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Why Russia opposes a NATO missile defence in Europe – a survey of common explanations



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English summary

During the past decade plans to establish a US-led NATO missile defence system in Europe has been one of the most contested issues in the relationship between Russia and NATO. This report provides a survey of the most common explanations for Russia's fierce opposition to NATO's missile defence plans. Officially Russia claims that the system may become able to destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles launched from Russian territory, thereby disturbing the mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia and the United States which is still seen as fundamental to Russian security. Alternative interpretations points to a preoccupation with the concept of depth in Russia's strategic culture due to historical experiences and more ulterior motives such as need for a bargain chip in order to gain concessions from NATO in other policy arenas; to justify increases in Russian defence spending; to consolidate power behind the Putin regime; or perceptions and preferences among the Russian leadership.

Sammendrag

Natos planer om et amerikanskledet rakett skjold i Europa har vært et av de mest omstridde spørsmålene i forholdet mellom Russland og Nato det siste tiåret. Denne rapporten gir en oversikt over de vanligste forklaringene på Russlands sterke motstand. Den offisielle russiske forklaringen viser til at rakett skjoldet muligens vil bli i stand til å tilintetgjøre interkontinentale ballistiske missiler skutt opp fra russisk territorium. Det vil i så fall kunne true den gjensidige kjernefysiske avskrekkingsevnen mellom Russland og USA, en evne som fortsatt utgjør grunnmuren i russisk sikkerhetspolitikk. Alternative tolkninger viser til mer underliggende motiver heriblant at historiske erfaringer har ført til en stor vektlegging av strategisk dybde i russisk sikkerhetspolitisk tenkning, Russlands behov for et forhandlingskort i andre Nato-sammenhenger, innenrikspolitisk maktkamp, og oppfatninger og holdninger blant russiske ledere.

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1 Introduction

During the past decade plans to establish a US-led NATO missile defence system in Europe has been one of the most contested issues in the relationship between Russia and the West. Russia has opposed NATO's missile defence plans, arguing that the system might become able to destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles launched from Russian territory or waters, thereby disturbing the mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia and the United States. Official NATO and US sources, however, deny this, leading some analysts to conclude that Russia's opposition is driven by ulterior motives. This report provides a survey of common explanations for Russia's response to NATO's plans for a ballistic missile defence system in Europe. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of factors shaping Russia's missile defence policy as well as prospects for future NATO–Russia missile defence cooperation or confrontation.

We start by giving a short introduction to NATO's plans for a ballistic missile defence in Europe. We then go on to present Russia's arguments against NATO's missile defence activities, followed by alternative interpretations for Russia's stand in the missile defence case. Finally, the study outlines prospects for NATO–Russia cooperation on missile defence.

2 NATO's missile defence activities

In short, missile defence can be defined as a set of installations intended to protect forces, populations and/or territories against incoming hostile cruise and ballistic missiles. The United States and the Soviet Union began to develop active missile defences in the 1950s and 60s. The Soviet Union deployed the first missile defence capability in 1968. Elements of a US missile defence system were deployed a few years later, but deactivated shortly thereafter due to high operational costs and domestic disagreements about the system's future. Whereas the Soviet missile defence system was designed to protect Moscow's population against incoming missiles, the first US system primarily aimed to protect forces and installations. Though several US presidents have launched plans to establish a missile defence system capable of protecting the whole country, most famously Ronald Reagan in his 1983 'Star Wars Speech', no such capability has so far seen the light of day. Russia still has a limited missile defence capability around Moscow inherited from the Soviet Union.

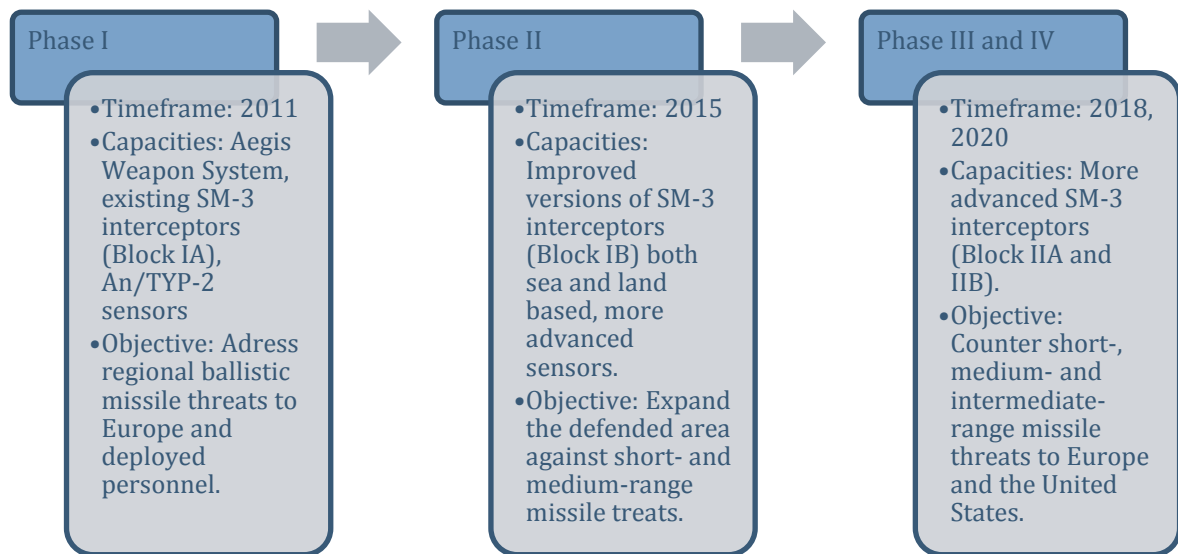
In 1972 the United States and Soviet Union signed a treaty which limited the countries possibilities to develop and deploy weapon systems with the ability to shoot down incoming strategic ballistic missiles. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) stayed in force until June 2002, when the United States unilaterally withdrew from the treaty. The US withdrawal was denounced in Moscow, though the Russian reaction at the time was not as harsh as many had expected. Shortly after the withdrawal from the ABM Treaty the US President, George Bush Jr., introduced plans to establish a ballistic missile defence capability on US territory. As distinct from the missile defence programmes of the Cold War era, Mr. Bush Jr.'s plans for an anti-ballistic missile system did not (officially at least) stem from fear of a large scale nuclear war with Russia, but from the assumption that certain 'rogue states', most notably Iran and North

Korea, were developing nuclear weapons as well as the means of delivering them (White House 2009).

Missile defence entered NATO's agenda in the early 1990s. The initial focus was on protecting deployed NATO forces against short- and medium-range ballistic missile threats, i.e. so called Theatre Missile Defence (TMD). Talks about a capability to protect NATO territory and population centres against ballistic and cruise missile threats, including long-range missiles, often referred to as a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system or territorial missile defence, did not gain speed within NATO before 2002 and the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty (NATO 2011). While the distinction between TMD and BMD systems is becoming increasingly blurred, it is primarily NATO's activities in the second area that is a major challenge in Russian–NATO relations and thus the focus of this report.

The cornerstone of NATO's current ballistic defence capabilities is the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) programme, which was established in 2005. The original purpose of the programme was to build a capability to protect NATO deployed forces against ballistic missiles with a range up to 3000 kilometres. The system consists of a command, control and information system, early-warning sensors, as well as various interceptors. Five member states – France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United States – are providing radars and interceptors, while NATO provides the communication, command and control systems (NATO 2011; NATO 2012a). As of January 2011, NATO's ALTBMD has the capability to plan a missile defence battle, provide early warning for inbound ballistic missiles and monitor a theatre missile defence battle (NATO 2011).

In January 2007 the Bush Jr. administration proposed to expand the plans for a US BMD architecture with a 'Third Site' located on European soil able to protect European NATO members against incoming missile threats. Agreements were concluded with the Czech Republic to host a radar and Poland to host ground-based interceptors. The architecture was changed in September 2009 when the Obama administration announced a new plan for BMD in Europe – the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) – which opted for an improvement of technologies and change in location of the facilities. The new system is designed so that it will be able to adjust to evolving missile threats against the United States and its European allies. If the current threat assessments persist, the system may gradually expand to cover the entire Euro-Atlantic territory; see Figure 2.1 (White House 2009; NATO 2012b).



Figur 2.1 The Phased Adaptive Approach for Missile Defence in Europe (White House 2009).

At the November 2010 Lisbon Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government officially decided to expand the ALTBMD programme and establish a BMD capability able to protect all NATO European populations, territory, and forces (NATO 2010). Like the Bush administration's BMD programme, NATO's desire for a BMD capability originated from the assumption that Iran and possibly North Korea were developing nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them (NATO 2012a).

The EPAA will constitute the cornerstone of NATO's missile defence system. So far the United States has concluded agreements with Turkey to host radars, with Romania and Poland to host interceptors, and with Spain to port US ships with Aegis radar systems. Germany, the Netherlands, and France have expressed an interest in contributing national capabilities (NATO 2012b). The first capability, the so-called interim capability, was declared in early 2012. This is a start-up capability with immediate effect, consisting of a common command and control system (based in Ramstein, Germany) plus voluntary national contributions (NATO 2012b). According to current NATO plans, the system is expected to gain full operational capability in 2020. It will then provide coverage for all NATO European territory and be able to handle complex attacks involving several incoming missiles (NATO 2012b). Implementation, however, depends both on technological development and funding. At the time being, NATO's ALTBMD can communicate with the US EPAA, but the two systems will not be fully interlinked until 2017 at the earliest (NATO 2011).

3 Russia's policy and response

3.1 Nuclear weapons in Russian security policy

Traditionally, mutual nuclear deterrence between the United States and Russia has been perceived as fundamental to Russian security. Though the threat of a large-scale nuclear war is no longer stressed in official security policy documents, the nuclear deterrent is still considered of paramount importance. Russia's security policy is laid out in the 2008 *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, Russia's *National Security Strategy to 2020* and the 2010 *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*. According to these documents, Russia will maintain its strategic capability for the purpose of preventing outbreak of conflicts, but is willing to reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons to the minimum level sufficient to maintain strategic stability. There is some discussion with regard to whether or not Russia's *Military Doctrine* allows for the use of strategic nuclear weapons in a conventional war. During the Cold War the Soviet Union pledged not to use nuclear weapons first, but in the 2000 military doctrine Russia opened up for first use. The new wording was removed again in the 2010 doctrine, but a first strike was not explicitly precluded (for a discussion of the wording see f. ex. Cimbala 2012:163ff).

In addition to the above mentioned documents, the importance of nuclear weapons has been regularly expressed in official statements. One example is the 2012 presidential campaign when Vladimir Putin stressed the fundamental role of nuclear weapons for Russia's security on several occasions (Putin 2012a; 2012b). The importance given to nuclear weapons in Russian security policy is also reflected in the country's military procurement plans. The State Armaments Programme for the period 2011 to 2020 includes comprehensive plans to modernize the country's nuclear weapons, and Russia's political leadership has on several occasions stressed that the nuclear triad gets top priority. Still, it should be noted that the main emphasis in the present armaments programme, as distinct from former armaments programmes, lays on the modernization of Russia's conventional forces (Hakvåg, Hove and Sendstad 2012:32f). This suggests that Russia may be trying to reduce its nuclear dependency.

3.2 Russia's response to NATO's BMD plans

Ever since a European missile defence system was introduced on the NATO agenda, Russia has loudly and consistently claimed that having elements of a NATO BMD system on the European continent will threaten Russia's national security. The official stand is composed of two principal arguments. First, Russia argues that the BMD system might undermine the fundamental condition of mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia and the United States. Acknowledging that the first two phases of the EPAA pose no threat to its deterrent capability, Russia is highly sceptical about the third and especially the fourth phase. According to Russian estimates, NATO's BMD might, when fully operative, be able to destroy incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) launched from Russian territory or waters (Medvedev 2011). Moreover, Russia is worried that the

system, once in place, will expand and result in a broader deployment of US military assets in Central and Eastern Europe (Ibid.).

Second, Russia more generally opposes the leading role taken by the United States in global security. According to Russian leaders, NATO's BMD plans are first and foremost representing US interests (Medvedev 2012; Putin 2012a; RT 2011), thereby becoming an example of US intervention on European soil. Russia protests against an alleged US/NATO tendency to see all non-allies as latent enemies (Medvedev 2012). In this aspect, Russia treats NATO's BMD as a part of a broader US foreign policy motivated solely by self-interest and intended to impose upon other countries American solutions and values. As proof, Russian leaders frequently state NATO's refusal to take Russian concerns into consideration and the refusal to freeze implementation of the BMD programme as long as discussions of Russian–NATO cooperation on BMD are proceeding (see Lavrov 2012; Medvedev 2011, 2012; Putin 2012a).

3.3 Major controversies between Russia and NATO

In general, there are three major controversies between Russia and NATO in the missile defence case. First, there is a divergence in threat perceptions. According to the United States and NATO, Iran, and possibly some other states, will have the potential to exploit existing technologies to develop missiles capable of threatening the security of Western European NATO members within a few years. However, in official documents NATO's threat perception remains unclear, and this ambiguity raises doubts in Russia (Kay 2012:45). Only a few of the 30 potentially threatening countries are named, which makes Russia wonder if the list could also include some of Russia's strategic partners such as India or China (Kozin 2011). Official threat assessments are furthermore complicated by divergent views within NATO, regarding both the attitude towards Russia and the view on missile defence in Europe.

When the plans for a BMD system in Europe were first announced, Russia categorically denied that Iran posed any real threat to Europe. The Russian Ministry of Defence' threat assessment firmly concluded that Iran and other so-called 'rouge states' have neither the desire nor the capacity to build intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) or ICBMs in the near future. Furthermore, the Ministry argued that even if obtaining such capabilities, these states would lack motives for launching an attack upon Europe (Ministry of Defence 2012). More recent Russian statements recognize that the existence of Iranian and North Korean missile programmes pose some general security risk, but maintain that the threat is exaggerated by US sources and that control with nuclear weapons could and should be exercised primarily through non-proliferation regimes (Makarov 2012b; Putin 2012a; Sergun 2012).

The second major controversy between Russia and NATO concerns the technical capabilities of the BMD systems. The United States and NATO keep reiterating that EPAA/ NATO BMD constitutes no threat to Russia because it will not be capable of intercepting ICBMs launched from Russian territory. Russia, as stated in section 3.2, believes it might. Russia's stand was elaborated on a missile defence conference in Moscow in May 2012 hosted by the Foreign Ministry and in a publication named *Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense: Cooperation or*

Confrontation? available from the Ministry's webpage (<http://www.mil.ru>). According to these official sources the modified SM-3 missiles planned for deployment in Poland in EPAA's third and fourth phase (SM-3 Block IIB) might be capable of intercepting Russian ICBMs launched from European Russia. Russian officials also claim that sea-based interceptors close to Russia may be able to threaten Russian ICBMs, including the sea-launched ballistic missiles (Shvarev 2012; Buzhinsky 2012; Gerasimov 2012). Russia furthermore argue that the contested sites in Poland and Romania will have only limited capabilities to protect Western and Southern Europe respectively against missiles launched from the South East (Gerasimov 2012), thereby suggesting that the claimed threat from Iran cannot be the real reason why NATO chose these sites. In order to eliminate the potential threat, Russia demands a legal guarantee that inter alia limits the number and types of missiles that will be deployed as interceptors, interceptor speed, coverage of missile defence systems, and power and orientation of missile-defence radars (Lavrov 2012; Makarov 2012a, Medvedev 2011). However, the United States and NATO have so far not been willing to provide binding commitments of this kind. This again is interpreted by Russia as an evidence of the systems anti-Russian potential.

Third, both parties have expressed their desire to cooperate on missile defence architecture in Europe, but their views differ with regard to the nature and scope of this cooperation. In 2003 a study was launched to assess the possibility for cooperation in the TMD area. Several computer-based exercises have been held, and at the 2010 Lisbon Summit the parties agreed to develop a joint ballistic missile threat assessment and a framework for possible BMD cooperation (NATO 2012a). Russia has argued in favour of a joint US–NATO–Russian BMD architecture, where NATO and Russia are equal partners. In 2010, president Medvedev proposed a 'sector approach' according to which Russia would be responsible for the defence of Europe from missiles launched from the South East (i.e. Iran), so that NATO would not need to place interceptors close to the Russian border or in its neighbouring waters. The United States and other NATO governments, however, argued that a joint system would give Russia a potential veto over their future operations, thereby in practice outsourcing NATO security to a non-member. Furthermore, NATO insisted that Russia's current capability could not substitute NATO's own planned capability. Instead of the sector approach NATO envisages two parallel, but interoperable systems that would be able to share data (Mankoff 2012:341; Sokov 2012; Weitz 2010). Russia has firmly rejected the NATO proposal stating that it will either have to be an equal partnership or no cooperation at all (RT 2012). According to Nikolai Sokov (2012), all plans for a joint system are today abandoned, though still officially on the agenda. Talks on less extensive cooperation persist, though the general impression is that the discussions have reached a dead end.

The diverging assessments of security threats and the systems capabilities have left both parties doubting the other's *real* intentions. Russian leaders have on several occasions suggested that NATO's BMD plans are really directed against Russia (Medvedev 2011; RT 2011). Likewise, some US officials seem to be convinced that Russia's objections to BMD deployments are not mainly due to concerns about the EPAA's technological capabilities (Weitz 2010:105). Dean Wilkening (2012) gives several reasons why such diverging political assessments of security threats and system capabilities may come into being even if no real clash of interest exists. He points out that since nuclear weapons are considered matters of highest security, information

about the other part's as well as third parties' capacities and capabilities may be weak or incomplete. In addition, much existing information is not available to the public debate and facts are likely to change with time as capabilities evolve. Furthermore, the advanced technological level of the matter in itself leads to a simplification of the political discourse since 'technical details are lost to most leaders' (Wilkening 2012).

4 Behind the official statements – alternative explanations for Russia's BMD stand

Within the academic literature, several alternative (i.e. non-technological) explanations are offered for Russia's opposition to NATO BMD plans. The alternative explanations are rooted in different theoretical schools, addressing factors both at the actor, state and inter-state levels. For the purpose of this report they have been organized into four broad categories dependent on the main explanatory factor(s). It should be noted that the rationality behind Russia's opposition suggested in this chapter may either substitute or come in addition to the reasons stated by Russian leaders, laid out in chapter 3, and that a combination of explanatory factors are not only possible, but likely.

4.1 Russia's historical experiences and strategic culture

The first category of explanations is based on assumptions about historical experiences and their influence upon strategic culture. Russia's fear of a US-led BMD system in Europe, and differences in threat perceptions on the part of Russia and the NATO members, in particular the United States, are explained by divergent experiences of important 20th century historical events such as the two World Wars.

Mikhail Tsypkin (2009) argues that Russia's opposition to a US-led BMD system in Europe can be explained by a general lack of trust in NATO and US initiatives caused by past humiliations and broken promises. According to Tsypkin, Russian politicians are annoyed about NATO's post-war expansion into former Warsaw Pact and Soviet territory. Following this line of interpretation, NATO BMD facilities deployed on the territory of former Soviet satellite states, an area still regarded by many in Russia as a Russian sphere of influence, will serve as a constant reminder of Russia's weakness in its own back yard (Tsypkin 2009).

Another version of this argument claims that Russia's response is caused by a bitterness rooted in a Russian perception that they have not been given what they were promised by the West at the end of the Cold War. According to this interpretation the Russian political leadership believe they were assured in 1990 that NATO enlargement would not go beyond the unified Germany and that they were promised during NATO's first round of post-Cold War enlargement in 1997–1999 that the Alliance was purely defensive and would never attack anyone. Yet shortly after the accession of the former Warsaw Pact members Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, NATO launched an offensive bombing campaign against Serbia over Kosovo. This development culminated with the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, leading to Russian fears about a disruption of the global strategic balance (Kay 2012: 46-47). Furthermore, the

arguments goes, there is a widespread opinion in Russia that the country is entitled to a special position in world affairs due to its crucial role in World War II, the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet block in East and Central Europe and the dissolution of the USSR (Troitskiy 2008).

Also Russia's preoccupation with strategic depth is frequently explained by historic experiences, i.e. with invasions from the West (Napoleon in 1812, Imperial Germany in World War I and Nazi Germany in World War II) (Cimbala 2008a; Sutyagin 2008). Similarly, the Russian scepticism to NATO's plans being motivated by concerns about Iran is sometimes explained by a lack of understanding of the motivations of US leaders – interpreted as a result of Russian strategic culture: Russians, marked by the massive devastation of 20th century wars, do not understand the American sensitivity to the vulnerability of the homeland to ballistic missiles (Tsypkin 2009). In addition, Lambeth (1987:45) argues, contrary to the US culture, the Soviet strategic culture, upon which the Russian is based, has never trusted solutions to be one hundred per cent effective. Russia (or in Lambeth's case the Soviet Union) therefore does not understand the US strive for full protection of its territory.

4.2 Russia's tactical and strategic considerations

In the second category, explanations rest with the nature of the international state system and the relationship between states. The central assumption is that Russia's BMD policy is based on strategic and tactical considerations aiming to protect and strengthen Russia's international position. This is largely in line with official statements from the Kremlin, stressing that Russia's foreign policy is driven by 'pragmatic', not ideological, concerns (see for example Putin 2012a).

Jennifer G. Mathers (2012) argues that both Medvedev and Putin have primarily see Russia's nuclear weapons as a political rather than military instrument. According to Mathers '[b]y drawing attention to the existence of Russia's nuclear arsenal, the president can help to boost the volume of his statements and increase the likelihood that his words will be heeded, whether his message is one of goodwill and cooperation or warnings' (Mathers 2012:496). It follows from this interpretation, that NATO's missile defence may not pose a military threat to Russia, but by making Russia's nuclear weapons less threatening, still be a political disadvantage. This view is supported by claims that the Russian attitude towards BMD has changed over time and due to Russia's capacity to act as an independent actor in world politics (Mankoff 2012:92, Cimbala 2008b:24).

Alla Kassianova (2005) and Stephen Cimbala (2008) also argue that Russia's BMD stand is at least partly based on pragmatic concerns. They see the Russian opposition against a US-led BMD system in Europe as motivated by ideas of tactical bargaining and argue that Russia's response is aiming to secure the best result for Russia whatever the outcome of NATO's plans. On the one hand Russia has tried to influence the BMD debate and make the plans more amenable to Russia's interests by offering an explicit alternative, i.e. the sector approach. On the other hand, Russia's response has been reactive, aiming to secure Russian interests if the BMD system should be implemented (Kassianova 2005; Cimbala 2008). Following Kassianova (2005) and Cimbala (2008), Russia's threat of asymmetric response is a security measure against a worst case

scenario, the harshness of the approach explained by an asymmetry between Russia and NATO when it comes to reliance on nuclear as compared to conventional military forces in their national security policies. Others have argued that by expressing strong opposition towards BMD Russia may use this issue to gain payoffs in other areas before making concessions. Russia might employ coercive tactics, seeking a higher level of influence in the European missile defence architecture than NATO-members are willing to agree to (Rousseau 2012; Weitz 2010: 107). Sean Kay (2012) for example claims that Russia has attempted to use BMD to gain concessions on the issue of Georgian and Ukrainian membership in NATO.

While some see Russia's opposition as a strategic or tactical choice, others interpret Russia's response as a lack thereof, arguing that when the United States and NATO first introduced their plans for a BMD system in Europe, remaining silent was not an option for the Russian leadership. They argue that Russian leaders may have feared that lack of protest would be interpreted in the United States as a tacit admission of the superiority of the US missile defence technology over the Russian one. According to Richard Rousseau (2012), Russian leaders worried that the construction of BMD facilities in Eastern European states would contribute to a closer integration of the region into the Western security structure under the aegis of the United States. This may result in a spill over effect – a scenario where NATO's BMD technologies are introduced in former Soviet republics – effectively impeding Russian control over its traditional 'sphere of influence' (Rousseau 2012). It has also been argued that Russia regards the growing role of former Soviet satellite states in European security institutions, such as NATO and the EU, as a threat to its great power aspirations, since these states have experienced a past of Soviet oppression and are generally suspicious of Russia's intentions (Tsyppkin 2009).

4.3 The domestic political environment in Russia

The third category of explanations emphasizes domestic political conditions when explaining Russia's policy in the BMD case. Explanations are derived from characteristics of the state, type of government, interest groups within the country, and national interests.

One interpretation within this category holds that Russia's opposition to NATO BMD and threat of an asymmetric response are the results of pressure from interest groups within the Russian military and defence industry. Out of self-interest, driven by the wish to increase the defence budget and secure jobs, the Russian military advocate worst-case scenarios resulting from NATO's BMD plans. Moreover, Russian policy-makers are influenced by business interests who inflate the BMD threat in order to increase the state order of military equipment (Tsyppkin 2012).

According to Kay (2012), the fierce Russian opposition to NATO's BMD plans can also be explained by a domestic political power struggle. Kay sees Russia's opposition as a means in domestic policy to consolidate the power of the ruling elite by pandering to the domestic political sentiment which sees nuclear weapons as the guarantee for Russia's sovereignty and security (Kay 2012). The Russian leadership takes every opportunity to inform the public of successful developments in the nuclear programme. Thus, Putin is able to further strengthen his own position as well as the impression that Russia is once again rising to great power status.

In the words of the Russian military journalist Alexander Golts: ‘for the Kremlin’s current leadership, if the missile defense issue didn’t exist, it would have to be invented. It is precisely the existence of this issue that enables the Kremlin to convince itself and its people that Russia is still a great state’ (cited in Shoumikhin 2003:316). This has created an ‘irreversible path’ situation: ever since Putin committed himself to opposing NATO’s BMD plans, it has been impossible for him to back down without damaging his position as a powerful leader (Tsyarkin 2012).

Many researchers also see Russia’s effort to preserve great power status as a quest for national identity (for example Cimballa 2008b; Shoumikhin 2003) or status recognition (Sutyagin 2012 among others). In the words of Kassianova (2005:681), Moscow’s BMD policy reflects ‘the continuing uncertainty about the new identity of the Russian state’. In her view, Russia has not yet decided whether NATO is an enemy or a friend, thereby the combination of harsh rhetoric with proposals for cooperation. Others point to the divided view on NATO and the West more generally among Russian policy elites (Allison 2006:99f; Solovyev 2008). Shoumikhin (2003) also argues that the ambiguous BMD policy reflects an ongoing internal fight between Russian military scholars, where the one side continues to view the United States with suspicion while the other opts for cooperation.

4.4 ‘Irrationality’ among the Russian leadership

In the final category personality, perceptions, choices and activities of individual decision makers provide the explanation. Russia’s policy decisions in the BMD case are assumed to be caused in part by ‘irrationality’ among Russian leaders, resulting from a biased Russian threat assessment, stressed by Mikhail Tsyarkin (2012) among others. The biased threat assessment is believed to be caused by several factors. First, there is the low quality of Russian intelligence assessments. There are indications that the tendency of ‘intelligence-to-please’ from the Soviet era is still present today. The military capabilities of NATO member states are overestimated, in part to avoid confronting the Russian leadership with information contradictory to existing plans, creating threat inflation (Tsyarkin 2012).

Tsyarkin goes on to argue that the biased threat assessment caused by intelligence-to-please is enhanced by the conspiratorial mindset of many Russian elites. The world views of these groups do not predispose to complacency with NATO’s BMD plans, Tsyarkin argues. There is a tendency to assume that Russia is the focus of hostile attention from US policy-makers, the US media, and the US public. Statements from US officials are scrutinized for anti-Russian bias, and references to Russia are interpreted as affirmations of a US preoccupation with the Russian ‘threat’ (Tsyarkin 2009). Two decades after the end of the Cold War the United States remains the main focus of Russian foreign policy, while Russia is only one of many concerns for the United States. However, according to inter alia Jeffrey Mankoff (2010:3), Russian leaders find this difficult to believe and are convinced that the US-led NATO BMD policy is about Russia.

Third, it is argued that Russia’s biased threat assessment stems from an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the United States. In Tsyarkin’s (2012) opinion Russian leaders are preoccupied with Russia’s

technological backwardness and have a tendency to exaggerate US technological prowess. There is doubt within Russia about whether the country's technological capabilities are able to match those of NATO's BMD system (Tyspkin 2012). Not everyone, however, agrees. Kassianova, studying the Russian missile defence discourse, quite to the contrary concludes that 'the superior quality of Russian-developed armaments and equipment is a singular conviction shared by absolutely every party to the discussion' (Kassianova 2005:675). Finally the biased Russian threat assessment is believed to be enforced by the identity issue. The perceived lack of a place for Russia in the European security system contains an emotional aspect because it puts into doubt the Russians' sense of identity as Europeans.

5 Missile defence in the future: cooperation or confrontation?

To sum up a number of explanations have been offered for Russia's opposition against NATO's plans for a BMD system in Europe. The official version is that the BMD system, when fully operative, may be able to destroy ICBMs launched from Russian territory and waters thereby undermining the condition of mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia and the United States. Alternative explanations hold that Russia's scepticism towards NATO and the United States may: be explained by Russia's historical experiences which have led to a lack of trust in NATO and US initiatives and a preoccupation with depth in Russia's strategic culture; be a result of tactical and strategic considerations aiming to strengthening Russia's position on the global arena; result from a tug of war between domestic actors and interests in Russia; and/or rest with a biased threat perception among the leadership. The explanations presented here are not mutually exclusive, and several explanations may be equally valid.

Setting NATO's intentions and motivations aside various explanations of Russia's BMD opposition offer different prospects for future Russia–NATO cooperation on missile defence. As laid out in section 3.3, there are three major controversies between Russia and NATO with regard to missile defence. First, there is a divergence of threat perceptions. Second, there are disagreements about the technical capabilities of the planned architecture. And third, there are different views on the possible nature and scope for cooperation. The last two stand out as the main obstacles to future cooperation as they are directly affecting what is perceived as Russian interests.

Russia's official stand, mainly emphasizing technological objections, suggests that cooperation is possible and can be reached through negotiations and eliminations of practical obstacles. This view is also reflected in the official Russian rhetoric which stresses Russia's will to negotiate and to find solutions acceptable to both parties.

The historical explanation points to a deficit of trust between the parties. As Trenin (2012) has pointed out, Russia does not trust NATO's and the United States' long-term intentions, and NATO, in particular Russia's neighbours from Central and Eastern Europe, do not trust Russia. While a deficit of trust does not in itself lead to confrontation, it is likely to make cooperation

challenging. This suggests that it may take many years to establish a profound BMD cooperation between NATO and Russia.

If tactical and strategic considerations are the main explanatory factors, prospects for cooperation depend on how, in the perception of the analysts, Russia sees the world: mainly competitive or mainly cooperative. Sokov (2012) and Mathers (2012), for example, both find Russia's BMD policy mainly motivated by concerns related to foreign politics rather than military ones. But while Sokov (2012) argues that emphasis on political rather than technical problems increases the chance for a deadlock, Mathers (2012) quite to the contrary believes it makes Russia more willing to cooperate with the West in order to find a mutually acceptable solution.

The third alternative explanatory factor also offers ambivalent prospects for cooperation. Explanations focusing on the domestic political environment point to the domestic restraints on Russia's foreign and security politics. For example, a strong scepticism to NATO among the Russian population, politicians and military may make extensive cooperation with NATO difficult. At the same time, liberal forces desiring a stronger Russian integration with Western Europe and the United States may push for more cooperation with NATO, including cooperation in the BMD field.

The bleakest prospects for cooperation are offered by those who see Russia's opposition as a result of 'irrationality' among the Russian leadership. Furthermore, this is the only explanatory factor that seems to suggest that a confrontation between Russia and NATO over BMD is likely. However, even if Russia's BMD policy should be motivated by intelligence overestimating the NATO/US threat and leaders with a conspiratorial mindset and a inferiority complex vis-à-vis the United States, other political and security challenges facing Russia still suggests that a military confrontation with NATO over BMD is not very probable in the foreseeable future.

Literature

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Abbreviations

ABM Treaty	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
ALTBMD	Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
EPAA	European Phased Adaptive Approach
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IRBM	Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile
TMD	Theatre Missile Defence