

THE CASE AGAINST AUSTRALIAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES MISSILE DEFENCE PROGRAM

Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith has said that Labor had not been convinced of the merits of missile defence as a global or strategic protection system.

"We weren't persuaded that the technology was there, we weren't persuaded that it was viable in terms of cost," he said.

"We made it clear during our time in opposition that we would happily give consideration to theatre or limited missile defence." (AAP)

"The technology's moved on, and so what we've said is that in conversation with our ally, with the United States, we're happy to give consideration to the missile defence arrangements," Mr Smith said. (Nine Network)



This year marks the 50th anniversary of the space age, launched with Sputnik on October 4, 1957. It also marks the 40th anniversary of the UN Outer Space Treaty (October 10, 1967), which seeks to ensure the peaceful uses of space for the benefit of all humankind. It is our strong view that this is not a time when our government should expand Australian involvement in missile defence.

There are a number of points we wish to raise in support of our view:

1. While the Federal Government may be considering missile defence arrangements, it should be made clear from the outset that Australia is already involved, at considerable expense.

For well over a decade, through Pine Gap, the Jindalee Over the Horizon radar, the \$6 billion air warfare destroyers and more — Australia has been hosting facilities integral to the US missile defence program, a space weaponisation plan which is creating the conditions that will surely move the arms race into the heavens. The aerospace industry will get rich from it, and taxpayers will get a more unstable world.

The US is building missile defence facilities in Alaska and elsewhere which will be used to launch the weapons which are supposed to destroy incoming missiles targeted on the USA. To alert these facilities, the US will need to use its network of ground stations, including Pine Gap.

Radomes at Pine Gap are connected to the early warning system called the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS). The SBIRS satellites monitored by Pine Gap have a footprint that covers the most important areas of US strategic interest — the Middle East oil fields, and China.

2. The distinction apparently being made by the Federal Government between theatre (limited) and global missile defence is not realistic.

The recent US shooting down of a satellite proved how easy it is to morph so-called "theatre" missile technology into so-called "strategic" use. The destruction of the satellite showed conclusively that the Aegis theatre missile defence system also has a use as an anti-satellite weapon (ASAT) -- new dangerous and provocative offensive space warfare technology.

The US is offering theatre missile defence systems to Japan, South Korea, Australia, and other countries because they are easier to sell as defensive systems. If this is successful, the argument for bigger and more offensive missile systems becomes easier to make.

It appears to be current Bush/Pentagon policy to introduce ballistic missile defence and ASAT weaponry in stages. The first is to say that troops in the field must be protected. This is then followed by pushing the idea of simply enlarging this into a system that 'protects' states.

Despite Stephen Smith's claim that the government is giving the matter "careful consideration", it appears that the US has unfortunately already achieved some success with this strategy.

3. , The claim that the technology has moved on is also dubious. Missile "defence" probably cannot be made to work. Since research began in 1976, attempts to destroy mock warheads have failed more than 70 per cent of the time.

There are three layers of missile defence — boost phase, mid-course and terminal phase.

Boost phase (once called theatre missile defence) testing has been having the most success. The Navy Aegis interceptor program has had pretty good luck hitting missiles soon after they are launched (testing has been off the

coast of Hawaii). This is the same system that recently knocked out the falling satellite. Other boost phase programs are under development. One, which has received most attention from the Pentagon lately, is the airborne laser. This has many technical troubles.

The midcourse program, which has been described as using a bullet hit a bullet in deep space, is the one with the big testing troubles. With too many variables like the speed of rockets in deep space, the ability to release decoys, etc, the successive failures of the Kwajalein and Vandenberg tests make it seem highly unlikely that this can become successful.

The Patriot missile and THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, a project to develop a system to shoot down short- and medium-range ballistic missiles) are the primary systems of the terminal phase program. They are under development but there does not appear to be much testing being undertaken at present.

It appears that the Australian Government may have been persuaded that the recent satellite shoot down means all the programs are having more success.

4. A major concern is that missile defence is not a benign, defensive umbrella. It is a space military program. The Australian Government is considering buying into an offensive project which has always been about the US controlling space, dominating space, denying other countries access to space and the US being the master of space. This is simply not in Australia's interests.

Missile defence is a controversial space battle system which aims to allow the US to launch a pre-emptive strike against any country which does not do its bidding, without fear of retaliation. Space-based weapons are an essential part of this plan.

During the Gulf War the US became convinced that whoever controls space will be able to project force "in space, from space and into space". The Pentagon believes that future military success will depend on space capabilities.

Using current satellite technologies the US is able to intercept communications from anywhere on Earth and is able to identify and target any "enemy" that it wishes. Through this control and the basing of weapons in space, the US intends to "dominate" the Earth and beyond. It says frankly that it will not allow any other power to get a foothold in space. This includes allies as well as enemies.

The same satellite capabilities also allow the US to spy on private citizens and companies. Official US documentation from Menwith Hill in England has proved that the US base is eavesdropping on English citizen's private communications.

5. It is impossible not to believe that Australia is being brought into the anti-satellite (ASAT) program for offensive operations against China's space systems. This is where US missile defence work is focussed.

The Pentagon has been war-gaming a US first-strike attack on China, set in 2016, for the past several years. In that attack Aegis ships would negate China's nuclear retaliatory force by intercepting their missiles in the boost phase.

Aegis ships, like those which shot down the satellite, are now being home ported by the US Navy throughout the Asian-Pacific region giving the US the ability to encircle China's coast. These Aegis ships give the US the ability to intercept China's 20 nuclear missiles that today are capable of reaching the west coast of the continental US.

The Howard Government also decided to purchase three air-warfare destroyers which are also planned to carry the Aegis system – which may be described as a theatre missile defence technology but has been shown to also function as an ASAT weapon.

These developments are provocative, destabilising and highly prejudicial to Australia's security and economic future.

6. The cost of developing missile defence is prohibitive. Participation in an arms race in space will rob the resources it will take to meet the challenges of global warming and a just distribution of the world's resources. The government cannot spend the same money twice. If you study one field of knowledge with your best minds you steal from other areas where that brain power is needed.

7. The risk is that the Australian government is buying into the inevitability of an all out arms race in space. This is a risk our government should not take.

Russia and China have voiced concern over what they regard as tightening military ties among the US, Japan and Australia, including ballistic missile defence.

Marc Vidricaire, a member of the Canadian delegation to the United Nations, has said: "... it is clear that technology can be developed to place weapons in outer space, and no state can expect to maintain a monopoly on such knowledge — or such capabilities — for all time. If one state actively pursues the weaponisation of space, we can be sure others will follow."

Any arms race in space would inevitably destabilise the balance of power and thereby multiply the risks of global

conflict. In such a competition, the possibilities of technological mistakes and pre-emptive strikes to avoid being overtaken by an adversary would be considerable.

8. Strategically, economically and morally, Australia should not become involved in the weaponisation of space and particularly not as a junior partner of super power which explicitly says it wants to "control" space to protect its own economic interests and to establish its superiority over the world.

The US Space Command has publicly stated that it intends to dominate "the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment....

"The medium of space is the fourth medium of warfare — along with land, sea, and air... The emerging synergy of space superiority with land, sea, and air superiority will lead to Full Spectrum Dominance."

9. In addition to our opposition to Australian involvement in BMD and ASAT programs that will be dangerous, expensive, and provocative and will surely fuel an arms race in space, there are economic interests to be considered.

The 1998 Space Commission Long Range Plan framed the space missile program in terms of furthering corporate-led globalisation and maintaining US economic and political dominance. "The United States will remain a global power and exert global leadership," it said.

"The global economy will continue to become more interdependent. Economic alliances, as well as the growth and influence of multinational corporations, will blur security agreements. The gap between 'have' and 'have-not' nations will widen, creating regional unrest" which would lead to conflicts threatening US dominance.

This not a vision of shared development opportunities among allies. Behind the spin of "defence" lies the hidden layer of forces lining up to harvest the benefits from the exploitation of space. There is little if any benefit for the Australian people from all this.

10. We ask the question: Who will own the Moon and Mars?

The Moon, Mars and other planetary bodies contain the untapped resources and riches of the future. Helium-3 gas has been found on the Moon. Helium-3 is seen as a fuel for nuclear fusion — so potent that just six metric tons would supply Britain with enough energy for a year. Germany, India and China are all studying ways to mine the isotope.

Numerous voices, at NASA and from private industry, are calling for immediate action. David Gump, president of LunaCorp, wrote: "Discovery of the fabulously valuable buried ice fields at the Moon's poles has dramatically increased the value of a lunar base, and the logic of a primary role for free enterprise."

Much of the ground work for space exploitation is now being laid. The surface of the Moon has already been mapped by the Clementine mission. In June 1997 NASA announced plans for manned mining colonies on Mars. The Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft undertook a year-long mapping mission.

The US Space Command is working hard to ensure that a military space corridor between Earth and the planets beyond will remain open and free for private corporate interests. Documents commissioned by the US Congress suggest that US military bases on the Moon will enable the US to control access to and from the planet Earth.

The world community, however, has called decisively for the use of space "for peaceful purpose ... carried out for the benefit and in the interest of all countries." This is the position the Australian Government should actively support.

11. Australia must come to grips with its strong self-interest in preventing the testing and use of space weapons. This will inevitably require dissociating our country from missile defence.

A comprehensive ban on the militarisation of outer space is urgently needed. Arming the heavens will only put us one step closer to a disastrous war in space that no one can win.

12. At the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 2000, 163 nations supported a resolution entitled "Prevention of An Arms Race In Outer Space."

It recognised "the common interest of all mankind in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes" and reiterated that the use of space "shall be for peaceful purpose ... carried out for the benefit and in the interest of all countries." The measure stated that the "prevention of an arms race in outer space would avert a grave danger for international peace and security."

Theresa Hitchens in an article in the Scientific American (18/2/08) writes:

Given the risks of space warfare to national and international security, as well as the technical and financial hurdles that must be overcome, it would seem only prudent for spacefaring nations to find ways to prevent an arms race in space.

The Bush administration has adamantly opposed any form of negotiations regarding space weapons....

... failure to negotiate such agreements entails real opportunity costs. An arms race in space may end up compromising the security of all nations, including that of the US, while it stretches the economic capacities of the competitors to the breaking point.

In our view, the Australian Government should now be taking urgent and determined action to achieve international agreement banning space based and anti-satellite weapons.

13. The ALP Platform says:

Labor considers that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile delivery systems is one of the most serious international security issues confronting the world today. Labor considers effective efforts to combat these developments require sustained multilateral, diplomatic and defence co-operation and action.

Labor is concerned that as a unilateral response to the problem of ballistic missile proliferation, national missile defence is disproportionate, technically questionable, costly and likely to be counterproductive. It also has the potential to undermine non-proliferation and derail world progress towards nuclear disarmament. Labor also notes that national missile defence would impact on the security situation in the Asia Pacific region, and that this could have serious consequences for Australia's strategic circumstances and national security.

Missile defence is often portrayed in a binary way: either you have missile defence and are defended, or you have nothing and are left vulnerable. This is not the case. There are many different options to explore when developing Australia's national security and we would be foolish to put all our hopes into one that has done nothing for us.

We strongly urge the new Federal Government to maintain ALP policy and reject any further involvement in the United States missile defence project. Indeed, in our view, it would be appropriate for the security, economic and political interests of our country, if the Australian Government withdrew entirely from missile defence. 🐼