

The New European Missile Defense Architecture

IS THERE A ROLE FOR UKRAINE?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 183
September 2011

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U.S. President Barack Obama rejected his predecessor's proposed ballistic missile defense system in Europe and substituted it with a localized theater system. This was generally understood to be a significant gesture in support of the "reset" between the United States and Russia. Moscow met this gesture, however, with continued opposition to any European missile defense system that did not include binding guarantees that the system would not threaten Russian strategic capabilities in the future. Lack of progress on this issue will presumably stimulate Russian efforts to enhance its defensive perimeter. This, in turn, will impact the national interests of Ukraine, which has an incentive to cooperate in European missile defense based on a mixture of geopolitical anxiety and technical interest.

A New System, Russia's Concerns

According to the "phased adaptive approach" of the Obama administration's new missile defense plan, the system will be designed to detect and intercept a missile launched by a "rogue state" (the United States named Iran) and is supposed to be deployed in three stages covering different geographical regions: Southern (Romania), Eastern (Poland), and Northern Europe. The strategic ground-based interceptor (GBI) systems formerly planned for deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic have been replaced by a tactical Aegis-type sea and ground-based system, which some Russian experts regard as actually able to outperform their GBI counterparts. There is a common opinion in Russia that the SM-3IIB interceptors being deployed on ships in Northern Europe, along Russian ballistic missile trajectories, are capable of striking down these missiles. Moreover, the claim that the last two stages of the plan will solve the problem of intercepting intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) potentially increases the vulnerability of Russian strategic nuclear forces. Finally, if some years ago the quality and quantity of Russia's strategic forces were considered sufficiently high to withstand any threat from a limited missile defense program, this will no longer be a safe

assumption by the end of the decade. Aging Soviet ICBMs (SS-18) built by missile facilities in Ukraine, together with the degradation of its naval strategic forces, presumably will reduce Russian nuclear forces by a factor of three (from the 2010 level). Even rough strategic parity with the United States will thus be broken. The European missile defense system could then be regarded as a key factor increasing Russian vulnerability.

It should thus come as no surprise that Moscow has been urging NATO for either a legally binding guarantee that the new missile defense system will not be developed to intercept Russian ICBMs or for full participation in the creation of the new system. The United States and NATO have rejected the first idea, while supporting the second. The devil, however, is in the details. Russia favors a sectoral missile defense variant, whereby it will be responsible for the security of NATO's eastern flank, Poland and the Baltic states in particular. For Moscow, a sectoral approach would mean a guarantee that the new missile defense system would not be directed against its strategic capabilities. The Alliance, however, considers such an idea a contradiction of NATO's principle of collective self-defense. Moscow regards this unwillingness to include Russia as a full participant as proof of the hidden adverse motivations of NATO and United States.

Future Scenarios

Three potential scenarios concerning Russia's response to a European missile defense system may be proposed. The first is based on Russia's aforementioned concerns and is a continuation of the classic conservative line, the pursuit of a course of *strategic confrontation* and military blackmail. In this case, if NATO fails to meet Russia's demands, Moscow might fulfill its threat to deploy missile systems along Russia's borders with NATO member-states. Moscow's intention to develop a new heavy ballistic missile to replace the ageing "Satan" (SS-18) could play a critical role in this scenario. Like its predecessors, the new missile has high counterforce first-strike potential. Its introduction will blur the prospects for future strategic arms control treaties between the United States and Russia, creating the precondition for a new arms race. This will most of all raise concerns about tactical nuclear weapons, as Moscow's quantitative superiority in this area gives it leverage. Finally, this scenario would likely include a deterioration of the Russian-U.S. dialogue on issues like the Iranian nuclear program and NATO enlargement.

The second scenario of *cooperation* is one based on genuine dialogue. This scenario has a chance at being implemented if both sides reach a consensus on MD. Short of joint sectoral European missile defense, as advocated by Russia but rejected by NATO, other compromise steps could make the strategic dialogue between Russia and the West more transparent and trust-based. Limits on interceptor speed could be introduced, or the United States could give a political guarantee that it will not deploy Aegis systems in Northern Europe. Even limited compromises could help the United States and Russia support the progressive tendency of the "reset." This scenario could

lead the two nuclear giants toward a window of opportunity for further reducing their strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

The third scenario, *limited dialogue*, is a situation in which the United States and Russia do not reach agreement on principal issues but keep up the façade of continuing dialogue. Such a scenario will not prevent an arms race, and would inhibit progress toward either tactical or strategic reductions, but it would help keep the door open to future discussions.

Ukraine's Position

Kyiv's position on European missile defense is mainly defined by three factors: an interest toward the European MD project, the absence of any concrete proposal from NATO, and Russia's opposition. In general, the absence of an official invitation to join the project makes domestic Ukrainian debate on the subject theoretical and loosely developed. Nonetheless, many in Ukraine (including some traditional left-wing parties and experts) support the creation of a joint NATO-Russia MD system, in which Ukraine is also a participant. At the same time, the Ukrainian government's interest in the project has varied. If in November 2010 Kyiv expressed eagerness to join in on a European missile defense system, in February 2011 it declared it was ready to participate in the project but only with Russia. Then, this past June, President Viktor Yanukovich [stated](#) that Kyiv is not prepared to join in. This last comment coincided with the public disagreement between NATO and Russia over the creation of sectoral MD. Nonetheless, Kyiv's tendency to support Moscow in the missile defense dialogue remains in tension with its desire to further deepen Ukraine's cooperation with Europe. Emphasizing the non-aligned status of Ukraine, Yanukovich also mentioned in his June remarks that "if Ukraine, even Russia, were engaged in some part of this system, European security will only benefit." Two weeks later, clarifying his statement, Yanukovich added that Ukraine was ready to discuss participation in the European MD system if it received a proposal to do so. This was a clear message that Kyiv remains interested in playing a role.

What kind of contribution could Ukraine make in the European missile defense project? We can base our analysis on the three scenarios outlined above. In the event of *confrontation* between Russia and the West, Ukraine will lack all room of maneuver. Moscow's pressure on Kyiv will grow, as it will be ever more concerned about militarily enhancing its Black Sea flank. The fact that Ukraine shares a 650-kilometer border with NATO member Romania, where the first Aegis Ashore systems are to be deployed (2015), makes the loyalty of Ukraine highly important to Russia. This scenario thus excludes any participation of Ukraine in the West's missile defense plans. At the same time, there are grounds to believe that Ukraine could then be involved in other technical projects, particularly the creation of the new Russian heavy missile. This is quite plausible, as Ukraine's Yuzhmash machine-building factory, one of the creators of the legendary Satan missile, has the qualifications and technical experience needed and which the Russian industrial complex lacks. Such strategic cooperation would dictate to Russia the necessity of including Ukraine into its closest orbit in all spheres.

The second scenario, *cooperation*, would be a significant step toward erasing traditional dividing lines between NATO and Russia and thus favorable for a range of opportunities for Ukrainian involvement in European MD – from housing MD infrastructure (Ukraine is situated on the intersection of strategic missile trajectories from the south [i.e., Iran], as well as from Russia) to technical cooperation, akin to the Sea Launch spacecraft launch service that unites Ukraine, Russia, Norway, and the United States. Today Sea Launch performs dual-use missions, work that can be of use to the European missile defense project. European MD is thus of interest to Kyiv from the business-technical point of view as well. Such partnership, however, remains possible only if Russia were to consent.

The third scenario of *limited dialogue* might bolster Ukraine's balancing act between Russia and the West. Mainly staying out of the project, Kyiv could still engage in limited collaboration on MD issues, such as joint military training or limited technical assistance in the framework of the Sea Launch missions. In this scenario, Ukraine's behavior would be more part of a diplomatic game to strengthen its hand in relations with Moscow than a signal of any kind of serious participation. In this case, clarification of NATO's own position could be decisive for determining the substance of Kyiv's cooperation; as long as NATO gives the impression that it does not wish to complicate relations with Russia because of Ukraine, the latter will hardly be interested in doing anything more than "talking" with NATO.

Conclusion

The development of a modern European missile defense system is of great significance to both Russia and Ukraine. In spite of the differences in their geopolitical weight, power, ambitions, and interests, both states will face serious consequences if the project is implemented. Russia sees no threat from Iranian missiles and thus sees the program as aimed at undermining its strategic capabilities. Moscow's position is thus "no" or, in the event of a joint NATO-Russia system, "maybe yes." Since Washington and Brussels do not share this position, any attempts by Ukraine to cooperate on European MD will be regarded by Moscow as interference by the West in its sphere of vital interests.

Ukraine's position on European MD can thus be boiled down to the apt [metaphor](#) of Valery Chaliy, former Ukrainian deputy minister of foreign affairs: "Until the big bear and big elephant come to an agreement, Ukraine has no role." For many years, the dividing line between NATO and Russia has passed through Ukraine. A scenario of Russian-Western cooperation on MD could be a brilliant opportunity for Kyiv to get over its geopolitically uncomfortable situation. In addition, cooperation on European MD could be a good opportunity for Ukraine to realize its political and technical potential. At the same time, Moscow remains the main partner for Kyiv, and its position greatly influences Ukraine's own. In spite of Ukraine's interest in the MD project, the continued lack of consensus between NATO and Russia continues to narrow Kyiv's choice.