

Ballistic Missile Defense: Catching Up to the Missile Threat

Presentation by Baker Spring
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BMD Has Lagged Behind the Missile Threat for Historical Reasons

- The roughly 30 period of the ABM Treaty and the Cold War Policy of Mutual Vulnerability
- The proliferation of ballistic missile capabilities on a case-by-case basis
- The cumulative effects of ballistic missile proliferation and the rise of a multi-polar world

Trends in Ballistic Capabilities

- Increased numbers of ballistic missile possessors
- Increased ranges in ballistic missiles
- More sophisticated missiles in the hands of new entrants, including countermeasures and decoys
- Overlap in proliferating states between those pursuing ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction

Increased Numbers of Ballistic Missile Possessors

- According to the Missile Defense Agency, the number of states possessing ballistic missiles has gone from 9 in 1972 to 21 in 2007
- Established missile powers – China and Russia – are modernizing their arsenals
- Ballistic missile flight tests are expanding, with over 120 foreign ballistic missile launches in 2007.
- Non-state entities – Hezbollah and Hamas – have acquired rockets and short-range missiles

Increased Ranges of Ballistic Missiles

- Iran launches a satellite on February 2, 2009
- North Korea attempts to launch a satellite on April 6, 2009, and its payload reaches 2,390 miles
- Both launches demonstrate progress toward an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability

Countermeasures and Decoys

- U.S. officials indicate that even new missile powers are pursuing countermeasures
- Vice Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General James Cartwright stated on April 6, 2009, “Clearly there is great leverage in working in missile defense in the boost phase, because you catch [the attacking missile] before you have the sophisticated threats or capabilities that might emerge, decoys and things like that.”

The Nexus Between Ballistic Missile and Nuclear Weapons Development

- India conducts a series of nuclear explosive tests in 1998, while developing a family of ballistic missile delivery systems
- Pakistan also conducts nuclear tests in 1998, and is also pursuing ballistic missiles
- North Korea conducts a nuclear explosive test in 2006, the same year it conducted multiple rocket launches
- Iran continues to pursue uranium enrichment in defiance of international pressure to suspend this activity

Ballistic Missile Capabilities and Threats in a Multi-Polar World

- International cooperation in the development of ballistic missile capabilities (e.g. Iran and North Korea)
- Transfer of rockets and missiles to terrorist organizations (Hamas and Hezbollah)
- Greater complexity in relations among missile powers because of more players with different interests
- Less predictable relations among missile powers because of more players with different interests
- The effect of the coalition dynamic on crisis stability
- The difficulty of managing relations with nuclear-armed allies
- The use of surrogates in the pursuit of foreign policy and security goals in the multi-polar world

U.S. Missile Defense Capabilities are Catching Up to the Threat

- Since U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, U.S. missile defense capabilities have started to catch up with the threat
- Policy developments
- Programmatic developments

Policy Developments

- The adoption of a more defensive posture in the new multi-polar world
- The rediscovery of the need for defense in the aftermath of 9/11
- The findings of the Nuclear Posture Review in late 2001
- The adoption of National Security Presidential Directive 23 on December 16, 2002
- The adoption of the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, also adopted in December 2002
- The pursuit of missile defense cooperation with allies and friends

Programmatic Developments

- The pursuit of a layered defense capability (not an architecture)
- The pursuit of a global missile defense capability (the distinction between theater and national missile defense systems dropped)
- The building of a modular, global sensor and command and control structure
- Improving discrimination capabilities
- Improving record of intercept tests (since 2001 about an 80 percent success rate in intercept tests)

Will Missile Defenses Continue to Catch Up to the Threat?

- \$1.2 billion cut to the missile defense program
- Boost-phase capability now in doubt
- Curtailing the scope of the deployments for countering long-range missiles
- Multiple Kill Vehicle (MKV) program is terminated
- Commitment of allied cooperation call into question (possible withdrawal from agreements with the Czech Republic and Poland)
- Missile defenses may be viewed as incompatible with arms control with Russia and global nuclear disarmament
- No commitment to space-based missile defenses