

May 28, 2010

The Boston Globe

Truth or consequences for missile defense

By [George N. Lewis](#) and [Theodore A. Postol](#)

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DURING THE PAST few weeks the Pentagon has been making claims about the success of a missile defense system called the Standard Missile 3. But our analysis of the Pentagon's own publicly available test data showed that instead of being the highly capable defense-system described by the Pentagon, the SM-3 was barely working, failing to destroy target warheads in eight to nine of 10 tests that were reported by the Pentagon as successes. President Obama, who once expressed doubts about the effectiveness of missile defenses, described the SM-3 as a "proven and reliable" centerpiece of a new missile defense program he announced last year. We believe that the president was misled by the Pentagon.

That misrepresentation may have led the president from skepticism to confidence and helped him decide that two nonworking missile defense systems, the SM-3 and the the Ground-Based Missile defense, could be expected to provide reliable defensive capabilities for the defense of the United States and for its European and Japanese allies.

These claims had other serious consequences for the security of the United States and its allies. The misconception about the potential role of missile defense now permeates the Nuclear Posture Review, which had to be delayed and revised before it was issued recently.

The NPR is an important doctrinal description of how the United States hopes to achieve nuclear arms reductions and to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Due to possible Pentagon misrepresentations of missile-defense test data, the NPR incorrectly assumes that existing missile defenses are so robust and reliable that they can actually be used to compensate for losses in our deterrent posture that would supposedly occur with reductions in nuclear weapons. Furthermore, if the United States and its allies make plans to depend upon missile defenses that don't work, it could ultimately have enormous consequences for our mutual security.

This is not the first time a president has been misled by false reports from the Pentagon about the capabilities of missile defenses. In 2000, the New York Times reported that the first two proof-of-concept missile defense experiments were misrepresented as successes when in fact they were failures.

President Clinton and then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had been misled at a time when they were trying to decide whether or not to proceed with what we now know is an unworkable and fundamentally flawed ground-based missile defense.

In another case, President George H. W. Bush and then-Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney were misled into believing that the Patriot missile defense was doing a spectacular job intercepting Iraqi SCUDS in the Gulf War of 1991. In truth there was no evidence that any SCUD warheads were destroyed in either Israel or Saudi Arabia.

The White House and Congress should investigate this relentless pattern of misrepresentations about the true capabilities of ballistic missile defense systems. It is of greater concern that these misrepresentations by the Pentagon have repeatedly fooled presidents and Congress when important national security and foreign policy decisions were being made.

Many of the individuals who contributed to the misrepresentations over the years are in important positions in the Obama administration's Pentagon, or in other influential government funded institutions. The president and Congress must hold these repeat offenders accountable. The president and Congress should not continue to accept this kind of chicanery as "business as usual." The common defense of the United States and its allies is at stake.

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