

Rep. McKeon's Address to Missile Defense Conference

March 26, 2012

Thank you General O'Reilly and thank you all for hosting me today. I'm honored to be in the presence of dedicated professionals who make defense this great nation their top priority.

Two weeks ago I gave remarks to the Reagan Library. Being in that beautiful facility reminded me of an old Reagan story, when he was first unveiling the Strategic Defense Initiative – the forefather of the Missile Defense Agency.

Around that time, an aide asked President Reagan if he really believed that a missile shield was practical.

“Only two people need to believe it'll work,” Reagan replied. “Me and Gorbachev.”

Ballistic missile payloads move like lightning. Knocking them out of the sky was once considered impossible.

Today, it's reality. Just ask our Israeli allies if missile defense works.

There have been doubters and naysayers ever since Reagan proposed shielding the United States from ICBM attack.

But those doubters don't know the abilities of the people in this room. The stories of successful tests and successful intercepts keep pouring in, and I don't think that's an accident.

Many of you know that we're starting work on the National Defense Authorization Act. That's the bill that funds and sets policy for the Defense Department. Missile defense is going to play a key role in this year's bill.

Chairman Turner, my colleague who leads the Strategic Forces subcommittee, has forged a practical way to bolster our defenses in a tight fiscal climate.

I'll get that in a moment.

I want to talk about why your mission is so important, and why missile defense is such a priority for us on the committee.

It's useful to note that ballistic missile technology was once reserved for great powers. During the Cold War, a small handful of nations had the ability to launch a payload deep into our atmosphere and bring it down to precise spot on the map.

Today, those countries have multiplied. That is really concerning.

Most of the states who seek this deadly technology are either unfriendly or unstable. During the Cold War, deterrence was our best defense against the use of ballistic missiles. Today, that geopolitical balance is fractured.

And many actors have shown willingness, and sometimes a preference, to use ballistic missiles to achieve political ends.

We see it every day in Israel, as terrorist groups unleash short and medium range rockets at civilian populations.

We see it in China, as Beijing builds more and more missiles to make the South China Sea, a vital economic artery, an impassable exclusion zone.

We see it in Iran, who holds thousands of U.S. forces in the Middle East at risk with their growing missile force.

In 1999, the Russian Federation rained missiles down on the city of Grozny [Groz-knee], killing and wounding hundreds of civilians. They did the same against civilian targets in Georgia during the 2008 war. We knew about these attacks because our missile detection satellites picked it up as it was happening.

That makes me a believer in missile defense capabilities, and it makes me deeply skeptical of any plan to share that technology with nations who use ballistic missiles against innocent civilians.

That is why I'm opposed to any effort to provide guarantees about our missile defenses to nations like Russia.

With an increase in states that have long range missiles, and an increase in states willing to use those missiles, it's simply common sense that we have capable assets, like those satellites, to defend against the threat.

That journey began when President Reagan visited NORAD. He asked an Air Force officer, "if we can track missiles, what can we do to shoot them down?" The President, an enthusiastic believer in America's ability to innovate, was frustrated that U.S. could do nothing to destroy a missile in flight.

Reagan had two important choices if the Soviets launched an attack. The first was to do nothing. That was unacceptable.

The second was to launch a massive retaliatory strike. That was also unacceptable.

Reagan saw missile defense as the third option, a way to defend free societies without compromising the values those societies hold dear.

I agree with this way of thinking.

So in the coming months, with Chairman Turner's input and guidance, we will be doing our best to ensure that the Missile Defense Agency has the resources and capabilities to detect, identify, and eliminate any missile threat to the homeland. We'll examine a few critical areas that should help the health and well-being of your mission.

First, we must ensure the reliability of the current ground based midcourse defense.

We test three ICBMs a year out at Vandenberg Air Force Base. Doesn't it make sense that we test our midcourse defense on a similar rotation? We have several decades worth of flight test data on the Minuteman III missile.

But GMD is still in its infancy.

Getting reliable data, so that we can calibrate our interceptors with the best information possible, is really important.

That means we properly resource a testing regimen that reflects realistic threats.

Secretary Gates said that a North Korean road-mobile ICBM would make that country a direct threat to the United States.

And an Iranian ICBM is currently being tested under the cover of space launches.

Given Iran's plans to send a satellite into orbit – as you know that's usually a pretext for a nuclear weapons delivery system-- we should be rigorously testing our system against ballistic missile launches.

I would also like to see the two-stage ground based interceptor tested as soon as possible as a hedge against threats, especially given recent tensions in the Middle East.

Modernizing and prioritizing GMD is just part of the story.

Though we can predict the path of missiles based on threats, we still must assure full coverage of U.S. territory against threats from any direction.

Limiting GMD to select areas is like having a ten foot tall, electrified barb wire fence on three sides of your property.

What good are defenses if they can be bypassed?

We will need to look at building an additional GMD site somewhere in the continental United States, ideally on the East Coast.

Given Iran's aggressive build up of strategic forces, their pursuit of a nuclear weapon, and their test of space launch systems, we need to bolster the eastern seaboard against the unthinkable.

I would like to see additional missile defenses in place to hedge against Iran, perhaps Standard Missiles or the two-stage version of the Ground Based Interceptor.

We also must closely examine proposed cuts to the THAAD system. I was pleased to see October's successful test of a THAAD interceptor, yet another example of how well this technology can work.

Given the number of US and allied forces that sit within range of Iranian and North Korean missiles, I think this system is incredibly important.

The defense of our forward stationed troops is incredibly important to me.

Because systems like THAAD and Patriot missiles are the shield above our deployed forces, we must get them right.

That means the providing the right funding, testing, and numbers needed to keep our troops safe.

Now, as we draw down our strategic nuclear forces while other states increase them, I see some real value-added from your mission.

Because the world is volatile, we should recognize missile defense as a stabilizing force.

Any system that gives enemies pause about attacking the United States is an asset.

Missile defenses can help dissuade cheating in Arms Control treaties and discourage surprise attack.

Some say we need to end our "Cold War thinking" about nuclear weapons.

I couldn't agree more.

Deterrence in the 21st century isn't the knockout punch of "Mutually Assured Destruction."

It means we counter the instability from lower nuclear force levels by keeping our guard up.

The Missile Defense Agency is our shield and our defense, playing a key role in deterring America's enemies, and I thank you for that.

Not two decades ago, the experts said that missile defense technology was a pipe-dream.

But thanks to your efforts, it is an everyday reality.

The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans used to be our best protection against attack.

But there is no going back to a world where America's geography was our best defense.

Technology has permanently shut the door on security through isolation.

Thank you for making sure that America always stays a few steps ahead of enemy technology.

Thank you for your professionalism, and thank you for proving the doubters wrong.

I hope you go to work every day, knowing that the peace and security of this great nation rests largely on your shoulders.

It's a heavy responsibility, but I couldn't think of a better team to shoulder that burden.

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