
Deja Vu with BMD: The Improbability of Russia- NATO Missile Defense



Richard Weitz

January 2013



Russia/NIS Center

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ISBN: 978-2-36567-114-9

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Summary

Consistent attempts by the US and NATO to cooperate on ballistic missile defenses have long divided Russia and the West. The failed talks on this issue have built a foundation of frustration that has reinforced the general lack of trust among the parties on this issue. Each US and Russian administration for the past twenty years has declared its commitment to collaborate on joint Russian-American BMD projects. Despite varying enthusiasm for NATO missile defense spending in European countries, NATO has always endorsed cooperating with Moscow on BMD if possible, if for no other reason than to dispel Russian concerns about any resulting system. Russia and the West have tried different approaches to overcome their differences, but so far nothing has worked for long.

Introduction

As we mark the outset of President Barack Obama's second term and the commencement of the return of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency, the most divisive issue between Russia and the West remains ballistic missile defense (BMD). The BMD issue has divided Moscow from NATO since the 1980s; nothing on the horizon seems likely to narrow these differences any time soon. These years of frustrating experience should have taught us that missile defense is precisely the wrong issue to make the centerpiece of the Russia-NATO reset.

For almost two decades, Russia has engaged in a variety of joint BMD projects with individual NATO members, including the United States (US), as well as the alliance as a whole. None of these efforts have achieved sustained success. Rather than worsen relations further on this quixotic endeavor, we need to think more creatively about deepening bilateral collaboration regarding other issues. These might include promoting regional security in Afghanistan and Central Asia after the majority of NATO forces withdraw from that region; averting new terrorism threats elsewhere; developing norms and limits for the newly emerging domain of cyber warfare; and enhancing the security of nuclear materials and other potential weapons of mass destruction.

US and Nato's Positions

The BMD Landscape

Russian-NATO BMD disagreements arose in the early 1980s, when US President Ronald Reagan ambitiously sought to construct a space-based missile shield over the United States. They persisted during the 1990s despite the end of Cold War antagonisms. Most recently, the dispute over the George W. Bush administration's plans to construct a "third site" for US national missile defenses (NMD) in Poland and the Czech Republic contributed to the most serious downturn in Russian-US relations in decades. Continuing tensions over the revised US BMD plan have impeded the NATO-Russia reset sought by both parties.

After months of deliberation and study, on 17th September 2009, President Barak Obama announced the postponement of the planned deployment of ten US long-range missile interceptors in Poland and an advanced battle management radar in the Czech Republic. The Obama administration announced a new, phased development deployment strategy for BMD, with NATO BMD systems growing flexibly over time in response to emerging threats. Like the previous Bush administration, the Obama officials indicated that the pace and extent of US BMD deployments in Europe would be calibrated to changes in missile threats to NATO and other US allies and partners. This strategy was endorsed at NATO summits in Lisbon in November 2010 and Chicago in May 2012.

Like previous US presidential administrations, the Obama administration has conducted an extensive campaign to cooperate with Russia on ballistic missile defense. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has even more enthusiastically embraced the idea of a comprehensive Russia-NATO missile defense architecture, setting forth the bold vision of "one security roof that protects us all" extending "from Vancouver to Vladivostok."¹ At the Lisbon summit, NATO governments dutifully pledged "to explore opportunities for missile defence co-operation with Russia in a spirit of reciprocity, maximum transparency and mutual confidence."² At the concurrent NATO-Russia Council session, the parties

¹ "Building a Euro-Atlantic Security Architecture," Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Brussels Forum 2010, organized by the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium, 27 March 2010, <www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_62395.htm>.

² "Lisbon Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon," NATO, 20 November 2010,

decided to resume computer-assisted theater missile defense exercises, which had been suspended since the 2008 Georgia War, and discuss how they could potentially cooperate on broader territorial missile defense questions in the future.

Almost everyone would welcome greater cooperation between NATO and Russia on BMD. Such collaboration could remove a major source of tension in their relations, reduce opposition in many countries to NATO BMD efforts, and possibly enhance collective deterrence and defense against Iran and other emerging threats. But as should have been expected, the parties have made little progress in implementing the Lisbon agenda. The NATO-Russia dialogue on missile defense remains replete with frustrations, threats and a lack of any comprehensive agreements on the issue. On 24th November 2011, one year after Lisbon, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warned NATO that it needs to address Moscow's BMD concerns or face renewed confrontation. In the absence of a BMD agreement, Medvedev said that Russia would: place on combat alert its missile attack early-warning radar station in Kaliningrad; deploy Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad; equip Russia's strategic ballistic missiles with advanced missile-defense penetration systems and new, more effective warheads; design measures to disable US missile defenses; ready modern offensive weapons systems able to "take out any part of the US missile defense system in Europe"; and consider withdrawing from the New START agreement.³ President Putin and other Russian officials have reaffirmed these threats on multiple occasions since then.

Russian Objections

The Russian view has been constant: the less NATO missile defense, the better—and none would be best of all. Soviet and Russian policy makers have always feared the US ability to pull off a technological coup and develop missile defenses so effective that they could compromise the Soviet/Russian nuclear deterrent. Having been unable to stop US and NATO missile defense research and development, the Soviets and Russians have been trying to prevent the fielding of actual BMD systems—or at least keep their numbers and effectiveness as limited as possible. Even after the Lisbon summit, Medvedev said that Russian officials were still trying to persuade NATO to scale back its BMD plans because they consider the anticipated speed, number and the widespread deployment of NATO interceptor missiles disproportionate to the modest level of threat presented by Iran or other states.⁴

<www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm>.

³ D. Medvedev, "Statement in Connection with the Situation Concerning the NATO Countries' Missile Defence System in Europe," 23 November 2011, <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/3115>>.

⁴ P. Goodenough, "As NATO Wraps up a Deal on Missile Defense, the Threat Remains Unnamed," 22 November 2010, CNSnews.com, <www.cnsnews.com/news/article/nato-wraps-deal-missile-defense-threat-r>.

Although the Obama administration relocated planned US BDM deployments in Europe closer to Iran and further away from Russian strategic offensive missiles based in European Russia, which constitutes the core of Russia's strategic deterrence, Moscow policy makers have continued to express unease at US BMD plans for Europe. The Obama administration's April 2010 BMD Review insists that US missile defenses are not designed against Russia or China. NATO officials made similar statements both before and after this review. Nonetheless, Russian analysts insist that NATO BMD efforts are a potential threat to their nuclear deterrent.

Russian officials have been seeking to block Western missile defense programs for decades. Their preferred tool has been binding arms control treaties, but they have also resorted to threats and other means to disrupt NATO BMD efforts. In recent years, senior Russian government officials, military officers and policy analysts have presented a range of complaints regarding the planned deployment of US missile defenses in former Soviet bloc countries. For example, they have argued that a purpose of NATO's BMD deployments near Russia is to intercept strategic missiles launched from Russia.⁵ Moreover, Russian officials have professed to fear that the United States could rapidly deploy additional BMD systems in a missile defense breakout that would prove difficult for Russian offensive forces to match.⁶ Furthermore, some Russian analysts have claimed that the United States could rapidly replace the defensive interceptors with offensive ballistic missiles that could attack nearby targets in Russia leaving minimal warning time for the defenders.⁷ Russian representatives have repeatedly threatened to take vigorous measures to counter these threats—including by enhancing the ability of Russian missiles to overcome NATO defenses.

⁵ V. Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," Munich, Germany, 10 February 2007, <www.natomission.ru/en/print/46/14/>; and Yu. Zaitsev, "New START Agreement Should Not Run Counter To Russian Interests" RIA Novosti, 24 June 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20090624/155340446.html>.

⁶ N. Petrov, "Outside View: ABM Talks Deadlock—Part 2," UPI, 26 March 2008, <www.upi.com/International_Security/Industry/Analysis/2008/03/26/outside_view_abm_talks_deadlock_-_part_2/2457/>; "Russian Expert Opposes US Missile System," UPI, 31 January 2007,

<www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Top_News/2007/01/31/russian_expert_opposes_us_missile_system/>; and N. Khorunzhy, "Who Can Europe-Based Missiles Threaten?" RIA Novosti, 17 October 2006, <<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20061017/54890694.html>>.

⁷ Yu. Baluyevskiy, "Pro Soedinnyx Shtatov: Shto Dal'she?: Komu I Zachem Nuzhen Protivoraketnyy Zontik [American BMD: What Next? Who Needs A Protective Umbrella, and Why]," *Voенно-Promishlenniy Kur'er*, 26 July 2006; A. Kislyakov, "Missile Defense and Its Consequences," RIA Novosti, 15 February 2007, <<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20070215/60788503.html>>. Lavrov's comments can be found in "German FM Calls for Civilized Dialogue on US Missile Shield," RIA Novosti, 22 February 2007, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20070222/61126427.html>>.

Barriers to BMD Collaboration

Several obstacles have repeatedly disrupted past Russian-NATO attempts to sustain joint BMD initiatives. These impediments are likely to impede current and future efforts as well. No developments have occurred, or look likely to occur anytime soon, that would overcome the perennial hurdles to sustained and substantial NATO-Russia BMD cooperation.

Technical Obstacles

Multilateral missile defense initiatives are inherently difficult. NATO governments have not yet developed an operational alliance-wide system despite working on this endeavor for more than a decade. The technology is very complex, the costs are very high and multinational BMD raises challenging command-and-control issues. Participants must craft an arrangement that would permit a timely launch decision in an environment when even a few minutes' delay in authorizing an interception attempt could prove fatal. Diverging technical standards and operational procedures of NATO and Russian BMD systems compound this problem. Whereas Russian officials demand that any European missile defense system be jointly run, with Moscow having the same rights and roles as the other participants, US representatives have made clear they could never rely on a BMD system that required timely Russian authorization for its use.

There are genuine limits to the extent to which NATO governments are willing to share technical information about their BMD programs or run joint BMD systems with Moscow. Restrictive technology transfer policies apply even among NATO allies working on common defense projects; barriers to sharing sensitive BMD technologies with Russian companies or missile threat data with the Russian military are considerably greater. NATO governments worry that disgruntled Russians will leak valuable BMD-defeating data to Iran, North Korea or other states of proliferation concern. These countries might then exploit this intelligence to develop more effective countermeasures. They also fear that, precisely at the point when the United States and NATO need to employ any systems they jointly control with Russia, Moscow will try to block their use for fear of provoking the targeted state or for other reasons.

In addition, Russia's less advanced BMD capabilities presents several problems for possible NATO-Russian joint BMD projects. First, Russia does not have much to offer NATO or the United States in return for BMD collaboration, whether in the form of joint BMD research & development or in any joint missile defense architecture. Lacking the means to make

positive incentives to encourage greater BMD cooperation with the West, Russian policy makers are compelled to rely on disincentives, such as making threats, to influence NATO's BMD-related decisions. These are not that effective since a decreasing number of NATO policy makers consider Russia a plausible military adversary.

Second, Russian resentment at its inferiority in missile interceptor technologies complicates negotiations on this issue. As former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates lamented, the Russians know they will always be behind the West in missile defense capabilities and therefore will always hate it.⁸ It is likely that Moscow dismissed an early request by the US to acquire Russian intercontinental-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs) for target practice of US BMD systems as insulting, and because it could make Russian missiles more vulnerable to US defenses.

Third, Russia's limited cadre of BMD technical experts might explain why Russian defense analysts traditionally exaggerate the effectiveness of US BMD technologies. The paucity of Russian specialists able to confirm that US missile defenses are not aimed at Russia, and would mostly likely lack the capacity to intercept Russian ICBMs even if they tried, means that Western arguments to this effect fail to gain much traction in Moscow. Russians' limited BMD expertise also might explain why, even when senior Russian leaders affirm their interest in such cooperation, many of these agreements to collaborate in principle stall when assigned to expert working groups to iron out the details. Of course, Russians also try to extend BMD talks endlessly to avert actual deployments by NATO, which Russia cannot match.

In contrast to Moscow's adamant objection to US BMD programs, Russian officials have at times appeared more welcoming of NATO invitations to collaborate on short-range battlefield and intermediate-range operational missile defenses. The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty has banned Russia and the United States from having ballistic or cruise missiles with ranges of between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. Thus, no threat to Russia's nuclear deterrent arises directly from BMD systems designed against tactical and theater missiles within this range. Relatively low-velocity interceptors and those that cannot operate outside the atmosphere are ineffective against Russia's fleet of long-range ballistic missiles. Russian defense companies have demonstrated a proven capacity to intercept airplanes flying at even great heights, and these surface-to-air missile systems have some capacity against short and intermediate-range missiles. Russian officials have plausibly hoped that Western governments might buy their BMD-related products designed for intercepting these types of non-strategic missiles, including Russia's latest generation of S-400 (and planned S-500) air and missile defense systems.

Despite repeated sales pitches and joint tabletop exercises, only a few NATO members have purchased Russia's BMD-related products due to

⁸ R. Burns, "Russia Adamantly Opposed to Missile Defense, Gates Says," *Associated Press, Boston Globe*, 18 June 2012, <http://articles.boston.com/2010-06-18/news/29284476_1_arms-treaty-new-start-treaty-missile-defense>.

political and technical obstacles. Furthermore, Russians understand that some of the scientific breakthroughs and other TMD technologies developed against intermediate-range missiles could be applied to defenses against the kinds of long-range ballistic missiles that Russia does possess. Russia might try to restrict the application of Theater Missile Defense (TMD) technologies to these targets, but political factors make that difficult. For example, the US Congress is unwilling to fund programs that only defend foreign populations and forward-based US forces, from short and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. They insist that some effort be made to protect the US homeland from long-range missile strikes from Iran and North Korea.⁹

Furthermore, as the technology evolves to allow for networked sensors and integrated multi-layered missile defenses, it will become increasingly more difficult to distinguish between tactical, theater and strategic BMD systems. This trend will make NATO governments more reluctant to limit the functionality of non-strategic BMD systems within set parameters if doing so inhibits their ability to leverage progress on this element to strengthen the entire BMD architecture. This convergence will also make Russia increasingly resistant to cooperating on “tactical” or “theater” missile defenses with NATO that could ever more plausibly contribute to the US’ national strategic missile defense.

Political Obstacles

At times, the US and other NATO governments have proposed that the parties simply set aside the complex technical issues dividing them and work together on specific BMD projects. The hope is that such collaboration would establish a record of successful cooperation whose momentum would make it easier to overcome the more fundamental, conceptual differences between the sides. In bilateral talks, US officials have been offering four concrete areas of BMD collaboration with Moscow:

1) joint centers (bi-national and multi-national) where Russian personnel can see first hand the non-threatening nature of NATO and US missile defense activities;

2) joint Russian-US expert studies regarding how US and NATO BMD might affect Russia’s nuclear deterrent and what steps can be taken to minimize any problems;

3) resumption and expansion of NATO-Russian TMD exercises (building on earlier collaboration, disrupted by the August 2008 Georgia War);

4) signing a legal agreement limited to supporting these and other cooperative projects.

⁹ See for example Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Hearing on ballistic missile defense policies and programs, 25 April 2012, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/e_witnesslist.cfm?id=5294>.

Russian officials have expressed some interest in cooperating with the United States and NATO on concrete technical projects (some of which were originally Moscow's proposals), but they have insisted on first reaching consensus with NATO on underlying strategic principles.¹⁰ A recurring Russian demand is that NATO sign a legally binding agreement affirming that its BMD systems will never threaten Russia's strategic deterrent. Russian diplomats demand specific limits on the number, location, capacity and other features of NATO's BMD architecture, with experts working out the details in direct negotiations. Although US officials stress that they will not try to negate Russia's nuclear deterrent—the size and sophistication of Russian's offensive nuclear forces make such an effort impossible in any case—they acknowledge that they would never secure congressional approval of a legally binding agreement deliberately constraining the US ability to protect Americans and their allies from foreign missile attacks.¹¹ Thus far, the Obama administration has been willing to offer only nonbinding political guarantees that the US will not seek to negate Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent, be they oral or in writing.¹²

Russian representatives refuse to accept mere political declarations on such an important issue. They profess themselves comfortable that the US would adhere to international legal obligations—at least as they apply to treaty law—but believe that political agreements lend themselves to different interpretations, depending on who is viewing the issue and the conditions under which they make their interpretation. Although they profess not to worry about another Obama presidential term, they claim to fear that some future administration will try, like Ronald Reagan, to expand US missile defenses in order to intercept Russian strategic missiles. In this regard, Russian analysts have expressed concerns about the open-ended nature of the evolving US global BMD architecture.¹³

These contrasting attitudes underscore how the decades of disagreement regarding missile defense have institutionalized distrust between between NATO and Russia. Politicians in these countries believe that the other side does not want genuine cooperation and is only playing for time. Some Americans and Europeans think that Russia is trying to delay and ideally derail US BMD programs by making unreasonable and impractical demands. Others think that the Russians know the NATO BMD systems could not possibly negate Russia's massive deterrent and are therefore using a phantom BMD threat to rally patriotic forces behind the Russian government, sustain support for high Russian military spending, or other parochial purposes unrelated to NATO's actual policies. Meanwhile, certain Russians suspect that NATO governments make insincere public declarations of their willingness to work with Moscow on missile defense in

¹⁰ D. Medvedev, "Statement in Connection with the Situation Concerning the NATO Countries' Missile Defence System in Europe," *op. cit.* [3].

¹¹ "US Says will Give No Missile Defense Assurances to Russia," RIA Novosti, 13 January 2012, <<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20120113/170733294.html>>.

¹² *Kommersant*, 18 January 2012, <www.kommersant.ru/doc/1853384>.

¹³ "US, NATO Have Some 1,000 Interceptor Missiles—Rogozin," RIA Novosti, 20 January 2012, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120120/170856516.html>>.

order to lull opposition to BMD deployment, both in Russia and in European countries unwilling to risk a major confrontation with Russia over the issue.¹⁴

This mistrust resonates and is reinforced in these countries' domestic politics. Russian and American politicians regularly attack those who offer compromises to satisfy the other side's stated security concerns. The awkward broadcasting of a private exchange between Presidents Obama and Medvedev at their bilateral meeting during the March 2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul made this dynamic clear. President Obama was chastised by his Republican opponents for suggesting that he would show enhanced flexibility with Moscow regarding the BMD issue if reelected. Even earlier, conservatives pounced on the Obama administration when media reported that the White House was prepared to provide the Russian government with detailed intelligence about the capabilities of US missile defense systems as a means of reassuring Moscow that they could not threaten Russian ICBMs.¹⁵ Such a trust deficit was also evident during the New START ratification debates in both Russia and the United States. It could easily reappear during future arms control debates involving Russia, the West and BMD.

After years of controversy over its costs and effectiveness, missile defense now enjoys wide and deep support within the United States. Hawks favor its potential contribution to shielding the United States from attack; doves see it as an essential trade-off for making further reductions in offensive nuclear forces; while those most concerned about preserving strategic stability see BMD as a prudent means of strengthening both defense and deterrence. Russian officials' underlying distrust of the West is manifest in their argument that Moscow dare not reduce its offensive nuclear forces as long as NATO BMD remains unconstrained since at some point these systems could adversely affect Russian forces in a strategic nuclear exchange with the United States.¹⁶

¹⁴ F. Weir, "Russia Exasperated with US over Missile Defense," *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 March 2012, <www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/484927>.

¹⁵ J. David. "Diminishing Our Military Capabilities," *National Review*, 6 January 2012, <www.nationalreview.com/corner/287388/diminishing-our-military-capabilities-jack-david>.

¹⁶ "Russia Says US Missile Plans Hamper Nuclear Arms Cuts Talks," RIA Novosti, 6 February 2010, <<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100206/157794552.html>>.

Two Challenges

Iran

Another problem is that Russia and NATO have different BMD timetables. In the Russian methodological framework, Russian analysts want NATO and Moscow to first agree on a common understanding of potential missile threats. According to Moscow, if (and only if) they jointly perceive a genuine missile threat, they would consider whether to undertake a joint response. Russians would expect any joint action to initially prioritize political and economic measures to avert the threat. If these non-military responses failed, then Russia might support joint military measures, which could include deploying jointly controlled BMD systems.¹⁷ In contrast, NATO officials believe that they already confront an emerging Iranian missile threat—and that, given the time it takes to develop and deploy missile defenses, they need to begin now to construct them. Another NATO concern is that Moscow's preferred approach of waiting for an agreed threat assessment and a jointly authorized response would give Russia a de facto right to veto NATO's BMD deployment plans by denying that a threat existed.

Although most Russians would not welcome Tehran's acquisition of nuclear-armed long-range missiles, they also seem less convinced than many NATO leaders that the Iranian government has decided to pursue nuclear weapons options, or that Tehran could develop an effective nuclear missile arsenal in the next decade. While Western representatives generally see Iran as an emerging threat, many Russians still insist that Tehran remains a proliferation challenge that can be managed through non-BMD means such as diplomacy and limited international sanctions. For reasons of pride and history, Russians often refuse to believe that US policy makers have become more concerned about Iran's minimal strategic potential than Russia's robust nuclear forces. They therefore presume—despite American professions to the contrary—that Pentagon planners seek BMD capabilities that can negate Russia's strategic deterrent under the guise of protecting the United States and its allies from Iran.¹⁸

Another factor that has discouraged a BMD compromise and fueled suspicions that the other side is seeking to delay and obstruct progress, is

¹⁷ "Russia Urges US, Europe for Joint Assessment of Missile Threats," RIA Novosti, 6 February 2010, <<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100206/157793285.html>>.

¹⁸ "Putin Slams US Missile Shield Ahead of Munich Security Talks," RIA Novosti, 3 February 2012, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120203/171103829.html>>.

that both parties have come to believe that the passage of time will improve the prospects of BMD cooperation. On the NATO side, there is the expectation that at some point Russian officials will finally realize that NATO BMD plans are not aimed at their deterrent and that, even if NATO aspired to negate Russia's strategic deterrent, that goal exceeded the capabilities of any possible NATO missile defense architecture. Meanwhile, Russians repeatedly hope that some *deus ex machina* will derail the NATO BMD program. These aspirations have ranged from the wish that a new US presidential administration would renounce the program, to the expectation that Russian threats would frighten Europeans into resisting the deployments for fear of ruining their relations with Moscow, to current aspiration that NATO budgetary pressures would weaken funding for these programs. Yet missile defenses enjoy bipartisan support in Washington; NATO allies have set aside their earlier unease and rallied behind Obama's BMD plans; and the US missile defense budget amounts to "only" some \$10 billion a year out of a \$600 billion yearly DoD budget.

Confidence-building measures

US and Russian officials have undertaken a lengthy but unsuccessful effort to negotiate confidence-building measures (CBMs) that would assure Russia that the US BMD systems in Europe would, due to their limited number and capabilities, not threaten Russia. The CBMs would increase the transparency of the US BMD facilities' operations and limit any theoretical threat they might pose to Moscow's own nuclear missile arsenal. Among the CBMs discussed were allowing Russian personnel to inspect operations at US-run BMD facilities on US as well as European territory. In addition, create barriers against "a breakout" in which the BMD systems near Russia would suddenly and rapidly increase, and possible constraints on the operation of BMD systems.

Russian leaders have never been sufficiently comfortable with these CBMs to assuage their concerns about the planned US BMD deployments. Enforcement of any of these CBMs also would present practical problems since they were not legally binding and sometimes required the consent of third parties (such as the Polish government) who appeared reluctant to accept US concessions made to Moscow that might impinge on their security. Furthermore, Russian officials have complained that the briefings US and NATO officials have given them regarding their BMD plans and possible CBMs were insufficiently comprehensive or detailed to allow them to judge the adequacy of possible CBMs. Finally, Putin has claimed that US officials have refused to take "yes" for an answer, and withdrawn CBM proposals offered orally in talks after Moscow agreed to them and asked them to be put down in writing.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Putin Blames US for Failed Missile Defense Talks," RIA Novosti, 3 February 2012, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120302/171680746.html>>.

For at least a year after NATO's Lisbon summit, the focus shifted from the CBMs to Russia's sectoral BMD plan, under which NATO and Russia would establish a BMD architecture for Europe in which each party would defend the other from missiles crossing through its territory. This represented a moderation of Russia's original demand for a single jointly run system, which NATO members rejected as giving Moscow veto power over the use of NATO BMD systems. Since under the sectoral arrangement, Russia would protect NATO from attacking missiles traveling over its territory, Russians argued that NATO should forego developing defenses that could engage missiles over Russia, which would also alleviate Moscow's fears that NATO BMD systems could intercept Russia's land-based long-range nuclear missiles. But NATO officials argue that their collective defense commitment cannot be delegated to a non-NATO member. A more practical problem is that Russia lacks the capability to shoot space traveling ballistic missiles. The Russian missile defense system is transitioning from the use of nuclear-armed interceptors to "hit-to-kill" systems like those used by NATO, but this process is incomplete and Russia has yet to test and verify the effectiveness of its new S-500 interceptors.

For now, both sides are continuing negotiations but are diverging. In March, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton affirmed that, while NATO "would love to cooperate on missile defense against mutual threats with Russia," the Alliance "has made a decision. We believe that it is in all of our interests to carry forward and implement that decision."²⁰ Meanwhile, Russia is following a dual-track policy of continuing negotiations with NATO while developing countermeasures. The Russian government has already approved a major increase in its defense budget. The country has been enhancing its own missile defenses, including by placing new radar complexes on alert and by deploying more S-400 air defense systems, which have a rudimentary anti-missile capacity. However, in one of his election manifestos Putin explained that rather than try to match NATO's expensive BMD programs, Russia would rely primarily on such asymmetrical measures to negate NATO's BMD program.²¹ The Russian military has accordingly announced plans to develop a new liquid-fueled heavy ICBM capable of carrying large numbers of warheads, decoys, and other aids designed to penetrate US missile defenses. On another occasion during the campaign, Putin said that maintaining an assured deterrent against US aggression was "Russia's obligation before humanity," implying that he would never cease trying to deny what he sees as a US quest for absolute security and global primacy unrestrained by fears of retaliation.²²

²⁰ "US Invites Russian Cooperation on Missile Defense," RIA Novosti, 7 March 2012, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120307/171861644.html%2022:55%2007/03/2012>>.

²¹ V. Putin, "Russia and the Changing World," *Moscow News*, 27 February 2012, <<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20120227/171547818.html>>.

²² "Is Putin Preparing Russia for War?" *Russia Profile*, 2 March 2012, <http://russiaprofile.org/experts_panel/55297.html>.

Next Steps

BMD issues might be dealt with in the next Russian-US strategic arms control agreement. The New START Treaty, which took effect in early 2011, lasts for one decade but can be amended or superseded by a later treaty. New START establishes new lower limits on the number of offensive strategic nuclear forces that the United States and Russia can possess and reestablishes mutual means of verification. Although the treaty's preamble, like previous Russian-American arms control agreements, notes that an inherent relationship exists between strategic offensive and strategic defensive forces, this part of the text is not legally binding and the treaty itself only constrains Russian and US long-range offensive nuclear forces. But Russian and US negotiators appear to have exhausted their energies on resolving their BMD impasse. They are now most interested in addressing multinational nuclear security issues. The US administration is seeking to reinvigorate the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, while Russian arms control experts are trying to extend the nuclear arms control process to encompass other countries such as Britain, France and China.

If the parties are looking for a face-saving means to lower tensions over BMD, establishing (long-discussed) jointly manned data exchange centers also would allow both sides to claim they are cooperating on BMD. NATO and Russian officers could operate one or more centers together and send technical data regarding ballistic missile launches from their satellites, radars and other sensors centers to their national and alliance command centers. Such an arrangement would provide a marginal, reciprocal increase in transparency, without jeopardizing their national security or freedom of action since sensitive interceptor data would be managed on a national/Alliance basis.²³ If a new cyber data exchange agreement is reached between Russia and the United States that would extend the nuclear alert communications mechanism to the cyber domain, then this Nuclear Risk Reduction Center, which now manages information exchanges in support of more than a dozen bilateral and multilateral treaties as well as other confidence-building measures that limit the nature and scope of military activities, might be extended to the missile defense domain and allow Russians to raise urgent concerns about NATO BMD activities.²⁴

²³ For one possible model see "Missile Defense: Toward a New Paradigm," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, February 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/WGP_MissileDefense_FINAL.pdf>.

²⁴ E. Nakashima, "In US-Russia Deal, Nuclear Communication System May Be Used for Cybersecurity," *Washington Post*, 26 April 2012, <www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-us-russia-deal-nuclear-communication-system-may-be-used-for-cybersecurity/2012/04/26/gIQAT521iT_story.html?tid=pm_world_pop>.

These measures may only offer a offer a fig leaf of joint collaboration. Yet if Russia and NATO correctly decide that rather than continue this fruitless quest for extensive BMD collaboration, they would do better to cooperate on less divisive issues, such as managing the instability in Central Asia and Afghanistan. By developing habits of collaboration regarding these other security issues, perhaps in several generations they might be able to take the bold leap towards constructing a joint missile defense system in which their very survival might rest in one another's hands.

Perhaps an advantage of Putin's return to the presidency is that he is the one person in Russia who could end the BMD quagmire by making major concessions on these points for the sake of pursuing stronger NATO-Russia cooperation on the more important interests they share. Putin made such a choice in 2001, when he acquiesced in the Bush administration's decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, to avoid upending the new Russia-US partnership against global terrorism. Hopefully, he might realize the impossibility of near-term joint Russia-NATO BMD as well as accept that the systems that NATO envisages cannot seriously undermine the mutual deterrent relationship that exists between NATO and Russia. Even better, Putin and others might understand that scenarios of a NATO attack on Russia are unrealistic and that their preoccupation with this fictitious danger is diverting energies from real dangers.