

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3372
September 28, 2011

Aegis Ballistic Missile Program: Expand Defense Against Long-Range Missiles

Baker Spring

The Senate Appropriations Committee has moved to eliminate development funding for the Navy's Standard Missile-3 Block II-B missile defense interceptor in its version of the Defense appropriations bill for fiscal year 2012. This interceptor is part of the broader Navy program for developing and deploying Aegis weapons system-based missile defense capabilities both at sea and on land. It is also part of the Obama Administration's missile defense plan, which is called the Phased Adaptive Approach. The sensitive issue regarding the committee's action is the question of when the Aegis-based missile defense system will attain the capability to defend the United States against long-range ballistic missiles.

Not Ready to Face Long-Range Missile Threats. According to the committee's report¹ released on September 15, the Missile Defense Agency had requested a little more than \$123 million to develop the Block II-B interceptor. The committee's action redirected the money to ongoing development efforts for the Block I-B and Block II-A versions of the interceptor. The Block I-B and Block II-A are the evolutionary steps in the broader program preceding the Block II-B. If Congress is going to cut \$123 million from the Block II-B development effort, it should direct the Navy to use a portion of the funds to conduct a test of one of these earlier versions of the Standard missile against a long-range target missile as soon as possible.

The question remains: When will the Aegis-based missile defense system attain the capability to defend the United States against long-range bal-

listic missiles? Under the Obama Administration's plan, this capability is to be provided by the Block II-B version of the interceptor, but it will not be available until 2020. Some estimates indicate that Iran, for example, could have a long-range missile by 2015 that could threaten the eastern U.S. Given the current timeline for development of the Block II-B interceptor, it is necessary to consider available options for developing and deploying Block I-B and Block II-A versions of the Standard Missile-3 interceptor in a manner that will give them the ability to counter long-range missiles. The Block I-B is scheduled to enter production in 2013, and the Block II-A is to be in the field in 2018.

Steps Congress Could Take Now. Retired Navy Admiral J.D. Williams has explained the need to accelerate the development of the Standard missile family to give it the capability to counter long-range missiles.² In a report earlier this year, Admiral Williams pointed out that versions of the Standard missile interceptor that will be available earlier than the Block II-B have an inherent capability to counter long-range missiles to defend U.S. territory. His analysis reveals that the U.S. needs to improve the overall Aegis command and control system for

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3372>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

ballistic missile defense and link the Aegis system to a land-based missile defense engagement radar placed in an appropriate position. This capability is designed to counter long-range missiles in the late midcourse stage of flight. A successful intercept test of the Block I-A version of the Standard missile, which is already deployed, against an intermediate-range target on April 15 in the Pacific bolstered Williams's conclusion.³

Another step Congress could take in response to the Senate Appropriations Committee's action is to direct the Missile Defense Agency to use a portion of the funds it cut from the Block II-B development program in fiscal year 2012 to fund a smaller and lighter kill vehicle for the Standard Missile-3 Block II-A interceptor. The Block II-A is a co-development program with Japan. A smaller and lighter kill vehicle for the Block II-A interceptor, based on the Advanced Technology Kill Vehicle (ATKV) of the 1990s, will make it more capable of countering long-range missiles by permitting it to attain higher maximum velocities without altering the launchers on Navy ships.

Continue Building Strong Global Defenses. These important steps would permit the Aegis mis-

sile defense program to catch up to the emerging ballistic missile threats posed by Iran and other states. Defending U.S. territory should be the most important priority for the missile defense program, and Congress should insist that the Obama Administration treat it that way. This is in addition to U.S. commitments to field a collective missile defense capability with its allies to defend their territories and forward-deployed U.S. military forces under the Phased Adaptive Approach. A global missile defense architecture will make the best contribution to U.S. security. Further, the Senate Appropriations Committee's action to withhold funding from the Block II-B development effort should not be used as a means for walking away from this effort in its entirety. The development of the Block II-B should remain part of the Phased Adaptive Approach, particularly for Europe.

—*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 and a contributor to *ConUNdrum: The Limits of the United Nations and the Search for Alternatives* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009)

1. Committee on Appropriation, U.S. Senate, Report on the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2012, September 15, 2011, at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-112srpt77/pdf/CRPT-112srpt77.pdf> (September 28, 2011).
2. Vice Admiral J. D. Williams, USN (Ret.), "Improving Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense Command and Control," Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 89, May 2, 2011, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2011/05/Improving-Aegis-Ballistic-Missile-Defense-Command-and-Control>.
3. Baker Spring, "Sea-Based Missile Defense Test Success a Major Step Forward," Heritage Foundation Foundry, April 15, 2011, at <http://blog.heritage.org/2011/04/15/sea-based-missile-defense-test-success-a-major-step-forward/>.