

“The Impact of National Missile Defense on Nonproliferation Regimes”

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ABSTRACT

The current US debate over national missile defense (NMD) has centered primarily on the likely impact of deployment on Russia's and China's strategic nuclear arsenals and the implications for US-Russian arms control treaties, particularly START I and II and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. This article looks at a key point often overlooked in the NMD debate: the possible impact of NMD deployment on nonproliferation regimes and norms. It argues that the integrity and long-term viability of nonproliferation regimes could have a much greater impact on the future of US security than the initial military response of Russia and China.

This article first explores the nature of forecasting in the US NMD debate and shows how all three major positions in this debate tend to analyze deployment in static terms. It then considers the perspectives of some of the 182 non-nuclear weapon states parties to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Unlike China and Russia, these states have no reason to fear NMD in terms of the effectiveness of their nuclear arsenals, and yet the vast majority opposes it. The article examines how their opposition to NMD deployment and possible behavioral changes might affect the long-term viability of existing nonproliferation regimes and, in turn, the international security environment.

Finally, the article proposes an alternative approach to combating missile proliferation by combining treaty-compliant military means and enhanced nonproliferation measures. By using regime-based incentives to stop emerging missile threats at their source rather than deploying NMD, the United States could create a stronger international security community, build respect for its leadership, and provide new venues for international cooperation against potential states of concern.