

WebMemo



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Sustain MEADS, the *Other* European Missile Defense Program

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In recent months, much of Congress's attention has been focused on the missile defense program that would place 10 ground-based midcourse defense interceptors in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. This particular focus is understandable; after all, the Obama Administration's unclear policy regarding this program has generated considerable public debate.

However, Congress should not lose sight of the fact that there is another vital missile defense/air defense cooperation program that deserves its attention and support: the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS) development program, which is jointly funded by Germany, Italy, and the United States.

Funding Situation. MEADS is being designed to counter tactical (short-range) ballistic missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, cruise missiles, and aircraft. It will consist of:

- A sophisticated x-band radar;
- A surveillance radar with 360 degree coverage;
- A tactical operations center;
- Launchers; and
- The next-generation Patriot interceptor.

The Germans are covering 25 percent of the cost of the program, while the Italians are covering 16.7 percent. The U.S. is responsible for the remaining 58.3 percent. This cost-sharing arrangement is based on a \$3.4 billion contract that was signed by the three countries in 2004.¹

The Obama Administration requested a little more than \$569 million in research, development,

test, and evaluation funding for the program for fiscal year 2010.² Generally speaking, Congress is on track to support the Administration's request. The question is whether the Obama Administration and Congress will support the program in the years after fiscal year 2010. Therefore, Congress should express its desire to see this program continue in fiscal year 2011 and beyond.

If the program continues, it is slated to begin flight tests in 2012. In fact, MEADS International, the joint venture executing the contract, announced on August 5 that the system had completed its component-level critical design reviews and that MEADS will begin system-level reviews.³

Why MEADS? The Obama Administration and Congress should sustain this program for the following reasons:

- *Continuation of the program will reinforce U.S. alliance commitments in Europe.* A variety of factors—including the Obama Administration's vacillation (in the face of Russian criticism) regarding the placement of long-range missile defense systems in the Czech Republic and Poland—are placing stress on the North Atlantic alliance. Abandoning this cooperative program for coun-

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tering short-range missiles will only serve to reinforce the trend toward a weaker alliance. Additionally, U.S. withdrawal will void its contractual obligation to Germany and Italy. If the U.S. moves forward with the systems for the Czech Republic and Poland, however, it is reasonable to demand that the Germans and Italians express support for the fielding of the long-range missile defenses for U.S. and Europe. After all, if the MEADS program is important to Germany and Italy, both nations should understand that the corresponding long-range missile defense system is important to the Czech Republic and Poland.

- *MEADS will provide a transportable missile and air defense capability.* This means the system will be able to accompany expeditionary ground forces to wherever they are deployed and protect these forces against air and missile attacks. Thus, MEADS will be a critical element of alliance force projection capabilities.
- *MEADS also provides tactical mobility for air and missile defense.* The MEADS system can keep up with highly mobile deployed ground forces as they conduct their operations, providing them protection on the move.
- *MEADS will provide 360 degree protection against missile and air threats.* The radar elements of the broader MEADS architecture will be able to detect, and provide precise tracking of, attacking missiles and aircraft regardless of their launch point. This capacity will not be limited to defending against attacks originating across a forward perimeter; attacks from the rear will be engaged as well. MEADS technology recognizes that on the modern battlefield the lines separating friendly from enemy forces are not clearly defined.
- *MEADS is interoperable with other defense systems.* MEADS is not a standalone system. It can

work in association with other missile defense systems, including the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and the Aegis sea-based missile defense systems. This flexibility will provide the ground force with a defense against shorter-range (“lower tier”) threats while THAAD and Aegis handle longer-range (“upper tier”) ballistic missile threats.

- *MEADS is an “open architecture” system.* This means that the system will support data links with radar and other sensors outside its own autonomous network. As a result, MEADS will be even more effective, as outside systems will be able to make use of MEADS capabilities to improve their performance. For example, MEADS, as with the longer-range defenses that should be fielded in the Czech Republic and Poland, may be able to make a material contribution the Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense system that NATO planners are currently designing.⁴

Congress Should Protect MEADS. Since the contract with Germany and Italy was signed in 2004, considerable progress has been made under the MEADS program. Nevertheless, the Obama Administration may be tempted to abandon the program in 2011. This decision would have negative consequences for U.S. alliance leadership in Europe, the ability to protect U.S. and allied ground forces in the field, and overall U.S. and alliance air and missile defense capabilities. On this basis, Congress should warn the Obama Administration against cancelling this very important defense program before the arguments of opponents of the program inside the Administration advance too far.

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1. Space Daily, “MEADS International Awarded \$3 Billion System Development Contract,” September 28, 2004, at <http://www.spacedaily.com/news/bmdo-04zd.html> (August 13, 2009).
2. U.S. Department of Defense, “Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request: Summary Justification,” May 2009, pp. 3–36.
3. Press release, “MEADS Program Receives Hardware Design Approvals, Enters System-Level CDR,” MEADS International, August 5, 2009.
4. See David Kiefer, Deputy Programme Manager, NATO, presentation before the Royal United Services Institute’s Annual Missile Defense Conference, May 28–29, 2009, at <http://www.rusi.org/events/past/ref:E4930106FE7696/info:public/infoID:E4A38B59475CF7> (August 13, 2009).