

CONTRIBUTORS

A new threat to US nuclear missile and space warfare warning systems

By Grady Means

President Biden recently outlined his economic strategy, highlighting his commitment to “Made in America.” Oddly, at exactly the same moment, the State and Defense Departments were endangering U.S. security by preparing to spend up to \$4 billion to outsource part of America’s nuclear and space attack warning systems to foreign sources — American companies are not even allowed to bid. In short, the government is providing jobs within a critical national security program to foreign countries, with U.S. taxpayer money. It raises so many questions about whether this White House knows what its State and Defense Departments are doing.

After the 9/11 attacks, a U.S. commission determined that poor communication, lack of cooperation, poor judgment and rivalry among American law enforcement, intelligence, defense and national security agencies led to lack of preparedness that possibly could have prevented the attack. Now there is a similar, emerging situation of bad judgment, confusion and miscommunication among federal agencies — where the stakes may be much higher.

It revolves around the Thule Air Force Base in northwest Greenland. It is America’s northernmost base, with closest proximity to the Arctic and Russia, and one of our most important strategic assets. Its mission is central to our early warning and response to strategic nuclear attacks from Russia and, potentially, China and North Korea. It is on the flight path of one of the most likely routes of nuclear attack on Canada and the U.S. from any of these enemies. This is all in today’s context of those three countries advertising growing nuclear arsenals and their improved delivery capability with hypersonic missiles, growing space capabilities, and other systems they claim can’t be defended against. Last week, Russia announced nuclear force drills in preparation for conflict with Ukraine.

The principal players in this drama are the U.S. Defense and State departments,



GREG NASH

Means: While President Biden expresses his commitment to “Made in America,” his State Department plans to outsource the management of a critical military base to foreign bidders.

and the governments of Greenland and Denmark (Greenland is a self-governing part of Denmark). Since the 1940s, Greenland has supplied the land for Thule Air Force Base to the United States, rent free. Over nearly 80 years, the U.S. has systematically upgraded the base so that it is now home to NORAD warning systems, Space Force, and strategic response to protect the U.S. and Canada. For the past five years, a major U.S. government contractor has managed a contract for base maintenance through its wholly owned Danish subsidiary.

Although diplomatic and American bureaucratic discussions have become oblique, the key issues are money and U.S. national security.

From an economic perspective, Greenland and Denmark want to be paid fairly for the use of the land on which the base is located. Clearly, the government of Greenland would expect to be compensated to support its economic

development and jobs for Greenlanders. As the governing of the country has become local and indigenous in recent years, these feelings have grown stronger. Similarly, Denmark would expect compensation for the use of its territory.

In the U.S., the bureaucratic questions have become: “Which agency should pay, how much, and to whom?” The Defense Department clearly uses the base and would be expected to cover much of the cost of running the base. But the Trump State Department negotiated with Denmark and Greenland to re-compete the contract, seeing the issue through a diplomatic and foreign economic development lens. The Biden State Department is moving forward on that to outsource the current base management contract as its vehicle for the payoff, upping the ante from the current \$500 million to a contract with a \$4 billion ceiling, and denying U.S. companies or their subsidiaries the ability to bid.

All of this is creating an obvious American national security issue of the highest order. American control and management of maintenance of this critical defense base has obvious security implications. In addition, during a serious confrontation with our adversaries or an outright attack, the immediate American surge of base personnel and support would be vastly complicated if base maintenance management were controlled by foreign powers who have only a limited direct role and stake in the conflict.

But that is exactly where this issue is headed. Following further State Department negotiations, the Defense Department has announced that only wholly-owned Danish companies can bid on the contract renewal. American companies and their Danish subsidiaries, even if they are the most efficient and experienced, are not allowed to bid at all — and neither cost nor technical capability, nor past performance, are central criteria in the award. Compromise national security and defense, ignore “Buy American,” and pay more money? That seems to be contrary to the speeches Biden has given on U.S. economic and national security strategies. It could become Afghanistan redux.

So, what to do? The answer is: 1) protect American national security; 2) pay the rent; 3) use American taxpayer money to Buy American. In short, get the best and most secure American contractor to maintain Thule Air Force Base, and then, separately, pay the Danish and Greenlanders a fair rent for the base to support their economies and economic/political interests. Yes, this might cost the Defense Department a little more (or maybe not), but it supports reasonable policy choices for security and appropriate payment to our foreign hosts. To cut that corner is false economics and really dangerous national security policy. The White House should stop this fiasco now.

Means is a writer (GradyMeans.com) and former corporate strategy consultant. He served in the White House as a policy assistant to Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. Follow him on Twitter @gradymeans1.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

How to combat the scourge of counterfeit medicine

From Arnaud Bernaert, head, Health Security Solutions, SICPA

I wish I could say the Jan. 18 piece, (“Drugmaker says counterfeit versions of its HIV medicines ended up in patients’ hands”) surprised me, but unfortunately, substandard and counterfeit

medicines are a worldwide problem, a booming organized crime industry growing at the staggering pace of 20 percent annually. The vast illegal marketplace of counterfeit goods is estimated to be worth \$2-4 trillion worldwide, and according to Global Financial Integrity, medicine counterfeiting is the single most lucrative market of all transnational crimes.

Not only do counterfeit medicines impact patients’ health and safety, but pharmaceutical companies are also impacted, suffering

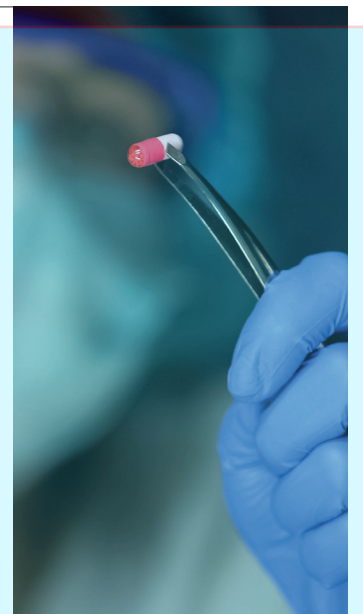
damage to their image, intellectual property losses and unfair competition. For governments, fake medicines compromise national health care policies, impacting life expectancy and public confidence in the health care system.

One of the solutions is embedding security labels with overt features that are easy to authenticate but hard to replicate. This provides consumers with a clear basis for trust in the product’s authenticity and can directly deter counterfeiters. A second step effort is no dif-

ferent in principle from covert watermarking, used by banks to secure their bank notes, or how governments mark cigarette packets to fully capture excise taxes. Reinforcing the connection between the physical product and its digital twin, in the tracking of the products with unforgeable records along its supply chain journey, is what will finally defeat counterfeiting criminals.

Lausanne, Switzerland

EMAIL YOUR LETTERS TO
LETTERS@THEHILL.COM



ISTOCK