



The US National Missile Defence programme: a destabilising provocation

Introduction

National Missile Defence (NMD), often known as 'Star Wars', is part of the United States' military strategy to achieve 'full spectrum dominance' – full military control of land, sea, air, space and information. Whilst the US describes it as a defensive system, because it allows the US to shoot down incoming missiles, in reality it will also enable the US to attack other countries without fear of retaliation. It has already sparked international controversy and provoked a new global arms race, with an increased danger of nuclear weapons use. There are fears that continued development – including plans to site bases in Poland and the Czech Republic – will provoke a new Cold War with Russia.

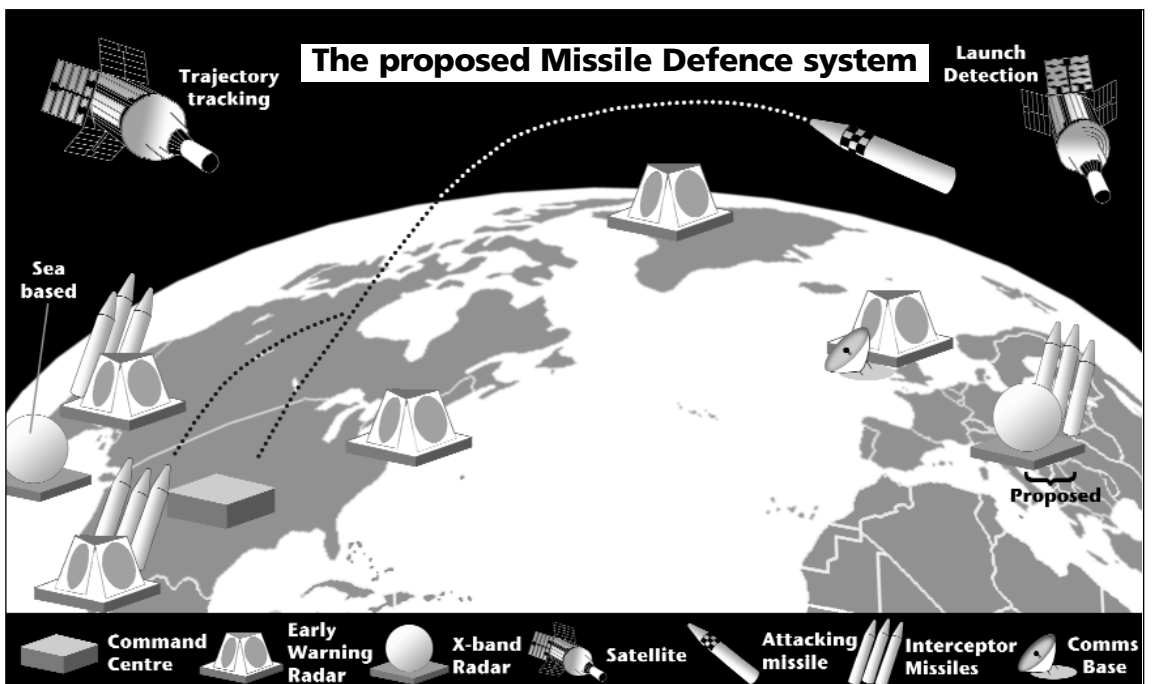
By allowing bases such as Menwith Hill and Fylingdales to be crucial components of the system the UK is complicit in the US military agenda and has put Britain on the front line in any future US war. A potential aggressor could seek to destroy the NMD facilities in Europe in the context of an imminent war with the US. The missile defence system itself, whilst located in Europe, is not designed to 'defend' Europe. The term 'National Missile Defence' refers to the defence of the US homeland. The planned

interceptor missiles would shoot down InterContinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) on the way to the US not to Europe. This situation is reminiscent of the early 1980s, when Western Europe was placed at risk of attack because the US sited its cruise missiles here. We are in danger of a rerun of that nightmare scenario.

Current situation

The US NMD system is a modified (cut-down) version of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) developed during the Reagan administration in the 1980s. It was declared operational in 2006. Now officially known as the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense system, it consists of sensors such as ground based radars and satellites intended to detect, track and identify incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles. The system currently comprises five early warning radar bases: one at Fylingdales in the UK, one at Thule in Greenland, and three on US soil in Alaska, California and Massachusetts. Interceptor missiles intended to knock out incoming ICBMs are currently based in Alaska and California.

ICBMs are the fastest missiles with the longest range and are typically (although not exclusively) developed to deliver nuclear warheads. President



Bush insists that the US needs NMD in case terrorists or 'rogue' states such as Iran or North Korea ever develop ICBMs able to reach them. In fact, terrorists could deliver a nuclear weapon more easily, cheaply, and with less likelihood of detection in other ways – in a truck, on board ship, or even part of an aeroplane. States like Iran and North Korea are unlikely to obtain long range missile capability for some years. Thus, it is not surprising that Russia and China believe NMD to be deployed against them.

Space Wars

There is considerable concern that future developments of the US NMD programme will mean that weapons will eventually be located in space. A range of high powered lasers are already being developed with the aim of intercepting missiles at the speed of light. These may be based on the ground, on satellites or mounted on specially converted aircraft. US research and development programmes are also investigating space based missiles and micro-satellites to rendezvous and possibly interfere with others' space assets. The technologies developed for missile defence can also be used against satellites and/or targets on Earth.

Although there are not, as yet, any actual weapons stationed in space, space has already been militarised – that is to say, it is already used for military purposes. The US has become increasingly dependent on its satellites to deliver global military operations – for communications, surveillance and to guide pilotless aircraft, bombs and missiles to their targets. Over 100 military satellites supported the US and UK Iraqi war effort.¹ These satellites are very vulnerable to attack and the US is eager to station weapons in space to protect them.

Not only is the US planning to expand its technological capabilities but also the geographical range of its system. The US hopes to station interceptor missiles in Poland and construct a radar station in the Czech Republic by 2012. There are also plans to establish a radar station on the Pacific island of Guam. Ship-based interceptor systems patrol near possible launch sites and are being deployed by South Korea, Japan and possibly India.

Provoking a new arms race

If you look at world history, ever since men began waging war, you will see that there's a permanent race between sword and shield. The sword always wins. The more improvements that are made to the shield, the more improvements are made to the sword. Former French President Jacques Chirac

The US claims that missile defence is simply there to provide a kind of protective shield but the system actually gives the US a position of greater power and control in the world. As well as seeking *"The ability of the future force to establish an 'unblinking eye' over the battle-space through persistent surveillance"*, it was also stated in the 2006 US Quadrennial Defence Review that, *"The United States should continue to enjoy an advantage in space capabilities across all mission areas. This advantage will be maintained by staying at least one technology generation ahead of any foreign or commercial space power."*²

Even if the limited missile defence the US has so far developed worked, it would not protect against an all-out nuclear attack. It could, however, be used to 'take out' the few remaining missiles left over from a US first strike on Russian or Chinese missile silos. This asymmetric advantage has been a US military aspiration since the start of the Cold War and explains why Russia has expressed grave concerns about missile defence. This also explains why Russia has recently threatened to retaliate against US missile defence plans by targeting their missiles at Europe.³

With missile defence the US could launch a first strike (with or without nuclear warheads) with increased confidence that any retaliatory missiles could be shot down. As Professor Dave Webb explains, *"This will allow them to go to war (or threaten to) more often, or at least more confidently, whenever it suits their foreign policy objectives. It is also the perception of this threat that could easily lead to a gradual build up of nuclear arsenals."*⁴

So in the long term, feeling threatened by this imbalance, other states may do any or all of the following:

1. increase their own arsenals (so that they have enough missiles for some of them to be able to get through the system without being intercepted)
2. advance the technologies of their arsenals to outwit the NMD system
3. develop their own missile defence systems.

And so the arms race continues.

In partnership with the US, several other countries – Japan, Australia, India, Israel and NATO countries in Europe are now developing their own theatre missile defence programmes – these systems are mobile and designed to protect a smaller area against intermediate and shorter range missiles.

US resistance to legal restraints

The US unilaterally withdrew from the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. The ABM Treaty was an arms control agreement made 30 years earlier between the US and Soviet Union. It restricted the development of US and Soviet anti-ballistic missile programmes and specifically prohibited development of new, extensive National Missile Defence systems. It was seen as the cornerstone on which nuclear arms limitation between the two countries was based.

A key agreement relating to the weaponisation of space is the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. It bans the siting of weapons of mass destruction in space, but it does not forbid conventional weapons in space. In an attempt to prevent the weaponisation of space, a number of resolutions to initiate talks on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) have been discussed at the UN's Conference on Disarmament. But further progress towards a PAROS treaty has been blocked by the US and Israel. The reason for this opposition is made clear by US policy documents. For example, in the US Quadrennial Defence Review of 2003:

'Space and information operations have become the backbone of ... civilian and military capabilities. This opens up the possibility that space control – the exploitation of space and the denial of the use of space to adversaries – will become a key objective in future military objectives'.

The US updated its National Space Policy in 2006. The policy confirmed US opposition to PAROS asserting that, *'The United States will oppose the development of new legal regimes or other restrictions that seek to prohibit or limit U.S. access to or use of space.'*⁵

Remarking on the Space Policy the US Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security stated that, *'Specifically, the United States must have the means to employ space assets as an integral part of its ability to manage crises, deter conflicts and, if deterrence fails, prevail in conflict.'*⁶

European involvement in US NMD

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), a military alliance between the US, Canada and 24 European states, is considering the development of a limited theatre missile defence system to protect its troops in battle. A programme for such a system was approved in 2005.⁷ The US has suggested that the proposed extension of their NMD system in the Czech Republic and Poland could also combine components of the new NATO programme to form an integrated European missile defence system.

There is concern that European citizens and their parliaments are not being made fully aware of the

consequences of such involvement in missile defence developments and in US NMD. NATO member governments are not even being allowed to access classified risk assessments that NATO has been carrying out since the 1990s. A European missile defence system that is an integration of US NMD and NATO systems would further increase tensions that are pushing the world towards a new Cold War. In reality, there are strong arguments to suggest such a system may never be technically able to shield the whole of Europe. Such a scheme could also make Europe complicit in the future weaponisation of space.

Concerns about Britain's role

UK involvement in the US national missile defence programme makes us a target. A state wanting to attack the US with ballistic missiles might well attempt to disable the missile defence system first by taking out a key tracking station such as the one at Fylingdales. As Air Marshal Lord Garden has said:

*'Enemies intent on using weapons of mass destruction would see the need to take on our infrastructure, of which the ballistic missile warning radars would be a very important and perhaps the most vulnerable part.'*⁸

In addition, interceptor missiles based in Europe would have the explicit function of destroying missiles, possibly nuclear armed, over Europe. The environmental and health consequences of such an occurrence could be disastrous.

The UK has assumed a significant role in the NMD programme, without parliamentary scrutiny or accountability. This ties the UK even further into the US's foreign policy and military agenda. Other ties that bind us include: our close relationship with the US on the development and testing of nuclear weapons, including the extensive bilateral Mutual Defence Agreement, first signed in 1958 and most recently renewed in 2004; a dependence on the US for the UK's own nuclear weapons system Trident; the siting of around 110 US nuclear weapons at the US airforce base in Lakenheath, Suffolk.

US National Missile Defence bases in Britain

Fylingdales is one of five US Ballistic Missile Early Warning Radar stations across the world. In 2003 Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, gave permission for the base to become part of the NMD programme. Despite major public and political opposition on the grounds of international security and local health concerns, the upgrade process continued, without planning

permission, and is due to become operational for missile defence in 2007.

This joint US/RAF base is intended to be able to track enemy missiles and determine their intended trajectories, allowing interceptor missiles to be fired from other locations to knock them off track. So far, the system has proved to be ineffective: controlled tests have had minimal success in terms of shooting down missiles, but this has not deterred the US from pressing ahead.

Menwith Hill is run by the US National Security Agency (NSA), operates outside US law and is not accountable in British law. It is part of a global network of bases used to spy on all forms of international telecommunications – including private phone calls, emails and faxes – and is crucial for the intelligence-gathering necessary for any US-led military attack.

In 1996, Britain announced that the European Ground Based Relay station for the Space Based Infra Red System (SBIRS) would be established at the base. SBIRS is another aspect of the Early Warning and tracking system. This use of the base to advance the NMD programme appears well underway with recent Pentagon budget reports showing that over \$90 million has been allocated to building projects – and all without British scrutiny or approval.

The base is not formally assigned to the National Missile Defence programme, as Fylingdales is, and in 2002 the UK Defence Select Committee expressed concern that Menwith Hill would be used for NMD without permission. The then Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, assured them that it was for early warning only and would be handled ‘entirely separately from missile defence.’⁹ However, a 1997 US General Accounting Office report describes the purpose of SBIRS as ‘to enhance the detection and tracking of ... ballistic missile launches and provide critical data for ... missile defence systems.’¹⁰

Other bases in the UK associated with military space activities are at Boddington, Cheltenham, Croughton, Defford, Digby, Feltwell, Morwenstow, Northwood and Oakhanger.

Other implications

Cost

- In 2003 a Missile Defence Centre, costing £5 million a year, was established by the UK government to help get British companies involved in the US programme.
- By 2004 the UK government had already spent

£30 million on missile defence research.¹¹

- The 2006 US Missile Defence Budget was \$8.5 billion and is likely to soar to an annual \$19 billion by 2013.¹²
- A 2003 report by prominent economists estimated that the total cost of the NMD programme to the US will run to over \$1 trillion.¹³

Local effects

- *Health concerns:* upgrades to Fylingdales increase concerns that levels of electromagnetic radiation from the facility will impact upon the health of local people.¹⁴
- *Disruption:* figures obtained by *The Herald*¹⁵ show that the US government paid the UK Ministry of Defence £1.7 million over the past three years to undertake ‘Stop and Search’ checks at Menwith Hill. The MoD police stopped over 2,100 motorists and searched more than 940 vehicles in this period. Figures given by the North Yorkshire police (who do not receive direct funding from the US) revealed that between June and September 2005, 6,279 drivers, passengers and pedestrians were stopped in the vicinity of the base.
- *Rights to protest:* Public demonstrations at US missile defence bases in the UK are subject to the new Serious Organised Crime and Police Act. It is now a criminal offence to trespass on the grounds of the site with a maximum penalty of 51 weeks in prison.

Opposition

There is considerable public opposition to Britain’s current commitment to the US NMD programme: a 2004 Yorkshire CND/ICM poll showed that 67% of the British public are opposed to UK involvement. But no significant parliamentary debate has taken place and decisions relating to the role of Menwith Hill and Fylingdales are made behind closed doors. There are regular protests at both bases, and at other facilities in the UK associated with the system. These protests will be stepped up in the months ahead.

The majority of the public in both the Czech Republic and Poland are against plans to use their country for the system. A recent Czech poll showed 68% public opposition, with 77% wanting a referendum on the issue. Russia has also reacted strongly to the US hosting such bases near to their borders and there are real fears that continuing developments may provoke a new Cold War between the two countries. CND is cooperating with other European campaigning groups and organisations to rid the whole of Europe of this dangerous system.

The UK government's support for this new era of US military 'full spectrum dominance' must be challenged and overturned through the British democratic process. We must put pressure on politicians to encourage peaceful and useful activities in space. The UK must not add any more support to the US's military agenda. CND

opposes the US's national missile defence system as a provocative initiative, helping to further destabilise international relations, and already contributing to an increase in global tension. We oppose UK participation in the system and urge the UK government to withdraw its facilities and support.

No to a new nuclear arms race, no to a new Cold War

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