

ARMY SHOULD DEPLOY JLENS

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Article by Col. (Retired) Gerald May



The Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor (JLENS) system.

Months before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941; the U.S. Army mounted an electronic device on high ground near Wheeler Field. Able to detect aircraft at long range, the equipment was there for further evaluation. It was a "Radio Detection and Ranging system" - RADAR. But men testing the system had no way to warn our ships and aircraft about any "blips" they detected. That Sunday, at 0700, RADAR saw scores of aircraft. At 0753 the commander of the Japanese planes radioed "Tora, Tora, Tora," and bombs began to fall. The cost of ignoring a new system that provided essential battlefield threat warning was terrible.

Today, despite new technological tools and devices we have designed and attempted to field, threat detection and evaluation are fading arts. There are two reasons. First, those on the developmental and political decision-making levels do not accept that we don't know what we don't know. Instead, program decision-makers think and say, "trust me, we know best." This mindset underpins the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) where new systems and technologies are vetted by politicians, bureaucrats, boards of flag officers, science and technology committees, and defense industry competitors. A new idea lives or dies based on their collective assessment of the threat, the field requirements, and the cost.

Second, when generals and admirals who know what they need in their war-fighting combatant commands request a new system, they are often denied it for lack of a monetary trade-off (what are you willing to give up to get it?) or by budget shortfalls.

During the Reagan "Star Wars" initiative we modified acquisition procedures and put the PPBS process on hold. We unburdened defense equipment developers in industry by saying: if you have a good idea that works in your lab, we'll let the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps test it in an operational environment. Results of that policy included infra-red heat seeking and laser detection and pointing technologies -- and the end of the Soviet empire.

Today we pretend to save money by attaining the technological high ground. We use buzz words like, "let's get smarter," and "more bang for the buck," the same clichés of the 1960s and 1970s when we "modernized" systems that warned of threats to the American homeland. We shut down the North American Aerospace Defense Command, formerly North American Air Defense Command's (NORAD's) surveillance radar network. We deactivated the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, closed the Mid-Canada Line and the Over the Horizon (OTH) systems. In the 1980s we ended the Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) Detection and Warning System, and the Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS) that detected submarines approaching our coasts. We reduced our defenses to few systems on which we rely completely, a reliance not based on redundancy and phenomenological comparisons to assure validity, but built on budgetary considerations.

In today's world where physical threats are insidious, hard to detect, and even harder to evaluate, we are applying yesterday's technology to the battlefield. Threats to our military are now diverse: not uniformed soldiers but people with suicide vests; not aircraft carriers but swarming speed boats; not tanks but jihadists planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs); not fighter jets but armed drones; all those threats plus cruise missiles with nuclear- and toxic-agent warheads. So now what do we do?

There is no single answer, but there are several interactive answers. First, we need to rely on tools shown to work. For example, congress appropriated funds and the Army built a promising and tested way to put our development process back on the road to multiple threat detection and evaluation -- the Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor (JLENS) system.

JLENS works. It has been tested successfully against cruise missile targets, swarming boats, and even people planting roadside bombs. It recently detected and tracked a salvo of four ripple-fired tactical ballistic missiles at White Sands Missile Range, N.M. This proven capability to defend our forces in hot spots like the Strait of Hormuz, the Korean peninsula, and the Strait of Malacca has not been overlooked by our combatant commands. They want JLENS.

Tests show JLENS will improve our military's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. It minimizes losses by maximizing warning and interception capability, and by providing timely multi-threat recognition. And when it is integrated with space and ocean surveillance and with border security monitoring centers, its multi-service applications will add significant value to already existing defense systems.

It is time for Congress and the Army to do it once again -- test and deploy the system quickly, and give our war-fighters the protection they deserve. JLENS holds a key part of the 21st century high ground.

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About the author – Col. Gerald May is retired from the U.S. Air Force, he worked in the National Security Council, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), and the Air Force Space Command. An expert on the International Space Station and missile defense, he is the author of, *The Blackthorn Conspiracy*.