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Trends. Missile Defense Legislation: Script Analysis and the Real Issue

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As the missile of independent prosecutor's Kenneth Starr's report on President Clinton's real and alleged misbehavior(s) landed in Washington, D.C. and formally launched events that may lead to a vote on an impeachment inquiry and impeachment itself, the United States (U.S.) Senate came one vote shy of ending a filibuster related to blocking legislation that would require establishing a national defense against long-range missiles as soon as the technology becomes available.

Supporters of the legislation have woven a script with cognitive threads of foreign missile attacks being more likely with less warning, of virtually any system and technology being better than no system, of the legislation's opponents being inadequately security-conscious, of the U.S. intelligence community being undependable in matters of threat warnings, and of their (the supporters') roles as saviors. The script's finale is that successfully opposing the legislation undermines security.

Opponents of the legislation have woven a script with cognitive threads of defense system being founded on antiquated technology that would operationally fail or be of limited use against renegades and terrorists, of the defense system violating existing international weapons treaties--especially the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, of a resultant scenario leading to the greater proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, of exorbitant cost undermining U.S. economic strength, and of their (the opponents') roles as saviors. The script's finale is that successfully supporting the legislation undermines security.

Thus, politicians with access to the same data have arrived at very different decisions. Too often this is the case in security politics. Concerns for the next election, domestic and partisan politics, corruption, collusion, and intelligence--i.e., as in intelligence quotient (I.Q.)--shortfalls or learning disorders may be only part of the problem. A less-mentioned, but significant contributor is a primitive script woven by cognitive threads of that which is horribly threatening to the very sense of self and of that which may be of equal horror and must conquer threat or at least survive it. This script may serve as a template for all others, yet is rarely read by its possessors and acknowledged by them even as it is acted out. In international security conflicts, the mother of all scripts does not feature missile attacks and missile defenses but the figurative struggle of life against death by competing selves. (See Baltes, M.M., & Wahl, H-W. (1996). Patterns of communication in old age: The dependence-support and independence-ignore script. *Health Communication*, 8, 217-231; Demorest, A.P. (1995). The personal script as a unit of analysis for the study of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 63, 569-592; Lee, D.A. (1997). Frame conflicts and competing construals in family argument. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 27, 339-360; Loria, B.R. (1995). Structure determinism and script analysis: A bringing forth of alternative realities. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 25, 156-168; Schmitt, E. (September 10, 1998). G.O.P. missile defense bill loses by one vote. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Bill Clinton, Impeachment, Kenneth Starr, Legislation, Missile Defense.)