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# Magic Treaties: Public Discourse on Ballistic Missile Defense

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**Abstract.** This article explores public discourse on the fate of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in the context of developing ballistic missile defenses.

One of the biggest concerns of opponents of United States Government ballistic missile defense initiatives centers on the fate of the 1972 ABM Treaty. Opponents contend that the Treaty must be viewed as one of a number of other treaties, formal agreements, and so on that together constitute the rules of engagement for all activities with strategic import--above and beyond matters directly involving nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Without the Treaty, all bets are off, and there is no longer a framework for the foreign policies of all the players--viz., nation-states, global institutions, and non-state actors.

This contention reifies the essence of a formal treaty and provides it with a magic similar to that possessed by the great forces of Nature defying the understanding of primitive (pace, cultural relativists) hunter-gatherers. Is there really no strategic framework with the violation, abrogation, jettisoning, discounting, or figurative desiccation of a formal treaty?

One might assert that without a formal treaty and, thus, with no framework, various political actors will now be able engage in previously forbidden behavior. The same, however, can apply even with the formal treaty still in play. Covert activity, cover, camouflage, deception, and intelligence shortfalls are some of the culprits in the latter case. The key here is that whether or not there is a formal treaty, there are still operative frameworks that are in some ways almost always incompatible and inconsistent within, between, and among all political actors.

Again, with a formal treaty there will be varying interpretations of the various behavioral constraints--the "frame" of the framework of the treaty. These interpretations will be made in the framework of a political actor's perception of strategic interests. Without a formal treaty, there will still be behavioral constraints differentially constructed from past treaties and agreements and others that are still operative. These constraints also will stem from perceptions of strategic interests. And whether there's a formal treaty or not, frameworks also will be constructed based on ideologies, attitudes, personal constructs, psychodynamic conflicts, and other intrapsychic elements.

In fact, frameworks are intrinsic to human perception. To assume that political actors will be cast cognitively adrift without the ABM treaty or "something to replace it" is to cast adrift human psychology as well. To assume that the framework or frameworks delineated from some formal treaty can be compatibly and consistently shared within, between, and among, and within political actors--saving them from being cast adrift--is also problematic.

One can, then, take a strong stance and assert that opposing ballistic missile defense development based on fears of losing a strategic framework should be opposed for it masks other psychological, economic, technological, and political concerns of significant import (See Ferrell, J. (1999). Cultural criminology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 395-418; Fu, H-Y, Lee, S-L, Chiu, C-Y, & Hong, Y-Y. (1999).

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Setting the frame of mind for social identity. *Intercultural Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23, 199-214; Gordon, M. (July 19, 2001). Pushing agenda for ABM's, Bush prepares to meet Putin. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Murphy, S.P. (2001). "Ida did not go directly anywhere": Symbolic peregrinations, desire, and linearity in Gertrude Stein's *Ida*. *Literature and Psychology*, 47, 1-11; Stephenson, G.M., & Haylett, S.A. (2000). Self narrative framing: The effects of systematic written reflections on personal progression in 12-step facilitation therapy. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 13, 313-319.) (Keywords: ABM Treaty, Ballistic Missile Defense, Framework.)