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# Trends. Defense Mechanisms on Defense: A Perle of Wisdom or a Brilliant Pebble

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The latest United States (US) test of components of a limited anti-ballistic missile defense system proved to be a technological failure. In fact, because of a failure in already well-tested technology, technology needing much testing never had its chance to be evaluated. A reasonable observer might then assume that--above and beyond the many arguments about ultimate technological, cost, domestic political, strategic balance, and proliferation concerns--we are at least no closer to a deployed limited system than before the latest test.

However, former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, Richard Perle, has written that now a "far more effective defense is greatly increased." This defense is based on boost phase technology--i.e., the interception of missiles early in their flight--via sea-based assets and space-based lasers and other devices. What is not clear is how a failure of a limited defense based on ground-based interceptors inexorably suggests the probability of less failure for a comprehensive defense based on sea-based and space-based assets.

The subtext of this seeming lack of logic does provide clarity. Mr. Perle is a political advocate for a comprehensive, not a limited system and for breaking, not modifying the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The latest test failure is merely being included into a narrative to support these political positions. The very valid technological, cost, domestic political, strategic balance, and proliferation concerns continue to be finessed again to serve a political agenda.

In fact, the entire history of attempts at anti-ballistic missile defense seems characterized by socially constructed ideologies that are Procrustean beds for the world rather than ontological havens. This might be the most dangerous aspect of the nuclear world in which we live. (See Fishkin, J., Keniston, K., McKinnon, C. (1973). Moral reasoning and political ideology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, 109-119; Jones, W. H., Nichol, S. S., & Prokop, C. (1977). Self-concept as a function of political ideology and activism. *Psychological Reports*, 40, 1295-1296; Perle, R. (July 13, 2000). A better way to build a missile defense. *The New York Times*, p. A29; Tetlock, P.E. (1983). Cognitive style and political ideology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 118-126; van Hiel, A., Kossowska, M., & Mervielde, I. (2000). The relationship between Openness to Experience and political ideology. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 28, 741-751.) (Keywords: Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, Failure, Missile Defense System.)