

# WebMemo



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## Two Plus Two Equals Five: The Obama Administration's Missile Defense Plans Do Not Add Up

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Last week, President Obama announced that the U.S. would end the “third site” missile defense program to field interceptors in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. Obama declared he will instead pursue a new “phased, adaptive approach” to provide protection for U.S. territory and allies in Europe. The Administration argues this changed approach, which focuses on making use of sea-based and Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) technology, is better suited to the new threat environment and more capable, flexible, and cost-effective.

These claims, put forward in the White House’s “Fact Sheet on U.S. Missile Defense Policy,”<sup>1</sup> do not hold up under scrutiny. The announced program for shifting to sea-based and SM-3 technology suffers from three serious flaws:

1. The Administration’s “new” threat assessment is questionable;
2. The program makes no specific, sustained investment to exploit the full range of sea-based and SM-3 technology; and
3. The plan sets up a false choice between long- and short-range defenses in terms of sequencing, when the U.S. needs to field defenses against both short-range and long-range missiles immediately.

Congress should be skeptical of the Administration’s new plan and demand protection against all missile threats as soon as the technology permits.

**A False Dichotomy: Short-Range v. Long-Range Defenses.** The White House claims that

Iran’s development of long-range intercontinental ballistic missile capabilities is proceeding slower than expected. In response, the President will shift the focus of America’s missile defense program from longer-range missiles to shorter-range threats. Instead of placing 10 ground-based missiles in Europe for the purpose of intercepting long-range missiles from Iran, Obama will use a combination of land- and sea-based missile defense systems—primarily upgraded versions of the SM-3—to deal with short- and medium-range Iranian missiles. The installation of longer-range missile defense systems has been postponed until 2020.

Although the White House argues that the threat from Iranian long-range missiles is not urgent, according to a U.S. Air Force assessment, Iran could produce an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of hitting the U.S. within only six years.<sup>2</sup>

Other experts concur that Iran is not developing short-range missiles at the expense of longer-range missiles but rather pursuing its missile capabilities holistically. While Iran may appear to be flight-testing short-range missiles, it frequently uses the information gained from such tests to develop longer-range missiles. For example, Iran successfully devel-

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oped designs for its solid-fuel ballistic missile and liquid-fuel space launcher after only a few test flights, each significantly longer than the last, according to missile expert Uzi Rubin's recent interview with *Iran Watch*.<sup>3</sup>

Already, Iran has succeeded in producing missiles with significant reach. In May, Iran successfully launched the solid-fuel Sejil missile, which has an estimated range of 1,560 miles—far enough to reach Poland.<sup>4</sup> Even the International Atomic Energy Agency says Iran has “sufficient information” to build an atomic bomb and that it will likely “overcome problems” with its delivery systems.<sup>5</sup>

There is no evidence that Iran is abandoning or stalling its pursuit of long-range missile capabilities. Rather, recent intelligence estimates portray the threat as real and immediate. Consequently, the Administration should view any missile threat from Iran, whether short- or long-range, as urgent and make the necessary investments to counter all of Iran's potential capabilities instead of selectively interpreting U.S. intelligence.

The Administration's proposal is also based on a false dichotomy that the only two possibilities for missile defense are the third site or an alternative land- and sea-based system. The White House conveniently assumes that the U.S. could not pursue the third site and other programs—such as the

sea-based system it is now touting, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, the Medium Extended Air Defense System, or the NATO cooperative program—at the same time.

Third site missile defense does not preclude the development of other forms of defense. Indeed, the U.S. has long been pursuing these additional programs in tandem. Rather than creating a false choice between long- and short-range defenses, the Administration should pursue both the third site and the upgraded versions of the sea-based and land-based SM-3 on a technology-driven timeline.

**No Reason Why the Old and New Plans Should Not Be Done Concurrently.** The White House also argues that its alternative missile defense proposal will be more cost-effective and faster to develop and deploy. Both claims are misleading and require further clarification from the Administration. The White House's plan will be cheaper (an estimated \$2.5 billion instead of \$5 billion for third site programs<sup>6</sup>) but juxtaposing the two plans is like comparing apples and oranges: These two plans offer very different levels of defense. And a lower price tag is irrelevant if the plan it is attached to offers less protection.

The claim that the alternative system will be faster to deploy also requires examination. Under the new plan, the U.S. will have no long-range, intercontinental, defense capabilities until 2020.<sup>7</sup> If

1. Press release, “Fact Sheet on U.S. Missile Defense Policy: A ‘Phased Adaptive Approach’ for Missile Defense in Europe,” The White House, September 17, 2009, at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/FACT-SHEET-US-Missile-Defense-Policy-A-Phased-Adaptive-Approach-for-Missile-Defense-in-Europe](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/FACT-SHEET-US-Missile-Defense-Policy-A-Phased-Adaptive-Approach-for-Missile-Defense-in-Europe) (September 22, 2009).
2. National Air and Space Intelligence Center, “Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat,” April 2009, at <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/missile/naic/NASIC2009.pdf> (September 21, 2009).
3. Uzi Rubin, interview with *Iran Watch*, September 17, 2009, at <http://www.iranwatch.org/ourpubs/roundtables/interview-rubin-091709.htm> (September 21, 2009).
4. Editorial, “Obama's Missile Offense,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2009, p. A22, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204518504574418563346840666.html> (September 22, 2009).
5. George Jahn, “Nuke Agency Says Iran Can Make Bomb,” Associated Press, September 17, 2009, at [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090917/ap\\_on\\_re\\_eu/eu\\_iran\\_nuclear](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090917/ap_on_re_eu/eu_iran_nuclear) (September 21, 2009).
6. Anne Gearan, “Obama Drops Bush-Era Missile Defense Plan,” Associated Press, September 18, 2009, at <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20090918/NATION/909180387/1020/Three-men-arrested-in-terror-probe-Obama+drops+Bush-era+missile+defense+plan> (September 21, 2009).
7. “US Sees 3–5 Year Delay in Iranian Long-Range Missile,” *Forbes*, September 18, 2009, at [http://www.forbes.com/feeds/reuters/2009/09/18/2009-09-18T150149Z\\_01\\_N18251473\\_RTRIDST\\_0\\_USA-SHIELD-IRAN.html](http://www.forbes.com/feeds/reuters/2009/09/18/2009-09-18T150149Z_01_N18251473_RTRIDST_0_USA-SHIELD-IRAN.html) (September 21, 2009).

projections that Iran will produce a long-range missile by 2015 are correct, 2020 is too late.

In the meantime, President Obama is moving to reduce the number of long-range missile interceptors fielded in Alaska and California from 44 to 30. Congress needs to ask the Obama Administration why it is cutting both programs that were designed to defend the U.S. from the Iranian long-range missile threat at once.

Congress should also ask the Administration to clarify its statements about whether or not America's missile defense technologies are effective and improving. After all, another justification in abandoning the third site is that, according to the Administration, missile defense technologies have advanced so much in recent years that additional programs are unnecessary.

Such statements are at odds with President Obama's previous position that missile defense technologies are ineffective and unproven. The Administration used the earlier "unproven" charge to curtail or terminate a number of missile defense programs this year and to justify a \$1.6 billion cut to the overall program. Now President Obama is using the opposite argument to justify the termination of the third site. The President's strategy seems to be based not only on shifting intelligence assessments but also on shifting evaluations of defense capabilities.

**Appeasing the Bear.** The decision to end third site missile defense was made not with national security needs in mind but to appease Russia. The Administration threw allies overboard to make Moscow happy and yet should not realistically expect anything in return—like helping stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, the Poles, steadfast American allies, feel betrayed.

The U.S. essentially gave Russia a veto over a NATO decision and turned Poland and the Czech Republic into second-class citizens of NATO—members under the influence of Moscow. This not only weakens national defense but also undermines international alliances and damaged America's position as a global leader and defender of liberty.

In defense policy, safety, not savings, should be policymakers' ultimate goal. While overall government spending explodes, President Obama continues to target defense alone with budget cuts. Many painful lessons throughout history have shown that national security should not be shortchanged. There is scant evidence that ending third site missile defense and replacing it with an alternative system will be better, faster, or cheaper.

Instead, this shift will weaken America's missile defense capability against real and emerging threats, harm U.S. allies, and embolden its enemies. The choice between defending against short- and long-range missile threats is a false one. Furthermore, by relying on a single weapon system family to counter a wide range of threats, this new "phased, adaptive approach" places all of America's missile defense eggs in one basket. Therefore, Congress should demand the Administration fund both short- and long-range missile defenses, thereby preparing for all potential threats.

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