

19 April/avril 2007

MISSILE DEFENCE

NATO has done extensive work on missile defense since the mid-1990s.

Today NATO conducts three major Missile Defence-related activities:

- Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) Programme;
- Technical and Political-Military work to support decisions on possible Missile Defence for the protection of NATO territory and population centres; and
- Cooperation with Russia on Theatre Missile Defence (TMD)

ALTBMD

NATO has worked since the mid-90s to develop options to protect its deployed forces, within or outside NATO territory, against ballistic missiles with a range of up to 3000 km. After a series of studies and the development of military and technical requirements, the North Atlantic Council in 2005 approved the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) Programme. ALTBMD will consist of a NATO-funded Command and Control backbone integrating sensors and missile defense interceptors to be provided by member nations. An initial capability to defend forces (e.g. the NATO Response Force) against shorter-to-medium range theatre ballistic missiles is planned for 2010. A Full Operational Capability composed of integrated layered theatre missile defences is planned for the 2015-2016 timeframe. That capability will protect larger areas against missiles up to 3000 km range. ALTBMD could also serve as an element of territorial MD, if NATO decides to deploy such a capability. The ALTBMD Programme is run by a Programme Management Organization reporting to the Conference of National Armaments Directors.

Missile Defence

At the Prague Summit in 2002, NATO initiated a series of activities to address the increasing missile threat, including a Missile Defence Feasibility Study (MD FS) to explore options to protect the Alliance's territory, forces and population centres against the full range of ballistic missile threats. At the 2006 Riga Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government noted the conclusions of the MD FS that missile defence for NATO territory is technically feasible, within the assumptions and limitations of the study. The MD FS proposed a scaleable architecture comprised of long-range interceptors and sensors, as well as ALTBMD assets required to protect against shorter range threats to Alliance territory. At Riga, the Heads of State and Government further tasked work on the political-military implications of MD, including an update on current and future ballistic missile threat developments.

In January 2007, the US announced negotiations with NATO Allies Poland and the Czech Republic on stationing in these countries elements of the US national missile defence system that would also provide protection to much of Europe¹.

Today, as NATO discusses Missile Defence, including the US plans, it seeks to understand how a US Third Site would contribute to the defence of Europe, and to assess the impact of the US plan on the findings of the MD FS.

The Alliance will continue to provide transparency on Missile Defence issues, building on ongoing extensive consultations among Allies; between NATO and Russia; and between the US and Russia. The NATO-Russia Council remains the most appropriate forum for NATO nations to engage Russia on this issue².

NATO-Russia activities on Theatre Missile Defence

Work on NATO-Russia TMD began in 2002. Initially it focused on developing a basis for mutual understanding and cooperation (for example, through a common terminology), and then expanded to include a variety of activities designed to explore opportunities for intensified practical co-operation, including joint TMD training and exercises. It also works to develop interoperability between Russian and NATO forces protecting their respective Areas of Responsibility in Crisis Response Operations. Current activities focus on 5 main areas:

- Development of a compendium of TMD terms (English, French and Russian)
- Development of Experimental TMD Concept
- Development of Experimental TMD Concept of Operations (CONOPS)
- Training and Exercises
- Technical Interoperability Study

The NATO-Russia Ad-Hoc Working Group on TMD is developing new proposals to increase both technical and operational interoperability between NATO and Russian TMD forces.

¹ As the US currently deploys Missile Defence interceptors in Alaska and California; the proposed European facilities are sometimes referred to as the "Third Site".

² NRC consultations on Missile Defence were held in November 2006 and February and April 2007