MDA Director: Ship-based Missile Defense More Capable, Flexible than Land-based Options

WASHINGTON – The director of the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) accepted the declaration by Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. John M. Richardson that he wants to get his Aegis-equipped warships out of the missile defense patrol missions, but noted that the Navy ships provide better capabilities than available land-based alternatives.

Air Force Lt. Gen. Samuel A. Greaves, the MDA director, said June 26 that he understood the concern over the limited number of the multimission ships and "the strain on the crews and equipment" of keeping the multimission-capable destroyers and cruisers deployed on the ballistic missile defense (BMD) missions.

Greaves was asked at a Mitchell Institution breakfast session about Richardson's June 12 complaint that he had six multimission ships that could go anywhere quickly to address security threats but were tied up "in a tiny little box, defending land." The CNO said those ships could be used in emergencies, but "I want to get out of the long-term missile defense business."

Richardson said the BMD mission could be taken over by land-based systems.

Greaves noted that "the CNO did verify that he is supportive of the Aegis BMD mission."

"The existing ground facilities is Aegis Ashore," Greaves said, and there is a "question if you could deploy additional

capabilities. THAAD also could do some of that," he said, referring to the Army-operated Terminal High Altitude Area Defense antimissile system.

"But the Aegis weapon system has more capability" and can reach higher altitude targets, Greaves added. He also noted the "flexibility of the (Navy) platform to respond to the threat."

"But, if the nation decides that we need to balance out, or increase the number of land-based capabilities," Greaves said that with "the demonstrated ability we have, we can do it with Aegis Ashore."

The first Aegis Ashore site in Romania was declared operational in May 2016 with a Spy-1D radar and 24 Mk 41 vertical launch systems holding Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) missiles. But the planned second site in Poland that was expected to be operational by early 2019 has run into major problems with site construction. Greaves estimated it would take another 18 months to complete.

In his address, Greaves cited his priorities of increasing the reliability of the existing BMD capabilities, increasing the engagement capabilities and keeping pace with the rapidly improve threats.

"The times for delays and studies are over," he said.

A top priority in keeping up with the emerging threats, Greaves said, was fielding a capability against hypersonic weapons. That threat is real, based on what has been seen in actions by others, he said, apparently referring to China and Russia, which have claimed to have demonstrated ultra-high-speed weapons.

Among MDA's planned projects, Greaves listed an upcoming retest of the SM-3IIA missile, which failed an intercept trial last year. He said officials have isolated the problem to a

part that worked nine out of the 10 previous tests and were working to ensure it will work in the future.