Clinton's Empty Boast About Our Safety From Missiles

by Phyllis Schlafly October 17, 1996

In the first Clinton-Dole debate, Bob Dole let Bill Clinton get by with his boast that "no nuclear missiles are pointed at U.S. children." Dole could have retorted that a Russian general recently told CBS's 60 Minutes that he could retarget the powerful Russian ICBMs in a matter of minutes.

The United States has no system capable of shooting down ballistic missiles, whether they are from Russia or some rogue nation. That's an appalling default of leadership, since the U.S. government's number-one constitutional duty is to "provide for the common defense."

The reason we have no defenses against incoming ballistic missiles is the Clinton Administration's slavish adherence to the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty. Written by Henry Kissinger and signed by Richard Nixon in 1972, it is today highly dangerous to U.S. security, as well as obsolete and irrelevant to current threats.

In 1972 the terrible ICBMs could only be built by the superpowers that had a sophisticated technological base. Now, 24 years later, we are in the era of the "poor man's missiles" that can be built and launched relatively inexpensively, and might even be bought at bargain-basement prices from cash-hungry Russians.

The theory behind the ABM Treaty was Mutual Assured Destruction, popularly known by its acronym MAD. Each of the superpowers was supposedly deterred because of the knowledge that a massive launch by one side would be followed by massive retaliation, and that would assure the destruction of both sides.

The ABM Treaty was based on the rationale that the leaders of the two superpowers were rational and would act from a mutuality of self-interest and deterrence. The biggest threat today is from the "non-deterrables" (Libya, Iran, Iraq, and North Korea), countries that don't like us and behave in ways that we don't find rational and our State Department is unable to predict.

When Ronald Reagan asked the crucial question on March 23, 1983, "Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them?", he struck a body blow to MAD. His determination to go forward with developing and deploying an anti-missile system (later known as our Strategic Defense Initiative or SDI) was the principal factor in ending the Cold War.

Unfortunately, the liberal politicians and the media are still chanting Ted Kennedy's hysterical epithet, "Star Wars," and persisting in their devotion to the stupid notion that it's safer not to defend ourselves. Keeping America vulnerable to missile attack only encourages the state terrorists to build ballistic missiles as the surest way to threaten the United States.

This excessive commitment to the ABM Treaty has brought about a "deliberate dumbing down of our fighting capabilities," according to Ambassador Henry F. Cooper, a nationally recognized expert on strategic systems and arms control policy. The 28 U.S. military personnel who were killed when a Iraqi Scud hit their barracks during the 1991 Gulf War might have been spared if our Patriot missiles had not been dumbed down because of ABM Treaty concerns.

What America most urgently needs is a ballistic missile defense system capable of destroying an offensive missile during its boost phase, that is, soon after launch and before it reaches its ballistic velocity when it can release its warheads, decoys and penetration aids. Then, the warhead would fall near the launch site.

Since the boost phase is so short and a defensive system must be able to react within 10-20 seconds after an unanticipated launch, the system must be continuously deployed. A system of satellite-borne lasers or interceptors orbiting in space over potential launch sites is the only kind of system that can realistically meet this requirement.

We ought to give the highest priority to building effective, on-station, wide-area defenses against missiles that rogue dictators can use to threaten us or our allies. We should start today with an investment of $1 to $2 billion a year, heading toward global space-based system deployment by 2001.

The liberals (who are never deterred by their high cost of government programs they like) pretend to be worried about the cost of a satellite missile defense system. Actually, its cost is not excessive compared to the cost of not providing such protection.

And it's not excessive compared to the cost of other protections such as air superiority (hundreds of billions for the F-14, F-15, F-16, F-18 and F-22), or command of the sea (hundreds of billions for aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and submarines), or superior ground forces (tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, and helicopters).

The ABM Treaty represents a Maginot Line mentality, that is, a system foolishly designed to protect against the previous war, in this case, the Cold War. Even Henry Kissinger, the author of the ABM Treaty, admitted that it now "makes no sense in the multipolar world of proliferating powers."

Continuing to try to adhere to the ABM Treaty means imposing on ourselves restrictions that do not apply to potential enemies. The United States should withdraw from the ABM Treaty immediately, as permitted in Article XV, and then build the most effective, affordable defenses that current technology permits, with or without Russia's cooperation.