

## **Europe needs a debate on missile defence**

**by Eckart von Klaeden**

Europe has long been neglecting the new strategic threats arising from the proliferation of unmanned military aerospace vehicles. Japan, by contrast, is currently modernising its missile defences around Tokyo. In 1998, North Korea tested a two-stage missile through Japanese air space, and parts of it landed in Tokyo Bay. That set alarm bells ringing in Japan and led to the country's participation in the US Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) programme. Besides land-based SAM launchers, Japan already has five operational guided-missile destroyers.

Besides North Korea, more than 20 nations now possess ballistic missiles; most are short-range to medium-range systems, but there is a marked trend towards longer ranges.

For some years now the international community has been devoting a great deal of attention to the Iranian nuclear programme. Germany has been playing an active role in the efforts of the international community to dissuade Iran from the pursuit of its nuclear plans. Tehran's parallel development of delivery technology in particular would make a nuclear-armed Iran a direct threat to us. Iran is investing very heavily in the development of long-range missiles.

Within five to ten years it could be capable of building its own medium-range ballistic missiles with a range of 3,000 kilometres – Munich, for example, is 2,760 kilometres from Iran. Although this means that Iranian ballistic missiles do not yet pose a direct threat to Germany, Tehran can already reach Ankara or Istanbul with the Shahab III missile, which is a lengthened version of the North Korean No Dong and was tested in 2004; in other words, it poses a direct threat to Turkey, our NATO ally, and Cyprus, our EU partner.

Germany, Europe and NATO must carry out a long-overdue joint substantiated threat analysis; as a matter of urgency, they must adapt their perception of the threat to reflect present-day realities and reach agreement on an anti-missile shield.

The fact that the International Atomic Energy Authority believes it will take Iran two, four or six years to build a nuclear bomb is truly no reason to sound the all-clear. Given that anti-missile systems can take up to ten years to develop, we should actually be taking the first steps already to create one. Opponents of such a defence system argue that Iran has no interest in threatening Europe. Iran, however, is seeking to become the dominant regional power. To that end, it has an interest in reducing the influence of the West, and especially the United States, in the Middle East and undermining the US role as the guarantor of Israel.

The same purpose would be served if it were able to drive a wedge between the United States and Europe by threatening Europe with nuclear arms if the United States or Europe were to

engage in operations in the Middle East. Europe could be taken hostage like the 15 British sailors and marines at the end of March. Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas, its denial of the Holocaust, the repeated threatening gestures of the Mullahs' regime towards Israel, the Iranian nuclear and missile programmes and the country's persistent infringement of international law – all of these factors must finally be viewed in an overall context in Germany too.

Opponents of active prevention cite the fierce criticism that the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, levelled in his address to the Munich Conference on Security Policy at the US missile-defence plans for Europe, which, in his words, would 'inevitably lead to an arms race'. This immediately raised the spectre, in Germany as elsewhere, of a new arms spiral, although his argument completely misses the point that it is a purely defensive system with no warheads of its own, a system which, with only ten interceptor missiles, would be far from capable of neutralising Russia's current arsenal of 3,300 deployable nuclear warheads, for which strategic delivery vehicles are available. It also ignores the fact that Russia was informed of the missile-defence plans, both on a bilateral basis by the United States and through the NATO-Russia Council.

It is reminiscent of the fairy tale of the Wolf and the Seven Little Kids when the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, in an article in a German daily newspaper, sanctimoniously asks whether Europe had actually been consulted, while at the same time the Chief of the Russian General Staff and the Commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces not only threaten to make the missile-defence sites in Poland and the Czech Republic 'targets for the strategic missile forces' of the Russian Federation but also declare that Moscow could pull out of the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-range and Shorter-range Missiles (the INF Treaty).

The same attitude was reflected at the end of March in the rejection by Vitaly Churkin, Russia's Ambassador to the UN, of the request made by the United Kingdom that the UN Security Council demand the immediate release of the Britons seized by Iran. Yet the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, had said in his speech in Munich that the United Nations alone could legitimise the use of military force in international conflicts, and the British naval personnel were patrolling Iraqi waters with a mandate from the United Nations.

It also damages the credibility of Russian foreign policy when Russia supplies Iran with surface-to-air missiles and President Putin tries to justify it by saying that Iran should not feel driven into isolation. In actual fact, the success of the UN sanctions depends on Iran getting the message that it will be boycotted by the international community until it finally chooses to abide by the binding resolutions of the Security Council.

In view of the catastrophic situation in Iraq and the onset of the US election campaign, Russia evidently sees an opportunity to develop its influence in the greater Middle East at the expense of the United States. Moreover, a dispute within the European Union or between Europe and the United States about essential security precautions might well be warmly welcomed in some quarters within the Russian Federation.

Moscow, however, should not cling to the old zero-sum game from the Cold War era. The fact is that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose a serious risk to Russia too. This need not take the form of a direct threat. The regime of the Mullahs could acquire a new self-assurance that might lead it into critical conflicts with Russia. After all, Moscow has been very publicly duped by Tehran on several occasions in the recent past.

Russia should therefore recognise its own interest in regarding Europe as a common security area and should consequently give more serious consideration to offers of cooperation from both the United States and Europe than it has in the past. The fact of the matter is that Europe has a profound interest in Russia becoming more fully involved in the formulation and pursuit of European security policy.

In this context, the establishment in Europe of some of the components of a comprehensive, globally structured US missile-defence system against new potential threats, combined with efforts on the part of NATO in and for Europe, is in the interests of Germany and Europe, while Russia's involvement is not only in its own interest but also in the interests of Europe and the United States.

This is surely made all the more valid by the need to avoid recourse to military action against 'rogue states' which possess nuclear arms and ballistic missiles or against those that aspire to such capabilities. It is particularly inconsistent of the opponents of an anti-missile shield to accuse the United States of military interventionism while they themselves seek to prevent the creation of an alternative to military action. The credibility of the US nuclear shield, after all, serves to ensure that those allies and other nations whose security is guaranteed by the United States, including nations in the wider Middle East, feel no need to develop their own nuclear-arms programmes. These security guarantees have precluded such programmes in the past. The US missile-defence programme will serve the same purpose. In this way it does not foment a nuclear arms race but seeks to prevent it.

NATO is the right body to integrate the US missile-defence system into a strategy for European security. The involvement of Russia and its possible participation should be further discussed in the NATO-Russia Council. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council also includes those Member States of the EU that are not NATO members. Taking decisions on this issue in the EU framework, on the other hand, would not make sense, because the United States and Norway would not be at the table. It is also in the true interests of Poland that the matter be dealt with in NATO. The project is not a suitable basis for the creation of a special relationship with the United States outside the NATO framework. That would only accentuate existing differences within the EU and NATO and would serve any intentions on the part of Russia to weaken NATO and bring about alienation between the United States and Europe.

Remarks:

Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

Eckart von Klaeden is a Member of the German Bundestag as well as the foreign-affairs spokesman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group and a member of the CDU Presidium