

Adm. Davidson: 360-Degree Air Defense of Guam is Top Priority



The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68) passes Point Udall as it enters Apra Harbor in June 2020 prior to mooring at Naval Base Guam for a scheduled port visit. The commander of U.S. Indo Pacific Command says his No. 1 priority is additional homeland defense security for the strategically important island. U. S. NAVY / Chief Mass Communication Specialist Matthew R. White

ARLINGTON, Va. – The top U.S. military official in the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility has placed 360-degree defense of Guam from air and missile threats as his top priority.

Adm. Phillip S. Davidson, commander, U.S. Indo Pacific Command, speaking in a July 21 teleconference with reporters, said that ballistic missiles launched from China or North Korea and cruise missiles launched from aircraft, ships or submarines are a threat to U.S. forces in Guam, a U.S. territory, which is increasing in importance as a base for U.S. forces.

“My No. 1 priority, and the most important action we can take to readily and most fully implement the National Defense Strategy, as a first step, is a 360-degree persistent integrated air defense capability of what I call Homeland Defense System Guam,” Davidson said.

Davidson advocates deploying the Baseline 10 Aegis Ashore missile defense system to Guam to supplement the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, system already in place on the island.

The Aegis Ashore system is an adaptation of the Navy’s Aegis

Combat System installed on Ticonderoga-class guided-missile destroyers and Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers. The SPY-1D radars of the system are teamed with an array of vertical launch cells housing Standard SM-3 missiles. Two Aegis Ashore systems are deployed to Europe, in Romania and Poland.

“The backbone of the Homeland Defense System Guam would be the Baseline 10 Aegis Ashore system,” Davidson said. “The reason I’m a key advocate for that is, first, it is technology that is available to us now and could be delivered by 2026, when I believe the threat will require us to have a much more robust capability than the combination of THAAD, which is deployed there now, and an Aegis ship in response can provide.

“You are going to need a complete clock – a 360-degree coverage in order to help defend Guam,” he said. “Further, Aegis Ashore, the C5I [command, control, communications, computers, cyber, intelligence], that comes with it, enables you to bring in other capability like PAC-3 [missile defense system], other shorter-range defenses as well, much like Baseline 10 on a ship enables you to link and engage with other capability sets. That’s going to be required going forward. And it comes quickest. And that’s why Homeland Defense System Guam is at the top of my list.”

Davidson said the funding would have to be approved by Congress in the 2021 budget for ground to be broken in time for Aegis Ashore to be operational in Guam by 2026.

Guam was an important base during the Cold War and Vietnam War, with a squadron of ballistic-missile submarines, an EP-3 fleet air reconnaissance squadron and a detachment of P-3 maritime patrol aircraft, as well as an Air Force wing of B-52 long-range bombers. Its importance declined after the Cold War but returned in the 21st century to counter the rise of China’s military power. The Navy has stationed four attack submarines in Guam along with two submarine tenders. At

Andersen Air Force Base, the Navy operates a sea combat helicopter squadron and a detachment of MQ-4C Triton long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles. The Navy also is building facilities for Marine Corps units that are scheduled to be moved to Guam from Okinawa in the future.

Japan, which also deploys the Aegis system on its Kongo-class guided-missile destroyers, also had planned to deploy Aegis Ashore, but recently canceled the deployment because of concerns of damage to local communities near the launch sites.

U.S. Navy cruisers and destroyers forward-deployed to Japan patrol the Sea of Japan in rotation to provide ballistic-missile defense. Former Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John M. Richardson advocated for more Aegis Ashore systems to make the ships available for other tasking.