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All Test Objectives Met in Test of Sea-based Interceptor Missile Maneuvering System

The capability to maneuver an interceptor missile towards its target is vital to having a successful defense against ballistic missiles. As part of the Missile Defense Agency's continuous development and testing program to field effective defenses against ballistic missile attacks, we successfully completed a very important ground test on July 26, 2004 involving an advanced interceptor missile maneuvering system that could enable an interceptor missile launched from a U.S. Navy Aegis cruiser or destroyer to more effectively "steer" itself directly into the path of an enemy missile warhead before it can hit its target with a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon.

Traveling at several thousand miles per hour, the steering system must have the capability to adjust the interceptor's flight path very quickly in terms of both speed and direction while tracking the target so that it can directly collide with the target warhead. This is the cornerstone of "hit to kill" technology, which uses only kinetic energy to destroy the target, and doesn't rely on explosives. The recently completed test of the Throttleable Divert and Attitude Control System (TDACS) for the Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) sea-based interceptor missile will help MDA to apply this advanced technology not only to sea-based missile defense, but will also help us in our research and development program for other missile defense technologies, including missile interceptors that can someday destroy hostile missiles shortly after they are launched, in what we call a ballistic missile's "boost phase".

Sea-based missile defense is one of several missile defense technologies currently in development and testing. The overall objective is to develop, test and deploy effective missile defenses that can intercept and destroy hostile ballistic missiles of any range (short, medium, intermediate and long-range) during any phase of flight. Sea-based missile defenses that will be added to some existing Aegis ships can utilize the mobility of the ships to better position missile defenses in any of the world's oceans to protect our deployed military forces, and also to help defend our friends and allies. Sea-based missile defenses also have the potential to someday provide a defense against long-range missiles directed at our homeland and other countries.

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