MISSILE DEFENSE AGENCY

News Release

http://www.mda.mil
mda.info@mda.mil

7100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-7100

Archive

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Missile Intercept Test Successful

The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) announced today it has successfully completed a test involving a planned intercept of an intercontinental ballistic missile target. The test took place over the central Pacific Ocean. A modified Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) target vehicle was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., at 9:11 p.m. EST, and a prototype interceptor was launched approximately 20 minutes later and 4,800 miles away from the Ronald Reagan Missile Site, Kwajalein Atoll, in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The intercept took place approximately 10 minutes after the interceptor was launched, at an altitude in excess of 140 miles above the earth and during the midcourse phase of the target warhead's flight. This was the fourth successful intercept for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) Segment, formerly known as National Missile Defense.

The test successfully demonstrated exoatmospheric kill vehicle (EKV) flight performance and "hit to kill" technology to intercept and destroy a long-range ballistic missile target. In addition to the EKV locating, tracking, and intercepting the target resulting in its destruction using only the body-to-body impact, this test also demonstrated the ability of system elements to work together as an integrated system. The test involved the successful integrated operation of space and ground-based sensors and radars, as well as the Battle Management, Command Control and Communications (BMC3) function to detect the launch of the target missile, cue an early warning radar to provide more detailed target location data; and integration of a prototype X-Band radar (based at Kwajalein) to provide precise target data to the EKV, which received the target updates from the In-Flight Interceptor Communications Systems (IFICS) at Kwajalein.

The EKV separated from its rocket booster more than 1,400 miles from the target warhead. After separation, it used its on-board infrared and visual sensors, augmented with the X-Band radar data provided by BMC3 via the In-flight Interceptor Communications System, to locate and track the target. Sensors aboard the EKV also successfully selected the target instead of three balloon decoys. Only system-generated data was used for the intercept after the EKV separated from its booster rocket. A C-band transponder aboard the target warhead did not provide any tracking or targeting information to the interceptor after the interceptor was launched.

Tonight's test is a major step in our aggressive developmental test program, and is the fourth successful intercept in six attempts. We will continue to pursue this testing regime to achieve a layered approach to missile defense, using different architectures to deter the growing threat of ballistic missiles carrying weapons of mass destruction.

Over the next several weeks, government and industry program officials will conduct an extensive analysis of the data received during the flight test to determine whether anomalies or malfunctions occurred during the test, evaluate system performance and determine whether or not all flight test objectives were met. Since the system is in the developmental phase of design and testing, performance of individual elements and the overall system integration was as important as the actual intercept.