

The Empty Promise of Global Missile Defense

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The Bush administration has been rightly criticized for its go-it-alone foreign policy. But in one area at least, the administration is enthusiastically embracing multilateralism: the marketing of its global missile defense project. The White House, the Pentagon, and major U.S. weapons makers are trying get other countries to buy into this internationally unpopular program by offering foreign corporations a piece of the Star Wars action.

As a first step, Boeing struck an unprecedented deal this summer with Britain's BAE Systems to cooperate on research and development for the Bush administration's multi-billion dollar ballistic missile defense program. While analysts tout the potential technical gains of collaboration between firms, missile defense boosters are enthused about the potential political payoff. As Baker Spring of the Heritage Foundation notes, "if you can get foreign firms involved, they will bring their countries along."

European governments have been particularly skeptical of Washington's Star Wars plans. But if networkships with giant US defense firms promising money and jobs help to change their minds, the Boeing-BAE agreement is likely to be the first of many such deals. Other U.S. corporations with missile defense contracts are exploring cooperative agreements with counterparts like the Netherlands-based European Aeronautics Defense and Space Co., Europe's largest aerospace company.

At first glance, it seems there's plenty of missile defense "pork" to go around. The United States has spent more than \$90 billion on missile defense projects since 1983, and Donald Rumsfeld and his fellow Star Warriors at the Pentagon are pursuing a multi-tiered system that could cost \$200 billion or more over the next decade and one-half.

But behind the appearance of Star Wars largesse for US allies, serious questions lurk. How much "sharing" will actually occur, and what economic impact will it have? The "Big Four" missile defense contractors - Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and TRW - have already split two-thirds of all missile defense funding awarded by the Pentagon over the past four years, racking up long-term contracts worth in excess of \$20 billion in the process. Missile defense work has also been highly concentrated geographically, with roughly 90% of the contracts since 1998 going to firms in just four states: California, Alabama, Colorado, and Virginia.

This concentration of Star Wars spending is great news for the Bush administration's friends in the arms industry. In all, President Bush has appointed 32 former executives, paid consultants, or major shareholders from the arms industry to major policymaking positions in the Pentagon, and other major agencies, including eight from Lockheed Martin and eight from Northrop Grumman, which recently purchased TRW.

These corporate beneficiaries may be the only big winners in the multi-billion Star Wars program. Given the "boutique" nature of missile defense production - the \$11 billion Airborne Laser Project (ABL), for example, is currently slated to produce only 7 aircraft in all - the billions spent on missile defense are likely to have very little "bang for the buck" in terms of generating jobs. Spreading this work out internationally will further dilute any job-creating potential, undermining industry claims that missile defense funding will spur jobs and economic growth either here or abroad. The Star Wars pork barrel will be less than half full for American and international defense workers alike.

Hopefully the folly of Star Wars - and the first strike military doctrine of which it forms a part - will become

apparent to the American public before billions of dollars and thousands of lives are put at risk. The Pentagon is ready to spend \$200 billion or more on an unworkable system designed to protect against the least likely method a hostile nation or terrorist group would use to deliver a nuclear weapon to U.S. territory. And the Bush administration is poised to spend \$100 billion or more on a "preemptive war" against Iraq, despite the fact that Saddam Hussein's regime does not currently possess nuclear weapons or long-range ballistic missiles.

Rather than throwing good money after bad pursuing a dangerous first strike military doctrine, the Bush administration should increase spending on preventive measures designed to curb the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The administration should finance the accelerated destruction of U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons and bomb-grade materials, bulk up enforcement of international agreements to stem the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and fund the now-suspended U.S.-North Korean framework agreement to cap Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. These efforts would create at least as many jobs per billion dollars spent as missile defense, while freeing up billions more for necessary domestic investments in education, infrastructure, and primary health care. Increased nonproliferation spending would also have another major benefit. Instead of sparking a new arms race, as the administration's missile defense scheme will surely do, they might actually make the world a safer place.

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