

AAAS NEWS AND NOTES

edited by Coimbra Sirica

SCIENCE POLICY

Group Studies Educating Public on Science of Missile Defense

Recent news accounts reported on the Pentagon's success in intercepting and exploding a mock warhead as it soared across the Pacific on 4 December. As they have after every such test, journalists who wrote about the event described the controversies that swirl around the nation's proposed missile defense system, but it is hard for both policy-makers and the public to understand the science and technology that are used to bolster arguments on all sides of the issue.

"The reason the public needs to understand the science of missile defense is because the debate on both sides is largely political rhetoric," said Charles Peña, a senior defense policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a nonprofit public policy research foundation in Washington, DC. "Technical aspects have been twisted to serve political interest on both sides."

Peña was one of the speakers at the AAAS Workshop on Ballistic Missile Defense held on 3 December at the Association headquarters in Washington, DC. The purpose of the event was to launch an effort to develop educational materials on international security and weapons of mass destruction for policy-makers, students, and other members of the public. The December workshop focused on missile defense as the first step in developing information on science and policy as it is used to counter current and future threats to the United States.

"We are asking how we can make the public more literate about missile defense," said Elizabeth Kirk, AAAS Directorate for International Programs. "In some cases, people want a fully integrated system deployed now, but it will take some time to make this a reality."

Kirk, who organized the AAAS workshop, asked participants to suggest how educational materials should be crafted.

"The message was that politics can't be left out of the process," Kirk said. "We don't want to alienate anyone. We are going to let both sides look at the materials before we send them out."

The workshop reflected various positions

on missile defense, but all the participants seemed to agree that an educated public was necessary to making sound policy.

"This is going to potentially involve a lot of taxpayer money," said Philip Coyle, a policy analyst for the Center for Defense Information and the Pentagon's former "chief tester" for missile defense, who has argued that the nation is not technologically ready to deploy a missile defense system. "People should know what they are getting and whether we are spending our defense dollars on the most important priorities."

Coyle and several of the other speakers at the workshop described the future of missile defense technology as dependent on policy. In other words, policy-makers would have to decide how realistic the threat was and whether they would want a system that intercepts missiles at take-off, in midcourse, or as they close in on their targets. Some proponents of missile defense argue for a layered system consisting of all three

segments, although that would be much more expensive. Complicating the policy and technical options still further are questions about whether missile defenses should be land-based, sea-based, airborne, or space-based, and the treaty and arms control issues implied with each of these options.

"My suggestion would be to outline the political debate to the public, then to give them the technical foundation," Peña said. "You would tell them that this is not an argument for missile defense, but that they do need to understand how it works."

Several workshop participants noted that AAAS's reputation for political neutrality made the organization a good sponsor for the educational initiative.

"It does not hurt to have AAAS involved, with its public image of scientific neutrality," said Leon Sigal, director of the Northeast Asia Cooperative Security Project. "Journalists tend to think everyone is an interested party, but with AAAS involved, it's a case of scientists with very different opinions coming together to inform the public."

According to Kirk, a report based on the workshop and on a panel discussion at the AAAS annual meeting will be written to guide organizers in deciding what action to take next.

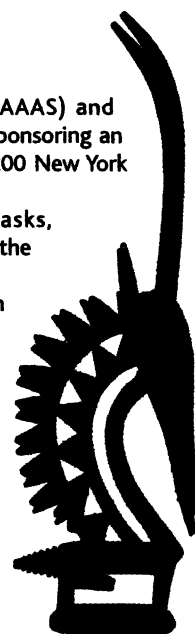
SCIENCE AND ART

AAAS Exhibits Art from Africa

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and Africare, a nonprofit organization that provides aid to Africa, are sponsoring an exhibit of African art on the first floor of the AAAS building at 1200 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC.

Art from Africa: Symbol and Form is an exhibition of masks, sculptures, paintings, and textiles that are on loan from Africare, the Embassy of the Republic of Senegal, and private collections.

"A lot of the pieces in the exhibit represent ways that African artists interpret and use the natural world," said Alan Bornbusch, Director of the Africa Program in the AAAS Directorate for International Programs. "The artists describe processes and natural phenomena around them. They might be about agriculture or the peculiar characteristics of certain animals." Bornbusch notes also that the pieces highlight the richness of artistic traditions and technological innovation across Africa. "We make the point that many traditions are being carried on through new technologies, in some cases to satisfy Africa's growing consumer markets," Bornbusch said. The exhibit, which was organized by the AAAS Africa Program and the AAAS Art of Science and Technology Program, will be open through 15 March 2002.



Results of the 2001 Election of AAAS Officers

Following are the results of the 2001 election. Terms begin on 20 February 2002.

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President-Elect: Mary Ellen Avery. *Board of Directors:* John E. Burris, Norine E. Noonan. *Committee on Nominations:* Elizabeth H. Blackburn, Gerald D. Fischbach, Neal Lane, Thomas D. Pollard

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