

## Smaller Fish to Fry

By Lonn Waters

Earlier this week Pentagon and Congressional sources leaked that the Bush administration will seek \$70 billion in emergency funding for the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for 2005. With spiraling defense expenditures and rising deficits, the Department of Defense must reevaluate and eliminate programs no longer relevant in today's post-September 11<sup>th</sup> reality. Instead the Bush administration has failed to focus on the priorities of fighting the war on terrorism and transforming the American military and is spending money like a prodigal son. It appears that the Department of Defense believes that Congress will pony up for anything and everything, rather than risk the blame for 'losing' the war on terror or risking American lives by cutting defense appropriations. If Bush wanted to make America safer, the monies currently being poured into the national missile defense program would be better spent on homeland security initiatives.

Bush sought \$10.2 billion in funding for 2005 for the Missile Defense Agency, an increase of nearly 20% over last year. With this investment the military hopes to have 20 ground-based interceptor missiles in California and Alaska and 10 sea-based missiles on Navy ships operational by the end of 2005. Ultimately, the Department of Defense envisions 250 ground-based interceptors, sea-based theater missile defenses and even a space-based kinetic energy program. To develop and implement these complex technologies, including radars, communications capabilities and the missiles themselves, the Department of Defense will spend on average of \$24 billion a year from 2010 through 2020. That is a lot of money – roughly \$1 billion dollars per deployed missile. Unfortunately, these increased outlays are scheduled for the next decade when each of the services expects to replace significant portions of their physical platforms with expensive, transformational units.

Setting aside the issue of whether the interceptor missiles will actually work, one must ask whether spending all this money on national missile defense will increase America's security? That answer is unclear at best. Russia and China, two "near-peer" competitors could easily overwhelm this defensive shield through sheer numbers of missiles. Indeed, due to this fact the Russian president Putin declined to raise a ruckus about the U.S. unilaterally withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Clearly then, national missile defense has been designed for smaller states pursuing the development of both nuclear weapons as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles. In fact, this entire system really seems designed to protect America from North Korea and its very small, but growing collection of nukes. Ultimately, such a system may reduce the threat of North Korean missiles. In the short run, however, North Korea has more incentive to threaten or potentially use their weapons for greater leverage at the bargaining table before the national missile defense system becomes operational.

By now the administration should have learned the lesson that our enemies are not likely to fight with expensive weapons systems where America's technological advantage can be brought to bear. Sadly, small terrorist attacks are the model for the future hostilities. These groups or individuals need not even use chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons – homemade truck bombs were used with devastating effects at the World Trade Center in 1992 and the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

Current plans call for the Department of Defense to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on missile defense that the U.S. hopes to never need and is unlikely to ever use. Instead, it should spend these monies to stabilize and reduce the ballooning operational costs for the war on terror and securing America's borders and infrastructure. The pressing problems of today are terrorists with homemade bombs and chemical agents, not an intercontinental ballistic missile. If September 11<sup>th</sup> taught us nothing else, it should be that we must look to our internal weaknesses first. Although the Department of Homeland Security will spend \$47 billion dollars in 2005, more could be done to protect the United State and prepare for the next asymmetric attack.

Even though North Korea's nuclear weapons program is unsettling, the Bush administration should focus its attention and budget priorities on homeland security programs. We have smaller fish to fry...

Lonn Waters is a graduate student at MIT's Department of Political Science in the Security Studies Program.