



DISARMING ARCTIC SECURITY

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Re-visiting Missile Defence Cooperation?

Recent reporting on Russia's new military doctrine accorded banner coverage to the Kremlin's designation of NATO as its "number one threat,"¹ but very few news stories acknowledged the new doctrine's statement of Russian openness to cooperation on missile defence.² Arctic missile defence installations may not figure prominently in the current deep strains in NATO/Russian relations, but East/West relations are unlikely to reach any sustainable equilibrium without some resolution of the missile defence question generally, so any opening on that front deserves attention.

American and NATO ballistic missile defence (BMD) programs have from their earliest days bedeviled relations with Russia. As a diminished military power, Russia assigns high strategic importance to its nuclear deterrent and looks warily upon any development that it thinks might undermine its nuclear retaliatory capability. The fact that no American or NATO BMD system has either the technical competence or the sheer numbers to pose any credible threat to Russia's deterrent, is not really the point. Left unchecked, argue President Vladimir Putin and his generals, western BMD could at some point be rapidly expanded to the point that it would become a threat. At the very least, American/NATO BMD does not put Moscow into a mood to contemplate further cuts to its nuclear arsenal.

Indeed, in their year-end musings, Russian military leaders have been declaring that rebuilding strategic nuclear forces – submarines, intercontinental missiles, long range strategic bombers – will be a priority in 2015,³ and they have also been touting Russia's own development of missile defence systems analogous to the US/NATO Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and the North American US ground-based midcourse defence system with its Arctic-based interceptors.⁴

Just as BMD has from its earliest origins raised concerns about its destabilizing effects, it has all along also been accompanied by ideas and proposals for Russia/United States cooperation on missile defence as a way of mitigating those effects. Even Ronald Reagan's 1980s Strategic Defense Initiative included a general offer to work with the then Soviet Union for a joint system.⁵ The Russian news agency TASS describes the current Russian offer to cooperate as a willingness to include, as part of its deterrent and conflict prevention strategies, the "creation of mechanisms of mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral cooperation in counteracting possible missile threats, including, if necessary, creation of joint missile defense systems if Russia has equal participation in these projects."⁶ Pledges of cooperation set aside the more fundamental question of whether BMD can ever be made to work, but such pledges are intended to, and do, address the political problem of strategic destabilization.

The premise of US/NATO/Russian cooperation on missile defence is the joint development and management of a non-discriminatory system that would be tasked with providing protection from rogue state missile launches, without affecting US/NATO/Russia strategic forces and their mutual deterrence posture. Of course, it's especially important to remember that the focus on the so-called rogue state missile threat involves the expenditure of indecent sums of money, all borrowed, on a defence system that remains more theoretical than practical against a threat that too is much more theoretical than actual.

As it turns out, the repeated declarations of openness to cooperation, have also been more theory than practice. Most recently, the US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, has said cooperation in missile defence is still possible with Russia.⁷ The NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010 invited missile defence participation from Russia. In 2011 Putin created a working group within the Kremlin to foster missile defence cooperation with NATO, and in 2012 he appointed a special envoy for missile defence discussions with NATO. But in late 2013 both were rescinded, while cooperation with Belarus and Kazakhstan on air defence and missile defence were upgraded.⁸

The two sides have rather different views of what cooperation means. Russia envisions the establishment of two systems that would be joined together by a unified command and control centre. NATO rejects this model on the grounds that it would be transferring part of its responsibility for protecting elements of NATO territory to a state that is not within NATO. Hence, NATO envisions cooperation as including shared intelligence and early warning data and other elements of the system's infrastructure while maintaining separate chains of command on the operational side. NATO argues that such an arrangement would leave NATO and Russian each in charge of operations for their own territory.

Russia has also consistently asked for legal commitments from the US and NATO that their BMD operations would not be directed toward Russian strategic deterrent forces, which the US and NATO have just as consistently rejected, offering instead political rather than legally binding guarantees.⁹

Given all of these differences and the realities of current relations, it would take a very high caliber of optimism to define this as a moment of opportunity for renewed cooperation, even the most minimal levels of cooperation that could help to avoid the most obvious and brazen provocations of strategic missile defence. But perhaps the two Russian and American statements – the new doctrine's openness to cooperation and the American Ambassador's affirmation that cooperation is still possible – can at least be taken as evidence that predictions of the death of cooperation are still premature.

In the meantime, missile defence ambitions and programs seem to be in an all-systems-go mode, in Russia as in the USA and NATO. Further deployments in the Arctic region are still on the American books, with plans to add 14 new interceptors in Alaska, bringing the total to 40 from 26 (and with another four in California).

As we've argued here before,¹⁰ US-Russian and US-Chinese¹¹ tensions over BMD do not make it easier for them to cooperate in other contexts, such as Syria and the Ukraine, and it would be unrealistic to assume that BMD-generated disagreements do not also at some level undermine cooperation in the Arctic. Direct linkages are unlikely and would not be helpful, but, as a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson told reporters in Beijing in response to the announcements of additional interceptors were to be deployed in Alaska: "Strengthening anti-missile deployments and military alliances can only deepen antagonism and will be of no help to solving problems."¹² He was not referring to the Arctic, of course, but there is no reason to believe that the Arctic would somehow be exempt from the effects of such antagonisms.

The pursuit of security cooperation in the Arctic is at the very least not bolstered by current BMD dynamics. It is impossible to expect full cooperation within the context of an Arctic security community when those same states are at loggerheads on other issues in other regions of the globe (especially when much of the hardware at the heart of those disagreements – interceptors in Alaska, radars in Alaska and Greenland, and nuclear weapons in Russia – are based in the Arctic).

Notes

¹ "New Russian military doctrine names NATO as No. 1 threat" (Christian Science *Monitor*, 27 December 2014); "New Russian Military Doctrine Labels NATO as Main Threat" Agence France-Press, 28 December 2014).

² “Russia’s new military doctrine allows creation of joint missile defense systems,” TASS, 26 December 2014. <http://itar-tass.com/en/world>

³ “Strategic nuclear force to become Defence Ministry’s priority 2015 – General Staff,” TASS, 29 December 2014. <http://itar-tass.com/en/world>

⁴ Esther Tanquintic-Misa, “Russia Develops US-Like Ballistic GMD, THAAD Missile Defense Systems; Fears US’ Cruise Missile Rearmament Program, *International Business News*, 9 December 2014. <http://au.ibtimes.com>. “Russia is developing a missile defense system similar to the United States’,” Sputniknews, 8 December 2014. <http://sputniknews.com>.

⁵ “At the October 1986 Reykjavik summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Reagan suggested that both countries abandon “mutual assured destruction” by agreeing to eliminate all offensive ballistic missiles within 10 years while researching and jointly developing strategic missile defenses.” Daryl G. Kimball, “Why Sarah Palin Is Wrong About Missile Defense Cooperation with Russia,” *Arms Control Now Blog*, 10 June 2011. <http://armscontrolnow.org/2011/06/10/why-sarah-palin-is-wrong-about-missile-defense-cooperation-with-russia/>

⁶ Russia’s new military doctrine allows creation of joint missile defense systems,” TASS, 26 December 2014. <http://itar-tass.com/en/world>

⁷ “U.S. Missile defense cooperation with Russia still possible,” TASS, 25 December 2014. <http://itar-tass.com/en/world>

⁸ “Putin Dissolves Task Force for Missile Defence Cooperation with NATO,” *Global Security Newswire*, 31 October 2013. <http://www.nti.org/gsn>

⁹ Azriel Bermant, *The Russian and Iranian Missile Threats: Implications for NATO Missile Defense*, Memorandum No. 143, November 2014. *The Institute for National Security Studies*, Tel Aviv University.

¹⁰ [Missile Defence and the Arctic](#), 4 June 2013, *The Simons Foundation*.

¹¹ Part of the US interest is to extend missile defence in response to North Korea so that China is increasingly uncomfortable with it and thus may be more open to pressuring North Korea to alter its behaviour to prevent provoking BMD deployments that impinge upon China. “The new deployment is also intended to send a signal to China, which tried but failed to block the more recent nuclear test, to rein in the North. ‘We want to make it clear that there’s a price to be paid for letting the North Koreans stay on the current path,’ a senior official said Friday.” Tom Shanker, David E. Sanger and Martin Fackler, “US Is Bolstering Missile Defense to Deter North Korea,” 15 March 2013, *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/world/asia/us-to-bolster-missile-defense-against-north-korea.html?pagewanted=all>

¹² Tom Z. Cillina, “Pentagon Shifts Gears on Missile Defense,” *Arms Control Association*, April 2013. http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2013_04/Pentagon-Shifts-Gears-on-Missile-Defense