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## CONTINUE THE SEA-BASED TERMINAL-PHASE MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAM

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On December 14, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Edward C. Aldridge announced that the Department of Defense is canceling the Navy's missile defense program for protecting small areas such as port facilities. This program—until recently known as the Navy Area-Wide (NAW) program—was designed to destroy attacking missiles in the terminal phase of flight.

Although media attention has focused on the cancellation of this program, a more important announcement regarding national defense was Under Secretary Aldridge's related statement that the Department of Defense will continue to pursue a sea-based terminal defense capability. According to Aldridge, the cancellation of NAW was due to growth in program costs; it does not imply that a sea-based defense is infeasible.

In fact, the NAW program was only one of three viable alternatives for sea-based missile defense. It is now up to the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO), the Pentagon office that runs missile defense programs generally, to define the program to replace NAW. The Bush Administration and Congress should insist that BMDO propose an alternative program as quickly as possible.

### **THREE SEA-BASED MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAMS**

Earlier, BMDO maintained three sea-based missile defense programs. The first—the NAW pro-

gram—was designed to counter ballistic missiles in the terminal phase to protect small areas. The second, and more promising—formerly known as the Navy Theater-Wide (NTW) program and now called the Sea-Based Midcourse program—is designed to protect entire regions by destroying attacking missiles outside the atmosphere. With upgrades, this system will also be capable of defending U.S. territory against long-range missiles. The third program—the Sea-Based Boost-Phase program—uses surface-to-air missiles to destroy target ballistic missiles shortly after they are launched and is being designed to counter the North Korean threat in particular by deploying Navy ships off the Korean coast in the event of a crisis.

The most important of the three alternatives for sea-based missile defense is the Sea-Based Midcourse program, which offers the best near-term option for providing a reliable defense of U.S. territory against ballistic missile attack. The cancellation of the NAW program does not affect prospects for the Sea-Based Midcourse

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program, which the Department of Defense and the BMDO will continue to develop.

Congress has provided additional funds for this program in recent years and should continue to consider it a priority. Now that the ABM Treaty is being set aside, counterproductive legal impediments to missile defense have been removed, and opportunities for refining the system are available. With proper support, BMDO should be able to make this system capable of defending U.S. territory.

### **DEFINING AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE NAW PROGRAM**

The Department of Defense canceled the NAW program because the law requires that a program that exhibits a 25 percent increase in unit cost may continue only if the Secretary of Defense certifies, among other things, that there is no reasonable alternative for providing a capability that would ensure national security to the same extent. The Department of Defense chose not to make the certification. It did not cancel the program because it believes a sea-based terminal defense is infeasible.

The Department of Defense seems to believe an alternative is available. Under Secretary Aldridge stated that BMDO will continue to work on obtaining the kind of capability that would have been provided by the NAW system. Congress should press BMDO to provide the alternative plan as quickly as possible.

The nation needs a sea-based terminal defense against ballistic missile attack, primarily for the defense of U.S. friends and allies. Given that several of these important friends and allies—Saudi Arabia and South Korea, for example—now face a serious missile threat, the United States should field a system quickly. While the Army has begun initial production of the Patriot PAC-3 ground-based terminal defense, there may be political or logistical factors that would bar the timely deployment of the Patriot PAC-3. A highly mobile sea-based system, which also can patrol in international waters, pre-

sents a logical alternative. BMDO has a responsibility to Congress and the American people to quickly define and present a plan for the replacement to the NAW system.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Defense Department's decision to cancel the NAW program is a disappointment, but it is not a disaster. The decision does not signal that either missile defense generally or sea-based missile defense in particular is technologically infeasible. Nor does it signal that the United States is abandoning the sea-based terminal defense as an essential part in the design of an overall missile defense system.

Fortunately, the cancellation of the NAW program does not interrupt the more important work taking place on the Sea-Based Midcourse program. The cancellation of the NAW program must be viewed in perspective, in the context of a range of missile defense program activities that are varied and widespread. President George W. Bush understands, and has stated publicly, that the nation's missile defense development effort is designed to determine what systems will best meet defense needs. In the process, it is to be expected that some programs will be set aside while others take on a more prominent role.

The Administration must remain focused on putting the most capable defenses into the field as quickly as possible. The missile threat to the American people and U.S. allies is growing. President Bush's decision to withdraw from the outdated ABM Treaty has removed the single most debilitating obstacle to the design and deployment of an effective missile defense system. The Administration should now take advantage of this moment of opportunity to move the nation's missile defense programs forward with all deliberate speed.

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