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Trends. Are the Bush Missile Defense Guidelines Defensible?

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United States (US) Presidential candidate George W. Bush recently provided some guidelines on the viability and nature of an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense for the United States during a speech at the National Press Club. Public discourse on these guidelines seems to be focused on single Issues like Bush's druthers for a defense system more comprehensive (in range and architecture) than that of US President Clinton, for a draw-down on US nuclear weapons towards a figure compatible with a successfully negotiated and ratified Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty III, for unilaterally taking various US nuclear assets off of alert status, and for abrogating or going beyond the ABM treaty.

This public discourse is wanting in three respects. First, a concurrent internal assessment of all the guidelines seems to be largely ignored--especially as to potential escapes from or inconsistencies of logic. Second, a concurrent external assessment of all the guidelines seems to be largely ignored as well--especially as to the derivative and interactive consequences for other significant political actors such as Russia, the People's Republic of China, and various rogue nation-states and non-state political actors. Third, the necessary assessment of the interactions of internal and external cannot be effected until the first two inadequacies are dealt with.

When guidelines develop into policy and programs supporting deterrence, non-proliferation, other strategic goals, and--if necessary--system employment, the three wanting elements of discourse must be seriously addressed. At this point a defense becomes defensible. (See Berkowitz, N. H., Hylander, L., Bakaitis, R. (1973). Defense, vulnerability, and cooperation in a mixed-motive game. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 25, 401-407; Excerpts from Bush's remarks on national security and arms policy. (May 24, 2000). *The New York Times*, p. A19; Lebow, R. N., & Stein, J. G. (1987). Beyond deterrence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 43, 5-71; Ramirez, J. R. (1982). Echein: The built-in problem in the psychology of vehicle driving, arms possession and nuclear capability. *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 3, 86-102; Wessells, M.G. (1995). Social-psychological determinants of nuclear proliferation: A dual-process analysis. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 1, 49-65.) (Keywords: George W. Bush, Missile Defense, Public Discourse.)