



Europe's antimissile defence and related geopolitical challenges

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When NATO member states met in Lisbon on 19th and 20th November 2010 to decide on a new Strategic Concept, they made *Missile Defense* the "keystone" of the Atlantic Alliance. On account of millennium dialectics of the sword and the shield, the laws of the "technological world" and ballistic proliferation, we cannot treat this extremely strategic question with an attitude of denial. And yet it would be foolhardy to content ourselves with a shield granted by the United States without being involved in its creation. Finally, antimissile defence must not be a pretext for Europe to close in on itself. The main objective is for Europe to be in a position to take up international political challenges.

"These unlimited areas are, just like any other, merely the theatre of a struggle for world domination."

Carl Schmitt

It is an established fact that the United States has developed and implemented antimissile technology. Russia, with its more meagre resources, is doing the same. Within the Euro-Atlantic area, the deployment of antimissile systems will enable us to counter threats connected with the proliferation of ballistic technology in the Middle East. European security will consequently be strengthened. However, it would be foolhardy to content ourselves with a shield granted by the United States without ensuring that European allies take an active part in its creation. In the same way, it would be a mistake to regard antimissile systems as a substitute for the strength of weapons, whether nuclear or traditional. Consequently, as an experienced military power, France should not restrict its involvement to a "share". It needs to promote its technologies, put forward its military capacities and pose as a pilot nation. Finally, antimissile defence must not be a pretext for turning away from the rest of the world. The relative decline of the West is resulting in more active involvement in the management of regional and international imbalances, by means of weapons amongst other things. There will be no salvation via technology.

Antimissile defence, the "cornerstone" of the Alliance

A long-term undertaking

For all too long, the antimissile issue has been distorted as a culturalist impulse of Americans in search of absolute security. This caricature is often used by military-industrial *lobbies* to their own advantage. The decision made at the latest NATO summit in Lisbon is in fact the culminating point of long-term technological efforts and deep strategic thought processes. We can distinguish between three different cycles. The first cycle began in the 1950s, resulting in the "*Sentinel*" (1967) and "*Safeguard*" (1969) projects. The ABM treaty, which was signed three years later, drastically reduced the deployment of such engines. Ronald Reagan's speech on the SDI (*Strategic Defense Initiative*) on 23rd March 1983 marked the start of the second cycle, with an ambitious overall objective: surpassing the nuclear era. The end of the Cold War led to budget cuts and downsized ambitions.

The current deployment project is part of a third cycle, which began in the early 1990s, against a backdrop of ballistic and nuclear proliferation in North Korea and South Asia (India, Pakistan). *National Missile Defense* (1998) became *Missile Defense* (2001), a global territorial defence system against "low power" missiles, extended to cover allies of the United States in order to prevent geostrategic division. In addition to American locations (Fort Greely in Alaska and Vandenberg in California), sites in central Europe were meant to house around ten interceptors (Poland) and a very long range radar (Czech Republic). Despite strong Russian opposition, NATO's allies lent their support to the American projects (Bucharest summit in 2008). In 2009, American projects were redefined as a result of the "outstretched hand" diplomacy advocated by Obama. The deployment of antimissile systems in Europe remains on the agenda despite hostility from Moscow.

Countering the proliferation of ballistic weapons

The aim of establishing antimissile systems in Europe is to respond to nuclear and ballistic proliferation in the Middle East. The IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) highlighted grey areas in the Iranian nuclear program. Meanwhile, Teheran is developing missiles with a range of 2000-2500 km, which puts South-eastern Europe within their reach. Nor should we forget our Turkish ally, just next-door to Iran. As well as the possible use of nuclear weapons as a means of coercion, we must anticipate the development of an "aggressive sanctuarisation" strategy. If Iran is protected by nuclear weapons, it could carry out offensive politics from the Arabian-Persian gulf as far as the Eastern Mediterranean and jeopardize free access to the Middle East. Teheran would then be able to impose its will on petrol-consuming countries. As a result, there is a risk that the nuclearization of Iran could cause a chain reaction in the Middle-Eastern area, as the other regional powers embark on a race for nuclear weapons.

The possibilities, though partly concealed by asymmetrical conflicts, are terrifying. Proliferation can but increase instability in the Middle East, the "Gordian knot" of the world, with extremely serious consequences for neighbouring Europe. A rise in the number of nuclear powers increases the probability of the use of nuclear weapons, since dissuasion is not a "law" of any kind in the deterministic sense. Consequently, the problem of proliferation brings the focus back onto Albert Wohlstetter's questions (see "The Delicate Balance of Terror", 1958). According to Wohlstetter, the balance of terror is unstable and dissuasion of a virtual enemy is by no means automatic, as symmetry of arsenals does not assume moral symmetry of the protagonists. To counter the threats of players who are not part of dissuasion logic, the heads of armies need to have access to flexible options, including antimissile defence, which increase their freedom of action.

Indivisible transatlantic security and the "great Western area"

In the light of current difficulties, when the temptation is to give in to an "every man for himself" attitude, the deployment of antimissile systems has the advantage of consolidating European defence against new threats, since the principle of indivisible transatlantic security is a cornerstone of the alliance combining the old and new West. The antimissile issue highlights the importance of the transatlantic link in a world whose fragile equilibrium is threatening to topple at any moment. We need to take a look at some geohistory at this point. Ever since the break-up of the "concert of power" and the new "thirty years war" which tore Europe apart between 1914 and 1945, the United States has been reassuring European security and acting as an offshore pendulum. NATO is the framework within which European defence is organised, working alongside the United States. The NATO alliance is a forum for expressing a certain idea of the West and gives geopolitical shape to what is first and foremost a certain view of the world.

The existence of such a "Euro-Atlantic community" is reminiscent of the "Great Area" theory (*Grossraum*) developed by German jurist Carl Schmitt. The *Grossraum* concept results from the dynamics of the relationships between power, technology and the economy. Each of these forces transforms the world and the perception of human society. According to Carl Schmitt, this spatial revolution marked the end of the old "nomos of the Earth" based on a balancing act between the states located in the centre of the Westphalian system. Distorted by the geocentric nature of common representations, the "Great Area" is often reduced to a sort of continental "superstate". Instead, we should imagine a wider, dynamic reality with terrestrial, maritime and aerospatial dimensions. Consequently, the Euro-Atlantic Community forms a single "Great Area" and antimissile defence adds to its geopolitical solidity. The illusion of the multipolar "*brave new world*" of the UN is vanishing, and the "Grossraum" concept gives western nations a real comparative advantage on the international scene.

The limitations of antimissile defence granted by the US

A project partly reintegrated within NATO

Although Bush's project had the advantage of taking allied security interests into account, defence was nonetheless merely granted by the United States rather than mutualised within NATO. For the most part, the idea of adding a third site was based on strictly bilateral agreements (Washington-Warsaw and Washington-Prague). NATO simply went along with the idea without taking on a leading role. The Allies then gave their agreement in principle to the American initiative (Bucharest summit, April 2008), and NATO planned to finance an additional device to protect countries in the south-eastern area of the Alliance (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) not covered by *Missile Defense*, on the basis of work carried out in the field of theater defence. Given the lack of a strong allied consensus, the Russian leaders exploited the discordance to block the deployment of antimissiles in Europe. This is a concrete example of the conclusive alliance between the westerners of the Old World and those of the New.

Although the decision to postpone the initial project (17th September 2009) can be put down to hesitation by the Obama administration, its effect was to reintegrate the issue within the scope of NATO. The European allies were subsequently more closely associated with the project. As a result of the decision, more thought was also given to ways of cooperating with Russia, and the limits of such cooperation, beyond information exchange and confidence-building measures, were clearly felt. The American project was redesigned to intercept short and medium range missiles, a threat that essentially concerns Europe. To begin with, SM-3 missiles will be deployed on the *Aegis* vessels

in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Land interceptors will subsequently be set up on a Polish and a Romanian site, in the North and South of Europe. The radar system will be deployed on Turkish soil in the Eastern part of Anatolia. To cope with intensifying threats, the project is designed to escalate ("*Phase Adaptive Approach*") and should reach maturity in 2018.

Basing ambitions on capacities

NATO has been involved in developing theater antimissile defence since 2001 (*Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense*) and has now decided to expand on the programme to include the defence of territories. The Allies will provide joint funding for a command and control system (C2) responsible for summarising information supplied by sensors – very long range satellites and radars – and of transferring it to the interception device, which is an active part of antimissile defence. It goes without saying that the United States is the major architect of this "system of systems" as well as being the main supplier of the equipment used. This fact alone is hardly surprising and is nothing to be ashamed of. The United States has invested huge sums in *Missile Defense* and is also acting as a "re-insurer" in military terms, supplying Europe with the main guarantees of security. Nonetheless, active involvement is needed from the Allies in order to maintain a strong transatlantic link and in the interests of balance.

Analysts highlight the political and military integration logic which underlies antimissile defence, which begs the question of decision sharing. Still, we need to address this issue through the prism of the past debate surrounding nuclear strategy. The consequences of deciding to intercept one or several enemy missiles are not as serious as those of deciding to make use of nuclear weapons in the first place, and the solutions are similar to those implemented in inter-allied aerial defence. Furthermore, given the short space of time which the decision makers would have to counter a ballistic attack (10-15 minutes for a medium-range missile), the important decisions would have been made beforehand when setting out the rules of engagement. Only "security producing" nations able to provide skills and engagement systems will really be involved in the overall architecture. It is time to mention the role that France can play, with its weapons industry and abilities in terms of spatial alert (EADS-Astrium *Spirale* demonstrator, Thales "radar" skills), interception abilities (MBDA-Safran-Thales *Aster-30*) and component coordination (Thales and EADS "C2" skills).

Antimissiles as components of global dissuasion

Fortunately, the French authorities took full stock of strategic developments and launched an *aggiornamento* under the presidency of Jacques Chirac (Speech given at L'île Longue on 19th January 2006). The decision made in Lisbon is the next logical step in the process. However, we must stress that antimissiles are merely one part of the answer to the problem of proliferation. In addition to the diplomatic measures taken to hold back destabilisation forces (international legal systems and control of sensitive technologies), we must not forget the role played by military counter-proliferation tools (information, preventive conventional strikes) and by nuclear weapons faced with the threat portrayed by a large enemy State (antimissile systems are designed to intercept several tens of basic devices with a range of up to 3000 km). Consequently, antimissile defence must not be considered as a substitute for nuclear weapons, but as one of the components of global dissuasion based on strike force, means of interception and the ability to send forces and power onto external theaters.

It would make even less sense to regard antimissile defence as a type of escape route allowing European nations to turn their backs on today's world in order to concentrate on economic and social issues. Like nuclear weapons, antimissiles will not put an end to conflict, i.e. same/other dialectics and friend-enemy polarity. Quite the opposite is true. Titanic forces are being set in motion in the new age, and the threats are moving closer to the European "limes". Greater presence is therefore needed on Europe's boundaries and in the "geographic distance", especially in military terms, in order to find solutions to the international mess before it triggers systemic chains of events. In this respect, the Libyan crisis illustrates the geographical proximity of the challenges

facing us as well as the need for "combatant nations" in Europe. Given the prospect of chaotic anarchy, antimissile defence could be used to protect expeditionary forces sent out to pre-empt threats and to ensure that European populations are not attacked by the anomic player being targeted.

By way of conclusion

By way of conclusion, we can say that antimissile defence requires financial, technical and human investments prior to any future ballistic battle. As a framework nation within the Alliance, France cannot distance itself from the general trend. Moreover, France is in a position to mobilize the resources required to surpass the critical intensity threshold which will enable it to remain a "producer of security". It is not about retreating behind high-tech walls, but about replacing resources to form a "great strategy" involving both sword and shield to promote the interests, values and responsibilities of the West.

Getting to the heart of the matter, we can see that proliferation, which leads to the deployment of antimissile systems, represents the advent of technology in geostrategic terms as a universal, cosmopolitan phenomenon. In other words, the western military supremacy seen in the asymmetrical wars of the past and in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is now being called into question. Technology, no matter what kind, does not give us the possibility to withdraw from the world if it is on the verge of toppling. The investments we need to make in order to rise to the challenges facing us are intellectual, moral and spiritual.

Research Programme



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