

## Clinton Won't Authorize Bogus Missile Defense System

by Edward Spannaus

Under growing international and domestic pressure, President Bill Clinton announced on Sept. 1 that he will not authorize deployment of a national missile defense (NMD) system. The President's announcement was welcomed by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, and by the United States' NATO allies, all of whom had warned against the destabilizing effects of a move which would represent an abrogation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Indeed, a unilateral U.S. deployment of an NMD system was opposed by Russia, China, the NATO allies, and by many scientific, political, and military leaders inside the United States.

The system under consideration by the Clinton Administration, had nothing in common with President Ronald Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative, the conception of which was developed by *EIR*'s Founding Editor Lyndon LaRouche, and was centered around the application of "new physical principles" and an offer of technology-sharing made by Reagan to the Soviets.

The original Reagan SDI proposal was derailed by saboteurs inside the Pentagon and within the Reagan-Bush camp, who hijacked Reagan's proposal and turned it into a Cold-War provocation, utilizing off-the-shelf junk technology which was bound to fail.

Rather than a crash program to develop the most advanced technologies, including lasers, the unworkable system promoted in recent years by elements in the Pentagon and the Bush camp, utilized "kinetic energy" systems ("hitting a bullet with a bullet")— which are inherently incapable of providing any effective defense against incoming nuclear missiles.

President Clinton implicitly recognized this in his Sept. 1 speech, when he declared, "I simply cannot conclude, with the information I have today, that we have enough confidence in the technology and operational effectiveness of the entire NMD system to move forward to deployment."

### Strategic Confrontation

Even though it has been clear for months that the tide was turning against a decision to go ahead with the NMD system, it is likely that the final "nail in the coffin" was the near-outbreak of nuclear war which occurred during the 48-hour period after the sinking of a Russian nuclear submarine, the *Kursk*, on Aug. 12 (see "Putin Goes from Elected President to National Hero," *EIR*, Sept. 1, 2000). According to various accounts, that situation of near-nuclear confrontation was defused by direct contracts between Presidents Clinton and Putin, as well as by communications between Russian and U.S. military officials.

If Clinton still had any doubts in his mind, the events around the *Kursk* incident would have convinced him of the folly of throwing another match into the strategic tinderbox.

President Clinton was initially opposed to the very NMD plan which he later appeared to advocate. As a number of observers have pointed out, the Administration's shift was a Dick Morris-style "triangulation" maneuver, designed to protect Al Gore from Republican criticisms of being "soft on defense."

Clinton had initially hoped to be able to negotiate an agreement with then-President Boris Yeltsin, whereby Russia would agree to a modification of the ABM Treaty, in exchange for concessions around the START III strategic arms limitations talks involving the number of nuclear weapons each side would be permitted to retain.

But Putin, who succeeded Yeltsin at the beginning of this year, declined to seriously consider any changes in the ABM Treaty. Going into the June summit meeting between Putin and Clinton, the Administration was hopeful that some agreement on the ABM Treaty could be reached, but Putin reportedly refused any serious discussion of the matter, and Russian spokesmen warned that any abrogation of the ABM Treaty,

which they termed “the cornerstone of strategic stability,” would have serious and destabilizing consequences.

Then came the June 13-14 Inter-Korea Summit, which undermined the idea being peddled by some Republicans in Congress and elsewhere, that North Korea was planning to launch a nuclear missile attack on the United States.

The “rogue state” justification was always a fraud (as if any smaller state with a couple of nuclear warheads is going to lob a nuclear missile at the United States with its thousands of nuclear missiles), and it was rightly denounced as such by both Russia and China, who saw the proposed NMD system as an effort to deny them their own deterrent capability. In other words, a U.S. NMD system—if it worked—would potentially give the United States the capability to launch a nuclear first-strike, and to block a retaliatory second strike.

The ABM Treaty was intended to maintain the strategic balance between the United States and the then-Soviet Union; as flawed as the ABM Treaty was, the effort to unilaterally abrogate the treaty under current strategic circumstances, is even worse.

## Growing U.S. Opposition

In mid-June, a bipartisan group of former diplomats, military officials, and defense specialists made public a letter they had sent to President Clinton, urging him to defer the NMD decision, due to unresolved issues concerning “costs, technology, and security and foreign policy implications.” The group included former Clinton Administration Defense Secretary William Perry, and the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. John Shalikashvili.

Shortly after that, it was disclosed that a Pentagon review panel of 12 experts, led by former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Larry D. Welch, had raised questions about the feasibility of deploying an NMD system by 2005. The report cited problems with the interceptor booster rocket, the ability of the interceptor to discriminate between a real warhead and decoys, and the five-year timetable for the construction of a working system.

And in July, came a rather spectacular failure of a missile interception test over the Pacific Ocean—the second failure in three tries.

The July test failure emboldened critics of the NMD plan, and also undermined its support within the Administration and among Clinton’s top advisers. *EIR* was told in July that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not regard the current plan as viable. By late summer, Defense Secretary William Cohen was reportedly the only advocate of the plan in Clinton’s top circle of advisers.

A week after the July test failure, three Senate Republicans joined all the Senate Democrats in voting for a measure which would have required more stringent testing of the proposed NMD system, and therefore a significant delay of the program. The amendment, offered by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), would have required the Pentagon to test the system

against all possible countermeasures, including warheads surrounded by decoys. The measure failed, on a 52-48 vote.

Durbin said that Republicans “ran like scalded cats” when faced with the possibility of a realistic test of the system. “They are afraid to admit that their multibillion-dollar theory may not work,” he said. At the same time, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and other leading Senate Democrats called upon President Clinton to defer any decision on building an NMD system to his successor.

## Russian, Chinese, and NATO Concerns

In his specially arranged speech at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 1, President Clinton stressed the importance of the various arms control agreements, including the ABM Treaty, which he said had been negotiated by both Republican and Democratic Presidents alike. He termed the ABM Treaty a “key part of the international security structure we have built,” and “therefore, a key part of our national security.”

Clinton acknowledged Russia’s concerns, noting that Russia likely fears that the proposed NMD system, “or some future incarnation of it, could threaten the reliability of its deterrence and, therefore, strategic stability.”

In addition to acknowledging Russia’s concerns, and pledging to work with Russia on strategic defense and arms reduction, the President also said that “another critical diplomatic consideration” was the views of the NATO allies. “They have all made it clear that they hope the United States will pursue strategic defense in a way that preserves, not abrogates, the ABM Treaty.”

And finally, Clinton stated that “we must consider the impact of a decision to deploy on security in Asia,” adding: “As the next President makes a deployment decision, he will need to avoid stimulating an already dangerous regional nuclear capability from China to South Asia”—referring to India and Pakistan.

While the big budget and the attention were going to the NMD system, work has been quietly proceeding on the Pentagon’s laser missile defense program, with a much lower budget. A *Wall Street Journal* feature article on Sept. 5 reported that there have been significant advances in the approaches utilizing new physical principles.

“During the past few years,” the *Journal* reported, “scientists . . . have quietly toppled several of the biggest barriers to a workable laser-weapons system. They pumped up the power of a chemical laser, and they reduced the size of its supporting computer systems as new generations of high-speed semiconductors emerged. Perhaps most important, they turned an astrophysics theory dating back to the 1950s into a tangible system enabling laser beams to maintain their strength while overcoming atmospheric disturbances.”

These breakthroughs suggest that the time is ripe to scrap the bogus NMD schemes of the past decade, and to go back to the original LaRouche-Reagan SDI approach.