

Managing Expectations of Missile Defense

In December 2002, the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush directed that the Pentagon roll out a rudimentary missile defense system as soon as possible. To meet this goal, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) announced that it will be deploying 20 ground-based interceptors and up to 20 sea-based interceptors by 2005, as well as upgrading existing radars and building new ones. This would be done under the aegis of spiral development, where systems would be fielded while still undergoing testing. Supporters claim that this will allow for an initial deployment of missile defense programs, providing a marginal defense until a more solid one can be developed.

From looking at statements by administration officials, however, it seems that even a “marginal defense” may be beyond the reach of MDA’s near-term capabilities. Officials are extremely careful to caution that whatever happens by 2005 will be very minimal. By managing expectations of the missile defense programs from the get-go, the Bush administration is hedging its bets that in the next two years something – anything – may be fielded and claimed as a success, whether or not it is proven to work.

The administration has been careful not to oversell the missile defense system's capabilities since Bush's decision late last year to begin fielding an initial ballistic missile shield by 2004. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has said the "test bed" could provide the United States only a limited defense against missile attack in the case of a real incursion.

"While modest, these capabilities will add to America's security and serve as a starting point for improved and expanded capabilities later, as further progress is made in researching and developing missile defense technologies and in light of changes in the threat," Bush said in a December 2002 statement.

“Christie: Aegis Missile Defense Can Be Used With Limited Success,” *Inside The Navy*, Feb. 17, 2003.

During a Jan. 31 briefing on the agency’s \$7.7 billion budget request for fiscal year 2004, a senior Defense Department official said that with the limited number of interceptors (20) used with the initial system, “it is not clear how they will be manned 24 hours a day.”

(deletia)

How the Ft. Greely and Vandenberg sites will operate is not known, the official said. “Our job right now is to develop the assets, put in the infrastructure, test it out in an integrated way and then with the user – U.S. Strategic Command, U.S. Northern Command, the combatant commanders – make sure the system can operate,” he added.

“We have limited quantities and until we work out all those procedures it is not clear how they will be manned 24 hours a day.”

“Deployed GMD System May Not Be Operational Around the Clock,” *Inside Missile Defense*, Feb. 5, 2003.

If there is one thing on which missile defense advocates and critics agree, it's that the technology isn't ready yet. Where they differ is on whether the technology will be "ready enough" three years from now to meet President Bush's accelerated deployment plan announced last week.

Even under the Pentagon's best-case scenario, the missile defense system expected to be fielded by the end of 2005 will be able to shoot down no more than 20 incoming enemy rockets before all available interceptor missiles are spent. And that assumes jury-rigged radars function flawlessly, the weather is cooperative, half-tested missiles don't err and the enemy doesn't use decoys or other tricks.

That's a far cry from Ronald Reagan's dream of a missile defense "astrodome" protecting the United States, but defense officials are optimistic. "We think that this modest and initial capability is both warranted, but will also be very, very useful," J. D. Crouch, assistant secretary of defense for international security, said when plans were unveiled last week.

“Missile Plan Faces Obstacles; Pentagon sees value in Bush's proposal to deploy the system in three years. But critics say an essential phase of testing would be left out,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 24, 2002.

Rumsfeld acknowledged that much remains to be done to make the system effective. Sophisticated weapons systems like the anti missile defense generally must overcome the "failure after failure after failure" that dog such programs, he said.

"When you're at the leading edge of technology," Rumsfeld said, "you expect that . . . you're going to learn and gain knowledge both by your successes and also by your failures.

“President orders missile shield still in tests, program to take 2 years, \$17.5B,” *The Boston Globe*, Dec. 18, 2002.

In his remarks Tuesday, Bush noted that the missile program was still largely under development, but he said the threat of a missile attack and the promise of the program's

future made it necessary to begin fielding the system by the end of 2004.

"While modest," Bush said, "these capabilities will add to America's security and serve as a starting point for improved and expanded capabilities later, as further progress is made in researching and developing missile defense technologies and in light of changes in the threat."

"Missile defense system gets deployment order," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 18, 2002.

"It would be a very preliminary, modest capability. It would be in a testing and learning mode. But also in the event it were needed, it would be able to provide you some limited capability to deal with a limited number of ballistic missiles."

"U.S. to deploy missile shield by 2004: Fears of external attack prompt plan," *National Post*, Dec. 18, 2002.

"I like ... idea of beginning, and putting something in the ground or in the air or at sea and getting comfortable with it, and using it and testing it and learning from that," said Rumsfeld. "A lot of things just don't arrive fully developed."

(deletia)

But Rumsfeld, while acknowledging the limited nature of the protection offered by the system, said it was "better than nothing, and it's a start." As for the charge of a political motivation, he said: "There isn't anything we're doing in this department that ... is rooted in politics."

"U.S. to Deploy Missile Defense," *Newsday* (New York, NY), Dec. 18, 2002.

"It will be an evolutionary program," Rumsfeld told a Pentagon news conference. "It will evolve over a period of time, hopefully improving as you go along."

"When it finishes some day, out there in the years ahead, it very likely will look quite different than it begins," he said.

"Missile shield is a go; Bush vows to have limited system in place by 2004," *The Orlando Sentinel*, Dec. 18, 2002.

Even supporters say there is still a major problem with the booster unit, which has yet to be consistent in tests. "You can't use an interceptor that doesn't fly right," said Lt. Gen. Ronald Kadish, MDA director. "I don't like where we are with the booster."

But Kadish said the system now works. That's something "I could not tell you . . . with confidence" a few years ago, he said. "Test and fix, test and fix, test and fix, that is what we are doing."

"Bush orders anti-missile system put in place," *USA Today*, Dec. 18, 2002.

(deletia)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sure. I'd be happy to comment on both. First, I have not gone back to look at the records of other advanced development testing programs, but if one goes back and looks at things like Polaris and various others, the early days of the NRO, where there were failure after failure after failure, I think that anyone who thinks about it understands that when you're at the leading edge of technology, you expect that there are going to be - you're going to learn and gain knowledge both by your successes and also by your failures. It's just something that's a reality in research and development and in science and technological programs. So this, as I understand it, the most recent one, J.D., was a separation issue.

J.D. CROUCH: Right.

SEC. RUMSFELD: And J.D. will be happy to get into the details of that, if that would be helpful.

Let me just take a minute to set the scene for J.D. on missile defense in response to your question. There's lots of words that the Pentagon uses that have a meaning, like capability or initial capability or deployment. And I think that rather than use those words that have strict meanings, it's better to describe what I see as our current missile defense approach.

And it is this: It is to recognize that there is a threat of ballistic missiles to this country and to our friends and allies, and that our interests, the president's interests had been to be able to do a broad-gauged research and development program in missile defense unconstrained by the ABM Treaty, which he now has been able to do for a period of some months: six months I think is all.

A second principle that I've held is that I like the feeling, the idea of beginning and putting something in the ground or in the air or at sea, and getting comfortable with it, and using it and testing it, and learning from that. A lot of things just don't arrive fully developed, full blown. And there it is.

So, by avoiding those words, I think we maybe come to a better understanding as to

what's going to happen. I think the way to think about the missile defense program is that it will be an evolutionary program. It will evolve over a period of time. Any capability with a small c - I'm not talking about initial capabilities, initial IOCs or any of that. But capability with a small c will probably - one would hope - improve as you go along. And when it finishes some day out there in the years ahead, it very likely will look quite different than it begins. And it very likely will have layers. And it very likely will involve a variety of different locations, and it will very likely involve the participation of a number of countries.

So what the president was announcing - and let me say one other thing. Think of the Predator. The Predator was still in the development and the testing stage. And we've been using it in Afghanistan. We've been using it in a few other places. Now, had it gone through all the checks and all the hurdles, and was ready to go? No. But we used it.

Could we use the missile defense capability in the event there were a need to use it after some pieces of it get put in place? Answer, yes.

Does that mean it would have been - it would have been finished in any way? No, it would be a very preliminary, modest capability. And you would be learning -- it would be in a testing and learning mode. But also in the event it were needed, it would be able to provide you some limited capability to deal with a limited number of ballistic missiles.

(deletia)

QUESTION: But, if I could, Mr. Secretary, should Americans feel marginally safer if they think about North Korea and that particular threat, which you and others have identified, with these interceptors in place, or no?

RUMSFELD: At the moment when one looks out there I think the answer is yes. I think that it is certainly better to have that capability than to not have it. That's why we're doing it.

I wouldn't want to overplay it, I wouldn't want to oversell it, I wouldn't want to suggest that it has a depth or breadth or capability that will take some time to evolve. But certainly the answer's yes.

(deletia)

RUMSFELD: We are doing this in a very appropriate, methodical way. And we are putting things out there that we will then learn from. I think it is very clear that there have been any number of systems that have been put in place before they were fully developed.

Indeed part of what we're talking about in our whole acquisition process is spiral development, where you don't wait until something's completely done for 20 years. You begin the process. You put some capability out there. And then you improve that

capability in successive blocks.

I think it is a - walking away is the best to approach this problem.

(deletia)

RUMSFELD: To the extent we have a capability, it will have a deterrent effect. You're quite right. To the extent it has a limited capability, it will have a deterrent effect only to that limit.

“Defense Department operational update briefing. Briefers: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Gen. Richard Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff,” Federal News Service, Dec. 17, 2002.

J.D. CROUCH: Our evolutionary approach is sort of characterized here. This - what was discussed or what was announced today is not a fixed or final architecture of any kind. It's an initial capability, and it's building on the Pacific testbed that I think we have briefed you about before and I think the general will talk about a little bit more later on in the brief. It integrates new technologies, and our hope is to continue to improve these capabilities, to improve them from a technical standpoint and, as technology and other international security environment warrants, to augment these capabilities.

Their number, type and location will change over time, as the secretary said. And this - what we're - what we've announced today is a very modest initial interceptor inventory and an investment that provides a useful defense capability, but one that, you know, has limitations, as the secretary said. And we want to be very clear about that.

The other thing I think is very important is that this capability will give our combatant commanders and the like the ability to be involved in the operation and in fact in the development of follow-on capabilities, and that's an important thing as well.

And it allows us to field some capability quickly, employing test assets as we go along, but without making a commitment to serial production and very large-scale investments.

(deletia)

CROUCH: As I said, it will provide an initial modest defense capability.

(deletia)

KADISH: We are confident to proceed in this initial capability, recognizing the final architecture is not knowable today because we have a lot more research and development to do to improve our capability over time. But what we do know is that our fundamental technology of hit-to-kill, collision of the interceptor with the warheads that completely

destroys the warheads, works. Whereas a few years ago, I could not tell you that with any confidence.

The system testing that we have done gives us confidence that we have the ability to integrate these elements, as complex as they are, and to make them effective. And our computer predictions, of which are very sophisticated, are telling us that when we do have a successful test, it occurs just as we had predicted.

So those confidence-building measures, along with the fact that we're going to have a very aggressive RDT&E program, subject to all the risks that are inherent in this business of failure and success, and some things will work and some things won't, but we will build confidence over time, as we invest in the program.

(deletia)

KADISH: So when you look across the board, we have made, I think, significant progress in our overall hit-to-kill technology. And that's why we have gained the confidence that we could take this next, modest step.

(deletia)

CROUCH: This is not "obviously aimed" at anything.

We've been saying for two years, since we came in here, that we wanted to develop and deploy, when ready, missile defense capabilities. We've moved deliberately in working with the Russians, to get out of the ABM Treaty so we could do realistic testing. We now have a set of capabilities that we think are mature enough to give us an initial and very modest set of missile defense capabilities, and we are moving forward on that. We have - we are moving forward on it based on months and months of work, all of which predated current, you know, difficulties.

So I think that from our perspective, you know, we do think that missile defense capabilities can have a powerful impact on those countries that might threaten us. They have a deterrent effect, and we hope they have a dissuasive effect, in the sense that we hope that our missile defense capabilities will keep countries that might be thinking about investing in ballistic missiles from continuing those investments that might threaten ourselves or our friends and allies. So, to that degree, it is connected. But I think it is certainly not connected directly to what's going on.

(deletia)

Q And the general question is, this looks like your aggressive RDT&E program, plus a few more things, but if it looks like a R&D program, what has changed today - the secretary asked us not to think of deployment with a capital "D" sort of thing, as we normally do, but what has really changed today?

MR. CROUCH: ... This is a - I think the president directed us to take - to build on that initial testbed and provide some capabilities that would give us, as I said, a very modest capability, but that would be a modest operational capability that would be available if we managed to implement these plans, you know, with all the caveats that the general mentioned - (chuckles) - in the '04, '05 time frame. That means, as he said, a major difference I think is that before, we had a testbed that we could have transformed into a capability if we wanted to.

Now, we have taken the step - the next step to say we're going to create some operational capability that will eventually give us some 24-7 coverage that we will also use as part of our testing program. So it's, again, I'd like to characterize this as a modest next step that does provide some capability.

And I think that's, you know, the way the secretary talked about it this afternoon, and certainly the way the president talked about it in his statement.

“Missile defense deployment announcement. Briefers: Lt. Gen. Ronald Kadish, director, Missile Defense Agency; J.D. Crouch, assistant secretary of defense for international security,” Federal News Service, Dec. 17, 2002.
