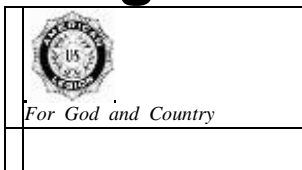


The American Legion



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Editor – The following guest editorial by the national commander of The American Legion is offered for your publication consideration.

Guest Editorial – 643 Words

Missile Defense: The Stakes Couldn't be Higher

By David K. Rehbein

A young girl picking daisies opens one of the most infamous political ads ever devised. It is suggested her life is about to end violently and quickly as a nuclear mushroom cloud appears. President Lyndon Johnson intones, “These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.”

While no one in Washington has the power to mandate love, our leaders can protect us by adequately funding and deploying a national missile defense. Mocked by critics in the 1980’s as a Star Wars fantasy, nobody seems to be laughing as North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il has been test-firing missiles like a kid launching fireworks on the fourth of July. Defense Secretary Robert Gates takes the threat seriously enough to have positioned a military ground-based missile defense system to protect Hawaii from missile attack. While The American Legion applauds this decision, the nation’s largest veterans service organization is concerned that the United States is not doing enough to protect us from, well, nuclear annihilation.

In 2008 delegates at The American Legion National Convention in Phoenix unanimously passed Resolution 94. It urges the U.S. government to develop and continue to deploy a national missile defense system which is in the national interest of the United States and the American people and an essential ingredient of our homeland security.

In recent months, North Korea has repeatedly tested its nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missile capabilities. Moreover, the Iranian President Ahmadinejad has given no indication that he plans to retract his public promises to make his country a nuclear power. While some may naively believe that these leaders are of stable mind and would be deterred by America’s military might and nuclear capabilities, often overlooked is the history these rogue regimes have of proliferating weapons to terrorists.

Referring to the possibility of capturing Pakistan’s nuclear weapons, a top al Qaeda commander said, “God willing, the nuclear weapons will not fall into the hands of the Americans and the Mujahideen would take them and use them against the Americans.”

But despite all of this, the Obama administration has called for a \$1.62 billion reduction in missile defense for 2010, nearly a 15 percent decline from the 2009 appropriation. The 2010 Defense Authorization Bill includes a provision to reduce the number of Ground-Based Midcourse Defense Interceptors from 44 to 30. These cuts are hardly signs that Washington is committed to providing an impenetrable national missile defense.

The Heritage Foundation has produced a chilling documentary titled *33 Minutes: Protecting America in the New Missile Age*. A trailer of the film can be viewed at www.legion.org. It makes the sobering point that a ballistic missile fired at the United States could reach its target in 33 minutes or less. It is a moral imperative that our leaders in Washington protect America from this catastrophic possibility.

As Gates recently said about protecting Hawaii with a ground-based system, “We are in a good position, should it become necessary, to protect Americans and American territory.” But is “good” really good enough? As LBJ said of the poor daisy-picking girl, “These are the stakes!”

David K. Rehbein, of Ames, Iowa, is national commander of the 2.6 million-member American Legion, www.legion.org, the nation’s largest wartime veterans organization.