

Missile Defense System

NATO and Missile Defense

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At their Lisbon summit meeting in November 2010, NATO leaders decided to develop a capability to defend “NATO European populations, territory and forces” against limited ballistic missile attack. They then met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev

and agreed to explore a cooperative NATO-Russia missile defense arrangement. While the Alliance is making progress on its missile defense system, the prospects for cooperation with Russia appear murky. NATO nevertheless should leave the door open for a cooperative arrangement.

NATO leaders decided to make missile defense an Alliance mission for differing reasons. Washington has long sought a capability to defend the United States against limited ballistic missile attack from countries such as Iran and North Korea, and has deployed 30 ground-based interceptor missiles (GBIs) in Alaska and California. The Bush administration proposed to put a third GBI site in Poland. The Obama administration in 2009 changed to the phased adaptive approach (PAA) based on the SM-3 interceptor, which it believes offers earlier protection against Iranian missiles, which can now reach Turkey and parts of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. The PAA is “adaptive” in that the capabilities of the SM-3 are planned to be upgraded to tackle longer-range missiles in anticipation that Iranian missiles will over time acquire greater range.

Most NATO members do not worry much about the prospect of an Iranian missile attack but had other reasons to support a NATO missile defense system. For Central European members, the plan offers a welcome and reassuring U.S. presence, particularly in Romania and Poland, which will host SM-3 interceptors and small detachments of U.S. military personnel to operate them. Other NATO allies see missile defense as assuming part of the deterrence and defense burden and perhaps enabling less reliance on—

and a reduction in the number of—U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. Still other allies judged this issue to be of significant importance to Washington and simply went along, particularly as the U.S. military will bear most of the costs.

Despite the 2010 agreement to explore cooperation on missile defense, the NATO-Russia dialogue has been stalemated over the past year by Moscow’s demand for a “legal guarantee” that U.S. missile defenses would not be directed against Russian strategic missiles. The Russians worry particularly about Phase 4 of the PAA, when the SM-3 is to acquire some capability against intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Even if it wished to, the Obama administration cannot offer a legal guarantee, as it would have zero chance of ratification in the Senate, where the missile defense issue unfortunately has become highly politicized.

The Russian concern that missile defenses could affect the strategic balance has validity. If missile defense capabilities continue to develop, and the United States and Russia continue to reduce their strategic offensive forces, at some point there will need to be a serious discussion—and perhaps a negotiation—about the offense-defense relationship. But that is down the road. It is difficult to see the SM-3, even in Phase 4, posing much if any threat to Russian ICBMs.

If NATO and Russia can get past Moscow’s call for a legal guarantee, the sides’ ideas on practical cooperation seem to coincide on many areas, including transparency, joint exercises and a jointly manned data sharing center. So the challenge for NATO is getting Russia to yes on missile defense cooperation.

That may not be easy. Vladimir Putin, who will return to the Russian presidency on May 7, has taken a hard-nosed stance on missile defense and the need for a legal guarantee from the United States—something he did not seek when exploring missile defense cooperation with the Bush administration.

NATO leaders will meet in Chicago in May and undoubtedly reaffirm their commitment to missile defense. In the meantime, NATO should take several steps. First, Washington and the Alliance should offer Moscow maximum transparency regarding NATO plans and the capabilities of the SM-3. That includes reiterating the offer by the U.S. Missile Defense Agency to allow Russian experts (con’d)

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Russia's Negative View of the European Phased Adaptive Approach

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Russia's perspective on the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) has been remarkably consistent. Moscow opposes the missile defense program, alleging that it is somehow detrimental to Russia's deterrence and demanding that the United States provides a legally binding security guarantee that its missile defenses are not aimed against Russia.

The EPAA includes four phases: phase 1 (2011 timeframe) consisting of deploying a land-based AN/TPY-2 radar and existing Aegis BMD-capable ships equipped with proven SM-3 Block IA interceptors. This phase's deployment is already underway.

Phase 2 (2015 timeframe) will comprise of the deployment of a more capable SM-3 Block IB interceptor and a land-based SM-3 ballistic missile defense interceptor site in Romania. "The situation completely changes with the realization of the third and fourth stages of the missile defense... This is a real threat to our strategic nuclear forces," said Lt. Gen. Andrei Tretyak, head of the General Staff Main Operations Directorate.² A more advanced SM-3 Block IIA interceptor, a second land-based interceptor site in Poland and a deployment of a SM-3 Block IIB interceptor capable of countering medium-, intermediate, and intercontinental-range ballistic missiles will be developed and deployed during phases 3 and 4.

The Russians offered additional insight into the current thoughts of their leadership about the EPAA in the context of the New Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (New START). The Russians insisted on inserting language in the Preamble of the treaty that recognizes the interrelationship between strategic offensive and defensive arms. Moscow has interpreted this language as binding and has been using it as a vehicle to limit U.S. missile defense options.

Moscow also repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the Treaty if the United States does not change its missile defense plan. "All our military specialists are convinced that the proposed European missile shield configuration will impair the world's strategic parity and the relations that we recently had, including the [New] START Treaty," stated Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recently.³

Kremlin has also accused NATO of a lack of transparency regarding its missile defense system. This is just factually incorrect. The United States has been very transparent regard-

ing capabilities of its missile defenses and conducted many high-level briefings on the capabilities of the U.S. missile defense system. Washington even invited Russia to observe one of the U.S. SM-3 tests. There is no such reciprocity regarding Russia offering insights into its strategic and missile defense build up.



Some statements of U.S. officials suggest that obstacles in U.S.-Russian missile defense cooperation are of political nature and that the situation will change after elections pass.² This is unlikely. Vladimir Putin will be the next Russian president and he recently stated, "Yes, we do have a dispute over the AMD system and how it should be developed, but this didn't start yesterday. It started before this modern-day détente you mentioned. There is nothing new here."³ This will make negotiations more difficult.⁴

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, Russia has not overcome the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) mindset. There are no demands for nuclear parity between Washington and Paris, or Beijing and London. Moscow is still viewing Washington as the "glavny protivnik" – the principal adversary.

Russian opposition to U.S. missile defense is fundamentally based on its desire to maintain the balance of terror, and to keep Americans and U.S. allies, including civilians, vulnerable to a ballistic missile attack. If Washington limits U.S. missile defense system according to Russia's desires, which would be self-defeating, the United States would make itself vulnerable to North Korean and the future Iranian long-range missiles, as well as to accidental launches. This is not the policy Washington wishes to pursue considering an increasing pace of ballistic missile proliferation. ■

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to observe SM-3 tests in order to see for themselves that the interceptor lacks the capabilities to pose a serious threat to Russian strategic missiles.

Second, NATO officials should stop saying that cooperation with Russia would not in any way affect Alliance missile defense plans. If the Russians have ideas for a cooperative arrangement that might alter NATO's plans but would not degrade the Alliance's ability to defend NATO members, why not consider them?

Third, NATO should underscore the "adaptive" part of the PAA. It is not just about upgrading SM-3 capabilities to cope with Iranian missiles of increasing range. Alliance officials should point out that Phase 4—the one that con-

cerns Moscow most—could be slowed if Iran is not progressing toward an ICBM.

Fourth, the Alliance could propose cooperation on a *provisional, time-limited* basis. If, after three or four years, Moscow continued to be concerned about U.S. missile defense capabilities, it could freely walk away, and the Alliance would acknowledge that in advance.

Finally, NATO should make clear that the door remains open for cooperation and encourage Mr. Putin to come to Chicago. If the sides can get past the legal guarantee stumbling block, a rich menu of cooperation appears possible. ■

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REFERENCES AND NOTES

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