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November 12, 2001

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In the interest of national security we urge you to deny funding for any program, project, or activity that is inconsistent with the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The tragic events of September 11 eliminated any doubt that America faces security needs far more substantial than a technically improbable defense against a strategically improbable Third World ballistic missile attack.

Regarding the probable threat, the September 11 attacks have dramatized what has been obvious for years: A primitive ICBM, with its dubious accuracy and reliability and bearing a clear return address, is unattractive to a terrorist and a most improbable delivery system for a terrorist weapon. Devoting massive effort and expense to countering the least probable and least effective threat would be unwise.

Regarding the technology, while "hitting a bullet with a bullet" under laboratory conditions is feasible, it is far more difficult to design a system that can survive and provide effective protection against a surprise attack that employs varying countermeasures, some of which may surprise the defense. The inherent advantages of the offense exceed the inherent advantages of superior American technology, particularly if the offense is a rogue state that needs only to succeed with one among many weapons to accomplish its purpose.

Previous attempts at a national missile defense have collapsed as it became evident that performance was much lower and cost much higher than advertised. We see no evidence systems currently being put forward will meet or merit a different fate.

Our nation can gain more effective protection against a weapon of mass destruction on a ballistic missile by keeping such weapons from proliferating into the hands of hostile entities. Abrogation of the ABM Treaty, added to recent expressions of hostility toward other arms control agreements, would also undermine nonproliferation. It would also undermine as well cooperation with Russia and China on reducing nuclear dangers. We therefore urge that the ABM Treaty remain in force.

Hans Bethe
Cornell University
1967 Nobel Prize in Physics

Steven Weinberg
University of Texas at Austin
1979 Nobel Prize in Physics

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