

Missile Defence

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Last Century, at the end of the Seventies, when Europe was under military pressure from the Soviet Union, a small group of European Heads of State and Government, led by the German Chancellor of the time, Helmut Schmidt, did conceive a bold plan to restore the credibility of deterrence and buttress the Western challenge to the Communist system. The European idea to build and deploy new American intermediate range nuclear forces on the European continent was sold successfully to the US President and embodied the new spirit of the Eighties, which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Today, our triumphant political and economic system, instead of challenging the World, is increasingly plagued by inward looking political leaderships, and by a suffocating urgency to preserve itself and to defend against a plethora of not very well defined enemies, generally pictured as much more powerful and threatening than they actually are. The need to build new defences against ballistic missiles is part and parcel of this perception of increased vulnerability.

The US can hope to set up an effective anti-missile defence of their territory also because the threats come from very far: the other side of the Antarctic, the Pacific Ocean, the Middle East or Southern Asia, giving them enough time to detect the attack and ample space to attempt the interception. Even so, the original plan of establishing a multi-layered complete defence against massive missile attacks has been indefinitely postponed in favour of a much more modest system aimed at defending the US against a single missile fired by mistake or very few, inaccurate and low technology weapons fired by unspecified « rogue states ». The fact that many serious doubts remain also about the effectiveness and reliability of this kind of reduced anti-missile shield is further proof of the complexity and ambiguity of the entire matter.

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