

**The United States Senate
Committee on Foreign Relations**

Hearing On:
U.S. Strategic and Arms Control Objectives

Testimony By:

Dr. Keith B. Payne

President, National Institute for Public Policy
Faculty, Georgetown University
School of Foreign Service
National Security Studies Program

May 5, 1999

Prepared Statement

Dr. Keith B. Payne

**President, National Institute for Public Policy
Faculty, Georgetown University
School of Foreign Service
National Security Studies Program**

Introduction

It is a great honor to address here two questions crucial to consideration of national missile defense (NMD): First, how valid is the arms control theory underlying the 1972 ABM Treaty?; and, second, is the mutual vulnerability approach to deterrence in the U.S. national interest?

The ABM Treaty was built on particular arms control and deterrence theories. It now is clear that those theories were thoroughly mistaken. Many are reluctant to acknowledge these flaws, perhaps because so much political and intellectual capital has been invested in the ABM Treaty. But we should cease being influenced by theories that have so little validity.

The ABM Treaty and Arms Control Theory

The ABM Treaty, for example, was ratified on the premise that strictly limiting NMD would lead to “stabilizing” offensive force reductions. Arms control theory at the time posited that if NMD was limited, reductions in Soviet ICBMs would be forthcoming because the Soviet Union would not need to penetrate U.S. defenses and therefore could agree to reductions. In short, the theory was: no ABM Treaty, no offensive force limitations; with the ABM Treaty, “stabilizing” offensive force reductions.

While seeking the Senate’s advice and consent for the ABM Treaty, Nixon administration officials were specific about this expected benefit of limiting NMD; indeed, it became the primary justification for the treaty. For example, in 1972 Henry Kissinger testified before the Senate that, “As long as [the ABM Treaty] lasts, offensive missile forces have, in effect, a free ride to their targets.”¹

¹ *Military Implication of the Treaty on the Limitations of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and the Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Forces, United States Senate, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D. C.: U.S. GPO, 1972), p. 121.*

This “free ride” for Soviet missiles was considered useful as the necessary basis for negotiating offensive arms reductions. Unfortunately, the expected benefit never was realized; in fact, history unfolded in the opposite direction.

For the two decades following the ABM Treaty, the Soviet Union pursued a massive buildup of “destabilizing” ICBMs capable of threatening U.S. strategic deterrent forces. To be specific, the number of such deployed Soviet ICBMs increased from 308 in 1972 to over 650 sixteen years later, with a related increase in the number of Soviet countersilo warheads from roughly 300 to well over 5,000.² As a result, U.S. ICBMs became vulnerable to a Soviet pre-emptive strike. The “Scowcroft Commission,” for example, judged U.S. ICBM silos to be vulnerable by 1983 as a result of this Soviet offensive buildup: “The Soviets nevertheless now probably possess the necessary combination of ICBM numbers, reliability, accuracy, and warhead yield to destroy almost all of the 1,047 U.S. ICBM silos, using only a portion of their own ICBM force.”³

This Soviet buildup was precisely what arms control theory predicted the ABM Treaty would preclude; it was entirely contrary to the confident expectations that justified the treaty. Such a confounding of expectations was predicted at the time by very few prescient critics of the ABM Treaty.⁴

Other related arms control claims for the ABM Treaty similarly went unrealized. For example, during Senate hearings in 1972 senior officials claimed that the treaty reflected Soviet acceptance of the U.S. concept of mutual deterrence through mutual vulnerability. As Secretary of State William Rogers stated before the Senate: “This [ABM Treaty] is a general undertaking of utmost significance. Without a nationwide ABM defense, there can be no shield against retaliation. Both nuclear powers have recognized, and in effect agreed to maintain nuclear deterrence.”⁵ The validity of this claim was critical for the

² These statistics concerning Soviet strategic weapons are found in John Collins and Bernard Victory, *U.S./Soviet Military Balance, Statistical Trends, 1980-1987*, Report No. 88-425 S (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 15, 1988); and John Collins and Patrick Cronin, *U.S./Soviet Military Balance, Assessments and Statistics*, Report No. 85-89 S (Washington, D. C.: Congressional Research Service, Spring 1985).

³ See *Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces* (the Scowcroft Report) (Washington, D. C.: April 6, 1983), p. 4.

⁴ Several participants in the SALT I process were accurate in their relatively pessimistic estimates of what would occur over the next fifteen years. See, for example, William Van Cleave's testimony in *Military Implications*, pp. 569-92. See also, Don Brennan, “When the SALT Hit the Fan,” *National Review*, June 1972, pp. 685-92; and Mark Schneider, “Problems of SALT: 1972,” *Survive*, July/August 1972, pp. 2-6.

⁵ Secretary of State William Rogers, Statement to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 19, 1972, quoted in, *SALT I Reconsidered* (Washington, D. C.: Institute of American Relations, 1979), p. 99.

ABM Treaty because it meant that neither side would seek to upset the supposed deterrence balance established by the treaty.

Former senior Soviet officials, however, have since explained repeatedly and at length that the ABM Treaty did not reflect Soviet acceptance of U.S. notions of deterrence and mutual vulnerability. Far from it. For the Soviet Union, the ABM Treaty represented a tactical move to derail U.S. superiority in missile defense technology and to permit the Soviet Union to concentrate its resources on its strategic offensive buildup.⁶ In complete contradiction to arms control theory, the ABM Treaty appears to have facilitated the Soviet offensive missile buildup of the 1970s and 1980s.

The optimistic expectations used to justify the ABM Treaty went unmet, I believe, because U.S. arms control theory ultimately was based on “mirror-imaging”; it mistakenly attributed U.S. goals and hopes to the Soviet Union.

Ironically, when Boris Yeltsin finally endorsed START offensive reductions in 1992, he simultaneously proposed U.S.-Russian cooperation on a global ballistic missile defense system. That is, President Yeltsin proposed that offensive reductions and missile defense move forward together. And, even now, key members of the Duma advocate cooperating with Washington on limited NMD deployment as the route necessary to preserve the START process.⁷ With twenty-seven years of hindsight, it now is possible to conclude, based on abundant empirical evidence, that the arms control theory underlying the ABM Treaty was mistaken at its foundation.

The ABM Treaty and Deterrence Theory

The deterrence theory underlying the ABM Treaty is similarly mistaken. The deterrence argument justifying the treaty in 1972 was that mutual deterrence would provide reliable protection against missile attack, while missile defense would undermine deterrence and not protect adequately. Therefore, so the argument concluded, the U.S. should focus on mutual deterrence as the preferred alternative to NMD.

This line of reasoning was prevalent during the original Senate ABM Treaty hearings and remains a commonly-expressed view. Unfortunately, it reflects a complete lack of familiarity with almost two decades of scholarly

⁶ See, for example, the discussion in, William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 71, 436.

⁷ See, “Duma Member Alexei Arbatov on Joint NMD,” *Russian Arms Control Digest*, No. 36 (April 13, 1999). See also, “Duma Advisors Advocate Russian Accommodation on ABM Treaty to Preserve Some NMD Limits and START Process,” *Russian Arms Control Digest*, No. 39 (April 26, 1999).

research concerning deterrence. I can summarize those findings in one sentence: deterrence is inherently unreliable for reasons that cannot humanly be “fixed.”

Many U.S. officials and commentators continue to assert otherwise. They typically express the notion that the absence of a Third World War proves that deterrence can be made reliable. For example, in 1995, then-Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Joseph Nye said that “if deterrence prevented 10,000 Soviet missiles from reaching the United States, it baffles me as to why it wouldn’t prevent 20 Chinese missiles from reaching Alaska.”⁸

Then-Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Jan Lodal made the same point in even more definitive terms: “Nuclear deterrence worked throughout the Cold War, it continues to work now, it will work into the future... The exact same kinds of nuclear deterrence calculations that have always worked will continue to work.”⁹

When discussing U.S. nuclear weapons then-Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch stated in congressional testimony that, “Deterrence is *ensured* by having a survivable capability to hold at risk what potentially hostile leaders value, and we will maintain that capability.”¹⁰

Perhaps it is enough to note in response to such statements that confidence in deterrence became popular during the decades of peace following the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. That confidence came to a quick end with the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914.

I have closely examined numerous actual historical cases of deterrence and coercion occurring over the course of many centuries.¹¹ My findings, and those of similar empirical studies, are that deterrence fails with some frequency because flesh and blood leaders do not consistently behave in the manner required by deterrence theory. Unlike the leaders typically assumed in theory, real leaders can be uninformed and misinformed, isolated and out-of-touch; they can make terrible mistakes, behave willfully, foolishly, emotionally, unpredictably, unreasonably, and even irrationally. They may not prefer conflict, but see no acceptable alternative; or, they may have goals for which they are willing to lead their societies into great wartime sacrifice and enormous risk.

⁸ “Word for Word,” *Defense News*, October 23-29, p. 26.

⁹ Jan Lodal and Ashton Carter, News Conference Transcript, July 31, 1995. (mimeo).

¹⁰ Testimony in U.S. House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *U.S. Nuclear Policy: Hearings*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1995), p. 36 (emphasis added).

¹¹ Some of this work is summarized in, Keith B. Payne, *Deterrence In The Second Nuclear Age* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

Unfortunately, there are no earthly developments that can reliably prevent these very human factors from undermining deterrence, and we should recognize this danger. We were, for example, very fortunate to have made it through the Cold War—a conclusion now shared by former U.S. officials who were involved in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and have had the opportunity to compare notes with their Cuban and Russian counterparts.

The finding that a strategy of deterrence is inherently unreliable does not mean that deterrence is useless. Far from it. But it does suggest strongly that to choose to remain vulnerable to countries such as North Korea, on the basis of confidence in deterrence, would be to thoroughly misunderstand what deterrence can and cannot accomplish.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ABM Treaty was built on arms control and deterrence theories that now can be demonstrated empirically to be mistaken. The ABM Treaty did not facilitate the promised offensive force reductions and, contrary to all comforting assurances, deterrence is inherently unreliable; its functioning cannot be “ensured” or even predicted with any confidence. Serious empirical research on the subject allows no other conclusion. In light of the pace of missile proliferation, this fact alone argues strongly for NMD deployment if the necessary technology is available.