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DON'T LET POLITICS OR BUREAUCRACY HOBBLE MISSILE DEFENSE

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Now that the ABM Treaty is due to expire, the biggest threat to rapid development and deployment of an effective missile defense system for America may be the Senate. During a March 13 hearing on missile defense, for example, Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, made the mistaken assertion that the strength of America's military technology is due in large measure to the Defense Department's "existing disciplined and proven policies for acquisition and oversight." This assessment is well off the mark. In reality, the defense acquisition process is bureaucratic, cumbersome, expensive, and slow, in no small part because of political pressure from Congress. Technological advances have occurred despite these problems. In January, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld decided to expedite the fielding of an effective missile defense by freeing the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) from some of the burdens imposed by the acquisition process.

Regrettably, the Senate may reverse this wise approach with the fiscal 2003 Defense Authorization Bill. The bill, reported out of the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 15, includes provisions drafted by Senator Reed's subcommittee that limit the MDA's discretion and impose over \$800 million in missile defense program cuts. Specifically targeted for reduction are the Sea-Based and Ground-Based Midcourse missile defense systems, the Space Boost-Phase experiment, and the Space-Based Laser

program. Restraining the MDA from aggressively pursuing advances in important technologies such as these would have an irresponsible and unintended consequence: increasing America's vulnerability to missile attack.

Secretary Rumsfeld's decision to give the MDA greater managerial discretion to acquire an effective missile defense system is entirely appropriate given the growing threat from ballistic missiles. A business-as-usual approach will not suffice for such an exceptional program. Instead, a streamlined acquisition process would allow the Pentagon to demonstrate its ability to deploy a very complex array of technologies more quickly and at less cost than the standard process allows. In addition, it could serve as a model for improving the general defense acquisition process, which may be constraining other high-technology weapons programs.

Why Missile Defense Acquisition Needs a Streamlined Approach. The priority the Administration places on missile defense is appropriate

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because the nation has no capability of defending its territory and people against missile attacks. Additionally, as ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction proliferate to rogue states, they become better able to threaten America as well as security in every region of the world. In such an increasingly hostile environment, even a system with limited defense capabilities has value.

Deploying missile defense for America will involve developing, procuring, and integrating a variety of independent systems, including command and control, sensors, and interceptors, into a “system of systems.” But the current acquisition process is not designed to manage a program of this complexity; it is designed to manage the acquisition of a single model of aircraft, tank, or ship. Deploying missile defenses is far more involved than determining whether one type of tactical aircraft is more capable than another. Further, the evolving missile threat may necessitate pushing new technology into the field before it has passed all the requirements of the acquisition process.

Deploying new technology in this way is not novel. In the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. military has deployed Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) even though this technology is still in development. The success of the UAV in the operation against al-Qaeda shows that new technology can make vital contributions in the battlefield. Few would argue that deploying the Global Hawk was too risky because it had not cleared the acquisition process. The greater risk would have been in not deploying it.

Serious Defects in the Standard Acquisition Process. Though problems with the defense acquisition process are not new, they have persisted largely because much of the process and its costs are linked to paperwork requirements. Ambassador Henry Cooper, director of the former Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO), wrote about such costs in his January 1993 “End of Tour Report.” In 1991, according to Ambassador Cooper, fulfilling the paperwork requirements of cautious acquisition administrators during a six-month period of oversight of the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system required 75,000 government labor hours, more than 250,000 contractor labor hours, and more than a ton of supporting documentation, at a cost of over \$22

million—money not used to conduct tests or build weapons. Costs like these are not routinely tracked.

Behind this kind of extreme oversight is an ingrained “risk averse” mindset—the predictable result of a political process that rewards caution and penalizes innovation and risk-taking. Secretary Rumsfeld is taking steps to change that mentality, but Congress must realize that it also is part of the problem. While it is inappropriate to expect no oversight by Congress, too often Congress has yielded to political pressure to categorize failed development tests as reasons to cancel a program or conduct a highly visible hearing on its shortcomings. Program managers could easily conclude that it is in their best interest to be cautious and avoid controversy. But as Ambassador Cooper found, the cost of doing only what is necessary to avoid controversy can be astronomical.

Conclusion. Forcing the Secretary of Defense to restrain the MDA’s development and deployment of new technologies without allowing him to reform the acquisition process will increase the likelihood that an effective missile defense will not be fielded in a timely fashion. Making the MDA use the same cautious, risk-averse approach to acquisition that has hobbled weapons programs in the past is irresponsible, given the real and growing threat of missile attack. MDA acquisition administrators should be less concerned about controversy and more concerned about fielding an effective defense.

Members of Congress should not consider steps that would undermine the efforts of Secretary Rumsfeld to enable the MDA to proceed aggressively toward missile defense. They also should not try to second guess every decision the MDA makes during development. And when it takes up the Defense Authorization Bill in June, the Senate should adopt amendments that restore the \$800 million to the missile defense budget and preserve the MDA’s discretion to manage this program. Americans want protection from weapons of mass destruction, and Congress should not create barriers to that protection. Instead, it should remove any restraints that remain.

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