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The
elephant in
the room:

cost
overruns,
continuing
technology
problems
and the
absence of
Russia

NATO Watch Chicago Summit Media Briefings Series

No.2 Missile defence: can this issue be solved by 'giving Obama more space'?

Anticipated outcomes

NATO will declare initial operational readiness of parts of its missile defence capability. The command centre is expected to be located at the alliance base in Ramstein, near Frankfurt in Germany. Disagreement with Russia over missile defences are unlikely to be resolved in Chicago, or any time soon, especially as there will be no NATO-Russia Council meeting at the Summit and NATO's ALTBMD system is "going to be deployed no matter what". Russian concerns will be brushed under the carpet as positions on both sides harden.

The back story

During what they thought was a private conversation at the Nuclear Security Summit in Korea in March, reporters overheard [President Obama](#) asking President Medvedev to tell incoming President Vladimir Putin "on all these issues, but particularly missile defence, this can be solved but it's important for him to give me space."

Soon after becoming president in 2009, [Obama had the missile defence programme reviewed](#), partly based on his intention to improve relations with Moscow. The interceptors would be upgraded over four phases, culminating in 2020 and designed to protect Europe and the United States from ballistic missile attack. Aegis radars based on ships would be supported by a long-range radar based in Turkey. In the later phases Aegis radars and missile interceptors would be based on land. Last year, Romania and Poland signed interceptor basing agreements with the United States (and SM-3 missiles will be deployed in those two countries by 2015 and 2018, respectively), while the Netherlands announced plans to upgrade four air-defence frigates with extended long-range missile defence early warning radars. Finally, the United States agreed to base four Aegis missile defence ships in Spain as part of the US contribution to NATO's BMD capability.

At their Lisbon Summit in 2010, [NATO's Heads of State and Government](#) agreed to extend the scope of NATO's Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) programme—largely command, control and communications capabilities—beyond the protection of NATO deployed forces to also protect NATO European populations and territory. They also agreed to explore opportunities for missile defence co-operation with Russia in a spirit of reciprocity, maximum transparency and mutual confidence.

At the Foreign and Defence Ministers Meeting in April 2012, the Secretary General stated that NATO was determined to declare an interim missile defence capability at the Chicago Summit and suggested ways and means of working cooperatively with Russia to reassure Moscow that the system would not be directed against them.

However, Foreign Minister Lavrov made it clear after the meeting that missile defence remained the biggest challenge for Russia's relationship with NATO and he reiterated Moscow's demand for firm guarantees that the planned shield would not be directed against Russia. He said that a written political declaration, as offered by NATO, was insufficient and that the guarantees should be based on military, technical and other criteria that ensure the system will not directed against any European country, including Russia. The [Moscow Times](#) reported that a NATO spokesman said technical limitations would render the system incapable of intercepting missiles from Russia and that "this is completely out of the question". Apparently, a senior NATO official made it clear that the plans would go ahead without Moscow: "NATO's system is going to be deployed no matter what."

And on April 16, in advance of the Brussels meeting, Radio Free Europe reported that:

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko has called for the United States and NATO to change their position on a missile-defence system planned for Europe. Grushko is quoted as saying continued backing of the missile shield would make pointless upcoming talks on the issue between the Kremlin and officials from NATO member countries.

Delays, cost overruns and technological problems

The [Lisbon Summit declaration](#) states: "The United States European Phased Adapted Approach is welcomed as a valuable national contribution to the NATO missile defence architecture, as are other possible voluntary contributions by Allies."

“We have to either build our own antimissile defence or give some asymmetrical answers”

Vladimir Putin,
February 2012



A freeze on further deployments and extension of the ‘phased adaptive approach’ timeline should be another option

However, [two recent reports](#) suggest that political aspirations have overrun practical considerations. The US Defense Science Board which advises the US Defense Department and Congress’ nonpartisan Government Accountability Office suggest major delays, cost overruns and critical technology problems have beset the whole programme.

[Reuters](#) reported on 26 April that the US House of Representatives’ Armed Services Strategic Forces subcommittee voted to withhold 25 per cent of funds authorised for missile defence until the NATO allies committed to their financial contributions.

A pre-Summit opportunity for compromise?

The high-level Moscow conference on missile defence (on 3-4 May 2012) could provide an opportunity for creating ‘sufficient space’ on this issue. The [Moscow Times](#) reported that NATO Deputy Secretary, and former US Ambassador in Moscow, General Alexander Versbow, will lead a small delegation. [NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#) was invited at the end of March to attend the conference.

Chief of the Russian General Staff, [Army General Nikolai Makarov](#) told journalists on 25 April after the NATO-Russia Council meeting in Brussels that, “There will be more than 150 participants from 50 states. NATO’s 28 member states have confirmed their participation.” Representatives from China, South Korea, Japan, the CIS and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries will also be participating.

Sergei Koshelev, Head of the Defence Ministry’s Main Department for International Military Cooperation, said:

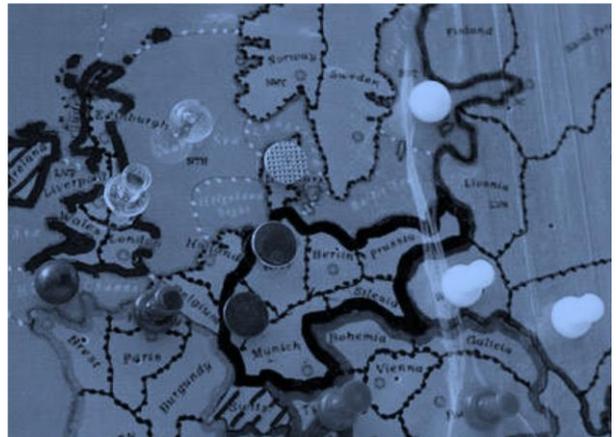
We would like to analyse the existing global missile threats and assess the technical characteristics of the future missile systems that may threaten Europe. There is still time for a compromise on missile defence. Our goal is to clearly explain our concerns using pure facts and figures and convince our partners that they should respect these concerns.

In early April, [The Voice of Russia](#) reported that Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko had been appointed as the new Russian envoy to NATO, the first professional diplomat to represent Moscow in Brussels. [A NATO source](#) said he was happy to learn of Grushko’s appointment. In his previous post he was in charge of issues related to European and Euro-Atlantic organizations and thoroughly knows the issue. “Grushko is a professional and has been dealing with NATO for a while,” the source said.

NATO Watch conclusion

Given the actual and projected costs, the seemingly insurmountable technical problems, the questionable military justifications and the obvious detrimental impact on NATO-Russian relations, it is surely time for a major political review of the advisability of pressing ahead with territorial missile defence deployments in Europe. Declassification and open publication of all the feasibility studies and missile proliferation threat assessments over the past decade that have been used to justify deployment of territorial missile defences in Europe would be a good place to start. A freeze on further deployments and extension of the ‘phased adaptive approach’ timeline should be another option. Regrettably, however, we do not expect these sorts of discussions to be on the table at the Chicago Summit.

A freeze on missile defence deployments in Europe would also buy President Obama some valuable time. The Phased Adaptive Approach to missile defences is unproven, unnecessary and requires uncosted, additional resources at a time when NATO defence budgets are facing deep cuts. It needs to be recognised on all sides that missile defence systems are themselves ‘old thinking’, exacerbate divisions within Europe and hardly represent a good example of Rasmussen’s call for ‘Smart Defence’. Diplomacy and engagement can defuse tensions with North Korea and Iran—the supposed main source of ballistic missile proliferation concerns—and smarter, cheaper and more effective military solutions are available if a real threat ever emerges.



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