

# WebMemo



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## Current Ballistic Missile Defense Plans Offer No Confidence in New START

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In a recent *Wall Street Journal* commentary, Vice President Joe Biden argued that the Senate could ratify the New START nuclear deal with Russia with confidence. He urged Senators to ignore concerns that the treaty would place limits on future missile defenses. The Vice President believes current missile defense plans are more than adequate. Biden glossed over the fact that these plans are far from comprehensive. They are inadequate to respond to unpredicted threat advances. Finally, the treaty could well complicate and limit the ability of the U.S. to develop comprehensive missile defenses.

**From Defending the West to Modest Protection for Europe.** Upon entering office, President Obama slashed the number of land-based interceptors planned to protect the U.S. homeland from North Korean and Iranian ballistic missiles by 44 percent. The cuts included scrapping the “third site” ballistic missile defense plan to defend the United States and U.S. allies against the threat of long- and medium-range ballistic missiles from Iran. These installations were to be completed by 2013. In its stead the White House elected to focus on more limited regional missile defense.

In conjunction with a plan approved by NATO at the recent Lisbon summit, Obama has sketched out what the Administration hopes will lead to the development of the Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense system, the Medium Extended Air Defense System (a U.S., German, and Italian joint program), and the U.S. Phased Adaptive Approach for missile defense in Europe.

Obama dubbed his “new” plan for Europe the Phased Adaptive Approach. The four-phase program is intended to be the cornerstone of NATO’s ballistic missile defense initiative. Under Phase I (which the White House hopes to begin in 2011), U.S. Aegis ships with SM-3 interceptors will deploy to the Mediterranean with sea- and forward-based sensors stationed in southern Europe. In Phases II (2015), III (2018), and IV (2020) more interceptors will be deployed, both on Aegis ships and ground platforms.

In his effort to cheerlead for New START, Vice President Biden neglected to mention the limitations of this approach. Even if the Obama plan is implemented on schedule and at cost (questionable assumptions), parts of Europe will remain vulnerable to long-range Iranian threats until 2020. The program also makes no specific, sustained investment to exploit the full range of sea-based and SM-3 technology. Furthermore, land-based SM-3 is a dramatically different capability from the current sea-based SM-3. It has yet to be flown. The Missile Defense Agency is already two years behind the deployment plans.

**America the Vulnerable.** Envisioning far more robust and comprehensive defenses, the Bush Administration focused on development and expansion of

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a variety of missile defense programs, such as the Kinetic Energy Interceptor, Airborne Laser, and Multiple Kill Vehicle. These efforts would have served to ensure that the U.S. outpaced potential threats. Bush's plans to protect the U.S. homeland also included up to 44 ground-based interceptors in Alaska and California (in addition to 10 cancelled interceptors in Poland).

Obama reduced long-range interceptors in Alaska and California from 44 to 30. The Administration also cut funding for all future programs. The Missile Defense Agency's budget was cut by 15 percent.

**Fast-Growing Threat.** Biden's trumpeting of Obama's missile defense also fails to mention that the threat is progressing far faster than anticipated. According to the Department of Defense's estimate, Iran will have an ICBM capability as early as 2015, fielding a threat long before Obama's limited defenses will be in place. Meanwhile, North Korea continues to expand both its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons capability, revealing just last week a new nuclear facility previously unknown in the West. In addition to developing an ICBM capable of targeting anywhere in the United States, Pyongyang has 600 SCUD short-range ballistic missiles that threaten Japan and 100 No-Dong intermediate-range ballistic missiles that can reach U.S. bases in Okinawa and Guam.

In addition to Iran and North Korea, over 30 other countries all over the world have ballistic missile capability. The trends in ballistic missiles development point to increasing accuracy and range, use of countermeasures, and access to biological, chemical, and nuclear warheads. Many states are increasing their ballistic missile inventories.

**Beyond Plan Obama.** There are a number of initiatives the U.S. could undertake to make missile defenses much more robust and comprehensive. For example, the navy plans to have roughly 300 SM-3s by 2015. For an additional \$170 million, the navy could accelerate production of these interceptors and build a larger inventory.

The White House could also fund development of smaller and lighter kill vehicles for the SM-3 interceptors. This would permit the U.S. to use the more advanced SM-3s to destroy ballistic missiles launched from ships off the U.S. coast, such as missiles armed with electromagnetic pulse warheads.

The long-range land-based force could be expanded, including the use of both two- and three-stage interceptors. The U.S. could invest more aggressively in boost-phase intercept intercontinental ballistics missiles. Finally, space-based interceptors, which would provide the most comprehensive coverage against a range of global threats, could be developed.

**Implications for New START.** Vice President Biden sees no problem with New START because White House plans envision none of the components of comprehensive missile defense that could outpace current threats or deter the emergence of future ones. However, the treaty could well limit a future Administration more committed to comprehensive defense.

The treaty limits U.S. (and by definition also NATO's) missile defenses at least in five areas. Most significant is the fact that the preamble of the treaty establishes a link between strategic offensive and defensive arms. Also, Paragraph 3 of Article V prohibits conversion of offensive strategic missile launchers to launchers of defensive interceptors and vice versa. These conversions have been done in the past and might be required as an option for the President in case of future crisis.

**Rubber-Stamping Treaty Would Be Wrong.** Despite the Vice President's assurances, the Senate should carefully weigh how New START could hamstring the ability of future Presidents to deal with future threats. In addition to analyzing the treaty, the Senate should demand full access to the treaty negotiating record as well as complete transparency on any side agreements negotiated with Moscow. It is inconceivable that all this material could be provided and analyzed in the time available during the lame duck session. Senators should consider that fact during their deliberations.

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