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Ballistic Missile Defense

The anti-ballistic missile (ABM) deployment at the Stanley R. Mickelson SAFEGUARD Complex, Grand Forks, North Dakota, became fully operational on 1 October 1975, meeting to the day an objective set four years earlier. In February 1976, based upon an earlier recommendation by the Secretary of Defense to reduce the scope of SAFEGUARD operations, Congress voted to discontinue the deployment of missiles at Grand Forks, but to retain the Perimeter Acquisition Radar (PAR). All missiles were removed by the end of the fiscal year, and the PAR was modified to provide expanded early warning and attack assessment.

Notwithstanding the discontinuance of SAFEGUARD deployment, the Secretary of Defense directed the Army to conduct a rigorous research and development effort, within the provisions of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, that would preserve U.S. options to develop and deploy a ballistic missile defense (BMD) system and preclude technological surprise by the Soviets.

The BMD research and development activity is centered in two interrelated programs—advanced technology and systems technology. The Advanced Technology Program is oriented to advance the state of the art of BMD components, improve the understanding of BMD phenomenology, and investigate the feasibility of new defensive concepts and technologies. Major research efforts are conducted in the areas of interceptor missiles, radar and optical sensors, data processing, and reentry physics. The Systems Technology Program deals with the development and deployment of BMD systems. These systems are kept current by incorporating the gains made through the Advanced Technology Program. The Kwajalein Missile Range, which is under the BMD Program Manager, provides the technical facilities and instruments for full-scale testing of BMD systems and components; it is also used extensively by the other services for testing strategic offensive systems.