

July 2, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

As scientists and engineers, many with long experience in advising the government on military issues, we applaud your commitment to “restore scientific integrity in government decision making.”

In this context, we strongly support your statement that missile defense systems must be “proven” before they are deployed. We urge you to apply this principle to the proposed U.S. missile defense system in Europe, which your administration is currently reviewing.

This system has not been proven and does not merit deployment. It would offer little or no defensive capability, even in principle. At the same time, its deployment would result in large security, political, and monetary costs.

Congress has required that the Secretary of Defense certify that the interceptors have been shown to work “in an operationally effective manner” through “successful, operationally realistic flight testing” before they can be deployed in Europe. This has not occurred. Testing of the interceptors has not begun and will not be completed for several years.

The interceptors proposed for Europe would use the kill vehicle and a modified version of the interceptor booster being fielded as part of the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system. This technology has not been adequately tested and has no demonstrated capability in a realistic attack scenario. None of the GMD tests have included realistic countermeasures or tumbling warheads. All flight intercept tests have been conducted under highly scripted conditions with the defense given advance information about the attack details.

For these reasons, the intercepts achieved in past tests of the GMD system say nothing about the effectiveness of these interceptors under real-world conditions. Until these systems are subjected to an honest technical assessment and a rigorous testing program, there will be no data on which to base an assessment of how effective they might be in an actual attack.

We assess that the planned European missile defense system would have essentially no capability to defend against a real missile attack. Independent and U.S. governmental technical analyses have shown that any country that could field a long-range missile could also add decoys and other countermeasures to that missile that would defeat a defense system like that being proposed for Europe. As the September 1999 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on foreign missile developments stated, “Russia and China each have developed numerous countermeasures and probably are willing to sell the requisite technologies.”

Claiming that this system is effective when it is not is dangerous and could contribute to unwise decisions by U.S. policy makers. Moreover, deploying now would continue to undermine

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relations with Russia, whose cooperation is key to making progress on a range of important security issues, including nuclear arms reductions and halting the Iranian nuclear and missile programs.

We urge you to issue a directive affirming that the United States will not deploy any part of the proposed U.S. missile defense system in Europe before it is proven to be effective under realistic operating conditions.

Sincerely,

Signers:

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Lecturer in Public Policy Studies, Duke University

Philip W. Anderson *
Joseph Henry Professor of Physics Emeritus, Princeton University
Nobel Laureate in Physics

Lewis M. Branscomb #
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cc: The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State
The Honorable Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense
General James L. Jones, USMC (ret.), Assistant to the President for National Security
The Honorable John Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology
The Honorable James B. Steinberg, Deputy Secretary of State
The Honorable William J. Lynn III, Deputy Secretary of Defense
The Honorable Ellen Tauscher, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security
The Honorable Ashton Carter, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics
The Honorable Michèle Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
The Honorable Michael Nacht, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs
Mr. Barry Pavel, Senior Director for Defense Policy, National Security Council
Mr. Michael McFaul, Senior Director of Russian and Eurasian Affairs, National Security Council