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Successful THAAD Interceptor Launch Achieved

Air Force Lieutenant General Henry "Trey" Obering, Missile Defense Agency director, announced the successful completion of a flight test today of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) element of the Ballistic Missile Defense system at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico.

The test involved the launch of a THAAD interceptor missile, which is designed to intercept and destroy short to intermediate range ballistic missiles during their terminal phase of flight. The THAAD interceptor has the capability to intercept a ballistic missile inside the earth's atmosphere (endoatmospheric) or just outside the atmosphere (exoatmospheric). Today's test did not include a target missile, so no intercept was planned. The primary objectives for the test included the evaluation of high endo-atmospheric flight environment effects on the THAAD Block 2004 interceptor design; demonstration of proper interceptor launch from its ground-transportable storage canister, validation of booster, kill vehicle and shroud separation dynamics; and operation of the interceptor's divert and attitude control system consisting of small rocket motors to maneuver the kill vehicle to place it in the path of a target missile for a "hit to kill" intercept using only the force of the direct collision to destroy the hostile missile. Equipment on the test range also collected a large amount of interceptor telemetry data to help refine and improve THAAD technology.

While this flight test focused on interceptor fly-out and controllability, the continuing flight test program will progress to operationally realistic target intercepts at White Sands Missile Range and also at the Pacific Missile Range Facility on the Hawaiian island of Kauai.

The test completed today starts a new round of THAAD developmental testing that builds on the investment from earlier THAAD tests, which included two consecutive target intercepts in 1999. It is the first missile defense system that is capable of intercepting a target missile both inside and outside the atmosphere. An important capability of THAAD is its rapid mobility to where it is needed, and a THAAD launcher (containing eight missiles) and its radar and command center can be airlifted and then trucked to forward locations to protect our deployed forces overseas and our allies and friends.

The THAAD program is managed by the Missile Defense Agency in Washington, D.C., and executed by the THAAD Project Office in Huntsville, Ala. Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company is the prime contractor.

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