



Criticizing success? Long-range missile defense system works

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On Sept. 28, 2007, some 75 miles into space over the Pacific Ocean, a kill vehicle from America's missile defense system destroyed the mock warhead of a long-range missile. This test of the Ground-Based Mid-course Defense (GMD) system provides further evidence that its "hit-to-kill" technology is effective. The GMD interceptor destroyed the mock warhead by the force of collision and did not use an explosive warhead of any kind.

Hit-to-kill technology is common to a variety of missile defense interceptors now in either development or deployment. In addition to the GMD system, the technology is used in the Navy's Standard Missile-3, Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), and Patriot PAC-3 interceptors. Roughly 80 percent of

recent tests across all four of these programs have been successful.

Yet critics continue to argue that missile defense will prove ineffective. Congress should reject arguments that cloak policy preference in technical analysis and should protect Americans with a policy of designing and building the most effective missile defense system possible.

At different times and for different reasons, an element of the scientific and engineering communities has argued against the adoption of a missile defense system on technical grounds. Most prominent among these criticisms was a 2000 report from the Union of Concerned Scientists criticizing the technical feasibility of the GMD system.

Given the growing confidence in the technology, these scientists and engineers now appear to be changing their tune. In fact, one group has charged the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) of the Department of Defense with understating the capabilities of the GMD interceptors that may be placed in Poland. The MDA has defended its assertion that the system will be unable to intercept Russian long-range missiles launched at the United States.

Implied in the critics' argument is that it is inappropriate or illegitimate for the United States to field missile defense systems that are too effective, particularly if they possess even a limited capability to down Russian missiles. In other words, these scientists and engineers have argued against the GMD system both because it is ineffective and because it is too effective.

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