but also the best insurance of regime security” (p. 97). What we see, then, are two sources of rationality of the African state: first, the self-interest of age-old realpolitik, and, second, the altruism of modern-day constructivism.

If we can now move beyond those seemingly omnipresent images of African exceptionalism and savagery, which were successfully reinforced by Robert Kaplan (“The Coming Anarchy,” Atlantic Monthly [February, 1994]: 45–76), it is possible to see in this volume new opportunities for enriching international relations theory in several respects, such as Janis van der Westhuizen’s examination of South Africa’s market- ing power as the other “Rainbow Nation” (aside from the United States) as a means of attracting tourists and foreign investors (Chapter 5); the problem of sanctioning “rogue states” (Chapter 9); the enigma of the Westphalian system (Chapter 10); the coalescence of “modernists” and “anti- modernists” to protect the environment in southern Africa (Chapter 11); the impact of U.S. foreign policy on stability in southern Africa (Chapter 12); and the trend toward “new regionalism” in Africa as a response to security and developmental challenges (Chapter 13).

It is difficult for a diverse collection of essays, such as those contained in this volume, to measure up to the unenviable expectation of the editors to “replace the dominant . . . reading of the IR text” with another, obviously theirs. This volume does not come anywhere close to meeting that objective. What it does achieve, however, is raise a question that has been made even more important by the events of September 11, 2001, and that is whether the world is getting closer, as proponents of globalization would have us all believe, or growing farther apart, as “the clash of civilizations” thesis suggests. Either way, this volume is best seen as a call for a truly international theory of international relations and, for that reason, deserves the attention of scholars and practitioners alike.


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As Michael O’Hanlon concludes in his excellent contribution to Rockets’ Red Glare: “We should . . . get used to the debate over ballistic missile defenses. It has been around a long time, and no final resolution is imminent” (p. 132). In one sense, a review of these three recent books makes clear that many analysts had grown a bit too used to positioning themselves in terms of the 1972 ABM Treaty. Preoccupied with arguments over whether the treaty should be preserved, modified, or rewritten in light of a changing strategic and technological context, no one seemed to have anticipated that President George W. Bush would simply withdraw from it, invoking Article XV’s provision that either party could withdraw if “extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this Treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests.” Even many strategic defense supporters who deemed the treaty obsolete (as Robert Joseph persuasively maintains in his contribution to Rockets’ Red Glare) generally believed that it should only—and would only—be scrapped if negotiations over U.S.-proposed changes broke down. (“The Bush Administration,” surmises O’Hanlon, “will surely try very hard to amend it before going to such an extreme”) (p. 112). In the event, the president’s team disavowed even the word “negotiation,” saying they were willing only to “consult” the Russians regarding the treaty’s impending demise.

While the sudden arrival of the post–ABM Treaty era, coupled with the new light thrown by 9/11 on the entire subject of homeland security, leaves all three of the books under review sounding slightly anachronistic, the central arguments advanced by the authors retain their relevance. The reason, as Roger Handberg notes in Ballistic Missile Defense and the Future of American Security, in summing up the historical record of four decades of debate over national missile defense (NMD), is “the fragile nature of any NMD deployment decision” (p. 182). After all, four previous American presidents committed themselves to some version of NMD (Lyndon Johnson to “Sentinel,” Richard Nixon to “Safe-guard,” Ronald Reagan to the “Strategic Defense Initiative,” and George H. W. Bush to “Global Protection Against Limited Strikes”), only to have some mixture of domestic and international politics, along with daunting technological hurdles, result in the decision’s being reversed or deferred. For those who wish to acquire a detailed understanding of the domestic political obstacles confronting deployment, Handberg’s book provides a detailed and insightful commentary. The missile defense lobby, he shows, has had to contend with more than just the community of dedicated opponents of NMD. Pursuit of deployment has repeatedly been stymied by a defense establishment wary of seeing funds diverted from existing missions, members of Congress who are similarly worried about the fiscal health of their cherished domestic policies, and a defense industry ambivalent about a program with such an uncertain future. Moreover, the slow pace of technological progress, combined with the opportunity provided by the budget process to revisit decisions annually, has until now provided ample time for economic downturns or diminishing external threats to take the steam out of efforts to deploy a defense.

Handberg divides the principle antagonists across four decades of debate over missile defense into “Wilsonians,” who believe that deploying an NMD will increase the danger of war, and “believers,” who are relentlessly committed to the pursuit of a U.S. national advantage. (His third group, the “pragmatists,” will be discussed shortly.) These ideological perspectives, Handberg argues, drive the competing techni cal assessments that have attended a succession of prospective defensive systems. Those who believe in NMD for other reasons simply regard setbacks like test failures as temporary hurdles on the road to inevitable success (unless the “Wilsonians” successfully impede technical progress). Those who oppose defenses as fundamentally dangerous, by contrast, will predictably declare whatever technology is under consideration as either hopelessly flawed or easily overcome with cheap countermeasures.

Handberg characterizes both groups as under the sway of the same belief in a “technological imperative”: Opponents “fear its success,” even as supporters “push for that outcome.” That observation is questionable. To the extent that opponents are motivated by a belief in a technological imperative, it is that the nuclear revolution, embodied in the offensive arsenals constructed by the Cold War superpowers (most dramatically in the form of long-range ballistic missiles), made defense in its traditional sense forever obsolete. NMD “believers,” by contrast, assume that the offense–defense balance remains largely subject to human will. For those who have come to regard mutual assured destruction (MAD) as inescapable, episodic outbreaks of technological optimism about ballistic missile defenses must be countered by scathing critiques of prospective defensive technologies, coupled
to the more general admonition that security requires the regulation of armaments and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

That rationale for mutual “offense-only” deterrence animates a very large literature that dates back to the dawn of the missile age, to which The Phantom Defense is the latest substantial contribution. As in many such efforts to sway the attentive public, one encounters in this well-written book an occasional tension between assertions that defenses are bad because they are fundamentally unworkable, and, alternatively, that they are bad because they might seem effective enough to tempt a future American leader into launching war against another nuclear power. Each of those positions can slide into polemical overkill, as when we are told, without supporting documentation, that “an overwhelming majority of scientists and engineers who have considered national missile defense have deemed it a fantasy” (p. xvii). Or: “Since a national missile defense could never be tested in battlefield conditions, any shortcomings would not become apparent until it was too late” (p. 147).

That tendency to assert that defenses are both obviously unworkable and supremely dangerous is particularly unfortunate in a volume that also includes some strong, eloquently conveyed arguments against U.S. deployment of an NMD. Thus, Chapter 4 effectively depicts the great distance that the states now known as the “axis of evil” must travel before they can hope to deliver mass-destruction weapons to American territory via missiles, and Chapters 5 and 6 convincingly poke holes in some of the optimistic technical claims emanating from the strategic defense lobby (some of which they document as blatant misrepresentations). In short, the NMD lobby has probably both exaggerated the near-term missile threat from “rogue states” and greatly understated the technical challenge of coping with offensive countermeasures. The reader is left uninformed, however, of plausible responses to those concerns, just as the authors fail to address ways in which defensive deployments might not result in a world of arms racing, major power hostilities, and growing likelihood of nuclear war. While it is true, as James Wirtz notes in his introduction to Rockets’ Red Glare, that “those involved in political advocacy feel no compulsion to explain the downside of their policies to their audience” (p. 6), it is also true that engaging serious counterarguments can ultimately be more persuasive than belittling or ignoring them.

The Phantom Defense was produced by the Washington-based Center for International Policy, which promotes a foreign policy “based on democracy, social justice and human rights” (p. 183). Their association of those hugely important goals with a fairly sweeping pacifism (as when they assert that “diplomatic solutions to major problems will not be reached as long as the United States resorts to the military instrument,” p. 155) is likely to have more limited appeal in the aftermath of 9/11. Of course, opposition to U.S. unilaterism in nuclear policy need not rely on such broader condemnations of the use of force, nor does a willingness to consider ballistic missile defense necessarily mean a wholesale rejection of nuclear arms control, let alone diplomacy in general.

Between the group Handberg labels “the believers” (who indeed sometimes seem to fit the bellicose stereotype depicted by the authors of The Phantom Defense) and the antidefense “Wilsonians,” there is indeed an important, probably growing middle group. Handberg approvingly calls them the “pragmatists” that is, those who are always willing to “reweigh their choices in light of changing international circumstances and technology issues” (p. 157). This middle group, which holds the balance of power in domestic political battles over NMD, has been shifting toward support for deployment. Handberg notes, over the past five years. Accounting for that shift has been both increased concern over hostile states acquiring missiles of increasing range and a general belief that missile defense technology appears to be making significant advances.

The Wirtz and Larsen book, for the most part, is representative of that pragmatist camp. Most of the contributors endorse what is probably the mainstream view among experts: that while the Russians and Chinese can probably develop affordable and effective countermeasures to prospective U.S. ballistic missile defenses, the next several years may well bring us to the point that NMD deployment merits serious consideration. Astutely anticipating the general direction of policy, Wirtz and Jeffrey Larsen directed their contributors (noted experts drawn from universities, think tanks, and the government) to assume that the United States will deploy missile defenses, and to judge the consequences of three basic policy options: limited defense in a cooperative setting, enhanced defenses that might undercut cooperation, and unlimited defenses unconstrained by treaty. Although the contributors did not uniformly engage each scenario, the editors clearly succeeded in generating the sort of detailed inquiry that can help move the debate forward.

The first three chapters do a fair job of acquainting non-expert readers with the origins and evolution of events bearing on the adoption and subsequent challenges to the ABM Treaty, followed by three chapters that look at the political, strategic, and arms-control implications of alternative defensive architectures. (As noted, the chapter by O’Hanlon stands out, although all are worth reading). The third and strongest section of the book deals with regional responses, with separate chapters devoted to China, Russia, South Asia, and U.S. allies. The China chapter, by Bradley Roberts, is particularly good, dramatizing both the intensity of China’s desire to avoid coercion by the United States and the types of steps China can take to undercut any benefits from a unilateral move toward NMD (none worse than returning to its “old ways” of assisting other states in their programs of unconventional weapons and missile delivery systems). The inclusion of a chapter on South Asia, by Timothy D. Hoyt, is obviously timely, and it usefully lays out the contagion effects throughout the region should China counter U.S. defenses with a stepped up nuclear buildup. Those predisposed to embrace the Bush administration’s commitment to NMD should read this section carefully; they may well conclude, as Larsen points out in the conclusion, that the United States must go much further than it has to date in addressing the concerns of allies and potential adversaries (i.e., Russia and China).

Does that mean giving up on defense entirely? Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Rockets’ Red Glare is its evidence that the pragmatic center is beginning to contemplate a policy direction that transcends the sterile four-decades-old debate between the “believers” and the “Wilsonians.” Several of the contributions, most strongly the one on Russia by Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Goldgeier, pay serious attention to the desirability of moving toward an arms-control regime that engineers a transition from today’s nuclear world of total offense dominance to one of mutual defense emphasis. While the “road to a cooperative transition is long,” they note, it is “in both countries’ interest that they begin the journey” (p. 228). If 9/11 is to have a long-term impact on the debate over missile defense, one may hope that it strengthens prevailing views on the need for major power cooperation, even if it has also tragically demonstrated the need for homeland defense. Rockets’ Red Glare helps prepare the groundwork for efforts to reconcile those objectives.