

QA: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ☮
US Missile Defence



CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

QA: US Missile Defence

What is US missile defence?

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, designed to detect and shoot down incoming missiles.

Missile defence is another step towards achieving the US military's goal of 'Full Spectrum Dominance', which aims to be able to gain full control of land, sea, air, space and information in a conflict. The system is purportedly designed to protect the United States and its allies from missile attack.

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

Because it is really a system that allows the US to be offensive and make first strike attacks without fear of retaliation. Missile defence systems aim to knock out a return attack and therefore render any 'deterrence' systems obsolete.

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. Yet countries like Russia and China are highly mistrustful of this claim, believing that it is designed to make an attack on them easier. Currently, the US states that the system is necessary to counter a threat from Iran and possibly North Korea, yet both US and Israeli intelligence agencies indicate that Iran does not appear to have a nuclear weapons programme and neither country has the technological capability to threaten the US with long-range missiles.

Missile defence systems like those currently being deployed by the US were banned for decades by the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the US and USSR, which recognised that such systems made attack without retaliation possible. In 2002, the US unilaterally withdrew from this Treaty to pursue the further development of the system.

Along with the expansion of the NATO military alliance, the US' missile defence plans are contributing to an increase in international tension, especially with Russia, which is concerned about the US and NATO bases lining up on its borders.

Why does CND campaign against US 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 threatening existing arms limitation treaties and leading to a new nuclear arms race which significantly increases the chances of nuclear weapons being used.

To put it simply, the stronger the shield (i.e. a missile defence system), the more other states will seek to redress the balance of power by overcoming the shield with a sharper sword (i.e. bigger and better missiles and a more effective nuclear weapons system) and they may also develop their own missile shield system. And so the arms race escalates.

The integration of US and NATO missile defence systems in Europe and 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 and has contributed to the ongoing crisis in eastern Europe. US missile defence has been a bone of contention between the two countries for some time.

How does this affect us in the UK?

Britain plays an integral role in the US missile defence system and this puts us on the front line in any future US wars. Menwith Hill, in Yorkshire, is the largest military spy base in the world. All of its 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. Menwith Hill plays a key role in US war fighting and planning and has been designated as a relay station for US satellites being developed for identifying and tracking missiles and targeting interceptors as part of the US missile defence system. RAF Fylingdales in North Yorkshire operates as a Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station for the US and British governments, tracking and targeting missiles aimed primarily at the US.

These sites, and others, commit Britain to a continued supporting role for the US military agenda – with no parliamentary debate or public consultation. Britain's role in the US missile defence system was not considered as part of the 2011 Strategic Defence and Security Review, but the government has indicated that ballistic

missile defence capabilities will be considered in the next one, due in 2015. There is considerable public opposition to the system – not surprising given the increased security risks.

Are there any other countries involved?

Yes, President Obama's plans involve almost the whole of Europe signing up to the system through the US-led military alliance NATO, further exacerbating tensions with Russia.

NATO announced at its Lisbon Summit in 2010 that it will 'develop a missile defence capability to protect all NATO European populations and territory', expected to be in place by 2025.

NATO's command and control centre for missile defence has been established at Ramstein, Germany. Romania has signed an agreement with the US to establish a land-based component of the missile defence system on their territory. Early warning radar stations, manned in part by US personnel, are operational in Turkey and Israel, with one currently being built in Qatar. Spain has agreed to permanently host four US Navy ships equipped with the Aegis missile defence system at its naval base of Rota. The first ship arrived in Europe in February 2014, with the rest to arrive over the next two years. The ships have advanced sensor capabilities and interceptor missiles which can detect and shoot down ballistic missiles.

Even though Obama announced in 2009 that a planned deployment of parts of the system in Poland and the Czech Republic would not go ahead, a new development was then announced. Interceptors will now be installed at a base in Redzikowo, Poland by 2018.

How do missile defence components work together?

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

How much does it cost?

The US is expected to spend at least \$150 billion dollars on US missile defence development by 2018, with the final bill expected to rocket due to production delays. Engaging NATO and Europe in the system means that member states are also expected to contribute towards costs.

What can I do to stop it?

We must make it clear we do not want to participate in a system which puts us at greater risk. It is vital that we continue campaigning to stop government support for the Pentagon's plans. Contact your MP and explain your opposition. There must be a full public and parliamentary debate about the missile defence system, and Britain's role in it must be challenged. This is not impossible and there are many groups around the world campaigning to prevent the development and siting of missile defence components.

Nuclear weapons and US missile defence developments are inextricably linked: such terrible swords and shields must be abandoned. Disarmament initiatives and a greater international political drive towards conflict resolution and peaceful dialogue will lead us to a more peaceful, safe and secure world.

