Pursuing Peace with the Weapons of War: Ballistic Missile Defence and International Security

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International security is a tedious balance between the interests of the nation-state and the stability of the system as a whole. This tension tends to be further exacerbated when weapons, highly capable of inflicting great damage, are introduced into the equation. International peace and security may be the desired goal but weapons are not a means to peace and stability, they are a means to conflict and suffering. This is the problem with proposals for ballistic missile defence (BMD); its goal is to provide security to those who employ it but at the same time it alters the balance of power in world politics and provokes counter-measures increasing the chance of a future exchange of firepower between adversaries. This reality is truly scary when one considers the amount of discussion, research and implementation that occurred both during the Cold War as well as in the current climate of international security. This paper will show that the implementation of ballistic missile defence systems, largely driven by the interests and actions of the United States, is a threat to international peace and security. This argument will be proven through an examination of the concept of ballistic missile defence, the cases for and against its implementation and the current realities that are of consideration to ballistic missile defence and its role in international peace and security.

What is Ballistic Missile Defence?

Ballistic Missile Defence, in its many different forms, is essentially a defensive measure against the possibility of incoming nuclear missile threats from an enemy faction. These threats would usually manifest themselves in the form of intercontinental ballistic missiles or ICBMs. Rather than focus on deterring attacks through the threat of retaliation, the implementation of a ballistic missile defence would allow states to intercept any attacking missiles before they could reach their intended target.

“BMD has a threefold function: (1) To act as a deterrent to the hostile entities investing in missile technology by making it clear to them that their investment would be a waste of money because their missiles would not present a threat to the US or its allies. (2) To provide protection for population centers and critical facilities should the deterrent aspect not be effective. (3) To give [leaders] time to consider all the ramifications before launching an offensive strike in retaliation, should the hostile entity attempt to attack” (Fox & Orman 5).

This strategy of national defence arose out of the Cold War where political tensions and the threat of attack were constant between the two great superpowers, the United States and the USSR. The United States, with its strong industrial military complex and vast budget for military expenditures has gone through a number of different models for ballistic missile defence and is generally seen as its leader and foremost proponent. The earliest of the BMD models was in the 1950s and employed the idea of detonating Nike nuclear missiles in the vicinity of oncoming missiles in order to neutralize the threat. This plan was never put into action, but laid the foundation for later projects including Robert McNamara’s Sentinel Program in 1963 and his Safeguard program in 1967.

By 1972, the escalation of the threat of ICBMs led to the creation and signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty between the US and the USSR. “The ABM Treaty was a bilateral treaty, which corresponded to the world’s essential bipolarity, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Treaty reflected the international law of the bipolar international system as a drop of water reflects the whole ocean” (Mullerson 516). This treaty was essential in

de-escalating the paralyzing threat of an international exchange of nuclear missiles between the powers. It allowed for the creation of alternatives to defensive capabilities while not sacrificing the defence of either nation. "The ABM Treaty was part and parcel of the concept and practice of strategic nuclear deterrence, in the form of either mutually assured destruction or counterforce strategy" (Mullerson 513). Mutual assured destruction is a form of deterrence from nuclear attack which relies of the basis that if you have the necessary military capabilities then you can deter other states from launching attacks against you because you are able to deliver a devastating retaliatory blow before suffering damage. This was a novel approach to security as it relied on a state's capability to inflict critical harm or destroy its opponent to keep the international peace. The Treaty sought to downgrade the threat of an international volley of missiles by limiting both the number and types of ballistic missiles each nation could have. "The ABM Treaty specifically ruled out the testing, development and deployment of strategic missile defense systems or components that were air-, sea-, space-, and mobile land-based" (Boese and Kerr 21**).** Each nation would be able to possess 100 interceptor ballistic missiles of only short- and medium-range capabilities for a limited capacity of missile defence.

In 1983, US president Ronald Reagan announced his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) or as it commonly became known, his "Star Wars" plan. Though never implemented, SDI would have used a combination of ground- and space-based missiles to provide an excellent security net for the United States. President Reagan "was attempting to find a replacement for the mutually assured destruction (MAD) policy that had dominated the East/West relations throughout much of the Cold War" (Fox & Orman 3). He saw ballistic missile defence "as an addition to deterrence, by making it less attractive to attempt to attack the US, and in the fullness of time making the defence so effective that an attack would be ineffective" (Fox & Orman 4).

Ballistic missile defence has yet to be fully implemented as it has been designed; it is still very much a work in progress as new technologies develop and strategies change. There has been much debate throughout the end of the Cold War and even now. The United States has taken steps to pave the way for greater implementation of this style of defense, most notably withdrawing from the ABM Treaty in 2002.

The Case for BMD

The case for moving away from systems of deterrence to defensive ballistic missile systems relies on a lot of circumstantial arguments and uncertain scenarios. The most prominent arguments for the creation of a ballistic missile defence system are that the bipolar Cold War concepts of the balance of power no longer exist having been replaced by a balance with multiple centers of power, and that the proliferation of weapons both nuclear and conventional has created a new level of threat that states did not face during the Cold War era.

During the Cold War era, the international community was divided for the most part into a bipolar balance of power (Note: For the purposes of this paper, the states associated with the Non-Aligned Movement are not of particular consideration as they did not play a major role in the proliferation of nuclear weapons or international security/balance of power). Mutual assured destruction was suitable for the Cold War era where strategic focuses centered around only one main adversary. Since then, "the world has ceased to be bipolar with the two superpowers promoting hostile ideologies and vying for world supremacy. This is the most radical change that directly affects the raison d'etre of the ABM Treaty" (Mullerson 517). The development of strategic defences, like BMD, is less of a threat to international security in light of the growing number of threats. Remaining limited by the ABM Treaty does not allow the United States the ability of defending itself from its growing number of adversaries who do not play significant roles in the traditional balances of power. "Throughout the Cold War, the policy of MAD was designed to deter the Soviets and China. With the development of missile defence, successive U.S. administrations have made it clear that initial BMD deployments are to provide protection against nations with fewer, less sophisticated missile systems" (Fox & Orman 8). There are more threats in the world today than there were during the Cold War thus there is a greater need for a more flexible and diverse security strategy such as a system of ballistic missile defence.

The reality of weapons proliferation as it currently exists provides another reason for the implementation of a defensive system like BMD. A 2003 report by the Liu Institute for Global Issues states that "a key premise of strategic BMD advocates is that the spread of nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver them over intercontinental distances is inevitable. Furthermore, they add, the use of these weapons by particular states is not preventable

through deterrence. Defence is therefore the only option" (Regehr 22). Recent developments in technology and its accessibility means that more people have weapons and delivery systems that pose credible threats to a state and its allies. These threats have traditionally been resistant to diplomacy and ignore the facets of deterrence by using unconventional or asymmetric forms of warfare. It is no longer enough to rely on deterrence when the new class of adversaries does not follow traditional means of warfare. "Deterrence alone, without feasible parallel measures of defense, against multiple threats… is a high-probability high consequence risk that is hardly rational to live with" (Mullerson 534).

Another possible outcome of the development of a ballistic missile defence is that it would lead to greater international cooperation in terms of the development of an international security network. Japan has made moves to work with the United States on implementing a BMD system but the majority of the discussion has revolved around the US cooperating with some of its European allies. "If the United States and Europe can eventually agree on a ballistic missile defence, assuming they prove technologically feasible and cost effective – a deployment could provide important insurance against a growing threat while strengthening deterrence by making the willingness to use force more credible" (Gordon 18).

The Case Against BMD

To create a ballistic missile defence system today would require a state to increase its military capabilities by adding more missiles with greater capabilities as well as delivery systems in order to mobilize the missiles to intercept incoming threats. Increasing the number of weapons available for use in the world is not a sound strategy for promoting peace and security. There has never been a weapon that man has not used on itself, so to think that a BMD system would have a deterrent quality to it is naïve. "Shields may be protective, but linked to swords they are part of an offensive and provocative system. And the US ballistic missile shield that Canada is now considering making its own, is being aggressively linked to an every-sharpening nuclear sword" (Regehr 27).

Non-proliferation is the only real means to promoting international peace and security. This, however, is paradoxical when ballistic missile defence is added to the equation. It is ironic but, "for BMD to have any chance at success, non-proliferation must be highly successful. BMD is not something you can turn to if non-proliferation fails; BMD depends on the success of non-proliferation. Yet, at the same time, the very pursuit of BMD undermines non-proliferation efforts, thus helping to create the conditions under which BMD cannot be successful – it is the classic lose-lose scenario" (Regehr 22). Ballistic missile defence not provide peace and security, it breaks these things down. Prominent academic and critic of US hegemony, Noam Chomsky, points out that "BMD is widely recognized to be a 'Trojan horse for the real issue: the coming weaponizaton of space,' with highly destructive offensive weapons placed in or guided from space. BMD itself is an offensive weapon. That is understood by close allies, and also by potential adversaries" (Chomsky 226). The decline in peace and security precipitates further problems in the international community in the form of instability in the balance of power. "Greater global and regional instability would basically encourage arms races, including the use of technologies that are still only hypothetical" (Ivanov 18).

A further reason that ballistic missile defence is not strategically wise is the fact that these weapon systems are ineffective. For the amount of money and infrastructure that would be necessary to implement such a system, their value and effectiveness are more than questionable. For example, "when the system that is now being assembled is fully operational and working as intended, it will still be aimed at only about 1 percent of the nuclear-tipped missiles that are capable of reaching North American shores. Protection from the other 99 percent of nuclear-armed missiles capable of hitting North America will still depend entirely on prevention" (Regehr 12-13). With statistics like this, it is surprising that BMD systems are even being considered in international security. To be able to defend oneself against only 1% of the total threat is not strategic, it is only providing false security. This is further proof of the offensive nature of ballistic missile defence. "Even when it matures, strategic missile defense is not intended, nor will it ever have the capacity, to protect Americans, or Canadians, from the primary arsenals of missiles capable of striking North America" (Regehr 12).

Adding to the case against BMD as an effective system of defence is that the current threat climate has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Missiles are no longer the primary threat to the nation-state. Dirty bombs,

suitcase nukes and biological weapons and other cutting edge weapons have replaced intercontinental ballistic missiles as the most credible threat states face. “It may not be fair to blame BMD for not responding to such non-missile threats, but it is surely fair to question the relative priority given to the narrow, limited, and unlikely, strategic missile threat when other kinds of threats loom much larger and pose a much more credible danger” (Regehr 13). Ballistic missile defence reflects a threat from a different era of technology and threat level. The current “threat of ballistic missiles is limited and changing slowly. The only proven defence against this threat is diplomacy, deterrence, and measured military preparedness” (Cirincione 69).

Lastly, ballistic missile defence is not a credible response to the current security dilemma because of the destabilizing effect it would have on international order. Introducing a system of strategic defence changes the security dilemma between states. The effective peace that has existed between powers since the end of the Second World War, would be threatened if the system of mutually assured destruction were to collapse from the neutralization of the retaliatory threat. The world would see the return of a credible first strike scenario that would increase the likelihood of a pre-emptive attack in order to prevent another state from acquiring this ability. Arms races would follow and the international community would be plunged back into a climate of fear and anxiety over the return to heavy national militarization. This projection is based on the reality that “Russia’s acquiescence on the cancelled ABM Treaty and on BMD itself is still based entirely on the assumption that missile defence as it is currently being readied for deployment offers no challenge to Russia’s offensive capacity, that is, its ability to mount a credible deterrent. Russia’s apparently sanguine approach to US BMD is built on its unambiguous commitment to ensuring that its offensive capacity will always be able to overwhelm any defence effort that the US tries to develop” (Regehr 23). If the implementation of the United States or NATO’s ballistic missile defence were to change this, it would be the basis of the renewed arms race and Cold War tensions that have been dormant for almost two decades. For either of the two military superpowers to acquire a first strike ability through the possession of a defensive capability would remove the deterrence element from the balance. With little or no threat of sustaining critical damage, nuclear powers are more likely use these weapons systems.

Russia also contests what is the actual reason for the US efforts towards BMD. “Russian officials have argued that North Korean or Iranian missiles would not likely enter European airspace, and that the real reason for BMD is to emplace US radar in Eastern Europe to monitor Russian missile sites and naval operation” (Hildreth and Ek15). It is clear that the introduction of a ballistic missile defence would have a negative effect on the relatively peaceful balance of power and as such should be avoided.

Thus, the case against the introduction of a ballistic missile defence system is strongly supported by the fact that it would escalate arms proliferation, act ineffectively in defending its employer and destabilize the international order. It is crucial that proponents of BMD recognize that “the importance of strategic stability for international security is so great that it must not be made subject to politics, domestic considerations, or unilateral foreign policy. This is the only way to ensure stability, prosperity, and a democratic world order in the twenty-first century” (Ivanov 20).

Current Realities

The case for the implementation of a ballistic missile defence system is based on the changing nature of security threats, the proliferation of states possessing nuclear weapons and, the potential for creating greater cooperation in international security through multilateral control mechanisms and mutual defence initiatives. These concepts are frequently used by proponents of ballistic missile defence in order to find legitimacy and acceptance for their desired escalation of strategic weaponization. The problem, though, is that these supporting arguments are relatively subjective and far from certain. The implementation of such an invasive and expensive system would be reckless and inflammatory to international peace and security and therefore should be avoided.

The case against the implementation of a ballistic missile defence is far more concrete and less abstract. It arguments are based on actual precedence and stated intent rather than the hypothetical arguments of its counterpart. Introducing a functional ballistic missile defence system into the currently realities of the international system would have a negative effect on peace and security because it would escalate arms proliferation, be ineffective in defending its nation from attack and destabilize the international community.

The end of Cold War tensions did not bring an end to the desire to implement ballistic missile defence systems. It has remained a constant topic in US military strategy and has become a topic of great discussion following the United States' withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 under the direction of President George W. Bush. However, the context in which ballistic missile defence would be deployed has been changed in much of the discussion. In the current political climate, "policymakers have recommended that the establishment of any anti-missile systems in Europe should proceed solely under NATO auspices rather than on a bilateral basis with just two NATO partners" (Hildreth and Ek 13). With this in mind, in November 2002 "at the Prague Summit, Allied leaders [directed] that a Missile Defense Feasibility Study be launched to examine options for protecting Alliance forces, territory and populations against the full range of missile threats" ("Missile Defense: How did it evolve?"). Since then, NATO has held a number of exercises utilizing theatre missile defence (TMD), most recently in Germany this past January. These tests have been productive and now "the aim of the NATO programme for an Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense Capability to protect NATO forces is to have an initial operational capability by 2010" (NATO, What does this mean in practice?). This system would include ten silo-based interceptors to be deployed in Poland, a fixed radar installation in the Czech Republic, and another transportable radar to be deployed in a country close to the Middle East (Hildreth and Ek 1). Behind this NATO expansion to include ballistic missile defense into its arsenal is the influence and security interests of the United States.

The United States of America is possibly one of the most, if not the most, abrasive countries in the entire world. It's intrusive global presence and monopoly on hegemonic power has left many other states with a bitter taste in their mouths. This dislike can stem from a number of reasons but the two most commonly found are because of American foreign policy and the global presence of the US. Officials in the US have long recognized that there exists much opposition to its activities worldwide and seen the need to find ways to protect its interests, both home and abroad. In the post-9/11 reality, the US Administration has adopted the belief that "the deployment of a nationwide missile defence system – even one using unproven technologies – would force potential adversaries to reassess the risks that they would face by confronting the USA, thereby enhancing US freedom of action when responding to regional crises" ("A Survey of US ballistic missile defense programmes" 402). The United States has embraced this freedom provided by the presence of ballistic missile defence and pursued it with vigor. This commitment has been a costly one for the United States; "in 2007, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimated that the USA had spent $107 billion on missile defense since the mid-1980s" ("A Survey of US ballistic missile defense programmes" 406). Most recently, the US budget request for BMD was $8.9 billion for 2008. In comparison, the US expenditures on Official Development Assistance for 2007 only totaled $21.8 billion ("Development Cooperation Directorate"). This shows the great level of importance that the United States is placing on BMD when its expenditures on this single security system are roughly equivalent to 41% of its entire foreign aid budget. Furthermore, 'what makes this spending most remarkable is that the threat it seeks to counter is actually declining. There are far fewer missiles, missile programs, and hostile states with missiles aimed at the United States and its armed forces than there were 20 years ago" (Cirincione 68). It is clear that the United States favours weapons proliferation rather than development in building a more peaceful and secure world.

The basis of the US model of BMD is the Ground-based Midcourse Defence system (GMD) that employs a network of radar systems to identify and track threats incoming threats and interceptor missiles to destroy those threats. This system has proven to be effective after a September 2007 test where a mock threat was successfully intercepted by one of the United States' ground-based interceptor missiles. There are further plans to increase American intercept capabilities including more radar technology and the exploration of different delivery modes, the most prominent of these being the sea-based Aegis program where US warships would be equipped with and able deploy interceptor missiles towards a threat.

International reactions to the US-led ballistic missile defence initiatives have been mixed, even amongst US allies. Israel and Japan have both come out in favour of BMD, most likely supporting US programs due to their close proximity to alleged rogue states, Iran and North Korea. "The Bush Administration continues [regarded] both countries (Iran and North Korea) as unpredictable and dangerous, and did not believe they can be constrained by traditional forms of military deterrence, diplomacy, or arms control" (Hildreth and Ek 2). As declared targets or enemies of these rogue states, Israel and Japan's security benefits greatly from the strategic implications of US missile defence programs.

Other traditional allies have not been so forthcoming in their support for US-led BMD. Both Canada and the United Kingdom have struggled with the idea of joining US missile defence, moving back and forth between support and rejection. Canadian foreign and security policy expert Andrew Richter contends that "this hesitation can be largely explained by the similar political dynamic in both countries, where center-left governments are under constant pressure from within their own ranks to avoid being drawn too closely into the US defence orbit" (Richter 159). Canada has, however, been tacitly supporting BMD. Richard Sanders argues that "although Canada has not joined the 'Coalition of the Willing to Admit Involvement in BMD,' it has long been complicit in creating, designing, researching, developing, testing, maintaining, and operating numerous crucial BMD system" (Sanders 23). It has done so through its commitment to NORAD, which is an integral component to US BMD command and control, and through the Canadian Space Agency and its development of RADARSAT-2 tracking system, which the US will be utilizing in its network of radar systems.

Naturally, there have been fierce opponents of the US-led ballistic missile defence efforts and not surprisingly they are also the ones that BMD was originally intended to defend the US from. Russia and China, who are likely the only real superpowers, other than the US, in the world, are fervent opponents to BMD. As stated earlier, Russia believes that any BMD system on the European continent is a threat to its security and "the capability of a national antimissile defense system to undermine Russia's nuclear deterrence is not alleviated by contentions that this system will be of a 'thin' or 'limited nature'" (Ivanov 16-17). China's opposition to BMD stems from the introduction of BMD to Japan, a historical adversary of China and the influence that this system would have on any future issues with the contestation of Taiwan. The opposition of these two world giants is particularly concerning consider the possible responses that could ensue. "Expressing its concerns in concert with Russia, China has angrily denounced the US program, and issued threats that if the system was deployed, it would – like Russia – rapidly expand its limited nuclear arsenal" (Richter 145). Thus, there is proof, in the stated intentions of Russia and China, that the implementation of ballistic missile defence systems would restart the arms race of the Cold War era.

The current realities of ballistic missile defence indicate just how powerful a concept it is in international relations. It has mobilized an alliance, divided long-time allies and sparked the furor of dormant giants. As such, it is clear that BMD is nothing to be toyed with and must be undertaken with the greatest of care.

Conclusion

In conclusion, peace and security is not achieved by a gun barrel but with the olive branch. Implementing ballistic missile defences are counter-productive to attaining peace and security because their presence promotes the escalation of arms proliferation, is ineffective in acting as a defensive measure and its destabilizing effect on the international community. It is for these reasons that ballistic missile defences are a threat to the pursuit of international peace and security. Unfortunately, current realities show that ballistic missile defence is something that is not likely to go away any time soon, especially considering the attention and effort it is receiving from the United States. Ironically, the United States' efforts to defend itself using BMD may in fact be creating a greater threat than existed before. "The sooner the United States returns to a balance of realistic threat assessment, smart budgeting, and vigorous diplomacy, the sooner it will truly be prepared for the genuine threats of the 21st century" (Cirincione 70).

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