



Supporting Missile Defense

Europe plays a key role in thwarting threats from weapons of mass destruction

By per Concordiam Staff

More than five decades after World War II and two decades since the end of the Cold War and its corresponding threat of nuclear annihilation, existential security concerns seem far from the minds of average Europeans. This sense of safety, combined with tight government budgets in a time of economic crisis, makes costly weapons systems and other defense expenditures seem less essential to citizens and policymakers alike. But despite the impression of security, Europe cannot afford to be complacent to continued threats in a still-dangerous world. While the Cold War danger of global nuclear war has receded, the risk of missile-borne nuclear attack remains.



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A sailor stands by a weapons control desk aboard the USS Monterey. The ship, which carries AEGIS ballistic missile defense technology, is currently conducting Phase I screening.

At the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) was designated a core element of NATO's collective defense requirements and the Alliance committed "to expand NATO's current system to protect NATO-deployed forces to also protect NATO European populations and territory." And at the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, the Alliance confirmed its strategic and financial commitment. NATO defense and intelligence communities consider the ongoing ballistic missile and nuclear weapons development efforts of regional actors such as North Korea to be legitimate security threats. Many NATO and European Union officials are concerned that the ongoing economic crisis may deter European nations from fulfilling their basic obligation to protect their people and territories from nuclear attack.

Missile defense evolves

In 2006, based on the conclusions of a NATO feasibility study, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recommended building a BMD system in Europe. The original plan was intended to protect both the United States and NATO allies from intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). However, in 2009, the plan was revised with the transition to the Phased Adaptive Approach (PAA) after a new threat assessment indicated that short- and medium-range missiles from the Middle East could pose an "increased and more immediate threat to allied forces and populations on the European continent," according to a report from the Atlantic Council think tank.

The first of the four-phase PAA employs Aegis-guided missile cruisers with ship-based interceptors on the Mediterranean Sea, supported by ground-based early detection radar systems to be located in Central Europe. In May 2012, the Alliance announced that the first stage of its European missile defense shield was "provisionally operational." The U.S. transferred control of its missile defense radar sites in Turkey to NATO command and authorized a similar command structure for U.S. ships engaged in the PAA. Three additional phases, incorporating more advanced

interceptors and radars, are to be deployed through 2020, incrementally improving area of coverage and intercept capabilities, and will provide security for all NATO territories against potential missile attack from a rogue country.

"Arc of instability"

If the commitment made in Lisbon, to achieve an integrated European BMD system by 2020, is to be met, BMD research and development must continue to receive sufficient resources. As missile defense technology evolves, so does the threat. The U.S. Department of Defense September 2010 "Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report" (BMDR) states: "The ballistic missile threat is increasing both quantitatively and qualitatively, and is likely to continue to do so over the next decade." The BMDR states that several states are improving the quality and accuracy of their missile systems and defenses, and numerous states are also developing nuclear, chemical and/or biological weapons capabilities.

At the 10th Congress on European Security and Defence in Berlin, held in November 2011, Edward Hanlon, a retired U.S. Marine Corps general and president of Raytheon International, Europe, pointed to the development of an "arc of instability across North Africa and the Middle East." Advanced missile technology wedded to unstable and potentially hostile regimes is a dangerous combination.

Critics of BMD consistently argue the continuing validity of the Cold War concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) as a nuclear deterrence strategy, contending that no hostile regional power would assure its own destruction by launching a nuclear missile at Europe. However, nuclear deterrence works both ways. NATO can also be deterred from acting in its own interests by a nuclear-armed hostile state, be it in operations to support democracy, aid refugees, or defend friendly nations. Panelists at the Berlin conference questioned how operations in Libya might have differed if the "rogue regime" of Moammar Gadhafi had possessed nuclear weapons and the means to deploy them.

The premise of MAD also relies on the assumption of rationality. NATO can't rely

on potential adversaries to be rational, retired Col. Hans-Hinrich Kühl, former commander of the German Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defence School, said in 2011. An adversary who feels there is nothing to lose may strike out against his enemies. Kühl also pointed to technological advances that increase the chances of chemical and/or biological weaponization outside the scope of Western verification regimes.

Russia is among the strongest critics of NATO's BMD policy – and a staunch proponent of MAD doctrine. Russia's concern is founded primarily on the fear that NATO could use BMD systems to counter Russia's arsenal of nuclear weapons. Russia worries that if its nuclear arsenal were to be neutralized, it would be vulnerable to political coercion or even

military intervention. While these anxieties are based on outdated Cold War assumptions, NATO needs to establish a better climate of trust with Russia, former NATO Military Committee Chairman and retired German Gen. Harald Kujat told the Berlin conference. Through cooperation on BMD, NATO and Russia can more effectively defend against a threat to which both are vulnerable.

Budgets threaten missile defense

The ongoing financial crisis has resulted in substantial cuts to already frugal European defense budgets. Defense analysts at Europe's World say that NATO European defense spending had fallen to 1.6 percent of GDP in 2011, well below the suggested 2 percent

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, left, former Minister of Defense Bogdan Klich, right, and Gen. Mieczysław Stachowiak visit Redzikowo air base in 2008 in northern Poland, where a missile shield base will be located.



This Soviet-built air base near Deveselu, Romania, will host the first land-based missile interceptors to be installed as part of NATO's Phased Adaptive Approach.



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commitment, and project cuts of 10 to 15 percent more. “The current defence budgets of many NATO countries are already ‘austerity budgets,’ additional cuts look set to magnify the problem at a time when more funds are needed,” the policy journal noted.

But Europe must have credible military power to advance its interests on the world stage. And it's not as if Europe can't afford to do more if priorities were readjusted. The European Union (\$14.82 trillion GDP in 2010, or 11.55 trillion euros) has a larger economic output than the United States (\$14.66 trillion, or 11.43 trillion euros). But cooperation is crucial for Europe. As Hanlon said, limited economic resources need to be rebalanced toward priority requirements while existing resources are refocused to meet new missions. Finally, the concept of “pooling and sharing” needs to be implemented to create an effective and affordable BMD system.

Credible defense requires collective action. Separately, Europe is a group of mostly small countries with limited resources, but together it's a world power with extensive human, technical and economic resources. As Lt. Gen. Markus Bentler, commander of Germany's Response Forces Operations Command said at the 2011 security conference in Berlin, multinationality is imperative; there is no alternative if Europe is to have meaningful military structures.

Science fiction to reality

Once, the idea of a BMD shield, capable of shooting nuclear-tipped missiles from the sky and terminating their deadly missions, was thought to belong to the realm of science fiction. After the Strategic Defense Initiative – the forebear of today's BMD technology – was proposed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1983, detractors derisively dubbed it “Star Wars.” Almost three decades and hundreds of billions of dollars later, a limited system is in place in Europe and development of more comprehensive and effective technology continues.

Former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev once said about nuclear war: “The survivors would envy the dead.” But many argue that full deployment of technology capable of placing the threat of nuclear war into the dustbin of history requires a commitment of time, energy and resources. Collective action, cooperation and contributions by all NATO members are essential to meet the commitment made by NATO heads of state in Lisbon. As Hanlon said at the Berlin security conference, NATO needs to find the same “determined resolve to protect the interests and people” of Allied nations that it displayed in the Cold War to defend free Europe against communist totalitarianism. □