

THAAD Moves Forward After Second Hit

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Just weeks after the Army's Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system destroyed a ballistic missile target for the second time in a row, the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) announced on August 19 that it is making preparations to advance the system into the next phase of development. The decision is significant because it means that THAAD will not have to achieve a third intercept, as originally required, before moving into the pre-production phase, known as "engineering, manufacturing and development." THAAD, the most mature of the "upper-tier" theater missile defense systems, failed to destroy a Scud-like target in its first six attempts, but hit its intended target on June 10 and again on August 2 at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. In justifying its plans, BMDO stated, "This decision will save millions of dollars and potentially accelerate the ultimate fielding of the THAAD system, currently scheduled for 2007." Some critics, however, have warned against moving too quickly with the program, which has cost approximately \$4 billion thus far, and have challenged the significance of the recent intercepts because they occurred in a benign testing environment.

In a related development, the conference report to the fiscal year 2000 defense authorization bill separates funding for THAAD and its sea-based counterpart, Navy Theater Wide, for the next five years and mandates that decisions concerning each system be made based on their individual performances. This provision essentially reverses the Pentagon's current approach, under which a review would be held in late 2000 to determine whether THAAD or Navy Theater Wide should be the "lead" system that receives the majority of upper-tier TMD funding.

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