

April 5, 2005

The Honorable John W. Warner, Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
225 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4601

Dear Senator Warner:

In December 2002 President Bush directed the Pentagon to begin deploying a ground-based missile defense (GMD) system that he ordered operational by 2004. Although eight interceptors have been placed in silos, the deadline for initial operations was missed and the administration has not announced a new goal. We judge that, in the absence of realistic and successful testing, declaring the system operational—and any further deployment of GMD components—would be technically indefensible.

The GMD system is intended to defend the United States from long-range ballistic missiles that could be acquired in the future by North Korea. According to a senior Bush administration official, this deployment is explicitly intended to provide the President with “more options,” and the system would be 90 percent effective against a North Korean missile.¹ Other members of the administration have also implied that the defense will be highly effective.

These statements are attractive but wrong. As scientists and engineers, many with long experience in advising the government on military issues, we conclude that this missile defense system will have essentially no capability to defend against a real missile attack.

Moreover, accepting the assertion that this defense has some utility when it does not is dangerous and could contribute to unwise decisions by U.S. policy makers.

Our assessment is based on the following facts:

- The GMD system has no demonstrated capability to defend against a real attack, even from a single warhead unaccompanied by countermeasures. It remains in an early stage of development, and the testing program has provided essentially no information about how the system would perform in a real missile attack. All flight intercept tests have been conducted under highly scripted conditions with the defense given advance information about the attack details. Until realistic tests are completed, there will be no data on which to base an assessment of how effective the system might be in an actual attack.
- At the same time, even without such tests, it is possible to understand the severe limitations of the system by analyzing the intrinsic capabilities of the system components. Even if the defense components work perfectly as designed, technical

¹ Edward “Pete” Aldridge, then U.S. undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, March 18, 2003.

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assessments demonstrate that the GMD system will be unable to counter a missile attack that includes even unsophisticated countermeasures. Numerous government reports have identified simple countermeasures that are readily available to states such as North Korea.² Thus, the system will be unable to defend against a real attack, should one occur.

For these reasons, we urge you to eliminate all funding to purchase or deploy any additional interceptor missiles until operationally realistic tests of the system demonstrate that it would work against a real world attack. Interceptors already purchased but not deployed should be used for testing. As President Bush said early in his presidency, “We will evaluate what works and what does not.”³ To meet this objective, the Pentagon needs to refocus the GMD program on conducting operationally realistic tests, which are the only means of collecting accurate data on system performance.

Sincerely,

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² National Intelligence Council, *National Intelligence Estimate on the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015*, September 1999; Director, Operational Testing & Evaluation, *Annual Report FY 2000*; General Accounting Office, *Missile Defense: Actions Being Taken to Address Testing, Recommendations, but Updated Assessment Needed*, GAO-04-254, February 2004.

³ Remarks by the President to Students and Faculty at National Defense University, May 1, 2001.

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