



# Executive Memorandum

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## SUCCESSFUL MISSILE DEFENSE TEST SHOWS TECHNOLOGIES WORK

BAKER SPRING

The argument that missile defense for America is not feasible suffered a stunning setback on June 10, 1999. In the early morning skies over New Mexico, the Army's seventh test of its new Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, an anti-missile system under development, successfully intercepted a target ballistic missile launched 120 miles away. Without using an explosive warhead, the interceptor destroyed the incoming missile by crashing into it—a very difficult feat—at an altitude of almost 60 miles.

For many years, critics of missile defense said this could not be done. Even in March 1999, as Congress debated and then approved a bill (H.R. 4) establishing as policy the deployment of a national missile defense system, opponents refused to consider that it could be done. On March 18, for example, Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) was quoted in the *Congressional Record* as saying, "As for whether [missile defense] will be a hit, hit-to-kill technology is nowhere near feasible."

True, it took seven tests to score the first "hit," but new technologies always require testing to reveal deficiencies, and this successful test proves that—borrowing the analogy of many critics—a bullet *can* hit a bullet. According to the contract with the interceptor's maker, the next step in the program is to conduct a second successful test by July 1.

Deploying an effective missile defense system, however, will require much more development and testing, and much more support from Congress and the Administration. Scientists and engineers must be free to develop and test the technology on a rapid timetable to stay ahead of the emerging threat of attack.

Already "Behind the Curve." Unfortunately, however, THAAD, which was designed to intercept intermediate-range missiles that travel at speeds no greater than 5 kilometers per second, is already "behind the curve." In August 1998, North Korea launched a Taepo Dong-1 rocket with an estimated maximum velocity of between 7 and 8 kilometers per second. THAAD cannot intercept missiles with this much velocity, let alone the next generation of Taepo Dong missile, which is likely to be capable of reaching America's shores.

The reality of the growing missile threat was amply documented one year ago by the congressionally mandated Commission to Assess the Ballis-

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tic Missile Threat to the United States (Rumsfeld Commission). The commission's July 1998 report was released just weeks before the Taepo Dong-1 launch, and its conclusions about the threat were soundly reinforced by the findings of the Cox Committee released on May 25, 1999, regarding China's nuclear weapons program.

Thus, as exciting as the successful THAAD intercept is, proponents of missile defense are not celebrating. The THAAD system alone will not protect the United States from the various missiles that could be launched. Moreover, missile defense programs have been hampered by restrictions on the development and testing, as well as the deployment, of certain kinds of missile defense systems imposed by the Clinton Administration's policy of observing the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Continuing to adhere to this treaty makes any missile defense system less capable than it otherwise would be and forces the United States to continue playing catch-up with the evolving threat. The policy of adhering to the defunct ABM Treaty—an agreement signed with the Soviet Union, a state that no longer exists—is wrong. Without these restraints, and with full funding and streamlined management, development and testing of the THAAD system alone would be much farther along than it is.

**What Must Be Done.** Something must be done to free engineers and scientists from the ABM Treaty's constraints and allow them to create the most effective ballistic missile defense possible. As a first step, the Administration should remove barriers it erected during the President's first term that prevent the successful testing of missile defense systems such as the sea-borne Navy Theater-Wide (NTW) system. The NTW system would use "hit-to-kill" technology similar to that demonstrated in the successful THAAD test. The ABM Treaty, however, bars

the testing of the NTW system against long-range ballistic missiles, including North Korea's Taepo Dong and a new class of missile China is now developing with stolen U.S. nuclear and missile technology.

Congress should require that the NTW system be tested against such longer-range missiles. To increase the likelihood of success in this testing, Congress also should insist (1) that the speed of NTW's interceptor be maintained at the speed for which it was originally designed, not slowed to meet the Administration's restrictions, and (2) that NTW be allowed to use external sensor data, including data provided by a system of sensor satellites. Such a system, once fully tested, would deploy 650 interceptors on 22 of the Navy's Aegis ships to defend U.S. territory against a limited ballistic missile attack.

**Conclusion.** One of America's greatest strengths is that it does not hesitate to take on daunting technological challenges. To its credit, it often succeeds. Building a missile defense for America is no more technologically difficult than putting a man on the moon.

Those who refused to believe that such ingenuity could be brought to bear in the challenge to field an effective anti-missile system should now, along with all other Americans, breathe a sigh of relief. The successful THAAD test means that the United States can build and deploy a system that will protect Americans from the threat of annihilation. But Washington must strive to do this sooner rather than later.

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