

PAC-3 Ready for Action

- [Arms Control Today](#)

On September 26, the Army declared that a “limited number” of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missiles were available for deployment. The PAC-3, which is designed to destroy short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and aircraft by colliding with them, is the first hit-to-kill anti-missile system ready for operational use.

The PAC-3 system has been under development for several years. The announcement that the missiles were available for deployment had been scheduled in advance for some time and was not connected with the events of September 11.

Army spokeswoman Captain Amy Hannah would not comment on how many PAC-3 missiles were available or when and where they could be deployed. Hannah said Lockheed Martin, the company that produces the PAC-3, recently transferred the missiles to the Army.

A Lockheed Martin spokesman declined to discuss the issue, citing a letter sent October 2 by Edward Aldridge, undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology, and logistics, to private contractors. The letter asked companies to exercise “discretion” when speaking publicly about “statistical, production, contracting and delivery information” because such information could be useful to foreign intelligence collectors.

On October 19, the PAC-3 successfully completed its final intercept test in the developmental stage of its testing, which works out hardware and software bugs and refines a weapon system. During the developmental tests, the PAC-3 missed only once, hitting nine out of 10 targets. Now the PAC-3 will move forward to operational testing and evaluation, which is more representative of actual tactical conditions. For example, real soldiers, not testing personnel, operate the weapon during operational testing.

Currently, the PAC-3 is in low-rate production, but a decision is set to be made in September 2002 whether it should be moved to full-rate production. It is standard practice to keep a weapon system in low-rate production while testing is still being conducted.

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