



America at Risk

Memo

Protect America Month: Providing for the Common Defense in the 21st Century

The Heritage Foundation's Protect America Month—running from Memorial Day to Independence Day—focuses on defense spending in the 21st century. America still faces serious threats in the world and now is not the time to weaken our military through defense budget cuts.

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Moving Forward on Missile Defense

Baker Spring

On February 2, 2009, Iran successfully launched a satellite into orbit using a rocket with technology similar to that used in long-range ballistic missiles. On May 20, it test fired a 1,200-mile solid-fuel ballistic missile. North Korea attempted to launch a satellite on April 6 that, while failing to be placed in orbit, delivered its payload some 2,390 miles away in the Pacific Ocean. This was followed on May 25 by an explosive nuclear weapons test. Under these circumstances, with the ballistic missile threat to the U.S. and its allies clearly growing, common sense would dictate that the Obama Administration fully fund the missile defense program.

In fiscal year (FY) 2001, which was the last Clinton Administration budget, funding for the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization was \$4.8 billion. This was achieved only because of aggressive congressional support for ballistic missile defense in the face of a reluctant Administration. In FY 2002, funding for what is now the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) was increased to \$7.8 billion. Projected FY 2009 spending for broader missile defense programs, which extends to the services, is \$10.92 billion. This was the product of the last Bush Administration budget.

In contrast to this trend, on April 6, 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that the Obama Administration's FY 2010 broader defense budget would reduce the ballistic missile defense budget by \$1.4 billion.¹ Overall missile defense spending, includ-

ing for the MDA and the military services, will be reduced to \$9.3 billion from \$10.92 billion in FY 2009.²

This cut is notable given that a May 7–10, 2009, poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance revealed that 88 percent of the respondents believe that the federal government should field a system for countering ballistic missiles capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction.³ Moreover, even with a missile defense budget of \$10.92 billion for the current fiscal year, the American people remain significantly vulnerable to ballistic missile attack because missile defense programs have lagged behind advances in policy, funding, and—regrettably—the missile threat.

Rather than structuring the budget and programs to counter this problem, the Obama Administration proposes to cap at 30 the number of fielded interceptors for countering long-range missiles; terminate the Multiple Kill Vehicle (MKV) program for defeating counter-measures in the midcourse stage of flight; terminate the Kinetic Energy Interceptor (KEI) program for intercepting ballistic missiles in the boost-phase

at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4396> (June 4, 2009).

2. U.S. Department of Defense, "Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request," May 7, 2009, p. 3-34, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/budget.html> (June 4, 2009).

3. Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, "2009 Missile Defense Tracking Study," May 2009, at <http://www.missiledefenseadvocacy.org/data/files/2009%20-%20national%20poll/2009%20missile%20defense%20report-final.ppt#330> (June 5, 2009).

1. U.S. Department of Defense, "DOD News Briefing with Secretary Gates from the Pentagon," April 6, 2009,

stage of flight; defer the purchase of a second Airborne Laser (ABL) aircraft, also designed to intercept ballistic missiles in the boost-phase stage; increase funding for the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) interceptor, including for procurement; and increase funding for sea-based ballistic missile defense, including for conversion of additional ships to give them missile defense capabilities and procurement of Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) interceptors.

In response to these proposals, supporters of a robust missile defense need to take seven specific steps.

Step #1: Try to restore overall funding to the missile defense program, including for additional interceptors in Alaska, California, and Europe. To be effective, missile defense must be properly funded. The Administration's \$1.62 billion reduction from FY 2009 for missile defense is unwarranted, given the recent missile launches by both Iran and North Korea.

Step #2: Retain the MKV program, which would develop smaller and lighter kill vehicles so that more than one can be mounted on a defense interceptor, allowing it to destroy both the warhead and the decoys.

Step #3: Preserve the ABL program, the primary system in development for gauging the potentially dramatic improvements in combat capabilities derived from perfecting directed energy weapons.

Step #4: Field a system to protect U.S. coastal areas from sea-launched shorter-range missiles. In the near term, lesser missile powers and possibly terrorist groups could attack U.S. territory by launching a short-range Scud missile from a container ship off the coast. Congress should direct the Navy to take steps to counter this threat.

Step #5: Advance the Obama Administration's proposal for strengthened sea-based missile defenses by moving funding and management authority for these systems from the Missile Defense Agency to the Navy. It has long been expected that mature missile defense systems developed under MDA management would be transferred to the services to manage remaining development and procurement activities. The sea-based

systems developed by the MDA have matured to the point that such a transfer is warranted.⁴

Step #6: Continue boost-phase missile defense programs by focusing on developing and fielding interceptors derived from modified air-to-air missiles. The Administration's new emphasis on ascent-phase intercept capabilities has come largely at the expense of boost-phase systems, specifically with termination of the KEI program and curtailment of the ABL program, but there remain strong arguments for retaining boost-phase options.

Step #7: Refute the charge that space-based missile defense will "weaponize" space. Congressional supporters of missile defense need to force a debate on the charge that space-based ballistic missile defense interceptors would weaponize space. The fact is that space was weaponized when the first ballistic missile was deployed, because ballistic missiles travel through space on their way to their targets.

As Iran and North Korea are demonstrating, there are clear trends in the direction of both missile and nuclear proliferation. The Obama Administration seems inclined to put the missile defense program back on a path where it will lag behind this growing threat. If it does this, both the American people and America's friends and allies will be left vulnerable. Such vulnerability in an unpredictable world is profoundly destabilizing and increases the risk of nuclear war.⁵

—*Baker Spring is F. M. Kirby Research Fellow in National Security Policy in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*

4. See, for example, Independent Working Group on Missile Defense, the Space Relationship, & the Twenty-First Century, *2009 Report* (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2009), pp. 129–130, at <http://www.ifpa.org/pdf/IWG2009.pdf> (June 15, 2009).

5. Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games: An Exercise Examining Stability and Defenses in a Proliferated World* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005), at www.heritage.org/upload/NuclearGames.pdf.



PROTECT AMERICA

The 21st century will be a dangerous place if America fails to protect itself and its allies.

This product is part of the Protect America Initiative, one of 10 transformational initiatives in our Leadership for America campaign.