

# Heritage Lectures

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## Missile Defense: The Way Forward

*The Honorable Jeff Sessions*

President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) speech of March 23, 1983, rightfully causes us to reflect on the things that have happened since it was delivered. For instance:

- The U.S. established a Department of Defense-wide organization, now called the Missile Defense Agency (MDA), employing 3,000 people and dedicated to the missile defense mission.
- MDA has developed and deployed the PAC-3 missile—successor to the Patriot missile—Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, and the forerunners of the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) program.
- President George W. Bush, facing down those with fevered brows (the same crowd Reagan faced), took an essential step by withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, as we had every lawful right to do. What silly arguments they made, predicting all sorts of disasters if Bush actually withdrew—disasters that, of course, never occurred. I doubt you will hear any apologies, however.
- Since 2002, we have fielded—they are in the ground—an initial national missile defense capability consisting of 24 ground-based interceptors capable of knocking down incoming inter-continental ballistic missiles; 17 Aegis BMD warships capable of long-range surveillance and tracking, of which 10 are also capable of missile intercepts; 21 Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) interceptors for Aegis BMD warships; and an assortment of sensors, radars, and com-

### Talking Points

- We may soon see important agreements signed with our allies in Poland and the Czech Republic, allowing us to base elements of our ground-based missile defense system in Eastern Europe as a defense for all Europe and the U.S. against the growing Iranian threat.
- Maintaining funding for the European site is one of the hardest battles we will have to fight this year, but it is a battle we must win.
- The U.S. currently spends less than \$10 billion on national missile defense and all our other missile programs. Our systems must get more robust and more capable because history teaches us that our enemies will not stand still.
- President Ronald Reagan would be pleased that his Strategic Defense Initiative vision was maintained through good and bad times.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl1077.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl1077.cfm)

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mand-and-control systems—systems that really work, *now*.

- The recent shutdown of our malfunctioning satellite was one of our most remarkable technical feats to date.

### Looking to the Future

Looking to the future, I believe that we will soon see important agreements signed with our allies in Poland and the Czech Republic, allowing us to base elements of our ground-based system in Eastern Europe as a defense for all Europe and the U.S. against the growing Iranian threat.

Maintaining funding for the European site is one of the hardest battles we will have to fight this year, but it is a battle we must win. It is unconscionable to me that we would pull the rug out from under allied governments and leaders who have risked so much and who have congruously stood with us against the protests of their domestic leftists and the intimidating behavior of President Vladimir Putin's Russia. And I don't think we will. (Don't you think President Reagan would have been proud of them?)

Just over the horizon is a new generation of even more powerful missile defense technologies, including more capable SM-3 missiles; better defenses against short-range rockets, artillery, and mortars; and a system of speed missiles that defeat enemy missiles in the boost phase—or even destroy them on the launch pad. These are well within our grasp. We may soon begin seeing missile defense applications for directed-energy weapons, as well as very high speed boosters.

While some Democrats oppose even funding basic research for some of these technologies, the good news is that, unlike in Reagan's time, reflexive, anti-missile defense views are small in number and no longer part of the mainstream debate on either side of the aisle.

We have, I believe, crossed the Rubicon. The Democrats on our defense committees have used their newly gained majority to nibble away at some missile defense funding, but not to slash it.

In their first year back in charge, the Democratic majority cut the missile defense request about three percent. Their decision to make only a small reduction speaks volumes: It says missile defense is now not just a conservative cause, a Reagan "Star Wars" vision, but it has become a national commitment that we must complete.

The people want this security, and the Congress will not deny it to them. Earlier in our debate, I quoted Henry Kissinger's response to the arguments against missile defense: "I never heard of a nation whose policy it is to keep itself vulnerable to attack."

At a time when totalitarian dictators and Islamic radicals are developing the means to threaten the United States and our allies with mass destruction, and when the North Koreans launched with great fanfare their Taepo Dong missile two years ago on the 4th of July, clearly missile defenses are needed more than ever.

Edward Teller, the famous Hungarian scientist who originally convinced Reagan of the need to launch SDI, put it this way: "I love my grandchildren. I want to be sure that they will be able to live out their lives without facing the terrible choice between slavery and Armageddon." Today, the Missile Defense Agency is making sure that we can all live in such a world.

But more must be done. We spend less than \$10 billion on national missile defense and all our other missile programs. The momentum must not be lost. Our systems must get more robust and more capable because history teaches us that our enemies will not stand still.

As we continue to expand our systems and cooperation with allies in Europe and Asia, I believe President Reagan would be pleased that his vision was maintained through good and bad times—until it has been deployed and made our people safer from attack.

—*The Honorable Jeff Sessions, a Republican, represents Alabama in the United States Senate. He delivered these remarks at a March 11, 2008, Heritage Foundation event commemorating the 25th anniversary of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.*