

MISSILE DEFENCE – AUSTRALIAN INVOLVEMENT

Why is the Government committing Australia to participation in an expensive and potentially destabilising missile defence programme?

Talking Points

- Government has agreed in-principle to greater Australian participation in the US ballistic missile defence programme
 - Government's decision was based on the less certain global and regional environment resulting from the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction.
- Potential areas for Australian participation in the ballistic missile defence programme will be guided by Australia's long-term strategic security interests
 - Australia is working with the US to determine what would be the most appropriate forms of Australian participation
 - Government not thinking in terms of establishing a missile defence shield.
- Government believes missile defence should not have a destabilising strategic impact because it is defensive, not offensive in character.
- Australian participation in the missile defence programme is expected to create opportunities for Australian industry.

Background

Senator Hill is planning to announce on 4 December the Government's in-principle decision to commit Australia to greater participation in the missile defence programme. We understand Mr Downer is also planning to comment today on this announcement.

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Consultation : Defence, DFAT, International Division

MISSILE DEFENCES

What is the Government's policy on missile defences?

Talking Points

- The government shares international concerns about the destabilising impact of ballistic missile proliferation, particularly where such missiles are capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction.
- The US interest in developing effective missile defence systems to counter this risk is understandable.
- The government believes such systems should not have a destabilising strategic impact because they are defensive, not offensive in character.
 - Australia has encouraged the US to consult widely on its missile defence plans to provide reassurance on such concerns.
- The Government has maintained regular consultations with the US on missile defence issues
 - the US has stated that it is willing to make missile defence systems available to its allies
 - any proposal for cooperation with the US on missile defences would be considered on the basis of Australia's strategic and national interests
 - but there are no current plans for Australia to acquire long-range missile defences.
- But the government believes firmly that options to protect Australia from any future threat of long-range missiles should not be dismissed.

Background

'Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003' released in February 2003 included the following text "Given the prospect of the ADF operating more often with our allies and friends in regions under threat of WMD delivered by ballistic missiles, Australia supports the development of effective missile defences to protect deployed military units. In relation to strategic missile defence, the US is looking to involve its allies and this will be an increasingly important priority in the twenty-first century. We are continuing our close dialogue with the US on missile defence, particularly given our close cooperation on Ballistic Missile Early Warning."

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