



Pentagon Report Raises Questions about the Capabilities of “Missile Defense” and the Architecture of Plans for “360-degree defense of Guam”

January 23, 2023 (Hagåtña, GU) An unclassified report from the U.S. Secretary of Defense’s office on [Operational Test and Evaluation](#) (DOT&E) has leveled criticism at the Missile Defense Agency (MDA), and the U.S. Navy’s Indo-Pacific Command (IndoPaCom) and Joint Region Marianas (JRM) much touted “360° Defense of Guam” plans. More broadly, the report raises questions about the effectiveness of Missile Defense Systems (MDS) overseen by the MDA.

[The DOT&E report](#) follows an unusually [pointed criticism](#) of anti-missile systems from a senior U.S. Department of Defense official (ASD for Space Policy) in November 2022:

So fly before you buy, if fly includes shooting a missile down to prove that it works, and I think, you know, fundamentally, we have – as a department, as a country, we have not tested things enough or we don’t build enough tests into our programs and we have made this weirdly risk-averse system that somehow is averse to missile tests or testing of equipment.

The DOT&E’s top two concerns with respect to the MDA’s Missile Defense Systems are:

- 1) the need for realistic and emerging threat representations in flight and ground testing;
- 2) the need for accredited modeling and simulation (M&S) to assess MDS effectiveness

These two identified challenges underscore criticism of anti-missile systems by [other independent assessors](#) including indications that intercept tests are often staged, conducted in perfect conditions, or tests are cancelled when conditions may affect test results (e.g. rain). More pointedly, the report repeatedly references the need for “realistic” raid scenarios and “complex engagement conditions.” The top two recommendations highlight the extent to which real world threats are not currently managed by DoD’s Missile Defense Systems (p. 308):

1. Increase the rate of target and threat model development to keep pace with emerging real-world threats.
2. Continue to prioritize independent accreditation of M&S used in ground tests and ensure M&S can adequately represent current threat missile capabilities, electronic attack, countermeasures, debris, and realistic raid sizes.

Based on modelling available, the DOT&E report anticipates some success with mid-course ballistic missile intercept (e.g. THADD system) if an attack uses the most basic warhead (a single, non-maneuverable reentry

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vehicle). It notes, however, that the even these defensive capabilities could manage only a “small number” (p. 301) of basic ballistic missile threats.

“Defense of Guam”

The [MDA](#), [IndoPaCom](#), and [JRM](#) have aggressively been promoting a next generation missile defense system for Guam to respond to a “360° threat.” The DOT&E report, however, makes clear that the [media campaign around such proposals](#) have been significantly ahead of capabilities. Specifically, the report notes (p. 307):

The MDA is currently developing a concept for a persistent, 360-degree, layered integrated air and missile defense capability for the defense of Guam. This concept involves interoperability and coordination between multiple assets defending against cruise, ballistic, and hypersonic threats. The proposed architecture is made of both new and existing components in close proximity and with overlapping areas of regard. This presents a significant test planning challenge. *DOT&E currently assesses that the proposed test strategy needs further development to be adequate.* An agile test program that fully explores interoperability and engagement planning through ground testing, tracking exercises, and intercept flight testing is warranted. (emphasis provided)

PCIS Chair, Robert A. Underwood, noted the significance of the DOT&E report:

For residents of Guam and Micronesia, this report calls for careful analysis of planning for the “defense of Guam.” Discussing the viability of anti-missile systems in Guåhan appears to be based on capabilities which do not currently exist and may not exist for a decade or more. Hoping for a defense system and asking us to adjust our lives in Guåhan—to accommodate our existence for it—is not realistic planning. Guam is not just a target for potential adversaries. It is in the cross hairs of anti-missile defense contractors and their advocates in uniform.

PCIS Director Kenneth Gofigan Kuper added,

The Pacific Center for Island Security will continue to track the development of these issues. When large changes are being proposed for the island, detailed scrutiny and analysis is needed. It is not just Guam’s role in a potential conflict that is important, but also the life-changing moves that are made in preparing Guam for this role. Both have consequences that can rip the fabric of our society here in Guam.