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Trends. Defending Positions on Missile Defense: A Case of Negative Transference?

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The United States Government (USG) seems to be ready to go ahead with a national missile defense system against attacks by so-called rogue nation-states, terrorist groups, and other non-state actors. This readiness has met with much opposition.

Some opponents argue that the "go ahead" will mean the death of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and that this death will have negative consequences for USG security and for the rest of the world as well. Support for this position is based on the following: (1) The ABM Treaty is the linchpin of all nuclear weapons limitation and reduction agreements. As the treaty goes, so do the other agreements. However, there is no necessary linkage between the one and the others. This is especially the case for Russia, which will retain the capability to overwhelm the system proposed by the USG. (2) Once a treaty is signed, it becomes immutable. Changing it renders all agreements of the changer as suspect. The changer-here the USG-will lose the tool of formal agreement from its security armamentarium. However, virtually all agreements have conditions under which such agreements can be modified. Even if they don't, the notion that agreements truly should be immutable even in the face of technological and political change impinging on security threat would seem to be a greater threat to any political entity than changing an agreement based on technological and political change.

Other opponents argue that the USG position is largely a maneuver to influence the upcoming US presidential elections. This political ploy cheapens the nature of USG agreements and leads us back to the reasoning in (2) above. Still other opponents argue that the USG position is not based on adequate technical data to support such a position. However, this argument would become moot if such technical data would exist now or in the future.

The four main arguments against the USG position can be refuted, but their staying power remains. Could it be that in a world with only one superpower-"hyperpower" to some-there is a psychological dynamic to malign that superpower's security needs? That a motive to "pull down" the political entity on the top of the security heap takes precedence over the actual security consequences worldwide? Or a conservative penchant to be change-averse-bordering on the superstitious-precludes new thinking in new situations? Or merely a "business as usual" perspective that will only most grudgingly support or step out of the way of a legitimate policy initiative for a political payoff? Regardless, the USG position on its defense seems to be eliciting defensiveness in others-a defensiveness mimicking a negative transference, a defensiveness that the USG will not need much defense to counter. (See Beckler, E. (November 6, 1999). U.S. pushes missile defense despite allies' opposition. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Castelnuovo-Tedesco, P. (1986). Fear of change as a source of resistance in analysis. *Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 14, 259-272; Chertoff, J.M. (1989). Negative oedipal transference of a male patient to his female analyst during the termination phase. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 37, 687-713; Honig, A.M. (1960). Negative transference in psychosis. *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review*, 47, 105-114; Weiler, M.A. (1987). Interpretation of negative transference in nonanalytic settings. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 17, 223-236.)