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LEAKED PENTAGON REPORT INFLATES COST OF MISSILE DEFENSE

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On March 5, 1999, *The Washington Post* reported that the Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) believes the U.S. Navy's anti-missile program, if used as the basis of a national missile defense (NMD) system, would cost \$16 billion to \$19 billion—much more than the proponents of the sea-based system currently estimate. The Heritage Foundation's Commission on Missile Defense concludes, for example, that a sea-based system could begin deployment within four years for less than \$8 billion. The Pentagon's conclusion differs significantly because its analysis is based on several invalid assumptions. Contrary to the Pentagon's assessment:

- **No “dedicated” fleet is needed.** The principal erroneous assumption behind the Pentagon's inflated cost figure is that the Navy would need to dedicate a given number of ships exclusively to the mission of missile defense. The BMDO's reported assessment for a “stand-alone” Navy NMD calls for three to six additional ships at a cost of \$3 billion to \$5 billion each. But the \$16 billion to \$19 billion the Pentagon estimates these will cost is unnecessary. The Navy's Aegis ships are flexible systems that already have the capability to carry out a variety of missions, including air defense, land-attack or strike missions, mine countermeasures, and anti-submarine warfare. There is no reason that they could not perform the anti-missile function if they were equipped with the Navy's Theater Wide

interceptors and supported with new sensors. In fact, this course would be preferable because, at any given time, some of these ships are at sea and in position to intercept missiles launched from the most likely trouble spots. Effectively yet unobtrusively deployed close to threat areas, they could intercept ballistic missiles more easily than could ground-based NMD systems located in the continental United States, thereby better protecting Americans at home, U.S. troops overseas, and U.S. allies.

If Washington decided that navy anti-missile interceptors should be “dedicated” assets, it would make more sense to place them on inexpensive platforms, such as anchored barges in strategic locations, than to invest in additional, mobile (and expensive) Aegis cruisers dedicated solely to missile defense and make them stationary platforms. For this reason, the Pentagon's assumption that a “dedicated” fleet would be

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required for missile defense simply cannot be regarded as serious; it must be seen as a transparent attempt to prejudice the case against using the Aegis fleet as the cheapest and fastest route to an effective missile defense.

- **Sea-based defenses are cheaper and faster.** Compared with the current plan for one or two ground-based NMD sites, ship-based NMD clearly is more economical. The Navy's Aegis vessels already are paid for and are on regular deployment. For about \$2.5 billion to \$3 billion more, the Navy could deploy—within three to four years—650 missile interceptors on 22 Aegis cruisers. Leveraging the investment already made with this modest additional amount would give the country effective protection against both long-range and short-range missiles launched from the most likely locations, and it would do so more quickly and at far less cost than any other option.
- **Relief from the ABM Treaty is necessary to provide tracking data from external sensors.** The final flawed assumption behind the reported BMDO study is based on the observation, correct as far as it goes, that the Aegis SPY-1 radar by itself is inadequate to support ship-based missile defense. This premise is valid only if the ship-based interceptor is blocked from receiving target detection and tracking data from external sensors—for example, data from the Space-Based Infra Red System low-altitude sensor now in development. According to *The Washington Post* article, the Pentagon asserts that the Navy's shipboard radars must be provided with "sufficient warning of the impending attack to deploy within a few hundred kilometers of the threat launch location or the specific area to be defended." Precisely. But to do that would require relief from the now-defunct 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

This flawed assumption reveals the crux of the matter—the Administration's commitment to observe a treaty that was signed during the Cold War, when the threat came from one opponent, the Soviet Union. That party no longer exists, and the threat of missile attack to

the United States now comes from many hostile regimes that possess or are developing ballistic missiles and hyper-lethal weapons. It makes no sense to limit—artificially and deliberately—the inherent technological advantages of ship-based NMD supported by target data from a variety of external sensors just to preserve an outmoded relic of a bygone strategic era.

NO EFFECTIVE DEFENSE IS POSSIBLE WITHIN THE ABM TREATY

According to the unanimous findings of the bipartisan Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States (the Rumsfeld Commission), the United States "might have little or no warning before operational deployment" of threatening ballistic missiles. Consequently, the "threat to the U.S. posed by these emerging capabilities is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates and reports by the Intelligence Community."

Yet incredibly, the Clinton Administration's approach to this growing threat is to pursue negotiations with Russia aimed at resurrecting the ABM Treaty, which lapsed with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Maintaining the self-imposed restraints of the ABM Treaty is the single greatest reason the Administration (and the BMDO specifically) does not aggressively support the development and deployment of an effective, affordable, and near-term national missile defense.

The Clinton Administration prefers a limited ground-based system that would preserve the framework of the ABM Treaty. This system would take longer, cost far more, and be far less effective than the approach based on the Navy's Aegis fleet.

Congress should promptly convene a hearing—perhaps a joint hearing of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees—to promote an open debate on what missile defense plan would provide the most expeditious and least expensive way to protect Americans from ballistic missile attack.

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