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Missile Defense Systems

GMD Backgrounder

Description & Purpose: The nation's only operationally deployed capability to defend against long-range ballistic missiles.

Customer: The Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system is the centerpiece of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency's (MDA's) layered ballistic missile defense architecture.

General Characteristics: GMD is designed to detect, intercept and destroy long-range ballistic missiles during their midcourse phase of flight. It provides early detection and tracking during the boost phase, as well as midcourse target discrimination, precision intercept and destruction of the target through force of collision.

As prime contractor, Boeing is designing, producing, integrating, testing and sustaining all GMD components. Key subcontractors include Raytheon, which provides kill vehicles and radars; Orbital Sciences Corp., which supplies interceptor boosters; and Northrop Grumman, which provides the battle management.

Background: GMD has been in development since 1998 and incorporates decades of research, development, test and evaluation on proven "hit-to-kill" and other advanced technologies.

In December 2002, President Bush directed the Department of Defense to field an initial set of missile defense capabilities, including GMD, in 2004-2005. As a result, in the fall of 2004, the Boeing GMD team began fielding ground-based interceptors at Ft. Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. Initial GMD components also included high-powered radars based on land and at sea, and a command-and-control system consisting of an extensive communications network and two fire control nodes.

The program continues to field additional interceptors and to integrate additional sensors into the GMD system. GMD system elements reach across 12 time zones and are linked by over 20,000 miles of fiber optic cable. The U.S. government has placed Boeing under contract to develop a GMD interceptor site for Europe.

The system is alert capable, providing the first-ever protection of the United States against intercontinental ballistic missiles. Under rigorous testing, the GMD system has

demonstrated impressive capabilities, including the ability to shoot down an incoming ballistic missile.

The system has achieved five successful intercept tests with a prototype interceptor and two successful intercept tests with the operationally configured interceptor. Flight testing is scheduled to continue.

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