



A Necessary Change of Course— FY10 Missile Defense Funding

By Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.)

This year on the Armed Services Committee we considered the administration's cut to ballistic missile defense. The majority of Democrats on the committee supported the president's budget request, which suggested enormous cuts to missile defense systems that protect the homeland from intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). While the missile defense budget sustained an overall \$1.2 billion cut to last year's budget, money was added to missile defense systems that protect our forward deployed forces and our allies from shorter range ballistic missiles. This, so the argument goes, is because these kinds of missile defense systems defend against "99 percent of the threat." This misleads the American people into believing their government has built a missile defense system that is 99 percent effective against ballistic missiles that threaten America. This couldn't be any farther from the truth.

While it is a fact that in statistical quantities the world has a much larger number of short- and mid-range ballistic missiles than long-range missiles, there are still missiles that could reach America's shores. Even though the quantity of long-range ballistic missiles are fewer, their lethality, as measured by their ability to carry a nuclear warhead very long distances, cannot be overemphasized. Countries with irrational regimes that are hostile toward the United States—like North Korea and Iran—are hell-bent on building, testing, using, and proliferating nuclear technology as well as long range ballistic missiles.

Case in point: Iran recently launched a satellite into space, which, according to General Maples, director of the Defense

Intelligence Agency, "shows progress in mastering technology needed to produce ICBMs." Moreover, while the House Armed Services Committee sat in debate over the FY10 National Defense Authorization Act, reports broke in the media that North Korea, the country partnering with Iran's missile development program, was preparing to launch a missile from its Tongchang-ri facility in the country's northwest, and the missile was reportedly aimed toward Hawaii.

And yet paradoxically, while all of these events were taking place, our Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) element, the one and only system we have in place to defend the homeland of the United States from ICBMs, sustained a 35 percent cut over last year's appropriated amount. In addition, the administration halted the number of interceptors being emplaced at 30, rather than the full 44, as had been planned. This decision is particularly inopportune as North Korea and Iran continue moving closer to producing ICBMs. The more interceptors we have in our arsenal, the more chances we have at interdicting an incoming missile.

How, one might ask, is such a cut defended at such a critical time for America's national security? The administration is leading Americans to believe that sheer quantities of assets directly correlate to the level of threat they pose to America's national security. Fiscal year 2010 funding clearly emphasized defense against the threat of greater quantity, without consideration of the threat of the weapon's lethality or the intent of their use by the enemy. There was a significant increase in funding to counter



short- and mid-range ballistic missiles used overseas, and it was paid for with funding for defenses against ICBMs aimed at the United States. While large quantities of assets, in this case short- and mid-range ballistic missiles, are certainly a threat to our forward deployed forces and our allies, the lethality of a weapon aimed at the United States must also be considered. It would take only one nuclear armed ICBM to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent Americans.

So let us not merely evaluate the multitude of one type of missile over another when we consider our enemies' weapons and the defense of America. Every day, North Korea and Iran continue to actively work toward achieving the type of long-range missile capability that could hold the entire Western world under threat. Let us hope that the current administration re-evaluates its policies in the area of ballistic missile defense, changes course, and puts the appropriate level of priority on preparing to meet all the threats we face as a freedom-loving nation, before these nations meet the technological point of no return—and before it is too late. ★

Editor's note: Rep. Trent Franks represents Arizona's second district. Franks is a member of the House Armed Services Committee's Strategic Forces Subcommittee.