

The Star Wars family - What is Bush planning? Greenpeace Briefing July 2001

In late June the Bush administration published the final budget for next years defense programs including missile defense. This was the first glimpse at the conclusions of the review of missile defense programs ordered by the President and decisions about what, if any, programs were to be cut.

The budget made it quite clear that no existing programs were to be cut. Instead spending was to be increased and the research and development program was not only to be expanded, but put on a fast track to deployment. Overall, the budget was increased to \$8.3 billion USD, an increase of almost sixty percent on the amount the Clinton administration proposed to ask for if they were still in office.

In the words of the 2002 Program Budget Decision report, the increase in the budget was made to "accelerate technology development".¹ Furthermore, the budget revealed the Bush administration intended to completely restructure the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization into three distinct areas rather than a myriad of different programs. These will be known as the boost, midcourse and terminal defense protection programs.

The budget also proposes that missile defense programs previously under development by the Air Force will be moved to BMDO and that those programs close to deployment be taken under the control of whichever service would finally be using them.

In summary, the Bush administration is proposing to push through a missile defense program which, if it functions correctly, will provide the United States, its interests, allies and overseas troops with truly global protection from missile attack.

The rest of this briefing takes you through all the various systems being researched and developed as part of a global shield, what they are and how close they are to actual deployment.

National Missile Defence

The purpose of this system is to defend all 50 states of the United States against ballistic missile attack through a system of space based sensors and land-based tracking radars (in the United States, Thule in Greenland and Fylingdales in the United Kingdom) and batteries of interceptor missiles. The original scheduled initial operational capability was to deploy 20 interceptor missiles at a site in Alaska by 2005, followed by a further 80 two years later. It is now felt that this system will not be operational until 2007 at the latest although the Bush administration is determined to push through deployment of some form of this system by the end of his first term in 2004.

¹ US Department of Defense Program Budget Decision on Ballistic Missile Defense for Fiscal Year 2002, PBD 816, June 22, 2001

Navy Area Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (NATBMD) Program

This involves upgrading the existing Aegis combat system onboard the Ticonderoga class cruisers and Arleigh Burke-class destroyers with a more advanced suite of missile defense capabilities including a new interceptor missile. The plan is to build at least 1,500 new missiles deployed on an unknown quantity of Aegis equipped ships to provide Theater Missile Defense (TMD) protection during the final stages of a missile's flight to its target. The intent is to provide protection for amphibious assault forces and coastal cities from short and medium-range missile defense attacks without diminishing the Aegis systems current capabilities. It is intended that full-scale production of the system will begin in late 2003.

Navy Theater Wide (NTW)

This again is an upgrade to the Aegis system. Building upon NATBMD the intention is to boost the range of the HARM missile used by Aegis by adding an extra stage to it and adapting the warhead so it has its own power source and is maneuverable. The intent is to provide protection for coastal areas from missile attack during all stages of its flight and to detect, track and eliminate ballistic missiles over a greater range than previous Aegis weapons system upgrades.

Current plans are to equip four ships with eighty of these advanced missiles by the end of 2007.

The Airborne Laser

This used to be under the control of the US Air Force but is being moved back under the control of BMDO. The concept appears simple, Boeing 747 aircraft equipped with a high-energy laser patrol in pairs just outside enemy airspace scanning the horizon for the plumes from just launched enemy missiles. The launched missile would be illuminated by a tracking laser while computers calculate its course, distance etc. When all data has been received, a second much more powerful laser would lock onto the target and fire a three to five second burst at the missile, destroying it or inflicting sufficient damage to cause it to self-destruct in the early stages of its flight.

It is hoped that a first test of this system will occur sometime in 2003 and that at least seven aircraft will be deployed to meet the military's theater-wide missile defense needs by 2008.

However, the Airborne Laser is an ambitious technological challenge that intends to utilize lasers and other technology that have not been used outside the controlled and stable environment of a laboratory before.

The Space Based Laser

An idea out of the original Reagan vision and still very much in the concept phase. The idea would be to have a ring of twenty satellites armed with lasers around the earth. These lasers would acquire and fire at any missile launched, anywhere in the world with enough sustained power that it would self-destruct in the initial stages of flight.

The tentative date given for putting the first one of this system into space is 2012, as an experimental test bed, to learn about the challenges and

feasibility of deploying a space based missile defense system. As such this remains an experimental program.

Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS)

An international cooperative initiative with Germany and Italy intended to provide limited area defense of forces in combat arenas. The idea is for MEADS to be highly mobile, easily deployable, to provide all round coverage and to be easily integrated into allied military operations. It is intended that it be used as protection from missiles launched when they are in their final stage of flight much like the Patriot system which it is intended to replace.

It is hoped to have the first military unit fully equipped with MEADS by 2012 although its future is very shaky.

The German parliament is questioning whether or not MEADS is a system that Germany actually needs or can afford. Recently MEADS was given a reprieve when a memorandum of understanding between the three nations involved was signed to ensure sufficient funding. An annual review of MEADS has been agreed to "determine each nation's intent to fund and continue the project..."

Patriot advanced Capability 3 (PAC 3)

This is the name for the latest version of the interceptor missile for the Patriot system. It is being developed to provide an increased capability against advanced theater ballistic and cruise missiles and hostile aircraft. Like MEADS it is intended to destroy targets in the final stages of their flight.

Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)

A mobile ground-based Theater Missile Defense (TMD) system intended to protect troop concentrations, population centers and 'civilian assets'. THAAD would destroy incoming missiles as just before or as they re-enter the atmosphere. The intent is to purchase over 1,200 missiles to be deployed by 2008.

Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS)

This is a set of thirty satellites that will ring the globe in both low and high orbit to provide a global monitoring capability for launches of ballistic missiles using infrared sensors. This information would then be fed into the Star Wars system through a central command center and through at least two ground relay stations at Menwith Hill in the United Kingdom and Pine Gap in Australia. The concept is for SBIRS to conduct the initial tracking with other parts of the system, dependent upon where a particular missile is heading, taking over at a later stage. The hope is to have most of the system in place by 2005 to act as the eyes for the National Missile Defense system intended to protect the US outlined above.

Conclusion

The majority of these systems are beset by delays, cost overruns and technical difficulties due to their complexity and are unlikely to meet their current target deployment dates.

Concern has been raised as to whether the more advanced systems such as NMD, SBL, ABL, MEADS and NTW will ever be deployed because of the technology required to match the original idea does not exist.

However, the Bush administration appears to be disregarding these fundamental difficulties with its decision to proceed with all of these systems. The policy is paving the way for a full blown revival of the Reagan Star Wars dream, coupled with the determination to make it a reality through a fast-track research and development program and large injections of taxpayers money.

Development of a shield such as Star Wars behind which you can hide and strike out with impunity is deeply destabilizing to global security. The U.S. plan has damaged the international arms control and disarmament process to such a point that it will be difficult to recover, and brings the likelihood of a new nuclear arms and the collapse of the international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime ever closer.

The longer Star Wars is allowed to proceed the more damage will be done.