

PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT  
SPONSORED BY

## U.S. Can't Delay Fielding Missile Defense Systems

May 19, 2008, 12:10 p.m.

*By Rep. Trent Franks*

*Special to Roll Call*

---

What is it that causes Members of Congress to so often forget that the most critical imperative of the federal government is to provide for the common defense?

We now live in a post-Cold War world where ballistic missile proliferation is becoming rampant and where terrorists are not deterred by the threat of mutually assured destruction. In 1972, nine countries had ballistic missiles; today, 27 countries possess ballistic missiles and some contain hostile regimes that actively support terrorists.

Chief among these is Iran, whose ballistic missile program is substantial and continues to be aggressively expanded. Already, Iran holds our forward-deployed forces in the Middle East at risk with short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

Our close ally, Israel, faces the existential threat posed by longer-range Iranian ballistic missiles. The Israelis have every cause to be alarmed when these missiles are coupled with the apocalyptic rhetoric of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Our intelligence estimates indicate that Iran could field a ballistic missile capable of reaching Europe and the eastern continental United States as early as 2015, and the Israelis estimate it could be much sooner than that. Iran also continues to enrich uranium in defiance of international law, and the recent National Intelligence Estimate reported with high confidence that "Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so." Iran continues to defy calls to comply with international standards of transparency.

North Korea poses another threat to our security through its development and proliferation of ballistic missiles and advanced technological knowledge. We already know that in addition to the North Korean nuclear weapons program, the xenophobic regime of Kim Jong Il possesses a long-range ballistic missile capability that could hold Alaska and Hawaii at risk, as well as the short-range ballistic missiles that could threaten our forces and our South Korean allies. Deploying Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense to the Korean peninsula will extend further protection to our forces, in addition to our current deployment of the Patriot air and missile defense system and Aegis cruisers and destroyers. Furthermore, Japan's decision to collaborate with the United States in deploying its own fleet of Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense ships signifies its realization of the potential threat posed by its neighbor, North Korea.

The four-star leadership of our geographic combatant commands — those responsible for monitoring separate slices of the globe and for conducting military operations should trouble arise — have testified before Congress that they need more "near-term systems," such as THAAD batteries and Aegis ships, than the present budget can provide. Congress has responded to this need by authorizing more funds for THAAD and Aegis than the president's budget request for fiscal 2009. Yet there is still a need, and Congress must do more to stay ahead of our enemies' quickly advancing missile technology. Although sea-based systems such as Aegis and land-based systems such as THAAD have sufficiently matured, we remain vulnerable to an attack from a missile launch with multiple warheads and countermeasures.

Moreover, as North Korea and Iran seek to add intercontinental ballistic missile capability to their arsenals, we must also invest in the systems necessary to defend against the long-range threat. Long-range missiles fitted with nuclear warheads have profound implications for the U.S., as well as its European allies.

The conclusion is unavoidable: America's ability to defend ourselves and our allies against the specter of nuclear-armed ballistic missile attack is at risk if we fail to properly invest in ballistic missile defense.

As we go forward, it is important to distinguish that while some critics resist the development of "far-term" programs over "near-term" programs, we must be consistent in our pursuit of both. Only a few years ago, the concept of Ground-Based Midcourse Defense, capable of intercepting an enemy missile outside the atmosphere at its highest trajectory, was considered far term and highly improbable. Yet GMD was put on operational alert in 2006 when North Korea tested its long-range missile technology.

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer punctuated the ballistic missile threat best when he recently stated: "We have seen nations testing these missiles," he said. "Let's not beat around the bush here. It is not something virtual. This is not a computer game. This is real."

To keep pace with the current threat, it is critical that we begin constructing and fielding ballistic missile defense components that are best suited to counter a launch from the Middle East, just as our Alaska-based components are best suited to counter a long-range launch from North Korea. The administration has paved the way for the European Site Initiative through its negotiations with the Czechs and the Poles to base these components on European soil, and our allies recognize the value of such a system to their security. NATO endorsed the European Site Initiative at its recent summit in Bucharest, Romania, characterizing the initiative as "a substantial contribution to the protection of the allies."

We have already been able to make upgrades to our network of early-warning radars to optimize them for support of European-based missile defense components. The government of the Czech Republic has already willingly agreed in principle to construct a radar system that will permit us to track ballistic missiles launched from the Middle East toward Europe or the United States, and we are working hard to conclude a similar agreement with the government of Poland that will permit us to base on Polish soil 10 interceptor missiles capable of shooting down a long-range missile launched from the Middle East.

If we cannot adequately fund military construction for the radar or the interceptor facilities in fiscal 2009, we will continue to delay fielding this tremendously important system because we will have no infrastructure in place to support it. We must also adequately fund the hardware and software that make up the European ballistic missile defense capability. These items will take significant time to acquire, and we need to begin investing in them now in order to have a defense in place to meet the threat by 2015, or perhaps sooner.

Our colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee have contemplated the challenge before us and they have shown considerable support for missile defense in their National Defense Authorization Act markup. It is my sincere hope that the House Armed Services Committee and the Appropriations committees in both chambers will match that support with the resolve to make these crucial investments. To refuse to adequately fund these programs risks demonstrating to our European allies that we do not take missile defense seriously, causing them to wonder whether they should, either. We also risk emboldening those countries who view the proliferation of ballistic missile and nuclear weapons technology as their hedge against U.S. security interests throughout the world.

When we consider the vital protection this investment affords to our war fighters, our homeland and our allies, it is clear that the United States cannot afford not to make the crucial investment in the missile defense systems that comprise our only defense against ballistic missiles. Acting now may avoid the unthinkable scenario of one day awakening to the grim reality of an enemy armed with nuclear missiles against which we and our allies have no defense.

**Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.) is a member of the Armed Services Committee.**