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Europe's Need for a Damage-Limitation Option

Oliver Thränert*

In his speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin strongly criticised US plans for constructing elements of its missile defence shield in Poland and in the Czech Republic. This missile defence system could protect both the US homeland and parts of Europe. President Putin, however, warned that these systems could cause a militarisation of outer space along with yet another arms race. Many European authors have also articulated negative views about the US missile defence project. Echoing Mr Putin's arguments, these critics point out that these US defences in Europe would pose a threat to Russia's strategic nuclear deterrence posture and therefore could cause an arms race between NATO and Russia. Paradoxically, the same analysts often doubt the technical feasibility of strategic missile defences. Moreover, many believe that Iran, as opposed to the arguments put forward by the Bush administration, would not become a major threat to Europe, even if Tehran were to develop nuclear weapons. The mullahs, so the argument goes, are not irrational and would not have any reason to attack Europe or the US. Even if they intended to do so, NATO's nuclear forces would successfully deter them.

In essence, we are witnessing a cleavage between two schools of thought. On the one hand are the traditionalists (who are more vocal in Europe), who prefer traditional approaches such as diplomacy, non-proliferation, arms control and deterrence. On the other hand are the modernists or missile-defence advocates, who believe that measures to meet new threats such as the proliferation of long-range missiles and nuclear weapons should also include missile defences. This latter line of thinking is more influential in the US and countries such as Israel and Japan, which are exposed to Iranian or North Korean missiles.

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It was very unfortunate that President Putin's Munich speech activated the current missile defence debate. As a consequence, at least the European discussion has been framed along Russian arguments. But the central question has often been overlooked: Does Europe need a missile defence shield to protect its population against possible threats arising from the Middle East?

This paper first considers potential threats originating from the Middle East. It then looks at a scenario in which Iranian nuclear-tipped missiles might become a threat to transatlantic security. The main rationale for this scenario is to explain why classic nuclear deterrence, which we experienced during the cold war, would not be sufficient to meet possible new threats in the future. That section is followed by a brief analysis of Russian arguments concerning the planned US missile shield. The paper concludes with a few questions that need further discussion.

Threat perception

When looking at the Middle East, current threat perceptions mainly focus on Iran. Indeed, Tehran has one of the most advanced missile programmes in the region. But before asking what this means for European and transatlantic security, we should first recall that missiles are not weapons of mass destruction. What is decisive is the combination of missiles and nuclear warheads. Therefore, Iranian missiles would only become really dangerous if Tehran were to pursue its current policy of aiming at having a nuclear weapon option. The jury is still out on whether the UN Security Council could convince Iran through its policy of incrementally increased sanctions to change course. If so, the entire issue of missile defence for defending Europe and the US against possible Iranian threats would look completely different.[1]

Furthermore, a threat is a combination of capacity and intention. But we do not exactly know the purposes for which Iran is developing its missiles. Is Tehran seeking the capacity to deter foreign invasion, or in other words, are its intentions more defensive in nature? Or is Iran intending to become more assertive vis-à-vis its neighbours and at the same

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[1] For an analysis of the negotiation process, see O. Thränert, "Sorting out the Iran Puzzle: The International Community's Coordinated Iran Diplomacy has Opened Doors", *Internationale Politik* (transatlantic edition), Vol. 7, No. 4, 2006, pp. 32–38.

time keep foreign powers at bay? At this juncture, it appears almost impossible to answer this question, not least because even if current Iranian motivations are more defensive, this stance might change once Tehran acquires a nuclear missile capability.

Finally, the future development of the Iranian missile programme is very hard to predict. The Iranian missile programme is among the best-kept state secrets. Western intelligence information is often fragmentary and controversial. Time and again, this situation causes dissensions within the intelligence community. For instance, in 2001, most US agencies argued that Iran would be able to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by 2010. The CIA did not share that view. Today, US intelligence services estimate that Iran might develop an ICBM by 2015. Yet, there is an important 'known unknown' in this equation: To what extent will Iran continue to receive foreign assistance from North Korea (with which it has very close ties concerning missile development) and from Russian or Chinese technicians (apparently still working in Iran but whose exact knowledge and skills are unknown)?

The answer to this question is probably more important today than it was in the past. Iran is now at a crossroads in its ballistic missile programme. If Iran really wants to extend ranges to more than 2,000 km (its newest, single-stage Shahab-3 has a range of about 1,500 km), it needs to master the multistage technology. That phase is very complicated and ambitious. Many doubt that North Korea, which certainly benefited from the assistance of Russian technicians, was successful in this regard. While Pyongyang successfully tested a three-stage Taepo-Dong-1 on a single occasion in 1998, to the extent that the first two stages worked, a test of the Taepo-Dong-2 in 2006 was a complete failure. Considering that all current Iranian ballistic missiles are based on North Korean models, it is therefore questionable whether Iran will develop its own multistage missile in the near future. While there is no doubt that Iranian leaders are willing to extend the ranges of their missiles, it will presumably take them much longer than the US intelligence community expects. Nevertheless, as noted above, there are many uncertainties surrounding the analysis of this issue.[2]

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[2] See A. Seaboyer and O. Thränert, "What Missile Proliferation Means for Europe", *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2006, pp. 85–96.

At the same time, Europeans should not neglect the possibility that Pakistan may also become part of the equation. Islamabad already possesses about 60 nuclear weapons, although their type is unknown. The country is steadily enhancing its nuclear capabilities. Its most advanced ballistic missile, the solid-fuelled, two-stage Shaheen-2, has a range of about 2,500 km. This system, although successfully tested on repeated occasions, has not yet become operational. In the past, Pakistan has heavily benefited from Chinese assistance. Whether Beijing will continue providing support for Pakistan's missile developments remains to be seen.[3]

Today, the Pakistani leadership under President Pervez Musharraf is seen as a Western ally. At this time, however, his government is facing strong pressure from Islamic radicals. Therefore, many observers do not rule out the possibility that Pakistan sooner or later may become a failed state with nuclear weapons, or another Taliban-ruled (and this time nuclear-armed) country. Again, it is hard to predict what consequences this would imply for European and international security. It is possible, however, that missile defences could make sense as a damage-limitation option.

Why not simply rely upon nuclear deterrence?

Deterrence optimists such as pundits of neo-realism often take the view that a nuclear Iran could be successfully deterred just like the Soviet Union was during the cold war. Yet today, the strategic context looks completely different. In his famous debate with Kenneth Waltz on potential threats associated with the spread of nuclear weapons, Scott Sagan challenges the optimist neo-realist view. Sagan argues that further nuclear proliferation could result in small states being easily invaded by their nuclear weapon-equipped neighbours, as the latter may believe their new weapons will deter intervention by outside powers.[4] This is exactly the situation we might face if Iran goes nuclear. Many states in the Middle East already fear that a nuclear Iran might turn more aggressive and provide a cover for

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[3] See R.S. Norris, "Pakistan's Nuclear Forces, 2007", Nuclear Notebook, Natural Resources Defense Council, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 63, No. 3, May/June, 2007, pp. 71–73, p. 74.

[4] See S.D. Sagan, "Sagan Responds to Waltz", in S.D. Sagan and K.N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, New York, London: W.W. North & Company, 1995, p. 129.

proxies such as Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations. Leaders in Tehran may calculate that a foreign invasion to counter what may be perceived as Shia imperialism becomes less and less likely the more Iran's nuclear and missile capacities advance. In any event, many observers believe that for Iran, nuclear weapons are weapons of deterrence *and* power projection.[5] Against this background, the question is not whether the US, NATO or the international community could deter Iran from a nuclear attack. At stake is whether a nuclear Iran could deter international intervention aiming at re-establishing regional order against Iranian aggression or assertiveness. Observing recent history in Middle Eastern affairs, we might pose the question: Would the international community have sent troops to free Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991, if Saddam Hussein had already had nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching Europe or the US? [6]

In the past, during the cold war period, the main idea of deterrence was *not to use* military force in a relatively stable situation. In the future, in a world with more nuclear powers equipped with long-range ballistic missiles, countries feeling responsible for protecting international order would need to decide whether they want *to use* their forces against aggressions in a contingency that might result in severe damage caused by the use of nuclear weapons by the aggressor.[7]

Deliberately accepting one's own vulnerability, as the West did during the cold war, does not seem the appropriate strategic approach in such a context. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether missile defences could help the US and its European partners regain room for manoeuvre to intervene if there is a need to re-establish order in the Middle East or elsewhere. Missile defences of whatever nature will never work completely reliably. Still, even limited missile defences would have an impact on an aggressor's calculations, as he could not be certain actually to

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[5] See D. Dassa Kaye and F.M. Wehrey, "A Nuclear Iran: The Reactions of Neighbours", *Survival*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2007, pp. 111–28, p. 117; C. Dueck and R. Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 122, No. 2, 2007, pp. 189–205.

[6] See V.A. Utgoff, "Proliferation, Missile Defence and American Ambitions", *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 85–102.

[7] We should also not overlook the fact that nuclear deterrence during the cold war did not deter the Soviet Union from invading Afghanistan in 1979.

cause damage with his nuclear missiles. But for the country or coalition seeking to intervene against aggression by a nuclear newcomer, the important question is whether it could afford the damage possibly resulting from a nuclear response despite the missile defences in place, or if it decides instead that it cannot afford the risk and thus chooses not to intervene with troops, thereby avoiding nuclear retaliation by the new nuclear state in the first place.

Here it is held that there would possibly be a significant difference between the calculations of the US and those of the European allies for at least two reasons. First, before the Iranians developed missiles that could reach US territory, they would already have such weapons at hand that could threaten European cities. Therefore, in such a contingency, it might be easier for Washington to decide to send troops to the Middle East than it would be for Europeans to do so, although the US would certainly not like to see its European allies taken hostage by Iran. Second, in contrast with Europe, the US reputation as a world power would be at stake in a severe crisis in the Middle East. If a country like Iran, with its current Islamic leadership, follows an aggressive approach directed against its neighbours, and Washington is unable to protect its friends and allies and re-establish order because Iran could threaten US cities with its ICBMs, this would significantly undermine the reliability of US security guarantees in the Middle East and elsewhere. As a consequence, Washington could be in danger of losing its status as a world power.

For these reasons, even limited missile defences could be more valuable to the US than to Europe. In a scenario in which Iranian missiles could reach European but not US territory, even limited defences protecting Europe would make it much easier for Washington to go to war against Iranian aggression. Even if Tehran could hit targets in the US with missiles, the damage limitation resulting from missile defences could better enable the US to protect friends and allies in the Middle East against Iranian aggression, thereby maintaining US world leadership.

From a European perspective, the situation could look quite different. Europe is not a world power and thus does not have such a status to lose. European governments would not like to see Iran becoming a dominant power in the Middle East and undertaking proxy wars. Yet they would have a hard time convincing their populations to intervene in the Middle East against Tehran's will if this action could result in an Iranian nuclear attack in response. It is true that Tehran would need to calculate that American as well as British and French nuclear forces could strike back. But

could European governments be certain that deterrence works? More importantly, if they determine that it does, could European political leaders convince their constituencies of that view? Moreover, would European publics be convinced by the argument that if deterrence failed, the installed missile defences could limit the damage, and thus is it worth accepting the risk and participating in an invasion in the Middle East despite the possible consequences?

The argument put forward here is that missile defences are much more likely to provide Washington as a world leading power with more room for manoeuvre in the face of a crisis in the Middle East, caused for instance by a nuclear Iran, than they would for its European allies. Yet does this mean that missile defences do not make sense at all for Europe? Just because the US may have a different calculus and may intervene militarily, in such a situation it would still be perfectly appropriate for Europe to have a damage-limitation option at hand. As previously mentioned, this would also clearly be in Washington's interest, as the US needs to avoid the situation in which its European partners are taken hostage.

In addition, missile defences could contribute to stabilising crises. Iranian leaders are not irrational, but they may miscalculate in a crisis, as could any government. Given the nature of the Iranian leadership, it is also unlikely that it would establish crisis-management procedures such as hot lines or red telephones as the US and the former Soviet Union did, albeit only after their common experience of the Cuban missile crisis. Again, damage limitation through missile defences may make sense in the context of crisis mismanagement. Also, if the Iranians were to know that owing to missile defences the US or NATO (or both) would not be under great pressure to pre-emptively strike at Iran's nuclear weapons early on, Tehran might not find itself in a 'use them or lose them' situation. This prospect would again contribute to restoring stability.

Finally, missile defences can be seen as tools to support non-proliferation policies, not to weaken them. Such projects signal to countries interested in nuclear weapons and offensive long-range missiles that the states they want to threaten are capable of developing defences that could undermine the political aims the proliferators might be seeking to achieve through their weapons programmes. Therefore, missile defences would serve as disincentives to potential proliferators, thereby reducing their willingness to violate non-proliferation treaties.

To wrap up this section, missile defences are more likely to provide the US rather than Europe with more room for manoeuvre in the face of

new nuclear adversaries. At the same time, damage limitation is an important option for Europe, because the US might choose to act in a crisis in which the Europeans might hesitate to do so, and because missile defences could contribute to crisis stability. They could also support non-proliferation regimes, which are especially seen by Europeans as an important element of their policies.

US missile defence and Russia

The West has an interest in stable and reliable relations with Russia as a partner. One of the main obstacles on the way ahead is that Moscow still has not defined the role it wants to play in the world. Russia today perceives itself as a country that is back on the world scene and wishes to be respected as a great power. But what does Russia stand for, and what are its foreign policy priorities? Instead of dealing with these questions, many debates in Russian foreign policy circles currently focus on criticising the West for actions such as NATO enlargement.[8] If the West really wants to establish a longstanding and stable partnership with Russia, it should avoid taking all the arguments put forward by Russia at face value. This situation does not facilitate Russia finding its way in the future, a precondition for a fruitful relationship between Moscow and its Western partners. The present debate about missile defence is an interesting test case in that regard.

The planned US missile defences do not pose a threat to Russia. Although Russia and the West do not always share the same interests, the cold war and with it the ideological confrontation are gone. Today, the large conventional forces facing each other in Central Europe are obsolete. There is no longer a danger that a crisis could escalate from conventional to nuclear war.

As mentioned several times by the Bush administration, its current missile defence plans are not directed against Russia. Rather, the intention is to provide protection from single long-range missiles from Iran or North Korea. While the interceptors that are already stationed in Alaska and California as part of the ground-based midcourse defence system are well suited to defend the US homeland against possible attacks from North

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[8] See D. Trenin, *Russia's Strategic Choices*, Policy Brief No. 50, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., May 2007.

Korea, they are less well positioned to hit missiles originating from the Middle East. To that end, Washington wants to deploy 10 ground-based interceptors (GBIs) in Poland. These could intercept Iranian missiles either on their way to Central Europe or to the American east coast.

President Putin in effect accepted this line of the US argument when proposing that a Russian radar system stationed in Azerbaijan could be jointly used by Moscow and Washington in the future to detect Iranian missile launches. Such an approach would be better than using a new radar system to be built in the Czech Republic, the Russian president opined. Mr Putin also speculated about the positioning of US missile interceptors in Turkey rather than in Poland. This move would not threaten Russian interests. With these proposals, Mr Putin admitted that a missile threat from Iran could become real and that the US aim is to defend against threats originating from the Middle East, not to undermine Russia's strategic nuclear-deterrence posture.

In fact, the planned US missile defences could not fulfil such an intention with respect to Russia. To achieve the purpose of intercepting a large proportion of Russia's still numerous strategic nuclear missiles, Washington would need to deploy several hundred missile interceptors in Europe. The present US plans are based on 54 GBIs – 44 in the US and 10 in Europe – through 2013. More importantly, some of the Russian missiles would not cross Europe in order to reach US territory, but would cross the North Pole region; therefore, they could not be intercepted by systems stationed in Poland. Even if future US presidents were to decide to intensify US missile defence efforts, these would never reach a point in which missile defences could be relied upon to destroy or intercept all Russian nuclear forces in a first strike. After all, why should a US president decide to attack Russia without the certainty that New York City, for instance, could not be entirely destroyed by one large, Russian nuclear weapon in response? Indeed, if Russia were really concerned that US missile defences could endanger its second-strike capability, why has the Russian critique of US interceptors already stationed in Alaska and California thus far been rather lukewarm, while the rhetoric criticising the US plans to build up parts of its missile defences in Europe been so intense?

Prior to the June 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Russia had been escalating its campaign against the US missile shield. It warned of a possible new arms race – including the test firing of new Russian missiles. In addition, Moscow threatened to abrogate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which bans an entire class of US and Russian

ballistic missiles, and to suspend compliance with the reductions agreed in the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. These statements almost led to the point where the struggle about missile defences became more important than the other items on the original G8 agenda such as global warming. In making them, Moscow intended to underscore its importance as part of the family of the world's leading countries.

The reasons for this Russian policy are based on both Russian domestic politics and Moscow's foreign policy goals. Both are interrelated. As far as domestic politics are concerned, President Putin seeks to portray himself as a great statesman who is not to shy in confronting Western policies. In doing so, Mr Putin serves an anti-Western paranoia that is widespread not only among the Russian political elite but also among the Russian population.

In terms of foreign policy goals, President Putin aims at demonstrating that Russia is no longer as weak as it was during the 1990s. Therefore, the days of Moscow accepting Western policies that weaken the Russian position, such as NATO enlargement, are forever gone. The Russian leadership additionally wants to exploit ongoing transatlantic irritations. Furthermore, Moscow intends to negatively affect the European integration process and send a signal to new NATO members such as Poland and the Czech Republic, in whose national decision-making Russia still wants to have an influence. President Putin is aware that in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular – a country he understands very well owing to his excellent German language skills – the reputation of the Bush administration is very low. Mr Putin also realises that Washington missed explaining its missile defence intentions appropriately to European publics. By arguing that US missile defences could cause a nuclear arms race, the Russian president has hoped to diminish even further the reputation of the current US administration in Europe.

At the same time, by criticising the Polish and Czech governments, both of which are willing to allow Washington to base parts of its missile defences on their territories, President Putin has highlighted the different security policy orientations of European countries. These divergences are partly reflected in the criticism by other European governments that the new NATO members are relying too much on the US rather than being interested in developing European security and defence policies. Finally, by opposing missile defences in Poland and the Czech Republic – but not in Denmark or the UK, which have already passed decisions to contribute to respective US defence plans – and proposing that the US station these

systems in Turkey, President Putin wants to underline that there is still a difference between old and new NATO members and that Moscow continues to have a say as far as former Warsaw Pact members are concerned.

Furthermore, Russia is in the process of modernising its strategic nuclear forces, which remain a priority for Russian defence planners. Moscow continues to deploy silo-based and road-mobile Topol-M (SS-27) intercontinental missiles. Russian engineers are also working on new ballistic missile submarines armed with the new Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile. Moreover, Moscow is pursuing programmes to develop new long-range cruise missiles. Further modernisation projects include the Igla manoeuvrable warhead and a reported hypersonic delivery vehicle. Finally, Russia is engaged in fourth-generation nuclear weapons research, such as precision low-yield nuclear weapons, clean nuclear weapons (earth penetrators and neutron weapons) and weapons tailored to create special effects such as an electro-magnetic pulse. Owing to budgetary constraints, Russia's strategic nuclear forces will decrease in numbers in the near future. Nevertheless, given the aforementioned modernisation programmes, Moscow intends to keep its forces up to date. Apparently, the goal is to have a strategic nuclear fleet that is "small, but beautiful" long into the 21st century.[9]

Some of these projects are motivated by US missile defence plans and aim at overcoming them. Yet, the main rationale for Russia to continue placing many of its defence eggs into the basket of strategic nuclear forces is different. Russian leaders are well aware of the central role these weapons play in Russia's status as a world power. Next, for Russia, modernising its strategic nuclear weapons is still less expensive than keeping its conventional forces up to date, not least because all of its plans to create an effective state-of-the-art professional army have failed so far. Russian strategic thinkers are now mimicking NATO's flexible response strategy of the cold war to the extent that they see nuclear forces as the only weapons able to counter NATO's conventional superiority. This argument has grown more influential, particularly since NATO's enlargement. This process might be pursued even into former Soviet territory. Finally,

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[9] See P.I. Bernstein, J.P. Caves, Jr. and J.F. Reichert, *The Future Nuclear Landscape*, Occasional Paper No. 5, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., April 2007, pp. 25–27.

NATO's war against Serbia in 1999 indicated to Moscow that the transatlantic alliance does not hesitate to use force. Against this background, it seems fair to conclude that Moscow, in criticising US missile defence plans in Europe and warning against another arms race, is seeking to legitimise a strategic, nuclear modernisation programme that is already underway.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the West has an interest in a cooperative partnership with Russia. In fact, missile defences could become part of such a partnership. At present, the US Missile Defense Agency, together with Russia, conducts a Theatre Missile Defense Exercise Programme. The US has also invited Russia to cooperate on the development of defence technologies and share intelligence on common threats. Washington has even offered to permit Russian officials to inspect future US missile defence bases in Europe.[10] Discussions within the NATO–Russia Council to ensure transparency as well as to sort out possible joint endeavours in that regard should also be intensified. After all, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, especially in the Middle East, could turn out to be a threat for Russia as much as for the West. But before common missile defence projects can materialise, Moscow needs to decide whether it wants to cooperate in this field or whether it wants to continue to use the missile defence debate as a rhetorical tool to separate the Europeans from the Americans and create divisions within Europe.

Some believe that President Putin's proposal to use the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan jointly with the US in the future points in the right direction. This view seems questionable, however. The Gabala radar is part of the Russian early warning system. It could be useful for early warning purposes, but the Bush administration is mainly seeking an X-band radar capable of tracking and guiding defence interceptors towards Iranian offensive ballistic missiles. Therefore, it would be much better to install such a system in the Czech Republic as currently planned by Washington rather than in Azerbaijan, which is too close to the Iranian border. Many observers also believe the Gabala radar to be outmoded. Furthermore, the Gabala radar station is a significant element of Russia's national defence. Once the data from the Gabala radar as well as Russian space-based

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[10] See T. Shanker, "Pentagon Invites Kremlin to Link Missile Systems", *New York Times*, 21 April 2007.

surveillance systems confirm a missile attack, it would trigger nuclear retaliation. Therefore, it seems rather unlikely that Moscow would completely share all its data with other nations such as the US. By the same token, if some cooperation between the US and Russia were to take place, particularly if a crisis erupted in the Middle East, Washington could never be sure that Moscow was indeed sharing all of its data. Against this background, the US could not entirely rely upon cooperation with Russia in terms of the Gabala radar. Therefore, it could not renounce its plans for its own radar in the Czech Republic as part of its missile defence system.[11]

Issues that need further discussion

Even if one is in favour of the Bush administration's missile defence plans, some open questions remain. One concerns the technical feasibility of missile defence. Since 2002, when the flight test programme for the ground-based midcourse defence began, three out of six tests were successful intercepts. Still, many express doubts concerning the effectiveness of the system. They argue that those tests were not undertaken under realistic conditions. The GBIs to be deployed in Poland, which will consist of two rather than three stages, have not yet been tested. Given the fact that the US began intensifying its missile defence activities during the Reagan administration of the 1980s, one might ask how long it will continue to take to develop an effective strategic missile defence. Yet, exactly because it is so difficult and time-consuming to develop effective defences, it seems inappropriate not to increase the current efforts instead of waiting until today's potential missile threats develop into real ones.

Next, there is the issue of costs. The total estimated costs for the European missile defence project are $4.04 billion for the fiscal years 2007 to 2013.[12] Because the planned US defence systems to be deployed in Poland and the Czech Republic would not only defend Europe but would mainly be part of the US national homeland defence, Washington will cover the expenses. Should Europeans in the future be expected to share the missile

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[11] See A. Zagorski's comment in the Russia Profile Weekly Experts Panel, "Putin's Surprise", 15 June 2007 (retrieved from http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=Experts%27+Panel&articleid=a1181909384).

[12] See S.A. Hildreth and C. Ek, *Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe*, CRS Report for Congress, Code RL 34051, Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., updated 25 July 2007, p. 4.

defence bill, this could cause trouble for many European governments. Their main problem would be how to reconcile the cost-expansive transformation of conventional forces already engaged in international contingencies such as Afghanistan with the expected missile defence costs.

Moreover, the planned radar station in the Czech Republic and the GBIs to be deployed in Poland would be part of a multilayered, US national missile-defence architecture. Washington considers forward-based missile defences in Europe an additional option to other US interceptors to defend against Iranian missiles crossing European territory in their mid-course flight. These defences could also intercept Iranian ballistic missiles that are targeted against Central Europe. Washington continues to insist, however, that it remains in full control of these defences and does not intend to give the Europeans a say insofar as command and control are concerned. In other words, the US project clearly lacks a NATO component. For the Europeans this means that they will completely depend upon the US on an issue of strategic proportions (including the problem of the debris falling on European territory from missiles intercepted on their way to the US). Whether proposals to deploy two GBI bases in Europe – one controlled by the US and one by NATO – could contribute to a solution to this problem needs further discussion.[13]

Notably, the US GBIs in Poland could protect Central Europe, but not the southern flank of NATO's territory. The Atlantic alliance needs to rely upon the concept of the indivisibility of security. This means that all NATO members need to have the same protection against missiles. So far, in its own missile defence efforts NATO has focused on the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Defense Programme, aiming at improving the protection of deployed NATO forces in out-of-area contingencies. NATO has also been deliberating strategic missile defences. A related feasibility study concluded that a long-range ballistic missile defence system to protect the alliance would be technically feasible. In June 2007, NATO defence ministers agreed to conduct a study of a complementary anti-missile capability that would protect the south-eastern part of the alliance territory, which would not be covered by the planned US interceptors. How these projects could be combined with the US GBIs in Poland, particularly in

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[13] See S. Frühling and S. Sinjen, "NATO Missile Defense: The Political and Operational Case for a Two-Base Structure", *Rusi Journal*, December 2006, pp. 58–61.

relation to command and control of a NATO-wide missile defence, remains an open question.

Finally, even if all these issues could be resolved, another central question would remain: What impact would a NATO missile defence capability providing protection for Americans as well as Europeans have on the European security and defence policy (ESDP)? If missile defence were seen as an indispensable strategic tool for Europe, operated by NATO, would that not imply a diminishing role for the ESDP? This question is especially of concern to countries such as France, which puts an emphasis on the development of Europe as a security and defence actor. Although it is true that the Bush administration has taken the initiative on missile defence and may be criticised for not consulting its European partners appropriately on the issue, the EU itself has failed to adopt a clear position on this security and defence matter.[14]

Conclusion

The discussion about a missile defence system that could protect both the European and American populations has just begun. Governments will have to take decisions while not exactly knowing how the missile threat, for instance from the Middle East, will evolve. The costs and technical feasibility of missile defences will also remain unclear. In any case, Europe as well as the US should continue engaging in missile defence projects because the option of damage limitation is of the essence at a time when further nuclear and missile proliferation is taking place. At the end of the day, this is a question of world order. Missile defences could provide at least the US with more room for manoeuvre to re-establish order. Cooperating with Russia in the area of missile defence should be a Western goal, but it should not be seen as a precondition. Some important questions affecting NATO, such as command and control issues, need further consideration. Still, the respective debates should not give room for a transatlantic struggle at a time when cooperation seems more needed than ever.

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[14] See T. Bauer and F. Baumann, *Missiles for Europe? U.S. plans expose Europe's strategic weaknesses*, CAP Policy Analysis No. 3, Centre for Applied Policy Research, Munich, July 2007.

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