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Missiles for Europe? U.S. plans expose Europe's strategic weaknesses

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Executive Summary

The debate over U.S. plans to construct a missile defense system reveals the complexity and multi-layered character of political processes at the beginning of the 21st century. To a great extent, however, the debate has much less to do with the defense system itself than with the safeguarding of particularistic interests either on the international stage or within domestic disputes between political parties. On the one hand, Russia is seeking to strengthen its position within its former Soviet sphere of influence and is striving to reclaim its role as a global actor. On the other hand, parts of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) are attempting to use the debate as a means to return the SPD to its roots as a peace party. Additional key issues include unresolved questions about the respective roles of NATO and the European Union within the fields of security and defense policy as well as divergent perceptions of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear and missile programs.

After setting out the core components of the debate and examining the main factors and issues that lie beneath the surface of the discussion, this paper arrives at the following conclusion: continuing efforts to construct a comprehensive missile defense system must be carried out within the framework of NATO in cooperation with Russia. Only a common solution can prevent the further erosion of trust. In addition, this approach could also serve to bring the United States back into the collective fold of NATO. Furthermore, a new strategic agreement between the EU and NATO should be considered; this agreement should focus on defense policy issues and directly address the question of territorial missile defense. In this process, however, the EU must define its strategic interests within the global system and assert these interests vigorously. Finally, within the German domestic debate, policymakers must reach out more effectively to citizens – and involve them in policy discussions – in order to be able to develop convincing explanations for the policies they pursue in the 21st century.

1. Missile defense: a source of division in Europe?

1.1. Core issues of the debate

The discussion currently underway concerning the involvement of Poland and the Czech Republic in U.S. plans to construct a missile defense system is both complex and misleading at the same time. The debate has been difficult to resolve not only due to technical concerns and questions regarding the system's effectiveness, but primarily due to differing and conflicting views of the security and defense policy implications of missile defense. Russia's harsh criticism of the program, together with its threat to suspend its obligations under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty), has only further exacerbated the situation.

If one takes a more precise look at recent statements, however, it becomes evident that the issue of missile defense is merely the tip of the iceberg, and that Russia is actually engaged in an effort to restructure its relations with the United States, NATO, and the European Union. In addition, the debate is significant in terms of German domestic policy as well. Policymakers particularly from the Social Democratic Party (SPD) argue emphatically that the project could lead to a new arms race in Europe, while the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has so far expressed its support for engaging in targeted dialogue with the U.S. and Russia within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council. And opinions within NATO appear to be divided as well, in contrast to official pronouncements. Taken together, these positions provide a clear example of the complexity and multi-layered character of interests in today's international system. Furthermore, the situation highlights the problems and challenges confronting the European Union as it seeks to define its role as an international actor capable of influencing intricate networks of mutual dependency and effectively responding to global trends.

Multilayered debate

1.2. Divergent threat perceptions

While the issue of missile defense has already led to discernable tensions in U.S.-Russian relations, it also has the potential to serve as a stumbling block in transatlantic relations and relations between the U.S., NATO, and the EU. The central issues here have to do with different strategic objectives and threat perceptions as well as questions concerning how and to what extent the European allies of the United States will be involved in the program. For example, the Europeans themselves disagree about the extent to which Iran's nuclear and missile programs will pose a genuine threat in the future. Not only in Germany but also in Norway and other European countries, skepticism toward the entire missile defense initiative is increasing. Many view the program as the first step toward a renewed arms race that will impede political and multilateral solutions to international disputes such as current disagreements over the correct strategy to combat nuclear proliferation.¹ Warsaw's contradictory position is an additional problematic factor. Poland does not feel threatened by Iran but nonetheless wishes to be part of the missile defense system as a means of enhancing its security vis-à-vis a re-emergent Russia. This misinterpretation of the technical and strategic capacity of the planned U.S. program will be examined in greater detail below.

Threat from Iran

In contrast, the United States emphasizes that it does not wish to take the risk of becoming vulnerable to the threat of Iranian medium-range nuclear missiles without having an adequate defense system at its disposal. This involves a time factor that the

Important time factor

U.S. has underscored by stating its plans to field an active missile defense capability by 2010, since U.S. experts proceed from the assumption that Iran may be able to deploy longer-range missiles, and thereby present a threat to the West, by 2015.²

2. Technical Aspects

U.S. plans to involve Poland and the Czech Republic in the missile defense program have a longer history that extends in part back to the Strategic Defense Initiative (also known as the “Star Wars” program) initiated under the Reagan administration. The dissemination of modern missile delivery technology after 1990, together with the growth of various nuclear weapons programs in such countries as North Korea, Iraq, Iran, India and Pakistan, increased the possibility of a more widespread security threat posed by long-range missiles with nuclear warheads.³

Layered missile defense

For several years, the United States has been pursuing an approach that involves the construction of a comprehensive, layered defense system that could intercept missiles during the early launch phase (boost-phase defense), during flight outside the Earth’s atmosphere (midcourse phase defense), and during final descent (terminal phase defense).⁴ The difficulty with missile interception during the boost phase lies primarily in the relatively short reaction time during which the enemy object must be located and destroyed. While the U.S. has already conducted numerous tests with airborne laser weapons, there are enormous technical – and hence financial – difficulties in making these weapons operational. In addition, positioning and interception systems would need to be located in the immediate vicinity of the launching position. Various systems have already exist for the terminal defense phase, including the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) system and the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS), the latter of which is still under development as a cooperative program between the United States, Germany, and Italy. Both systems are capable of defending against both ballistic and cruise missiles.⁵

Limited midcourse defense capability

The plans currently under discussion to construct components of a missile defense system in Europe involve midcourse phase defense and are therefore oriented solely toward the interception of individual ballistic missiles. A 1997 decision by the Clinton administration to establish a limited midcourse defense capability, to be completed in three phases, forms the basis for this concept.⁶ During the first phase, radar and interceptor missiles were deployed in Alaska to defend against a potential threat from North Korea; a limited level of operational capability is expected by 2008. The inclusion of European elements is now meant to add an Atlantic dimension to the overall program. In addition to installations in the United Kingdom, this includes the ten interceptor missiles in Poland and the X-band radar in the Czech Republic that are currently at the center of the discussion. These installations would provide protection to the United States itself as well as to a large part of the European continent.

“Hit to kill” approach

However, the interceptor missiles would not be equipped with warheads. The experience of the 1990-91 Gulf War demonstrated that the missile debris caused by the explosion of an interceptor in the direct vicinity of an enemy missile could still inflict significant damage. This form of missile interception has given way to the “hit to kill” approach in which the interceptor collides directly with the enemy missile. In the “hit to kill” approach, the interceptor achieves its desired effect not through an attached warhead but rather purely through the kinetic energy that is released when the massive interceptor strikes the targeted missile. Both the Patriot PAC-3 and MEADS systems use this type of interception.

3. Missile defense: key levels of debate

3.1. Russian involvement

After the U.S. pushed forward with its plans in January 2007 and Poland and the Czech Republic agreed to allow missile interceptors and radar installations to be stationed on their territory, a heated dispute arose regarding Russia's involvement in the overall program. During this year's Security Conference in Munich, Russia accused the United States of failing to provide timely and sufficient information about its plans. In addition, Russia perceived the installation of interceptor missiles and radar systems in Central Europe as a threat to its own strategic nuclear capabilities. Both of these arguments have been disproved repeatedly in the meantime. First, ten interceptor missiles would not be sufficient to neutralize Russia's nuclear capabilities, which comprise several thousand warheads.⁷ In her response to Russia's allegations, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice went so far as to state that it was "anachronistic and not grounded in reality"⁸ to speak of a threat to the Russian nuclear arsenal in this case and that there was therefore no basis whatsoever for claiming that U.S. missile defense plans would ignite a new arms race. Second, Lieutenant General Henry Obering, Director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, stated that Moscow had in recent years already been informed of the United States' plans, both within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council as well as in direct talks between Washington and Moscow.⁹

Overblown criticism from Moscow

The critical stance of many Europeans and Russia's harsh reaction to U.S. plans led Germany to insist that Russia be more closely involved in further deliberations. The German government suggested that the NATO-Russia Council would offer a suitable forum for such consultations. In addition, the United States offered Russia the opportunity to inspect the planned installation sites in Poland and the Czech Republic and proposed that the U.S. and Russia enter into a cooperative process that would provide a forum to discuss the technical and political details of a joint missile defense program, the sharing of early warning data, and joint maneuvers.¹⁰ So far, however, Russia has not acted on this proposal, which was advanced by the United States on several occasions including an April 2007 visit to Moscow by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.¹¹

U.S. gestures of accommodation

Russia's negative stance has had a detrimental effect on relations between the two powers above and beyond the contested issue of missile defense. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has emphasized repeatedly that good relations between NATO and Russia, as a leading Eurasian power, are essential for solving numerous European and global problems. In an article published in the May issue of the journal *Europäische Sicherheit* (European Security), de Hoop Scheffer asserted that, despite progress in certain areas of NATO-Russian relations, Russia nevertheless did not lend the necessary political support to cooperative efforts. Referring to Moscow's reaction to U.S. plans to build a missile defense system, he argued that Russia has still not completely let go of the stereotypes of the past. In his view, five years after the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, it is time for NATO and Russia to renew their commitment to cooperate at a high political level.¹²

NATO-Russian relations

3.2. Additional areas of tension

Furthermore, the situation has the potential to escalate. As a condition for agreeing to station ten interceptor missiles on its territory, the Polish government requested that the U.S. provide Poland with Patriot air defense missiles. Warsaw stated bla-

Poland's demands tantly that it wanted the Patriot missiles for the purpose of securing Poland, above all against Russia.¹³ This stance was exactly what the United States has vehemently denied all along – i.e., that the overall program is directed against Russia; as a result, the U.S. clearly rejected Poland's demands.

CFE Treaty In the meantime, in a state of the nation address, President Putin threatened to unilaterally suspend Russia's obligations under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (the CFE Treaty), because certain Western states have not yet ratified the Agreement on Adaptation of the CFE Treaty that was adopted in Istanbul in 1999. The adapted CFE Treaty replaced the bloc-to-bloc structure that the original 1990 treaty had established for defining the military balance of power between the contracting parties with a European system of regional stability. Western states have made their ratification of the adapted treaty conditional upon the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova-Transnistria and the establishment of a timeline for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. However, the negotiating parties in Istanbul had neglected to specify a clear road map and time sequence that would apply to the withdrawal of Russian troops and the subsequent ratification of the treaty. Thus the suspicion arises that the Russian President is seeking to exploit the tensions surrounding the missile defense issue in order to negotiate a new CFE Treaty adaptation that would work to Russia's advantage.

ABM Treaty In general, Moscow's negative stance, which approaches on irrationality, indicates that Russia is seeking to redefine its relations with the United States, NATO and Europe. After all, Russia's reaction to the Bush administration's unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic-Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 was rather mild and appeared to have a primarily symbolic character. At the time, there were speculations that Russia and the U.S. were working behind the scenes to agree on a new ABM regime directed against China. Global security policy developments in recent years – including NATO's increasing proximity to Russia following rounds of enlargement, as well as the unilateral policies of the United States toward Iraq – have led to the recognition in Moscow that Russia's relations with the last remaining superpower and the Western alliance must be placed on a new basis.

Russia's great power aspirations Russia is ready "to demonstrate its dissent with the West and is looking for ways to push Western states out of the area that Moscow views as its sphere of influence."¹⁴ Experts make similar arguments with respect to Russia's negative posture toward the Ahtisaari plan to provide Kosovo with an internationally supervised form of independence. In this latter case, Moscow is acting as the representative of Serbian interests; however, its strategy appears to be motivated more by its desire to recapture its status as a global actor than by its traditional alliance with Belgrade.¹⁵ At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin highlighted the 1000-year history and tradition of his country. He then went on to assert that the economic success of recent years will "inevitably translate into political influence."¹⁶ It should be acknowledged that Putin is not alone in pursuing this line of argumentation; for example, the European Security Strategy unveiled by Javier Solana in 2003 emphasizes that, due to its sheer economic power, the European Union is practically condemned to play a stronger political role in the world.¹⁷

3.3. The Role of NATO

Initially, the United States engaged only in bilateral negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic regarding their potential involvement in the missile defense pro-

gram. However, after applying pressure in her function as European Council President, German Chancellor Angela Merkel succeeding in ensuring that the issue was debated for the first time within the framework of NATO in mid-April 2007. While official statements sent out a signal that the Alliance had reached a general consensus regarding European involvement in the construction of a missile defense shield, some NATO members expressed reservations. Germany, Canada, Norway, and at least three other members believe that there is a considerable need for further discussion.¹⁸ Along with the general question of whether a missile defense shield is necessary, these countries are particularly concerned about the program's potential impact on NATO-Russian relations. President Putin has compared the U.S. initiative to the deployment of Pershing missiles in the early 1980s and has repeatedly threatened to take countermeasures.¹⁹

No unified position in NATO

Warning against a "spiral of distrust," German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has demanded that NATO engage in a serious internal debate and that Russian concerns be given more serious consideration.²⁰ Although a new arms race in Europe is rather unlikely, there are additional issues that could lead to disputes such as the future status of Kosovo and Russia's significance as an energy supplier. Unlike in the United States, Russia's geographic proximity and resource wealth play a key role in Europe's relations with its Russian neighbor.

Spiral of distrust

A second group of states – Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey – have doubts of a very different kind: the defense shield as currently envisaged by the U.S. does not cover the states of Southeastern Europe. Because these countries take the threat from the Middle East – particularly the Iranian nuclear program – very seriously, they are interested in an expansion of the defense shield or in supplementing the U.S. program with an additional NATO component.²¹ As the starting point for such an endeavor, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer mentioned the plan for a comprehensive missile defense system to protect the entirety of NATO territory, which was initiated at the 2002 NATO Summit in Prague.²² There is an additional NATO program to build an Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) system, which is intended to provide protection against ballistic and cruise missiles to NATO forces deployed in the field. However, it is not yet clear to what extent these different programs can be coordinated or whether such coordination is even possible at all.

The present situation serves to confirm U.S. skepticism with regard to discussing its plans within the framework of NATO. First, the initiative is a U.S. program which now seeks to include two Central European allies; as a result, general approval from NATO is not required. Second, it is highly unlikely that the project would have reached such an advanced stage if the missile defense plans had been developed within a NATO framework from the outset. However, the strategy of excluding NATO from the planning process for reasons of efficiency has now backfired, because it demonstrates the low level of relevance that the U.S. attaches to the North Atlantic alliance. By no means will the U.S. allow the further implementation of its plans to depend upon a vote of approval by its NATO partners. And the success or failure of negotiations within the NATO-Russian Council will have no influence on the decision-making process in Washington.

The role of the U.S.

Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg has even made clear that his country no longer feels sufficiently protected by NATO. In addition, Poland's above-mentioned request that the U.S. supply it with Patriot missiles for protection against Russia reveals the extent to which some alliance partners doubt NATO's efficiency.²³

The current debate can therefore be viewed as further proof of the growing disunity within NATO as well as the conceptual and strategic weakness of Europe in the area of security and defense policy.

Russia feeds dissent

The dispute over the missile defense program once again exposes the differences between old and new Europe that became evident during the Iraq conflict. While the U.S. distances itself from Western strategic forums and undermines these forums by placing increasing emphasis on ad hoc alliances, Moscow seeks to exploit internal European and transatlantic differences of opinion to deepen the rifts both within the Western alliance and between Europe and the United States.²⁴

Following the 26 April 2007 meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov demanded a serious debate on the architecture of European security and, in so doing, struck the core of the current dispute. In the present situation, quarrels concerning the U.S. missile defense shield represent merely the tip of the iceberg – the real problem lies much deeper. The Czech Republic has fundamentally called into question NATO's ability to function and uses this stance to justify a bilateral agreement with the United States. At the same time, Poland appears to be making every effort to weaken both NATO and the EU. These developments give rise to the question: What security strategy can do justice to European and Western interests and demands? And this in turn highlights the issue of the future of both NATO and European Security and Defence Policy.

The future of NATO

So far, EU member states have not succeeded in fashioning a clear profile for their own defense identity, and this has also had a detrimental impact on transatlantic relations. Yet it is precisely the present security climate – including renewed East-West tensions and the increasingly precarious situation in the Middle East – that challenges the North Atlantic alliance to develop a clear strategy for achieving collective security. Such a strategy must take into account both the role of the EU as well as a stronger partnership with Russia. An intensified rivalry with Moscow would be counterproductive for the security of NATO member states, particularly given the increase in external threats.

3.4. Where is the European Union?

No EU position

Debates over Russian involvement in the missile defense program and, even more, U.S.-Russian tensions following Putin's state of the nation speech overshadow another, more important question: What role do Europe and the European Union play in this context? In an article published in the weekly newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*, Eckart von Klaeden, spokesman for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group,²⁵ set out three possible approaches to further negotiations regarding missile defense. First, he solidly rejected a bilateral solution between the U.S. on one side and Poland and the Czech Republic on the other, because this would generate negative centrifugal forces within NATO and the EU. Second, he asserted that the EU would provide an unsuitable forum due to the exclusion of the U.S. and Norway. According to von Klaeden, only NATO offers the proper setting for negotiating the way forward. In the meantime, this third option is being pursued vigorously. It possesses the advantage of transferring what started as a bilateral U.S. initiative into a multilateral framework.

Javier Solana argues that Europe needs to engage in a discussion regarding the missile defense plans. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that the EU will not

play a role in the actual decision-making process. This stance reflects the general policy that the EU has no competences whatsoever in the area of traditional national defense. However, one can question whether protection against ballistic and cruise missiles belongs strictly to the category of national defense or whether it is not a core element of security and defense policy. After all, on the one hand, the EU benefits from member state contributions to EU crisis management operations and deployments, which can also involve mobile missile defense systems. On the other hand, however, the EU shies away from a discussion of the role it should play in the deployment of a missile defense system for Europe.

The EU's unclear position in this matter reveals an additional strategic deficit vis-à-vis the United States. The U.S. initiative in early 2007 regarding the deployment of interceptors and radar sites in Central Europe proceeded in a very unfortunate manner. It highlighted the sparse use of transatlantic channels for discussing security strategy in recent years. And this in turn reveals a fallacy in the assessment of current transatlantic relations. Hopes that the transatlantic partnership could be rebuilt on a new basis following the end of the dispute over the Iraq war have not been fulfilled. Rather, strategic dialogue between both partners simply no longer takes place. While this allows both sides to avoid exposing their differences in public, it has precious little to do with a self-declared transatlantic partnership that is meant serve as a driving force for shaping effective responses to the challenges arising from transformations in international relations at the beginning of the 21st century. However, the EU cannot demand to be taken seriously as a security actor when, at the same time, it fails to adopt clear positions on urgent security and defense policy issues and passes the ball to NATO instead.

Insufficient transatlantic dialogue

3.5. The debate in Germany

The missile defense dispute has also caused numerous controversies in Germany. The main lines of the conflict run between the governing coalition and its opposition in parliament. While the government tends to favor missile defense – albeit within the framework of NATO – the Free Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party vehemently oppose such a system. While the opposition parties primarily criticize the United States' unilateral behavior in the matter, they also call into question the basic necessity of a missile defense system. These doubts were articulated most clearly by former Environment Minister Jürgen Trittin, who declared that the United States' declared reasons for building the system were "dishonest," and that the defense shield was for all intents and purposes directed against Russia.²⁵ The Free Democratic Party, too, has warned against the division of Europe and a confrontation with Moscow, as well as the renewed arms race that might result from such a confrontation.²⁶ However, since – as mentioned above – the U.S. plans do not pose a threat to Russia's offensive capabilities, such statements may be understood primarily as attempts to curry favor with voters for domestic political purposes.

Spectrum of opinion:
Governing coalition –
opposition

However, resistance to the missile defense program has emerged not only among the opposition parties but also within the governing coalition. Segments of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), in particular, have sought to take advantage of the opportunity to reposition the SPD as a peace party. Party chairman Kurt Beck has even warned against the outbreak of a new Cold War and announced his general opposition to the program,²⁷ as has former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who fears a negative impact on German-Russian relations.²⁸ Both Beck and Schröder reflect the basic mood within the SPD: plans to construct a missile defense system – regard-

SPD as peace party

less of whether they are carried out by the U.S. or NATO – are viewed as both unnecessary and dangerous. Any risk to Europe from long- or medium-range missiles is either denied or relegated into the far-off future and thereby defused for the time being. In contrast, moderate voices among the Social Democrats – found mainly among those with responsibility for governing – primarily criticize the unilateral approach of the United States. They argue that, with regard to the issue of missile defense, Europe and Russia should not be presented with a *fait accompli*. First among these voices is Foreign Minister Steinmeier, who has demanded that the issue be addressed within both NATO and the EU so that both institutions can become constructively involved in finding a solution and thereby avoid the instigation of a new arms race.²⁹

Missile defense as
guarantor of security

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Socialist Union (CSU) maintain a similar view to that of Steinmeier, but they express clearer support for the project. Chancellor Merkel, in particular, has argued forcefully that the missile defense program should be addressed within the framework of the North Atlantic alliance and in consultation with Russia.³⁰ In contrast to Steinmeier, however, Merkel does not demand that the EU play an active role in the debate. In addition, CDU and CSU spokespersons have underscored the program's positive implications for the security of Western Europe. The CDU's defense policy expert, Karl Lamers, has even sought to turn the program opponents' fears of a renewed arms race on their head. He asserts that, rather than igniting a spiraling arms race, such a missile defense program could, due to its defensive character, ultimately promote global disarmament and/or bring an end to Iran's dreams of acquiring nuclear weapons.³¹ In contrast to the opposition parties, and more explicitly than their coalition partners, a majority of CDU/CSU politicians favor the missile shield and even endorse an extension of the system to cover all of NATO territory. At the same time, however, their concept involves close coordination with Russia.³² Thus while reflexively critical attitudes toward the U.S. still appear to be operative among Social Democrats, CDU/CSU politicians continue to demonstrate reliable Atlanticist tendencies. The relatively conciliatory tones expressed by leaders of the SPD – with the exception of the party chairman and SPD secretary general Hubertus Heil – can be attributed primarily to the imperatives of working within a grand coalition.

Contradictory public attitudes

The multiplicity of opinions among leading politicians also reflects the uncertainty of the German public. According to a recent survey commissioned by the news magazine *Stern* and conducted by the Forsa research institute, 48% of German citizens consider the United States to be a greater threat to world peace than Iran, and only 31% hold the opposite opinion.³³ Thus plans to extend the U.S. missile shield to cover Europe are greeted with considerable skepticism. In general, however, Germans – like citizens from other European countries – hardly feel threatened by outside forces. Only 2% of Europeans and 1% of German citizens name terrorism or defense as a significant problem. In contrast, unemployment and poverty are viewed as much more urgent threats.³⁴ At the same time, more than two-thirds of Europeans (and even higher percentages of Germans) are in favor of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (67%) and the European Security and Defence Policy (75%).³⁵ These percentages reveal a paradoxical relationship between the public's threat perceptions and their preferred solutions. As long as the public does not feel threatened by external terrorist or military attacks, a missile defense shield will not engender higher levels of subjective security. The high level of approval for the Common Foreign and Security Policy also indicates that Europeans prefer a cooperative foreign policy. In contrast, it is unclear why Euro-

peans deliver such a positive assessment of the European Security and Defence Policy if they perceive no external threats.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1. NATO: Yes, but...

It is possible to state with certainty that NATO is the appropriate forum for taking further action with respect to missile defense. For a number of years now, the Alliance has been engaging in deliberations on the establishment of a comprehensive missile defense system to protect NATO territory. In addition, as mentioned above, NATO has already begun formulating plans to build a mobile missile defense system to protect NATO forces in their areas of operation. Therefore, pending negotiations should clarify how NATO's current projects can be coupled with newly proposed plans to construct an Atlantic dimension of a limited midcourse defense capability. Discussions on a joint approach must take into account two central considerations. First, the Alliance must assess the military efficiency of a joint approach. Second, the Alliance must clarify the function and authority of Europeans in cases when missile defense capabilities are actually put into operation. This would allow the development of an effective overall system that could provide protection to all of Europe and the North American continent. The relevant NATO working bodies must now engage in determined efforts to produce results in these areas.

NATO's comprehensive approach

Even more important is the question of decision-making authority within such a joint program. And this is precisely where an additional issue arises that so far has not been taken into sufficient consideration: if NATO were to become the sole forum for implementing this program, this would have significant repercussions on the way in which Europe currently conceives of itself in terms of security and defense policy. This issue was also addressed at a conference held in Brussels within the framework of the Security and Defence Agenda. The conference examined, among other things, the question of who is now responsible for defense-related issues in Europe and what role the EU should assume in shaping defense policy in and for Europe. In addition to the three options laid out by Eckart von Klaeden, there is a fourth option that has been the subject of comparatively little discussion. The issue of missile defense should be used as the impetus for a new round of negotiations on the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU. These negotiations could then lead to a "Berlin Plus 2.0" declaration that, based on the 2003 Berlin Plus agreement, would clarify the relationship between the two institutions in the area of territorial defense.

Berlin Plus 2.0

However, in order for such a process to take place, the EU itself must – as a basic precondition – come to an agreement regarding the further development of European Security and Defence Policy. Only when defectors such as Poland and the Czech Republic are once again willing to participate in a common European approach will the EU be able to strengthen its position within North Atlantic security structures and thus to influence these structures in a manner that serves its interests. Only then will it be possible to conceive of a revitalization of the transatlantic security community. Such a community should be based on true partnership rather than old oaths of loyalty. This would involve, for example, a continuation of the practical strategy pursued by Chancellor Merkel. At both the EU-U.S. and EU-Russia summits in spring 2007, Merkel emphasized that sustainable and efficient policy solutions require open and honest discussions rather than superficial declarations of harmony.

Greater pragmatism

4.2. Bring the U.S. back on board

The United States must be persuaded to once again place a higher priority on NATO in its geopolitical considerations. Incorporating the missile defense debate into the NATO framework would provide a suitable forum for shifting the bilateral U.S. initiative into a multilateral setting. Such a development would bring the U.S. back into the collective fold and strengthen the North Atlantic Alliance's role as a security actor both in and for Europe. It would also lay the foundations for a revitalized transatlantic partnership that, in the coming years, could help to prevent U.S.-driven unilateral actions or bilateral agreements which so often serve as a divisive force precisely in efforts to achieve further European integration. At the same time, it would thwart Russian attempts to further undermine U.S.-European relations.

Superiority of multilateral approaches

It is precisely U.S. unilateralism that acts as the main divisive factor in the issue of missile defense. NATO's deliberations on the construction of a missile defense shield have encountered far less resistance – from members of the Alliance as well as from Russia. If, from the outset, the issue had been addressed openly and explicitly as a joint program within the framework of NATO and the NATO-Russia Council, the current tensions and the unfortunate linkage of the issue with other important decisions and agreements (e.g., the CFE Treaty) could have been avoided. Even more significantly, such a joint effort could help revive NATO – in the interest of all Alliance members – as a system of collective security and defense. Furthermore, by including cooperation with Russia, this joint effort would serve to revitalize the Alliance's power to influence policymaking at the highest level, as NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer has so urgently demanded.

4.3. Define Europe's role in a multipolar world

It is also of crucial importance that the European Union clearly defines its role in the world. There is no longer any doubt that international relations are undergoing a process of fundamental realignment at the beginning of the 21st century. New actors have emerged (such as China and India), former powers are seeking to reclaim their position on the global stage (such as Russia), and the globalized flow of finance, trade, and services has reduced distances and increased interdependence between the world's nations. Along with global challenges such as demographic change, migration, climate change, terrorism and resource scarcity, these shifts have given rise to a completely new matrix of international relations featuring redistributed and to some extent diametrically opposed nodes of power.

Strategy to avoid marginalization

In an increasingly interconnected world, heightened conflicts of interest among both state and non-state actors have become more immediately and directly tangible. The EU must exert determined efforts to define and assert its role within this system – otherwise it risks becoming a victim of marginalization due to its own inability to adapt. The balance between fair policymaking and efficient and sustainable decision-making processes can be achieved only if the EU defines its strategic interests and asserts these interests by using the appropriate instruments within the appropriate forums. This process should not only be inward-directed (i.e., internal to the EU itself) but should also focus on cooperation with other actors (such as the United States, Russia and China) and organizations (such as NATO).

4.4. Stimulate greater German public interest in security policy

Unfortunately, foreign and security policy issues are still too often misused in Germany as a means for political parties to score domestic political points. With regard to missile defense, this was particularly evident in the case of the SPD party chairman, who sought to recast his party as a power for peace. In order to prevent this misuse of important security policy issues for domestic political purposes, it is necessary to cultivate greater public interest in security policy in Germany. This would promote public debate on such issues as the pros and cons of foreign military deployments and plans to build a missile defense system. Without an honest public discourse regarding Germany's own security and defense policy interests and priorities, policymakers will find it increasingly difficult to generate the necessary support for their decisions – even if this means engaging in long, hard political clashes.

Germany's political elites must strengthen their efforts to provide logical and convincing explanations for global political developments. Only in this way can the real, core issues be separated from superficial sloganeering and the arguments of populist opportunists be exposed for what they are. The complexity of contemporary processes for reaching and implementing policy decisions makes it more difficult to identify the core themes that need to be debated and explained. Nevertheless, it is necessary to preserve the explanatory power – and hence the competitiveness – of the political sphere, in order to revive citizen involvement in the political process and to achieve the highest possible level of legitimacy and participation. This would also help to counteract a contradictory tendency in public attitudes toward security policy which has been evident for some time, i.e., the tendency of German society to attribute considerable importance to issues of security policy while rarely demonstrating the willingness to support measures that are necessary to ensure security.

Provide convincing explanations

Germany needs to formulate a clear definition of its security interests within the international political system – this is the core element for stimulating greater German public interest in security policy. Only those entities that can clearly define their strategic interests will be able to assert and legitimate these interests in a manner that is convincing to both their allies and their own societies. Whoever wishes to find answers must be willing to ask the right questions. Whoever wishes to give answers must also be willing to put them into action. Whoever wishes to assume public responsibility for answers must also be willing to face criticism.

Define interests

Notes

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