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The Heritage Foundation's Leadership on Missile Defense

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Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to The Heritage Foundation's celebration of the 25th Anniversary of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) Proposal.

I'm happy we're joined tonight by so many champions of missile defense. Ambassadors, Generals, Members of both Houses of Congress—including Congressman Trent Franks of Arizona, co-chairman of the Congressional Missile Defense Caucus—welcome. I'm also looking forward to hearing Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama later tonight. Senator Sessions has been a long-time supporter of missile defense.

Thank you, all of you, for your continued work to protect America and Americans from the threat of ballistic missile attack.

Satellite Shootdown

Last month, a single SM-3 [Standard Missile-3], launched from the USS *Lake Erie*, made headlines when it successfully shot down a disabled satellite 150 miles above the Pacific Ocean.

The missile was part of the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System, and it struck a bull's-eye by annihilating the satellite's titanium-clad fuel tank. The tank would have endangered lives on Earth if it had landed in a populated area and released toxic fuel into the air.

As a result of that shootdown, our adversaries cringed. China and Russia, of course, strongly objected.

The Heritage Foundation and Missile Defense

Just 25 years ago, when the story of Heritage's involvement in missile defense really began, the idea

Talking Points

- When the story of The Heritage Foundation's involvement in missile defense really began 25 years ago, the idea that the United States could defend itself from an intercontinental missile strike from space was simply not believable.
- In February 2008, a single Standard Missile 3, launched from the USS *Lake Erie*, made headlines when it successfully shot down a disabled satellite 150 miles above the Pacific Ocean.
- Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Heritage quickly moved on to the next challenge—getting the U.S. out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972.
- One of Heritage's main objectives is for the U.S. to fully deploy a comprehensive missile defense system within the next decade. Heritage will lead the way in educating Americans about the need for this type of comprehensive protection.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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that the United States could defend itself from an intercontinental missile strike from space was simply not believable.

Yet there were a select few “thinkers” who believed not only in the need for, but more importantly, in the feasibility of missile defense. My colleagues, including a young policy analyst by the name of Kim Holmes, beat the drum in the early 1980s, and people gradually paid attention.

The most significant proponent, of course, was President Ronald Reagan.

Heritage was the first institution to convene a blue-ribbon group of defense experts to produce an authoritative report on both the necessity of ending the “mad” policy of Mutual Assured Destruction, and also the need for an anti-missile shield to capitalize on America’s advances in space technology.

We published our first missile defense piece, *High Frontier: A New National Strategy*, in 1982 and it became a major inspiration for President Reagan’s SDI program. After it was released, Heritage became the nerve center for inside-the-Beltway missile defense support, and high-ranking officials such as Lt. General James Abrahamson, Director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO), visited us often.

Tonight we are honored to have with us Lt. General Henry A. Obering, the current director of SDIO’s successor agency, the Missile Defense Agency.

Members of Congress often asked us to brief them, or to use our podium to voice their strong support for missile defense.

Post-Cold War Missile Defense

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Heritage quickly moved on to the next challenge—getting the U.S. out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972. That agreement became a fundamental impediment to rolling out effective missile defenses. And the constraints we put on ourselves even after the collapse of the Soviet Union were, frankly, absurd.

We later found out the Soviet Union was not abiding by the ABM Treaty anyway.

Kim Holmes and his crew were quick to argue for declaring the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty defunct. On February 2, 1992, our missile defense expert, Baker Spring, was the first to call the “ABM Treaty...a relic of the Cold War.”

It took almost another 10 years before someone with Reagan-like clarity made getting out of the ABM Treaty a plank in his presidential campaign. Once again, Americans began paying attention to the issue, and in December 2001, President George W. Bush made the historic announcement that the United States would withdraw from the ABM Treaty.

Today the Pentagon’s Missile Defense Agency is developing and testing the components of a layered defensive system so that we can shoot down missiles as close to take-off as possible.

Leadership for America

As many of you know, Heritage has embarked on a 10-year campaign called Leadership for America. One of our initiatives within Leadership for America is called, simply enough, “Protect America.” And one of its main objectives is to fully deploy a comprehensive missile defense system within the next decade.

Heritage will lead the way in educating Americans about the need for comprehensive protection. As part of this effort, we are currently filming a documentary called *33 Minutes: Protecting America in the New Missile Age*.

Its title refers to the brutal truth: From anywhere on Earth, a missile fired by any hostile nation or by a rogue dictator can obliterate a target in 33 minutes or less. *Thirty-three minutes*. The American people must take pause and face this horrible reality.

Our movie will not only expose moms, dads, and citizens across the country to this current vulnerability, but it will show why the only effective response to the present threat is to destroy incoming missiles in space, far from our citizens and our cities.

Looking back, I am extremely proud of the role The Heritage Foundation played—and continues to play—in achieving missile defense.

—Edwin J. Feulner, Ph.D., is President of The Heritage Foundation.