

Bloomberg.com  
November 2, 2004

## **U.S. Missile Defense Needs System Trials, Tester Says**

By Tony Capaccio

The Boeing Co.-designed U.S. missile defense system being installed in Alaska must pass two flight tests in the next three months before it's deemed reliable, said Thomas Christie, the Pentagon's director of operational testing.

"I cannot with a great deal of confidence say" that the system works until those tests are completed, Christie said in an interview. "I can't right now with confidence put a number" on the probability of the system stopping a missile from North Korea, he said.

The tests are scheduled to take place by February. The system's last intercept trial was in December 2002, when it failed to hit the target. The next tests were scheduled for May and June, then postponed after a software glitch before first of those. Since October 1999, the missiles have hit their targets in five of eight intercept tests.

The system is a scaled-down version of a missile-defense program first envisioned in March 1983 by President Ronald Reagan. The final decision declaring the system operational is up to President George W. Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Bush in 2002 pledged to have the first elements of a missile- defense system in place this year.

Pentagon officials have declined to say whether the system must pass the scheduled tests before it is put on alert.

"Christie's comments confirm what has been evident for months, if not years -- the missile defense system in place in Alaska is not ready for prime time," said John Isaacs, president of Council for a Livable World, a Washington D.C.-based arms control group. "Even more significant is that the Bush administration has not declared the system operational."

Both delayed flight tests would have replicated to a greater degree than previous tests the characteristics of a North Korea launch, Christie told the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier this year.

The Missile Defense Agency has almost completed installing a sixth booster rocket at Fort Greely, Alaska, intended to intercept missiles fired from North Korea at the U.S., including Hawaii and Alaska. The Pentagon has already conducted dry runs replicating the sequence of events that would take place if a missile were launched, Pentagon program manager Maj. Gen. John Holly said this month.

"I think they've done the right thing in postponing these tests but we have not yet fired the interceptor with the actual booster that's in the hole," Christie said. "That's something that has to be done to give some sort of confidence that the system is going to hold together."

"We are working closely with Mr. Christie to ensure we continue to make our flight tests as

operationally realistic as possible, and discussions regarding any concerns about beginning initial defensive operations will involve direct contact with Mr. Christie, not through any news media," said Richard Lehner, a Missile Defense Agency spokesman.

The Pentagon budgeted \$12.8 billion through 2009 for ground-based development and procurement -- about 80 percent of which would flow to the Boeing industry team, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Congress's auditor. This is in addition to \$12.4 billion spent between 1996 and 2003, the GAO said in an April 23 report.

Boeing is the top contractor for the ground-based system. Northrop Grumman Corp. provides the command-and-control system; Raytheon Co. produces the warhead; Orbital Sciences Corp. and Lockheed Martin Corp. make the booster rockets.

The administration has "downplayed" the system "and for all the right reasons," Christie said. "Earlier, they were on the march to declare that in September and they had enough sense to say 'let's put it off and not go ballyhooing something that we might have to eat crow over.' There is some capability there if you have to use it. The issue is what is the level of that capability?"