
FACT SHEET

PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS ON THE ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILE TREATY AND THEATER BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSES

During the last six months the Clinton Administration has reviewed its policy on U.S. ballistic missile defense requirements and the future of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. One result of this review has been the reaffirmation of U.S. commitment to the Treaty, as evidenced by the Administration's statement last July that the "narrow" or "traditional interpretation of the Treaty is the correct interpretation. At the same time, the Administration has recognized the need to set new priorities. It has decided to refocus significantly the U.S. ballistic missile defense program, assigning the highest priority to the development and deployment of advanced theater missile defenses. The second priority is research and technology development--but not deployment--of national missile defense, oriented toward limited long-range ballistic missile threats that may emerge early in the next century. The third priority is research on advanced follow-on ballistic missile defense technologies, as insurance against possible future threats.

During the Fourth ABM Treaty Review, held in Geneva from September 27 to October 1, 1993, the United States, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine affirmed their commitment to the Treaty and the importance of maintaining its viability in view of political and technological changes. The participants also discussed the issue of state succession, although the United States took no position on succession at that time. Following the Treaty Review, the Administration directed special attention to the ABM Treaty succession issue, and concluded it could agree that former Soviet states could be considered ABM Treaty Parties by succession. The United States has proposed to work out with such states the specifics for multilateral operation of the ABM Treaty.

At the same time, the Administration has been reviewing the Bush Administration's position on substantive modifications to the ABM Treaty. In light of the decision to refocus the U.S. ballistic missile defense program, the Clinton Administration has decided to withdraw all previous U.S. proposals to amend the ABM Treaty provisions to allow a more robust ABM defense against strategic ballistic missiles. This means, for example, that the U.S. will no longer propose to amend the ABM Treaty to

allow five to six ABM system deployment areas (instead of the one deployment area now permitted) or hundreds more ABM interceptor missiles, beyond the 100 ABM interceptor missiles now allows. Nor will the U.S. continue to propose that the Treaty be amended to allow space-based sensors to perform direct ABM battle management functions or otherwise substitute for ABM radars.

However, the United States will seek an agreement among the participants in the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC) to clarify the distinction between theater ballistic missile defenses not limited by the Treaty and strategic ballistic missile defenses limited by the Treaty. The U.S. proposal, if accepted by all Parties, will clarify the capabilities to defend against advanced theater ballistic missiles and should permit our theater ballistic missile defense program to go forward as currently designed.

Chronology

1993

July 13, 1993: Narrow Interpretation of the ABM Treaty Endorsed by the Clinton Administration

On July 13, 1993, Thomas Graham, Jr., Acting Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, provided Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with the Clinton Administration's reaffirmation of the "narrow" or "traditional" interpretation of the ABM Treaty: the ABM Treaty prohibits the development, testing, and deployment of sea-based, air-based, space-based, and mobile land-based ABM systems and components without regard to the technology utilized.

September/October 1992: Fourth Review of the ABM Treaty

The Fourth Review of the ABM Treaty, held between September 27 and October 1 of 1993, reaffirmed the participants' commitment to the ABM Treaty and advocated efforts to strengthen the Treaty.

December 1993: U.S. Decision on ABM Treaty Succession

The Clinton Administration announced its acceptance of multilateralization of the ABM Treaty and directed that negotiations begin on procedures to implement a multilateral succession.

December 1993: U.S. Position on Theater Missile Defense

The Clinton Administration announced its goal to seek a clear, negotiated, demarcation between ABM and non-ABM systems in order to clarify the ABM Treaty provisions.