

QA: US Missile Defence

What is US Missile Defence?

Missile Defence is a military system designed to protect the United States and/or its military forces (wherever they might be) from missile attack.

The US missile defence system is made up of a series of ground based radar, command and missile interceptor bases around the world, with support from satellite and sea-based facilities. The system detects and shoots down incoming missiles. Missile Defence is a step towards achieving the US military goal of 'Full Spectrum Dominance', which aims to gain full US military control of land, sea, air, space and information. Missile Defence is also leading to the possibility of war in and from space.

If it is defensive, why are people worried about it?

Ever since President Reagan first came up with the idea in the early 1980s – at that time it was called the Strategic Defence Initiative or 'Star Wars' – the US has claimed that Missile Defence is a defensive system. Currently, the US states that the system is necessary to counter a threat from Iran, although intelligence indicates that Iran does not have the technological capability to be a threat to the US. In fact, the system is widely seen as offensive – because it will allow the US to attack other countries without fear of retaliation. These systems were banned for decades by the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which recognised the dangers they present. In 2002, the US unilaterally withdrew from this Treaty to pursue the system. Taken together with the recent US tendency towards pre-emptive wars, the US plans are causing great concern internationally.

How does it work?

In theory, the system uses a network of space-based heat detecting satellites to detect any ballistic missile attack launched against the US from anywhere in the world. Another network of ground and space-based radars will track and target incoming missiles. Then the US can launch a missile of its own to intercept – smash into and destroy – the enemy missile before it reaches the target.

Will it definitely work?

That is not yet certain. Tests to track and destroy 'enemy' missiles with interceptor missiles have a high failure rate, and decoy warheads can also be used to confuse the interceptors. Even if it did work, it would not protect the US from an all-out nuclear attack, and it would not prevent non-missile

attacks on the US. In fact, it is very limited as a defensive system.

So what is the point of it?

When considered as an offensive attack system, US Missile Defence seems to be more effective. The radar and communications components allow the US military to spy on other states, tracking (and possibly targeting and even destroying) satellites and intercepting electronic communications, and retrieving information that could be used for both economic and military purposes. The system gives the US a confident first-strike military advantage. If it attacked another major nuclear power, the US could knock out most of its weaponry in a first strike, then take out any remnants being fired back, with its missile defence interceptors.

The location of Missile Defence bases around the world (and in space), together with other new military technologies such as the X-51 hypersonic cruise missile, is part of the US plan to develop a "Prompt Global Strike" force to enable it to strike anywhere on the face of the Earth within 60 minutes.

Which countries are involved?

As well as being located in the US, Missile Defence bases can be found at the following locations:

Britain	Fylingdales, Early Warning Radar Station, Yorkshire
	Menwith Hill, Satellite Communication and Relay Station, Yorkshire
Greenland	Thule Air Base, Early Warning Radar Station
Australia	Pine Gap, Satellite Communication and Relay Station, near Alice Springs

The US is also proposing the following sites:

Czech Republic	Early Warning Radar Station, Trokavec
Poland	Interceptor Missile Base, Gorskó

The US is also working with other Missile Defence 'partners', to support the development of new systems in Japan, Australia, India, Israel and NATO countries in Europe. These smaller, mobile (Theatre Missile Defence) systems are being developed for use in the battlefield, wherever that may be, to supposedly protect US armed forces in action.

What facilities are located in the US?

- Early warning Radar Station, Clear Air Force Station, Alaska
- Interceptor Missiles at Fort Greely, Alaska
- Early Warning Radar Station, Beale Air Force Base, California

- Interceptor Missiles at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California
- Early Warning Radar Station, Cape Cod Air Force Station, Massachusetts
- US Strategic Command Centre (StratCom), Omaha, Nebraska
- Sea based X-Band Radar, Adak Island, part of the Aleutian chain

Why is Missile Defence an issue in Britain? Doesn't it protect us?

Britain plays an integral role in the US Missile Defence system. Menwith Hill, in Yorkshire, is the largest military spy base in the world. All operational activities are directed by the US and the information it intercepts is fed directly back to the National Security Agency (NSA) in the US. In July 2007, it was announced by the British government that Menwith Hill would become part of the US Missile Defence system. The government has been criticised by Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee for failing to consult parliament on this decision. Menwith Hill will play a key role in any future US war fighting and planning.

There has also recently been an upgrade of the Early Warning Radar at Fylingdales, enabling it to accurately track and target missiles from the North York moors. Together, these developments commit Britain to a continued supporting role for the US military agenda – with no Parliamentary debate or public consultation. There is considerable public opposition to the system – not surprising given the increased security risks: the bases will be a prime target in future wars.

A CND/YouGov poll in July 2007 revealed that 54% of the public agreed that “the siting of US missiles and early warning bases in the UK, Poland and the Czech Republic as part of the US National Missile Defence programme, increases the security threat faced by the UK and Europe.”

The US Missile Defence system does not defend the countries that host the Missile Defence bases – whether Britain, Poland or the Czech Republic. The Pentagon has stated that Missile Defence is being developed for the US alone. It has suggested that mobile systems being developed within NATO could be combined with existing and proposed US bases to provide a limited missile defence system for most of Europe. However, this has yet to be verified and properly debated in the European Parliament.

How much does it cost?

Since the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, spending on the Missile Defence programme has grown substantially. Under President Clinton, the average annual US spending on Missile Defence was \$4billion per year – this has increased dramatically to approximately \$9billion per year under President Bush.

But the bases have been in Britain for so long – there's not much we can do about it now is there?

There's a lot that we can do. We must make it clear to the government that we do not want to participate in a system which puts us at greater risk, and is increasing global tensions. There must be a full public and parliamentary debate about the issue, and Britain's role in it must not be decided behind closed doors. This is not impossible. In 2005, the Canadian government told the US that Canada would not support the Missile Defence programme. Political and public opposition to the proposed bases in Poland and the Czech Republic is growing at a rapid rate. We are making links with these campaigns. Now is the time for us to put pressure on our government to withdraw from the programme.

Why does CND campaign against Missile Defence – it isn't about nuclear weapons is it?

CND has campaigned against the US Missile Defence programme since Reagan's first plans in the 1980s. We recognise that this military system is already leading to a new nuclear arms race and increases the chances of nuclear weapons being used. Bigger and better missiles will be sought to get through or round the Missile Defence system. The positioning of bases and (especially) interceptor missiles close to Russian missile silos, and in countries that were formerly Soviet allies, is causing concern in Russia. President Putin has already threatened to aim missiles at European targets again and withdraw from the Treaty that limits the size of conventional forces in Europe. Already there is talk of a new Cold War.

What can I do?

We must build on existing public opposition by increasing people's understanding of the real threats posed by US Missile Defence. It is vital that we build an effective campaign to stop government support for the Pentagon's plans. Contacting our MPs and explaining our opposition is an important part of this.

CND has a leaflet, postcard and briefing available for public and parliamentary campaigning: for lobbying MPs, for local stalls, for setting up meetings and contacting local press. In combination with actions and demonstrations at Menwith Hill and Fylingdales, CND is organising a series of high-profile events across the country specifically focused on the implications of the development of US Missile Defence. Please join us.

■ For more information on how to get involved visit www.cnduk.org, phone us on 0207 700 2393, or write to us at the address below.

