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State of the Union 2007: What the President Should Have Said on Missile Defense

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Everyone can name some issue that the President should have addressed—but didn't—during his State of the Union speech Tuesday night. While the President hit on the key issues that face our nation's national security—such as Iraq, terrorism, Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea—he should have also talked about the critical importance of missile defense.

Now that the Democrats have taken control of both houses of Congress, pushback on this increasingly important area of our national defense is likely, especially as the President asks for additional funding for the troop increase in Iraq.

The Democrats have never really liked missile defense, and empowered by their new position in the Congress, they will likely use the Pentagon's request for funding for the ongoing Iraq operation and additional manpower for the Army and the Marine Corps as a lever to hammer defense programs they don't particularly like—such as missile defense.

This would be a *big* mistake.

The U.S. has made significant progress on missile defense since the Bush Administration took office. But despite the deployment of launchers in Alaska and California for dealing with the North Korean nuclear and missile threat, more work needs to be done, especially as Iran moves towards a nuclear breakout.

Last year, an Independent Working Group on missile defense released a detailed report on how to move the most effective missile defense systems into the field as quickly as possible. The report recommends accelerating the deployment of sea-based defenses that are derived from the Navy's Aegis weapons system to make it effective for countering ballistic missiles.

This system can be used to provide protection against short-range missiles launched from ships at U.S. coastal areas or American forward-deployed forces, as well as land-based intermediate-range missiles. This system has had a very successful test record.

Further, the report recommends revisiting the 1991 proposal of the earlier Bush Administration to field missile defense interceptors in space. This system would intercept ballistic missiles of all but the shortest ranges in their boost phase, when they are most vulnerable.

While U.S. attention is rightfully focused on the decisive issues of the war on terrorism, Iraq, and Afghanistan, America should not take its eye off other potential adversaries—and geographical flashpoints—where robust missile defenses would

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prove crucial to defending American forces and bolstering our national security.

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