

Illusive Visions and Practical Realities: Russia, NATO and Missile Defence

Richard Weitz

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary-General, has repeatedly urged European and American leaders to collaborate with Russia in developing a comprehensive missile-defence architecture that would be jointly built and managed by Moscow and its new partners. He has pointed to continuing improvements in Iran's potential capacity to launch ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads as an emerging threat to all European countries, including Russia, and has warned that a failure to undertake a vigorous response could endanger Europeans' security. He has further argued that pursuing a joint NATO–Russia initiative could build a foundation for concrete security cooperation among the parties in other areas. Rasmussen's vision of 'one security roof that protects us all' extending 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok' is certainly bold, and his pessimistic threat assessment regarding Iran is now shared by many Western and Russian analysts. In principle, he is also correct that having 'one security roof would be a very strong political symbol that Russia is fully part of the Euro-Atlantic family ... not outside, but very much inside'.¹ But past experience suggests that such extensive NATO–Russian cooperation on ballistic-missile defence (BMD) is highly unlikely, notwithstanding the recent upturn in NATO–Russia ties. Even the more limited BMD collaboration outlined in the article by Nikolai Sokov in this issue would be hard to realise unless several factors that have repeatedly disrupted past Russian–American attempts to sustain joint BMD initiatives can be overcome.²

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As Sokov's article shows, one long-standing barrier to Russian–US collaboration may be weakening: more Russian policymakers now seem to concur with the traditionally more pessimistic US and NATO threat assessments regarding Iran.³ Most Russians would not welcome Tehran's acquisition of nuclear-armed long-range missiles, but in the past their experts have denigrated Iran's security ambitions and defence capabilities. Now some

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Russian experts and policymakers seem more convinced, though perhaps still less so than many of their NATO colleagues, that Iran is developing an effective ballistic-missile arsenal, that Tehran's nuclear capabilities are substantially improving, and even that some Iranian leaders are seeking nuclear-weapons options. That said, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently characterised Russia's policies toward Iran as 'schizophrenic', suggesting unease among US policymakers regarding the extent to which they can

count on further Russian assistance in countering Iran's potential nuclear threat through missile-defence collaboration and other cooperative efforts.⁴

Unfortunately, many long-standing barriers to NATO–Russian cooperation, including impediments to information sharing and limited capacity for rapid decision-making, persist. Indeed, achieving multilateral control over BMD systems is an inherently difficult task, even for close allies. NATO governments have so far been unable to deploy an alliance-wide missile-defence system despite more than ten years of work. The technology is exceptionally complex and the financial costs high, and BMD management entails challenging command-and-control issues. Participants must craft an arrangement that would permit timely launch decisions in situations where even a few minutes' delay in authorising an interception attempt could prove fatal. In the case of NATO–Russian missile-defence collaboration, the diverging technical standards and operational procedures of the parties' respective BMD systems would compound this problem. Whereas Russian policymakers rightly want to exercise control over how Russian assets might be used, Western commanders have made clear that they could never rely on an architecture that required urgent Russian authorisation for its use.

Restrictive technology-transfer policies, moreover, have disrupted multinational defence projects even among NATO Allies. The barriers to sharing sensitive technologies with Russian companies, or missile-threat data with the Russian military, are considerably greater. Proposals to integrate NATO and Russian missile-defence efforts must overcome the reluctance of the parties to reveal their vulnerabilities in an arrangement that would give all sides a much deeper understanding of the capabilities and operations of one another's systems. In addition, 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. These countries might then exploit this intelligence to develop more effective counter-measures. Russia's military cooperation with China has also induced caution among NATO governments about sharing missile-defence technologies with Moscow. Not only could China use any technical knowledge it obtained in this area to circumvent US and Japanese systems, but Chinese experts might share such insights with Tehran or Pyongyang.⁵

A history of failure

Recurring US attempts to create national missile defences have long divided Russia and the West. These problems arose in the early 1980s when President Ronald Reagan embarked on a quixotic quest to construct a space-based missile shield (the Strategic Defense Initiative) over the United States. Despite the end of Cold War antagonisms, BMD-related tensions persisted during the 1990s, when the Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin administrations struggled to delineate acceptable limits on the capabilities of US theatre missile defences (TMD) that would allow US forces to intercept North Korean short- and medium-range ballistic missiles but would not threaten Russia's longer-range missiles. Most recently, the dispute over the George W. Bush administration's plans to construct a 'third site' for US national missile defences in Poland and the Czech Republic contributed to the most serious downturn in Russian-US relations in decades. Even after President Barack Obama relocated the initial phase of the planned deployments closer to Iran and further away from the intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) based in central Russia, which Moscow considers a vital element of its stra-

tegic nuclear deterrent, Russian policymakers continued to express unease at Washington's plans for Europe. Although the April 2010 Ballistic Missile Defense Review, like other US government documents and statements, insists that American missile defences are not designed to oppose Russia, many Russian analysts continue to perceive them as aiming to establish a forward-based infrastructure that the United States could eventually use to negate Russia's nuclear deterrent.⁶

Russian officials have at times appeared more receptive to NATO invitations to collaborate on battlefield missile defences. During the first years of the Vladimir Putin presidency, Russian officials expressed guarded optimism that they might collaborate with NATO to develop systems designed to intercept short- and medium-range missiles.⁷ In February 2001, the Russian government formally proposed a cooperative NATO–Russia effort to develop a mobile, land-based BMD system, intended primarily to protect military forces on expeditionary operations, which would incorporate both Russian and Western technologies. In June 2002, the newly established NATO–Russia Council established an Ad Hoc Working Group on Theatre Missile Defence, which held its first meeting at the end of the following month.⁸ Its five Support Working Teams, composed of experts from the NATO staff and the member countries, have looked at terminology, experimental concepts, joint concepts of operations, systems and systems capabilities, and training and exercises.⁹ The parties began by first establishing a common glossary of definitions and determining the nature of the threat. They then discussed what types of compatible systems would best counter this danger. Since 2003, Russian and NATO military personnel have also conducted several command-post exercises in which they used computers to simulate joint operations against third-country threats.¹⁰ These exercises aimed to enhance Russian–NATO inter-operability and establish the basis for possible joint operations during combined expeditionary missions. But like the NATO–Russia Council Working Group discussions, these exercises have yet to yield substantial progress in developing an operational NATO–Russian missile-defence architecture.

Since the mid-1990s, Russian defence companies and officials have anticipated that Western governments might buy a variety of their prod-

ucts, including batteries of Russian S-300 and S-400 air- and missile-defence systems. In September 2003, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Kislyak told *Vremya Novostei* that Russian companies 'have our own anti-missile systems that might be useful, and they are among the world's best. In such cooperation we are not the beneficiaries, we are very serious partners.'¹¹ In March 2005, Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov offered to contribute the S-300 and the soon-to-be-deployed S-400 surface-to-air missiles to any pan-European TMD system.¹² In an effort to persuade European governments to purchase Russian-made missile-defence products, Russian officials claimed that, unlike Russian suppliers, Americans refuse to transfer their latest technologies, insist on manufacturing defence products within the United States, and expect allies to pay dearly for any purchases.¹³ Yet despite repeated sales pitches and joint tabletop exercises, only a few NATO members have ever purchased Russian-made BMD-related products.

Russian leaders have also, from time to time, shown interest in collaborating with NATO governments in establishing a pan-European missile-defence architecture, provided Moscow would be allowed to exercise decisive influence over its construction and operation. In addition to commercial considerations, Russian representatives repeatedly offered to cooperate with NATO governments on theatre missile defence in the hopes of persuading them not to develop BMD networks that excluded Moscow. In 2007, Putin proposed constructing such a network, but US officials refused to accept his condition that Washington abandon its BMD plans for Europe. The Bush administration saw any Russian contribution as supplementing rather than replacing US and NATO initiatives.

The 'third site' controversy

In the absence of effective cooperation with Russia, NATO countries have proceeded to develop a new, multi-layered BMD architecture independently of Moscow. Firstly, in March 2005, NATO announced its decision to develop an Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense system by 2010. This system aims to protect deployed NATO military forces, wherever they operate, from short- and medium-range ballistic-missile attacks. Secondly, in May 2006, a four-year 'NATO Missile Defense Feasibility Study' concluded

that the Alliance could construct a system capable of defending its national territories against the growing missile threats from Iran, Syria and North Korea.¹⁴ Finally, the G.W. Bush White House announced its 'third site' plans in 2007, after pursuing negotiations, independently of NATO, with Poland and the Czech Republic. Specifically, the administration wanted to place ten American-operated missile-defence interceptors in Poland and an advanced missile-tracking radar station in the Czech Republic. These installations would have formed part of the ground-based mid-course defence element of the American global missile-defence network, which also includes 'first' and 'second' sites in Alaska and California, BMD radars in Greenland and the United Kingdom, and space-based sensors.

Although the Czech and Polish sites were near the path of the most likely missile attacks against US territory from Iran, Russian strategists protested their proximity to Russia. The East European BMD dispute rapidly escalated and came to represent the growing security alienation between Russia and NATO. But Russian objections extended far beyond the planned East European systems. In his February 2007 speech at the Munich security conference, Putin indicated that Moscow saw the European deployments as but one component of a larger American effort to negate Russia's nuclear deterrent and thereby reinforce Washington's dominant position, based on US conventional military superiority, in world security affairs:

The United States is actively developing and already strengthening an anti-missile defence system. Today this system is ineffective but we do not know exactly whether it will one day be effective. But in theory it is being created for that purpose. So hypothetically we recognise that when this moment arrives, the possible threat from our nuclear forces will be completely neutralised ... The balance of powers will be absolutely destroyed and one of the parties will benefit from the feeling of complete security. This means that its hands will be free not only in local but eventually also in global conflicts.¹⁵

At first, G.W. Bush administration officials believed that their Russian counterparts genuinely, if erroneously, felt threatened by the planned East

European deployments. They responded by launching a comprehensive campaign to convince their Russian colleagues that these systems aimed only to counter an emerging Iranian missile threat and, due to their limited number and capabilities, could only threaten Russia if they were greatly expanded in the future. As Russian opposition continued, however, US officials became convinced that Russian leaders objected to the planned deployments even though they actually understood that the proposed systems could not threaten Russia's large arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles. US observers began to emphasise other reasons for Russian objections to the deployment. Some US analysts speculated, for example, that Moscow's sabre rattling aimed to justify increases in Russian defence spending and to mobilise nationalist forces behind the Putin regime. They also perceived Russian protests over the planned Polish and Czech missile-defence deployments as motivated partly by Russian objections to NATO's continued enlargement into former Soviet-bloc territories. Senior ministers of the governments of Poland and the Czech Republic, the two countries that had committed to hosting US systems under the G.W. Bush administration, also characterised Russia's hostile reaction as an attempt to establish that their countries still fell within Moscow's sphere of influence.

For their part, Russian officials complained that briefings given by US officials on the proposed deployments were insufficiently detailed, a problem that would need to be overcome in any effort to pursue comprehensive NATO–Russian BMD collaboration in the future. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov characterised US actions as reflecting 'an old approach when our American colleagues decided something and then implemented their decisions proceeding from the assumption that others will have to accept something that has already happened'.¹⁶ RIA Novosti political commentator Vladimir Simonov accused the Bush administration of making a feigned effort at consultation with Moscow to appease Europeans worried by the strained ties between Washington and Moscow.¹⁷ The Russian envoy to NATO, General Konstantin Totsky, argued that rather than simply offering briefings of what Washington planned to do, the United States and Russia should hold discussions at the expert level to exchange opinions and take into account each other's concerns.¹⁸

Russian analysts also expressed concerns about the open-ended nature of the evolving US global BMD architecture. Like other Russian commentators, Nikita Petrov complained that ‘Washington has never said when it intends to stop the deployment of its missile defense system’.¹⁹ Although Russian defence experts acknowledged that their country’s vast strategic missile arsenal could overwhelm the small number of interceptor missiles planned for Poland, they claimed that the United States could easily deploy additional systems in the future. They were especially worried that the United States would seek to deploy systems in other regions near Russia besides Poland and the Czech Republic. The Russian media speculated that

the US government wanted to deploy a BMD radar in the Caucasus, where it could monitor both Iranian and Russian territory. Various American statements stressing the need to preserve US options to respond flexibly to changing threats exacerbated these concerns.²⁰

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Russian policymakers apparently hoped that their protests and threats would induce NATO to abandon the proposed deployments. By showing that US policies were provoking a major East–West crisis, Russian leaders might have anticipated that their NATO coun-

terparts would pressure the United States and potential host governments to resist Washington’s plans. These aspirations were not without foundation. The missile crisis revived long-standing transatlantic differences over the value of missile defence, which began with Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative and have persisted since then.²¹ At the time, and perhaps still today, many Europeans did not think that pursuing BMD was worth the damage the missile-defence issue was inflicting on US–Russian relations. They also agreed with Russian arguments that the best way to counter the threat from Iran was to negotiate limits on its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes. Even many European backers of the planned BMD deployments were uncomfortable with the way in which it was proceeding. They would have preferred that such an important initiative proceed as a multi-lateral programme within a NATO framework instead of being a bilateral initiative between the United States and the governments of Poland and

the Czech Republic. American officials belatedly sought to shore up Allied support for the system by redefining the proposed deployments as complementing related NATO efforts in this area and helping defend North America from long-range missile strikes. Although they initially envisaged the proposed deployments primarily as forward-based elements of the US National Missile Defense system aimed at countering possible ICBM launches against the continental United States, US government representatives soon began to depict these systems as intended also to help defend US allies from missile strikes originating in Middle Eastern countries.

Some US and NATO analysts saw Russia's confrontational posture as an attempt to bargain for much greater influence in any European missile-defence architecture than Western governments would like to provide. Russian defence leaders certainly made statements affirming Russia's right to participate as a core member of any European BMD architecture. For example, the chief of the Russian General Staff, General Yury Baluyevskiy, indicated that Russia would only fully support a NATO missile-defence system that was jointly developed with Moscow. NATO must choose, he wrote, 'whether the missile defense system in Europe will be developed jointly with Russia, or whether it will be a segment of the U.S. national system without Russia's participation'.²² The head of the Russian Air Force, Vladimir Mikhailov, told Europeans that deploying US BMD assets on their territories, rather than developing a combined air-and-continental TMD system with Russia, would make Europe vulnerable to anti-American terrorism and reinforce its strategic subordination to the United States.²³ He insisted that the principle of equal participation should govern the creation of any multilateral BMD systems, with Russia closely involved in every step of its formation and operation and enjoying the same status as the United States and its allies.²⁴ After meeting with the German foreign minister, Lavrov reaffirmed that the NATO–Russia Council still had 'a lot of potential as a mechanism of collective cooperation' provided the participants continued to respect its cooperative decision-making procedure.²⁵ But although Western governments stressed their continued interest in cooperating with Russia on missile-defence issues, including within the NATO–Russia Council, they refused to grant Moscow a veto over the

kind of BMD architecture NATO countries would establish to defend their security.

Ongoing challenges

Throughout 2007 and 2008, Russian and American officials discussed a number of US proposals to mitigate Moscow's security concerns regarding the planned deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic. In particular, they offered a series of confidence-building measures that would increase the transparency of the facilities' operations to the Russian government as well as limit any theoretical threat they might pose to Russia's own nuclear-missile arsenal. Among the proposed measures, US officials suggested that, with the approval of the Czech and Polish governments, Russian personnel might inspect operations at the US-run facilities.²⁶ They also offered to give Russian inspectors access to BMD sites on US territory.²⁷ In addition, Gates said that the United States would not operationalise the sites until it had 'flight testing from Iran that showed a capability to threaten Europe'.²⁸ American officials further indicated they would negotiate limits on Washington's missile deployments at the sites to overcome Moscow's worries about 'breakout', or the prospect of the United States vastly increasing its BMD systems near Russia.²⁹ US negotiators also reviewed possible constraints on the capabilities and operation of the systems to reduce the possible threat they could pose to Russia's own strategic nuclear missiles.³⁰

These offers never succeeded in making Russian leaders comfortable with the planned deployments. Lavrov continued to argue in favour of Moscow's alternative proposal to establish some kind of joint US–NATO–Russian BMD architecture for Europe, observing that while Moscow was willing to negotiate, Russian policymakers nevertheless remained 'convinced that the best way to assuage Russia's concerns ... will be to abandon such plans and turn to a truly collective project'.³¹ Lavrov was referring to various Russian proposals made by Putin to share with Washington data from the Russian-operated early-warning radars located at Gabala in Azerbaijan and Armavir in Russia's North Caucasus. At the June 2007 G8 summit in Germany, Putin offered to provide the United States with unprecedented access to intelligence on Iranian missile developments from the Russian-leased Gabala

radar station in return for Washington's promise to freeze its planned Czech and Polish deployments. At the July 2007 Kennebunkport summit, Putin additionally told Bush that the United States could also use a nearly completed BMD radar located in Krasnodar Territory in southern Russia, about 700km northwest of Iran.³² The Russian president also proposed establishing an ambitious pan-European BMD architecture that would integrate NATO and Russian defences against common missile threats. Putin further called for the revival of the Joint Data Exchange Center in Moscow and the establishment of a similar joint early-warning data centre in Brussels in order to more fully involve other NATO governments. Putin's comment that 'the deck has been dealt, and we are here to play' implied a willingness to consider additional initiatives that would meet US, NATO and Russian security needs.³³ A member of the Russian delegation said at the time that 'we are proposing global strategic partnership and the choice is with our American partners'.³⁴

Although the G.W. Bush administration expressed interest in accessing the information from the Gabala and Armavir radars, it was unwilling to accept Putin's condition that the United States suspend its East European deployments in exchange. White House representatives maintained that, while these Russian early-warning radars might be able to supply data useful for assessing Iranian missile launches, they lacked the battle-management capabilities of the X-band radar planned for the Czech Republic or the ability to intercept any missile directed at Europe, as the Polish interceptors were designed to do. Although Putin's Kennebunkport proposal aimed to overcome some of the technical objections raised by US defence analysts regarding the Gabala site, it did not address two other factors that American policymakers understandably decline to highlight in public.

Firstly, many people in Washington doubt that a truly multinational BMD system could work. As noted above, intercept decisions must be made quickly: even a few minutes' delay in transmitting information would prevent a timely launch. These concerns are particularly relevant

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in the case of Putin's proposals for a joint Russian–American command-and-control system for a radar in Azerbaijan or southern Russia. The fear is that Moscow might use any dual-key arrangement to impede future measures that Washington might wish to take, such as tracking or intercepting a suspicious Iranian missile launch. These considerations also explain the initial US reluctance to give NATO an operational role in the deployments planned for Poland and the Czech Republic. Given the stakes involved, the American government wanted autonomy in decision-making.

Secondly, many US officials worry about the opportunities for Russian intelligence gathering that would be presented by any joint missile-defence initiative. Putin himself observed that his proposal envisaged the unprecedented integration of the US and Russian BMD architectures. This arrangement would give both parties a much deeper understanding of the capabilities and operations of their respective national systems. An unspoken US concern is that such intelligence might find its way to Tehran, Pyongyang or other actors of proliferation concern, where it would facilitate the development of counter-measures. In contrast, the Czech and Polish facilities were planned to be largely American-run enterprises, which would have facilitated the rapid transfer of data to the US BMD command and would have minimised opportunities for intelligence leakage.

The failed effort to develop confidence-building measures that would have satisfied the security needs of both Russia and NATO provides a cautionary example of the difficulty in converting such proposals into concrete, operational arms-control limits. Likewise, the extent to which Moscow should play a role in deciding whether Iran was capable of threatening Europe with missile attacks (a major justification for the planned missile interceptors in Poland) proved exceptionally difficult to determine. Russians and Americans have differed for years on the question of whether Iran presents a genuine threat to NATO's security. Russian analysts have long accused their American counterparts of exaggerating Iranian capabilities to justify placing BMD systems in Europe that actually seek to counter Russia's own nuclear deterrent. Attempts to reach an understanding at the US–Russian presidential summit in Sochi in April 2008 largely failed. At the summit, Putin called for 'equal democratic access to managing' any BMD

architecture,³⁵ while US officials insisted (as they continue to do today) that they would never give the Russian government a veto over when and how the United States could employ its missile defences.³⁶

Moscow's insistence that Russian personnel enjoy a permanent presence at any BMD facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic to monitor their operations has presented another stumbling block. Immediately after the Sochi summit, Lavrov reaffirmed that the Russian government would insist on having a constant military presence at any Polish or Czech BMD sites in order to monitor their operations 'second-by-second'.³⁷

The initial US proposal had envisaged only short-notice inspections of the BMD facilities by specially designated officials from the Russian embassies in Poland and the Czech Republic.³⁸ US officials had characterised this monitoring as a component of a larger framework that could also encompass inspections at Russian and American sites.³⁹ Polish and Czech leaders, recalling past periods of Russian and Soviet occupation, expressed irritation about not being consulted in advance about the US proposal and categorically rejected hosting a permanent Russian military presence.⁴⁰ Instead, they offered to consider granting Russian monitors temporary access to the facilities based on their territory, but only on a reciprocal basis.⁴¹ The Russian government refused to allow either country to monitor Russian defence sites, even for short-term inspections.⁴²

A further problem was that Washington never identified any specific steps it was prepared to take to assuage Russian fears about a BMD breakout, in which the United States would rapidly increase the capacity of its missile defences around and near Russia. It was never made clear, for example, how widely any limits on future US BMD deployments might apply, how long these might last or whether they might restrict the joint BMD research and development programmes the United States conducts with foreign allies, including Japan, Australia and Israel. Even today, US officials indicate they would expand US missile defences to address any emerging threats. Thus, a growing Iranian missile capability would trigger a robust US BMD response around Iran, and therefore around Russia.

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Enforcement of confidence-building measures would also have presented practical problems. Many US officials resist agreements that would limit Washington's ability to respond rapidly to emerging threats. In contrast, Russian policymakers have, in their arms-control negotiations with the United States, insisted on formal, legally binding treaties. Lavrov has said that, in assessing threats from foreign countries, 'what matters [to Moscow] in such cases is potential, not intentions'.⁴³

Prospects under the Obama administration

The Obama administration has been surprisingly committed to missile defence, despite the traditional scepticism of many Democrats towards BMD projects. The main reason for this has been a genuine fear of the improving offensive ballistic-missile capabilities of Iran, North Korea and possibly other countries. These threats are seen as expanding in both quantitative and qualitative terms. A secondary concern is to encourage Republican support for the administration's arms-control initiatives, including the recently signed New START Treaty with Russia.

Like the previous administration, Obama's national-security team has indicated it is prepared to deploy additional BMD systems in Europe and elsewhere as the perceived threat increases. In the case of Europe, the Obama administration's Phased Adaptive Approach would place ground-based versions of the traditionally sea-based SM-3 interceptors in Romania or other countries near Iran from 2015. But it would also consider stationing more advanced interceptor missiles in Central European countries such as Poland as early as 2018 should Iran's missile capabilities continue to improve. Such a move would again alarm Russian policymakers about a potential BMD threat to their country's nuclear deterrent. A desire to maintain the flexibility to counter any unexpected missile threats, from Iran or elsewhere, would make the Obama administration and its successors reluctant to accept Sokov's call for a 'politically if not legally binding regime governing missile-defence developments'. Perhaps an even greater obstacle, at least for the next few years, is that the current US administration knows Republicans and other pro-BMD members of Congress would attack Obama for constraining US

Obama's missile-defence priorities

The Obama administration released its Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report on 1 February 2010. Consistent with other administration statements, it outlines the White House's fundamental plans and priorities for US ballistic-missile defences. Among them:

- The administration has stressed the need for flexible plans and capabilities that can adapt as threats and technologies evolve. The BMD programmes associated with this 'phased adaptive approach' aim to defend against the currently limited ballistic-missile threats, while hedging against the emergence of more substantial challenges in coming years.
- The administration aims to defend the American homeland, US military forces and foreign partners from ballistic-missile threats. In contrast to the growing number of US TMD systems protecting forward-deployed American troops as well as other countries, US national missile defence will continue to rely exclusively on the ground-based mid-course defence systems at Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.
- The US government will no longer describe the planned systems for Europe as a 'third' national missile-defence site, and any European-based systems will more clearly aim to protect European countries from Iranian missiles. The administration also wants to better integrate its initiatives with NATO's independent missile-defence efforts to defend Alliance military forces and European population centres.
- In the Middle East, the administration will deploy BMD systems in several countries to help them counter Iranian missiles, while continuing cooperative research and development programmes with Israel.
- US BMD collaboration with Japan will continue under Tokyo's new government, while South Korea may become a more important partner. Cooperation with Taiwan is excluded, however, because of opposition from Beijing.
- The Pentagon will undertake more rigorous research, development and testing under realistic operational conditions to ensure the effectiveness and reliability of new systems before committing to deploy them.
- The United States will share technologies and funding with other countries to support collaborative BMD research and development, and other international missile-defence partnerships.
- The administration will not seek to negate the nuclear deterrents of Russia and China.

The Obama administration requested increased funding for missile defence after making an initial spending cut during its first year in office. The latest budget proposal requests a \$700 million increase in funding in fiscal year 2011 over 2010. Still, the administration insists that any BMD programme must be fiscally sustainable over the long term. Other NATO governments remain less committed to BMD-related spending, which could deepen intra-Alliance tensions over NATO burden sharing.

missile-defence programmes to obtain greater Russian support against Iran.

Russian officials continue to offer to collaborate with NATO on missile defence, but they want to focus first on developing a shared understanding of potential missile threats. The next step would be to pursue political and economic measures to avert them. Moscow insists that, if Russia and NATO countries perceive a genuine threat, they should undertake a joint

response, which could include deploying BMD systems. Sokov observes that ‘a key condition for Russian participation is full-scale integration into any early-warning and defence system – not just the provision of data, but actual involvement in decision-making and operation of the system’. The Obama administration and other NATO governments want to cooperate with Russia on missile defence, but like their predecessors are not willing to give Moscow a potential veto over their BMD

operations, or over Washington or NATO’s future BMD plans for Europe or elsewhere.

Given the Obama administration’s commitment to developing missile defence, BMD issues invariably became a divisive issue during the negotiations on the New START Treaty. In these talks (as well as through other means), Russian officials strived but failed to place binding limits on the open-ended nature of US BMD deployments, especially in Europe. One reason for the modest nature of the reductions in offensive nuclear strategic forces required by New START is that Russian officials refused to accept lower limits on warheads and strategic delivery vehicles unless US strategic defence capabilities were also constrained. In the absence of such guarantees, Russian policymakers insist they need sufficient offensive nuclear systems to overcome any possible American missile shield. The text of the New START Treaty places no formal constraints on US BMD programmes, though Russian officials have affirmed their country’s unilateral right to withdraw from the treaty if US missile-defence programmes ever develop to the point where they might jeopardise the credibility of Russia’s nuclear deterrent.⁴⁴

Obama is not willing to give Moscow a potential veto

In thinking about future strategic arms-control possibilities, it is important to note that there is no consistent pattern in how closely Moscow and Washington link strategic offensive forces with strategic defences. The connection was tightest during the first Soviet–American strategic arms-control dialogue, the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT), in 1969–72. The agreement that emerged from the talks (SALT I) consisted of both an Interim Agreement on Offensive Arms, which froze the American and Soviet ICBM fleets at existing levels, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which severely limited the location and size of each country’s national ballistic-missile defence systems. The Soviet Union and the United States agreed to the pairing because one factor driving both countries to increase their offensive nuclear forces was a determination to overcome the other’s missile defences. The linkage was also evident in the mid-1980s, when Soviet officials refused to negotiate major reductions in their offensive nuclear forces as long as Reagan insisted on pursuing the Strategic Defense Initiative. In 2002, however, the Russian and American governments agreed to the Moscow Treaty, despite the concurrent decision of the G.W. Bush administration to withdraw unilaterally from the ABM Treaty. Although the Putin administration had refused to accept amendments to the treaty sought by the United States that would have permitted a wide range of BMD activities, the Russian government decided to accept the Moscow Treaty rather than allow the United States to have a completely free hand in developing strategic offensive and defensive forces.

Thanks in part to Rasmussen’s efforts to improve NATO–Russia relations and encourage BMD cooperation, NATO and Russian foreign ministers agreed at the 4 December 2009 NATO–Russia Council meeting to revise their joint work programme and to restructure the working methods of the council itself. They also launched a Joint Review of 21st Century Common Security Challenges. One of the topics under review is the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and their means of delivery. The review will supplement the Russian–American BMD threat assessment, the results of which will feed into the council study. Nonetheless, the various recurring obstacles to NATO–Russian BMD cooperation largely persist, making it unlikely that the parties will realise Rasmussen’s ambi-

tious goals to establish a jointly run missile-defence system for the Northern Hemisphere. Pursuing such an unrealistic goal risks generating yet another round of mutual recriminations resulting from frustrated expectations. Joint BMD projects cannot be used to create a political consensus on missile defence when it does not already exist.

It would be more profitable at this point to focus on harmonising Russian–NATO threat assessments, pursuing shared early-warning capabilities, strengthening barriers against accidental or unauthorised missile launches, and expanding joint initiatives to curtail the proliferation of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons rather than to seek to construct a comprehensive NATO–Russia missile-defence architecture. It might even be possible to establish a few jointly run TMD systems, but these facilities, which may not be available during a genuine crisis if one party objects to their use, should only be seen as optional supplements to the parties' core BMD architectures. The Obama administration's BMD Review, completed earlier this year, noted that 'one of the benefits of the European Phased Adaptive Approach is that it allows for a Russian contribution if political circumstances make that possible. For example, Russian radars could contribute useful and welcome tracking data, although the functioning of the U.S. system will not be dependent on that data.'⁴⁵ One possibility under this approach would be to convert the Gabala radar into a shared Russia–NATO early-warning system that could enhance both parties' BMD capabilities but that would not be indispensable to the functioning of either party's European missile defences. Even so, NATO and Russian officials should recognise that the value of this collaboration would be primarily political, helping to reconcile their differences over BMD in general and, ideally, reinforcing the message to Iran that its missile programmes are alienating important countries.

Notes

¹ 'Building a Euro-Atlantic Security Architecture', Speech by NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Brussels Forum 2010, organised by the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium,

27 March 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_62395.htm?selectedLocale=en; see also Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'The Promise of Euro-Atlantic Missile Defense', Project Syndicate, 30 March 2010,

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