

DOES THE INTERIM NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY SUFFICIENTLY ADDRESS U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE?

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an analysis of the United States' 2019 Missile Defense Review and 2020 Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat Report to validate that the vision established by the 2017 National Security Strategy was appropriately reflected in the reports. The Trump Administration published a clear and comprehensive National Security Strategy in 2017 that drove the research for these subsequent reports. The description of the ballistic and cruise missile threats facing the United States as well as the air and missile defense capabilities developed to combat these threats are clearly articulated for the development of an updated national strategy. The Biden Administration maximizing the data and intelligence in these reports to develop their own official National Security Strategy would increase the efficiency of the United States' response to the identified threats.

KEYWORDS:

Missile, Threat, Security, Strategy, Defense

The Biden Administration has failed to identify the gravity of the missile defense threat in their Interim National Security Strategy of 2021 and should reference these reports prior to publishing the official NSS of the new administration.

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY (2017) OVERVIEW

The National War College describes the National Security Strategy (NSS) as, “the design and application of ideas for employment of means as well as the orchestration of institutions and instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic) to achieve viable ends that protect or advance national interests” (Heffington et al., 2019: 1). The President, who is ultimately responsible for the priorities within the NSS, utilizes a strategy that is described best by Harry Yarger when he writes, “the art and science of developing and using the political, economic, socio-psychological, and military powers of the state in accordance with policy guidance to create effects and set conditions that protect or advance national interests” (Yarger, 2006: 65-66). The elements and instruments of national power are reflected in the document. A key instrument of national power is the military, and as discussed already, the key platform for the military is the expansion of offensive and defensive missile capabilities.

The 68 page 2017 NSS provides guidance and a comprehensive overview of America's threats and strategies to combat them - specifically in relation to missile threats and fostering a defensive strategy.

INTRODUCTION

As the threats of conflict and insecurity progress, the weaponry and national defense requirements have also evolved in turn. The development of modern weapons systems has increased the capabilities of military forces, allowing them a broader spectrum of offensive options to choose from. The problem that the United States faces is maintaining a deliberate and advanced defensive structure that is responsive to these technological advancements. The vision expressed in the Trump Administration's 2017 National Security Strategy drove the research of the Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat Report and the Missile Defense Review.

The Trump Administration's NSS identified that "many actors can now field a broad arsenal of advanced missiles, including variants that can reach the American homeland" (Trump, 2017: 3).

The administration continued by articulating their priority as, "first, our fundamental responsibility is to protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life [...] A layered missile defense system will defend our homeland against missile attacks" (Trump, 2017: 4). The Interim National Security Strategy Guidance (INSSG) published under the Biden Administration only mentioned the term "missiles" once, in reference to North Korea. The INSSG failed to incorporate the same sense of urgency related to the growing ballistic and cruise missile threats that the Trump Administration's NSS covered. Due to the guidance the 2017 NSS provided to U.S. agencies concerning missiles, the 2019 Missile Defense Review and 2020 Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat Report were researched and published. These reports provide data concerning the significance of the missile threats to the U.S. as well as the United States' ability to defend itself.

2020 BALLISTIC AND CRUISE MISSILE THREAT REPORT OVERVIEW

The Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat Report (BCMTR) provides the Biden Administration with detailed analysis to assist with their understanding of the scaling missile threat and their official NSS development. The BCMTR confirms the reliance of modern nations on missile technology by stating, "with the relatively low operating costs, potential to penetrate defense systems, and value as a symbol of national power, ballistic and cruise missile will continue to be the offensive weapons of choice for many nations" (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 39). The BCMTR provides unclassified data on the array of threats the United States faces.

These weapons systems are symbols of national power, "especially when those systems are armed

with weapons of mass destruction" (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 2). State actors and diplomatic agencies often attempt to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction through sanctions and coalition efforts; the irrefutable truth is that adversarial governments to the United States' national interests continue to use these cost-effective means to increase their status on the world stage.

Missiles are not strictly used for posturing by these opposing nation states. "Ballistic and cruise missiles present a significant threat to US and Allied forces overseas, and to the United States homeland and territories" (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 4). These ballistic and cruise missiles have been used effectively in the past several decades, specifically in the Russian kinetic conflicts with Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 4). The ability of the United States to learn from these conflicts and recognize that ballistic and cruise missiles are being used tactically and not solely as a symbol of international status is crucial to how seriously they focus on their air and missile defense infrastructure.

2019 MISSILE DEFENSE REVIEW OVERVIEW

The Missile Defense Review (MDR) compliments the BCMTR but focuses more on the United States' actions to counteract the threats identified by the Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee. As the Biden Administration begins to formulate ways to defend against the threats identified in the BCMTR, understanding the current capabilities of the United States Forces from the MDR will help generate realistic options. The MDR seeks to arrest the technological and strategic advancement of the capabilities and deployment of the missile programs of the opponents of the United States in three areas.

These include the US' adversaries "increasing the capabilities of their existing missile systems, adding new and unprecedented types of missile capabilities to their arsenals, and integrating offensive missiles into their coercive threats, military exercises, and war planning" (Shanahan, 2019: 3-4).

Due to the low cost of production for offensive missiles in foreign nations, the MDR reflects the US strategy that "operations supporting missile defense will degrade, disrupt, or destroy an adversary's missiles before they are launched" (Shanahan, 2019: 16). Disabling the enemy's ability to launch their missiles on a target is a critical task under the MDR in order to prevent the radar scope from becoming overly saturated with enemy tracks and diminishing the on-hand missile inventory (Shanahan, 2019: 44). In 2019, the House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee pushed for the U.S. Army to, "bring options to Congress for a low-cost interceptor to be used in the Raytheon-made Patriot system. That is because the most updated variant is roughly \$5 million a shot" (Judson, 2019: 1). Due to offensive ballistic missiles being cost-effective compared to the high cost of defensive interceptors, this tactic is efficient and economically supportable (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 2). The information from this review, as well as the recommendations concerning how to counteract enemy tracks, should be used in developing the United States National Security Strategy as it pertains to missile defense.

MISSILE DEFENSE REVIEW NESTED IN NSS

The NSS published by the Trump administration provides guidance and priorities to government agencies to focus their efforts. The priorities and strategy prescribed in the NSS instructed the Department of Defense on their research and publication of the MDR.

Secretary Shanahan begins the introduction to the MDR by explicitly stating, "This 2019 Missile Defense Review (MDR) is consistent with the 2017 NSS" (Shanahan, 2019: 3). The Biden Administration needs to provide a clear vision and additional guidance to U.S. Air and Missile Defense leaders in their own NSS based on the content of this report. A particular example of the necessity for a clear missile defense strategy and the United States' role is illustrated in the heightened tensions of the Pacific-Asian region.

The 2017 NSS addresses Pacific-Asian concerns and specifically promises to "cooperate on missile defense with Japan and South Korea to move toward an area defense capability" (Trump, 2017: 47). The Trump Administration also pledged, "we will maintain our strong ties with Taiwan in accordance with our "One China" policy, including our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide for Taiwan's legitimate defense needs and deter coercion" (Trump, 2017: 47). Secretary Shanahan deliberately covers each of these broad stroke commitments in detail when discussing how the Department of Defense was coordinating their missile defense coverage with US allies and partners (Shanahan, 2019: 65-77).

The US' pledge to defend Taiwan was reaffirmed by the Biden Administration in the INSSG, "we will support Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments", but fell short of the specific commitment made by the previous administration to provide for Taiwan's defense needs (Biden, 2021: 21). The failure to detail the level of support the U.S. would provide in the INSSG directly influences the Defense Department's ability to project the disposition of their assets and soldiers. The critical differences between the 2017 NSS and the 2020 INSSG include the 2017 NSS's guidance to "provide for Taiwan's legitimate defense", "deter coercion" and "cooperate on missile defense" rather than the 2021 INSSG's guidance to "support Taiwan".

These differences in specificity become critical when other nations breach the guidance provided as China did in the fall of 2021. On 1 October 2021, the Chinese People's Liberation Army "flew fighter jets, bombers, and other warplanes", over Taiwanese airspace, making it the largest incursion by China to date (Buckley and Myers, 2021: 1). Buckley and Myers (2021: 15) have reported that "some advisers and former officers in China argue that the United States no longer has the will to send forces if a war were to break out over Taiwan". China has always sought to develop and advance itself into self-reliance by the manufacturing of arms (Bitzinger & Char, 2018: 193).

The MDR also reflected that "China is also developing missile capabilities intended to deny the United States the capability and freedom of action to protect U.S. allies and partners in Asia" (Shanahan, 2019: 4). China has consistently indicated it would "retaliate swiftly and immediately to any indication the U.S. had deployed military forces to Taiwan" (Shinkman, 2021: 1). These threats provide a significant variable to providing military support to Taiwan and Asian-Pacific allies. Taiwan, being an island, would require support by either ship or air, both of which would be put at risk by approaching the island in the face of the missile capabilities being developed by China. Additionally, the threat of a response from the Chinese military against the United States' homeland or U.S. interests would be severe. The situation in Taiwan provides the Biden Administration with one clear example that other nations are not slowing down for the administration to have the opportunity to catch up.

BALLISTIC AND CRUISE MISSILE THREAT NESTED IN NSS

When the Trump administration published the 2017 NSS, the MDR was able to begin providing the necessary data and analysis on foreign ballistic and missile threats.

The Biden Administration has the benefit of this report being available prior to their official NSS development and should use the threat analysis provided in the BCMTR to address those threats in their strategy. The current INSSG does not address these threats in detail or appropriately provide a National response to them.

The NSS identified four major ballistic missile threats to the United States. The Iranian regime was identified as, "developing more capable ballistic missiles and has the potential to resume its work on nuclear weapons that could threaten the United States" (Trump, 2017: 26). North Korea was specifically noted for having "pursued nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in defiance of every commitment it has made. Today, these missiles and weapons threaten the United States and our allies" (Trump, 2017: 26). Russia, firmly established as a nuclear power with a robust military arsenal of ballistic missiles, is still "developing advanced weapons and capabilities that could threaten our critical infrastructure" (Trump, 2017: 8). Finally, the most prominent rising threat in Asia - China - is "building the most capable and well-funded military in the world, after our own. Its nuclear arsenal is growing and diversifying" (Trump, 2017: 25). These four threats were exhaustively researched and reflected in the BCMTR which clearly proved the nesting of the report with the NSS. The BCMTR reflects their "key findings" through reports on North Korea, Iran, China, and Russia. Each includes a summary of their different ballistic missile capabilities as well as their latest tests of their developing missiles (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 2-3).

MDR AND BCMTR VALUE ASSESSMENT

The value of both of these reports cannot be overstated due to the aggressive advancement of these weapons systems and their impact on the United States influence internationally and national defense.

It is clearly content concerning exact locations, speeds, intercept capabilities, cost analysis, Critical Asset List, and Defended Asset List that would complete the report and provide the data necessary to formulate a more deliberate strategy, however, due to classification requirements that data is understandably missing from these versions. The 2017 NSS was delivered to the Department of Defense leadership where the main ballistic threats were originating and gave clear guidance on the end state expected of the military community to combat those threats. The MDR and BCMTR were developed in response to the directives received from the Trump Administration. The value of these reports is that they are now available for the Biden Administration to use in developing its official NSS. The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance did not mention the ballistic missile defense agenda or end state desired of the military community. Due to the Ballistic Missile Attack by Iranian Forces in January 2020, and the increased ballistic missile testing in the Pacific by North Korea and China, these two reports should be invaluable for the administration to formulate a deliberate response (Lubold et al., 2020, para. 1).

U.S. AIR AND MISSILE DEFENSE ASSETS

The Biden Administration has several air and missile defense tools to incorporate into a National Security Strategy and several considerations to understand as they choose how to utilize these tools. The United States currently employs several various air and missile defense systems across the globe to counteract the growing ballistic and cruise missile threat. The first is the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system. The THAAD system “engages SRBMs, MRBMs, and IRBMs using hit-to-kill technologies in the terminal phase of flight in either the endoatmosphere or the exoatmosphere” (Shanahan, 2019: 48).

The diversity of this system being capable of engaging the short, medium, and intercontinental ballistic missiles kinetically striking it in flight, whether in or out of the earth’s atmosphere is nothing short of world-leading. There are currently seven active THAAD batteries in the US Army. The analysis is currently being conducted concerning how many active THAAD batteries are necessary to support the strategy for a “layered missile defense system that will defend our homeland against missile attacks” (Trump, 2017: 4). The concern driving this analysis is that the seven batteries have provided proof of concept and employability for specific strategic points around the world, but to manufacture the equipment and train additional personnel to defend a homeland as vast as the United States would require an incredible amount of funding.

The second major missile defense asset the United States employs is owned by the US Navy. The Aegis Sea-based Missile Defense is a ship outfitted with an Aegis Weapon System (AWS). The AWS utilizes “the SM-3 and SM-6 guided missiles to provide protection at sea and ashore against regional ballistic missiles” (Shanahan, 2019: 48). The mobility of these ships provides the United States with a unique capability to transport air defense assets to different theaters as needed. Today, the United States has “38 operational multi-mission Aegis BMD-capable ships divided between the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets, with plans to increase that number to 60 by the end of FY 2023” (Shanahan, 2019: 49). The capability that the AWS provides was deemed successful enough to develop an “Aegis Ashore” system that utilizes the intercept missiles and technology of the ship on a land-based system. There is one Aegis Ashore site in Romania currently operational and one in Poland still under construction (Shanahan, 2019: 50).

The fourth ballistic missile defense system fielded by the US Army is the PATRIOT system. The mobile, land-based system defends against SRBMs, cruise missiles, air breathing threats (planes and helicopters), as well as unmanned aerial systems (UAS) (Shanahan, 2019: 50).

The Army only has eight battalions stationed in the United States (including one test battalion that does not deploy) which can field 33 Patriot batteries (Shanahan, 2019: 50). There are seven more battalions stationed forward in the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Europe which includes another 27 batteries. The Patriot Batteries are all going through modernization upgrades and have an arsenal that includes the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile and the Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) interceptors (Shanahan, 2019: 50).

The final part of the United States' Air Defense assets is the human dimension: the soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who are tied to these systems and create an additional consideration for the employment of these systems. On the 19th of November, 2020, CSM Grinston, Sergeant Major of the Army, held a symposium with non-commissioned officers from 1-7 ADA, 3-4 ADAR, and the 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade Headquarters in order to better understand the increased mental health issues coming out of the Air Defense community (Nalley, 2020: 1). "Air Defenders and Air Defense organizations' support personnel, who have seen what seems like an exponential rise in demand for their skill sets in forwarding environments" have become mentally worn out (Nalley, 2020: 1). Air defense soldiers have a higher deployment cycle than any other branch of the United States Army, including Special Forces. The average air defense soldier receives 1.18 days home for every day deployed before they are expected to be deployed again. Providing ideal coverage of the globe without taking the realism of the human factor into account is shortsighted and would require more funding for both personnel and equipment to be sustainable.

CURRENT AIR AND MISSILE DEFENSE THREATS

The United States faces many specific threats in the realm of ballistic and cruise missiles.

One of the key differences in these munitions that is hard to distinguish without prior intelligence is the type of warhead affixed to the missile. There are two standard classifications for warheads on these missiles: conventional and nonconventional. Conventional warheads are used for specific purposes; an example of a conventional warhead would be a munition designed to cause a large crater in the middle of a runway resulting in planes being unable to take off or land. Nonconventional warheads include nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 6). The ballistic missiles these warheads are affixed to can be launched from "silos and other fixed facilities, on submarines, surface ships, road – and rail – mobile launchers, and on aircraft" (Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee, 2020: 8). As the Biden Administration begins considering how to counteract the growing threats the U.S. is facing, it is important to understand that any ballistic missile may have a conventional or nonconventional warhead affixed to it. In order to properly plan a defensive strategy, every missile should be assumed to be nonconventional, as this is the most deadly possibility and defended against as such.

The adversarial countries identified in the 2017 NSS that have been growing their ballistic missile arsenals as a method to increase their instruments of national power have continued to test and exert this power on the geopolitical stage. During the month of September 2021, North Korea tested a variety of weapons systems successfully. North Korea "test fired two cruise missiles, which flew figure-eight and oval patterns in North Korean airspace for 1,500 km before striking their targets" (Byung-joon & Seok-min, 2021: 1). North Korea also "test fired two short-range ballistic missiles from a train, which travelled 800 km before landing in the sea within Japan's exclusive economic zone" (Wonju, 2021: 1). Later in the same month, North Korea also launched a "hypersonic missile" which clearly demonstrates their continued effort to increase their ballistic capabilities (Dahlgren, 2021: 1).

However, North Korea is not the only adversary continuing to test its latest ballistic innovations. “Russia’s defense ministry announced its first and second flight tests of a Zircon hypersonic missile from attack submarine Severodvinsk (K-560)” (Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2021: para 1.). The missiles were launched from the submarine’s surfaced and submerged positions successfully which now provides a new level of sophistication to the Russian missile capabilities.

North Korea is not a singularity in their hypersonic missile advancement. China and Russia have both successfully tested their hypersonic missile technology. As Copp notes, “A hypersonic missile that China launched into space this summer ‘did circle the globe’, a U.S. official confirmed to Defense One, and the Pentagon is still working through the implications of the surprise test” (Copp, 2021). When questioned about the Chinese missile launch the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Mark Milley said, “I don’t know if it’s quite a Sputnik moment, but I think it’s very close to that. It has all of our attention” (Copp, 2021). The pressure for the Biden Administration to provide an answer concerning these advanced missile tests was increased when Russia successfully launched their own hypersonic missile. Vladimir Putin described Russia’s hypersonic weapon’s stating, “they could hit almost any point in the world and evade a U.S. build missile shield” (Soldatkin, 2021: para. 5). These growing threats are substantial and it is the responsibility of the Biden Administration to publish a strategy that the Department of Defense and government agencies can enact.

CONCLUSION

The Trump Administration provided a clear and comprehensive NSS for the Department of Defense to enact.

The results of the former President’s vision were clearly reflected in the MDR and BCMTR. These documents both articulated the vision of the NSS from which they received their guidance and should be used by the current administration to develop their own official NSS. The vision of different administrations may change but the analysis accomplished by these reports provides the data necessary to begin focusing the efforts of the Department of Defense against modern threats that are not subject to political partisanship. The Interim National Security Strategy that was published by the Biden Administration is insufficient in providing adequate guidance to the Department of Defense or U.S. government agencies on how to respond to the escalation of adversarial missile capability and development of the United States’ defenses against them. The U.S.’ adversaries around the world are increasing their instruments of national power, specifically through the economically efficient growth of ballistic missile technology. The United States’ current defensive arsenal must be very deliberately deployed in support of the national strategy. Knowing that national strategy is only possible once it is developed and published by the current administration. The reality is that it is always going to be easier to build and utilize offensive ballistic missiles than it is to defend against them. However, the government and those who serve in the government have accepted the responsibility to defend the citizens of their nation. Defending the citizens of the United States against the growing missile capabilities is a mission that never ends, but always needs to be fought. The United States’ ability to strategically manage what is defendable and what is left vulnerable to enemy attacks is going to be a necessary dilemma that leaders must be willing to decide, but it all begins with the President’s vision and National Security Strategy.

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