

National Missile Defenses are only one element in the intended “Full Spectrum Dominance”, which the Pentagon has been envisaging (<http://www.dtic.mil/jv2020> for an unclassified version of “Joint Vision 2020”), and Mr Rumsfeld, the newly appointed Secretary for Defense, appears to be endorsing.

Everyone – including the British Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence, and most of the academic strategic community – seems to have forgotten that National (or Area) Missile Defences form part of an “Offensive Posture”: and this fact was the rationale behind the 1972 Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty – not, as currently suggested, “strategic stability” as such.

Area Missile Defences would (in theory) enable you to attack your opponent without fear of his retaliation with ballistic missiles. This means any deployment of NMD will wreck “Mutual Assured Deterrence”, which (despite its acronym, MAD) can be stable as long as neither side can appear tempted – temptable - to attack the other. When the other plausibly fears this, an arms race is triggered - or exacerbated.

The Bush Administration’s declared intention to deploy NMD will be seen as indicating to the world at large that they intend to be able to attack others, while enjoying impunity: the Defense counter-proliferation preparations (which include pre-emptive nuclear capabilities) cited in Joint Vision 2020 unfortunately support this suspicion. (Mr Rumsfeld has added anti-satellite weapons to his list of desired capabilities.)

Britain of course should in no way encourage any of these ideas.

Mr Rumsfeld’s Report on US vulnerability to “rogue states” was a “worst case analysis”, on which it would be most unwise to base policy. Most

suspect “rogue state” capabilities are reflections of what they perceive as threatening US (or Israeli) capabilities: they are for “deterrence” of perceived threats, and as such they make some sense: neither the US nor Israel would wish to see a conflict “nuclearised”; but for “first strike” attacks on the US – or even on Israel - they make no sense. The CIA’s December 2000 publication, “Global Trends 2015”, makes clear why “rogue states” are quite unlikely to choose Intercontinental Missiles with which to attack the United States: there are far preferable methods.

Moreover, for the time being, there is no BMD system that might sensibly be considered for “deployment”. Of the present NMD programme, the Pentagon’s own Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, Philip Coyle, pointed out in testimony to Congress last September 8th that reasonable deployment requires:

“the fielding of an operational system with some military utility, which is effective under realistic combat conditions, against realistic threats and countermeasures, possibly without adequate prior knowledge of the target cluster composition, timing, trajectory or direction, and when operated by military personnel at all times of the day or night and in all weather. Such a capability is yet to be shown to be practicable for NMD.”

But even if it were, no US Government will be able seriously to depend on a hugely complex system of instantaneously interactive, computerised, automated systems that are – necessarily – quite untestable.