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Leo Szilard and the role of physicists in countering nuclear threats

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Even before the first nuclear bomb was tested, Leo Szilard led efforts by physicists to assert leadership on the use of nuclear weapons. He warned about the future possibility of delivering nuclear weapons by missiles and also pointed out the ease by which nuclear bombs could simply be carried across borders. The U.S. has had an anti-ballistic missile program since the 1950's. Initially it was intended to counter a Soviet nuclear threat but with the end of the cold war the goal was changed to dealing with accidental or unauthorized launches of Russian ICBMs. More recently, the goal of the U.S. missile defense program was shifted to countering a possible future threat posed by emerging missile states. The APS Study of boost- phase intercept was carried out in the Szilard tradition of physicists providing leadership on public policy issues involving science and technology, in the hope that factual analysis of technical problems can contribute to better public policy.