

# Antimissile system in doubt

FF 8-23-93 A1

**By Philip Brasher**

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — Those live TV shots of Patriot missiles streaming into the sky during the Persian Gulf War had members of Congress dreaming of a day when rockets buried in the North Dakota prairie could shield the U.S. mainland from nuclear attack.

Two years later, the dream is no closer to reality, and the price tag is starting to give budget-conscious lawmakers second thoughts.

The House and Senate armed services committees have voted to slash spending for missile defense programs, including the proposed system in North Dakota for defending against long-range nuclear strikes.

The House panel argued that it's too expensive to continue moving toward deploying the antimissile system. If some enemy does get the missiles to threaten the United States, an antimissile system could

be developed on a crash basis, the committee said.

"In the current fiscal environment ... it is unwise to spend \$1.2 billion per year and seek deployment in the absence of any evidence that such a threat is likely to emerge in the next 10 to 15 years," the panel said in a report to the House.

The National Missile Defense program is supposed to protect the continental United States from a terrorist's nuclear attack or an unauthorized launch in the old Soviet Union.

Plans call for 100 interceptors at the antimissile site near Nekoma, N.D., that was abandoned during the 1970s.

But the deployment date has been pushed back from 1996 to at least 2004, and the Pentagon is considering dropping even that goal in a pending review of the nation's long-range defense needs.

This fall, the House and Senate are expected to consider cutting money for the program even more than the armed services committees recommended.

"Frankly, what's going on here is that there are very true believers left," said David Lewis, an adviser to Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich.

President Clinton this year requested \$3.8 billion for missile defense programs in 1994 and proposed to de-emphasize the National Missile Defense program. He wants to put a higher priority to developing a Patriot-like system to better protect troops and civilians from short-range strikes in war zones.

The Senate committee cut the funding to \$3.4 billion. The House panel opted for \$3 billion.

Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, the Senate Armed Services Committee chairman who pushed the National Missile Defense idea through

Congress in 1991, still thinks it should be deployed, said spokesman Scott Williams.

Improvements in missile defense "are urgently required," his committee said in its report to the Senate.

But the panel expressed frustration with the lack of progress on the system, given the \$30 billion already spent on Star Wars antimissile research of the past decade.

"From a standing start, we landed a manned spacecraft on the lunar surface in less time than" the 11 years the Clinton administration says it will still take to deploy the Nekoma system, the panel said.

The House panel, chaired by the more liberal Rep. Ron Dellums, D-Calif., says there are better ways to protect the United States: helping dismantle Soviet weaponry and

## □ Antimissile AB

Continued from Page A1

working with other nations to stop the proliferation of nuclear missile technology.

"Well beyond the end of this decade, a new long-range missile threat against the United States is unlikely to occur," the committee said. "The emergence of such a threat by late in the next decade should be detectable well in advance, if it occurs at all."

Both the House and Senate will begin debate on their 1994 defense authorization bills after lawmakers return from recess after Labor Day.

Attempts to cut the antimissile programs could succeed, given the congressional pressure to cut federal spending and a newspaper report last week that the Pentagon rigged Star Wars tests in the 1980s, said Ken Luongo, an analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The New York Times quoted former Reagan administration officials as saying scientists misled Congress on the success of a missile interceptor. A retired general who headed the Army's missile defense program at the time denied that the tests were rigged.

□ Antimissile

Back page, Column one