

**AMERICAN BAPTIST  
RESOLUTION ON  
NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM**

The entire world lives constantly under the threat of massive nuclear war. Through five decades of intense nuclear build-up, many people have hoped and prayed and worked for an end to the madness of the arms race, but without notable success.

We believe that many nations, including the United States, have placed too much trust in technological developments and military might. Weapons and defenses have become like gods to many people in and out of government, but faith in weapons and defenses is misplaced (Isaiah 31:1, Psalms 33:13-17, Exodus 20:3).

We have heard that nuclear warfare can be made obsolete in our lifetime, that we can build a series of airborne, ground, and space based shields and lasers which will protect us by their ability to intercept incoming nuclear weapons. That is a very appealing notion to the generations that have lived under the sword of nuclear devastation. Some leaders in the weapons debate are convinced that a National Missile Defense (NMD) System (the succession program to the Strategic Defense Initiative) will provide protection from nuclear annihilation.

However, we believe these convictions are misplaced. Significant evidence exists that the proposed shields, detonators, and laser systems, although developed from "state-of-the-art" technology and labeled "defensive," will not defend us against destruction should a nuclear war begin.

As currently conceived, deployment of an NMD system will not be able to stop a full scale attack from nuclear missiles. Furthermore, NMD cannot protect us against nuclear-tipped cruise missiles, nuclear-armed bombers, "backpack" bombs and very low trajectory ballistic missiles.

One Secretary of Defense has set a goal of deploying a strategic defensive system in space which is "99 percent effective." That would make it far more reliable and effective than any weapon or system now in the U.S. arsenal. But even if that level could be reached, it will not protect us from nuclear incineration. NMD is a "limited" system of approximately 100 defensive missiles to be stationed at one or possibly two sites. Estimates are that this site and deployment pattern would be able to counter at most only some 20 incoming missiles when multiple warheads and decoys are included. And this assumes that the very challenging technological hurdle of developing a "hit-to-kill" system can be overcome.

This project is not in any way comparable to putting a person on the moon or creating an atomic reaction in a laboratory, as some supporters have suggested. It has its own set of problems related to integrating battle management, sensing satellites, guidance of missiles, plus those already mentioned--decoys, multiple warheads, and "hit-to-kill" destruction means.

We agree with noted scientist Hans Bethe who said, "...it would be far easier and far less dangerous, to reduce the arsenals of nuclear weapons on both sides drastically in the near future."<sup>1</sup> Security will not be found unless we learn to get along with adversaries and move away from the massive military spending which is now well above a quarter of a trillion dollars each year, and rising. An adequate defense can not be based entirely on technology and systems. Defense must include serious preventive diplomacy and negotiation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Star Wars: Weapons in Space, by Hans Bethe and Edward Teller.

A system billed as purely "defensive" can easily be used in combination with offensive weapons to carry out a massive first strike, so it can be interpreted by an enemy as constituting a major threat.

NMD cannot protect the U.S. against the real threats posed to our population, especially the nuclear threat. NMD will, however:

- Drain hundreds of billions of dollars from the federal budget
- Increase suspicion among nations that the U.S. seeks global hegemony
- Pollute space and the earth's environment
- Spur other nations to develop their own large offensive nuclear capabilities to defeat the U.S. NMD system.

The General Board of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. urges the United States government and other nations to:

1. Work together on reducing hostility;
2. Work together to create a climate of greater trust; and
3. Work together on reducing the power and breadth of their arsenals, rather than building more weapons and more military systems.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1987  
108 For, 53 Against, 15 Abstentions  
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1989  
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - December 1990  
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1995  
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 2000  
(General Board Reference # - 8157:3/89)

---

## **POLICY BASE**

### **American Baptist Policy Statement on Military and Foreign Policy**

The proliferation of increasingly powerful weapons does not guarantee national security and may result in less security. Arms control and disarmament are essential for the welfare and survival of humanity.

### **American Baptist Policy Statement on Peace**

We will persistently seek alternatives to war as a means of settling international disputes.