

THE STRATEGIC CHAMELEON: PERCEPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF US PLANS FOR STRATEGIC MISSILE DEFENCE.

Executive Summary

The six months to April 2001 have seen a plethora of reports on US NMD. Most have been bemused by technical considerations, or unclear as to the implications of US plans. Having hosted informal discussions between the key interested parties (the USA, Russia, China and NATO) for two years, the Oxford Research Group seeks in this report to highlight the security concerns of the Republican Party, to analyse how these fit with the concerns of allies, the concerns and responses of Russia and China and the potential for cooperative approaches to meet these concerns.

1. Elements of a US NMD system.

President Bush has yet to outline his plans for a national missile defence system, but it is likely to include land, sea and possibly air-based components. In the mean time the development of the limited land-based NMD system initiated under President Clinton continues.

2. Why does America want to build national missile defences?

The past decade has seen a steady increase in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology, for building nuclear, chemical or biological bombs, and the ballistic missile technology to deliver them. America increasingly views these developments as a major threat to its security. Loss of confidence in the arms control and non-proliferation regime and cooperative means of resolving international crises have in part led to a shift in US foreign policy away from interdependence and towards unilateralism. National Missile Defence is a symptom of this shift. Domestic politics also play a key role. The Republican Party has been a driving force behind NMD for many years through its majority in Congress. Following the Republican victory in the 2000 Presidential elections, what policies can we expect from the Bush administration?

3. What concerns have been raised?

Three intrinsically linked areas of concern have emerged. The first is that a shift towards unilateralism will lead to a US quest for invulnerability through military supremacy. A second is that unilateralism and NMD will result in a re-militarisation of international relations. The final area of concern is that NMD will lead to the weaponisation of space.

4. Cooperative approaches to addressing missile proliferation.

Several arms control initiatives have been outlined to address and control the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. These generally focus on a restructuring of the current Missile Technology Control Regime to give it a more comprehensive reach.

5. Appendices

Appendix A: The implications for arms control and strategic stability.

Appendix B: Past, current and projected global medium, intermediate and intercontinental ballistic missile inventories.

Acronyms.