

Helms Sets June Deadline for ABM Agreements

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On January 22, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-NC) announced that the Clinton administration has until June 1 to submit the September 1997 ABM agreements to the Senate for its advice and consent to ratification. The agreements establish a "demarcation line" between permitted theater missile defense (TMD) systems and restricted ABM systems, and recognize Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine as the successor states to the former Soviet Union under the ABM Treaty.

The administration has consistently stated that it will not submit the ABM agreements (along with the START II extension protocol) to the Senate until after Russia has ratified START II.

Helms, a long-standing critic of the ABM Treaty, stated that "For the first time in 27 years, the Senate will have a chance to re-examine the wisdom of that dangerous treaty. And, if I succeed, we will defeat the ABM Treaty, toss it into the dustbin of history, and thereby clear the way to build a national missile defense for the United States." The Clinton administration, however, believes that the treaty will remain in force even if the Senate rejects the 1997 agreements.

Helms also restated his position that the Foreign Relations Committee will not take action on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) until after its consideration of the ABM agreements and the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, which the administration likewise has yet to submit to the Senate. National Security Adviser Samuel Berger told the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on January 12 that achieving Senate approval of the CTBT is one of the administration's top priorities for 1999.

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