

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
ON STRENGTHENING MISSILE DEFENSE IN EUROPE

Diplomatic Reception Room

10:21 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. As Commander-in-Chief, I'm committed to doing everything in my power to advance our national security. And that includes strengthening our defenses against any and all threats to our people, our troops, and our friends and allies around the world.

One of those threats is the danger posed by ballistic missiles. As I said during the campaign, President Bush was right that Iran's ballistic missile program poses a significant threat. And that's why I'm committed to deploying strong missile defense systems which are adaptable to the threats of the 21st century.

The best way to responsibly advance our security and the security of our allies is to deploy a missile defense system that best responds to the threats that we face and that utilizes technology that is both proven and cost-effective.

In keeping with that commitment, and a congressionally mandated review, I ordered a comprehensive assessment of our missile defense program in Europe. And after an extensive process, I have approved the unanimous recommendations of my Secretary of Defense and my Joint Chiefs of Staff to strengthen America's defenses against ballistic missile attack.

This new approach will provide capabilities sooner, build on proven systems, and offer greater defenses against the threat of missile attack than the 2007 European missile defense program.

This decision was guided by two principal factors. First, we have updated our intelligence assessment of

Iran's missile programs, which emphasizes the threat posed by Iran's short- and medium-range missiles, which are capable of reaching Europe. There's no substitute for Iran complying with its international obligations regarding its nuclear program, and we, along with our allies and partners, will continue to pursue strong diplomacy to ensure that Iran lives up to these international obligations. But this new ballistic missile defense program will best address the threat posed by Iran's ongoing ballistic missile defense program.

Second, we have made specific and proven advances in our missile defense technology, particularly with regard to land- and sea-based interceptors and the sensors that support them. Our new approach will, therefore, deploy technologies that are proven and cost-effective and that counter the current threat, and do so sooner than the previous program. Because our approach will be phased and adaptive, we will retain the flexibility to adjust and enhance our defenses as the threat and technology continue to evolve.

To put it simply, our new missile defense architecture in Europe will provide stronger, smarter, and swifter defenses of American forces and America's allies. It is more comprehensive than the previous program; it deploys capabilities that are proven and cost-effective; and it sustains and builds upon our commitment to protect the U.S. homeland against long-range ballistic missile threats; and it ensures and enhances the protection of all our NATO allies.

This approach is also consistent with NATO missile -- NATO's missile defense efforts and provides opportunities for enhanced international collaboration going forward. We will continue to work cooperatively with our close friends and allies, the Czech Republic and Poland, who had agreed to host elements of the previous program. I've spoken to the Prime Ministers of both the Czech Republic and Poland about this decision and reaffirmed our deep and close ties. Together we are committed to a broad range of cooperative efforts to strengthen our collective defense, and we are bound by the solemn commitment of NATO's Article V that an attack on one is an attack on all.

We've also repeatedly made clear to Russia that its concerns about our previous missile defense programs were

entirely unfounded. Our clear and consistent focus has been the threat posed by Iran's ballistic missile program, and that continues to be our focus and the basis of the program that we're announcing today.

In confronting that threat, we welcome Russians' cooperation to bring its missile defense capabilities into a broader defense of our common strategic interests, even as we continue to -- we continue our shared efforts to end Iran's illicit nuclear program.

Going forward, my administration will continue to consult closely with Congress and with our allies as we deploy this system, and we will rigorously evaluate both the threat posed by ballistic missiles and the technology that we are developing to counter it.

I'm confident that with the steps we've taken today, we have strengthened America's national security and enhanced our capacity to confront 21st century threats.

Thank you very much, everybody.

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10:26 A.M. EDT