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# NATO's Missile Defense – Realigning Collective Defense for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

*This article examines the rationale and implications of NATO's missile defense program which was an appropriate, but problematic, response to collective defense requirements. By designing a theater-based missile defense in southeastern Europe, the United States has returned the question of credible collective defense back to NATO. The discussion provides a survey of the missile defense debates in NATO and the evolution of the concept under President Barack Obama. It then examines the challenge of constructively engaging Russia in the dynamics of NATO's missile defense decisions and deployments. The analysis concludes with an overview of what this re-prioritization of collective defense in means for realigning America's role in NATO.*

## Key Words

Missile defense, NATO, Iran, Turkey, Russia, containment, collective defense, alliances.

## The Dilemma of Modern Collective Defense

Missile defense has been at the core of global security dilemmas since the advent of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missile delivery systems. During the Cold War, missile defenses were seen as undermining the nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was because missile defense can increase incentives to launch first-strike nuclear attacks if an enemy's retaliatory response is survivable. At best, associated technological competition can cause arms races. In 1972, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the US and the Soviet Union limited missile defenses and focused the strategic balance on mutual assured destruction. For some American critics of arms control, however, this treaty restricted America's capacity for national defense. This perspective was made popular by President Ronald Reagan, who's "Strategic Defense Initiative" had a stated goal of helping eliminate nuclear threats entirely. Physicists and experts regularly remind policymakers

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that the technology is unfeasible and the risk of new arms races high. Yet what American politician wants to argue against defending an American city against nuclear attack even if there is a logic to raising concerns about missile defenses? Missile defense has thus been popular and support for it has become a political litmus test in the United States - regardless of the science or risks.

NATO has struggled since the end of the Cold War over how to make collective defense relevant absent the Soviet threat. As Joseph Lepgold pointed out in 1998, during the Cold War nuclear deterrence worked for collective defense because: "...once anything more than a minimum nuclear deterrent force is provided, it can often be extended to others at little cost. The United States has not hesitated in covering, albeit often implicitly, many states with its nuclear umbrella."<sup>1</sup> Lepgold noted that it would be difficult to persuade allies to undertake a range of new missions absent a unifying threat. The incentives of allies to undersupply capabilities or take risks was exposed in new missions like in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya where victory was achieved for almost in spite of NATO.<sup>2</sup> Now, as dangers of nuclear proliferation rise, the question of whether the allies in NATO can regain their footing on collective defense is a primary concern. A fundamental question arises for NATO members as to whether conventional assumptions

of nuclear deterrence applies to a state like Iran. Iran's conventional military power is antiquated and containable by the collective military power in NATO. However, an Iran with nuclear weapons introduces dangerous uncertainty to the calculus of deterrence. Even a minimal Iranian nuclear capability could enhance Iranian leverage in the Persian Gulf-making it difficult to maintain the flow of oil. The question is increasingly urgent given reports in late 2011 from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about the advancement of Iran's nuclear program.

Collective defense planning only occasionally arose in NATO after the Cold War as new members joined the alliance. For example, after Russia invaded Georgia in summer 2008, the Polish Prime Minister said that: "Poland and the Poles do not want to be in alliances in which assistance comes at some point later- it is no good when assistance comes to dead people."<sup>3</sup> Military conflicts, like the 2003 invasion of Iraq also raised concerns- in this case in Turkey. Before the war, Ankara requested that NATO coordinate for collective defense in the event of a retaliatory attack by Iraq against Turkey. This request was rejected by some allies who believed the best way to protect Turkey was to stop a US invasion of Iraq. In crisis, NATO members refused for nearly a month to plan for defense of Turkey. Collective defense planning eventually moved

forward, but only after the US shifted the discussion out of the political realm of NATO and into its military committee (which then did not include France).<sup>4</sup> The allies in NATO had a bigger problem as security management challenges are increasingly non-military- ranging from cyber-attack, energy security, climate change, terrorism, demographics, and economic crises.<sup>5</sup> The military utility of NATO seemed increasingly outdated- particularly as it struggled with basic warfighting in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya- and especially if it could not address new collective defense requirements.

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By 2008, when NATO first contemplated missile defense, there were over 120 ballistic missile launches worldwide- though most of these were conducted by American or European allies.<sup>6</sup> Iran, in particular, is a significant concern to European NATO members given its increasing proximity to missile ranges. Iran has the largest force of ballistic missiles in the Middle East and the second largest in the underdeveloped world after North Korea. Iran appears

to be developing capacity to produce weapons grade nuclear material as suggested by the IAEA in November 2011.<sup>7</sup> Iran's existing missile capability (about 1,000 total short and long-range) is mainly old Soviet-era SCUDs. However, Tehran has been seeking Russian nuclear-capable, intermediate-range, strategic air-launched cruise missiles (KH-55 Granat) and appears to be consolidating the basis of an indigenous ballistic missile program.<sup>8</sup> The internal "Shahab" system has been claimed by Iran to test successfully up to 1,300 kilometers (Shahab-3). Iran has also researched a 2,500-kilometer range (Shahab-5) missile and launched suborbital rockets implying a nascent capacity for inter-continental ballistic missiles. For now, these systems may put southern Europe in range of Iranian missile launches albeit with limited accuracy.<sup>9</sup> There is thus growing allied consensus on Iranian objectives but disagreement on the pace and degree of capabilities. For example, while Iran was developing advanced centrifuge capacity, they also experienced technical setbacks. Iran likely remained some distance away from even a crude nuclear weapon test and without effective long-range delivery systems. Nonetheless, the combination of Iran's behavior outside the norms of acceptable international behavior gave the NATO allies legitimate concern. As Victor Utgoff writes: "Widespread proliferation is likely to lead to an

occasional shoot-out with nuclear weapons, and that such shoot-outs will have a substantial probability of escalating to the maximum destruction possible with the weapons at hand. This kind of world is in no nation's interest."<sup>10</sup>

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Even with agreement on the concept, the NATO allies also confront the reality of physics and technological constraints. As Philip Coyle and Victoria Samson state: "...shooting down an enemy missile is like trying to hit a hole-in-one in golf when the hole is moving at 17,000 mph. And if an enemy uses decoys and countermeasures, missile defense is like trying to hit a hole-in-one when the hole is moving at 17,000 mph and the green is covered with black circles the same size as the hole."<sup>11</sup> Sometimes a defensive capacity can make offensive war more tempting- and thus scare other countries into balancing efforts or even incentivize "use-it-or-lose-it" pre-emptive wars. Finally, even if ballistic missile defenses were effectively deployed to cover all NATO territory, these systems would not stop cruise missiles, which fly low and fast and can carry a nuclear payload, or terrorists with a weapon parked on a boat in a

harbour.<sup>12</sup> There are about 75,000 cruise missiles worldwide relative to less than a dozen, mainly friendly, nations that have ballistic missiles with ranges longer than 1,000 kilometers.<sup>13</sup> The point about cruise-missiles is important because even if a ballistic missile defense system works, its presence creates incentives to circumvent the system. Defenses that do not work can create a false-sense of security, while simultaneously damaging essential security relationships.<sup>14</sup>

Still, the idea of a missile attack with nuclear weapons on a NATO ally mandates serious policy consideration. If Iran got nuclear weapons, other governments in the Middle East might feel the need to get nuclear weapons. Thus it would be preferable for NATO members to provide reassurance of a defense shield and thus disuade against a chain-reaction of regional nuclear proliferation. One Saudi diplomat was asked how to respond to a nuclear Iran and answered: "With another nuclear weapon."<sup>15</sup> The initial American response, developed under the administration of former President George W. Bush envisioned the European systems as a Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) element of the American national Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS). The system would have incorporated ten two-staged Ground-Based Interceptors in Poland and an X-band radar in the Czech Republic (and integrated into a radar system in Israel).

This plan was negotiated bilaterally by Washington in discussions with Poland and the Czech Republic sidestepping NATO consultation. Furthermore, the decision was announced without a testing program. As the the Directorate of Operational Test and Evaluation (which worked with the US Department of Defense) stated in 2007: “The proposed GMD expansion to the European theater has not accomplished system engineering adequate to support the development of a test program sufficiently detailed to certify a high probability of working in an operationally effective manner.”<sup>16</sup> This was especially problematic because ranges and trajectories require a system based on two-stage rockets which were unproven.

The initial American plan had substantial warfighting deficiencies unique to the European theater of operations. This was because of proximity and reduced time for deployment in the geometry between Iran and Europe made the system more operationally appropriate for continental American defenses than European. The NATO allies nevertheless accepted the American plan seeing it better to engage and influence the systems’ progress as it was proceeding in any event.<sup>17</sup> Serious intra-alliance concerns predictably emerged. If the system did work, would the United States employ its national ballistic missile defenses to protect European allies, or instead reserve them for American

territorial defense? Or, would a missile bound for Washington be shot at but risk spreading nuclear debris raining down on Germany or France? Such concerns made European allies seek command and control roles in the NATO system. However, technology and ranges mean that a missile launched from Iran at a European target would provide only 20 minutes to detect, track, and intercept. Thus launch decisions would have to be taken quickly and with precision—something Washington believed only it could guarantee.<sup>18</sup>

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This program was viewed with deep mistrust in Moscow and negatively impacted US-Russia relations. Russia staked out strong opposition to NATO’s missile defense concepts. This approach was pursued to gain concessions on other issues, such as Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO.<sup>19</sup> At times, Russian leaders also seemed to use missile defense concerns to pander to domestic political sentiment. Nevertheless, the United States worsened the situation by appearing patronizing and insensitive to Russian security concerns as leaders in Moscow perceived them, not as Washington thought they

should perceive them. For example, then US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice characterized Russian threats of military redeployments as “pathetic rhetoric” that reflected views which “border on the bizarre.”<sup>20</sup> Russia, in turn, made clear it would pursue missile development to circumvent NATO systems. Moscow also threatened to deploy missiles with ranges of up to 400 kilometers in Kaliningrad to target missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. Direct pressure was put on the Czechs the day they announced their participation— with Moscow announcing disruptions in the flow of energy supplies in the country.<sup>21</sup>

## The Obama Reset

In Winter and Spring 2009, newly-elected president Barack Obama finished a review of existing missile defense plans for Europe. The Obama team opted to reset European missile defense along a premise that programs should be aligned with threats and capabilities. The NATO allies were pleased to adjust as they had been asked by the Bush administration to approve a concept they were uneasy with. In addition to bypassing NATO, the Bush administration often sold their concept with scare tactics. For example, they included in NATO briefings a computer simulation of a hypothetical long-range ballistic missile attack from Iran against each allies’ capital city. This was an Iranian capability that did

not exist nor would it for some time. However, the pressure made it politically hard for allied representatives to assess with a measured response.<sup>22</sup> The initial NATO consensus approach consolidated by the Bush administration was thus thin and mainly a signal to potential aggressors: “The Allied defense posture must make it clear to any potential aggressor that NATO cannot be coerced by threats or use of weapons of mass destruction, and that the Alliance has the capability to respond effectively.”<sup>23</sup> NATO officials indicated there was value in “dissuading countries from developing missile capabilities in the first place, secondly in deterring an adversary who might think well, we’ve got missiles we potentially could use them but we can’t be sure that we’re going to have the intended effect and, you know, does it still make sense from...the adversary’s perspective, to launch an attack.”<sup>24</sup> Operational concerns pervaded NATO—especially the lack of coverage for the southeastern countries most vulnerable to Iranian missile ranges. As then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer indicated in 2007: “When it comes to missile defense, there shouldn’t be an A League or a B League within NATO.”<sup>25</sup> For Poland, the main benefit was that the systems would represent a commitment of about 100 American troops (and Patriot missile batteries) onto their territory, which to them signaled credibility behind Washington’s

commitment to Polish security. Thus many Polish advocates (and missile defense industry advocates) saw the Polish and Czech commitments as a litmus test for American politicians. This was less so in the Czech Republic where public opinion was overwhelmingly opposed to the government's participation. Still, for all of the allies, once having set out and approved, with political buy-in, a major course correction was not an easy bridge to cross.

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Meanwhile, American concerns over costs and burdensharing also emerged over the Bush plan. In 2008, Congress cut \$85 million allocated to the Polish and the Czech deployments pending final approval by each country and independent technical evaluations. Congress required that the Defense Department certify that two-stage interceptors have “demonstrated, through successful, operationally realistic flight testing, a high probability of working in an operationally effective manner” before acquisition and deployment.<sup>26</sup> In addition to operational concerns, the question of why the United States should bear the sole cost of a European system

grew in Congress - though its own laws made technology-sharing among the allies hard to achieve and thus limited their participation.<sup>27</sup> Still, there was considerable political risk in the United States for the Obama administration to abandon the initial Bush plans. Backers of the Bush administration's approach argued Obama was going to “sell-out” American allies in Poland and the Czech Republic and was thus weak on national security.<sup>28</sup> Still, the European perspective was primed to welcome a new look at European missile defense. In November 2008, President Nicholas Sarkozy said that missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic would “bring nothing to security” but rather will “complicate things and move them backward.”<sup>29</sup> France's Minister of Defense, Herve Morin went further, asking about the expense of a “huge cost” of missile defense, asking “who would hold the key?” and added that: “There are risks, yes, but to say that there is a threat today would need to be checked.”<sup>30</sup>

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President Obama proved domestic critics wrong by showing that the United States was covering more NATO

members and addressing threats from Iran faster and with greater precision. The administration rectified three inter-related dynamics all of which had been hindering American national security. First, the United States focused attention on Iran but made clear that if that problem could be solved with Russian help, Moscow's concerns could be alleviated. US Under Secretary of State William J. Burns indicated in February 2009, regarding Iran: "If through strong diplomacy with Russia and our other partners we can reduce or eliminate that threat, it obviously shapes the way at which we look at missile defense."<sup>31</sup>

A private letter to this effect was sent by President Obama to his Russian counterpart, Dmitri Medvedev. The letter specified that if Russia engaged in diplomacy that produced effective results in turning back Iran's nuclear program there would be no need for the European ballistic missile defense deployments.<sup>32</sup> Russia hinted in response that it too then might not need to make new missile deployments. The problem, however, was that Russia knew the United States had little to bargain with given that the existing missile defense plans had scant technological basis for success. In 2009, NATO thus adjusted the plan on its merits, less so as a bargaining chip with

Russia than on the merits of how the system would work for collective defense. NATO's new look at missile defense stressed that: "Based on the technical and political military analysis of these options, we judge that missile threats should be addressed in a prioritized manner that includes consideration of the level of imminence of the threat and the level of acceptable risk."<sup>33</sup>

The new NATO missile defense architecture- the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) would proceed in four distinct phases.<sup>34</sup> Drawing out a sequence starting with most immediate regional threats made sense given public intelligence estimates

that fruition of any nuclear threat from Iran was not likely before 2015.<sup>35</sup> The first two phases reflect the convergence of immediate threat

concerns and viable technology. The second two- on much longer time horizons - are based on technology that does not exist. These later phases are more political in nature and create new self-inflicted problems for NATO. Phase One is being implemented with a focus on *Aegis* Ballistic Missile Defense ships equipped with SM-3 Block IA interceptors which are proven and effective. These missiles target an enemy missile close to launch, when it is slow and ascending with higher

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accuracy and speed. The naval vessel *USS Monterey* was deployed in 2011 as part of a rotational deployment of *Aegis* cruisers into the Mediterranean Sea. In September 2011, Turkey agreed to host a land-based early warning radar as a key part of this first deployment. Phase Two is set to be completed in 2015 and would deploy a land-based SM-3 missile defense interceptor site in Romania with a new kind of interceptor - the SM-3 Block IB. Phase Three would deploy in 2018 if technology agreed and include missile interceptors with a longer range - the conceptualized SM-3 Block IIA would be deployed. This phase is based on technology that does not exist nor is it likely to and thus seems intended more to reassure Poland. If the plan did function, it would broaden the range of area covered by NATO missile defenses - and reignite serious concerns in Russia. Similarly, Phase Four, set for 2020 would target medium and intermediate range missiles and include Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile threats to the United States...and be problematic for Russia.

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Gaining Turkish cooperation in the deployment of an early warning radar system was not a given. The missile

defense systems were seen as most benefiting Israel and turning Turkey into a frontline state against Iran whilst Turkey sought better relations with Tehran. Turkey held out for a year before agreeing to the radar installations on its territory. Ankara initially insisted on a role in command and control of systems deployed in Turkey. However, this was a non-starter for the United States which maintains that crisis scenarios require strict American command and control. Turkey held out, successfully, for official NATO language that would not specify an adversary- especially Iran.<sup>36</sup> This was easy enough for NATO- its founding treaty in 1949 never named the Soviet Union. NATO officials now note that there are many countries within range of the European area of collective defense with the capacity for missile delivery systems. As NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in November 2010: “We do not want to single out particular countries...More than 30 countries already have- or are aspiring to acquire- missile technologies with a range that can hit NATO territory. So there is no need to single out or name specific countries, because this is an evolving threat.”<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, there was a tension in that to sell the system to Russia (and thus assuage allies’ concerns about alienating Russia), the system required an emphasis on Iran. Yet for Turkey, this increases concerns about Iran’s reactions, illustrated by the

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman in late 2011 who stated of Turkey that: “We expect our friend and neighbor to be more careful and not prepare the ground for policies which would lead to tension and, beyond any doubt, to complicated consequences as well.” He added that: “Strengthening NATO’s presence in the region itself would be counterproductive to both regional security and also that of Turkey.”<sup>38</sup> And yet, showing the difficulty in bridging American priorities, in December 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: “It’s not directed at Russia, it’s not about Russia, it’s frankly about Iran”-discarding Turkish concerns and agreed NATO policy.<sup>39</sup>

## Russia’s Perceptions and Realities

After the announcement in 2009 that the American concept for missile defenses would be reigned, Russia reacted favorably. Progress ensued on completion of a new version of strategic arms reductions and, for a period, a new atmosphere seemed attainable in US-Russian relations. Nevertheless, by 2012, Russian opposition to the NATO missile defense plans hardened again. Russian leaders threatened compliance with arms reduction treaties and to target their own missiles at NATO missile defense sites. American and NATO officials continued to stress the limited nature of the systems and to reassure Moscow and,

if possible, even link it into the system. However, as Michael McFaul (then senior White House adviser on Russia, and now US Ambassador to Moscow) stated succinctly of the Russians on missile defense: “They don’t believe us.”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, whatever the American or NATO perception of intent, it is important to understand that the Russian view is not solely domestic posturing. It is true, as American negotiators point out, that in their private discussions with their counterparts, Russian officials have been far less belligerent in their opposition to European based missile defenses for NATO.<sup>41</sup> However, Russia has significant diplomatic and technical concerns which cannot be so easily discounted.

Diplomatically, the Russians have, in their view, considerable reasons not to trust NATO. While in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the US and Russian leaders (then Soviet) worked successfully on major nuclear arms treaties, the famous phrase of President Ronald Reagan of “trust but verify” has been turned back onto the United States. Russians assert they were told in the early 1990s that NATO enlargement would not go beyond integrated Germany. By 2012, the alliance of 16 had become an alliance of 29 (including former Soviet Republics). Russians were told during the NATO enlargement process that the alliance was purely defensive and would never attack anyone. Yet just days

after the first countries from the former Warsaw Pact were admitted (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic), NATO launched an offensive bombing campaign against Serbia- Russia's friend. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Russia gave open access to its airspace and to US base access in former Soviet republics near to Afghanistan. This was done on the assumption it would be temporary yet American bases remained. In 2002, the US withdrew from the anti-ballistic missile treaty which the Russians feared would undermine the global nuclear balance. By 2009, NATO was- against strongly stated Russian opposition - declaring eventual membership for Ukraine and Georgia. From the Russian point of view, these are not merely domestic political problems but rather reflect a belief that NATO ignored Russia's perception of legitimate security concerns.

Russia has considerable policy leverage as it can exert pressure on the United States and complicate NATO consensus processes. Russia holds an essential key to economic pressure on Iran. This means Russia has leverage but also a responsibility to be a constructive actor regarding Iran's nuclear program if it wishes to alleviate its concerns over missile defense. Russia also exerts influence over NATO transit routes into Afghanistan and energy supplies into Europe. Crucially, all the NATO allies genuinely want a positive and

constructive relationship with Russia and want a constructive solutions to impasses over missile defenses. Still, comments from the US Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, in December 2011 are both appropriate from the perspective of NATO and at the same time, more reason for concern in Moscow: "Whether Russia likes it or not, we are about defending NATO-European territory against a growing ballistic missile threat...We will adapt the timing and the details to that threat, which is why the focus of our joint effort ought to be about how to figure out how to reduce that threat rather than trying to threaten and retaliate for a deployment that has nothing to do with Russia."<sup>42</sup>

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Russian technological concerns cannot be easily dismissed because science is a rather immutable reality. The total number of missile interceptors envisaged by the start of the Third Phase of NATO's deployment would reach as high as 500 interceptors based on more than 40 ships. This would grant US missile defense mobility up into the Black Sea and up into the high north Arctic and include land bases in Poland

and Romania both of which move the system into range of Russian ballistic missiles.<sup>43</sup> Moscow also asserts that forward deployed radar systems could target three hundred times more missiles for detection than currently deployed American radars.<sup>44</sup> Russia has thus sought written guarantees to limit total missile interceptors numbers and speed. Russian negotiators want a limit of 3,5 kilometers per second which would make the NATO missile interceptors unable to catch up to Russian ballistic missiles. Russia is laying down a marker on Phase Three and Four of the NATO plans which envision SM-3 IIA and IIB missiles with expected speeds of 4,5 kilometers per second at least. The United States, as with the Bush plan, thus continues to risk significant alienation from an essential national security partner over missile defense technology that does not exist.<sup>45</sup> Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen testified to Congress that he had “confidence that we can continue to pursue that path” of the SM-3 IIB, even though “the missile you’re talking about I know doesn’t exist yet.”<sup>46</sup>

American officials repeatedly insist that the missile defense system is not a threat to Russian security- but seldom account for the possibility that Russia might define its own national security perceptions. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov asserts that missile defense will seriously poison Euro-Atlantic

cooperation on a range of issues. Lavrov and other senior Russian officials assert that the system is really a phased approach towards the global defense system that Moscow perceived under the Bush plans. Lavrov asserted in November 2011 that: “These plans are being implemented with no consideration for Russia’s legitimate concerns, thus undermining the principle of indivisible security.”<sup>47</sup> NATO has addressed these concerns by consistently offering Russia a role in the missile shield, perhaps incorporating a Russian early warning radar system into it. However, the Russian position has been that they should have joint command-and-control. This would not be feasible as it would both provide a Russian veto over collective defense decisions in NATO and undermine command and control in a crisis.

The problem for NATO is that Russian concerns about the higher speed missile interceptors which would be deployed in Phase Three and Four have scientific legitimacy behind them. As leading missile defense physicist Theodor Postol and analyst Yousaf Butt write: “whether or not the planned system is *intended* against Russia, the salient point is that it will have some inherent *capability* against Russia’s strategic forces.”<sup>48</sup> Postol and Butt remind NATO that missile defenses, especially in the European context, are not proven to work- even in phase one an two- in battle- tested scenarios. Moreover, missile defense

systems like that planned in NATO are dangerous since they are easily countered with decoys or by building more missiles to overwhelm the defense systems. Of course, that would prompt NATO to need more defenses, and thus further erode Russian confidence- provoking military counter-measures if only to assure Moscow's credibility. Even the revamped Obama plan, Postol and Butt conclude, seriously undermines NATO's common defense. They point out that: "Exaggerating the abilities of missile defense is dangerous...It suggests that political and military leaders have capabilities and options that they, in fact, do not have." They add that: "There have been no tests of these systems under realistic conditions... the current systems cannot reliably intercept a single test warhead that is launched at a known time on a known trajectory, even when there are no counter-measures or decoy warheads involved."<sup>49</sup> Consequently, at least regarding phases three and four of the NATO missile defense plan, the alliance is getting no obvious security benefits and simultaneously raising its own costs relative to Russia- which is a decrease in allied security.

Now, the Russians insist on a written treaty guarantee to limit the numbers and kinds of missiles which could be

deployed as interceptors. US officials reject that, saying they would provide written assurances but not binding commitments. To do otherwise would be to give a non-NATO member a veto over NATO's collective defense. Even if the Obama administration wanted to involve Russia at an operational level or to agree to treaty limits, it would not gain approval in the United States Senate. Some Senators argue that defenses should be deployed in the Republic of Georgia- seemingly guided by a desire to signal that America can and will do what it wants, regardless of Russia's concerns.

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Even achieving basic integration of Russia into the defense system- as both the Bush and Obama administration hoped- would face opposition in

the United States Senate. Thirty-nine Republican members wrote to President Obama in April 2011 opposing providing any "early warning, detection, or tracking" information to Russia- concluding that "any agreement would allow Russia to influence the defense of the United States or our allies...would constitute failure of leadership." They added that President Obama would have to: "make clear in every engagement with Russia that it will have no say in the location, capability, or timing of US missile defense deployments with a

NATO military alliance...We trust this includes the location of interceptors in Europe, including in Romania and Poland, and missile defense radars whether in Turkey, the Republic of Georgia, or another location that is most advantageous for the defense of the American people.”<sup>50</sup>

For the Russians, this kind of unpredictability drives their desire for legally binding commitments- even if that quest is unrealistic given the mood of the United States Senate. This dichotomy leads senior Russian diplomats like Sergei Lavrov to say: “They keep repeating

not to worry, not to worry, it is not targeted against you...If we are to be treated as a potential strategic partner, we’d like people to have respect for our intellectual abilities...

We need legally binding arrangements, because good intentions come and go, while military capability is what stays.”<sup>51</sup>

To the Russians, NATO not only appears unserious about involving them, but even if it did, it would not give Russia a say over how the system works. Rather Moscow would be left to trust the good intentions of the NATO allies. A simple exercise illustrates this problem- would America and NATO be comfortable with the same outcome in reverse- i.e. being totally dependent on the good will of Russia to guarantee their defense?

There is also a tension in NATO’s missile defense plans between the diplomatic objective of engaging Russia within the program, and the technological-operational dynamics behind the missile shield concept. This is particularly true, as Richard Weitz has shown, in the areas of information sharing, rapid decision-making, and the sensitivities of technology transfer.<sup>52</sup> As Weitz notes, sharing sensitive technology even among the NATO allies has always been difficult – thus either opening sensitive NATO technology to Russia or relying on Russian technology for the

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NATO defense plans would be a risky proposition. This would be especially true if, as Weitz writes: “NATO policymakers fear that intelligence

about their BMD systems and tactics might find its way to Iran, North Korea, or other states of proliferation concern.”<sup>53</sup> The Bush administration had actually put ambitious proposals to integrate Russia into the system to include planning, sharing radar facilities, and providing for Russian inspections of US missile defense facilities. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a Republican who served president Bush, even suggested tht the US could agree to not operationalize the entire system until Iran had demonstrated clear

missile capacity that would threaten the European area.<sup>54</sup> Thus there is a core dilemma in that policy options for NATO are simultaneously too few concessions for Russia, and too many for the United States.

## Conclusion

NATO has adopted an appropriate missile defense concept with an initial focus on theater missile defenses, diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran, and ongoing engagement with Russia to achieve common threat management. Should Iran test a nuclear weapon, the NATO missile defense system will be essential to any containment regime.<sup>55</sup> The best case would be a dynamic where a major change in internal priorities moved Iran to reject nuclear weapons completely.<sup>56</sup> That would, however, raise an important question: If there were no Iranian threat would NATO still build the missile defense system? Russia suspects NATO would, and thus sees a threat. As former

US Senator Sam Nunn states: “The United States and Russia need to pause – take a deep breath and realize that we are at a crossroads in our strategic nuclear relationship...We could stumble to the precipice of strategic danger if we and our Russian friends play a foolish zero-sum game with missile defense.”<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, one fundamental point is key about missile defense – it has shown that NATO can organize around its core foundation of collective defense. This will be especially important as America’s role in Europe recedes and a new emphasis on Asia grows.<sup>58</sup> In the coming years, Europe will have to assume lead responsibility for the kinds of “out-of-area” activity that have dominated the alliance since the end of the Cold War. While there are serious challenges remaining for missile defense in NATO, the new approach shows that the United States can lead the alliance in its core mission of collective defense in a new security environment and in innovative, flexible, and adaptive ways.

## Endnotes

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