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CHINA'S THIEVERY HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR MISSILE DEFENSE

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On May 25, 1999, the bipartisan congressional Cox Committee issued its 872-page report detailing efforts by China to obtain, through legal and illegal means, a stunning range of U.S. commercial and military technology secrets. China's expanding nuclear capabilities and its role as a proliferator of military technology highlight the need for the United States to deploy a national missile defense. Yet, despite the Cox report's startling revelations and clear evidence that the Third World missile threat is growing, President Bill Clinton refuses to make a decision on the deployment of a national missile defense until June 2000.

For its part, Congress recently declared it the "policy of the United States to deploy as soon as technologically possible an effective National Missile Defense capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack (whether accidental, unauthorized, or deliberate)." Congress now must make this policy declaration a reality.

Espionage Damages U.S. Security. The Cox report asserts that the "stolen information includes classified information on seven U.S. thermonuclear warheads, including every currently deployed thermonuclear warhead in the U.S. ballistic missile arsenal." This includes the most advanced U.S. warhead, the W-88, which is deployed on the Navy's submarine-launched Trident D-5 missile. China is expected to exploit this knowledge to modernize its intercontinental ballistic missile fleet, which will include submarine and road-mobile

weapons potentially tipped with multiple warheads and penetration aids.

China's relentless effort to acquire sophisticated U.S. nuclear weapons designs is part of a larger strategy to promote its position as Asia's hegemonic power. A key element of this strategy is China's determination to threaten other countries with ballistic missiles, as Beijing did in 1996 during Taiwan's first presidential elections. Since then, China has positioned more than 100 short-range missiles within striking range of Taiwan. Unless the United States and its Asian allies move quickly to deploy credible missile defense systems, China will continue to flex its "missile muscles" to intimidate its neighbors.

China's role as a proliferator of advanced military technologies also has contributed to the spread of ballistic missiles in the Third World. The Cox report emphasizes that the "PRC has proliferated nuclear, missile, and space-related technologies to a number of countries." These countries include Iran,

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North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The assistance to rogue states is particularly worrisome. On August 31, 1998, North Korea test-fired a three-stage rocket, the Taepo Dong-1, which many experts believe has the capability to reach parts of Alaska and Hawaii. Pyongyang is working overtime to build the Taepo Dong-2, an even longer-range missile capable of reaching the U.S. West Coast.

Implications for U.S. Missile Defense. China's potential to arm its next generation of mobile missiles with multiple warheads and penetration aids highlights the flawed nature of the Clinton Administration's proposed architecture for a national missile defense, which calls for two-ground based sites in the United States. The ground-based interceptors would be far more costly and less effective than sea- and space-based alternatives. They would have a more difficult time coping with multiple warheads and penetration aids, such as decoys.

To counter the growing Chinese missile threat, the United States should develop sea- and space-based defenses that can identify, track, and shoot down hostile missiles shortly after liftoff and before they can release multiple warheads or decoys. This "boost-phase" intercept capability will offset China's ability to threaten the United States and its allies with ballistic missiles. The ability to shoot down missiles over an adversary's own territory also will make Third World tyrants think twice before attempting to attack the United States.

Needed: Concrete Action. It is not enough for Congress to profess its commitment to deploy a national missile defense. It must provide the requisite funding, oversight, and programmatic direction to make this a reality. In this vein, Congress must not allow the defunct 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to crimp the testing and development of technologies that hold near- and long-term promise for defending the United States against missile attack. To this end, Congress should:

1. Mandate that the Department of Defense test an upgraded version of the Navy Theater-Wide system in a way that demonstrates a capability to destroy long-range Chinese ballistic missiles

in their boost phase. This technology represents the best near-term option for defending the United States against missile attack. The target missile in the test should have the flight characteristics of a real-world, modern intercontinental ballistic missile.

2. Revive the space-based, low-altitude interceptor program formerly known as "Brilliant Pebbles" that the Clinton Administration canceled in 1993. This technology represents the best-long term option for defending the United States against missile attack. It will require the development and testing of space-based interceptors that are capable of countering the real-world threat posed by China's ballistic missile programs.

CONCLUSION

In the post-Cold War era, ballistic missiles have become the coin of the realm for states seeking to offset U.S. prowess on the conventional battlefield. Indeed, U.S. vulnerability to missile attack provides China with an added incentive to modernize and expand its nuclear arsenal. It also encourages states like Iran and North Korea to develop missiles that are capable of killing millions of Americans.

In January 1999, the Clinton Administration finally conceded that "there is a [missile proliferation] threat and the threat is growing." But despite this belated admission and the Cox report's alarming revelations, President Clinton refuses to make a decision on the deployment of a national missile defense until June 2000. This policy of procrastination is indefensible. The United States should not have to play a high-risk game of catch-up with states developing ballistic missiles based on stolen U.S. nuclear secrets. Prudence dictates that Congress take steps to translate its stated objective of deploying a national missile defense into a reality.

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