

BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENCE- DEBRIS, THREAT

Q. Media reports have suggested that the US BMD system could intercept incoming missiles over Canadian territory, resulting in nuclear debris being dispersed within our borders. Is this true? If so, what is Canada prepared to do to deal with this eventuality? Have we expressed our concerns to the US on this issue?

Suggested Reply

- The question of debris is something we will be discussing in our ongoing consultations with our US counterparts.
- Debris is mainly a concern for "terminal phase intercepts" in the final stages of missile flight. However, impact would occur well above the earth's surface, and the missiles would be literally vapourized, by the kinetic impact of an intercept, leaving only small particles, much of which would burn up on re-entry into the atmosphere.
- We should be clear that the risk of debris falling in Canada is significantly less than the risk of not intercepting an attacking missile.

Q. Why are ballistic missile threats of such concern when an equally powerful weapon can be delivered anonymously by a ship sailing into a harbour?

Suggested Reply

- There are many different ways that weapons of mass destruction can be delivered. Each country must determine which threats to its security it considers the most serious and the most likely.
- There are a wide variety of measures to respond to threats, including confidence building measures, diplomatic negotiations, interdiction of suspect ships or individuals, as well as defensive measures.
- It is then a question of determining which measures provide the most cost effective means of responding to these threats.
- Determining the best response to the new threats in the post Cold War environment is one factor we are discussing with the US.