Congressional Report:
Helms, Gephardt React to Missile Defense Plan

Republican Senator backs plan, Democratic leader "concerned"

Republican Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Jesse Helms issued a statement strongly supporting President Bush's commitment to building a missile defense system, while Democratic Leader of the House of Representatives Richard Gephardt said he is concerned that such a system may undermine U.S. security rather than enhance it.

Senator Helms, in a statement released May 1 after the president made a speech on the subject earlier the same day, said "I greatly admire President Bush for his commitment to defend the American people against ballistic missile attack."

"The threat posed by rogue nations armed with nuclear or biologically-tipped ICBMs is real," Helms said, "and is growing rapidly -- largely because of the support that Russia and China are providing to hostile regimes. The President's decision to begin consultations immediately is wise and I expect that our allies will be strongly supportive."

Helms said it is time for the United States and Russia to "dispense with the illogical and immoral concept of mutually-assured destruction (MAD), as enshrined in the U.S.-Soviet ABM Treaty." Russia, he said, "must come to grips with the fact that the Cold War is over. It is time to scrap the ABM Treaty."

Helms added that "the United States must update its thinking as well, which is why I believe it appropriate for the president to consider significant nuclear reductions."

Congressman Gephardt said that the president "by announcing his intent to move forward with as yet unproven, costly and expansive national missile defense systems" is "jeopardizing an arms control framework that has served this nation and the world well for decades."

Gephardt said that initial reactions from allies and other nations suggest that the Bush administration's approach "is likely to increase threats to the U.S. and decrease global stability, as exhibited by the likely consequences: Russia's preservation and China's construction of large stocks of nuclear weapons to counter U.S. missile defenses; an end to transparency and verification of other nations' nuclear arsenals, which has preserved strategic stability and advanced U.S. interests; and the continued proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as other nations follow America's lead in taking unilateral steps that may serve their own immediate interests."

Gephardt also warned that at a projected cost of more than $100,000 million, the proposed missile defense system would draw resources from other important defense programs.

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