

A Single Nuke Could Destroy America

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A sword of Damocles hangs over our heads. It is a real threat that has been all but ignored.

On Feb. 3, Iran launched a “communications satellite” into orbit. At this very moment, North Korea is threatening to do the same. The ability to launch an alleged communications satellite belies a far more frightening truth. A rocket that can carry a satellite into orbit also can drop a nuclear warhead over any location on the planet in less than 45 minutes.

Far too many timid or uninformed sources maintain that a single launch of a missile poses no true threat to the United States, given our retaliatory power.

A reality check is in order and must be discussed in response to such an absurd claim: In fact, one small nuclear weapon, delivered by an ICBM can destroy the United States by maximizing the effect of the resultant electromagnetic pulse upon detonation.

An electromagnetic pulse (EMP) is a byproduct of detonating an atomic bomb above the Earth’s atmosphere. When a nuclear weapon is detonated in space, the gamma rays emitted trigger a massive electrical disturbance in the upper atmosphere. Moving at the speed of light, this overload will short out all electrical equipment, power grids and delicate electronics on the Earth’s surface. In fact, it would take only one to three weapons exploding above the continental United States to wipe out our entire grid and transportation network. It might take years to recover from, if ever.

This is not science fiction. If you doubt this, spend a short amount of time skimming the Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse Attack from April 2008. You will come away sobered.

Even as the new administration plans to spend trillions on economic bailouts, it has announced plans to reduce funding and downgrade efforts for missile defense. Furthermore, the United States' reluctance to invest in a modern and credible traditional nuclear deterrent is a serious concern. What good will a bailout be if there is no longer a nation to bail out?

Fifty years ago, it was not Sputnik itself that sent a dire chill of warning around the world; it was the capability of the rocket that launched Sputnik. The rocket that lofted Sputnik into orbit also could have served as an ICBM.

Yet for all its rhetoric, the Soviet Union was essentially a rational power that recognized the threat of mutual destruction and thus never stepped to the edge.

The world is different today. Intercontinental range missiles tipped with nuclear weapons in the hands of leaders driven by fanaticism, leaders that support global terrorism, leaders that have made repeated threats that they will seek our annihilation . . . can now at last achieve that dream in a matter of minutes.

Those who claim that there is little to fear from Iran or North Korea because "at best" they will have only one or two nuclear weapons ignore the catastrophic level of threat we now face from just "a couple" of nuclear weapons.

Again: One to three missiles tipped with nuclear weapons and armed to detonate at a high altitude — to achieve the strongest EMP over the greatest area of the United States — would create an EMP "overlay" that triggers a continent-wide collapse of our entire electrical, transportation, and communications infrastructure.

Within weeks after such an attack, tens of millions of Americans would perish. The impact has been likened to a nationwide Hurricane

Katrina. Some studies estimate that 90 percent of all Americans might very well die in the year after such an attack as our transportation, food distribution, communications, public safety, law enforcement, and medical infrastructures collapse.

We most likely would never recover from the blow.

Two things need to be done now and without delay:

1. Make clear in the strongest of terms that, if either Iran or North Korea launches a rocket on a trajectory headed toward the territory of the United States, we will shoot it down. The risk of not doing so is beyond acceptable. And if they construe this as an act of war, so be it, for they fired the first shot. The risk of sitting back for 30 minutes and praying it is not an EMP strike is beyond acceptable, beyond rational on our part.

2. Funding for EMP defense must be a top national priority. To downgrade or halt our missile defense program, which at last is becoming viable after 25 years of research, would be an action of criminal negligence.

Surely, with such a threat confronting us, a fair and open debate, with full public access and the setting aside of partisan politics, is in order. In the meantime, a policy must be stated today that we will indeed shoot down any missile aimed towards the United States that is fired by Iran or North Korea. America's survival, your survival, and your family's survival might very well depend on it.

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