



"History is indeed little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind."

—Edward Gibbon

23-Sep-05

Cruising for Trouble

According to Michael O'Hanlon ("Cruise Control: A Case for Missile Defense," *The National Interest*, Spring 2002, p.98), the need for a defensive shield against cruise missiles "has slipped through the cracks of public consciousness." The current emphases on 1) the development of a defensive shield against ballistic missiles and on 2) the implementation of measures to curtail the hijacking of domestic aircraft have blindsided the American people to the clear and present danger of a cruise missile attack. Perhaps if Tom Cruise would lend his name to a movie on the subject, say, "Cruise Missile Armageddon," the public's level of awareness would increase. As it stands, "the United States today utterly lacks an effective cruise missile defense plan. [D]efending against cruise missiles has probably become the most challenging air defense problem for the United States in this era."

O'Hanlon suggests that the prevalence and nature of these weapons renders America vulnerable to a cruise missile attack launched by terrorists or foreign states. At present, no less than 75 nations possess an aggregate total of 75,000 cruise missiles. Most are anti-ship weapons, "but a number of countries are working on converting some to land-attack variants." They are capable of carrying nuclear weapons, but may also be used to deploy

bacteriological, chemical, or radiological payloads. Currently, most warheads carry conventional weapons.

Cruise missiles are fast, able to cover a kilometer per second, yet subsonic. Because they do not have to carry the large amounts of fuel needed to power supersonic aircraft, they can be compact, relatively lightweight, and small. This enables the enemy to hide them and their delivery apparatus. Once launched, their small size, "their modest infrared heat signature," and the fact that they typically fly low (usually about 50 feet above the surface) makes them difficult to detect and intercept. They actually use terrain to cover their approach.

These are the perfect weapon to hide in cargo or even on passenger ships. Most significantly, they can be deployed from *commercial* aircraft retrofitted to carry them. It is possible that the high-capacity commercial jets being developed now could carry passengers *and* a cruise missile. This means that they can be launched within 100 miles of any American target, even those far away from the coasts.

Given these facts, the security implications for America are clear. America can no longer count on the oceans to the east and west of her for protection. In fact, the globalized economy she has built, dependent as it is on trade, can work to her detriment, as the hundreds of cargo and passenger ships that visit her ports daily can become launch platforms for missiles aimed at military and infrastructure installations, roads, bridges, factories, as well as the civilian population. Likewise, commercial aircraft approaching her territories from any direction, or indeed already *within* her territories, can be used to project enemy weapons into the very heartland of the nation. Nowhere is secure from a concerted and unexpected attack that would make 9-11 look small-scale indeed. Between missile launch and detonation, few spots in the nation are more than about five minutes away.

The military is aware of the nation's vulnerabilities to a cruise missile attack, and studies are being conducted on developing some sort of network of radar and interceptor installations to protect the nation's coasts. It is estimated that such a system would cost between \$10 and \$20 billion to construct, and a like amount to maintain over the next twenty years.

Whether America heeds O'Hanlon's recommendation that she "seriously consider the desirability and feasibility of a national defense against cruise missiles armed with chemical, biological, or radiological payloads" remains to be seen. Perhaps entitlement and social largess programs (school voucher systems, social security bailouts, etc.) will trump the priority of national defense, as seems to be the trend. Time will tell the extent to which an overconfident and self-satisfied America, falling for the phony [peace](#) overtures of her enemies, will be lulled to sleep - and to sudden destruction ([I Thessalonians 5:1-3](#)).

- Charles Whitaker

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

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by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

God (sometimes referred to as the Lord of Hosts) will marshal an army of resurrected saints who will wage a just war. Trumpets represent a cry of alarm and a call to action. The only time warmaking is just is when God decides, indicating that man's conscience has become so defiled, seared, and perverted that no other solution is possible. God also wages war to defeat His people's enemies (such as the Amalakites) and to put down the Satan-inspired end-time rebellion (Revelation 19:15; Joel 2:1-11).

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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