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Trends. Of Missile Defense and Defense by Metaphor

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Proponents of a national, regional, or even international ballistic missile defense often buttress their case through metaphor. The most successful metaphor has been the notion of a security umbrella that would ward off missiles like the rain. This metaphor was a cardinal feature of United States (US) President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative and can be noted in more recent public discourse about the Clinton and (George W.) Bush missile defense proposals--even if both seem to feature umbrellas against many fewer missiles. The current US Secretary of Defense has implicitly pushed the notion of a perforated umbrella--i.e., a system that would not completely work. Rhetoricians might be the best sources to provide an opinion to identify at what point a perforated umbrella metaphorically becomes no umbrella at all--and whether there is a rhetorical device through which no umbrella becomes an umbrella and, thusly, a missile defense policy covers all possibilities and becomes impervious not to missiles but to policy attacks.

Now Russian security experts are buttressing their case for not supplanting the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty through a metaphor of the wall. According to these experts, the Treaty is the foundation of dozens of other agreements related to nuclear weapons. Taking one brick out of a wall will lead to the wall tumbling down with incalculable and presumably tragic consequences--the same sorts of consequences that would presumably occur through abrogating or otherwise scrapping the Treaty. Of course, walls can also be jumped over or gotten around or get in the way or merely become obsolete.

Public discourse via metaphor affects and reflects thinking on public issues. This might enrage nuclear weapons experts and informed citizens who, as realists, might assert that all extant missile defense systems are based on "shooting bullets with bullets," not umbrellas, and that related treaties do not form a wall but merely present unknown interstices of vulnerability. However, policy victory and defeat will occur largely through the success and failure of respective metaphors. Is this an unfortunate metaphor for the value of human discourse and, more importantly, human life? (See Kelman, H.C. (1999). Interactive problem solving as a metaphor for international conflict resolution: Lessons for the policy process. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 5, 201-218; Mio, J. S., & Lovrich, N. P. (1998). Men of zeal: Memory for metaphors in the Iran-Contra hearings. *Metaphor & Symbol*, 13, 49-68; Myers, F. (1999). Political argumentation and the composite audience: A case study. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 85, 55-71; Noveck, I. A., Bianco, M., & Castry, A. (2001). The costs and benefits of metaphor. *Metaphor & Symbol*, 16, 109-121; Wines, M. (May 29, 2001). Russia continues to oppose scrapping ABM treaty. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: ABM Treaty, Missile Defense, Russia, United States.)