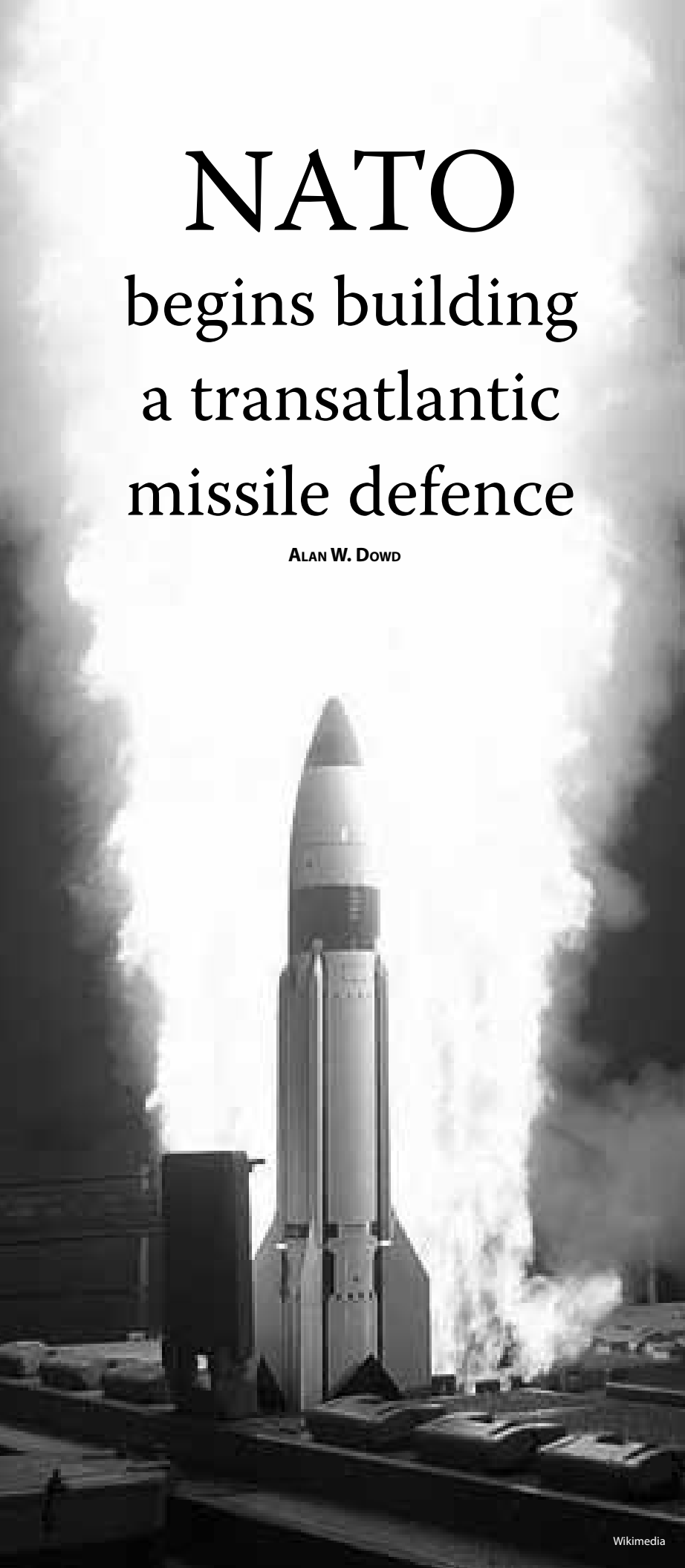


NATO begins building a transatlantic missile defence

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Once derided by its critics as “Star Wars,” missile defence has gone mainstream, as advances in technology and proliferation of long-range missiles have made missile defence not just a theoretical possibility, but an essential piece of the West’s security puzzle.

As evidence, consider NATO’s new Strategic Concept—the first reworking of the alliance’s mission statement since 1999. Adopted during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, the Strategic Concept declares the proliferation of ballistic missiles “a real and growing threat to the Euro-Atlantic area” and commits the Allies to “develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defence” (NATO, 2010b).

What does this new missile-defence mission mean for Canada, the United States, and NATO’s other 26 members?

Nightmares

Before answering that question, it is important to get a sense of the growing missile threat facing NATO. Three decades ago, there were nine countries that possessed ballistic missiles. Today, there are 32 (Arms Control Association, 2007). Several of them are unfriendly or unstable. Iran, North Korea, and Syria fall into the former category, Egypt and Pakistan into the latter.

NATO’s European members are most concerned about Iran, and for good reason. Iran is developing nuclear weapons and acquiring delivery systems for those weapons. For example, the trove of diplomatic cables illicitly shared with the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks reveals that US intelligence agencies have tracked the delivery of 19 intermediate range missiles from North Korea to Iran. The missiles give Iran the ability to strike as far away as Berlin (Cavas, 2010).

Moreover, the US Missile Defense Agency reports that Iran has tested and deployed a 2,000-km range ballistic missile of its own, bringing targets in Southern Europe within range. “With the successful launch of the Safir Space Launch

Vehicle on February 2nd, 2009, Iran demonstrated technologies that are directly applicable to the development of ICBMs” (US Missile Defense Agency, 2010). An ICBM would bring North America within Iran’s reach.

In other words, Iran is not just Europe’s nightmare.



These mushrooming threats led NATO in 2002 to begin studying the feasibility of a regional missile-defence system to protect the Allies in Europe. By 2006, NATO concluded that a European missile defence was a viable option (NATO, 2010a). In 2008, NATO declared that “missile proliferation poses an increasing threat to Allies’ forces, territory and populations,” endorsed US plans to deploy missile defences in Eastern Europe as a “substantial contribution to the protection of Allies from long-range ballistic missiles,” and outlined plans for a “NATO-wide missile defence architecture” (NATO, 2008). In 2009, NATO declared it was “deeply concerned about the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programmes,” and finally, in 2010, alliance leaders called missile defence “a core element of our collective defence” (NATO, 2010b).

NATO has achieved “an initial capability to protect Alliance forces against missile threats” (NATO,

2010a). The next step is protecting NATO’s population centres from missile attack. “We cannot afford to have even one of our cities hit,” says NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. “Nor can we afford to be held hostage by the threat of an attack” (Rasmussen, 2010b). Whether knowingly or otherwise, Rasmussen is echoing the sentiment of Adam Smith, who, recognizing that “a wealthy nation is...the most likely to be attacked,” noted that “the first duty of the sovereign” is “protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies” (Smith, 1776/1991: 689; 698). At its core, this is what missile defence is: protection against coercion, violence, and attack.

“Missile defence won’t be cheap, but neither will it break the bank,” Rasmussen explains (Rasmussen, 2010a). The missile defence system designed to protect NATO’s deployed forces, which is now being installed, will cost an estimated \$1.04 billion. He notes that for less than \$239 million in additional investment over 10 years, “this program could be expanded to enable NATO to defend European populations and territory” (Rasmussen, 2010a).

Today, NATO is doing just that by networking its various missile-defence systems in Europe, while standing up what the Obama administration calls the “European Phased Adaptive Approach,” or EPAA. EPAA includes a mix of sea- and land-based defences. Starting this year, NATO will begin sending Aegis warships armed with anti-missile interceptors to the Mediterranean and basing portable missile sensors in Southern and Eastern Europe. By 2015, NATO plans to deploy land-based interceptor missiles, along with more sophisticated sea-based interceptors, all building toward an array of anti-missile assets stretching from Turkey to Romania to Poland by 2020 (Champion, 2010).

According to President Obama, EPAA will initially “protect large parts of Southern Europe from short- and medium-range ballistic missile threats.” Then, as more effective, longer-range interceptors come on line in Romania and Poland, EPAA will be ready to defend against intermediate-range ballistic missiles and ICBMs (Obama, 2010).

A hole in the roof

The natural next step would be to link NATO’s European missile defences with the missile defences the United States has already deployed to defend North America. After all, the Allies envision a “NATO-wide” architecture. Toward that end, Obama has noted that EPAA will “augment” defence of the United States “against future threats of ICBMs launched from Iran” (Obama, 2010). Similarly, Rasmussen envisions “a security roof from Vancouver to Vladivostok” (Irish, 2010).

It is interesting that Rasmussen would choose those two points on the globe to promote missile defence, since Russia is openly critical of NATO’s missile-defence plans, and Canada is wary of Washington’s unwavering commitment to missile defences—a commitment that has been embraced by three successive administrations and now by NATO.

According to the new Strategic Concept, “NATO poses no threat to Russia” (NATO 2010). The feeling is not exactly mutual, however. If Russia’s cyber-attacks on NATO member Estonia, mugging of NATO aspirant Georgia, massive war games against a Polish “aggressor,” and deployment of short-range nuclear warheads to facilities bordering NATO’s Baltic and Eastern European members didn’t get the message across, then its 2010 military doctrine should. Among “the main external military dangers” identified by the Russian government in the document are



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Aegis cruiser testing missile defence.

“the creation and deployment of strategic missile defence systems” and plans “to move the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation” (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010).

Reacting to pronouncements like these, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said, “The Russians know that...our missile defences do not have the capability to defend against the Russian Federation’s large, advanced arsenal” (2010). But old habits—and decades of distrust—die hard.

NATO openly discussed its missile-defence plans with Russia in hopes of limiting such misunderstanding, but Moscow has been resistant. Although Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has expressed an interest in some sort of joint missile-defence system, hopes for a breakthrough at Lisbon foundered over Moscow’s insistence that a) none of NATO’s anti-missile sensors be pointed at Russia, and b) NATO trust Russia to “destroy missiles headed for NATO territory,” as the *Wall Street Journal* has reported (Fidler, 2010). To its credit, though, NATO is not ready to outsource the defence of allied territory to Russia.

Speaking of allied territory, it is important to note that Canada is part of the NATO alliance. In fact, Canada was a founding member of the NATO alliance. Yet Canada remains somewhat on the sidelines when it comes to NATO’s newest mission, missile defence. As former Canadian diplomat Paul Chapin observes, Canada is the only member of the alliance “without any plan to defend ourselves against a threat we all agree is real” (Chapin, 2010b). Indeed, Prime Minister Harper’s statement after the Lisbon Summit pointedly made no mention of missile defence, which is one of the centerpieces of the new Strategic Concept (Harper, 2010).

A government report, updated in June 2010, serves only to highlight Canada’s unease with the entire subject of missile defence. Although the report notes that “the threat to Canada and Canadian interests could increase,” it adds that “the ballistic missile threat to Canada is not currently considered to be high” (Department of National Defence, 2010). The report concludes with a noncommittal statement: “No final decision has been made on Canada’s involvement in the missile defence of North America” (Department of National Defence).

In short, while Europe has awakened to the missile threat, Canada’s approach remains passive, focused on “engaging diplomatically with potential ballistic missile proliferators; promoting multilateral arms control mechanisms; and examining the employment of defensive capabilities” (Department of National Defence).

Blame it on NATO

To be sure, there are elements within the Canadian military community that quietly support missile defence, but the political reality is that it remains a controversial, even unpopular, initiative among the Canadian public (Barry, 2010). The result is a kind of official agnosticism on missile defence, which is reflected in the aforementioned report. This is not new. University of Calgary Professor Donald Barry, writing in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, notes that Canadian governments dating back to the 1960s have been unenthusiastic about US missile defence plans (Barry, 2010).

One is left to wonder if opposition to missile defence is a function of a lack of confidence in the system

or of the false sense that staying on the sidelines will somehow keep Canada out of harm's way.

If it is the former, it pays to recall that nothing made by man is perfect. Missile defences, like any other weapons system, will sometimes fail. But they will also sometimes succeed. What future president or prime minister would prefer a zero percent chance of deflecting an inbound missile—something guaranteed by not deploying missile defences—over 50-50 odds, or even a 20% chance?

If it is the latter, the reality is that Canada already is a target, partly because of what Canada stands for and partly because Canada's enemies already view Canada as conjoined to the United States. From NATO to NAFTA, from Afghanistan to the Arctic, from commerce to culture, Canada and the United States are as connected as any two countries on earth.

Yet, as Chapin observes, Canada "seems able to support missile defence for others, just not for itself" (2010a:19). It is time for that to change. Perhaps NATO's enthusiastic embrace of missile defence at Lisbon can serve as political cover for Ottawa. Instead of sitting on the sidelines, Canadian policymakers can tell their ambivalent constituencies, "NATO made us do it."

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