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August 16, 2003

Missile Defense Booster Rocket Test Flight Successful

The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) announced today it has successfully completed a test flight of a developmental booster rocket design planned for use with the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system to intercept and destroy long-range missiles. The test did not involve the intercept of a target warhead, and did not carry an Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle (EKV), which, in an intercept test, is the system component that collides directly with the target warhead using "hit to kill" technology.

The three-stage developmental booster designed by Orbital Sciences Corp., was launched from an underground silo at Vandenberg AFB, Calif. at approximately 11:01 a.m. PDT. The objectives for the mission included demonstrating the vehicle's silo launch capabilities, verifying the vehicle design and flight characteristics, and confirming the planned performance of its guidance, control and propulsion systems.

A post-test analysis is underway, but initial indications show nominal booster performance. Another booster design by Lockheed Martin will participate in a similar test launch from Vandenberg AFB this fall. As part of a continuing development and testing effort leading to an initial defensive capability against a limited long-range missile attack beginning in 2004, both booster systems are scheduled to participate in flight tests that will test integrated system performance during both actual and simulated intercepts of a ballistic missile target.