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To Jennings, Stopping Missiles Is a Waste of Money, But Sawyer Is Afraid of More Dangerous World

ABC Tries To Shoot Down Missile Defense

According to Peter Jennings, the ABC anchor's e-mail box was "unusually crowded" on Wednesday morning. "Not sure why," he related in his usual afternoon e-mail to *World News Tonight* viewers, "though there was a lot of traffic on the subject of President Bush and missile defense."

Maybe the Internet got clogged up because of Jennings' disdainful Tuesday night coverage of Bush's proposal to proceed with efforts to defend the U.S. from missile attacks. "The consequences of his new policy are very far-reaching," Jennings lectured. "For one thing, he does not intend to abide by a major treaty made with the Soviet Union to limit the construction of missile defenses. He wants to spend a vast amount of money, and it doesn't matter if the system doesn't work perfectly."

After White House reporter Terry Moran showed the President's announcement, John McWethy presented a one-sided report about how missile defense was a fool's errand. "Critics call what the President is proposing a 'scarecrow defense,' an effort to put something out in the field in a hurry to scare away a potential enemy, even if the system does not fully work." Apart from a single six-second soundbite from GOP Senator Jon Kyl, McWethy's story presented only critics. "The administration will pursue a land-based system," McWethy told viewers, but "that system would cost \$36 billion, is already at least a year behind schedule, and nearly all early tests have failed."

"The administration will spend billions more on a system based at sea. It is even further behind schedule," McWethy's drumbeat concluded: "The U.S. has already spent \$100 billion trying to develop a missile defense. The Bush plan could easily cost \$100 billion more, with no guarantee that it will actually work."

McWethy's story included explanatory graphics to show what was envisioned, and Jennings felt the need to warn the

audience not to believe the drawings: "Critics often object to the animation in news reports because the animation usually has the systems working."

Nobody at ABC seems to like the idea of missile defense, but they can't agree why. On Tuesday night, Jennings tried to portray it as an unworkable boondoggle, as he has done in the past. (See box.) But in her lead-in to Wednesday's *Good Morning America*, Diane Sawyer wrinkled her brow in an exaggerated display of nervous concern: "This whole question of a missile defense shield — is it going to destabilize Russia and China and make it a more dangerous world?"

"This is a very controversial proposal," Terry Moran told Sawyer later in the show. "The President is determined to pursue it in the teeth of opposition from European allies, from Russia and China, from some members of Congress, and over an explicit treaty that the United States signed in 1972 which prohibits building it, but he's going to try to go ahead."

Let's be clear: Jiang Zemin and Vladimir Putin aren't wringing their hands worrying that the U.S. is going to waste a lot of hard-earned taxpayer money (a fear that doesn't usually keep ABC's newsies awake at night, either). America's adversaries seem to have more confidence in our technological inventiveness than the home-grown media.

When JFK told the world the U.S. was going to the moon, it wasn't possible, but a cheerleading media kept the public from losing faith. Now, the media seem eager to kill any hope of a defense against nuclear attack, fearful both of failure and success. — Brent Baker and Rich Noyes

Animators Sold Stupid Public On SDI

"We're going to take A Closer Look tonight at the plans for an anti-missile defense system, the one that has never been proven to work and may never work...In the opinion polls ever since World War II, the majority of Americans have said they think that scientists could build a system to protect the U.S. if they put their minds to it, partly in response to animation like that."

— Peter Jennings, speaking as animated missiles and satellites are shown on-screen *World News Tonight*, June 13, 2000.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For examples of the liberal media's worst bias, read "Notable Quotables" at www.mrc.org.