
Conference Report

Missile Defense Got Reoriented to Reality

by Marsha Freeman

A political battle rages in Washington, as to when the United States will get far enough along in its ballistic missile defense program to violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. But the military and technical officials who are responsible for carrying out the program itself, are taking the discussion out of the political arena and are reshaping it to reflect global strategic reality.

This emerged clearly at the fourth Space and Missile Defense Conference, held Aug. 21-23 in Huntsville, Alabama, from the leadership of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO), and representatives of the intelligence community. While partisans in Washington have been trying to promote immediate deployment of a defense system to counter the imminent threat of missile attack by so-called "rogue states," such as North Korea, no one knows what the threats to the United States will be over the next ten years, and it is unlikely there will much workable to deploy before then.

The perspective for the reorganized BMD program was laid out in introductory remarks by Lt. Gen. Joseph Cosumano, head of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command in Huntsville. General Cosumano reported that there will no longer be a national missile defense, to protect American cities, and a separate theater missile defense, to defend troops in the field and distant allies, each based on different technology. There will, instead, be an array of technologies integrated into one system of layered defense against ballistic missiles, through all phases of flight, from boost phase lift-off to reentry.

Lt. Gen. Ronald Kadish, director of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, stressed that the program is moving away from a "requirements-based system, to a capabilities approach." The requirements-based approach was largely the result of the report of the Rumsfeld Commission, released in 1998, which insisted that threats of ICBM attack by "rogue nations" were imminent, and that a national missile defense was required as soon as possible, no matter how ineffective. The capabilities approach will set a timetable that will lead to deployment only when a system is technologically ready.

General Kadish said that he is "not yet committed to a single architecture," or how specific technologies would be

organized and integrated, because we "don't know the best technology yet." He repeated several times, that he will not define an architecture, nor set specific dates for procurement, production, or deployment, under Washington pressure.

"There has been progress since last year," General Kadish said, "but there are many challenges which lie before us." He stated that the next scheduled test of the missile interceptor system will repeat the conditions of the last, July 14, test, without making it more complicated, because there must be confidence in the results. "We need more tests, that are more realistic," he said, and that simulate different possible battle environments and geographies. There is "no rush to deploy an untested system," he emphasized.

Assessing the Threat

Reading the *Washington Times*, or faxes from Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, the uninformed citizen might believe that North Korea already has intercontinental ballistic missiles pointed at the United States, and that the Chinese itch for a confrontation.

Speaking at the Huntsville conference, Ken Knight, Deputy for Global Projections for the Defense Intelligence Agency, stressed that, in fact, we do not know what threats the United States will face over the next decade.

Knight stated that the greatest strategic threats to the United States and its allies are from an array of global destabilizations. These include the threat of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure; threats to democracy in Ibero-America from narco-terrorists; political uncertainties in the Middle East, Russia, and China; and global economic threats.

Global stability is also under stress, he said, because 95% of the population growth in the world is in developing nations, without comparable economic development. Millions of refugees and displaced persons exist around the world. Which of these threats will pose the greatest danger to the United States is uncertain, he said.

Knight stated that one of the challenges for intelligence professionals in determining the threat, is understanding another country's "intentions." China, for example, is an ancient country and culture whose intentions, which may not always be what seems obvious to us, we have to try to understand. "We can't be sure of North Korea's intentions" either, he stated. We do not know, for example, if there is a strategic change in North Korea, after the summit with the South last year.

Concerning other "rogue states," Knight indicated that, in his mind, there was considerable uncertainty. In Iran, he said, it looks like "things will get better with the reformers in the long run, but we are still worried about the religious conservatives." He is concerned about various terrorist groups in the Middle East, and also international drug rings and organized crime. All of these considerations must be taken into account when considering threats to the United



The Russian Scud missiles, seen here on display at the Space and Missile Defense conference in Huntsville, Alabama, has been billed as an immediate threat from “rogue states” to U.S. troops, and allies. But according to military and intelligence analysts, the threats facing the U.S. are uncertain.

States. “We cannot predict the nature of a future war,” he concluded.

Vision or Hallucination?

Almost every military speaker referred to limitations on the defense budget as a key pacing factor in the development of a ballistic missile defense system. Even before it was made public recently that the budget “surplus” had evaporated, many in Congress had concerns, that the requirements of the military services, to pay for everything from housing to conventional weapons, would preempt any increases for ballistic missile defense.

Speaking on the topic of “BMD Enabling Technologies,” Dr. Charles Infosino, Chief Scientist of the BMDO, outlined some of the “revolutionary” technologies his office is developing. These include active sensor systems on interceptors to better discriminate a target from decoys. Further along, there may be interactive discrimination techniques, where an interceptor would deploy a dust cloud to see how an object responds.

Stratospheric airships (blimps, or hot air balloons) are being developed for surveillance and tracking. Large mirrors to act as laser relay systems could be developed, for use with ground-based lasers. And the Airborne Laser and Space Based Laser efforts are already under way. But, Dr. Infosino warned, “vision without funding is hallucination.”

Hallucination was certainly evident at the conference, during the speeches of neo-conservative Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pa.), *Washington Times* scaremonger Bill Gertz, and Center for Security Policy ideologue Frank Gaffney.

Weldon whined that since the change of Senate leadership to a Democratic majority, there is no longer a spirit of bipartisanship on ballistic missile defense, as there had been, he

claimed, after the Rumsfeld report came out. To rally the troops, Representative Weldon warned that the Russians and Chinese may be cooperating in defense, and decried the debate in Washington that has pitted ballistic missile defense against military readiness. He insisted on the need to counter the “disinformation being spread by the Union of Concerned Scientists and other groups”—though not mentioning that failed interceptor-missile technology tests have certainly added to skepticism about these BMD methods’ workability.

In this effort to “raise public awareness,” Weldon reported that Boeing Corp. is bringing “diverse groups,” like farmers, into Washington, to brief them on BMD in September. Following that, Israeli Knesset (parliament) members will be in Washington for hearings, and in December, Weldon will take U.S. Congressmen to Israel, undoubtedly to hear about how close Iran and perhaps Iraq are to obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

But Representative Weldon could not hold a candle to the ranting of former Defense Department official Frank Gaffney. He stated that the United States will indeed have a missile defense, but it will be *after* an American city, or Tel Aviv, or Taipei, is hit with a nuclear weapon! “We are living on borrowed time,” he intoned. Gaffney attacked President George Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld for having a “business as usual” response to the global threats, because they have not taken up his provocative proposal to immediately deploy Aegis-class destroyers, equipped with whatever anti-missile system can be mustered, to the shores of the “rogue states.”

Addressing what the military services and officers running the BMD program recognize they have to deal with, General Kadish diplomatically concluded: “The view from Washington isn’t always correct, but is important.”