

The Evolution of Missile Defense Plan from Bush to Obama. Implications for the National Security of Romania

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Abstract: *In 2011 Romania officially became part of the Obama administration's missile defense system in Europe which has significantly changed the strategic military relations both in Europe and worldwide. The Bush approach has been revised and progress in several sections has been achieved, both strategically and technically. For Romania, the participation in the missile defence plan, ensures more solid security guarantees, especially in an unpredictable and risk-prone international environment where the U.S. reconsiders its presence in Europe under the pressure of the economic crisis and of a relative decline in power; it has also become a more visible actor – alongside Bulgaria – which were initially excluded by the Bush missile defence plan. This paper's purpose is to review the main evolutions of the missile defense plan from the Bush to the Obama administration and to outline its implications on the national security of Romania.*

Key Words: *missile defense system, Obama plan, Third Site, national security, strategic partnership, NATO.*

1. INTRODUCTION

An extensive literature has identified the dawn of the U.S. missile defense system emerging from the famous so-called „Star Wars” speech of President Reagan in March 1983 which proposed a strategic shield that would render nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete, engaging the U.S. in „a technological endgame” aiming at terminating the confrontation between the two Superpowers[1]; however, missile defense emerged much earlier, during the World War II when the U.S. staff planners recognized the need for a defense system to counter the German V-2, the world's first ballistic missile fired against Great Britain on September 8, 1944[2].

What is important about Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) is that although it did not result in the immediate deployment of a ballistic missile defense system, it has generated a renewed interest in antimissile programs and created the premises of future attempts to terminate the ABM treaty and re-establish the U.S. as a sole superpower, decisions which have impacted the European security.

This paper is structured in three sections as following: the first section reviews several aspects of the Bush ground-based midcourse defense and outlines the impact of U.S. decisions to withdraw from the 1972 ABM Treaty - widely considered a cornerstone of strategic stability – and to begin formal negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic to deploy missile defense elements on their national territories; the second section is concerned

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with the emergence of Obama's Phased Adaptive Approach and its main improvements, as well as their influence on the European countries; while section three focuses on the implications of the current missile defense system for the national security of Romania.

2. THE BUSH MISSILE DEFENCE PLAN

The Bush doctrine of 2002 and 2005 emphasizes the threat posed by offensive capabilities such as ballistic missiles [3] and developed a research, development, and test program that focused on missile defense as a single integrated BMD system.

The objective of this program was to evaluate and develop technologies for the integration of land, sea, air or space-based platforms and to develop and deploy a *global* and *layered* system (known as „*Ground-based Midcourse Defense*”) which was capable of intercepting missiles *of any range* [4] *at every stage of flight*: boost, mid-course and terminal [5].

Most officials argued the layered defenses are advantageous from at least two distinct perspectives: firstly, the system provided more opportunities to target the attacking missile and increased the chances of shooting it down; and secondly, the layers were highly likely to confuse the attacker since countermeasures – which might have been effective in overcoming defenses in one phase of a missile's flight – could fail in other phases.

On December 17, 2002 when President George W. Bush issued a statement announcing his decision to base missile defense units at Fort Greely in Alaska and at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California in order to protect the U.S. territory from the ballistic missiles from the ‘Axis of Evil’ – Iran, Iraq and North Korea [6] –, the administration had already begun unofficial talks with Poland and the Czech Republic on deploying missile defenses on a „Third Site” [7].

On December 27, 2006 the new secretary of defense Robert Gates recommended that the U.S. should place 10 ground-based interceptors in Poland and advanced radar in the Czech Republic[8]; deployment of the missile defense sites in Eastern Europe was scheduled to begin in 2011 and to be completed by 2013 at a total cost of \$4.04 billion [9].

To a great extent, the European countries had opposed U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the 1972 Antibalistic Missile (ABM) Treaty [10] and criticized Bush's initial plans for a missile defense system which were considered potentially destabilizing, since Russia had been long opposing an US deployment of a national ballistic missile defense (BMD) [11].

Moreover, by initiating talks with Poland and the Czech Republic, the U.S. ignored the Joint Declaration signed by Presidents Bush and Putin on May 24, 2002 which called for joint R&D on missile defense technologies and cooperation on missile defense for Europe [12]. The formal negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic did not begin until May 2007.

The unilateral approach of President Bush increased tensions between the U.S. and Russia, jeopardizing future cooperation [13].

Also, several European leaders were dissatisfied with U.S. decision to have formal discussions with Poland and the Czech Republic: on the one hand, South-eastern countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Turkey would have remained unprotected, despite of being closer located to Iran; and on the other hand, the Allies were concerned about NATO and the EU being sidelined up to that point where it was argued that the Bush plan threatened to divide Europe and raised questions on the effectiveness of the principle of indivisible security since the development of a missile defense system was not occurring under the

auspices of NATO, but on a bilateral basis between only three NATO members: the U.S., Poland and the Czech Republic [14].

3. THE OBAMA MISSILE DEFENSE PLAN

On September 17, 2009 President Obama announced a new plan for Europe, a „Phased-Adaptive Approach” for a missile defense in Europe relying on deploying „*proven capabilities and technologies to meet current threats*” [15], especially navy Aegis ships with SM-3 interceptors (Standard Missile), and land-based army THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) and Patriot batteries.

Unlike the Bush Administration which focused on ICBMs which Iran did not possess, Obama’s plan was more oriented towards the actual offensive capabilities of Iran and North Korea: short and medium-range missiles that can reach southern Europe; in addition, the Obama plan would distribute defenses under NATO, in step-by-step phases covering all Europe, thus favoring full cooperation within the Alliance.

This new plan developing a more flexible and capable defense architecture was programmed for a timeframe of ten years, in four stages, as following [16]:

1. Phase One (in the 2011 timeframe): the deployment of current and proven missile defense systems available in the next two years, including the sea-based Aegis Weapon System, the Standard Missile-3 (SM-3- see picture 1) interceptor (Block IA) and sensors such as the forward-based Army Navy/ Transportable Radar Surveillance System (AN/ TPY-2) to address regional ballistic missile threats to Europe and the U.S. deployed personnel;

2. Phase Two (in the 2015 timeframe), after appropriate testing, the deployment of an upgraded version of SM-3 interceptor (Block IB) in both sea- and land- configurations, and more advanced sensors in order to expand the defended area against short- and medium-range missile threats;

3. Phase Three (in the 2018 timeframe), after completing the development and testing, the deployment of a more advanced SM-3 Block IIA variant to address short-, medium- and intermediate-range missile threats; and

4. Phase Four (in the 2020 timeframe), after development and testing are complete, the deployment of the SM-3 Block IIB (see picture 2) to improve the defense against medium- and intermediate- range missiles and the potential future ICBM threats to the U.S.

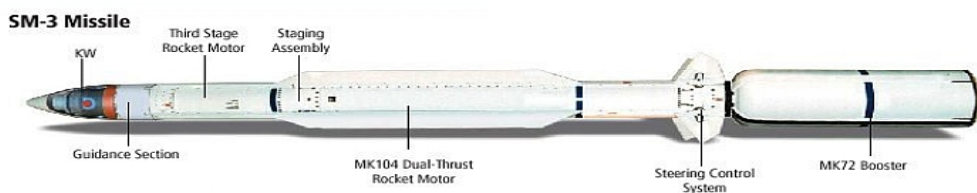


Fig. 1 SM-3

Source: Directory of U.S. Military Rockets and Missiles, <http://www.designation-systems.net/dusrm/m-161.html>

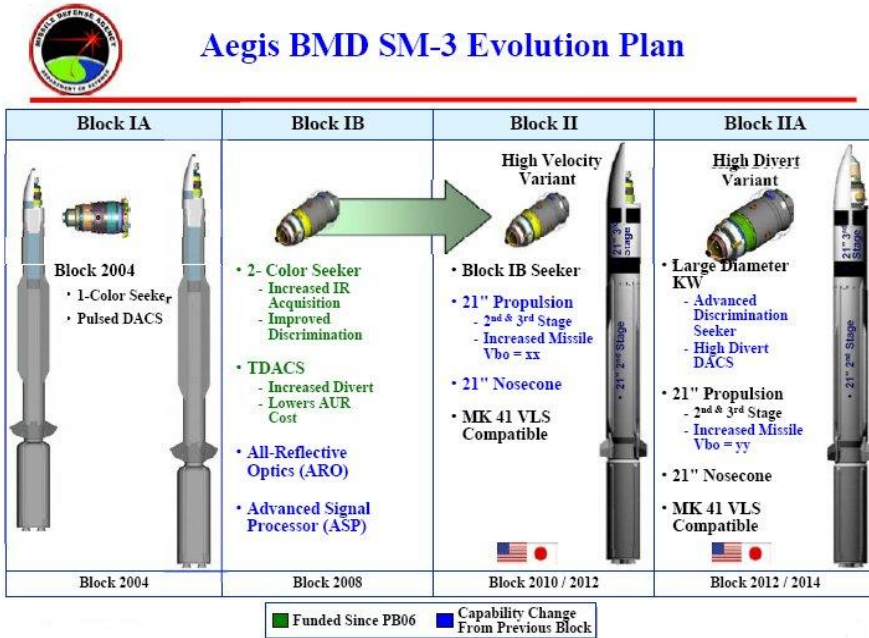


Fig. 2 Ballistic Missile Defense SM-3 Evolution Plan

Source: Directory of U.S. Military Rockets and Missiles, <http://www.designation-systems.net/dusrm/m-161.html>

In addition to these tactical aspects, the technical details of the anti-missile shield in Europe indicate a change from the previous administration. The U.S. nuclear arsenal is declining, but at a slower pace than one might think, considering the president’s declared commitment to disarmament [17]. In the April 2009 Prague speech, President Obama made a pledge to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in the U.S. national security strategy „to end the Cold War thinking” while the Defense Secretary Gates announced dramatic missile defense budget cuts and thus, cancelled several projects such as the KEI (Kinetic Energy Interceptor), MKV (Multiple Kill Vehicle) and the ABL (Airborne Laser Interceptor).

Nonetheless, shortly after, the Obama administration added other missile defense projects, notably the new Land-Based SM-3 interceptors and Airborne Infrared, which led to even higher costs compared to the Bush administration [18]; also, the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review reaffirmed the importance of nuclear weapons for the U.S. national security strategy. It soon became clear that the U.S. intends to remain a nuclear weapon state for the foreseeable future, which also impacts European Allies.

4. THE IMPACT ON ROMANIA’S NATIONAL SECURITY. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the 2010 National Defense Strategy of Romania, the transatlantic dimension of the national security is approached from two accompanying positions ensuring the highest security guarantees Romania was ever granted: on the one hand, as a strategic partner with the US and on the other hand, as a member of NATO, part of the European group of Allies [19]. On September 13, 2011 the Agreement on the Deployment of the Ballistic Missile Defense System in Romania was signed, which called for the establishment and operation of a U.S. land-based SM-3 BMD system („Aegis Ashore System”) at Deveselu Air Base near

Caracal in the 2015 timeframe as part of the second phase of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) [20]. Ever since, Romania's increased level of security as part of a continental missile defense system was repeatedly emphasized both by scholars and public opinion. As previously indicated, the Obama missile defense plan is more advantageous than the previous one from several perspectives. On the one hand, the flexible and proportionate response avoids the deterrent states from becoming a threat for other states, thus diminishing the consequences of the security dilemma. On the other hand, the underlying reasons of these changes are not related only to the goal of providing full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces against the threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles, but also to the urge of balancing the sharing of the costs of this system with the European Allies and of avoiding a U.S. official and continuous engagement in the European defense [21]. Consequently, the participation of Romania in this missile defense plan multiplies the national security guarantees, especially in the context when the U.S. rethinks its presence in Europe under the constraints of the economic crisis and its relative decline in power. What is more, Romania and Bulgaria (also expressing its openness to host U.S. missile defense elements to prove its solidarity as a member of NATO), which were not part of the Bush plan, have gained a more prominent role; as a result, the concerns of Bucharest regarding the loss of strategic relevance for Washington were infirmed, since the Black Sea Area seems to become increasingly important.

Often, more skeptical views - arguing that Romania might actually become a target of attacks because of hosting missile defense elements and thus, being provocative to Russia [22] or to „rogue states” – have been heard. Yet, the 2010 U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR) established that both homeland and regional missile defense systems will be delivered in phases and will focus on enhanced capabilities against medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles using multiple intercept opportunities by different types of interceptors; also, all future missile defenses will be adaptable (*mobile or transportable* – thus providing more *immediate* coverage, able to rapidly expand deployed interceptor inventories and readily upgradable) and consequently, will be able to intercept ballistic missiles early in their flight [23].

To conclude, the Obama administration missile defense plan of which Romania is part appears to be more adaptable, survivable and responsive to future threats than the previous one, but also most costly, which has been justified by the officials by the urge of a new defense system „at least as cost-effective, technically reliable, and operationally available in protecting Europe and the U.S. from long-range missile threats as the ground-based mid-course defense system” [24].

Although at present the U.S. nuclear arsenal is declining, the process is slow-paced given the initial commitment to ambitious goals of disarmament, while in its first two years in office, the Obama administration increased funding for nuclear weapons and initiated an encompassing modernization process in the field. This indicates that missile defense will remain an important component of the national security strategy for the Euro-Atlantic community for the foreseeable future.

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- [5] The boost phase of a missile's flight occurs immediately after launch with a duration of 3-5 minutes for long-range missiles and 1-2 minutes for short-range missiles. The missile is easiest to detect and track in the boost phase because its exhaust is bright and hot and early detection allows for a rapid response; yet, missile defense interceptors and sensors must be in close proximity to the missile launch. The midcourse phase occurs after the boost, outside the atmosphere and it can last up to 20 minutes for long-range missiles, allowing several opportunities to destroy the incoming ballistic missile. The terminal portion occurs when a missile or warhead re-enters the atmosphere and it lasts under a minute for short-range missiles and 1-2 minutes for longer-range missiles. Intercepting a warhead during this phase is difficult and the least desirable as there is little margin for error and the intercept occurs close to the intended target – *** Missile Defense Agency, *Fact Sheet. The Ballistic Missile Defense System*, April 2012. Available at: http://www.mda.mil/news/fact_sheets.html.
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- [9] *Idem*.
- [10] The ABM Treaty limited the U.S. and Soviet Union to two missile defense sites, each one having no more than one hundred interceptors; in 1974, the treaty was modified by a protocol that reduced the number of sites the signatory parts could deploy to only one. Dismissing a revision of the provisions of the treaty, President Bush stated the U.S. would have to „*move beyond the constraints*” as „*a new framework that allows us to build missile defenses to counter the different threats of today's world*” was needed. See George W. Bush, *Remarks on Missile Defense*, National Defense University, May 1, 2001.
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- [13] In September 1996 Presidents William Clinton and Boris Yeltsin initiated discussions for joint missile defense exercises; since then, they have developed several joint simulations on communication systems. On March 2004 they held their first jointly developed exercise for testing procedures in order to defend their forces from short- and medium-range ballistic missiles – R. D. Burns, *cited work*, p.80.
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