers. The Clinton Administration has declared its willingness to pursue limited national missile defense (NMD), along with ABM Treaty modification if necessary, when it deems a new long-range threat to be emerging. This position, as stated, is not far different from the expressed Congressional position in favor of an immediate decision to deploy a limited NMD in anticipation of long-range rogue missiles. As former Secretary of Defense William Perry declared: "The only difference between us and the Congress is an issue of timing. . . . There's not a philosophical or technical difference between us, it's a matter of judgment on the timing of how quickly we have to move to meet the threat."¹

In general, however, Russia opposes U.S. NMD plans and programs. The dominant view in Moscow clearly is that U.S. intentions toward Russia are hostile, and correspondingly that U.S. missile defense initiatives are not for counterproliferation purposes. Rather, they are an element in a well-orchestrated plan to undermine Russian security while Russia is relatively weak. Russian officials and analysts point to NATO expansion, START II, and some U.S. counterproliferation activities as elements of this overall "anti-Russian" grand design.

Many, perhaps most in the Russian military and political establishment subscribe to this "pessimistic" view, as it is termed in our study. They conclude that even an initially limited U.S. NMD would be intended to weaken Russia. Once deployed, it would grow inevitably to threaten the Russian strategic nuclear deterrent vis-[^]-vis the United States. Concern in Moscow over Russia's nuclear deterrent is particularly high at this point as the deterioration of Russia's conventional forces has strengthened the role of nuclear weapons in Russian military strategy. Therefore, we see strong Russian opposition to U.S. NMD aspirations and support for preservation of the 1972 ABM Treaty severely limiting NMD.

While this "pessimistic" school of thought dominates in Moscow, a more "pragmatic" approach to these issues maintains that Russia should pursue mutual accommodation with the United States. This more pragmatic position is not based on a philanthropic perspective or romantic expectations of an immediate U.S.-Russian strategic partnership. Rather, its starting point is that U.S. NMD is

inevitable over time. Pragmatists consider the "worst" future course to be one wherein an inflexible Russian position on NMD leads the United States to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and move toward NMD without any constraints. In this context, mutual accommodation is judged to be a better alternative because it offers a means of protecting the basic Russian interest in maintaining its strategic nuclear retaliatory capability.

Our study presents a specific proposal for reaching a pragmatic mutual accommodation that safeguards Russia's fundamental interest in maintaining its strategic nuclear deterrent, while facilitating the U.S. initiative for limited NMD. The key to this mutual accommodation is U.S. willingness to commit in concrete ways to limiting its NMD capabilities, and Russian acceptance of U.S. limited NMD requirements and the potential need to modify or replace the ABM Treaty.

There is no necessary inconsistency between limited NMD capabilities and the preservation of mutual nuclear deterrence. Limited NMD designed to defend against "a few dozen warheads" (as former Secretary of Defense Perry stated) need not undermine the U.S.-Russian strategic deterrence relationship even at strategic offensive force levels below START II. This compatibility of limited NMD with mutual deterrence was outlined in 1969 by Harold Brown, who subsequently served as President Carter's Secretary of Defense. At a time when the two sides had fewer than 1700 strategic missile warheads,² about half of the START II ceiling, Dr. Brown proposed that the U.S. deploy "several hundred" NMD interceptors to deal with "third-country attacks" without upsetting the U.S.-Soviet deterrence balance.³

The mutual accommodation we identify in our study is based on striking this balance between limited NMD capabilities and continued mutual deterrence. The study suggests that such a balance could be based on a new strategic arms control framework that integrates offensive and defensive forces. In principle, an agreement could specify, for example, a single ceiling for offensive and defensive missiles, with each side having the prerogative of choosing its specific balance between offense and defense, i.e., a limited "freedom to mix." The goal of this arms control framework would be to ensure that the limitations on offensive and defensive forces would combine to help protect each side's strategic retaliatory capabilities. Greater leeway for limited NMD, for example, would be complemented by restrictions on those offensive forces capable of threatening retaliatory forces, i.e., "counterforce systems" such as large MIRVed ICBMs. This new offensive-defensive arms control framework would supersede the ABM Treaty-although restrictions on NMD clearly would remain. It is important to note here that this proposal is radical in form but not in substance. For decades the goal of U.S. strategic arms control policy has been to limit NMD and "counterforce" offensive systems so as to help preserve the survivability of strategic retaliatory forces. In the past, we severely limited NMD, but found it very difficult to gain Soviet agreement to offensive counterforce limitations. The mutual accommodation suggested here pursues the same objective of protecting retaliatory capabilities, while making room for limited NMD.

I also would like to note that my preference, and the preference of each contributor to this study, is that the United States and Russia move away from a strategic deterrence relationship based ultimately on mutual offensive nuclear threats, i.e., "mutual assured destruction" or MAD. We are not satisfied with our outline for mutual accommodation that essentially revises MAD only to allow for limited NMD protection against rogue missiles. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the condition necessary for moving away from MAD is a level of political amity that does not yet exist. We are reduced to the hope that the mutual accommodation we outline can serve as a step toward the political relationship that ultimately will allow us to abandon MAD.

In our study we did not attempt to suggest the specific type of limited NMD the United States should pursue or the specific types of limitations to be placed on either offensive or defensive forces under this new arms control framework. The important details can be determined and negotiated only after the United States identifies the absolute level of limited NMD it deems necessary to address existing and anticipated third-party missile threats, and after Russia determines the type of strategic deterrent it requires. These are two key factors that must be balanced if mutual accommodation is to be possible and they would drive the specific character of a new arms control regime. The "good news" here is that both U.S. NMD objectives and Russian strategic nuclear force goals appear to be sufficiently limited to allow for mutual accommodation. I would like to conclude with two final points. First, the study points to a potential roadblock to mutual accommodation, even if Russia and the United States are so inclined. That roadblock is ABM Treaty "multilateralization." The Clinton Administration has expressed its commitment to recognize multiple new countries in addition to Russia as legitimate successors to the Treaty. These additional successor states reportedly are, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Our concern is that any negotiations to revise the Treaty can only be complicated, slowed, and perhaps rendered impossible by the introduction of multiple new agendas and interests.

Finally, I have had the opportunity to read the Senate's S-7, the National Missile Defense Act of 1997, and am encouraged to see that it is entirely compatible with the path toward mutual accommodation outlined in our study. In fact, it confirms the important points that: 1) the U.S. NMD goal is for the capability to protect against limited missile threats-it is not "anti-Russian"; 2) the expressed desire in Sec. 6 (a) of S-7 is for a cooperative, negotiated approach to ABM Treaty revision, not unilateral Treaty withdrawal; however, (3) there is some prospect for unilateral U.S. movement if a good faith cooperative approach does not bear fruit. For reasons already discussed, each one of these points will be important if we are to pursue the pragmatic mutual accommodation presented in our study.

Thank you.

1Remarks by Secretary of Defense William Perry at the Regional Commerce and Growth Association of St. Louis, Missouri, September 28, 1995; Federal News Service Transcript, DIALOG File 660, item 00165224.

2Robert Norris and Thomas Cochran, US-USSR/Russian Strategic Offensive Nuclear Forces, 1945-1996 (Washington, D.C.: Natural Resources Defense Council, January 1997), table 10.

3Harold Brown, "Security through Limitations," Foreign Affairs, Vol 47, No. 3 (April 1969), p. 430.

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3031 Javier Road, Suite 300 ¥ Fairfax, Virginia 22031 ¥ (703) 698-0563