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National Policy on Ballistic Missile Defense Fact Sheet

Restructuring our defense and deterrence capabilities to correspond to emerging threats remains one of the Administration's highest priorities, and the deployment of missile defenses is an essential component of this broader effort.

Changed Security Environment

As the events of September 11 demonstrated, the security environment is more complex and less predictable than in the past. We face growing threats from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of states or non-state actors, threats that range from terrorism to ballistic missiles intended to intimidate and coerce us by holding the U.S. and our friends and allies hostage to WMD attack.

Hostile states, including those that sponsor terrorism, are investing large resources to develop and acquire ballistic missiles of increasing range and sophistication that could be used against the United States and our friends and allies. These same states have chemical, biological, and/or nuclear weapons programs. In fact, one of the factors that make long-range ballistic missiles attractive as a delivery vehicle for weapons of mass destruction is that the United States and our allies lack effective defenses against this threat.

The contemporary and emerging missile threat from hostile states is fundamentally different from that of the Cold War and requires a different approach to deterrence and new tools for defense. The strategic logic of the past may not apply to these new threats, and we cannot be wholly dependent on our capability to deter them. Compared to the Soviet Union, their leaderships often are more risk prone. These are leaders that also see WMD as weapons of choice, not of last resort. Weapons of mass destruction are their most lethal means to compensate for our conventional strength and to allow them to pursue their objectives through force, coercion, and intimidation.

Deterring these threats will be difficult. There are no mutual understandings or reliable lines of communication with these states. Our new adversaries seek to keep us out of their region, leaving them free to support terrorism and to pursue aggression against their neighbors. By their own calculations, these leaders may believe they can do this by holding a few of our cities hostage. Our adversaries seek enough destructive capability to blackmail us from coming to the assistance of our friends who would then become the victims of aggression.

Some states are aggressively pursuing the development of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles as a means of coercing the United States and our allies. To deter such threats, we must devalue missiles as tools of extortion and aggression, undermining the confidence of our adversaries that threatening a missile attack would succeed in blackmailing us. In this way, although missile defenses are not a replacement for an offensive response capability, they are an added and critical dimension of contemporary deterrence. Missile defenses will also help to assure allies and friends, and to dissuade countries from pursuing ballistic missiles in the first instance by undermining their military utility.

National Missile Defense Act of 1999

On July 22, 1999, the National Missile Defense Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-38) was signed into law. This law states, "It is the policy of the United States to deploy as soon as is technologically possible an effective National Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack (whether accidental, unauthorized, or deliberate) with funding subject to the annual authorization of appropriations and the annual appropriation of funds for National Missile Defense." The Administration's program on missile defense is fully consistent with this policy.

Missile Defense Program

At the outset of this Administration, the President directed his Administration to examine the full range of available technologies and basing modes for missile defenses that could protect the United States, our deployed forces, and our friends and allies. Our policy is to develop and deploy, at the earliest possible date, ballistic missile defenses drawing on the best technologies available.

The Administration has also eliminated the artificial distinction between "national" and "theater" missile defenses.

The defenses we will develop and deploy must be capable of not only defending the United States and our deployed forces, but also friends and allies; The distinction between theater and national defenses was largely a product of the ABM Treaty and is outmoded. For example, some of the systems we are pursuing, such as boost-phase defenses, are inherently capable of intercepting missiles of all ranges, blurring the distinction between theater and national defenses; and The terms "theater" and "national" are interchangeable depending on the circumstances, and thus are not a meaningful means of categorizing missile defenses. For example, some of the systems being pursued by the United States to protect deployed forces are capable of defending the entire national territory of some friends and allies, thereby meeting the definition of a "national" missile defense system.

Building on previous missile defense work, over the past year and a half, the Defense Department has pursued a robust research, development, testing, and evaluation program designed to develop layered defenses capable of intercepting missiles of varying ranges in all phases of flight. The testing regimen employed has become increasingly stressing, and the results of recent tests have been impressive.

Fielding Missile Defenses

In light of the changed security environment and progress made to date in our development efforts, the United States plans to begin deployment of a set of missile defense capabilities in 2004. These capabilities will serve as a starting point for fielding improved and expanded missile defense capabilities later.

We are pursuing an evolutionary approach to the development and deployment of missile defenses to improve our defenses over time. The United States will not have a final, fixed missile defense architecture. Rather, we will deploy an initial set of capabilities that will evolve to meet the changing threat and to take advantage of technological developments. The composition of missile defenses, to include the number and location of systems deployed, will change over time.

In August 2002, the Administration proposed an evolutionary way ahead for the deployment of missile defenses. The capabilities planned for operational use in 2004 and 2005 will include ground-based interceptors, sea-based interceptors, additional Patriot (PAC-3) units, and sensors based on land, at sea, and in space. In addition, the United States will work with allies to upgrade key early-warning radars as part of our capabilities.

Under our approach, these capabilities may be improved through additional measures such as:

Deployment of additional ground- and sea-based interceptors, and Patriot (PAC-3) units; Initial deployment of the THAAD and Airborne Laser systems; Development of a family of boost-phase and midcourse hit-to-kill interceptors based on sea-, air-, and ground-based platforms; Enhanced sensor capabilities; and Development and testing of space-based defenses.

The Defense Department will begin to implement this approach and will move forward with plans to deploy a set of initial missile defense capabilities beginning in 2004.

Cooperation with Friends and Allies

Because the threats of the 21st century also endanger our friends and allies around the world, it is essential that we work together to defend against these threats. Missile defense cooperation will be a feature of U.S. relations with close, long-standing allies, and an important means to build new relationships with new friends like Russia. Consistent with these goals:

The U.S. will develop and deploy missile defenses capable of protecting not only the United States and our deployed forces, but also friends and allies; We will also structure the missile defense program in a manner that encourages industrial participation by friends and allies, consistent with overall U.S. national security; and We will also promote international missile defense cooperation, including within bilateral and alliance structures such as NATO.

As part of our efforts to deepen missile defense cooperation with friends and allies, the United States will seek to eliminate impediments to such cooperation. We will review existing policies and practices governing technology sharing and cooperation on missile defense, including U.S. export control regulations and statutes, with this aim in mind.

The goal of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) is to help reduce the global missile threat by curbing the flow of missiles and related technology to proliferators. The MTCR and missile defenses play complementary roles in countering the global missile threat. The United States intends to implement the MTCR in a manner that does not impede missile defense cooperation with friends and allies.

Conclusion

The new strategic challenges of the 21st century require us to think differently, but they also require us to act. The deployment of effective missile defenses is an essential element of the United States' broader efforts to transform our defense and deterrence policies and capabilities to meet the new threats we face. Defending the American people against these new threats is the Administration's highest priority.