

Ex-Clinton Aide Criticizes Missile Plan

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The Bush administration has placed the nation on a "collision course" with Russia and NATO allies by designing a missile defense plan to violate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in a matter of months, former national security adviser Samuel R. "Sandy" Berger said yesterday.

Berger, who was President Clinton's top foreign policy aide from 1997 to 2000, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Bush administration's aggressive timetable for testing and emergency deployment of missile defenses makes negotiating a compromise with the Russians "virtually impossible."

"Indeed, it may be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading almost inevitably to breach or unilateral abrogation which, at the very least, is premature," Berger said. "How can we expect to negotiate modifications of the ABM Treaty or a change in decades of strategic policy with the Russians in a matter of months?"

Congressional Democrats have advanced similar arguments. But Berger's position also drew unanticipated support from Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.), the committee's ranking Republican, who urged the administration to seek amendments to the treaty before any decision is made to abrogate or withdraw from it.

President Bush, Warner said, should try to negotiate a new security framework that leaves "some vestiges of the ABM Treaty in place" because many countries view the treaty as a cornerstone of arms control.

The ABM Treaty was negotiated by Richard M. Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev in 1972 to prohibit nationwide defenses against long-range missiles -- and thereby to curb each side's efforts to build more and more missiles to overwhelm those defenses. It specifically prohibits testing of sea-, air- or space-based defenses against long-range missiles.

Throughout the hearing, Berger clashed with Richard Perle, who was assistant secretary of defense for national security policy during the Reagan administration and now serves as chairman of the Bush administration's Defense Policy Board.

While Berger urged the administration to scale back its missile defense plans to avoid violating the ABM Treaty, Perle said the United States should withdraw from the treaty and pursue whatever defenses are necessary to protect the nation against missile attacks.

"The whole idea of buying some time implies that this treaty is serving our interests, and therefore we should preserve it for as long as we can," Perle said. "I think it's no longer serving our interests. It's contrary to our interests, and the sooner we exercise the right that was agreed upon in 1972 that we can withdraw, the better."

Perle said Russian officials cannot justify objecting to missile defense plans aimed at protecting the United States against countries such as North Korea and Iraq. "And if they can't -- and I believe they can't -- then we

Perle also argued that testing and deployment of effective missile defenses would slow, not accelerate, the proliferation of ballistic missiles by rogue states. "Sandy Berger is saying you can count on [Iraqi President] Saddam [Hussein] to be deterred by our deterrent," Perle said. "And I frankly don't want to count on the rational

While the Berger-Perle debate was unfolding before the Senate panel, on the other side of Capitol Hill, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told the House Armed Services Committee that the administration would not

simply violate or abrogate the ABM Treaty, but would withdraw from it if negotiations with the Russians failed to produce a new agreement.

Wolfowitz said he was optimistic that the administration would be able to negotiate a framework "that reflects the fact that the Cold War is over and the U.S. and Russia are not enemies."

Rep. Bob Stump (R-Ariz.), the committee's chairman, applauded the administration's "aggressive approach" to missile defense, as did other GOP members. But Rep. Ike Skelton (Mo.), the committee's ranking Democrat, accused the administration of shortchanging U.S. troops to pay for missile defense. "It's hard to support a program that says, 'Let's buy everything and throw it against the wall and see what sticks,' " he said.

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