

Next steps in missile defence

SDA roundtable
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Next steps in missile defence

Roundtable - 27 September 2012
European Parliament, Brussels

Session I – 12:00 - 13:30

Following successful tests on its interim missile defence capability in May, NATO seems on track to establishing an operational missile defence system. What level of protection will this offer the alliance? How will NATO's missile defence plans adapt to the alliance's new doctrine of 'smart defence'? Will Europe continue to freeload on the back of U.S. missile defence technology, or will it invest in its own defence industries? Will NATO's missile defence plans be cut back by reductions in European defence budgets?

Speakers

Robert G. Bell, Senior Civilian Representative of the Secretary of Defense in Europe & Defense Advisor of the U.S. Ambassador to NATO

George E. Mavko, Director, International Missile Defense, Raytheon Missile Systems

Bülent Meriç, Director General for International Security Affairs, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Alexander Vershbow, Deputy Secretary General, North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Moderated by Giles Merritt, Director of Security & Defence Agenda

Session II – 14:30 - 16:00

Recent missile tests in North Korea along with belligerent statements by Iran have returned missile defence to the forefront of the Western security agenda. But with the failure of the North Korean test and increasing international pressure on Iran, how real is that threat? Are Iran and North Korea really intent on destabilising the international order, or are both regimes pandering to domestic audiences? Is NATO unnecessarily putting relations with its neighbours at risk over threats from far off foes? Will missile defence continue to be a thorn in the side of NATO-Russia relations?

Speakers

Reza Aslan, Adjunct Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations

Vladimir Leontiev, Deputy Director, Department for Security and Disarmament Affairs, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ioan Mircea Paşcu, Vice Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Roberto Zadra, Head, Ballistic Missile Defence Section, Defence Investment Division, North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Moderated by Giles Merritt, Director of Security & Defence Agenda

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Speakers



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Moderator



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Introduction

Following the decision taken at the 2010 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Lisbon to establish a ballistic missile defence system capable of covering all member states in Europe and the United States, it was announced at the Chicago summit in May 2012 that interim defence capability had been achieved.

"At the Chicago summit, we were able to declare an interim missile defence capability," indicated Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, NATO Deputy Secretary General. "Key assets are deployed, an initial NATO command and control system is in place, the people are trained and the tests have demonstrated that it works."

This achievement implies that NATO is likely to meet its target of establishing a fully operational missile defence system by the opening years of the next decade. The Security and Defence Agenda's roundtable 'Next steps in missile defence' gathered decision-makers and experts in the field to discuss the way forward for NATO allies on the path towards a fully operational system.

While there are some who question the necessity of the Euro-Atlantic ballistic missile defence system, there are many arguments for its development. Chief among these is the notion that "a strong missile defence system is a new deterrent against the proliferation of ballistic missiles worldwide," stated George E. Mavko, Director for International Missile Defense at Raytheon Missile Systems.

"The need for missile defence is not based on a specific threat from a nominal enemy," noted Ambassador Bülent Meriç, Director General for International Security

Affairs in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "We must emphasise the generic nature of this defence system." This is essential, as an important balance must be struck between providing protection and not provoking a potential arms race.

"The need for missile defence is not based on a specific threat from a nominal enemy. We must emphasise the generic nature of this defence system."

B. Meriç

One of the greatest challenges facing NATO is how to establish equilibrium between political and military authorities. Part of this process involves European allies accepting a larger role in the development of the system. To this end European NATO members were urged at the Chicago summit to contribute more in the spirit of NATO's new tool of Smart Defence.

Under siege by the global economic downturn, European defence budgets are unlikely to be relied on to a much greater degree than what has already been decided, the participants heard. In many cases, the question of affordability is a matter of recognising that cost-sharing amongst allies for new capabilities projects and contributions by many European allies of current missile defence systems is a real possibility in the development of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), indicated Robert G. Bell, Senior Civilian Representative of the U.S. Secretary of Defense in Europe and Defense Advisor to NATO.

One of the major road blocks to expanding the EPAA beyond NATO to include other partners is the unsteady NATO-Russia relationship, in particular the relationship between Russia and the United States. While both sides have demonstrated some political goodwill towards resolving their differences, much remains to be done to resolve Russian concerns about the proximity of NATO's missile defence system.

"What we are looking for in the long term is a win-win

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situation," concluded Roberto Zadra, Head of the Ballistic Missile Defence Section in NATO's Defence Investment Division. "This cannot happen, however, if we undermine each other's efforts.

The only way out of it is to face these threats together."

Is NATO's missile defence system needed?

"Today, we face a grave and growing threat from the proliferation of ballistic missile technology," stated Vershbow. "Compared to twenty-five years ago, this threat is much less in dispute."

More than thirty states have ballistic missile technology, or are seeking to acquire it, he continued, adding that a portion of these have the capability to launch missiles fitted with weapons of mass destruction. As things stand now, some areas of southern Europe are already within range of these potential threats.

"We have a range of proven tools at our disposal to address the threat of missile proliferation," he noted, "namely deterrence, disarmament and diplomacy."

The necessity for NATO's missile defence system becomes clear in the case of those states armed with ballistic missiles refusing to be deterred or to disarm, or not responding to diplomacy.

The missile defence issue has come to a head based on three factors, indicated Ioan Mircea Pascu, Vice Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. The first is a technological one: since the 1980s, defence technology has improved to the point

where the idea of "offensive defence" has become untenable, mainly as a result of technological proliferation.

Secondly, following the Cold War, international regimes aimed at limiting the proliferation of ballistic missiles have been weakened as a result of a more nuanced geopolitical reality. This in turn has led to a restructuring of the hierarchies of power in the world, accompanied by further complications in international relations and defence issues.

R. Zadra

With the changing state of geopolitics, policymakers and defence experts should consider whether the issue of missile defence is even relevant, said Reza Aslan, Adjunct Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations.

"Nowadays, we are facing threats from rogue states and non-state actors," he added. "Iran's military is not a threat but the proxy forces under its influence are. Is missile defence addressing the threats we are likely to face? I am not so sure."

Addressing these threats entails a consideration of the perspectives of prospective enemies, such as Iran, he continued.

While NATO and its allies speak quite openly of the threat of Iran's nuclear programme, there is a lack of recognition of the threat that Iran perceives from NATO, the US and Israel. "Iran is quite literally surrounded by

R. Aslan

U.S. troops. There are 200 Israeli nuclear weapons aimed at them. Part of the process of improving this situation is to consider other perspectives," he concluded.

"The threat to Europe is real," stressed Mavko. Deploy-

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ing a robust missile defence system takes years of concerted cooperation and effort. "We cannot wait for the threat of ballistic missiles to appear and then scramble to build the architecture of defence. Rather, the time to act is now," he added.

Some of the stumbling blocks to missile defence are based on simple misperceptions, he continued. The notion in Europe that the U.S. will be available to defend European populations, territories and forces is not enough. "The U.S.' commitment to Europe cannot be questioned. In times of crisis, the U.S. will go where it is needed but its resources are finite," he concluded.

Furthermore, though valuable for protecting against possible attacks to a certain degree, European lower-tier defence systems currently in place in Germany, France, Greece, and Spain amongst others, are simply not sufficient against the threat of upper-tier ballistic missiles. At the moment, only the sea-based Aegis system can defend all of Europe against upper-layer attacks.

Though the U.S.' Aegis ships have upper-tier capabilities, "at any given time, there may be a limited number of ships available for European territorial defence," Mavko added. "Full defensive capability would require an additional four or five ships on the periphery of Europe. The U.S. cannot do this alone."

"Interim operational capability has been established," stressed Bell. "What it will offer in another ten years is full protection across all NATO European member countries. However, the robustness of the system is based on what each nation brings to the architecture."

Sharing responsibility and Smart Defence

"The Alliance's missile defence system is an example of true transatlantic teamwork in action," Vershbow underlined. Many different assets, from European allies as well as the US, have been brought together to deliver a common, integrated and shared Alliance capability.

European contributions to the system include German and Dutch Patriot missile batteries as well as Germany's hosting of the NATO command and control system at Ramstein, Germany. Furthermore, The Netherlands will upgrade four air defence frigates with missile defence radars; France will develop a long-range radar facility; Kürecik, Turkey is hosting the AN/TPY-2 portable ground-based radar system; and Poland, Romania and Spain have all agreed to host American land and sea-based missile interceptors.

The decision to host the AN/TPY-2 radar was a difficult one, politically speaking, for Turkey, noted Meriç. "Hosting a component of the NATO missile defence system poses many problems and has led to negative regional and domestic reactions," he added.

Owing to the sensitive nature of Turkish public opinion regarding this issue, he stressed, "the decision taken to host the radar system should be appreciated as a concrete display of the importance attached to the principle of indivisibility of allied security as well as the equitable sharing of the risks inherent in contributing to the Alliance's core missions."

"Our missile defence system is an example of Smart Defence, of allies working together to deliver capabilities collectively that they would be unable to afford on their own," stressed Vershbow. "In this endeavour,

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NATO acts as a unique organising framework that ensures unity of effort, interoperability and cost effectiveness."

"Reaching NATO's missile defence capability is based on the assumption that nations will contribute to overall defence," Bell stated. It has been made clear that European allies have made many valuable contributions to a wide range of capabilities through common investments.

Creating a missile defence system requires much more than developing exo-atmospheric interceptors, he stressed. European advances in cyber and communication technologies, for example, have greatly contributed to NATO command and control structures.

In a response to Julian Hale, Defence News correspondent, Bell explained that the minimum required assets from the United States and its European allies are the Aegis ships currently patrolling the Mediterranean, the AN/TPY-2 radar operating in Turkey and expanded functionality of the command and control centre.

Furthermore, he continued, though the U.S.' EPAA is at the forefront of missile defence at the moment, a true NATO missile defence simply cannot be accomplished without the political cooperation and goodwill of its European partners. In order to achieve interim capability, twenty individual political decisions had to be approved at two different levels by each of the 28 member states of NATO. In other words, this interim capability is the result of 1,120 consensus decisions – an impressive illustration of political will.

These efforts notwithstanding, much remains to be done to meet the demands of the further phases of NATO's missile defence planning, he concluded.

The cost of missile defence

When the European allies agreed to the missile defence system, the nominal budget was 800 million euro for the previously planned Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) with a further 200 million to be spent on expanding the command and control architecture to encompass the EPAA, said participant Vivien Pertusot, the Institut Français des Relations Internationales's Head of Brussels Office, in an audience intervention. What chance is there of the EPAA not happening without further European support?

"Reaching NATO's missile defence capability is based on the assumption that nations will contribute to overall defence."

R.G. Bell

"The summit communiqué from Chicago invited European Alliance members to contribute more to missile defence," underlined Bell. While President Obama has made clear the U.S.' pledge to provide for all four phases of the EPAA, it behoves European partners to think about how long the U.S. can handle

the lion's share of capabilities and costs.

The U.S. Congress is considering a bill which would restrict the amount of dollars earmarked for missile defence unless Europe shoulders a larger portion of the costs, he added. This may not be a concern as the pattern of European investments suggests continuation at appropriate levels into the future.

"The allies have collectively committed to spending 1 billion dollars on the ALTBMd," Bell noted. The question of cost is more a question of methodology, based on assumptions about what each ally can and will contribute, he continued. The Aegis ships, for example, are essential to the system but are in fact multiple-mission ships, with activities ranging beyond missile defence. In other words, the cost of each Aegis ship need not necessarily be assigned entirely to the missile defence

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system.

This notion ties in with the principle of the indivisibility of Alliance defence. "We need to recognise that systems and components can be combined in very affordable ways to complement what the US is bringing to the table," stressed Mavko.

Essentially, he continued, there are three basic elements to the system: sensors, command and control, and interceptors. Many of these elements have already been put into play. Where additional funding needs to be placed is in building more sensors, better streamlining command and control structures and either manufacturing more interceptor missiles or developing non-kinetic methods, such as cyber, to intercept a possible attack.

The biggest threat is an attack with a large number of missiles. Meeting this threat requires a lot of interceptors and these are expensive. "Affordability is the big enabler in this issue," he concluded. "The question, however, should not be 'can European allies afford to develop ballistic missile defence?' It should rather be 'can they afford not to, in the case of an attack?'"

Missile defence and NATO-Russia relations

"The issue of missile defence has brought a new dynamic to the cooperation within the Alliance and I strongly feel that cooperation in this area could be a real game changer in our relationship with Russia,"

Vershbow said. "Unfortunately, we have not made as much progress on this front as we would have liked to."

"Russia has a fundamental interest in cooperating with the West. We are faced with the same challenges."

R. Zadra

The NATO-Russia summit in Lisbon in 2010 provided a major opportunity for launching meaningful multilateral cooperation on ballistic missile defence, indicated Vladimir Leontiev, Deputy Director of the Department for Security and Disarmament Affairs at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Lisbon, the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) agreed to conduct a joint analysis of the framework for missile defence cooperation. Though a promising beginning, the discussion soon ran into problems and, as a result, this joint analysis has not been finalised and no framework for cooperation is within sight, he added.

The joint analysis document exists, noted Zadra, and, though many revisions have already taken place, at this point in time the process has come to a near standstill. "NATO and Russia have yet to agree on the fundamental elements of missile defence. Despite the fact that discussions are ongoing, there is simply not enough trust between the parties involved," he added.

"The issue of missile defence has brought a new dynamic to the cooperation within the Alliance and I strongly feel that cooperation in this area could be a real game changer in our relationship with Russia."

A. Vershbow

One of the key fundamental issues in the discussion is whether there should be a joint system, as Russia advocates, or two independent or mutually reinforcing ones, as NATO suggests. A joint system would also require outsourcing security to the other side, but neither Russia nor NATO are ready for this", he continued. "Since a joint system is simply not realistic at this point, we should identify joint elements of missile defence and set these up together."

"Essentially speaking NATO is a joint effort," stressed Pascu. "The issue with Russia is a question of entrust-

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ing the security of the Alliance to an outside third party." One of the major lessons learned from the Cold War was the realisation of a false division between East and West. "Russia has a fundamental interest in cooperating with the West. We are faced with the same challenges," he added.

While NATO-Russian discussions have slowed, bilateral talks between Russia and the U.S. on the issue have also misfired. Though a decision was reached to proceed on the basis of common interest and mutual respect, through the identification of common threats and the exploration of diplomatic means to resolve differences, the agreements reached were never implemented the way they were intended.

Though the outlook is grim, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. "One should not doubt the desire of the two sides to improve the U.S.-Russia relationship," Aslan said. Though the goodwill of U.S. policymakers is sometimes in doubt owing to internal political pressures, bilateral relations between these two countries will be pivotal in maintaining global peace.

Leontiev added that "in Russia, we distinguish between threats and challenges. The current situation concerning missile defence is more of a challenge. Whether we like it or not, we have to address the underlying issues and agree on the fundamentals. We want to discuss the practical implementation of these plans and we want to find a solution that would create a win-win situation."

Ultimately, noted Zadra, "what we do in NATO cannot replace the bilateral relationship between Russia and the U.S." However, he continued, NATO can add value to the bilateral relationship, for example through the

collective political reassurance that its missile defence plans are not aimed at Russia, as stated in the Chicago declaration, which was overall well-received in Moscow.

"The reason for the failure of both the bilateral and multilateral tracks is simple," Leontiev concluded. "The fact is that the U.S. and NATO still refuse to treat Russia as an equal partner and continue to apply policies that negatively affect Russia's security interests, seeking to change the existing strategic balance while pretending that it no longer matters. Unfortunately, it still does."

While the political dialogue remains stalled, U.S. global missile defence architecture continues to take shape. This concerns Russia. "Our calculations show that beginning in phase three, American interceptors will be capable of hitting Russian missiles. This means that the strategic balance will be broken unless Russia applies additional measures in order to maintain it," he underlined.

"We cannot disregard the threat of the EPAA and, unless things change, we must apply all necessary measures to ensure Russia's national security."

Seeing no reason to justify the deployment of NATO assets in such a way, he stressed that Russia is proposing as the optimal solution the creation of a common ballistic missile defence system with equal Russian participation. The feasibility of such a system was demonstrated during the joint NRC theatre missile defence exercise that took place in Germany in March 2012, though NATO refuses to accept these "politically incorrect" conclusions.

From the NATO perspective, Russia's continuing objections to its missile defence plans are "simply not

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grounded in facts," stressed Vershbow. "For geographical, scientific and numerical reasons, NATO's missile defence can not and will not change the strategic balance or pose any threat to Russia's assured second-strike capability."

The system's architecture is specifically configured to protect against missile threats from outside of the Euro-Atlantic area – not from Russia - and this will continue to be the case when NATO deploys the other phases of the system. "If the Russians were to work with us on missile defence, they would see the truth with their own eyes," he concluded. "We will continue as an Alliance to seek cooperation with Russia on missile defence. However, irrespective of progress in this area, we will push ahead with our own system as planned because it is critical to the defence of our people and territory in this 21st century."



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