

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## U.S. Missile Defense Policy After Russia's Actions in Ukraine

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Russia has invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea in blatant disregard of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and international law. Russia's crude steps carry important implications for U.S. missile defense policy.

Currently, the Administration's policy is not to affect the "strategic balance" with Russia in terms of ballistic missiles.<sup>1</sup> In reality, there is no strategic balance between the two countries. Given Russia's demonstrated willingness to use force to alter nations' boundaries and act against U.S. interests, it is clear that the U.S. should expand its ballistic missile defense to protect itself and its allies from Russia's ballistic missiles.

**The Threat from Russia.** Russia is currently engaged in the largest nuclear weapons buildup since the end of the Cold War. It is planning to spend over \$55 billion on its missile and air defense systems in the next six years, compared to about \$8 billion a year that the U.S. spends on its missile defense programs.<sup>2</sup>

Russia has over 1,400 nuclear warheads deployed on long-range ballistic missiles. These missiles can reach the U.S. within 33 minutes. It is also engaged in ballistic missile modernization and is reportedly developing intermediate-range ballistic missiles that

are prohibited under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with the U.S.<sup>3</sup> These missiles are most threatening to allies in the European theater.

**Administration's Missile Defense Policy: The Good and the Bad.** In 2009, the Obama Administration canceled President George W. Bush's plan to deploy two-stage ground-based midcourse defense (GMD) interceptors to Poland and highly capable X-band radar to the Czech Republic while also launching a "reset" policy in an effort to placate Moscow.

To replace Bush's missile defense plan for Europe, the Obama Administration proposed a four-phased missile defense plan, the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), consisting of two missile defense sites in Poland and Romania and forward-deployed radars. Phase Four—deployment of SM-3 Block IIB interceptors capable of shooting down medium-, intermediate-, and intercontinental-range ballistic missiles—would likely provide the U.S. and allies with better capability than the 10 GMD interceptors that were supposed to be deployed to Poland under the Bush Administration's missile defense plan. However, the Administration unwisely canceled Phase Four of the EPAA last year.

Nonetheless, at this time, it would be unwise to cancel the EPAA. U.S. allies in Poland and Romania are already politically invested in missile defense sites on their territories, and Poland has already been snubbed by the Obama Administration's surprising change in U.S. missile defense policy. It is also likely that costs and timelines involved in returning to the original plan would be high.

Rather, the geopolitical realities of the Russian aggression in Ukraine present an opportunity to assess how the current missile defense plan can be

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improved and where it would be suitable to add capabilities to it. An X-band radar in Europe would massively improve U.S. tracking capability, which would benefit both European allies and the U.S. homeland.

Russia's actions also underscore the importance of maintaining U.S. missile defense resources. Currently, the budget of the Missile Defense Agency (MDA), which is responsible for developing and acquiring U.S. missile defense architecture, is less than 1.5 percent of the Pentagon's overall budget. These investments are highly cost-efficient, especially considering that a successful ballistic missile attack would cost the U.S. significantly more in lives and treasure. The value of what is being defended matters, as do the costs of escalation after the attacked nation is compelled to defend itself by other means.

**What Should the U.S. Do?** To address U.S. vulnerability to an international ballistic missile threat, including that from Russia, the U.S. should:

- Develop a layered, comprehensive missile defense system capable of shooting down ballistic missiles, including salvo launches in quantities that Russia is capable of launching. Space-based interceptors provide the best opportunity to accomplish these tasks at the best cost-per-interceptor ratio.
- Deploy an X-band tracking radar to a European host nation that is a member of NATO. The Czech Republic was previously assessed to be the best to track incoming ballistic missiles from Iran. The radar would improve the capability of U.S. homeland missile defense systems.
- Make a public statement to Moscow that “strategic stability” is no longer a basis for U.S.–Russia relations due to Russia's extensive nuclear weap-

ons modernization programs and investments in ballistic missile defense technologies. Rather, the U.S. should emphasize the defensive nature of its force posture and consider ballistic missile defense an essential element of this posture.

- Increase investments in its missile defense programs, which have been underfunded and have lagged behind the ballistic missile threat for years. Any ballistic missile attack on the territory of the U.S. or its allies would carry enormous costs in lives and treasure, especially if the adversary's missile is fitted with a nuclear or electromagnetic pulse warhead.
- Encourage NATO allies to enhance their ballistic missile and air defense capabilities, including making their ships (where applicable) compatible with the U.S. Aegis weapons system.

**An Opportunity and a Threat.** Russian aggression affords the U.S. an opportunity to take a new look at its missile defense policy. It also demonstrates that Russia is willing to use force to change the status quo and act against U.S. interests. If the U.S. does not pay attention to this threat, it may pay a huge price later.

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1. U.S. Department of Defense, *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, February 2010, [http://www.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20as%20of%2026JAN10%200630\\_for%20web.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20as%20of%2026JAN10%200630_for%20web.pdf) (accessed March 19, 2014).

2. Ria Novosti, “Russia Plans \$55.3Bln Expenditure on Aerospace Defense by 2020,” February 28, 2014, <http://en.ria.ru/news/20140228/187971313/Russia-Plans-553Bln-Expenditure-On-Aerospace-Defense-by-2020.html> (accessed March 19, 2014).

3. Michaela Dodge and Ariel Cohen, “Russia's Arms Control Violations: What the U.S. Should Do,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4105, December 11, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/12/russia-s-arms-control-violations-what-the-us-should-do> (accessed March 19, 2014).