

# Is Missile Defence Working?

*Bruce Gagnon*

One of the biggest questions in the space technology world today is will ‘missile defence’ really work? Recently we’ve seen articles making a case that it does not work and never will. I would suggest that, depending on where you are standing, a strong case could be made that missile defence is working quite well. It’s all a matter of perception and definition.

When looked at from the point of view of the Russians or Chinese, one might consider that they view it very differently to some of the critics. Critics see scripted Missile Defense Agency tests, while Russia and China see a hyperactive deployment programme, which is directly connected to a larger US/NATO military expansion, ultimately leading to their encirclement.

Today, critics might see the missile defence system largely as a corporate boondoggle, while the Russians and Chinese are looking towards 2020 and beyond when new generations of a well funded research and development programme (now committed to by NATO’s 28 members) will have delivered faster, more accurate and longer range interceptor missiles.

Critics in a sense can help demobilize opposition to the programme. Some peace activists think it would be a waste of their valuable time and meagre organizing resources to spend energy working against a programme that has been labelled by experts as unworkable and an exaggeration. But viewed from a wider perspective, that includes US and NATO military encirclement of Russia as well as the Obama administration’s ‘pivot’ of military operations into the Asia-Pacific,

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one may see an entirely different picture.

The US/NATO military encirclement of Russia and China puts a very different framework around the missile defence issue. Keep in mind the Space Command's annual computer war game first-strike attack on China (reported in *Aviation Week*) set in the year 2016. The existence of missile defence becomes a crucial factor considering China's 20-some nuclear weapons capable of hitting the west coast of the United States. In the war game the Space Command launches another new speculative space technology, called the military space plane which is now under development. This system helps to deliver the initial attack on China's nuclear forces. When China fires its remaining nuclear missiles in a retaliatory strike, it is then that the US missile defence systems, now being deployed throughout the Asia-Pacific region, are used to pick off these nuclear weapons. Today, ground-based PAC-3 interceptor systems are being deployed in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Okinawa. In addition, the SM-3 interceptors on-board Navy Aegis destroyers are increasingly being ported near China's coast. So China's experience is that the war-game scenarios – in which we presume, they always lose – come alive with each new deployment, each new military base, and each new Aegis destroyer positioned in the region.

Coupled with that is the Strategic Command's mission of Prompt Global Strike (to hit targets on the other side of the planet in one hour with 'non-nuclear' missiles) as another key element in Pentagon first-strike planning.

China will be forced to respond to these moves on the grand chessboard. Its decision to deploy several ballistic missile submarines demonstrates a deep commitment to make its nuclear forces survivable against US first-strike attack planning. And, in turn, Maine's Congressional delegation, like those from other states, argue that we need to build more Aegis destroyers at Bath Iron Works because China is now expanding its naval forces.

China has long been a strong supporter of Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) at the United Nations Conference on Disarmament. Its reluctance to fully support the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FCMT) is directly linked to US unwillingness to seriously negotiate around PAROS and thus is integrally connected to missile defence. China feels it can't afford to forego its option to upgrade or build more nuclear weapons while its coastal region is being sprinkled with missile defence systems. Chinese leaders nervously view the scene from space satellite imagery as the US essentially doubles its military presence in China's neighbourhood.

China is also concerned about possible developments of space-based missile defence systems that would undercut its strategic nuclear deterrent in even greater ways. With the infusion of funding for additional research and development that will surely come from a broader NATO-wide participation in missile defence, one can understand China's consternation.

Russia's leaders, also long-time supporters of Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, are now questioning their continued participation in the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). They maintain that the Start Treaty and future nuclear disarmament negotiations are in jeopardy if the delicate balance between strategic offensive weapons and missile defence systems is destroyed due to an expanding US/NATO programme.

Recently, Russian military chief Nikolai Makarov didn't broach the subject of launching pre-emptive strikes against US missile defence sites in Eastern Europe because Russia views Obama's European Phased Adaptive Approach, as it is called, as a corporate pork barrel. At a two-day conference in Moscow, Makarov maintained that third and especially fourth phase deployments (Standard Missile-3 Block IIA and IIB missiles) would be capable of destroying intermediate-range missiles. When they are positioned in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, this makes them able to take down Russian inter-continental ballistic missiles.

These concerns largely come from the Obama Administration's promises to deploy Aegis based interceptors in the Black and Baltic Seas in the years ahead.

The United States/NATO now has bases and/or military operations in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, NATO partnerships are expanding into the Asia-Pacific region to include the likes of Australia, Japan, South Korea, and, very likely, India. NATO expansion throughout Eastern Europe and into Asia-Pacific will further Chinese and Russian fears of containment.

Additionally, in 2008, when a US interceptor missile launched from an Aegis warship struck a falling American spy satellite orbiting 130 miles over the Pacific Ocean, fears that these missile defence systems could be used as anti-satellite weapons also surfaced.

To be correctly understood, missile defence must be viewed in a much larger context than is presently done by most critics. The current global competition for declining scarce resources is driving much of the world's conflict today. Canada's recent announcement that it will spend \$35 billion to expand its warship-building programme in coming years is clearly connected to the reality of melting ice in the Arctic regions, which makes

it possible for oil and gas corporations to drill there. The US is already lining up Canada, Norway and other Arctic allies to stand against Russia in this push-and-shove for control of these resources.

The fact that Russia has the world's largest supply of natural gas, and significant supplies of oil, indicates one likely reason why the US and NATO are militarily surrounding her. Haven't we come to realize by now that the Pentagon's primary job today is to serve as the resource extraction service for corporate globalization?

In the case of China, while the US can't compete with its economy, the Pentagon has apparently determined that controlling China's access to vital resources would give the US the keys to its economic engine.

Historians have made the case for years that even though nuclear weapons have not been used since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they have been strategically utilized in numerous incidents since 1945 as guns pointed at the heads of particular countries. In the same way, the mere threat of missile defence as a key element in Pentagon first-strike attack planning is a loaded and cocked gun pointed at the heads of Russia and China. Both of these nations have to assume the worst-case scenario and prepare and plan to respond. Perception informs and creates reality.

Missile defence deployments indeed provoke military responses from Russia and China (and Iran and North Korea). Their responses are then used to further demonize those nations in the eyes of the citizens of the US and people around the world. These images of aggressive Russian and Chinese militarists are then used to justify even greater military spending in the US (and among NATO allies) in order to ward off their supposed aggression.

The public in the United States knows virtually nothing about the Pentagon surrounding Russia and China with missile defence systems, but they do know that US Secretary of War Leon Panetta hosted China's Defence Minister at the Pentagon on 7 May 2012. The *Washington Times* reported that

‘A key issue the US will explore is the objective of China’s “very robust and rapid” military modernization, especially in a region that is “at peace,” a senior defense official told reporters’.

When the Soviet Union deployed nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962, there was not much discussion about how well they would work or what their range and explosive capability was. The concern was over their close proximity to the continental United States and the potential for misunderstanding and over-reaction. The mere presence of these Soviet

systems so close to the US was almost enough to trigger a deadly nuclear war. In order to close the deal to remove the missiles from Cuba, President Kennedy secretly agreed to dismantling all US-built Jupiter intermediate range ballistic missiles deployed in Turkey and Italy.

It's quite amazing that when the situation is reversed, when the United States and its NATO allies are literally surrounding Russia and China, that we might be surprised that they respond similarly to how the US reacted in 1962.

Given enough time and money, it is possible to consider that some kind of missile defence system could be made to 'work'. If we've learned anything over the years, it should be that technological advances in weapons development are a guarantee. Humans started out throwing stones at one another and graduated to the club. Then they moved on to the bow and arrow, the Gatling gun, nuclear weapons, stealth bombers, and now space scientists land rovers on Mars. True or not, who is going to believe that missile defence will 'never' work?

The Pentagon always says,

'We work on many technologies at once. Some of them work and some don't. But we make progress along the way and are able to get something to work in the end by adapting various technologies.'

Russia and China see the development of missile defence and clearly understand the mission configuration. These systems are designed to serve as key elements in Pentagon first-strike planning. Whether one version of missile defence works or not is less important than the overall decision to build and deploy a first-strike offensive web of weapons systems surrounding Russia and China.

The historically important goal to rid the world of nuclear weapons hinges on serious negotiations and treaties that must include banning weapons from, in, and through space.

To say missile defence does not work is to miss the larger point. Missile defence is working quite effectively to help destroy the system of international treaties that limits humanity's mad rush to extinction. The UN's Conference on Disarmament has largely been frozen for the past 20 years and one key reason is the space technology issue. The US and its NATO allies seek control and domination of space and the Earth below on behalf of corporate interests and investments. Why would the US be so adamant in its refusal to seriously negotiate on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space unless it still maintained hopes and plans to create a space-based missile defence first-strike attack system?

I would hope that critics of missile defence would use this current controversy over US/NATO military expansion eastward to help the public understand the larger issues in play. We miss the key issue of our time when we do not see that missile defence, and all other military systems being used to surround Russia and China, are obstacles to nuclear disarmament, serious negotiations on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, and true peace.

We have real problems today called climate change and growing global poverty. We cannot afford to stand by and watch the dismantling of international treaties and institutions such as the United Nations while the United States and NATO push an aggressive campaign to further militarize the world. Future generations remind us that we should oppose not just some of the technology systems, but also that we stand against the policies of endless war that are tearing the world to pieces.

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## HE STEERS HIS FLIGHT

*Gillray invoked Milton in his last cartoon, published in 1810.*

Then with expanded wings he steers his flight  
 Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,  
 That felt unusual weight; till on dry land  
 He lights—if it were land that ever burned  
     With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,  
 And such appeared in hue as when the force  
     Of subterranean wind transports a hill  
     Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side  
     Of thundering Etna, whose combustible  
 And fuelled entrails, thence conceiving fire,  
     Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,  
     And leave a singed bottom all involved  
     With stench and smoke.

*Paradise Lost, John Milton*

*The Nottingham Contemporary's recent exhibition of Gillray's cartoons, tellingly juxtaposed with the films and installations of Mika Rottenberg, inspired a leap backwards in illustrating the stories of today's Star Wars, radomes et al. ([www.nottinghamcontemporary.org](http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org))*