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Title: The Offenses of Missile Defense System Failure  
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Abstract. This article describes the political psychology of analyses of a recent United States testing failure of components of a limited ballistic missile defense system.

Public affairs representatives of the United States (US) Department of Defense have announced that the first test of a fully integrated system of radars, sensors, and an interceptor rocket failed to hit a target missile carrying a dummy warhead. Analyses of the announcement focus on two main subjects.

The first subject embraces the "hard" topics of technology, cost, and time. Is even a limited ballistic missile defense system to ward off attack from limited ballistic missile offenses technologically possible? If so, is it feasible within constraints of cost and time? One might posit that if the past is the best predictor of the future, technological possibility and cost and time feasibility are remote. Yet, there are many pasts. Often enough, innovation and discovery break free of one past to create a future that becomes a new past. How much cost and time should be allowed to hedge bets or bet on the creation of a new past? This question falls within the realm of "soft" topics.

"Soft" topics include the psychopolitical consequences of developing and fielding a limited ballistic missile defense system with intent to employ it for various contingencies. Would "usual suspects" such as North Korea be deterred from attacking the US? From developing what could be employed to attack the US? Would the "usual suspects" be incited to strike before the system was operational or to strike an operational system? Would the "usual suspects" already have won by inducing significant US expenditures for developing, fielding, and maintaining a system that--depending on future threat--might be no more than a "white elephant"? Would "unusual suspects" appear on the scene?

Another set of possible consequences revolves around the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty. First, would the concurrent breaking or modifying of the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty support, detract from, or have no effect on the "word" of the US for other treaties it has entered into and for other treaties it seeks to effect? Second, some US supporters of the system argue that the 1972 Treaty was meant to proscribe building defensive weapons--otherwise an adversary might feel compelled to build an offensive capability to overwhelm them. But since the current missile defense system in question is intended to thwart limited missile offenses, one might posit that the 1972 Treaty is moot. Yet there are counters to this functional analysis--leading to diverse causal attributions from the developing and fielding of a limited missile defense system. The counters include putative effects all previous, present, and future arms limitation, reduction, and nonproliferation efforts. Third, President Jacque Chirac of France argues that questioning the worth of the Treaty--let alone leaving it--could lead to a disruption of strategic equilibrium and a new arms race. Yet, he does not mention that staying in place also could lead to the same consequences.

Thus, it is quite difficult to delineate the offense of ballistic missile defense system failure. There's the offense to expected or desired technical capabilities. There's the offense to expected or desired deterrent consequences of system success or failure. There's even the offense as opposed to defense perceived by an ally, neutral, or adversary inherent to a defensive system. And there's the offense that