

Ballistic missile defence

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Last updated: 26 Jan. 2022 11:42

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Proliferation of ballistic missiles poses an increasing threat to NATO populations, territory and forces. Many countries in NATO's proximity have ballistic missiles or are trying to develop or acquire them. Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) is one of NATO's permanent missions and is part of the Alliance's response to this threat, as a component of NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD). NATO BMD is strictly defensive and contributes to NATO's core task of collective defence. BMD capabilities are an essential part of NATO's strategic mix, along with conventional forces and nuclear deterrence.



US Aegis Ashore BMD site at the Deveselu military base in Romania

- In 2010, Allies decided to develop a territorial BMD capability to pursue NATO's core task of collective defence.
- NATO has a responsibility to protect its European populations, territory and forces in light of the increasing proliferation of ballistic missiles.

- NATO BMD is purely defensive; it is a long-term investment aimed at addressing security threats emanating from outside the Euro-Atlantic area.
- In July 2016, Allies declared Initial Operational Capability of NATO BMD, which provides a stronger capability across NATO's south-eastern area to defend Alliance populations, territory and forces from a potential ballistic missile attack.
- NATO BMD capability combines assets commonly funded by all Allies as well as specific voluntary contributions provided by several Allies.
- A number of Allies already offered their contributions or are undergoing development or acquisition of additional BMD assets such as upgraded ships with BMD-capable radars, ground-based air and missile defence systems or advanced detection and alert capabilities.

Introduction and components

Introduction

While NATO BMD is part of NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence, it has some unique political and operational parameters. The increasing threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles in the vicinity of the south-eastern border of the Alliance has been, and remains, the driver for NATO's development and deployment of a ballistic missile defence system, which is configured to counter threats from outside the Euro-Atlantic area. The aim of NATO BMD remains to provide full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces against 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 line 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.

Components

NATO BMD is based on voluntary national contributions, including nationally funded interceptors and sensors and hosting arrangements. It is also based on the command and control systems backbone delivered through the NATO BMD Programme, which is commonly funded by all Allies.

The United States contributes to NATO BMD through its European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). Turkey is hosting a US BMD radar at Kürecik; Romania is hosting a US Aegis Ashore site at Deveselu Air Base; Germany is hosting the command centre at Ramstein Air Base; and Poland is hosting another Aegis Ashore site, whose construction is nearing completion at the Redzikowo military base. Additionally, in the context of the EPAA, Spain is hosting four multi-mission BMD-capable Aegis ships at its naval base in Rota, which are ready to support the NATO BMD mission, if required.

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

Mechanisms

The Integrated Air and Missile Defence Policy Committee (IAMDC) is the senior committee under the North Atlantic Council that oversees and coordinates all efforts at the political-military level to develop the NATO BMD capability. It also provides political-military advice on NATO BMD to the North Atlantic Council, as part of its overall mandate related to policy aspects of NATO IAMDC.

The Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) is the senior committee responsible for steering the BMD programme aimed at developing the necessary technical functionalities for BMD planners and operators.

NATO Military Authorities are responsible for developing a military doctrinal framework for BMD and related operational planning, training and execution.

Several other NATO senior committees address NATO BMD in the context of broader topics, such as civil preparedness or crisis management.

Evolution

At the Lisbon Summit in 2010, Allied Heads of State and Government agreed to address air and missile defence in a holistic way by developing a NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINAMDS), including the development of territorial BMD capability. NATINAMDS is based on the previously existing NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS) enhanced by the new BMD elements.

The key policy document providing the framework for NATO's activities in the area of BMD is currently NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept. A new Strategic Concept will be agreed at NATO's forthcoming Madrid Summit in June 2022 to take account of changes in the global security environment and to make sure that the Alliance is prepared for the future. The new Strategic Concept will build on elements of the 2010 Strategic Concept that remain relevant, including in the field of BMD.

The 2010 Strategic Concept recognises, *inter alia*, that "*the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, threatens incalculable consequences for global stability and prosperity. During the next decade, proliferation will be most acute in some of the world's most volatile regions*". "*Therefore, NATO will develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defence, which contributes to the indivisible security of our Alliance*".

In addition, BMD is an important element of the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review of 2012. This document states that missile defence can complement the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence; it cannot substitute for them. NATO's ballistic missile defence capability, along with effective nuclear and conventional forces, demonstrates the Alliance's determination to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of NATO populations. NATO Heads of State and Government have reiterated this key element in all subsequent NATO decisions.

As a defensive capability, BMD is one element of a broader response to the threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles outside the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO's missile defence capabilities serve to complicate an adversary's planning, and provide damage mitigation. Effective missile defence could also provide valuable decision space in times of crisis..

At the Chicago Summit in 2012, the Alliance declared the achievement of the Interim NATO BMD Capability.

In July 2016, Allies declared the achievement of Initial Operational Capability of NATO BMD, which provides a stronger capability to defend Alliance populations, territory and forces across NATO's south-eastern area from a potential ballistic missile attack.

Starting in 2003, NATO and Russia engaged in Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (TBMD)-related discussions and activities in the framework of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). From 2010 onwards, discussions and activities expanded from TBMD towards territorial BMD. In that period, NATO and Russia considered possible areas for cooperation in this field. Progress, however, was limited. In October 2013, NATO-Russia BMD-related discussions were suspended by Russia. In April 2014, NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia in response to Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, while remaining open to periodic, focused and meaningful dialogue, in line with the dual-track approach. NATO BMD is neither designed nor able to undermine Russia's strategic deterrence capability.

Key milestones

NATO

May 2001

NATO launches two parallel feasibility studies for a future Alliance Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (TBMD) system.

November 2002

At the Prague Summit, Allied Leaders task a missile defence feasibility study to examine options for protecting Alliance forces, territory and populations against the full range of ballistic missile threats.

April 2006

The study concludes that a territorial ballistic missile defence capability is technically feasible.

April 2008

At the Bucharest Summit, Allied Leaders agree that the deployment of European-based US BMD assets should be an integral part of any future NATO-wide missile defence architecture.

September 2009

The United States announces a plan for its European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA).

November 2010

At the Lisbon Summit, Allied Leaders decide to develop a BMD capability to pursue NATO's core task of collective defence. To this end, they decide that the scope of the existing TBMD programme will be expanded beyond the capability to protect forces to also include NATO European populations and territory. In this context, the EPAA and other national contributions are welcomed as valuable components of the NATO BMD architecture.

September 2011

Turkey announces a decision to host a US-owned missile defence radar as part of the NATO BMD capability.

September 2011

Romania and the United States sign an agreement to host a US Aegis Ashore system in Romania as part of NATO's BMD capability.

September 2011

An agreement between Poland and the United States on hosting a US Aegis Ashore system in Poland enters into force.

October 2011

Spain and the United States announce an agreement to host US Aegis ships in the port of Rota, Spain, as another US contribution to NATO's ballistic missile defence capability.

April 2012

NATO successfully installs and tests the command and control architecture at Allied Air Command in Ramstein, Germany.

May 2012

At the Chicago Summit, Allies declare the Interim NATO BMD Capability, which is an operationally significant first step.

2014

First US Aegis destroyer stationed in Rota, Spain in February; second US Aegis destroyer stationed in Rota in June.

2015

Third US Aegis destroyer stationed in Rota in April; fourth US Aegis destroyer stationed in Rota in September.

May 2016

The Aegis Ashore site in Deveselu, Romania is declared operational.

July 2016

At the Warsaw Summit, Allied Leaders declare Initial Operational Capability of NATO BMD, which offers a stronger capability to defend Alliance populations, territory and forces across NATO's south-eastern area from a potential ballistic missile attack.

July 2018

At the Brussels Summit, Allied Leaders confirm that the next major milestone will be the completion of the core element of NATO BMD Command and Control, to enhance further the planning and execution of BMD operations. They also acknowledge that further work will be required to reach Full Operational Capability.

NATO-Russia Council

2003

In the framework of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), NATO and Russia agree to launch a study to assess possible levels of interoperability among TBMD systems of NATO Allies and Russia.

March 2004

An NRC theatre missile defence command post exercise is held in the United States.

March 2005

An NRC theatre missile defence command post exercise is held in the Netherlands.

October 2006

An NRC theatre missile defence command post exercise is held in Russia.

January 2008

An NRC theatre missile defence computer-assisted exercise takes place in Germany.

December 2010

First meeting of the NRC Missile Defence Working Group, whose aim is to explore a possible way forward for cooperation on ballistic missile defence.

June 2011

NRC Defence Ministers take stock of the work on missile defence since the 2010 Lisbon Summit.

April 2012

A computer-assisted exercise takes place in Ottobrunn, Germany.

October 2013

Russia unilaterally suspends discussions on missile defence in the NRC framework.

April 2014

In response to the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea by Russia, NATO suspends all practical cooperation with Russia, including on ballistic missile defence. In line with its dual-track approach, NATO remains open to periodic, focused and meaningful dialogue with Russia.