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# Hard Balancing in the Age of American Unipolarity: The Russian Response to US Ballistic Missile Defense during the Bush Administration (2001–2008)

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**ABSTRACT** One of the central debates in contemporary international relations scholarship concerns the issue of whether balancing has occurred in response to US-based unipolarity, and if it has, how this should be characterised. Existing research has seen analysts argue that major power responses to unipolarity can be placed in one of either three categories: an absence of balancing, soft balancing, and hard balancing. This article contributes to the scholarly literature by providing a case study of hard internal Russian balancing against the US's development and deployment of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems during the Bush Administration (2001–08). Russian hard balancing against the US has involved: (1) fielding new strategic nuclear and conventional weapons equipped with BMD countermeasures, and, relatedly, (2) making changes in military doctrine. As a result, security dilemma dynamics are increasingly in evidence in US relations with Russia.

**KEY WORDS:** Russian Hard Balancing, Unipolarity, Ballistic Missile Defense, Bush Administration

One of the central debates in contemporary international relations scholarship concerns the issue of whether balancing has occurred in response to US-based unipolarity, and if it has, how this should be characterised. Existing research has seen analysts variously argue that major power responses to unipolarity can be placed in one of

either three categories: an absence of balancing,<sup>1</sup> soft balancing,<sup>2</sup> and hard balancing.<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to contribute to this literature. It does so by arguing that the first two groups of analysts have missed distinct evidence of hard balancing<sup>4</sup> against the United States during the Bush Administration (2001–08). Moreover, while the third group of analysts have argued that hard balancing has occurred,<sup>5</sup> they have not engaged in detailed case studies of Russian balancing, arguably the most important example of hard balancing in unipolarity. Specifically, it is the contention of this article that a significant effect of the Bush administration's development and deployment of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD)<sup>6</sup> systems during the 2001–08 period has been to serve as a catalyst for hard balancing, primarily of an internal

<sup>1</sup>For the no balancing view see: William Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World', *International Security* 24/2 (Summer 1999), 18; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton UP); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, 'Hard Times for Soft Balancing', *International Security* 30/1 (Summer 2005), 72–108; Gerard Alexander and Keir Lieber, 'Waiting for Balancing: Why the World is Not Pushing Back', *International Security* 30/1 (Summer 2005), 109–39.

<sup>2</sup>For the soft balancing view, see among others: Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton 2005); Huiyun Feng and Kai He, 'If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and US Policy Toward China', *Security Studies* 17/2 (2008), 363–95; Robert Pape, 'Soft Balancing Against the US', *International Security* 30/1 (Summer 2005), 7–45; T.V. Paul, 'Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy', *International Security* 30/1 (Summer 2005), 46–71.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Layne, 'This Time it's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana', *International Studies Quarterly* 56/1 (March 2012), 203–13; Kenneth Waltz, 'Structural Realism after the Cold War', *International Security* 25/1 (Summer 2000), 5–41; Kenneth Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security* 18/2 (Fall 1993), 44–79; Christopher Layne, 'The War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power: The Paradoxes of American Hegemony', in T.V. Paul, James Wirtz, and Michael Fortmann (eds) *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford UP 2004), 119.

<sup>4</sup>For definition see Pape, 'Soft Balancing Against the US', 9.

<sup>5</sup>For references to these predictions see: John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W.Norton 2001), 392; Waltz, 'Structural Realism after the Cold War', 26–7; Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment', *International Security* 31/2 (Fall 2006), 7–41.

<sup>6</sup>It is important to distinguish between *national* missile defence (NMD) systems and *theater* missile defence (TMD) systems, both of which constitute BMD. The former refers to specific Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems, originally outlawed by the ABM Treaty, designed to protect the US mainland from an adversary's strategic long-range missiles (ICBMs that target the American homeland). The latter refer to BMD systems designed to protect US troop deployments, bases and allies against short to medium-range missile attacks, or sub-strategic missiles, that 'rogue states' have already deployed. The authors of this paper use the acronym BMD to refer to TMD and NMD, except when the distinction is relevant to the discussion.

variety, on the part of Moscow.<sup>7</sup> Rather than engage in hard external balancing and forming alliances against the US, Russia focused on internal balancing, boosting its own nuclear and conventional capabilities. Russian hard balancing against the US has involved: (1) fielding new strategic nuclear and conventional weapons equipped with BMD countermeasures, and (2) making changes in military doctrine. As a result, security dilemma dynamics were increasingly in evidence in US relations with Russia during this period. Indeed, China also faced a threat from US BMD policy and reacted in a similar manner. China's reactions to US policy are noted at some points, but it is beyond the scope of this article to explore this subject. In terms of the theoretical contribution of this article, to the extent that it provides a cogent explanation, it is an illustration of the continuing relevance of neo-realist theory, and defensive realism in particular, in illuminating the basic dynamics of world politics. It should be noted that the authors do see aspects of soft balancing occurring in Russian policy during the post-Cold War era, but our intellectual interests in hard balancing and word-length considerations necessarily require that the analysis is limited to explicating Russian hard internal balancing.

The article is divided into six sections. The first section outlines the unipolarity debate and locates our argument within it. The second section discusses the relationship between unipolarity, uncertainty, balancing, the security dilemma concept, and BMD. The third briefly chronicles the Russian pre-balancing efforts in the 1990s. The fourth examines the initial US moves to develop BMD and attendant rhetorical Russian opposition to US BMD. The fifth considers Russia's gradual move towards, and eventual adoption of hard balancing against the US. A sixth section considers possible objections to our argument.

### **The Unipolarity Debate: Unipolar Stability Theorists, Soft Balancers, and Hard Balancers**

In 1991, at the end of the Cold War, Charles Krauthammer drew attention to the existence of a 'unipolar moment',<sup>8</sup> by which he meant that there was only one pole left in the international system. As the post-Cold War era dragged into its second decade, an apparent anomaly appeared to exist, which prompted further comment from Krauthammer and William Wohlforth.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, no state or

<sup>7</sup>Following Waltz, internal balancing is defined as states 'relying on their own capabilities rather than the capabilities of allies'. See Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill 1979), 168.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment', *Foreign Affairs* 70/1 (1990/91), 23–33.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Krauthammer, 'Revisiting the Unipolar Moment', *National Interest* No. 70 (Winter 2002–03), 5–17; Wohlforth, 'Stability of a Unipolar World', 25.

coalition of states appeared to be actively balancing US power. International relations theorists, divided between unipolar stability theorists, soft balancers, and hard balancers have sought to grapple with this question. We review their respective arguments below.

Unipolar stability theorists have been struck by what they perceive to be the absence of balancing against the US in the post-Cold War era.<sup>10</sup> Writing in 1999, William Wohlforth concluded that 'none of the major powers is balancing' the United States.<sup>11</sup> In a subsequent collaboration with Stephen Brooks, it is maintained that the US's power position has, if anything, only increased, and still no balancing is in evidence.<sup>12</sup> For these analysts, the US has 'passed a threshold, and the effect of increasing power is reversed: the stronger the leading state and the more entrenched its dominance, the more unlikely and less constraining are counterbalancing dynamics'.<sup>13</sup> They further contend that America's historically unprecedented relative power has rendered the traditional constraining mechanisms of the international system 'inoperable'.<sup>14</sup> In this view, standard balancing dynamics do not apply for a simple reason. Here, it is pointed out that 'balance-of-power theory predicts that states will try to prevent the rise of a hegemon; it tells us nothing about a system in which hegemony is the status quo'.<sup>15</sup> In essence, Wohlforth and Brooks' position is that the standard balancing dynamics associated with bipolarity and multipolarity do not operate, or at least not strongly, in the unipole's relations with other states. By logical deduction, in this analysis, the security dilemma either no longer operates, or is very weak. Indeed, a perusal of the index of their text reveals no entry for the security dilemma concept.

Other analysts disagree with this analysis. Grouped under the rubric of 'soft balancers', they point out that there is an interesting innovation in state behaviour under unipolarity. In this view, rather than the hard balancing of the Cold War era, we are seeing the emergence of a new phenomenon, soft balancing. In a definition that most analysts of this persuasion would accept, Robert Pape defines soft balancing as 'actions that do not directly challenge US military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral US military policies. Soft balancing uses international institutions,

<sup>10</sup>Wohlforth, 'Stability of a Unipolar World', 18; Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 35–40; Brooks and Wohlforth, 'Hard Times for Soft Balancing', 72–108; Alexander and Lieber, 'Waiting for Balancing', 109–39.

<sup>11</sup>Wohlforth, 'Stability of a Unipolar World', 18.

<sup>12</sup>Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 27–35.

<sup>13</sup>Wohlforth, 'Stability of a Unipolar World', 23, 35.

<sup>14</sup>Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 4, 15–16.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements.<sup>16</sup> The contention is that the concept accurately characterises the post-Cold War policy of a variety of states toward the United States.<sup>17</sup> Some also apply the concept to explain US policy toward China.<sup>18</sup> That said, soft balancers do not spend much time discussing the security dilemma concept. A perusal of the major soft balancing theorists finds no explicit discussion of the concept.<sup>19</sup> There is of course, a perfectly reasonable way to explain this relative lack of emphasis on the security dilemma. Soft balancing is logically associated with the early stages of the balancing process. Thus, Robert Pape, in his analysis of soft balancing, has argued that the 'major powers are already engaging in the early stages of balancing behavior against the United States'.<sup>20</sup> As balancing gains strength, the security dilemma will increase in intensity. In this respect, soft balancing sets the stage for the return of hard balancing in world politics and the eventual recurrence of security dilemma dynamics. Since we are only in the early stages of soft balancing, soft balancers expect the security dilemma to be weak at this stage.

Notwithstanding the disagreements between the soft balancers and unipolar theorists outlined above, they are united on one point: that there is currently no hard balancing against the United States. A third strand in the literature adopts the view that hard balancing has already begun.<sup>21</sup> This perspective is illustrated in the views of Kenneth Waltz and Christopher Layne.<sup>22</sup> In 2000, Waltz pointed out that we can 'observe balancing tendencies already taking place'.<sup>23</sup> Waltz explicated on his logic, stating that in 'international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it. With benign intent, the United States has behaved, and until its power is brought into balance will continue to behave, in ways that sometimes frighten others.'<sup>24</sup> After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Layne identified 'the

<sup>16</sup>Pape, 'Soft Balancing Against the US', 10.

<sup>17</sup>Paul, 'Soft Balancing'; T.V. Paul, 'The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance', in Paul *et al.*, 14; Stephen Walt, 'Alliances in a Unipolar World', *World Politics* 61/1 (Jan. 2009), 101–2.

<sup>18</sup>Feng and Kai, 'If Not Soft Balancing, Then What?'.

<sup>19</sup>See references in note 2.

<sup>20</sup>Pape, 'Soft Balancing against the United States', 9.

<sup>21</sup>For references to these predictions see: Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 392; Waltz, 'Structural Realism after the Cold War', 26–7; Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion Revisited'; Layne, 'This Time it's Real'; Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure'.

<sup>22</sup>Waltz, 'Structural Realism after the Cold War', 27.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Intimations of Multipolarity', in Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin (eds), *The New World Order: Contrasting Theories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2000), 2; Waltz, 'Structural Realism after the Cold War', 27–8.

<sup>29</sup>See discussion and citations in He, 'Undermining Adversaries', 160–1; Timothy Crawford, 'Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics', *International Security* 35/4 (Spring 2011), 155–89.



capabilities (internal balancing). Conversely, balancing can also occur via policies that effect a reduction in an adversary's power capabilities. This type of balancing, known as negative balancing, has been the focus of an emerging literature.<sup>30</sup> Examples include attempts to prevent the formation of an adversarial alliance, or to terminate an opposing alliance.<sup>31</sup> It should be pointed out that negative balancing is seen in both the military and non-military spheres.<sup>32</sup> Arms sales to the 'enemy of my enemy' are an example of negative military balancing. Examples of negative non-military balancing include: strategic non-cooperation, institutional restraints, economic embargoes, and even initiatives to de-stabilise a rival's domestic politics. The first two of these non-military actions are analysed by scholars who focus on soft balancing.<sup>33</sup>

This paper analyses Russia's positive balancing, with a focus on the military sphere. That said, the authors of this article do not preclude the possibility of negative non-military balancing occurring at the same time as hard balancing. Thus, Russian voting behaviour in the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration, and in particular, Russian opposition to the US attempt to secure United Nations Security Council (UNSC) approval for the invasion of Iraq can be seen as an instance of negative non-military balancing.

In any case, the second concept that is significant in our analysis is the security dilemma. The concept was first coined by John Herz in 1950, even if its operation was understood at least as long ago as the ancient Greeks.<sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding critique from some realists,<sup>35</sup> it has found a central place in realist thinking, where it is used by both defensive and

<sup>30</sup>See discussion in He, 'Undermining Adversaries', 166.

<sup>31</sup>For a case study of the former see Timothy Crawford, 'Wedge Strategy, Balancing, and the Deviant Case of Spain', *Security Studies* 17/1 (2008), 1–38. For a case study of the latter see Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York: Columbia UP 2011).

<sup>32</sup>See He, 'Undermining Adversaries', 162–3. This definition of hard balancing is therefore broader than the 'standard' definition of hard balancing. For an example of such a definition see Pape, 'Soft Balancing Against the US', 9.

<sup>33</sup>He, 'Undermining Adversaries', 166.

<sup>34</sup>John Herz, 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma', *World Politics* 2/2 (Jan. 1950), 157–80; Robert Jervis, 'Realism, Game Theory and Co-operation', *World Politics* 40/3 (April 1988), 317–49.

<sup>35</sup>For a critique of the concept see Randall Schweller, 'Neo-Realism's Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?', *Security Studies* 5/3 (March 1996), 116–19; Keir Lieber, 'Grasping the Technological Peace: The Offense-Defense Balance and International Security', *International Security* 25/1 (2000), 71–104.

offensive realists.<sup>36</sup> That said, the centrality of the concept varies in realist thinking, occupying a much more critical role in defensive rather than offensive realism.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, given the basic assumption in offensive realism that all states are intentionally revisionist, that theory arguably works perfectly well without the security dilemma.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the cogency of Tang's point that correctly defined, the security dilemma's genesis is an interaction between defensive realist states in anarchy, involving a lack of malign intentions on all sides, and some accumulation of offensive capabilities.<sup>39</sup> There are two separate causal processes that lead to balancing in a realist world. In a defensive realist world, uncertainty over intentions activates security dilemma dynamics, leading to balancing. In an offensive realist world, conflict over real interests leads to balancing.<sup>40</sup> This article is a case study of how two defensive realist states have been caught, through the process of hard internal balancing, in security dilemma dynamics.

In any case, security dilemma theorists posit that under the structural condition of anarchy, characterised by persistent uncertainty, the security of states is interconnected. In this context, self-defensive efforts by one state to increase its security by arming itself generates fear in other states. The existence of private information and incentives to misrepresent heightens uncertainty, exacerbating security dilemma dynamics.<sup>41</sup> The foregoing compels states to respond. An action–reaction spiral process occurs. The end result is that the security of all states is reduced below levels which existed prior to the start of the dynamic. Significantly, this process explains how heightened possibility of conflict occurs even when no state intends it. That said, cooperation under the security dilemma is possible when offensive and defensive weapons can be differentiated, and when defence has the

<sup>36</sup>The literature is extensive. Among others see Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics* 30/2 (Jan. 1978), 167–214; Charles L. Glaser, 'The Security Dilemma Revisited', *World Politics* 50/1 (Oct. 1997), 171–201; Jeffrey Taliaferro, 'Seeking Security Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited', *International Security* 25/3 (Winter 2000–2001), 128–61; Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 35–6, 417.

<sup>37</sup>Tang Shiping, 'The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis', *Security Studies* 18/3 (2009), 587–623; See also Brian Rathburn, 'Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory', *International Studies Quarterly* 51/3 (Sept. 2007), 533–57.

<sup>38</sup>Glenn Snyder, 'Mearsheimer's World: Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security', *International Security* 27/1 (Summer 2002), 156.

<sup>39</sup>Tang, 'The Security Dilemma', 595.

<sup>40</sup>Snyder, 'Mearsheimer's World', 156–7; Schweller, 'Neo-Realism's Status Quo Bias', 117.

<sup>41</sup>James D. Fearon, 'Rationalist Explanations for War', *International Organization* 49/3 (Summer 1995), 379–414.

advantage over the offense.<sup>42</sup> Under such circumstances, 'security seeking' states can potentially, if not necessarily easily, differentiate themselves from non-security seeking and revisionist 'power maximising' states.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, while the security dilemma can be moderated through these variables, it cannot be eliminated.

In any case, it is appropriate to ask how the discussion of the security dilemma relates to a world of unipolarity and nuclear weapons? In a world of mutual assured destruction, where both parties have a secure second strike capability, nuclear weapons are the 'ultimate defensive technology' and can significantly moderate the intensity of the security dilemma.<sup>44</sup> The introduction of BMD is highly destabilising, even if the declared intention for doing so is defensive. BMD disrupts the extant balance, undermining established relationships of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) that exists between the US and Russia, even as it encourages nuclear proliferation in non-nuclear states.<sup>45</sup> A search by the unipole for security through missile defences is perceived as offensive, with other states (both existing nuclear states and non-nuclear states with an adversarial relationship with the unipole) seeking technology to undermine those defences. Even if the intentions of the unipole in constructing a shield are security-based, the unintended effect is that it will very likely be interpreted as an offensive attempt to achieve nuclear superiority as in the US–Russia case.<sup>46</sup> Threat levels rise, strategic calculations are complicated, and the security dilemma is exacerbated.<sup>47</sup>

Why is this the case? BMD is self-evidently referred to as being a defensive technology. However, in practice this means the opposite, since a shield will be of great utility in undermining existing deterrent relationships.<sup>48</sup> The whole purpose of a BMD is to negate the utility of the opposing side's nuclear capability, increasing the risk they could be subject to a first strike.<sup>49</sup> However, there is another aspect to US nuclear

<sup>42</sup>Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma'.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>For an excellent explication of this logic see: Keir Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2005), 126–7, 147. See also Charles L. Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy* (Princeton UP 1990), 95–6; Kenneth Waltz, 'Nuclear Myths and Political Realities', *American Political Science Review* 84/3 (Sept. 1990), 731–45.

<sup>45</sup>For the point on nuclear proliferation see Robert Jervis, 'Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective', *World Politics* 61/1 (Jan. 2009), 212.

<sup>46</sup>Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*, 75, 106.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>49</sup>Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton UP 2010), 81.

policy that has exacerbated the security dilemma. Even while pursuing missile defences, the Bush administration embarked on qualitative improvements to its nuclear capabilities that increase the accuracy of its first-strike weaponry.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the incentives in unipolarity for Russia are, in the first instance, to bolster existing nuclear capabilities to overwhelm missile defences, and over the longer run, to improve its own existing missile defences and develop new BMD technology analogous to the US programme. Where the unipole goes technology-wise, Russia can be predicted to follow.<sup>51</sup>

Uncertainty concerning the present and future is a critical variable in the operation of the security dilemma.<sup>52</sup> Even if we accept that uncertainty is relatively reduced in unipolarity compared to other variants of polarity,<sup>53</sup> its impact on world politics is still potent. In respect to states that are not alliance partners of the US, Nuno Monteiro has persuasively argued that uncertainty regarding the unipole's intentions is a powerful force in unipolarity.<sup>54</sup> As he points out, the marked imbalance of power that is a particular characteristic of unipolarity reduces structural constraints, provides the unipole with a wide latitude to pursue policies that are perceived as unilateral and revisionist, both in

<sup>50</sup>As has occurred with the United States. See Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of US Primacy', *International Security* 30/4 (Spring 2006), 7–44; Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'The Rise of US Nuclear Primacy', *Foreign Affairs* 85/2 (March/April 2006), 42–54.

<sup>51</sup>This conforms with Waltz's claim that 'competition produces a tendency toward sameness of the competitors'. Waltz, *Theory*, 127.

<sup>52</sup>Taliaferro, 'Seeking Security Under Anarchy', 136–41; Dale Copeland, 'The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay', *International Security* 25/2 (Fall 2000), 199–200; See also Rathburn's discussion of the realist view of uncertainty in Rathburn, 'Uncertain about Uncertainty', 553–57; Dale Copeland, 'A Realist Critique of the English School', *Review of International Studies* 29/3 (July 2003), 435.

<sup>53</sup>Both Morgenthau and Waltz agree that a movement from multipolarity to bipolarity decreases uncertainty. Their disagreement pertains to whether this change in structure is stabilising or not. Morgenthau contended that the high level of uncertainty associated with multipolarity led to caution and restraint, increasing stability, while Waltz took the opposite view. Both further agree that bipolarity decreased uncertainty, but disagreed on the implications of this development for stability. Logically, we can deduce that both Morgenthau and Waltz would agree that unipolarity decreases uncertainty even more, as Wohlforth clearly believes, but differ again on the implications for stability. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill 1967), 332–5; 337–8; Waltz, *Theory*, 168; Wohlforth, 'Stability of a Unipolar World', 24–5.

<sup>54</sup>Nuno Monteiro, 'Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity is Not Peaceful', *International Security* 36/3 (Winter 2011/12), 24–5.

the present and in the future.<sup>55</sup> While Monteiro focuses his analytical attention on recalcitrant minor powers, major states like Russia (and China) cannot take much comfort from such a situation. Moreover, from the Russian perspective, the situation is more complex. There is also a spillover effect of US actions on states in Russia's sphere of influence. Even if the US is unable to achieve a full-scale BMD project, one significant side-effect of US efforts could easily be success in a more limited regional BMD system that undermines Russian security. Rightly or wrongly, for defensive reasons, as will be described below, states on Russia's periphery which are allied to the US have seen virtue in tying themselves to US BMD policy. During the time-period of this analysis, the Czech Republic and Poland participated in US BMD policy. Thus, the Russians are balancing against both these aspects of US policy, activating the characteristic action – reaction security dilemma dynamic.

One might ask: What about assurance? Can the unipole not deal with the uncertainty problem by reassuring non-allies such as Russia and China via costly signals?<sup>56</sup> In theory, the answer is yes. In practice, this is extremely difficult. As nuclear politics of the post-Cold War era has shown, it is extremely challenging for the unipole to adopt policies that deal with emerging nuclear threats such as Iran and North Korea, even while assuring existing nuclear powers such as China and Russia. Critically, US missile defence technology designed to contain Tehran and Pyongyang is at once useful for limiting Moscow and Beijing's nuclear deterrents. Thus, in effect, American nuclear power undermines its ability to reassure other states, since they will feel that any assurances Washington provides, even if currently plausible, can be reversed at a later date, providing a critical base on which to leverage and to build on relative gains that have been accumulated in the intervening period. Todd Sechser highlights this exact point in his analysis when he points out that the immense power of a unipolar state makes it difficult for threatened states to be assured, particularly in the future.<sup>57</sup> This is all the more so if the unipolar state has a problematic history with the relevant states, as is the case in the US relationship with Russia (1946–91, post-Cold War era) and China (1949–71, post-Cold War era). For all these reasons, even if the unipolar power is undertaking what it claims, and indeed, no doubt even believes is a security-driven expansion, it will be very

<sup>55</sup> Monteiro, 'Unrest Assured', 24–5.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey W. Knopf, 'Varieties of Assurance', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35/3 (June 2012), 375–99.

<sup>57</sup> Todd S. Sechser, 'Goliath's Curse: Coercive Threats and Asymmetric Power', *International Organization* 64/4 (Fall 2010), 645.

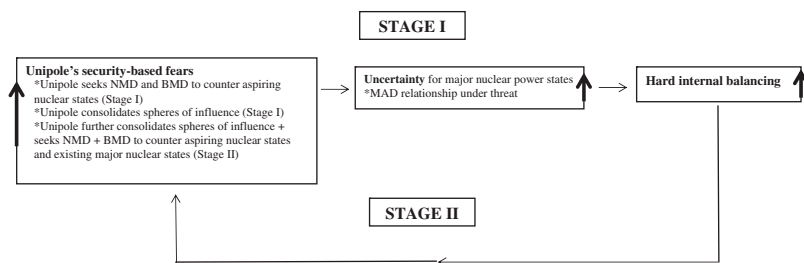


Figure 2. Security Dilemma Dynamics in Unipolarity

difficult for other states to differentiate it from a greedy state, increasing their fears and leading to balancing reactions against it. In dealing with the US, prudent states are necessarily going to assume that its intentions are at best ambiguous, and more likely adversarial. These dynamics are illustrated in Figure 2.

Before examining Russia's reaction to US BMD it must be understood that balancing is a fundamentally political decision. Unipolarity makes it potentially more costly for states trying to balance the unipolar power.<sup>58</sup> The unipole will invariably consider any attempt to balance against it indicative of revisionist intent, requiring a counter-reaction. Thus, Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu make the important point that 'under unipolarity ... balancing becomes the very definition of revisionism'.<sup>59</sup> But the potential cost of balancing is not necessarily prohibitive if states threatened by the unipolar power judge that the costs of not balancing are greater, and that vital interests are threatened more by remaining inactive. In particular, attempts by a super-power to strengthen its global position of primacy via BMD, accompanied by continued interference in regional balances of power in Europe through deployments of BMD to friends and allies, has predictably induced a hard balancing response from Russia, which we seek to analyse. Thus, in contrast to Brooks and Wohlforth's contention that all great powers will accommodate the status quo, and that balancing will be 'inoperative', in practice, this is far from clear and requires greater scrutiny.<sup>60</sup> The broad dynamics described above characterise the situation facing Russia in its relations with the US in the post-Cold War era. Here, developments in US BMD policy during the 1990s and especially from 2000 onwards, were an

<sup>58</sup>Monteiro, 'Unrest Assured', 24.

<sup>59</sup>Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, 'After Unipolarity, China's Vision of International Order in an Era of US Decline', *International Security* 36/1 (Summer 2011), 44.

<sup>60</sup>Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 4, 15–16.

important signal of US intentions.<sup>61</sup> Moscow rightly considered its nuclear deterrent and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty as essential to its security, particularly in an era of unipolarity. In any case, before we analyse Russia's hard balancing during the George W. Bush administration, let us briefly examine the emergence of Russian balancing during the 1990s.

### *The Rise of Russian Pre-Balancing in the 1990s*

States rarely immediately launch head-long into a hard balancing mode. Rather, balancing typically reflects a progression from a pre-balancing stage to an outright balancing stage. As Levy notes, balancing occurs in degrees.<sup>62</sup> During the pre-balancing stage, which Layne calls 'opaque balancing', a state engages in activities that prepare it for action against a target state.<sup>63</sup> This section describes the dynamics in US–Russian relations during this stage. We discuss US–NATO and BMD policy during the 1990s, and subsequent Russian pre-balancing against the US via an alteration of Russian nuclear doctrine.

### *US NATO and BMD policy during the 1990s*

In many ways the stage for Russian hard balancing that took place during the Bush administration (2001–08) was set during the Clinton administration.<sup>64</sup> Clinton's expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had the effect of undercutting Russian influence in its traditional sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, changes in BMD policy exacerbated Russia's concerns over NATO's expansion. Initially, the incoming Clinton administration rejected the need to deploy a National Missile Defense (NMD) system. Clinton's first Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, declared the 'end of the Star Wars era', relegating it to an R&D effort and changing the name of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) Organization to the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization. TMD systems such as the Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3); the Airborne Laser (ABL) directed at

<sup>61</sup>'The ABM Treaty at a Glance', <[www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/abmtreaty](http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/abmtreaty)>.

<sup>62</sup>Jack S. Levy, 'Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions, and Research Design', in John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman (eds), *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 2002), 134.

<sup>63</sup>Christopher Layne, *Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2006), 145–6.

<sup>64</sup>He, 'Undermining Adversaries', 187; Stephen Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton 2001).

<sup>65</sup>He, 'Undermining Adversaries', 181–3.



'boost-phase' Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD); and the Navy Area Defense (NAD) missile defence system, were allowed under the ABM Treaty, and remained in effect.<sup>66</sup> However, crises with various states throughout the decade (Iraq in 1991 and on-going US–Iraqi conflict thereafter, North Korea in 1993, and China in 1995–96) led to the emergence of a debate on US BMD. The wisdom of eschewing an NMD system was questioned since it was conceivable that in future crises 'rogues' armed with inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) would use them to deter US intervention by potentially threatening retaliation against the US homeland. In particular, these developments strengthened the hand of a number of BMD advocates, many of whom had championed the Reagan-era SDI project. These advocates viewed a NMD system as a component in maintaining or even extending the US's unipolar position. Opponents of BMD were sceptical about the potential of BMD technology, and feared that pushing ahead with an expanded BMD programme that included a national component would destabilise major power relations. These sceptics were also supporters of the ABM Treaty. President Bill Clinton sided with the sceptics in the short run by delaying deployment, even as he did enough to placate the BMD advocates by not ruling out a future US NMD. Clinton explained to his Russian counterpart that any eventual deployment would not undermine great power relations.<sup>67</sup> However, a series of missile tests conducted by North Korea in 1998 generated immense political pressure on the Clinton administration to push ahead with a NMD system. Facing a veto-proof Republican majority, the administration passed the National Missile Defense Act in January 1999. This Act committed the US to deploying a NMD shield 'as soon as technologically possible'.<sup>68</sup> As the next section shows, Russian balancing efforts emerged in response to the combination of NATO's expansion and shift in US BMD policy.

<sup>66</sup>Bradley Graham, *Hit to Kill: The New Battle Over Shielding America from Missile Attack* (New York: Public Affairs 2003), 23.

<sup>67</sup>In Nov. 1997, Clinton negotiated a 'demarcation agreement' with Russia that allowed the US to deploy TMD systems. Clinton followed this up by personally reassuring newly-elected Russian President Vladimir Putin in June 1999 that he would 'never support putting Russia in an untenable position with regard to mutual deterrence', and 'personally' opposed unilaterally abrogating the ABM Treaty. Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 120.

<sup>68</sup>See Act located at <<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-106s269pcs/pdf/BILLS-106s269pcs.pdf>>.



*Russian Nuclear Doctrine*

During the 1990s, Russia made two significant decisions to its nuclear policy that can be characterised as pre-balancing. First, it shifted its nuclear doctrine away from its long-standing No First Use (NFU) commitment. Decree No. 1833 on 'Main Clauses of the RF Military Doctrine' of 2 November 1993 (never officially published) did not make reference to the NFU obligation. In February 1997, the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Ivan Rybkin said the NFU policy was a mistake, and that if there was 'a direct challenge' to Russia, it could use nuclear weapons. Shortly thereafter, this position became official Russian military doctrine.<sup>69</sup> While this change can be attributed to Russia's conventional weakness relative to NATO, and thus Moscow's perceived need to reduce the nuclear threshold to deter potential NATO coercion, it suggests that Russia was willing to use its nuclear forces to respond directly to changes in its security environment. It is also notable that the move to consider the use of nuclear weapons in limited war scenarios, which gained momentum under Vladimir Putin's presidency, was discussed during the late Yeltsin-era, at the same time US BMD policy was shifting towards deploying an NMD system.<sup>70</sup> Second, on 26 March 1999, the Russian Duma decided to postpone ratification of START II. On 29 April 1999, only three months after Clinton signed the 'National Missile Defense Act', the Russian Security Council met to discuss Russia's nuclear deterrent. The Council decided to extend the lifespan of SS-18 ICBMs for two years, to keep Delta III SSBNs (nuclear-propelled ballistic missile firing submarines) operational through to 2005, purchase Tu-160 and Tu-95MS strategic bombers from Ukraine, and may have approved the initiation of research into new tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>71</sup>

Changes in Russian nuclear doctrine occurred against a backdrop of an increase in perceived US aggressiveness in world affairs. In particular, the US-led NATO intervention in the ex-Yugoslavia focused Russia's attention on the potential threat posed by the US-led NATO alliance. This led Moscow to revise its military doctrine in December 1999. In a

<sup>69</sup> Andrei Shoumikhin, 'Nuclear Weapons in Russian Strategy and Doctrine', in Stephen J. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past Present and Future* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College 2011), 112.

<sup>70</sup> The military doctrine signed on 21 April 2000 by Vladimir Putin was developed under Boris Yeltsin. It contained provisions relating to the limited use of nuclear weapons that were discussed four months earlier in the 'National Security Concept' and 'marked a qualitatively new stage in the development of Russian nuclear doctrine'. Shoumikhin, 'Nuclear Weapons', in Blank, *Russian Nuclear Weapons*, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Oksana Antonenko, 'Russia, NATO, and European Security after Kosovo', *Survival* 41/4 (1999–2000), 134–5.

section entitled 'Threats to the National Security of Russia', NATO was declared to have 'elevated to the level of strategic doctrine', the 'use of force beyond the zone of its responsibility and without the sanction of the United Nations' Security Council'.<sup>72</sup> In an obvious reference to the US and NATO, the doctrine declared that 'the Russian state must have nuclear forces capable of delivering specified damage to any aggressor state or a coalition of states in any situation'.<sup>73</sup> This was followed by Russia's 'West 99' wargames, the largest in a decade.

While the foregoing describes increasing frictions in US–Russian relations, it is important to note that while the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations kept the NMD project alive, they also maintained US adherence to the ABM Treaty, dampening (although not eliminating) Russia's concerns about US intentions.<sup>74</sup> With the arrival of the George W. Bush administration this changed, inducing a stronger internal hard balancing response from Russia. The next section catalogues changes to US BMD policy during the Bush administration and the rise of Russian fear.

### *US BMD Policy from 2000 and the Rise of Russian Fear*

As a presidential candidate, George W. Bush made it clear in 1999 that he intended to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. Bush made good on his promise, announcing in December 2001 his decision to pull out of the treaty in six months, over the opposition of Russia, China, and indeed much of the international community. In order to fast track the development and deployment of defences, Bush signed National Security Presidential Directive 23 (NSPD-23) on 16 December 2002, setting a course to develop a multi-tiered national BMD system. He announced that the US would not accept any limitations on the amount or type of defences it would deploy.<sup>75</sup>

The administration claimed the abrogation of the ABM Treaty would not induce reactions from Russia because the new system

<sup>72</sup>See translated English version at <[www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/gazeta012400.htm](http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/gazeta012400.htm)>.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2003), 429–31.

<sup>75</sup>The Pentagon made this clear when it stated that 'the end-state requirements are not known at program initiation', and that 'the United States will not have a final fixed missile defense architecture. Rather, we will deploy an initial set of capabilities that will evolve to meet the changing threat and to take advantage of technological developments'. The White House, 'National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-23: National Policy on Ballistic Missile Defense', 16 Dec. 2002, <<https://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-23.htm>>.

would be solely directed towards rogue states. For example, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz told ABC News, 'the BMDs we deploy will be precisely that – defenses. They will threaten no one. They will, however, deter those who would threaten us with ballistic missile attack.'<sup>76</sup> Indeed, in this view, the treaty's abrogation could actually pave the way for better relations with Russia by demolishing one of the last vestiges of the Cold War.<sup>77</sup> This explanation was implausible even to some American nuclear analysts.<sup>78</sup> It certainly did not escape the attention of the Russians (and the Chinese for that matter) that BMDs undermined their interests in a variety of ways.

First, and most obviously, a BMD system undermined Russia's nuclear deterrent. As noted above, the administration claimed that BMD would cause rogue states to devalue the utility of ballistic missiles. However, from the perspective of Moscow, the logic of US arguments against rogue states' ballistic missile systems applied with equal, if not more force, to their own weapons. When the administration declared that the US 'has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge – thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless',<sup>79</sup> it appeared to Moscow that they were inadvertently or not, the targets of this technology. Moscow was therefore compelled to react to BMD.

Second, and relatedly, the BMD system was potentially a significant component in perpetuating US global primacy, thus obviating the emergence of a multipolar world. For Moscow, BMD reinforced the US ability to enforce dissuasion against it. Thus, BMD was a concept tailor-made to consolidate unipolarity. Moreover, the clear possibility existed of the US transferring BMD technology to US allies in Russia's regional sphere, thus directly undermining its interests. The Department of Defense's September 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review emphasized the development of a 'refocused and revitalized BMD program', which 'aimed at deployment of layered missile defenses'.<sup>80</sup> Critically, these

<sup>76</sup>See Paul Wolfowitz's testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 12 July 2001, <[www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=399](http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=399)>.

<sup>77</sup>According to Bush, doing away with the ABM Treaty would help 'liquidate the legacy of the Cold War'. Cited in Jeffrey Lewis and John Steinbruner, 'The Unsettled Legacy of the Cold War', *Daedalus* 131/4 (Fall 2002), 7.

<sup>78</sup>See Steve Fetter and Charles Glaser, 'National Missile Defense and the Future of US Nuclear Weapons Policy', *International Security* 26/1 (2001), 43–4; Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'US Nuclear Primacy and the Future of the Chinese Deterrent', *China Security* (Winter 2007), 67.

<sup>79</sup>Quoted in G. John Ikenberry, 'America's Imperial Temptation', *Foreign Affairs* 81/5 (Sept./Oct. 2002), 49.

<sup>80</sup>Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington DC 2001), 42.

changes in the BMD programme permitted the exploration of previously untested technologies that would 'provide limited defense against missile threats not only for the American people, but also for US friends and allies'.<sup>81</sup> To the extent that Russia sought an alternative distribution of power in the international system, this was a direct challenge to its definition of national interests.

Third, a particularly disconcerting aspect to Russians was that American security was defined in ways that highlighted differences in regime type as an issue of particular concern in bilateral relations.<sup>82</sup> Thus, when Bush declared in his 2004 swearing in ceremony that 'our aim is a democratic peace', this was an alarming reference to the theory that democracies do not go to war with one another, but also that conflict between democracies and non-democracies is intractable.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, many neoconservatives were critics of Russia (and China) on ideological grounds.<sup>84</sup> A Project for a New American Century report typically stated that 'in time, American and allied power in the region may provide a spur to the process of democratization inside China'.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, Russian officialdom would have noted that even those in the US who held hope for a new US-Russian strategic partnership were quick to add an important regime-based caveat.<sup>86</sup>

Russia and China countered that the official rationale for BMD was inexplicable, jointly stating on 18 July 2000, that America's case was based on the 'pretext of so-called missile threats from some countries', and that invigorating 'political, legal and diplomatic means' was the only way to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to 'rogues'.<sup>87</sup> To both these states, the ABM Treaty was held to be the 'cornerstone of global strategic stability and

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown 2010), Chapter 13; Robert Jervis, 'Understanding the Bush Doctrine', *Political Science Quarterly* 118/3 (Fall 2003), 365.

<sup>83</sup>George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, Washington DC, 20 Jan. 2004, <[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/transcripts/bushtext\\_012004.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/transcripts/bushtext_012004.html)>.

<sup>84</sup>In particular, Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol and Robert Kagan. See James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking 2004), 284, 316.

<sup>85</sup>Project for a New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century* (Washington DC: Sept. 2000), 19.

<sup>86</sup>Sherman W. Garnett, John Edwin Mroz and John E. Tedstrom, *Toward the Common Good: Building a New US-Russian Relationship* (New York: EastWest Institute 2001), 7.

<sup>87</sup>Joint Statement by the Presidents of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, 18 July 2000, <[www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/missile-defense/history/joint-statement-china-russia.htm](http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/missile-defense/history/joint-statement-china-russia.htm)>.

international security', and thus its abrogation would 'trigger off another round of arms race and subsequently reverse the positive trend [that] emerged in world politics after the end of the Cold War'.<sup>88</sup> Rather disturbing for Moscow and Beijing was the US's single-mindedness on this issue, and seeming willingness to bear significant costs in pursuit of BMD. During Congressional testimony, Secretary of State Colin Powell recounted President Bush informing his Russian counterpart about the US view on missile defence. The President was reported to have said to his Russian counterpart: 'You can do whatever you think you have to do for your security. You can MIRV [multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicle] your missiles, you can keep more, you can go lower. Do what you think you need. This is what we know we need, and we are going to this level.'<sup>89</sup> Deputy-Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz echoed this basic view, stating that some costs were acceptable since BMD would place the US 'in a much better position – much, much better – five or ten years from now to defend our troops and, I'm almost sure, to be able to defend our people'.<sup>90</sup> In many ways, this quintessentially Bush-era statement, resonated with a long-standing unilateralist strain of American strategic thinking,<sup>91</sup> and suggested that at least some officials held a belief that the US had reached a position of power so great that it did not have to be concerned with any constraints on its actions (or in Brooks and Wohlforth's terms, a situation where constraints had become 'inoperable'<sup>92</sup>).

In a nutshell, in the shadow of Washington's immense power and commitment to expand BMD, Moscow and Beijing felt they had no other option but to assume they were the intended targets. Indeed, after being told that the system was directed at 'rogues', one Chinese government official stated: 'That doesn't matter. The consequences are still terrible for us.'<sup>93</sup> One Russian general retorted that the American

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Quoted in Secretary of State Colin Powell's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. See Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reduction* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office 2002), 10.

<sup>90</sup>Frontline interview with Paul Wolfowitz on 12 June 2002, <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/missile/interviews/wolfowitz.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/missile/interviews/wolfowitz.html)>

<sup>91</sup>Stephen Sestanovich, 'American Maximalism', *National Interest* No. 79 (Spring 2005), 13–23.

<sup>92</sup>Brooks and Wohlforth, 4, 15–16.

<sup>93</sup>Quoted in Eric Eckholm, 'The World: Missile Wars: What America Calls a Defense, China Calls an Offense', *New York Times*, 2 July 2000.

argument was ‘for the naive or the stupid ... This system will be directed against Russia and against China’.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, in their July 2000 statement, both states declared the system to be an attempt to gain ‘unilateral military and security superiority’, and used language suggesting they believed BMDs would create a new security dilemma, resulting in a net decrease in security.<sup>95</sup> The following sections systematically outline Russia’s reactions to the Bush administration’s BMD system.

### *Russia and US Ballistic Missile Defense*

In August 1999, the Russian Federation elected Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister. Assuming power at a time of Russian weakness,<sup>96</sup> he nevertheless declared that ‘the era of Russian geo-political concessions is coming to an end’.<sup>97</sup> Putin promoted a vision of a multipolar world and argued against the abrogation of the ABM Treaty. His view was that BMD unrestricted by a treaty could seriously threaten Russia’s deterrent. Indeed, as former Clinton administration official Strobe Talbott noted of the Russian position, ‘they found it [the abrogation of the ABM Treaty] even more objectionable than NATO enlargement or the air campaign against Yugoslavia’.<sup>98</sup> Russia agreed with the US that proliferation was a threat, but contended that ‘only by joint efforts of the international community is it possible to achieve a solution to this problem’, and therefore the US should look for ‘joint ways ... to use together the possibilities that both [have in] advanced technologies’.<sup>99</sup> Specifically, the Russians proposed an ‘ABM-for-Europe’ system be established in conjunction with efforts to strengthen the traditional non-proliferation regime.<sup>100</sup> Alongside this, the Russians broached the idea of

<sup>94</sup>Quoted in Martin Nesirky, ‘Interview – Russian General Slams US on Missile Plan’, *Reuters*, 14 Feb. 2000.

<sup>95</sup>See note 87.

<sup>96</sup>Between 1992 and 1998 Russia underwent a severe decline in military power. See Christopher Davis, ‘Country Survey XV: The Defence Sector in the Economy of a Declining Superpower: Soviet Union and Russia, 1965–2001’, *Defence and Peace Economics* 13/3 (June 2002), 145–77.

<sup>97</sup>Quoted in Stephen Cohen, *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives* (New York: Columbia UP 2009), 176–7.

<sup>98</sup>Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb*, rev. ed. (Washington DC: Brookings 2006), 15.

<sup>99</sup>Sergei Ivanov, ‘Russia’s “ABM-for-Europe” Plan: Remarks by Foreign Minister Ivanov’, *Disarmament Diplomacy* No. 54 (Feb. 2001), <[www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd54/54abm.htm](http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd54/54abm.htm)>.

<sup>100</sup>Ivanov, ‘Russia’s “ABM-for-Europe” Plan’.

joining the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) initiative. Neither initiative resonated with the Bush administration.

Notwithstanding the doubtful plausibility of Bush's claims that the Russians would enter into a 'new strategic relationship'<sup>101</sup> with the US as it pursued a variety of new BMD systems, including an NMD shield, Moscow nevertheless initially acted with restraint. Three considerations could explain the Russian response.<sup>102</sup> First, there was the possibility that the system would falter owing to technical difficulties and cost, which were subjects of debate within the United States. Second, there was also a qualified desire, in the aftermath of 9/11, to counter the joint threat of Islamic terrorism, papering over underlying tensions in the short-term.<sup>103</sup> Third, the fact of the matter was that it was the US's prerogative to make its own national security choices.

The Russian position on missile defence hardened as its relative power increased, and the US engaged in a series of geopolitical moves around Russia's periphery that were viewed as an attempt to further roll back its influence.<sup>104</sup> These moves included the expansion of NATO up to Russia's borders, and the offer of potential eventual full NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine – two states that occupied territory within Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Alongside NATO expansion, the US also supported 'colour' revolutions in the three former Soviet states of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. These were developments that saw the ousting of pro-Russian governments. NATO and other countries also recognised Kosovo's independence in 2008, at the expense of Russia's ally Serbia. Also, the US, as part of its War on Terror, built new bases and expanded existing ones in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and invaded Iraq in 2003 over the opposition of Russia.<sup>105</sup> To a Russian observer, the foregoing could

<sup>101</sup>Bush held that it was 'possible to build a Missile Defense and defuse confrontation with Russia. America should do both'. Statement by George W. Bush: New Leadership on National Security, *Disarmament Diplomacy* No. 46 (May 2000), <[www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd46/46bush.htm](http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd46/46bush.htm)>.

<sup>102</sup>Putin initially called the abrogation of the ABM Treaty a 'mistake', and claimed that the move 'does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation'. Terence Neilan, 'Bush Pulls out of ABM Treaty – Putin Calls Move a Mistake', *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2001.

<sup>103</sup>Russia allowed the US to use Central Asian bases; gain access to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, and joined the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) that sought to interdict the transfer of WMD between 'rogue states' on the high seas.

<sup>104</sup>Richard K. Betts, 'The Three Faces of NATO', *National Interest* No. 100 (March/Apr. 2009), 31–8.

<sup>105</sup>This took place in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia; Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania in Eastern Europe; the Philippines in Asia; in Djibouti in Africa; and Oman and Qatar in the Middle East.



easily be interpreted as an encirclement policy against Russia, chipping away at its core area of regional influence. Thus, general developments in US–Russian relations influenced how the BMD issue was perceived in Russia. When it came to assessing the deployment of BMD to Central Europe, Russia’s ambassador to the US Sergey Kislyak explained: ‘We see it not as ten innocuous missiles being deployed. We see it as an element of a bigger picture. This picture seems to be increasingly destabilising and potentially more destabilising in the future. That is the concern.’<sup>106</sup>

Compounding this, there was even talk among American academics that the US was acquiring nuclear primacy – a strategic capability that could destroy all but a handful of Russian ICBMs.<sup>107</sup> David McDonough noted that the growing inventory of high-yield warheads were disproportionate to the needs for tactical bunker-busting strikes against ‘rogue states’, and appeared most suitable for use against targets on Russian and Chinese territory, offering the US a potential first-strike advantage.<sup>108</sup> An analysis by RAND supported this point stating:

The force is larger than it needs to be if deterrence by threat of nuclear retaliation is the sole objective of US nuclear strategy ... What the planned force appears best suited for beyond the needs of traditional deterrence is a preemptive counterforce capability against Russia and China. Otherwise, the numbers and the operating procedures simply do not add up.<sup>109</sup>

BMD was critical for acquiring nuclear primacy, and from America’s point of view, achieving nuclear primacy would provide maximum deterrence. But to Russia (and China) such a capability could not be viewed as benign since it could increase America’s leverage in future crises. This was particularly the case since there was no reason in principle why bunker busters could not be combined with a programme like Prompt Global Strike, further increasing America’s ability to hold

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<sup>106</sup>Daryl Kimball and Miles Pomper, ‘A Fresh Start? An Interview with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, Russian Ambassador to the United States’, *Arms Control Today* 38/10 (Dec. 2008), 6–12.

<sup>107</sup>Lieber and Press, ‘The End of MAD?’, Lieber and Press, ‘The Rise of US Nuclear Primacy’.

<sup>108</sup>David S. McDonough, *Nuclear Superiority: The New Triad and the Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, Adelphi Papers 46/383 (London: IISS 2006), 63–4, 69.

<sup>109</sup>Glenn Buchan, David M. Matonick, Calvin Shipbaugh, and Richard Mesic, *Future Roles of US Nuclear Forces: Implications for US Strategy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation 2003), 92.



their respective deterrents at risk.<sup>110</sup> In 2007, the administration announced its decision to deploy part of America's homeland NMD system, the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) in Poland, and an X-band radar capable of monitoring Russian missile launches in the Czech Republic.<sup>111</sup> Russia viewed this Third Site<sup>112</sup> as intolerable for three reasons. First, the radars could be used to spy on Russian ICBM tests. Second, they could be a Trojan horse for the deployment of follow-on systems.<sup>113</sup> Finally, there was a geopolitical dimension, as Russia viewed this development as a strategic move designed to bolster the Czech Republic and Poland (already NATO members) into a vanguard against it. As a result, Russia's objection went beyond the potential technological capabilities of the system. BMD was part of a fundamental geopolitical cleavage in Europe between Russia and Central Europe. Polish officials in particular made no effort to hide the fact that to them the pre-eminent threat came from Russia and not Iran.<sup>114</sup> Further, as part of the Third Site agreement, Poland requested deployments of American surface-to-air Patriot PAC-3 systems, affording it the ability to engage tactical Russian ballistic missiles. US assistance was sought on modernising the Polish military in the context of a request for a bilateral security guarantee. Although the US initially held out on the latter, the timing of its conclusion was conspicuous as it took place immediately after Russia's invasion in Georgia in 2008.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>110</sup>Indeed, it is possible that some American officials favoured pursuing nuclear primacy in order to compel Russia and China to divert resources away from economic development and conventional weapon programmes to expensive nuclear force modernisation. See Douglas Alan Ross, 'Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy: Essential Pillar of Terminal Liability', *International Journal* 63/4 (Autumn 2008), 856.

<sup>111</sup>According to Russian officials, the administration also reneged on verbal promises that it would allow the permanent stationing of Russian monitors at two sites. See Peter Finn, 'Russia Alleges US Rollback" on Anti-Missile Plan', *Washington Post*, 6 Dec. 2007.

<sup>112</sup>The third site was the first deployment to take place outside the continental US, but the third after deployments at Fort Greely, Alaska, and at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.

<sup>113</sup>Stephen J. Cimbala, 'Strategic Reassurance in a Proliferation-Permissive World: American and Russian Options', *Defense & Security Analysis* 22/3 (2006), 235.

<sup>114</sup>Josh Rogin, 'Polish Foreign Minister: We're not actually Worried about Iranian Missile Threat', *Foreign Policy*, 29 April 2010, <[http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/04/29/polish\\_foreign\\_minister\\_we\\_re\\_not\\_actually\\_worried\\_about\\_iranian\\_missile\\_threat](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/04/29/polish_foreign_minister_we_re_not_actually_worried_about_iranian_missile_threat)> accessed 5 Nov. 2012.

<sup>115</sup>Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk linked the Georgian conflict's outcome to the idea that Poland could one day be subject to similar aggression. Nik Hynek and Vit Stritecky, 'The Rise and Fall of the Third Site of Ballistic BMD', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43/2 (June 2010), 183.

Indeed, even before the Russian intervention in Georgia, increasing Russian dissatisfaction with the US was clear. At a February 2007 security conference in Munich, Putin identified the US as a threat to international security, launching a systematic critique against the role BMD played in US strategy. Putin declared: 'Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations.'<sup>116</sup> Putin viewed the system in zero-sum terms, claiming that the expansion of BMD into Central Europe was stimulating 'an arms race', where the 'balance of power will be absolutely destroyed and one of the parties will benefit from the feeling of complete security'.<sup>117</sup> As a consequence, he said Russia had to 'think about ensuring our own security'.<sup>118</sup> What Putin left vague in 2007, he had stated explicitly a year before in an address to the Russian parliament. On that occasion, Putin stated that Russia had been forced to respond by further honing existing Russian capabilities 'for overcoming anti-missile defences'.<sup>119</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed Putin's position, explaining that: 'In questions of military-strategic stability, there are its own immutable laws: actions, counteractions, defensive, offensive systems'. He added that 'these laws operate regardless of how somebody would like to see this or that situation'.<sup>120</sup>

### *Russia's Hard Balancing*

This section builds on the preceding by delineating Russian hard internal balancing against US BMD, as evident in: (1) the fielding of new strategic and conventional weapons equipped with BMD countermeasures and, (2) changes Russia made to its military doctrine. Moreover, Russia officials repeatedly stated that they were responding to US moves.

<sup>116</sup>Vladimir Putin, 'Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy', 12 Feb. 2007, <[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555_pf.html)>.

<sup>117</sup>Putin 'Putin's Prepared Remarks'.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Putin stated: 'Work is already underway today on creating unique high-precision weapons systems and manoeuvrable combat units that will have an unpredictable flight trajectory for the potential opponent. Along with the means for overcoming anti-missile defences that we already have, these new types of arms will enable us to maintain what is definitely one of the most important guarantees of lasting peace, namely, the strategic balance of forces'. Vladimir Putin, 'Annual Address to the Federal Assembly', The Kremlin, 10 May 2006, <[http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823\\_type70029type82912\\_105566.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml)>.

<sup>120</sup>As cited in Wade Boese, 'News Analysis: BMD Five Years after the ABM Treaty', *Arms Control Today* 37/5 (June 2007), 33.

The first prong of Russia's hard balancing response involved fielding new strategic and conventional weapons equipped with BMD countermeasures. This development was not foreordained. In summer 2000, then-Chief of the Russian General Staff, Anatoly Kvashnin, drew up a radical 'denuclearisation' plan that envisaged reducing reliance on nuclear forces. At the time, Kvashnin was engaged in a heated internal debate with Minister of Defence Igor Sergeyev, who was opposed to a draw-down. Kvashnin initially emerged victorious, outlining a Putin-endorsed plan in early 2000 for a massive and rapid reduction of Russian nuclear forces to 1,500 missiles or less. This would have included eliminating Russia's MIRVed missiles, reducing the deployment rate of Topol-M missiles, retiring sea-based strategic missiles as they came to the end of their service lives, and removal of ground-based ICBMs as an independent and dominant leg of Russia's nuclear triad.<sup>121</sup> Kvashnin's plans were appealing in the context of a decade of economic decline. But the success of Kvashnin's proposal was linked to the US maintaining its ban on NMD, as Russia promised 'a material response' if the US exited the ABM Treaty.<sup>122</sup> True to their word, the Russian denuclearisation plans were cancelled immediately following the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty. Kvashnin, contrary to earlier comments, stated that Russia's nuclear forces guaranteed its security against US BMD.<sup>123</sup> This outcome did not alter the trend towards reducing the total number of Russia strategic warheads, but it did affect the depth and speed of Russia's denuclearisation, illustrating how BMD had an immediate effect on Russia's nuclear planning.

Russia's balancing strategy in strategic and conventional weapons occurred over subsequent years, as part of a broader military expansion. Since 2001, the Russian military budget has quadrupled, with an average increase of 7.4 per cent each year.<sup>124</sup> In this respect, Russia's strategic forces were tasked with qualitatively developing new strategic forces equipped with BMD countermeasures. A substantial missile upgrade programme was initiated in 2008, and Russia announced it would replace half its nuclear arsenal by 2015,<sup>125</sup> upgrade

<sup>121</sup>Nikolai Sokov, 'The Nuclear Debate of Summer 2000', 1 July 2004, Global Security Newswire, <[www.nti.org/analysis/articles/nuclear-debate-summer-2000/](http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/nuclear-debate-summer-2000/)>.

<sup>122</sup>Sokov, 'The Nuclear Debate'.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'Chapter Five: Russia', *The Military Balance 2012* (London: Routledge for IISS 2012), 189.

<sup>125</sup>John Feffer, 'An Arms Race in Asia?', *Asian Perspective* 33/4 (2009), 5–15.

all nuclear systems by 2020, and initiate research into low-yield nuclear weapons.<sup>126</sup> These increases were complemented with the development and deployment of new strategic and conventional weapons throughout the decade. One of the most significant new missiles deployed was the road-mobile Topol-M (SS-27) IBCM. It represented a qualitative advance over its predecessors, adding a manoeuvrable re-entry vehicle (MARV) capability, increasing its capacity to evade US BMD systems. It was first tested on 29 May 2007 and entered service in 2010.

Increases in resources to strategic weaponry designed to hard balance the US BMD was evident in Russia's reinvigoration of its own BMD program. First, Putin chose to improve Moscow's already established BMD (the A135) surrounding Moscow, comprised of 68 53T6 nuclear-tipped short-range missile interceptors. Funding for this system increased in 2007. Second, Russia made changes to its military doctrine. These changes are admittedly not as overtly indicative of hard balancing as the empirical balancing efforts outlined above. However, alongside the changes described above, they provide the broader context to view Russia's response to US BMD. In January 2000, Putin revised Russia's 1997 National Security Concept to adjust to newly perceived threats.<sup>127</sup> These threats were magnified owing to Russia's growing relative conventional weakness vis-à-vis the US. The prospect of the US withdrawing from the ABM Treaty added another element of uncertainty for Russia during the writing of its new doctrine. In the 1997 version of the concept, nuclear weapons were reserved solely to deter a large-scale attack. The 2000 concept allowed for the use of nuclear weapons to deter smaller-scale wars that did not necessarily threaten Russia's existence. This effectively lowered the nuclear threshold by suggesting strategic weapons could be brought into play in response to conventional attack against Russia or its regional

<sup>126</sup>This would be accompanied by new 'warships, primarily nuclear-powered submarines carrying cruise missiles, and multifunctional submarines as well as a system of aerospace defence'. This would 'guarantee' its nuclear deterrent and conventional war-fighting capability. BBC News, 'Russia to Upgrade Nuclear Systems', 26 Sept. 2008. Former Russian Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhaylov stated in a 2002 *Izvestiya* interview that Russia was working on a low-yield warhead to penetrate 30–40 metres into rock and destroy a buried target. See Mark B. Schneider, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Committee on Armed Services, US House of Representatives, 'The Nuclear Forces and Doctrine of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China', 14 Oct. 2011, <[www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/.../CHRG-112hhrg71449.pdf](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/.../CHRG-112hhrg71449.pdf)>.

<sup>127</sup>See text of 2000 version at <[www.armscontrol.org/act/2000\\_01-02/docjf00](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_01-02/docjf00)>; Jakub M. Godzimirski, 'Russian National Security Concepts 1997 and 2000: A Comparative Analysis', *European Security* 9/4 (Winter 2000), 74–94.

interests.<sup>128</sup> Alongside this, the doctrine declared that ‘the qualitative improvement of the strategic weapons complex’ was a priority.<sup>129</sup> Although no new formal doctrine would be announced until 2010, the ongoing US-Russian dispute over BMD affected Russia’s strategic targeting, with Russia threatening in 2007 to target Poland and Ukraine if they hosted US BMD systems,<sup>130</sup> and restarting long-range strategic bomber patrols across the Pacific.<sup>131</sup> Russia also announced in 2008 that it would no longer be reporting its missile launches under the International Code of Conduct (ICOC) against Ballistic Missile Proliferation.<sup>132</sup>

### *Objections*

There are a number of possible objections to the argument presented here.

First, it could be argued that US BMD was never intended to counter Russian nuclear and conventional capabilities. That may well be the sincere American view, and has no doubt been articulated countless times by its officials. To take one example, in 2008 Secretary of Defense Robert Gates commented in reference to BMD that ‘the Russians know perfectly well that this isn’t aimed against them’.<sup>133</sup> However, from the Russian perspective, the situation is not so obvious. For decision-makers in Moscow, capabilities are far more influential than intentions in world politics. As we point out earlier, states in competitive dyads are highly unlikely to take assurances at face value. This is especially the case when there is a history of hostility between them. This is further reinforced when one of them is perceived as pursuing an on-going post-Cold War strategy designed to actively maintain, if not extend its relative position, reflected in part by the steady expansion of the US into Russia’s sphere of influence via NATO expansion, and BMD activities referenced earlier in this article.

<sup>128</sup>Godzimirski, ‘Russian National Security Concepts’, 86–9.

<sup>129</sup>See text of 2000 version at <[www.armscontrol.org/act/2000\\_01-02/docjf00](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_01-02/docjf00)>.

<sup>130</sup>Victor A. Utgoff, ‘Proliferation, Missile Defence and American Ambitions’, *Survival* 44/2 (Summer 2002), 85–102.

<sup>131</sup>British Broadcasting Corporation, ‘Russia Restarts Cold War Patrols’, 17 Aug. 2007, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6950986.stm>>.

<sup>132</sup>Wade Boese, ‘Russia Halts Missile Launch Notices’, *Arms Control Today* 38/2 (March 2008), 46.

<sup>133</sup>Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, ‘Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence in the 21st Century’, Speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 Oct. 2008. See text of speech at <[http://carnegieendowment.org/files/1028\\_transcrip\\_gates\\_checked.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/1028_transcrip_gates_checked.pdf)>.

Second, it could be argued that if anything the Bush administration, however clumsily, sought to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in its strategy.<sup>134</sup> But this argument is open to interpretation. As far as the gross numbers of nuclear weapons is concerned, it is true that the Bush administration effected *quantitative* reductions in US nuclear weapons. However, at the same time, in *qualitative* terms, research by Lieber and Press has shown significant improvements in US conventional and nuclear counterforce capabilities.<sup>135</sup> This stretches up to the time of writing in 2013.<sup>136</sup>

A critic might object to the foregoing research, pointing to Secretary Gates' 2008 speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.<sup>137</sup> The thrust of Gates' speech appears to run counter to our argument, implying that numerous issues severely undermine the US nuclear arsenal. These include: (1) problems in the Air Force's handling of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons-related material; (2) supply-chain problems in America's nuclear components system; (3) a serious brain drain reflected in the loss of veteran nuclear weapons designers and technicians, and (4) the bleak long-term prognosis since the US had not tested a nuclear weapon since 2002, or developed a new nuclear weapon since 1990. This required the US to extend the life of existing weapons beyond what was intended.

The issues that Secretary Gates is commenting on are real. However, in evaluating the contents of this speech it should be noted that there are strong budgetary-political dynamics at work here. One of Gates' objectives in making the speech was to secure congressional funding to enhance American nuclear security in ways that are consistent with the re-affirmation of US primacy. Thus, Secretary Gates notes in the same speech that 'there is no way to ignore ... Russian or Chinese strategic modernization programs'.<sup>138</sup> He further notes that 'what seems to work best in world affairs ... is the possession by those states who wish to preserve the peace of the preponderant power and of the will to accept the burdens and responsibilities required to achieve that purpose'.<sup>139</sup> A close reading of Gates' comments in a less budget-securing context two years later suggests that we should adopt a more qualified reading of his 2008 speech. In 2010, Secretary Gates declared

<sup>134</sup> Amy Woolfe, *US Strategic Nuclear Forces: Background, Developments, and Issues* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 2013), 6–7.

<sup>135</sup> Lieber and Press, 'The End of MAD?', 7–8.

<sup>136</sup> Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'The New Era of Nuclear Weapons, Deterrence and Conflict', *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7 (Spring 2013), 3–14.

<sup>137</sup> Gates, 'Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence'.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

in the Department of Defense's Nuclear Posture Review that US 'investments ... represents a credible modernization plan necessary to sustain the nuclear infrastructure and support our nation's deterrent'.<sup>140</sup> Relatedly, Secretary Gates stated in the 2010 Ballistic Missile Report that 'the ability of the US to defend itself against many forms of this threat [i.e. ballistic missile attack] is also growing rapidly'.<sup>141</sup> In *qualitative* terms, the US did not reduce its commitment to nuclear weapons during the Bush (and it has to be said, the Obama) administration.

Third, it could be argued that Russia's response is to US conventional superiority, not its nuclear capability. This has plausibility and, especially during the 1990s, it did appear that the Russian decision to reduce the nuclear threshold, by reneging on their NFU commitment, was a response to the degradation of their conventional forces relative to NATO's. So, a qualified version of this argument is compatible with the view advanced in this article. However, a more far-reaching claim that the Russians are therefore not responding to US nuclear policy would be to under-emphasise the role of US nuclear weapons in Russian strategic thinking. Yeltsin and Putin's decision to extend the life of some of their strategic forces (that were otherwise scheduled for decommissioning) occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, during the same time US BMD policy was turning towards deploying more robust BMD systems. Subsequently, the Russians explicitly stated throughout the 2000s that they perceived America's pursuit of BMD to be a critical threat, thus requiring them to modernise their nuclear weapons force and develop new nuclear weapons capable of overcoming the US BMD system. They also opted to reinvigorate their own BMD programme.

Fourth, it could be posited that Russian balancing is directed as much against China as it is against the US, or even more so. There is some preliminary evidence of Russian unease at China's growing power capabilities.<sup>142</sup> However, was Russia concerned enough that it was balancing China in the 2001–08 period? This is an empirical matter. The publicly available evidence which we draw on to make our case overwhelmingly suggests that the Russians have been balancing the US, and not the Chinese. On the contrary, the Russians are engaged in

<sup>140</sup>Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (Washington DC April 2010), i.

<sup>141</sup>Department of Defense, *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report* (Washington DC 2010), i.

<sup>142</sup>Stephen Blank, 'The Chinese Reaction and Asian Impact on Russian Nuclear Policy', *Defense & Security Analysis* 28/2 (March 2012), 36–54.



developing their relationship with the Chinese, even if it is not as smooth as either side envisaged.<sup>143</sup> Pushing the point a little further, there is no compelling evidence that the Russo-Chinese relationship during the Bush administration (and indeed extending to the the Obama administration) has any of the characteristics of an immediate or general deterrence relationship.<sup>144</sup> A different interpretation of Russian policy, where Moscow is publicly balancing the US, but also conveying messages to the Chinese that they are the target of Russian balancing will have to await the release of the Russian and Chinese internal documents covering this period.

A fifth possible response to the analysis presented here is that Russia has been relatively at ease about its strategic vulnerability in respect to US BMD. In this view, the state of technology that underpins the US BMD project, both during the period of this analysis and stretching into the Obama administration, is still relatively under-developed. The likelihood of the US developing a full-blown shield that would undermine Russia's deterrent is unlikely in the short run, if not the long run. Again, this view under-emphasises the role of uncertainty and the technological imitation effect in world politics.<sup>145</sup> Even if the US BMD attempts are ambitious and far from guaranteed of success, the Russians are subject to the same concern with uncertainty in world politics that afflict all major powers across history. This dynamic will compel Russia to both distrust and respond to US technological advancements. From the Russian perspective, why would the US, which is manifestly pursuing a position of nuclear and full-spectrum primacy, not use these weapons as one of a variety of instruments to coerce Russia in a future crisis situation? Russians simply cannot passively accept this possible situation without a response.

Sixth, and relatedly, of course, a perfectly legitimate response to the question raised above is to note that as a purely empirical matter, it is not clear how BMD and indeed, offensive nuclear weapons boost US leverage over Russia.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, US nuclear advances do not appear to have given it coercive leverage across a variety of post-Cold War crises with Russia. This point is a well-taken one. However, we would suggest that the history of nuclear weapons technology in a previous age of

<sup>143</sup>Rajan Menon, 'The Limits of Sino-Russian Partnership', *Survival* 51/3 (June–July 2009), 99–130.

<sup>144</sup>Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications 1983), 27–47.

<sup>145</sup>Waltz, *Theory*, 127.

<sup>146</sup>This concern is also raised in Jeffrey S. Lantis, 'Correspondence: The Short Shadow of Nuclear Primacy', *International Security* 31/3 (2006/07), 174–7.



nuclear unipolarity counsels caution before accepting this view.<sup>147</sup> During that period, the US successfully leveraged its superior nuclear position to face down the Soviet Union in successive crises over Berlin (in 1958 and 1961) and during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.<sup>148</sup> Thus, it is far from clear that the Russians may choose to live with the increased vulnerability posed by US BMD and offensive nuclear weapons. This is an important point because the inferiority of Russia's post-Cold War era conventional forces compared to NATO has made Russia more reliant on strategic and non-strategic nuclear capabilities, beginning in the 1990s.<sup>149</sup> Notably, this increased Russian reliance on nuclear weapons is occurring in the context of cuts in Russia's nuclear arsenal. Indeed, there is a certain irony in this strategic situation, since it reverses the position that Russia experienced with NATO during the Cold War. From the mid-1960s to the end of the Cold War, NATO's strategy was to use nuclear weapons to counter Russia's superiority in conventional forces.<sup>150</sup>

## Conclusion

As Realist theorists have consistently pointed out, there is a strong strain in American elite (and arguably also popular) thinking that has historically only reluctantly accepted balance of power and deterrence thinking.<sup>151</sup> This explains the fact that whenever the US has had the ability and resources to do so, it has attempted to transcend the structural restraints of the balance of power and deterrence, in favour of unipolarity and missile defences. Yet, the irony in pursuing this course of action is that such behaviour is a catalyst for balancing and deterrence against the US. Again, this is not a surprise to realists. As Layne has pointed out 'the very fact of US preponderance' provides 'strong incentives to develop strategies, weapons, and doctrines' to 'offset American capabilities'.<sup>152</sup>

This article has examined the reaction of Russia, in the structural context of post-Cold War era unipolarity, to the evolution of US BMD policy from the 1990s through the Bush administration's tenure. It has

<sup>147</sup>For a fuller discussion see Keir Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'Correspondence: The Short Shadow of Nuclear Primacy', *International Security* 31/3 (Winter 2006/07), 192–3.

<sup>148</sup>Lieber, *War and the Engineers*, 134–40.

<sup>149</sup>Stephen Cimbala, 'Minimum Deterrence and Missile Defenses: What's New, What's True, What's Arguable', *Defense & Security Analysis* 28/1 (2012), 73.

<sup>150</sup>Lieber and Press 'The New Era of Nuclear Weapons', 6.

<sup>151</sup>Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 402; Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1994), 221, 431.

<sup>152</sup>Layne, 'The War on Terrorism', in Paul *et al.*, *Balance of Power*, 118.

been argued that Moscow's response is a demonstrable instance of hard internal balancing in the nuclear sphere, activating security dilemma dynamics. This point has not been sufficiently appreciated in the relevant academic literature on major power behaviour under unipolarity, which either sees unipolarity as overly durable and minimises security competition between the pole and major powers in the system,<sup>153</sup> or simply asserts (based on deduction) that internal balancing is not a viable option.<sup>154</sup>

It is possible that the reaction of Russia could have been avoided, or its intensity reduced, but it would have required a more restrained and comprehensive strategic vision of global security problems on behalf of the Bush administration. Russian officials stated that balancing would be their inevitable reaction to the US pursuit of missile defences. Moreover, Moscow responded even though they believed it was undermining their own and America's security, leading to an overall decrease in security. Ultimately, Russia nuclear balancing efforts sought to raise the costs to the US of maintaining unipolarity through the deployment of a multi-tiered BMD system that contains an NMD component. If there is one consolation that Washington can draw from the developments discussed above, it is that Russia has not begun to establish an alliance with China to externally balance the US. However, as this article attempts to show, the danger is that internal balancing has become self-reinforcing, thus facilitating the emergence of an increasingly conflictual international system in which heightened security dilemma dynamics characterise great power relations.

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<sup>154</sup> See Pape, 'Soft Balancing Against the US', 15–16.

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