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## U.S. Readies Key Ballistic Missile Interceptor Test

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The United States is readying for its initial trial of a ship-based antimissile system against an intermediate-range ballistic missile target, Reuters reported on Thursday (see [GSN](#), March 2).

The April test is likely to affect Obama administration assurances that it can meet a self-imposed schedule for establishing a missile shield to defend Europe against potential Iranian missile attacks.

Missile Defense Agency spokesman Richard Lehner said the test would involve a ship-based Aegis antimissile system developed by Lockheed Martin and a Raytheon-produced missile interceptor. The vessel will be located in the south central Pacific and the missile target is to be fired from the Marshall Islands in the central Pacific.

The opening for the test to take place ends on April 30, Lehner said.

Earlier ship-based tests have targeted mock enemy missiles with more restricted flight ranges. This month's test would be the first to involve an intermediate-range target that can travel from 2,000 to 3,500 miles. Such a range would put European capitals Berlin, Paris and London within striking distance of missiles fired from Iran's western edge.

The forthcoming test is "to demonstrate a capability against a class of ballistic missiles, and is not country-specific," Lehner said told Reuters by e-mail.

"During [the test] Aegis BMD (ballistic missile defense) will demonstrate for the first time its capability to negate the longer-range threats that must be countered in Phase 1" of the Obama missile defense plan for Europe, Defense Department operational test and evaluation chief Michael Gilmore told Congress in March.

Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance leader Riki Ellison said the coming test was a "proof of concept" for the White House.

"It is tremendously important that it's a success as this exact architecture is to be deployed in Europe by the end of this year in the first phase of Obama's plan," Ellison said (Jim Wolf, [Reuters](#), April 7).

Meanwhile, the Missile Defense Agency said on Thursday it had awarded three contracts for development of the Standard Missile 3 Block 2B program.

Defense contractors Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon "will work with MDA to define and assess viable and affordable missile configurations, conduct trade studies and develop and executable development plan" for the system, according to an agency press release.

The SM-3 Block 2B is a crucial component of the multipart Obama administration plan to deploy sea- and land-based interceptors around Europe, the release states. It is to be fielded around Europe in the fourth phase of the program that is to be finished no later than 2020. The interceptor is intended to be able to eliminate medium, intermediate and intercontinental ballistic missiles in the early stage of their flight.

The Boeing contract is worth \$41.1 million, while the Lockheed Martin and Raytheon contracts are respectively worth \$43.3 million and \$42.7 million (U.S. Missile Defense Agency [release](#), April 7).