

The proliferation of missiles will continue – missile defences will remain relevant

# Missile Defence: a valuable tool to defend against current threats

by Dr Oliver Thränert, Head of the Think Tank at the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich

On the occasion of its 2010 Lisbon Summit, NATO decided for the first time to establish a missile defence capability to provide full coverage and protection for its entire European population, territory and military forces against the increasing threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles.

## The world has changed

Since then, the world has changed. Whereas in 2010 the main concern was the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, following Russia's annexation of Crimea it was classical Article 5 defence of NATO territory that gained prominence. Besides, as a result of the 14 July 2015 agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme the proliferation threat has diminished. So is missile defence still relevant?

Most would agree that NATO missile defence is of little value with regard to Russia, given that Moscow has a missile and nuclear weapons capability against which defence is hardly possible. However, limited conflicts are conceivable, including Russian hybrid warfare operations on NATO's periphery. In the event of such contingencies Russia could threaten the Alliance with a limited first use of tactical nuclear weapons. NATO missile defences might then play an important role in defending allies and at least achieve damage limitation. In addition, the proliferation of missiles will continue. Not only does the 14 July 2015 agreement fail to prevent Iran from improving its missile force, but also, other countries in the Middle East and elsewhere will continue with their missile programmes. And NATO, despite its focus on Russia, cannot afford to entirely ignore international crisis-management operations.

## Missile Defence will remain relevant

Against that backdrop, missile defences will remain relevant. To begin with, missile defences provide damage limitation. But missile defences will never be able to reliably and comprehensively protect territories and populations. Therefore, terms such as "missile defence shield" seem inappropriate.

In addition, missile defence has an important effect on the aggressor's calculations. Uncertainty on the part of the aggressor is likely to increase. At the same time, missile defence is important to help maintain some room for manoeuvre against aggressors equipped with ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. To be sure, even with missile defences on hand, risk calculation would still be extremely difficult, but they would add an important option.



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## Dr Oliver Thränert

is Head of the Think Tank at the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, and "Non-Resident Senior Fellow" at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik). Born in 1959 in Germany, he studied Political Science, Modern History and Sociology and received his Doctorate from the Technical University of Braunschweig, Germany, in 1986. From 1986 to 2001, Mr Thränert was a political analyst for the Research Institute of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bonn (until 1999) and Berlin. In 2001 he joined the SWP, where he chaired the Research Group for International Security from 2002 to 2008. In addition, Mr Thränert lectured at the Technical University of Darmstadt (1990 to 1994) and the Free University of Berlin (2002) and was a visiting scholar at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario (1991).

Moreover, missile defence also contributes to crisis stability. If damage limitation through defences becomes achievable, the need to reduce damage by attacking the opponent's offensive capabilities would decrease. Because the opponents would be aware of this, they would not be forced to use their nuclear weapons early in a "use-them-or-lose-them" mode. Hence, the likelihood of escalation would diminish.

Finally, proliferators are motivated to acquire missiles as well as nuclear weapons in the hope that they can use them as instruments of coercion. Missile defences could help to reduce such risks. It is true that given the changing security environment, NATO has to adapt, particularly regarding its conventional capabilities. Against the backdrop of tied budgets in almost all European countries, missile defence may not be the first priority of the Alliance. However, neither should it be entirely neglected.

## NEWS

### The Iran Agreement

Laurent Fabius, Foreign Minister of France, talking about the possibility of the nuclear deal with Iran being rejected by the US Congress: "President Obama is not wrong when he says that the alternative to the deal would be a military conflict with Iran."

Source: *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 23 August 2015