

Bush Speeds Missile Defense Plans

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The Bush administration intends to break ground in Alaska next month on a missile defense test site and to develop a multi-layered shield that will include ship-launched missiles and lasers mounted on airplanes within four years, senior Pentagon officials said yesterday.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz is scheduled to outline the plan to Congress today. Officials said he would make clear that the administration is moving as fast as possible to build at least rudimentary missile defenses by 2005, regardless of probable objections by Moscow that the United States is violating the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Although President Bush has repeatedly stated his determination to build a missile shield, yesterday was the first time that the administration had laid out a detailed plan and timetable for erecting an initial system for shooting down enemy missiles.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld described the effort as an ambitious and accelerated testing program, saying the administration has no intention of breaking the 1972 ABM Treaty any time soon.

"We have every intention of working out an arrangement with the Russians, and I think we will," Rumsfeld told reporters last night. "I can assure you that if the United States of America intended to do something that would violate the treaty in July or August or September, I would know about it."

The ABM Treaty allows each side to build one land-based anti-missile system to protect a single city or field of missile silos. Russia has such a system around Moscow, and the United States originally chose to build one around a missile field in Grand Forks, N.D. But the treaty forbids any system intended to defend the entire nation. It also prohibits the development, testing or deployment of sea- or space-based defenses against long-range missiles.

Last week, the State Department instructed U.S. embassies around the world to inform foreign governments that the United States plans to test not just land-based interceptor missiles but also "other technologies and basing modes, such as air- and sea-based capabilities" against long-range missiles.

"As we have informed our allies and Russia, these tests will come into conflict with the ABM Treaty in months, not years," the department said.

By announcing the plans yesterday, the Bush administration signaled that it intends to proceed regardless of whether a flight test scheduled for Saturday -- the first in a year -- is a success or failure.

After the "kill vehicle" failed to hit a dummy warhead in the previous test last summer, President Bill Clinton delayed a decision on whether to begin construction of a limited missile defense system, saying that more testing and consultation with allies were necessary.

Already, the Bush plan faces an uncertain future on Capitol Hill, where leading Democrats in the Senate have expressed reservations about a fiscal 2002 defense budget that includes a 57 percent increase for missile defense while cutting spending on procurement of other weapons.

The administration plans to notify Congress immediately of its plan to begin clearing trees next month for a new test facility at Fort Greely, Alaska, near Fairbanks, officials said.

Although the administration's plan calls for basing five interceptor missiles there and upgrading a "Cobra Dane" radar installation on Shemya Island in Alaska by 2004, Rumsfeld said that none of the work at Fort Greely would violate the ABM Treaty this year.

In the past, government lawyers and arms control advocates have offered differing interpretations of what amount of construction would be allowed under the treaty. "As soon as the construction site becomes recognizably a strategic ABM interceptor launcher, it would violate the treaty," John Pike, director of Globalsecurity.org, a defense think tank, said yesterday.

Experts also offered various predictions about how Russia would react, but all agreed that the stakes for the administration are high. "I'm sure they will protest it as a violation of the treaty," said Spurgeon M. Keeny Jr., president of the Arms Control Association and an arms control official in the Nixon administration, which negotiated the treaty with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

In Saturday's test, an interceptor missile carrying a "kill vehicle" will be fired from Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands at a dummy warhead and a single decoy launched minutes earlier from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

But defense officials said yesterday that even a failure would not derail the program. "If it succeeds, it will give us more confidence," said a senior official, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity. "If it fails, we'll learn more."

He added that the Bush plan, with its emphasis on "layered" missile defenses, differs dramatically from the Clinton administration's pursuit of a single ground-based system designed to intercept long-range missiles high in space, about mid-way through their trajectory.

The Bush plan calls for multiple systems to target short-, medium- and long-range missiles at all three stages of flight, including "boost phase," which lasts about five minutes after liftoff; mid-course, which lasts about 20 minutes; and "terminal phase," which lasts 30 seconds when an incoming missile traveling at very high speed has re-entered the Earth's atmosphere.

With the addition of the new test site at Fort Greely and introduction of a sophisticated "X-Band" radar, either on a ship or at a ground station in Hawaii, officials said, the Pentagon would be able to carry out more realistic testing.

Some of the tests would involve Boeing 747 jets carrying lasers, a weapon in development that is designed to destroy missiles in their boost phase. The Pentagon also hopes to place interceptor missiles aboard destroyers equipped with advanced Aegis radars, which could track and destroy missiles in either boost phase or mid-course, officials said.

Although no firm cost estimates have been developed beyond fiscal 2002, officials said basic testing of all those technologies could be sustained for about \$8 billion a year, the amount now included in the defense spending plan that goes into effect Oct. 1.

A total of 17 tests -- 10 of ground-based systems and seven of sea-launched missiles -- are planned over the next 14 months, officials said.

The new test range, officials said, would enable launches of multiple missiles from several locations in realistic flight paths toward the United States -- unlike the current system, in which missiles carrying dummy warheads are fired from Vandenberg, away from the U.S. mainland.

"We could potentially have an airborne laser shoot at one of the targets in a layered system, deliberately let one go and have the mid-course [system] engage it," another official said. "That's what this test bed is all about."

Development of the new technologies is designed to allow rudimentary versions of the airborne laser, sea-launched missile and the current ground-based system to become operational by 2005, they said, if policymakers determine that missile threats from countries like North Korea, Iran and Iraq have escalated substantially and pose unacceptable risks.

"The idea here is that we would start many different paths in basing and in technology," an official said. "And all that can lead to . . . test assets that can be made operational if the situation warrants it. But that's not our intention, to make those operational right off the bat."

Staff writer Alan Sipress contributed to this report.

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