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## Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Systems and Rhetorical Madness

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**Abstract.** This article describes examples of political rhetoric on anti-ballistic missile defense systems from the two main presidential candidates in the United States. These examples may be undone by their consequential implications for military and politico-military deterrence and the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons even as they may garner success as campaign attack vehicles.

Many analysts have voiced surprise that anti-ballistic missile defense has become a significant Issue of the 2000 United States (US) presidential campaign. A common explanation for this Issue's rise is that it allows the presumptive Republican candidate, George W. Bush, to demonstrate that he has "made up" any and all of his putative deficiencies in the understanding of international security matters. Another explanation is that it serves the purposes of the presumptive Democratic candidate, Al Gore, who professes to already have a mastery of such matters. However, it is the esoteric and complex nature of anti-ballistic missile defense--with accompanying convoluted and/or unsubstantiated argumentation--that allows each candidate to attempt to seize the time.

One example is Mr. Bush's advocacy of unilaterally drawing down nuclear warheads beyond some level that would be agreed on bilaterally by the Russians. Mr. Gore claims that this is irresponsible as if the numbers of warheads between the US and Russia have to be at least roughly equivalent. Mr. Gore also claims that unilaterally drawing down warheads is equivalent to not having a priori judged what the implications would be if Russia didn't at some point follow the US lead. Other commentators have pointed out that the whole notion of what would be considered an appropriate drawdown must be evaluated in the context of (1) all nation-states and non-state political actors who possess or are working to develop or possess nuclear weapons and (2) whatever missile defense capabilities may be extant at the time of the drawdown and for some specified time after--and that unilaterally drawing down warheads does not suggest such an evaluation has occurred. Mr. Bush, of course, has countered that his suggestion of a unilateral drawdown would only be effected after his military advisors had completed such a comprehensive evaluation. This counter suggests that his suggestion of a unilateral drawdown may only be a suggestion and may not survive the close scrutiny of a comprehensive evaluation. Amidst the slings and arrows of political campaign attack, the consequences of effected policy seem to remain unknown.

Another example concerns the putative deterrent and anti-proliferation consequences of announcing the intent to deploy and then of moving to deploy an anti-ballistic missile defense. Mr. Gore asserts that a limited missile defense is intended to prevent a successful nuclear attack from rogue states and non-state political actors with very limited nuclear assets. He asserts that the defense's limited nature should not concern Russia, which can easily overwhelm such a defense. He asserts that although the People's Republic of China (PRC) could not overwhelm such a defense, the PRC should not worry because there is no intent to employ the defense against it. This last assertion--if it is to be believed--suggests that the PRC would then have a "free ride" to launch a nuclear attack against the US without fear of the defense if the PRC was willing to attempt to ride out subsequent US counterattacks. The same assertion also suggests that if the US were to launch first against the PRC, the US would do so with the understanding that the US would not use its defense against the PRC nuclear response.

Some of the surreal--if not absurd--suppositions stemming from Mr. Gore's position are rivaled by at least a few from Mr. Bush. Mr. Bush advocates the deployment of a much more comprehensive defense system. The good news--according to Mr. Bush--is that the defense can be shared with US allies. The bad news--according to many analysts of Mr. Bush's position--is that such a defense would almost certainly precipitate a new nuclear arms race. In other words, a Clintonian-Gore attempt to deal with the threat against an accidental launch or against the intentional and limited launch of rogue states and non-state political actors (through proliferation) leads to the development of a defense system that leaves current nuclear powers the choice of losing the political and military potency of nuclear assets or maintaining this potency by increasing the number and sophistication of weapons. Mr. Bush claims that potential US adversaries--e.g., Russia and the PRC--would not build up weapons reactive to the defense because the defense is only intended against those who might launch a nuclear attack against the US. If Russia and the PRC do not have this intent, then there is then no problem. Mr. Bush sometimes counters that some political entities--e.g., the PRC--are and would have built up nuclear assets in any case. However, this counter does not address how a US comprehensive defense deters such a build-up or how it does not incite an escalation into the build-up. (In much of the above, looking at the vagaries of US intent from the perspective of Russia and the PRC is largely ignored. This intent may be grossly influenced by US acts such as not ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, not supporting an international court of criminal justice for fear of being hauled before the dock, and seeking to stretch to the breaking point, if not break outright, the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.)

Both Mr. Gore and Mr. Bush are attempting to address novel features of the 21st century that impinge upon the necessity for an anti-ballistic missile defense. One novel feature may be that some political entities with nuclear weapons may not be considered rational by US security policymaker standards--thus mitigating against a mutually assured destruction (MAD) deterrent effect. There are at least two problems with this concern. One is that the US and Russia may be the only entities wherein MAD applies from a nuclear perspective. Other entities should, then, be dedicated to playing catch-up by any means necessary--which certainly would include methods that will not be defended against by any missile defense. The second problem is that suppositions on which policy is developed and which stem from policy are not testable by the canons of the scientific method nor by the various notions of the critical turn and intersubjectivity that form the essence of so-called postmodern and next-modern approaches to epistemology. Unfortunately, Mr. Gore and Mr. Bush are left in a mad world wherein MAD does not seem mad enough. (See Bonaiuto, M., & Fasulo, A. (1997). Rhetorical intentionality attribution: Its ontogenesis in ordinary conversation. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 36, 511-536; Defenses of anti-ballistic missile defenses. (December 10, 1999). *IBPP*, 7(21); Gordon, M.R., & Myers, S.L. (May 28, 2000). Risk of arms race seen in U.S. design of missile defense. *The New York Times*, p. A1, A6; Hartog, D.N.D., & Verburg, R.M. (1997). Charisma and rhetoric: Communicative techniques of international business leaders. *Leadership Quarterly*, 8, 355-391; Seelye, K.Q. (May 28, 2000). Bush's statements on missile defense criticized by Gore. *The New York Times*, p. A1, A18; Zompetti, J.P. (1997). Toward a Gramscian critical rhetoric. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61, 66-86.) (Keywords: Ballistic Missile Defense, Bush, Gore, MAD.)