

Virtual CRT: Golden Pacific - Getting Missile Defense Right in the Pacific

I. Introduction

The Virtual CRT: Golden Pacific convened senior defense leaders to examine one of the most pressing strategic challenges facing the United States: how to design missile defense in the Indo-Pacific that balances persistent protection of U.S. territory with the expeditionary demands of modern warfare. Hosted by Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance (MDAA) Chairman Riki Ellison, the discussion brought together General (Ret.) Charles Flynn (U.S. Army Pacific), Lieutenant General (Ret.) Jon Thomas (PACAF), and Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery (U.S. Navy INDOPACOM) to explore the future architecture of deterrence across the Pacific theater.

II. Strategic Context: The Pacific as the Center of Deterrence

Riki Ellison framed the discussion through direct observations from an extended trip across the Pacific, arguing that deterrence in the 21st century will be decided in this theater. Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, and the U.S. West Coast represent both strategic assets and known targets, making missile defense a foundational requirement for maintaining regional and global stability.

III. Persistent vs. Expeditionary Missile Defense

A central tension emerged between persistent missile defense—fixed, always-on protection of key territory—and expeditionary missile defense designed to maneuver with forces. General (Ret.) Flynn advocated transforming land-based missile defense from static protection into mobile, maneuver-oriented forces capable of both defense and counter-fire. Ellison countered that such expeditionary systems cannot substitute for persistent defense, particularly for U.S. territory such as Guam.

IV. Command, Control, and Integration

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Thomas emphasized the indispensable role of the Area Air Defense Commander (AADC) in coordinating sensors and shooters across the theater. Expeditionary systems, naval platforms, and fixed defenses must operate within a unified command architecture to ensure optimal engagement decisions and risk management.

V. Budgetary and Institutional Constraints

Rear Admiral (Ret.) Montgomery underscored that strategic ambition must be reconciled with fiscal reality. Defense budgets are flattening in real terms, forcing difficult tradeoffs. Golden Dome initiatives may receive priority funding, but services will face pressure to integrate efficiently rather than pursue service-unique solutions.

VI. The Role of Missile Defense Agency (MDA)

Participants repeatedly identified the Missile Defense Agency as the institutional center of gravity for persistent missile defense integration. MDA's historical role in developing Aegis BMD and ground-based defense positions it uniquely to architect Golden Dome integration across services and domains.

VII. Strategic Implications

Golden Pacific highlighted that effective Indo-Pacific deterrence requires layered missile defense: space-based sensing, persistent territorial defense, and maneuverable expeditionary forces operating within a unified data and command architecture. Failure to integrate these elements risks both wasted resources and strategic vulnerability.

VIII. Conclusion

The Virtual CRT: Golden Pacific underscored that missile defense in the Indo-Pacific is not a question of choosing between persistence and maneuver, but of integrating both. Golden Dome, MDA, and the combatant commands must align architecture, authority, and resources to ensure deterrence holds in the world's most consequential theater.