



News Release

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Missile Defense Radar Exercise Successfully Completed

Air Force Lieutenant General Henry "Trey" Obering, Missile Defense Agency director, announced the successful completion today of an important exercise to test the Cobra Dane radar located at Shemya, Alaska (Aleutian Islands) and the fire control system for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense element of the Ballistic Missile Defense System. The Ground-based Midcourse Defense is America's deployed system to protect the country against a limited long-range ballistic missile attack. The Cobra Dane radar has been used for missile surveillance for nearly 30 years, and has been upgraded for use as a missile defense radar.

The exercise involved the launch of a long-range ballistic missile from an Air Force C-17 cargo aircraft over international waters in the Pacific Ocean approximately 800 miles from Shemya Island. After the missile was dropped from the aircraft, a parachute deployed to stabilize and slow the missile. The missile's first stage rocket motor then ignited, sending the missile downrange. The target missile's flight was successfully tracked by the Cobra Dane radar, and the data obtained by Cobra Dane was then used to construct a Weapon Task Plan, or firing solution, that was fed into the systems fire control system manned by military "warfighters" in Colorado Springs, Colorado and Ft. Greely, Alaska, who currently operate the interceptor missiles now deployed in Alaska and California, as well as the sensors and radars that provide operational detection and tracking information. The deployed interceptors provide for the first time a capability to defend all 50 states against a limited long-range ballistic missile attack.

Launching a missile from an aircraft provided an operationally realistic trajectory and an opportunity to fly across the face of the Cobra Dane radar. The radar has not been available for use during previous flight tests because it is well outside the area of the existing missile test range that stretches between the Marshall Islands in the central Pacific Ocean to the California coast. However, because the radar has tracked ballistic missile flights for nearly 30 years, a huge amount of data is available regarding its performance. The exercise completed today marks the first time that data obtained from an actual missile tracked by Cobra Dane was fed into the missile defense fire control system to obtain a firing solution. If this had been an intercept test, or an actual missile attack on the United States, the fire control system would have taken Cobra Dane and data from other space-based, sea-based and ground-based sensors and developed a firing solution. This information would have been transmitted to interceptor missiles in Alaska and California, which would then launch from their underground silos, travel several thousand miles per hour to a point in space high above the earth and maneuver to place it directly in the path of the incoming warhead to destroy it using only a direct collision, known as "hit to kill" technology, to destroy the warhead before it reached its target in the United States with a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon.

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