

Opening Statement, Rep. Seth Moulton

FY24 Request for Missile Defense and Missile Defeat Programs

19 April 2023

Thank you, Chairman Lamborn. VADM Hill, during your 38 years of service you have been committed to the development and deployment of at-sea and land-based missile defense capabilities for not only the United States joint service, but for our allies and partners around the world. LTG Karbler, you have played a critical role across the Army's artillery and air and missile defense communities to address the growing threat to our forces, and have had a unique purview across both the space and missile defense missions. Your achievements for America's collective security, for the safety of every one of us in this room, have entailed sacrifices for your families, not to mention the professional burdens and responsibilities that have so often weighed heavily on your shoulders. Gentlemen, thank you. You have my sincere appreciation as you culminate extraordinary military careers.

It's appropriate and important to begin our discussion this morning by acknowledging that, unlike your impeccable military careers, missile defense and defeat has a mixed legacy, and continues to pose difficult questions about what its purpose is and should be, under what conditions it actually makes us safer and, therefore, how much and what kind of it we need. As a committee, it is important for us to evaluate these budget requests with a clear understanding of the strategic logic behind them. And so, I think it's helpful to frame the conversation with a discussion of the scenarios or levels in which we use or don't use missile defense.

The highest possible level of missile defense is the strategic level, which means deterring or defeating a nuclear attack on the United States by a near-peer

adversary, as President Reagan's fanciful and infamous Star Wars program envisioned. As both the Chairman and I discussed during the CSIS panel, and as affirmed by both the Trump and Biden administrations in the 2019 and 2022 missile defense reviews, this is not an area where the U.S. is pursuing—nor should we pursue—missile defense. Going down this road would not only be prohibitively expensive, but fundamentally destabilizing. The crazy logic of atomic peace is achieved through mutual vulnerability, where no major nuclear power would launch a nuclear attack because they know—we all know—that the result would be a nuclear holocaust. Until we can safely rid the world of all nuclear weapons, which I believe is ultimately necessary for the survival of humanity itself, we can neither unilaterally disarm nor unilaterally render useless our adversaries' arsenals. If we were to try to render our adversaries' missiles incapable, they would simply develop new ones to defeat our defenses, as we have seen with the deployment of increasingly sophisticated maneuvering weapons to evade current U.S. missile defense radars.

We should always remember that the U.S.'s decision to leave the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 to develop a homeland missile defense system in response to advancements by North Korea, or the DPRK, can be almost directly tied to both the Chinese Communist Party and Russia pursuing more advanced ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missiles. And the result has been to make the balance of power between nuclear superpowers fundamentally less stable. As multiple general officers have restated before this committee in the past month, we deter our near-peer nuclear adversaries with our own safe, secure, and reliable nuclear forces.

The next level down is the area where there is the most debate, and that is a limited capability to address rogue nations. This is where our current Ground-

Based missile defense system and the next generation interceptor fit in, and this is where we can argue that our advancements in missile defense over the past two decades, since pulling out of the ABM Treaty, have provided a security blanket against aspiring nuclear powers like North Korea and Iran. However, it should not be lost on this subcommittee that during the latest parade, the DPRK showcased 11 KN-22 ICBMs. The publicly stated shot-doctrine for the GMD system is 4-5 interceptors per one incoming ICBM. Given the fact that we currently have 44 emplaced interceptors—11 times 4 for anyone rusty on elementary school arithmetic—if North Korea gets just one more ICBM capable of reaching the United States, we won't have enough interceptors. We are therefore in an arms race—today—with North Korea, exactly the arms race the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty was designed to stop. And at some point, if we continue to expand our current arsenal of interceptors, we must ask not just how North Korea will respond, but how Russia and the CCP will respond as they see a pathway for our missile shield to impact their deterrent as well.

I hope that in today's discussion, Mr. Hill can help us understand how the Department of Defense is weighing that important question: At what point will this arms race provoke a response from Russia and the CCP? And, therefore, at what point do we move North Korea's nuclear arsenal into category five—which we deter with our own nuclear response—from category four, where we try to defeat an incoming attack as our doctrine suggests today? We must all recognize that decisions like that, indeed our decisions on this subcommittee this year, have implications not just for meeting today's tactical threats but for ensuring the strategic stability of America and the world for decades to come.

The third level of missile defense is a nuance that I think is important to distinguish from a rogue nation, because the size of the homeland system required

to deal with it is very different, and that is the instance of anyone—including a near-peer adversary—having an accidental launch. Any student of history understands how close to this possibility we have come in the past, and having some ability to defense against a small, even single, accidental launch should be maintained.

Level 2, which we are seeing play out on the battlefield today, is what we call regional missile defense. There is a big difference between level three and level two, from taking out a strategic, intercontinental nuclear weapon to stopping theatre-level missiles in current conflicts. Systems such as Patriot, THAAD, and the Aegis BMD weapon system are the cornerstone of regional missile defense capabilities, and investments being made in this budget request to improve these systems are needed to meet increasingly complex short- to intermediate-range weapons that are being proliferated around the world. We've seen these work in action. The incredible support Ukraine has received from allies and partners in the area of air and missile defense has enabled them to fight back against near non-stop Russian missile attacks. Missiles are an integral part of the modern way of war, and thus so too is missile defense. There is a fair question about how active regional and theater air and missile defenses impact strategic stability. Ukraine has reaffirmed the power of the higher-level strategic nuclear stability between nations, even in the presence of regional missile defense, because it has not resulted in any strategic nuclear exchange. But we must be cognizant of the danger of crossing this line when developing theatre-level defenses could be interpreted to impact strategic stability.

The final piece of missile defense is the foundation of all levels, level one, and that is the ability to detect and track threats from the moment they are launched—throughout their flight—and up until they reach their impact point. Our

ability to see an incoming threat is what gives us decision space to react and respond, either offensively or defensively, and is an area that this subcommittee has consistently pushed the Department to address. This is a place where more investment and better capabilities unquestionably make us more safe and the world more stable, and I am encouraged that the Administration has requested over \$6 billion dollars across several programs to develop, improve, and expand the capabilities of both land- and space-based missile sensors to address more complex threats that our adversaries are developing.

When we look at this complicated, multi-level and multi-layered picture, it is easy to be overwhelmed. This is esoteric stuff. But it is vitally important that we get it right, not just for our own national security but for the security of humanity itself. Taking the narrow view, it is an easy vote to buy a few more interceptors. But it is up to us in this room to recognize the much longer-term, strategic implications for the narrow authorization and budgeting decisions we make today.

As an American citizen, having a robust, layered missile defense system makes me feel more safe and secure today, and buying a few more interceptors would probably make me feel a little bit more comfortable tomorrow. But when I think about the world we will leave to my two- and four-year-old daughters, I am less sure. How will expanding U.S. missile defense today impact strategic stability tomorrow? We are already in an arms race. Will it make our world more safe? That is the discussion that we have too often glossed over or left for another day on this subcommittee and in Congress. And it is a discussion and debate we must have the political and intellectual courage to resolve.