



The West Needs a Defense System That Works

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Op-Ed

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Sixteen years after the end of the Cold War, the transatlantic community and Russia are not adversaries. Indeed, on a number of issues, we are partners. We both face a number of common challenges, among the most threatening is the possibility that a dangerous state will use ballistic missiles, tipped with nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, to hold our societies hostage – or worse.

Despite our best efforts, including notable successes in Libya and breaking up the A.Q. Khan network, weapons of mass destruction and missile capabilities continue to proliferate. We sincerely hope that the diplomatic efforts now underway will succeed in addressing the challenges we face from states like North Korea and Iran. We have made some progress with Pyongyang, and though Tehran still defies the international community, there are signs that it is feeling the diplomatic pressure.

However, we cannot guarantee success, and governments have a responsibility to defend their people. The logic of Cold War "Mutual Assured Destruction" does not make sense in today's strategic environment. Today, we seek security based on more than the grim premise that we can destroy those who seek to destroy us. We need to be clear that the missile threat from Iran is real and growing, and it is a threat not just to the United States, but to Europe and Russia as well. Looking a few years ahead, other such missile threats will likely emerge as well.

It is with these new realities in mind that we are developing and deploying modest missile defenses. Our goal is to field systems capable of protecting not only the United States and our forces, but also friends and allies like those in the transatlantic community.

We speak of the transatlantic community because we have learned that our security is not divisible; that if our allies are not secure, America is not secure. America cannot "go it alone." To ensure our common security, we need defenses in place well before a threat fully emerges.

Accordingly, we have approached some of our allies with the idea of deploying limited missile defense capabilities: 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar installation in the Czech Republic. While the United States can defend its own territory without these additional capabilities, fielding them would enable us to extend coverage to most of Europe while providing improved protection at home.

Our strategy is to strengthen our ability to detect, defend against, and thus deter a missile attack. Missile defenses are part of contemporary deterrence and promote stability, as we saw last summer, when we activated our system for the first time in response to North Korean missile launch preparations. In that case, our missile defense system allowed our national leadership to consider a wider, more flexible range of responses to a potential attack. Effective defenses also reduce incentives for states to acquire missiles in the first place, by undermining their military utility and thus promoting our nonproliferation goals.

We have come a long way from early programs and tests in the 1980s and 90s. Since 2001, we have had 26 successful hit-to-kill intercepts out of 34 attempts. And 15 of the last 16 flight tests have been successful in the past couple of years. Given this trend of success, we are confident that these systems will work, and that they will represent a practical 21st century solution to the new threat we all face.

The system we have in mind is limited, and the missiles have no warhead at all. It is oriented against a potential enemy with a small arsenal, attempting to blackmail our people, sow chaos, and sap our collective will.

Development of such a limited system is realistic. Critics of this approach should also be realistic: This system is of no use against a huge nuclear and ballistic missile arsenal, such as that possessed by Russia. Talk of a new "arms race" with Russia is anachronistic and not grounded in reality: America and Russia under the Treaty of Moscow are reducing our strategic nuclear warheads to levels not seen in decades.

Security should be—must be—discussed in a cooperative, multilateral way. That is why the United States has consulted extensively about our plans over the last few years both with Russia and our Allies, including in Moscow, within NATO, and at the NATO-Russia Council, most recently on April 19. NATO and Russia have had good, practical cooperation on theater missile defense for the past seven years. We look forward to continued and expanded cooperation both in NATO and with Russia.

President Bush has reaffirmed to President Putin our desire to cooperate with Russia on missile defense, and a U.S. delegation offered new proposals for potential partnership with Russia in this area in Moscow on April 17. We both have planned visits to Moscow to follow up and advance our consultations with the Russians – Secretary Gates recently completed a visit on April 24, and Secretary Rice will be visiting next month.

Our collective defense is too important for us to fall prey to scare tactics, slogans from the past, or attempts to drive wedges between us. NATO has a role in missile defense. So do bilateral arrangements between America, our Allies, and hopefully also with Russia.

We all face an emerging common threat, and America has proposed a practical solution. Europe, above all, must know – based on its own modern history - that the time to cooperate is now, not when the threat is imminent.

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