

## Brussels's Burden

Well into the year 2000, a strategic analyst can only be struck by the lack of public debate in Europe on the United States' projected NMD. Part of this is attributable to ignorance: European politicians tend to know as little about U.S. NMD as most U.S. politicians do about the new defense policy of the European Union (EU). Until NMD becomes a political reality, Europeans not specialized in defense matters are not going to focus on it. Those Europeans who do follow strategic affairs do not, as a rule, like NMD, much in the same way that the congressional armed services committees and the U.S. secretaries of state and defense are not exactly enthusiastic about the new European Defense Policy (EDP).

There is another similarity between NMD and EDP. In both cases, these policies are graduating from concepts into the real world. The Europeans most directly involved know, as Ivo Daalder and others put it, that NMD deployment is not a question of whether but of how,<sup>1</sup> in the same way that the relevant U.S. policymakers now assume that EDP will happen.

The EDP is now firmly established as part of the transatlantic dialogue. The EDP includes the creation of defense institutions within the EU, including *inter alia* a military committee, and the creation of a European rapid reaction force of 60,000 soldiers by the year 2003. A move toward establishing a European defense identity raises U.S. fears of duplication with, and discrimination within, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NMD, on the other hand, has been the subject of relatively little debate and could erupt on the political scene in a brutal and uncontrollable manner, poisoning U.S.-European relations. As a French saying goes, one should beware of sleeping waters. Although the degree of virulence of European reactions will depend on the exact circumstances of the NMD decision, the

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backlash will be stronger because there has not been much of a debate, with limited exceptions such as U.S. secretary of defense William Cohen's hard-sell of NMD at this year's Wehrkunde.<sup>2</sup> The discussion should be nurtured, on both official and nonofficial tracks, before the actual decision is made.

## **How Europe's Interests Will Be Affected by NMD**

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The assumption here is that NMD will be what the current U.S. administration says it will be (a limited system capable of dealing with a small number of ballistic missiles) and, furthermore, that it will actually do what it is supposed to. That may be an excessive leap of faith as to what the technology can accomplish. But, if the tests preceding the deployment decision prove satisfactory, this is a sensible way to focus the transatlantic debate. Europeans are well advised to assume that the decision on NMD will be made by the United States, irrespective of what the Europeans might think or say about its technical feasibility. European analysts understand that this scheme is not a remake of Star Wars, which elicited vehement European opposition on doctrinal and political grounds, but which was often and rightly dismissed as a technological fantasy that eventually collapsed under its own weight.

Four main areas of European interest would be affected by NMD. First, there would be the opportunity cost of the scheme. The funds involved would be considerable, with a \$28 billion figure on a 20 year period mentioned by the General Accounting Office. The part devoted to the total procurement, \$10 billion for NMD, would represent the equivalent of 11 percent of this year's U.S. procurement spending at fiscal year 2000 levels.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of NMD, these are resources that would presumably have been available for defense items upon which there is a degree of transatlantic agreement. Improving U.S. force projection capabilities, or sustaining the U.S. force presence in Europe and Asia. Nevertheless, even if the project encountered the usual cost overruns, the amounts are not such that this will be more than a second-order issue, an unwelcome distraction as it were. In the unlikely event that the United States convinced Europe to allocate a fraction of its already tight defense spending on a European variant of NMD, however, Europe would experience high opportunity costs.

No doubt, U.S. lobbying could enlist the support of this or that European defense contractor, who could in turn put pressure on its national government. The only thing that would be more unwelcome than a U.S. attempt to draw European resources into NMD, however, would be a successful U.S. attempt to do so. We have enough on our plate with the current collective shift by the EU to force projection, a belated but welcome development.

Weakening this priority in the name of NMD would not be helpful.

The strategic impact of NMD is a second realm of interest. At one level of analysis, the United States is right to dismiss some European fears. NMD is not going to negate the credibility of NATO deterrence, even if Russia built a copycat NMD capability with U.S. help. The French and British nuclear forces were prepared during the Cold War to cope with the Soviet antiballistic missile (ABM) system around Moscow. At the time, this system used nuclear-tipped, antiballistic missiles, with a much bigger “kick” than all-conventional NMD. At worst, Paris and London would be compelled to use available warhead potential. For instance, each of Britain’s four nuclear submarines currently carries 48 warheads on 16 Trident II missiles, an average of 3 warheads per missile; this average could be readily built up to 8 warheads per missile. Additionally, NMD will not prevent the United States from extending its nuclear guarantee to its European NATO partners. Similarly, the United States is right to point out, in the case of Asia, that it is easier to defend Seoul against North Korea if NMD provides assurance that putative Taep’odong 2s cannot hit U.S. territory.

**NMD could erupt on the European political scene in a brutal, uncontrollable manner.**

At another level, however, there is a legitimate European-U.S. divergence concerning the broad impact of NMD on deterrence as a means of war prevention. What Washington is telling the world through NMD is that the United States, which already commands 35 percent of the world’s military expenditures, considers itself secure only if it now gets a missile shield in addition to the world’s most powerful conventional and nuclear forces. And this is not in the face of a monstrous military challenge but against a famine-ridden, Asian backwater with a yearly GDP representing one month’s worth of WalMart’s sales. Since no one country in Europe is a continental-scale superpower, it cannot afford such a level of absolute security. Europe is, in effect, reduced to a second- or third-class rank not only from the standpoint of its status vis-à-vis the United States—most of us understand that the United States is in a class of its own in terms of power—but also in terms of the quality of our security which would appear to be second rate. This is not as dire as it sounds, if only because the Europeans, as shall be seen, do not always or entirely share the U.S. threat assessment which underlies the NMD project. Nor do they generally believe that NMD is an appropriate means to deal with that threat. But Europeans (as other non-Americans) will feel resentment toward this confirmation of U.S. hyperpower which, coming on top of other causes,

will complicate the transatlantic relationship.

In theory, this contradiction could be eased by U.S. efforts to transfer NMD technology to the Europeans, thus “equalizing” the degree of security on both sides of the Atlantic. But such a policy would fuel the European fear that an NMD “transfer” to Europe would interfere with other defense priorities, notably force projection. More generally, the offer, however generous, would still rub salt into the wound by pointing out that all and sundry U.S. strategic decisions, however ill advised, call the tune. In sum, in a “damned if you do (offer NMD technology), damned if you don’t” situation, the “do” would not be as bad as the “don’t.”

**E**uropeans do not entirely share the U.S. threat assessment.

The third highly specific, and potentially deeply divisive, impact of NMD on Europe is related to the role played by European-based elements of the future U.S. NMD system. These are located at the Fylingdale’s facility in Yorkshire, England, and at the Thule base on the Danish island of Greenland. Powerful, U.S.-managed, over-the-horizon missile warning and tracking radars are based there, completing

similar ballistic missile early warning installations based in Clear, Alaska.

It is as yet unclear what the exact degree of integration of Fylingdale’s and Thule would be in the NMD system. Publicly available details are lacking about the amount of work entailed at these locations to eventually include them in an NMD. If it were to become a highly contentious item in transatlantic relations, then Britain and Denmark would find themselves caught between their bilateral relationship with the United States and their other, national or European, allegiances.

Finally, we have the distant, but potentially powerful, impact of NMD on Europe’s relations with China. NMD is seen by Beijing as a direct threat to China’s comparatively limited nuclear forces, with only a clutch of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of reaching the United States.<sup>4</sup> On this issue, Chinese statements have been harsh, sometimes to the point of shrillness. Therein lies an apparent opportunity for Europe, insofar as China may offer economic and political advantages to Europeans as a way of “punishing” the United States. “It was not by chance,” to use a Soviet-era phrase, that France made a bid last November to get the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to condemn U.S. moves in the ABM arena.<sup>5</sup> Just a few weeks before, Chinese president Jiang Zemin visited Paris on a high profile, extremely friendly state visit. The transatlantic relationship would suffer if the Europeans succumbed to Chinese blandishments and were seen by the United States as working in tandem with Beijing.

Meanwhile, the Europeans cannot but note that Washington will waste precious goodwill in its relations with Beijing and Moscow, with whom the West's relations are difficult (and important) enough without complicating them further with NMD. The diplomatic opportunity costs of NMD will be tremendous, hampering the pursuit of other, more worthwhile objectives such as democratization and human rights in China and Russia.

### **'It's the Treaty, Stupid!'**

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If Moscow accedes to U.S. requests for Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty modifications, the European reactions will be disgruntled but relatively quiet. Unhappiness would be compounded by the revival of the Cold War feeling that Washington and Moscow settle matters above their allies' heads. Provided the modification, and the corresponding quid pro quos in the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) process, were of a limited nature,<sup>6</sup> the Europeans would live with the consequences.

The alternative scenario, in which the United States breaks out of the ABM Treaty without an agreement with Russia, would cause a furor which will make foreign reactions to the U.S. Senate's rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty seem tame in comparison. U.S. unilateralism, along with the dismantling of the last vestiges of cooperative nuclear arms control, would be universally condemned. No doubt the United States would try to limit the political damage by emphasizing the reasonable nature of the requested modifications. The fact would remain that a treaty is a treaty is a treaty. Even if the ABM Treaty contains an exit clause which the United States could invoke, the international and transatlantic impact of the United States pulling out of the treaty would be immense, barring an act of absolute foolishness by North Korea which would provide a credible basis for such a U.S. withdrawal. A harsh reaction, in which Europe would be seen as teaming up with Russia and China, could in turn elicit a U.S. backlash, with the United States turning against European defense initiatives. EDP could thus become a hostage of NMD.

We also have the issue of future U.S. developments in the ABM field, beyond NMD. To what extent will an NMD decision by one U.S. administration be a prelude to moves by a different administration down the "Star Wars" road? The Europeans understand that there can be no absolute answer here; but again, a cooperative agreement with the Russians on the ABM Treaty would be of the essence to assuage fears about this "slippery slope." That, of course, assumes that the Senate would ratify the treaty changes, a prospect in which the Europeans have little reason to place confidence if the vote were taken under the outgoing administration.

## One Man's Rogue Is Another Man's Partner

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Last but not least, U.S.-European differences vis-à-vis NMD rest on different threat perceptions. One of the differences is purely that of location: North Korea is relatively close to Alaska and rather far away from Europe. Even if the Europeans shared U.S. analyses about North Korea's intentions and capabilities,<sup>7</sup> they would not feel as directly threatened. As for the other so-called "rogue states," the Europeans tend to have a more laid-back attitude than the United States. Khatami's semi-democratic Iran certainly doesn't strike most European analysts as being more of a rogue state than Mao's China or Stalin's USSR, and certainly not a threat implying a drastic departure from a combination of deterrence and engagement. Iraq is seen as being in a box, in terms of acquiring a long-range missile capability, and Libya no longer causes sleepless nights. The point here is not to decide whether the United States or Europe is right on the threat assessment. Simply, there is not much of a chicken-little syndrome in Europe today. Every loud-mouthed dictator is not considered a wildly irrational rogue elephant, unamenable to classic mixes of deterrence, military pressure, and diplomacy. Indeed, the one thing dictators share is an appetite for power and, for that reason, they tend to be prudent when it comes to putting their power base under a direct, existential threat. Saddam Hussein did not use his biological and chemical weapons during the Persian Gulf War. He had, conversely, used them during the Iran-Iraq war, against a foe that could not retaliate with weapons of mass destruction.

## Policy Paths

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In order to defuse the alliance-splitting potential of NMD, several policy paths are available. The first, insofar that NMD is going to happen anyway, is that the United States should do the utmost to secure a cooperative agreement with Russia. The corollary of this path is Europe should not attempt to deter Russia from agreeing to a limited modification of the ABM Treaty along the lines mentioned above. Europe should make such a view clear in Moscow as in Washington. In terms of public diplomacy, this so far has not been the case.

The second recommendation is that the United States should not attempt to foist NMD upon Europe. The line to tread here is a relatively fine one. On one hand, the United States should deal with NMD as a national defense decision, not calling for alliance endorsement or, *a fortiori*, alliance participation. On the other hand, the United States could display to Europe the same sort of openness it has, or is contemplating, with Russia in terms of

sharing of early warning data and other missile related information.

On the European side, there should be a symmetrical readiness to live with a U.S. NMD decision without mounting diplomatic offensives in the UN or elsewhere— as long as the decision is conducted in a cooperative mode with Russia and strictly limited to the current definition of NMD.

In the same way that Europe does not appreciate the United States grouching about EDP, the United States is entitled to follow its own policies, however unreasonable they may appear to many, provided that they are kept within these bounds.

**NMD is not going to negate the credibility of NATO deterrence.**

## Notes

1. Ivo Daalder et al., "Deploying NMD: Not Whether, But How," *Survival* 42, no. 1 (spring 2000).
2. "Speech of Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen," Thirty-Sixth Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 5, 2000.
3. This is out of \$87.4 billion (including RDT&E). Nineteen percent, if one includes the acquisition of \$53 billion.
4. Fifteen to twenty, according to "The Military Balance 1999-2000," IISS, London, 1999.
5. The bid was moderately successful, the corresponding resolution (A/RES/54/54F) having been carried by only 80 UN members out of 188, with the majority abstaining or not taking part in the vote.
6. Along the lines described by Sam Nunn, Brent Scowcroft, Arnold Kantor in "A Deal with Russia on Arms Control," *Boston Globe*, September 13, 1999.
7. There is clearly room for difference here. The Ikonos satellite imagery of the North Korea launch facilities displayed on the Federation of American Scientists website at <[www.fas.org](http://www.fas.org)> is difficult to square with official assessments. See "Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015," National Intelligence Council, September 1999.

