CND BRIEFING

US Missile Defence

Introduction

The United States Missile Defence system – now integrated as part of the NATO Ballistic Missile Defence network – is making the world a more dangerous place by leading the world into a new arms race. Successive US administrations have committed to its development, seriously hampering international efforts towards nuclear disarmament. The system is a particularly contentious issue between the US and Russia, with the latter concerned that the system surrounds and threatens its territory. The UK plays a crucial role in the missile defence system. CND is concerned that there is no public or parliamentary debate about that role, which makes our country a prime target in any US-led wars.

Missile defence has nothing to do with global security but everything to do with US global dominance. It is the 'shield' that complements a US-led nuclear sword and is generating a new nuclear arms race. Moreover, although described as a 'defence' system, it actually allows for the capability to make first-strike attacks without fear of retaliation. Missile defence installations in Europe are seen as aggressive moves that are severely obstructing any further progress on nuclear arms reduction – this is particularly important with the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the strained relationship with Russia.

Many analysts are also concerned that an important role of missile defence is to take the Pentagon a step further towards the weaponisation of space. The Pentagon is using missile defence as a shield in more ways than one and they are busy developing weapons systems to fight wars in and from space. Clear demonstrations of the anti-satellite capabilities of missile defence systems have been presented by both China and the US.

Missile defence systems have been or are being developed by a number of states, including the US, Russia, China, Israel and India while France and Italy have jointly developed a missile capable of ballistic missile defence. Many other countries are also purchasing or hosting (mainly US) missile defence systems or components, these include Poland, Spain, Romania, Germany, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Kuwait, Japan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Jordan, South Korea, Taiwan and the U.K. We will focus on the US/NATO system in this paper, as they involve UK participation.

How it all started

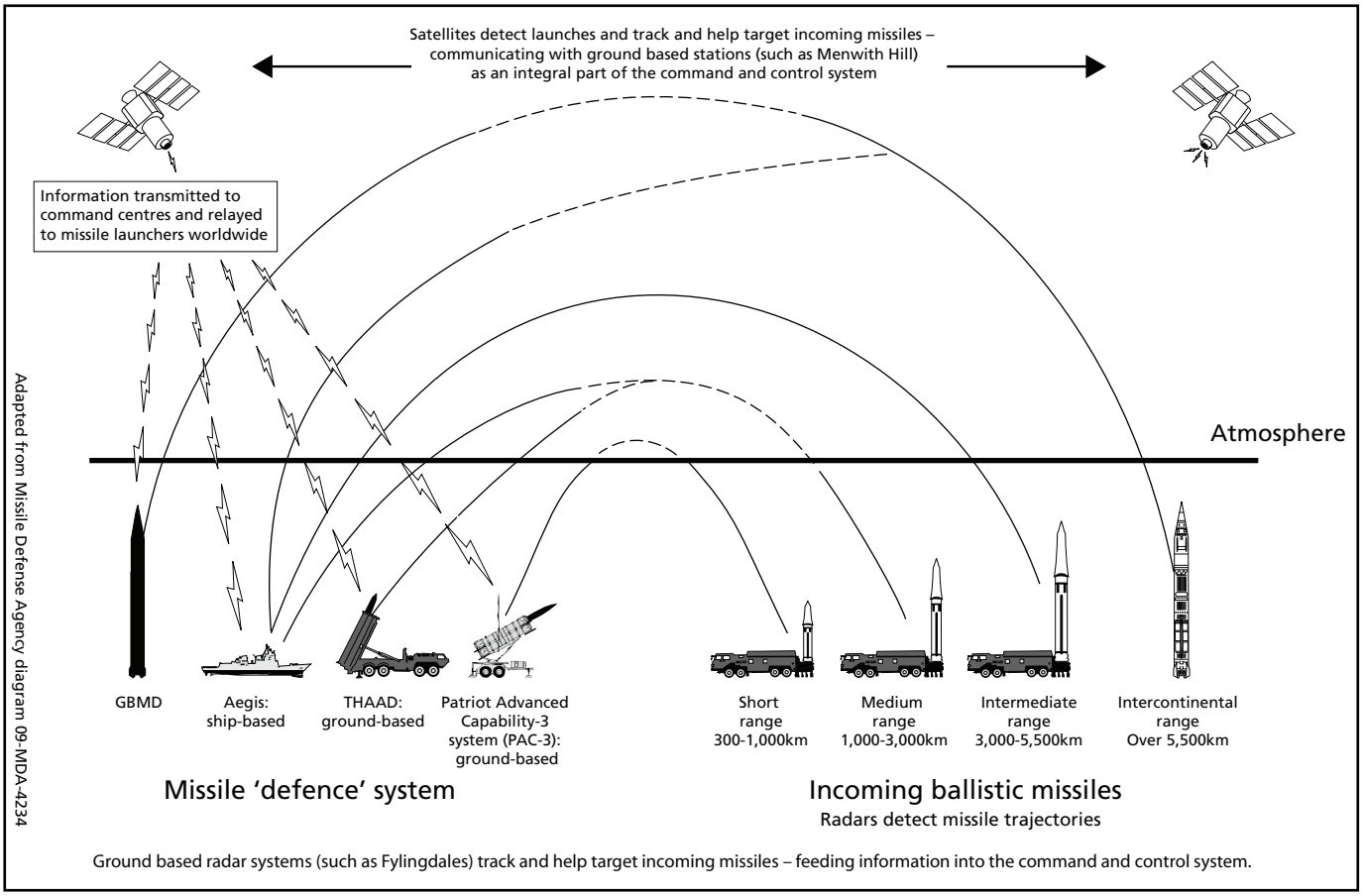
The current forms of US Missile Defence began with Ronald Reagan's so-called 'Star Wars' speech in 1983 in which he proposed the development of a system that would make nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete.'[1] He had been persuaded that it was possible to build a shield that would protect the United States from a missile attack from anywhere in the world. The Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) was implemented as a result and involved research and development into various kinds of speculative and extremely expensive technology such as ground and space-based interceptor missiles, energy beam and laser weapons. The command and control of these components would be coordinated through a global satellite system.

It was soon realised that this grand plan was technically unfeasible but successive US administrations have continued to finance research and development in some aspects of SDI at a rate of around $7-8 billion annually.[2] In 2001, President George W. Bush announced that the US would unilaterally withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with Russia in order to further develop, test and deploy missile defence technology. The ABM Treaty was an important, landmark agreement which had been up until this point a massive success in preventing the deployment of missile defence systems. President Bush insisted that the US needed missile defence in case terrorists or 'rogue' states such as Iran or North Korea were ever to obtain missiles able to reach them.

But significant opposition to US bases being established in Europe meant these plans looked vulnerable at the end of Bush's second term of office as President of the US. CND successfully campaigned against part of the system being located in the UK.

Obama: A shift in strategy

Before being elected President in 2008, Barack Obama stated that he would cut investments in unproven missile defense systems but also said that he was not opposed to missile defence altogether. The first



statement was welcomed by many but the second was more or less forgotten.

Obama did cancel the projects proposed for Poland and the Czech Republic. Encouraged by this development, Russia signed up to a new nuclear agreement with the US in April 2010. The new treaty stirred up some controversy in the US however, with Republicans accusing the President of giving in to Russia on the deployment of missile defence in Europe.

The reality was that new plans were in place for US missile defence – to modify and expand ship and land-based systems for installation in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The full details were presented in 2010 in a Ballistic Missile Review Report which showed that the Obama Administration was shifting from 'defending the homeland' against long-range missiles to 'defending against regional threats'.[3]

Obama wanted land-based Patriot missiles and sea-based Aegis SM-3 interceptors to be installed in Europe for 'protection' against short, medium and intermediate-range missiles. Poland and Romania have agreed to host interceptor missiles, radar systems have already been established in Turkey and Israel, and Spain is hosting US/NATO missile defence ships.

Donald Trump: Plans accelerate

In the early days of Donald Trump's presidency, one of the few military policies on the new White House website was a commitment to missile defence: *'We will also develop a state-of-the-art missile defense system to protect against missile-based attacks from states like Iran and North Korea'*.[4]

Following months of tension with North Korea over its continued nuclear testing, the US administration announced in May 2017 that its THAAD missile defence system in South Korea was operational, though not currently operating at full capability. As well as incurring protests from local residents who fear the weapon could make them a target, China and Russia are also concerned that the system could impact their nuclear capabilities. The move looks set to further antagonise the US and its allies' relations in the region.

Enter NATO

The costs involved in developing and deploying the US missile defence system have been and continue to be enormous. Over 27 years of development, missile defence has cost the US an estimated $150 billion – about the same as the Apollo space programme.[5] The US Missile Defense Agency requested a further $8.6 billion dollars in financial year 2012 but Congress insisted that European countries should pay for some of the costs. All 2013 US spending on missile defence equipment would be capped until those countries agreed to pay their share. The task of persuading European countries to agree to this has been assigned to NATO.

NATO has been developing a missile defence system since 2005 when, after a two year feasibility study, it embarked on the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) programme to provide complete coverage against tactical ballistic missiles with ranges up to 3,000kms wherever NATO forces might be deployed.[6] At the 2010 Lisbon Summit NATO members decided to extend this system by linking together the satellite, ship, radar and interceptor systems of different states into a missile defence system under NATO command and control. This would then be joined with the US systems to cover

the entire territory of 28 nations and a combined population of up to 900 million.

The 2016 Warsaw Summit declared the system in Europe as having an 'Initial Operational Capability'. Current parts of this system include the command and control centre at NATO's Air Command HQ in Ramstein Germany; four US missile defence destroyers based at Rota in southern Spain; a forward-based early-warning radar at Kürecik in Turkey and an 'Aegis Ashore' missile site in Deveselu, Romania. Further 'Aegis Ashore' missiles are due to be stationed in Poland at the Redzikowo military base in 2018. NATO claims that this system is needed to counter threats to Europe by Iran and North Korea, but neither country has actually threatened Europe and the real target is more like to be Russia which has repeatedly expressed concern about this undermining of its deterrent capabilities and has withdrawn from arms control talks as a consequence.

NATO has spent 150 million euros on theatre missile defence since 2006 and the additional cost of full European coverage is estimated at 1000 million euros. This is to be shared between the 28 allies.[7]

Britain's role

The UK is crucially involved through two bases in Yorkshire, at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill. Fylingdales is one of five US Ballistic Missile early warning radar stations across the world. Despite major public and political opposition on the grounds of international security and local health concerns, the British government gave permission for Fylingdales to be used as part of the US missile defence system in 2003. This joint US Air Force and RAF base in North Yorkshire detects enemy missiles and initially determines their intended trajectories, allowing interceptor missiles to be targeted and eventually fired from other locations to knock them out.

Menwith Hill is run by the US National Security Agency (NSA). It operates as part of a global network of bases used to spy on all forms of international telecommunications, including private phone calls, emails and faxes. The base is crucial for the intelligence-gathering necessary for any US-led military attack.

In 1996, Britain announced that Menwith Hill would also become the European Ground Based Relay station for the US Space Based Infra Red System (SBIRS) which is another component of the early warning and tracking system for missile defence. The UK government effectively quashed any opportunity for proper parliamentary consideration of this matter by announcing the collaboration in a written statement on the day before the summer closure of Parliament. The 'manner and timing' of the announcement 'and the resulting lack of Parliamentary debate on the matter' was subsequently criticised by Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

The UK government's 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) sets out three tiers of risks in order of priority based on a National Security Risk Assessment. The highest priority risks (Tier One) listed includes international terrorism, cyber-attack, flooding and pandemics. A nuclear weapon attack by another state on the UK was judged to be lower on the scale. It does not make sense therefore for the UK to be investing resources to developing a missile defence shield. Far from protecting us, missile defence bases are putting the people of Britain at greater risk.

The NSS also goes on to state that the UK will 'commit significant funds to the NATO Ballistic Missile Defence Network network'. It announces the government's intention to build a ground-based missile defence radar, as well as its intention to look into the possibility of the Type 45 Destroyers Ships operating in a missile defence role.

Russian response

The US missile defence system has increased tensions with Russia which believes that the system is a threat to its nuclear weapons defensive capability. In 2002, immediately after the US announced its withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Russia reacted by refusing to implement START II and has suspended the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened both to withdraw Russia from the INF Treaty (a major cold war arms treaty restricting the stationing of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe) and the CFE (which it did eventually leave in March 2015, citing the development of a missile defence system in Europe as one of the reasons).

In November 2011, when the US failed to agree to make the missile defence shield a joint project with Russia, then-President Dmitry Medvedev announced sweeping plans to address what Moscow considered to be a threat to national security. In December 2013 Russia confirmed that Iskander missiles had been stationed in its westernmost territory of Kaliningrad for over 18 months.

The technology spreads

China, France, Italy, India, Israel, Russia, Japan and Taiwan are in various stages of development of their own missile defence systems. It would surely be better for these countries to come together to discuss ways in which nuclear threats might be removed rather than spend huge amounts of money which perpetuate a new arms race.

Missile Defence in Northeast Asia

Following North Korea's missile test in 1998, Japan decided to partner the US to research, develop and deploy ballistic missile defence systems and is now one of the most active players in the field. In 2004, the Japanese government decided to make the countries' missile defence programmes exceptions to their self-imposed arms export ban.

As well as the THAAD missile defence system in South Korea, the US has also deployed THAAD in Guam and has 16 sea based systems as part of its Pacific fleet with intentions to increase this number to 41 with over 300 interceptors by 2018.

Japan is hosting US missile defence destroyers, has installed a number of short range Patriot missile defence systems and is hosting two high-powered US missile defence radars.

Although the US continues to claim that these systems are aimed at the developments of missile and nuclear technology in North Korea, Russia and China have expressed concern over the deployment of missile defence systems that could be targeting them and saying it could threaten regional security. Re-starting six-party talks to freeze North Korea's nuclear programme would be a much better way of ensuring security in the region. If current developments continue then North Korea may have time to develop not only the long/middle/short range ballistic missiles, but also tactical nuclear weapons.

Would it work?

The effectiveness and reliability of missile defence and its associated technologies have always been questioned. Independent scientists and engineers suggest that the proposed US Missile Defence system can easily be overcome by countermeasures such as cheap inflatable balloon decoys.[10] In outer space, where the intercepts are likely to occur, it's impossible to tell balloons and warheads apart. Deploying large numbers of dummy warheads could therefore easily overwhelm the small number of interceptor missiles available.

A 2011 report from the Defense Science Board, an advisory group to the US Defense Department declared that the range of the radars are too short to offer any cover for Europe and that the sensor technology can't distinguish between a warhead and missile debris.[11]

The US's non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) expressed concern about the system in 2012 due to major delays, cost overruns and critical technological problems.[12] In addition, in April 2012 the US National Academy of Sciences outlined its assessment of the US/NATO missile defence system in Europe in a letter to the chair of the house Armed Services strategic forces subcommittee.[13] It concluded that the proposed system 'cannot offer protection to the United States.'

Even before these reports, confidence in the system had waned. The US Missile Defence system is neither robust nor reliable. In a real confrontation missile defence would offer no meaningful protection. Missile defence is, however, working very well for the corporations who make billions of dollars from government contracts and international sales.

Conclusion

The US and NATO are surrounding Russia and China with missile defence and other military installations which are continually upgraded and moved closer to their borders, exacerbating international tensions and hindering nuclear disarmament. The international community has serious problems to deal with, including climate change, migration and terrorism, for which it will need countries to cooperate. Instead, the US and NATO insist on pursuing a militarily aggressive foreign policy which undermines their relationships with countries such as Russia and China.

Missile defence does nothing to encourage international understanding and cooperation. It is actually offensive, expensive, destabilising and extremely dangerous. CND will continue to raise awareness of and campaign against Britain's role in the US missile defence system and thereby the country's complicity in making nuclear war more likely.

Footnotes

1 President Ronald Reagan's 'Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security', March 23 1983 at http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/32383d.htm

2 The Missile Defense Agency has issued figures that indicate that $181.5 billion has been spent on Missile Defense between 1985 and 2016 (see https://www.mda.mil/global/documents/pdf/FY16_histfunds.pdf)

3 Ballistic Missile Defence Review report, February 2010 at http://archive.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20as%20of%2026JAN10%200630_for%20web.pdf

4 The White House website https://www.whitehouse.gov/making-our-military-strong-again

5 'Shoot the Moon: Missile Defense Costs as much as Apollo Program', by Adam Rawnsley, Wired.com website, August 4 2011 at http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/08/shoot-the-moon-missile-defense-costs-as-much-as-apollo-program/

6 ALTBM\D is described on the NATO web site under the heading link 'Components' at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49635.htm

7 NATO BMD Fact Sheet at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49635.htm

8 Missile plan sneaked out, say MPs', BBC News, November 25 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7111523.stm

9 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015', https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf

10 'A Flawed and Dangerous U.S. Missile Defense Plan', by George N. Lewis and Theodore A. Postol, Arms Control Today, May 2010, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_05/Lewis-Postol

11 'Science and Technology Issues of early Intercept Ballistic Missile Defense Feasibility', Defense Science Board Task Force Report, September 2011, http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2010s/ADA552472.pdf

12 'Opportunity exists to Strengthen Acquisitions by Reducing Concurrency', GAO-12-486, April 20 2012, http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-486

13 'The Failures of Missile Defense', by Philip Coyle, The National Interest, July 26 2012, http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-failures-missile-defense-7248

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