

House Committee on Armed Services
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces

“Adapting U.S. Missile Defense for Future Threats: Russia, China and Modernizing the National
Missile Defense (NMD) Act”

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July 23, 2014

Chairman Rogers, Congressman Cooper, and distinguished members present today:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee. It is a privilege for me to appear before you and provide my views on the future of missile defenses to protect the American homeland.

Background

Since the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, the United States has pursued a policy of limited missile defense. In broad terms, this has meant the development and deployment of active defenses to protect the U.S. homeland against relatively small ballistic missile attacks from states such as North Korea and Iran. In practice, the policy of limited missile defense has been implemented in fundamentally different ways by the Bush and Obama Administrations.

As articulated in 2002 by President Bush (NSPD-23), U.S. missile defense policy had the following objectives and characteristics:

- The development and deployment of a layered defense capable of protecting U.S. forces, U.S. allies, and the U.S. homeland against ballistic missiles of all ranges “in all phases of flight.” The focus was on hostile states that were “aggressively pursuing the development of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles as a means of coercing the United States and our allies.” This was assessed to be the principal threat at that time.
- The intention was to begin in 2004 the deployment of capabilities to protect the United States against such attacks. Until that time, the U.S. possessed no defense against these threats. This was seen not as a “silver bullet” but as a rudimentary capability that would be improved over time. In contrast to the normal DOD approach to development and procurement, this was to be a “starting point” for an “evolutionary approach” for fielding defenses capable of evolving “to meet the changing threat and to take advantage of

technological developments.” Instead of a traditional fixed architecture, the U.S. would pursue a range of capabilities that would be expanded taking into account the dynamic nature of the threat and rapidly changing technology. Presidential guidance stated that initial capabilities “may be improved through additional measures” such as: development of boost phase interceptors, enhanced sensors and the “development and testing of space-based defenses.”

- Countering the ballistic missile threat from states such as North Korea was described as “an essential element of the United States’ broader efforts to transform our defense and deterrence policies and capabilities to meet the threats we face.” President Bush stressed that “defending the American people against these new threats is my highest priority as Commander and Chief, and the highest priority of my Administration.”

Obama Administration policy, as reflected in the 2010 DOD Ballistic Missile Defense Review, also emphasized the priority of defending the U.S. homeland in the context of a layered defense. Beyond this rhetorical policy statement, the Administration’s actions have departed dramatically from those of its predecessor:

- The Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system was cut back significantly in President Obama budget submissions, with funding declining substantially in each successive proposed budget. The number of Ground-based Interceptors (GBIs) deployed at Fort Greely and Vandenberg AFB was reduced from the planned 44 (with an option of going to 100 or more) to 30. In addition to slashing the annual Missile Defense Agency (MDA) top line budget from about \$10 billion to about \$7.5 today, substantial funding was shifted from programs to protect U.S. territory and population centers to programs to defend against short- and medium-range missiles. In total, compared to the requests of the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration has reduced funding for missile defense programs over the past six years by approximately \$10 billion. Of that total, funding for capabilities to protect the United States – its stated first priority – has been slashed by about five billion dollars.

- Missile defense programs intended to keep pace with the threat from long range missiles were cancelled. This included all work on fast, including boost phase, interceptors such as the Kinetic Energy Interceptor (KEI), as well as the Airborne Laser that had intercepted and destroyed both solid and liquid missiles in flight. The Multiple Kill Vehicle (MKV), designed to provide a counter to the anticipated future deployment of countermeasures by adversaries, was ended without replacement. Even critical sensors were mothballed, including initially the sea-based X-band radar that provided the most effective capability for precision tracking. Collectively, these funding cuts and program cancellations sent a clear message to industry: the priority of homeland missile defense has been downgraded with the result that industry reduced substantially its own investments in related research and development.

- In stark contrast to his predecessor, President Obama and his top officials have repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to cut back on missile defenses in seeking other, presumably higher priority objectives such as Russian agreement to negotiate offensive arms control reductions.

This was evident in the 2009 cancellation of the original third site in Poland and the Czech Republic which would have increased by 10 the number of interceptors deployed to protect the United States from a future long range Iranian missile threat. It was also seen in the cancellation of Phase Four of the European Phased Adaptive Approach – the only phase that would have provided a capability to contribute directly to the defense of the U.S. homeland. Secretary Kerry carried the same message to Beijing last year when he reportedly offered to cut back on U.S. missile defense efforts in Asia for greater Chinese pressure on North Korea. Finally, and most telling, was President Obama’s 2012 hot-mike comment to then President Medvedev that, particularly for missile defenses, “after my election, I have more flexibility.”

Today’s Security Environment

While a welcome recognition of the need to strengthen U.S. defenses, last year’s decision to deploy 14 additional interceptors in Alaska and last month’s successful GBI intercept test do not alter the downward path of U.S. strategic defense programs. The result of deep budget cuts, cancelled programs and a clear shift in policy priorities is an inadequate and obsolescing missile defense capability to protect the U.S. homeland against a growing threat.

Members of this committee have access to highly classified assessments of the missile threats facing the United States. To provide context for the recommendations below, I would offer the following:

North Korea: Pyongyang under Kim Jong Un has continued the buildup of nuclear capabilities and ballistic missiles of all ranges. Last year, the North threatened preemptive nuclear attack on the United States and, in defiance of multiple UN Security Council resolutions, conducted its third nuclear test and numerous missile launches. Despite the hopes of many North Korean watchers, this provocative behavior has become even more frequent under the Dear Successor. Last week, Pyongyang conducted additional missile tests and reaffirmed its self-declared status as a nuclear weapon state with a growing arsenal derived from both plutonium reprocessing and uranium enrichment. The North’s proliferation activities also continue, including ballistic missile support to Iran. These activities, as seen in Syria, extend to the nuclear field.

Iran: Teheran possesses the largest ballistic missile force in the Gulf/Middle East and has rejected any limits on its modernization and expansion. Iran has successfully launched space satellites on multi-stage vehicles which has demonstrated the ability to execute the critical technologies associated with intercontinental range missiles. The 2014 Annual Report on Military Power of Iran notes that “Iran continues to develop technological capabilities that could be applicable to nuclear weapons and long-range missiles which could be adapted to deliver nuclear weapons, should Iran’s leadership decide to do so.” And intelligence officials have reaffirmed the assessment that Iran, with significant foreign assistance, could flight test an ICBM-class missile by 2015. Teheran has continued to stonewall IAEA inspectors on evidence of weaponization, reportedly efforts to design a nuclear payload for ballistic missile delivery.

Russia: Moscow has embarked on an aggressive, revisionist quest to re-establish Russia as a great power. This is reflected in the annexation of Crimea and its continuing pattern of support to the separatists in eastern Ukraine. It is also seen in the strengthening of its conventional forces following their poor performance in the 2008 invasion of Georgia and in the ongoing strategic modernization of its nuclear TRIAD and missile defense capabilities. Russia has increased reliance on nuclear weapons in its defense and deterrence planning. It is determined to expand its ICBM and SLBM nuclear forces on a scope and scale reminiscent of the Soviet Union. Unlike the U.S. nuclear force posture, which is limited by a self-imposed policy of “no new nuclear capabilities,” Russia is developing and deploying new missiles and warheads, along with new submarines and a new strategic bomber. Russian officials have identified its nuclear build up as the number one military priority.

Russian open sources have indicated that Moscow is also increasing funding for missile defenses, reportedly intending to spend more on these capabilities by 2020 than the United States. The goal, according to information provided to this Committee by the Joint Staff, is to “ensure defense of critical political and military targets in the Moscow area from a ballistic missile attack, either by the United States or any other nation with nuclear or conventional ballistic or cruise missile capabilities.” This is in contrast to U.S. statements that U.S. missile defenses are neither intended for, nor capable of, defending against Russian offensive forces. But it is consistent with President Putin’s public declarations that the primary threat to Russia comes from the United States.

China: The U.S.-China relationship is of vital importance to both countries. The complex interdependencies that exist make it essential that Washington and Beijing make every effort to manage and improve the relationship. Yet, the strategic uncertainties are enormous and the future of the relationship highly uncertain. The U.S. pivot or re-balance to Asia has been interpreted by Chinese leaders as a policy of containment, just as China’s expansive territorial claims and rapid military modernization, including of its nuclear forces and missile defenses, have been seen in the west as evidence of China’s growing and aggressive ambitions.

Two additional principles should inform any consideration of the future missile threat. First, while the deployment of ICBM-class missiles may take place in a longer time frame than assessed, the U.S. cannot wait until the confirmed appearance of the threat missiles before it deploys defenses. It is imperative to be ahead of the threat. Second, experience has demonstrated the enduring fact of strategic surprise with regard to both the capabilities and intentions of adversaries.

Need for a Policy Review

There is an urgent need for a fundamental review of U.S. missile defense policy and capabilities. This is a consequence of the downgrading and dismantlement of U.S. homeland defense programs in the past six years, the increasingly dangerous security environment described above, and the failure of Obama Administration policies to deal with these challenges.

Few would disagree that U.S.-North Korea policy has failed, going back three administrations. Denuclearization of the Peninsula, while still the stated goal, is increasingly unachievable as the North expands its nuclear and missile capabilities. China, while undoubtedly frustrated with its partner in Pyongyang, shows no sign of abandoning its longtime ally, or even threatening to withhold its assistance that is the lifeline of the regime.

U.S.-Iran policy, despite the hope of a “comprehensive agreement” on the nuclear program, is also best characterized by its failures. The objectives of suspending all of Iran’s enrichment activities and denying Iran a “nuclear weapons capability” have been replaced by the goal of extending Iran’s time for breakout from two to six or twelve months.

U.S.-Russia relations are at their lowest level since the Cold War. Both the Bush and Obama Administrations assumed a mostly benign Russia -- an assumption that has turned out to be false. Concessions by the Obama Administration, such as the abrupt cancellation of the original third site, did achieve the goal of getting Moscow to the negotiating table but did not lead to real reductions in Russian forces as New START requires only the U.S. to reduce warheads and launchers, while Russia is permitted to build up to these levels. More recent missile defense concessions, such as the cancellation of the SM3 IIB program that was to provide some European-based capability against Iranian long-range missiles, have been met by Moscow with demands for more concessions. Further U.S. unilateral cuts to its theater nuclear forces have not enticed Moscow to accept limits on this class of weapons, likely because it now enjoys an estimated 8 or 10 to one advantage.

There does not appear to be a comprehensive U.S. strategy to manage the relationship with China or to shape outcomes in which China and the United States have intersecting or competing interests. But it is apparent that U.S. restraint in offensive nuclear arms and missile defenses is not being practiced by Beijing. In January 2007, China conducted an ASAT test with a ground-launched ballistic missile. More recently, the PLA conducted a military exercise that highlighted nuclear attacks against U.S. cities. While U.S. officials have declared that U.S. missile defenses are not designed to counter China’s offensive missiles, Beijing has failed to reciprocate.

The consequence of these policy failures is likely a more proliferated and more dangerous world with greater uncertainties in key relationships and increased prospect for miscalculation on all sides. The implications for defending the U.S. homeland against missile attacks are significant.

Conclusions and the Path Forward

A number of conclusions concerning U.S. missile defense policy can be drawn from the above.

1. We must defend the U.S. homeland against ballistic missile threats from countries such as North Korea and Iran. While such threats are growing, our ability to defend U.S. territory against missile attack is atrophying and obsolescing. Through major budget cuts, multiple

program cancellations, and repeated concessions and policy failures, the U.S. capability to protect the United States has been undermined. The priority of homeland missile defense must be restored to keep pace with the quantitative and qualitative nature of that threat.

2. The GMD system, at the center of the homeland defense architecture, must evolve to meet the dynamic threat. Current problems with the ground-based interceptor, in particular the kill vehicle, must be fixed. Last month's successful test marked progress in this area but improved reliability of the system must be demonstrated through active testing and spiral improvements. The number of interceptors must be increased beyond the 14 announced last March. Cancellation of the SM3 IIB program, which was intended to be deployed in Europe to counter Iranian long-range missile threats to the U.S. homeland, makes additional GBI deployments at a third site in the United States essential. Even before the cancellation of the SM3 IIB program, the National Research Council recommended a third site in the continental United States.
3. The GMD system must also evolve over time with improved sensors, including in space, and with capabilities that can defeat countermeasures and provide greater cost efficiency for intercepting larger numbers of ballistic missiles. To start, the MDA should relook, and perhaps re-start, fast interceptor and MKV programs taking into account new technologies. At-sea capabilities that can contribute to the defense of the U.S. homeland should be supported recognizing the mobility and cost advantages offered by AEGIS-capable ships.
4. In addition to defending against limited missile threats from North Korea and Iran, the United States must reassess the role of missile defenses with Russia and China. Past calls for fielding a capability against accidental or unauthorized launches, such as that proposed earlier by Senator Nunn, are even more relevant today given the state of U.S. relations with Russia and China. Beyond protection against accidental and unauthorized launch, the United States should examine how defenses might contribute to deterrence of Russia and China. This is not a new concept but one that has been incorporated in presidential guidance of a number of past democrat and republican administrations. The Carter Administration envisioned a role for strategic defenses in defeating a Soviet nuclear warfighting strategy and President Reagan's SDI program defined requirements for missile defenses with the goal of complicating Soviet war planning, thereby strengthening deterrence. While today's security setting is much different from that of the Cold War, Russia's increased reliance on its nuclear forces and the greater prospect for miscalculation argue for a review of past strategic thinking.
5. We cannot defend against larger-scale missile attacks from Russia, or potentially China, in the same manner we are defending against rogue state threats. We likely cannot build or afford enough terrestrial based interceptors to counter such threats. What we can do is explore how non-kinetic approaches, such as directed energy, can be integrated into our

BMD architecture. We can also explore the full potential of space, for the deployment of sensors and interceptors, to meet future missile defense requirements. With advances in key technologies, including tremendous progress in computing and lightweight materials, space-based interceptors may provide, according to a 2010-2011 operational assessment by the Institute for Defense Analysis, “a unique capability when used as a boost-phase system...an effective defense layer against medium and long range threat missiles equipped with decoys and other countermeasures.” While the U.S. has made the policy choice of not pursuing space-based interceptor options following the cancellation of the GPALS system by the incoming Clinton Administration, Russia and China have not matched U.S. restraint. While both have called for outlawing the “militarization of space,” these calls are aimed at foreclosing U.S. missile defense options, not their own. The U.S. policy review should examine the strategic implications of deploying defenses in space and the strategic implications of not doing so in the projected security environment.

6. The way forward described above for homeland missile defense will require leadership at the policy and agency level. It will also require additional top line funding in a time of budget austerity. The amount likely will be far less than the cuts imposed over the past six years. Funding could also come from shifting resources from theater programs back to strategic defenses. Here, it is necessary to restore the balance between investments in theater capabilities and homeland defenses. These efforts should be complementary, working together in a layered defense architecture, rather than viewed as competitors for scarce dollars. The current balance, with about four out of every five dollars going to theater programs, is out of sync.

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