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# AKIN: Democrats propose cuts

Todd Akin

## COMMENTARY:

According to press reports, North Korea is preparing to test a missile capable of reaching the continental United States. Meanwhile, despite ongoing U.S. and European Union diplomatic engagement, Iran continues to develop its nuclear capabilities and recently advanced its missile technology by launching a satellite.

Though Republicans and the Bush administration worked hard to develop a national missile defense system, Democrats and President Obama have a record of opposing missile defense and have expressed an interest in cutting vital research and development funding.

As Americans, we have a legitimate reason to be alarmed when, over six months, Kim Jong-il's North Korea tests both a nuclear device and a number of medium- and long-range missiles - particularly given North Korea's willingness to sell weapons technology to the highest bidder. Any number of countries throughout the world would be very interested in acquiring long-range missile (nuclear or conventional) technology to raise their profile and increase their negotiating power with Western nations.

Over the past eight years, former President George W. Bush and the Republicans in Congress made missile defense a priority and worked to provide this country and its allies an effective shield from rogue states armed with ballistic missiles.

One important development toward the end of Mr. Bush's second term was an agreement to place ballistic missile interceptors and tracking radar in Eastern Europe. The United States has signed agreements with Poland to host the interceptor site and with the Czech Republic to host the radar site. These sites expand our missile defense capability to provide protection for our European allies and our forces in Western Europe.

The Obama administration has not yet taken a firm position on this agreement, but Democrats in Congress have firmly opposed the plan and already have cut portions of its funding. It is vitally important to our security, the security of our allies and our international reputation that this commitment to Poland and the Czech Republic be sustained.

Despite constant opposition from a number of powerful Democrats, our missile defense technology has improved dramatically over the past eight years, but we still have a way to go. Cutting funding will significantly impede our ability to develop effective protection. The Obama administration and the Democrats in Congress already are proposing significant cuts to missile defense in general and have strongly opposed a few programs that could revolutionize our missile defense capabilities.

One such program is the Airborne Laser. Mounted on a Boeing 747, this laser would be able to shoot down ballistic missiles while they were still over the launching country. Instead of stopping a ballistic missile over the Pacific Ocean or somewhere nearer the continental United States, this weapon would send the destroyed missile right back to the country launching it. The Airborne Laser is expected to take its first test shot while flying late this summer. It makes no sense to kill this program when it is so near the point where we can begin using it to protect the United States and our allies.

Even more confounding is Democratic opposition to Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD), which uses missiles in Alaska and California to shoot down ballistic missiles while they are still hundreds of miles up in the air and over the Atlantic or Pacific oceans. This capability exists right now and has been tested successfully eight times in the past few years. GMD is the best current and proven capability we have to defend against rogue nations such as Iran or North Korea, but Democrats continue to try to cut funding for it. Our nation should be able to defend itself against the threat of rogue nations with ballistic missiles. Cutting funding for missile defense is simply irresponsible.

In 2008, House Democrats cut missile defense funding by 10 percent. Fortunately, Senate Republicans were able to restore about half of that funding, but the cut slowed the development of our missile defense system. In 2009, with a Congress that is even more liberal and without a president willing to fight for the importance of missile defense, we can expect to see similar cuts.

In the face of threats from Iran and North Korea, it is the constitutional duty of Congress and the administration to "provide for the common defense." We must not allow rogue nations to threaten us with ballistic missiles when the technology exists to protect our country from them.

*Todd Akin, Missouri Republican, is ranking member of the House Armed Services sea power subcommittee.*

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