Another year over ...

It's been a tumultuous year for science and society, and, in my final column for *Nature Physics*, I'll briefly review the latest news on some of the issues I have written about over the past year.

First, on missile defence: bad news. The US decision to forego direct non-proliferation talks with North Korea clearly contributed to their decision to explode a nuclear device in October, leading to misguided calls to deploy even more non-functional missile interceptors, at great expense and with no gain in security. One can only hope that rationality will prevail and that countries will not feel driven to acquire nuclear weapons as their best defence against possible pre-emptive actions by the US or its allies.

For the Hubble Space Telescope, it's good news: NASA has just announced a shuttle mission in 2008 to repair and upgrade the telescope. There was no reason to forego this single mission to one of the most important bits of scientific machinery in space, when more than 20 missions, of almost equal hazard, were planned to maintain the largely useless International Space Station.

More bad news, however, on scientific integrity. It seems that, in the US, political interference in the results of scientific investigations continues. The Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife, a political appointee with no biological training, is reported to have rewritten numerous scientific reports, changing their conclusions. At the same time, the Bush administration's censorship of global warming research is under investigation. Let's hope that science might soon be the basis of sound public policy once again.

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For fundamental physics, I'm predicting good news. Starting next year, the Large Hadron Collider will no doubt produce surprises, and my hope is that they point to something other than the currently fashionable models for ne physics. The next frontier of astrophysical and cosmological investigation — gravitational waves — should become empirical science by 2010 or so, with improvements to LIGO underway. But I expect that one of the biggest mysteries, the nature of dark energy, will remain so for the foreseeable future. But then, it's the unexpected, and hence unpredictable, that makes physics so exciting.

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