



Missile Defense Briefing Report: No. 334

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NEW SENSOR BLIMP UNNERVES CITIZENS

The U.S. Army has officially launched the first blimp in its Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System (JLENS) program above the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland. The unmanned Army balloon is incorporated with current NORAD operations to guard against potential threats to the homeland, including "missiles launched from a Russian aircraft or submarine, or by terrorists from a hijacked container ship." The balloon, which is the size of a football field in length, is outfitted with radar tasked with cruise missile detection capable of scanning as far north as Boston and as far south as North Carolina.

The launch, however, has raised an unexpected issue. While the Army sees the program as an integral part of defending the nation's capital, it has spurred privacy concerns among citizens, who worry that the blimp - like similar ones along the U.S.-Mexico border which are outfitted with surveillance suites - could be used to spy on the general public. (CBS News, February 18, 2015)

TURKEY GOES ITS OWN WAY ON MISSILE DEFENSE

Turkey's Defense Minister has announced that his country will not integrate its missile defenses with NATO. The declaration came in the form of a written response to questioning from the Turkish parliament, and represents the clearest signal to date of Ankara's thinking about its missile defense future. Back in 2013, the Turkish government chose the China Precision Machinery Import and Export Corp. as its preferred BMD supplier - but Western concerns over the move, and its potential ramifications for the NATO alliance, of which Turkey is a member, have prevented the conclusion of a contract. But the recent letter from Ismet Yilmaz indicated that Ankara indeed plans to move ahead with its purchase of Chinese defenses, and that "the national system for Turkey's defense," once it is in place, "will be used without integrating with NATO." (Reuters, February 19, 2015)

NUCLEAR TALKS WITH IRAN SKIRT ITS MISSILES

It's becoming increasingly clear that, with or without a deal on Iran's nuclear program, nothing will restrict Tehran from developing and modernizing its missile arsenal. Iran already possesses medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles that, if armed with a WMD, pose a significant threat to the U.S. and its allies. A nuclear agreement with Iran could potentially address those capabilities, if it was to restrict Iran's delivery systems as well. But the P5+1 powers (the U.S., UK, France, Germany, China and Russia) have opted to exclude delivery systems from the scope of the agreement now being negotiated. Reports of Iran's work on multiple reentry vehicles and possible GPS guidance systems, meanwhile, indicate that its strategic arsenal is growing in both size and sophistication. (Aviation Week, February 17, 2015)

NORTH KOREA NOW LAUNCHING AT SEA

Defense officials have confirmed that North Korea attempted a sea based ballistic missile launch on January 23rd. The launch of the KN-11 missile from a sea-based platform was meant to mimic a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM). The successful test is cause for significant concern, because it indicates that North Korea's offensive capabilities may no longer be limited by geography. An active SLBM capability would allow North Korea to target Hawaii, Alaska, or parts of the U.S. West Coast without previous detection. (Washington Free Beacon, February 18, 2015)

A NEW RUSSO-IRANIAN MISSILE DEAL

In spite of UN sanctions, Russia is moving ahead with military assistance to Iran. According to Russian news sources, Russia has offered Iran units of the advanced "Antei-2500" anti-missile system. The move is significant, because the Antei is an upgraded version of the surface-to-air missiles Russia originally planned to sell Iran several years ago, but dropped because of Western concerns. (Defense News, February 23, 2015)