

NATO Ballistic Missile Defence

“Our missile defence programme represents a long-term investment against a long-term threat. Our goal is to achieve full coverage and protection for NATO’s European Allies against ballistic missile attacks from outside the Euro-Atlantic area.”

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 12 May 2016

The proliferation of ballistic missiles poses an increasing threat to Allied populations, territory and deployed forces. Many countries have, or are trying to develop or acquire ballistic missiles. The proliferation of these capabilities does not necessarily mean there is an immediate intent to attack NATO, but it does mean that the Alliance has a responsibility to take this into account as part of its core task of collective defence.

BMD for the protection of NATO European territory, populations and forces

At the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, NATO leaders decided to develop a territorial ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability. In May 2012 at the Chicago Summit, NATO leaders declared the Interim NATO BMD Capability as a first operationally meaningful step. It offered the maximum coverage within available means to defend NATO’s populations, territory and forces across southern Europe against a limited ballistic missile attack.

However, the final aim remains to provide full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces against the increasing threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles. This coverage is based on the principles of indivisibility of Allied security and NATO solidarity, equitable sharing of risks and burdens, as well as reasonable challenge. It also takes into account the level of threat, affordability and technical feasibility, and is in accordance with the latest common threat assessments agreed by the Alliance. Should international efforts reduce the threats posed by ballistic missile proliferation, NATO missile defence can, and will, adapt accordingly.

NATO ballistic missile defence is purely defensive and not directed against Russia. As explained by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, geography and physics make it impossible for the NATO system to shoot down Russian intercontinental missiles by the interceptors available for NATO BMD. They are too few, and located too far south or too close to Russia, to be able to do so. They are designed to tackle threats from outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

Key Functions

When fully operational, NATO BMD capability will be built around a command and control system which enables five key functions: planning; monitoring; information sharing; interception; and consequence management.

PLANNING: given the very short time period over which missile defence engagements can take place (a matter of minutes, sometimes of seconds), planning and anticipation are crucial for the development of an effective defence. A key part of the NATO capability will therefore be to plan, prepare and position assets as needed.

MONITORING: some NATO Allies own, or are acquiring, satellites which can detect the launch of a ballistic missile, and radars on land or on ships which are capable of detecting and tracking such missiles. These sensors will be linked in to the NATO command and control system.

INFORMATION SHARING: the command and control system enables NATO to bring together all the available sensor information, build it into a comprehensive and real-time operational picture of the BMD situation and share it with sensors and weapons systems provided by Allies.

INTERCEPTION: weapons systems and interceptors provided by Allies will be linked in to the NATO command and control system together with the various sensors, allowing NATO commanders to take appropriate and timely action, if necessary, to respond to a ballistic missile attack.

CONSEQUENCE MANAGEMENT: NATO will support national authorities to mitigate and manage the consequences of a missile attack or intercept. This can cover a range of measures before, during and after the event, including providing timely information to allow the national authorities to warn their population, and delivering capabilities to support national response activities.

Participation

As part of the US European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA):

- Turkey hosts a US BMD radar at Kürecik;
- Romania hosts an Aegis Ashore site at Deveselu Air Base (declared operational on 12 May 2016);
- Germany hosts the command centre at Ramstein Air Base;
- Poland will be hosting another Aegis Ashore site at the Redzikowo military base (in the 2018 timeframe);
- Additionally, in the context of the EPAA, Spain hosts four multi-mission BMD-capable Aegis ships at its naval base in Rota. These assets are national contributions, and are integral parts of the NATO BMD capability.

Several Allies currently offer further ground-based air and missile defence systems (such as Patriot or SAMP/T) or complementary ships as a force protection of other BMD assets. Other Allies are also developing or acquiring BMD-capable assets that could eventually be made available for NATO BMD.

In September 2011, the Netherlands announced plans to upgrade four air-defence frigates with extended long-range missile defence early-warning radars as its national contribution to NATO's ballistic missile defence capability. A similar announcement was made in August 2014 by Denmark, which decided to acquire a frigate-based radar system to enhance NATO BMD. In November 2015, the United Kingdom announced it would invest in a ground-based BMD radar, intended to enhance the coverage and effectiveness of the NATO BMD capability.

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