

# The Arguments Promoting Ballistic Missile Defense

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## Emerging Threats

The American government believes Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) is necessary to be able to stop a nuclear attack, most likely from emerging threats, not old adversaries such as Russia. 'Rouge states' such as North Korea and Iran are considered the most likely ballistic missile threats to the United States. The US National Foreign Intelligence Board reports that the majority of the American intelligence community believes that by 2015 the United States will likely face an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) threat from both Iran and North Korea.

North Korea has reportedly succeeded in developing a small arsenal of nuclear weapons. North Korea is developing its Taepo Dong-2 missile capable of carrying a nuclear payload and with a range capable of reaching some parts of the United States. North Korea already has short and medium range missile capability, able to attack notable US allies South Korea and Japan, which show serious interest in taking part in the

Ballistic Missile Defense programs to be able to intercept these North Korean missiles.

Iran is currently working to develop long-range missile capability, and much of the American intelligence community - but not all of it - believes Iran will have ICBMs by 2015. One thing to keep in mind is that although Iran is suspected of maintaining chemical and biological weapons and possibly working on developing nuclear weapons, current intelligence indicates Iran has not succeeded in attaining nuclear weapons thus far. However, with some former Soviet scientists willing to use their expertise to develop various weapons of mass destruction for 'rouge' states if they are paid the right price, it is plausible that Iran could succeed in attaining nuclear arms.

One threat that is much less talked about for obvious political reasons is China. The United States is quietly concerned about the threat China would pose if relations were to deteriorate between the two countries. The US doesn't regularly voice its concerns of the Chinese missile arsenal publicly to avoid such a deterioration in the relation-

ship. To the American government, BMD is considered necessary to counter the Chinese threat should relations sour.

## International Response

Opponents of BMD charge that the program itself could be the catalyst for a deterioration of the US-Chinese Relationship and lead to an arms race. However the American government does not agree with this assessment. Mr. Richard Cronin, an American analyst in Asian affairs, attempted to ease these concerns in a report to the US Congress.

"Since the September 11 attacks, China has tended to downplay its opposition to the U.S. missile defense program in the interests of putting U.S.-China relations on a more cooperative footing," Mr. Cronin states. His report suggests that China, although concerned, will not likely have a hostile reaction to the BMD program, but noted this could change should the program include Taiwan.

Russian opposition to the BMD program was an initial concern for the US, but Russian opposition has lessened significantly as Russian-American relations have improved during the presidencies of George Bush and Vladimir Putin.

## Response to Reliability Concerns

A frequent criticism of BMD is the unreliability of the defenses - the tests of the system have varied, with both successes and failures. Proponents argue that it is better to have a system that,

although not guaranteed, could prevent a nuclear attack from succeeding, than to have no chance to intercept an attack at all. The US Department of Defense has not hidden the fact that their BMD project is a work in progress, thus they expect improved reliability in the coming years as their technology improves. Indeed the system is improving - although not all the latest tests have succeeded, the majority have been successful and this represents a significant improvement from just two years ago.

## Canadian Participation

After initial opposition to BMD, the Canadian government exchanged letters with the US government in January with both countries pledging to negotiate a possible arrangement allowing Canadian participation in BMD. The government is not committed to participating in the program, and pledges a decision will not be made until negotiations with the US are complete, but many signs point toward Canadian involvement in BMD.

Mr. Rodney Moore, a Media Relations Officer for the Department of Foreign Affairs, told the Cadre that the Canadian government believes it should be involved in BMD, adding that emerging threats to the US are also threats to Canadian security. He explains that while the ballistic missile threat to Canada is not at the same level as the threat to the United States, the threat to America is also a threat to Canadian interests.

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