

TRANSATLANTIC MISSILE DEFENSE

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Missile Defense in NATO: A French Perspective

A Long Time Ago, in a Country Not so Far Away...

In France, missile defense comes with a long and complicated history. When the U.S. Congress passed the “National Missile Defense Act of 1999,” which called for the development and deployment of a U.S. national missile defense system, Paris reacted negatively. At that time, France still considered missile defense to be both unnecessary and destabilizing. French policy makers still considered the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction to be the *cornerstones* of strategic stability. French thinkers viewed missile defense as jeopardizing both the doctrine and the Treaty, as well as risking a new arms race with Russia.

Paris also feared that missile defense would undermine France’s nuclear posture. Experts in Paris insisted that their nation’s nuclear capability remain the only strategic system protecting France’s vital interest. The supremacy of France’s nuclear deterrent in French doctrine ruled out coexistence with a defense strategic system that provided protection to populations and territory.

Moreover, most French security experts doubted the technological feasibility of ballistic missile defense. They thought that only the United States would be foolish enough to spend huge amounts of money on unproven technologies that lacked operational or political usefulness. Instead, the French defense policy community viewed missile defense merely as an American “economic weapon” used to defeat the Soviet Union and win the Cold War.

External Events Challenge French Thinking

Opinions began to shift in the mid to late 1990s, however, as some experts and policy makers in Paris became convinced of the need to begin thinking about how to develop, deploy, and use – both at operational and strategic levels – theater as well as territorial missile defense. Several reasons can

Transatlantic Missile Defense

In October 2010, the Atlantic Council hosted a conference on missile defense entitled “Transatlantic Missile Defense: Looking to Lisbon.” The conference featured senior U.S. policymakers and experts from across the transatlantic community in a conversation about the political, technical, and budgetary issues relating to transatlantic missile defense in the weeks before the November 2010 Lisbon NATO summit. These issue briefs, written by discussants at the conference, provide a European perspective to the transatlantic debate on the future of missile defense within the NATO Alliance.

These briefs and the recent conference continue the work of the Atlantic Council on transatlantic missile defense. Previous activities include a workshop on NATO-Russia missile defense cooperation in November 2010, a conference on the implications of the Obama administration’s Phased Adaptive Approach missile defense policy in October 2009, as well as a conference on the Bush administration’s ‘Third Site’ missile defense architecture in 2007.

The Atlantic Council’s work on transatlantic missile defense is sponsored by Raytheon.

explain the existence of these different views on these issues:

- First, **technical analysis** conducted by French Ministry of Defense experts of U.S. Missile Defense projects – both National Missile Defense (NMD), Theater Missile Defense (TMD), and support elements such as the Space Based Infrared System – led to the conclusion that missile defense would become a reality and that systems would eventually be deployed. Paris realized that it needed to adjust policy to these realities to avoid risking the credibility of the French nuclear deterrent. More precisely, policymakers believed France’s strategic posture – meaning its nuclear doctrine and conventional concepts of operations – needed to adapt to the eventual deployment of a missile defense system capable of protecting Europe, which would probably cover France regardless of the wishes of policymakers in Paris.
- Second, in the 1990s, France concluded that **growing bipartisan support for missile defense in the United States** made it more likely that Washington would eventually develop and deploy a sophisticated missile defense system that would impact French policy. Although initially unwelcome in Paris, the enormous bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress for the 1999 National Missile Defense Act played a particular role in shaping French thinking.
- Third, France recognized **the necessity of missile defense to protect deployed French troops** from a growing cruise and ballistic missile defense threat. The first Gulf War clearly demonstrated that forces sent into hostile regions around the world had to be able to contend with the reality of ballistic missiles. France would have to protect not only its own forces but also those of the host nation and their population in any theater where French forces were deployed. Theater missile defense would therefore be a meaningful contribution to ensure their full cooperation and counter the use of ballistic or cruise missiles in anti-access strategies. French experts became increasingly convinced of the utility of a ballistic missile defense system as they identified

rapidly emergent missile and non-conventional threats to French and European territory.

By 1997, thinking had evolved enough in Paris for France to begin developing a theater missile defense program – based on a specific evolution of the Aster-30 medium range air defense interceptor – and to embark on the NATO Theater Missile Defense project.

Meanwhile, France conducted some reviews of its policy and options on territorial and theater missile defenses. In 1999 and 2000, Paris softened its criticism of U.S. missile defense projects and de-linked nuclear deterrence and ballistic missile defense. The prioritization of missile defense by the George W. Bush administration and the continued support for missile defense by Bush’s Democrat successor Barack Obama completed France’s policy evolution from vetted hostility to pragmatic cooperation.

This political shift in Paris was articulated clearly in two key speeches, the first by President Chirac in 2006 at l’Île Longue and the second by President Sarkozy in 2008 at Cherbourg. In the first, while reiterating that missile defense could not be a substitute for nuclear deterrence, President Chirac indicated it could complete deterrence by diminishing France’s vulnerabilities.¹ President Sarkozy continued France’s policy evolution by declaring: “In order to preserve our freedom of action, some missile defense system capable of defending against a limited strike could constitute a useful complement to nuclear deterrence, without substituting to it.”

France’s policy shift on missile defense was translated in the 2008 Defense and Security White Book, which calls for France to possess an autonomous Early Warning (EW) system by 2020.

French Support for Territorial Missile Defense – Oui, mais...

Although there is widespread bi-partisan political support in Paris for some kind of territorial missile defense, an influential minority of decision makers remain convinced that recent policy shifts on missile defense are detrimental to France’s national interests. Their political influence is limited at this point because of President Sarkozy’s strong influence on defense and international security issues, but they retain

¹ Présidence de la République, « Allocution de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, lors de sa visite aux forces aériennes, océaniques et stratégiques », 19 janvier 2006.

leverage on bureaucratic handling of these affairs. Although it is safe to assume that they will not gain the upper hand and reverse policy on missile defense, they could well impede and delay action on transatlantic missile defense.

As France adjusted its policy on missile defense from hostility to support, Paris has identified five key issues that it believes must be addressed to ensure the successful and fruitful development of a NATO missile defense plan.

- **Financial Costs: Financially, can France afford any missile defense system at any price?** At a time when the French Defense budget is expected to decrease about 20% in the coming 2 to 3 years,² it is probably not possible for France to develop all the bricks and support elements of a territorial protection system. Yet, France has invested in some specific technological areas in the last 5 years. For instance, efforts were made to demonstrate a space-based infrared early warning capability by putting 2 micro-satellites in orbit in 2009 in the €124 million *Spirale* program conducted by EADS-Astrium. That project, along with other developments on long-range radars or extended air command and control, means that France could still invest money and continue its efforts on some key elements considered to have some strategic value. This may include research on an upper-tier kill vehicle, ground based early-warning radars, and network based command and control elements.
- **Responding to the development of short and medium range threats:** At an operational level, theater missile defense will remain a priority for French forces. The current French assessment of the ballistic missile threat emphasizes the range increase made possible by continued development and procurement efforts by countries and actors of proliferation concern. But it also stresses the growing concern about the modernization of short and medium-range ballistic missiles using solid propellant, upgraded guidance package, and in some instances, rusticated penetration aids. NATO's Active Layered Theater Missile Defense program (ALTMD) is therefore seen in Paris as the minimal but vital effort to be conducted by the Alliance to be able to face such an adversary or

operate on a theater where a ballistic missile threat exists. There is indeed a strong conviction that the debate around missile defense for Europe should not have an adverse effect on ALTMD and other possible NATO theater missile defense systems. For instance, the low price tag associated with extending the Air Command and Control System to encompass a future European missile defense capability should not be the only factor to be taken into account before making technical and operational decisions.

- **France's role in transatlantic missile defense: Some experts in France feel Paris should play a leading role in building NATO policy and concept of operations on missile defense.** They believe France has unique experience on ballistic missiles and an industrial and technological base that commands greater involvement on the subject. Yet there is also recognition that some countries in Europe, which have invested in missile defense technologies and operations – such as the Netherlands or Germany – also must have a say on policy as well as technical questions associated with missile defense.
- **Command and control questions also occupy a considerable amount of attention at the policy level.** France is mainly concerned that NATO's missile defense architecture could eventually become subordinate to U.S. Command and Control structures. Europeans would then have no other choice but to go along with engagement decisions made in Washington. It is one of the reasons why the 2008 French White Book insists on the need for a European-owned early warning capability as a marker of European autonomy of decision.
- **French Industrial Interests: French defense companies have put a particular emphasis on missile defense as one of the possible major subjects for future investments.** The French security community will also look at missile defense projects in Europe through the (deforming) lenses of its industrial interests and the maintenance and development of its technological base.

² Defense News, "France to Cut Spending \$4.88B Over 3 Years", 28 September 2010.

From these elements it is clear that France's position on the development of a missile defense system for Europe will remain very cautious. Paris agrees on the need for missile defense as one of the pillars for common security on Europe at a political level, but it will consider other aspects of the question – including operational issues, technical and technological developments, and industrial cooperation – as things that should not be decided upon precipitously as other defense priorities have to be tackled at considerable cost.

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Missile defense will probably go under the radar screen in Paris after the Lisbon summit as more pressing defense matters – planning for budget reductions for the coming decades, making decisions on procurement/equipment priorities and force structure – will fill the agenda. Yet, one of the French priorities on missile defense in NATO will be to see the ALTMD to its conclusion (that is 2015+). Nonethe-

less, France will have an open mind toward all potential aspects of building a territorial missile defense system.

At a national level, budgets may be allocated for technological development, and research as well as testing (for instance on kill vehicle technology or space-based early warning), especially since some companies are looking for official support of their development efforts on missile defense.

France will continue to pose questions about command and control, missile defense concept of operations and engagement policy, but mainly as a means to ensure that NATO develops a coherent and balanced strategy on territorial missile defense commensurate with the technical capacities of the U.S. Phased Adaptive Approach.

November 2010

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To tackle the tough issues facing NATO and the transatlantic community, the Atlantic Council created the Strategic Advisors Group (SAG). Co-chaired by Atlantic Council Chairman Senator Chuck Hagel and Airbus CEO Tom Enders, the SAG is comprised of North American and European preeminent defense experts. Founded in 2007 by then-Atlantic Council Chairman General James L. Jones, General Brent Scowcroft, and Fred Kempe, the SAG provides timely insights and analysis to policymakers and the public on strategic issues in the transatlantic security partnership through issuing policy briefs and reports, hosting strategy sessions for senior civilian and military officials and providing informal expert advice to decision-makers.

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