



U.S. Releases Its 2022 “Missile Defense Review”

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The U.S. “Missile Defense Review” (MDR) indicates that its priorities are defence of its own territory against direct attacks from North Korea and Iran, and protection of overseas bases and allies, mainly from China and Russia. The Biden administration confirms the plan for finishing the European element of the “missile shield”, but also suggests the need for increased military efforts by allies from NATO. The intense use of missiles and drones by Russia against Ukraine and increased risks of intentional or accidental strike on the territory of NATO confirms the necessity of strengthened integrated air and missile defence of the Eastern Flank of the Alliance.

The MDR was prepared by the Pentagon and published at the end of October, together with the “[National Defense Strategy](#)” (NDS) and “Nuclear Posture Review” (NPR). Previous editions of the MDR were prepared by the administrations of Barrack Obama in 2010 and Donald Trump in 2019. The newest document prepared by the Biden administration is shorter, and its text is more general. It was prepared with other documents based on the conclusions of the “[National Security Strategy](#)” (NSS), which shows its cohesion with the new NDS and NPR.

Priority of U.S. Territorial Defence. The newest MDR assumes continued investment into the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system with GBI interceptors to defend against limited attack from inter-continental ballistic missiles. Similar to previous editions, [the MDR assumes the GMD will be effective in case of an attack by North Korea](#) (with a small but intercontinental arsenal of missiles) or Iran (which might develop a missile arsenal from its space programme). Currently, the architecture of the GMD is based on a network of satellites and radars, and 44 GBI interceptors. After 2023, these should be augmented by 20 Next Generation Interceptors, with full re-armament of 64 missiles of this type. The review stresses that such capabilities of the GMD are no threat to the Russian and Chinese strategic missile arsenals. These arguments have been rejected by Russia and China for more than two decades. Both powers claim that the GMD system at some point in the future may be expanded, and that it could

provoke a strategic arms race by undermining the rule of mutual deterrence.

The MDR in general terms foresees further studies on building U.S. territory cruise missile defence. However, the document does not specify the purposefulness or shape of such a new defence. Its four possible options, according to preliminary estimates by the Congressional Budget Office, could require two decades of investments ranging from \$75 billion to as much as \$465 billion. Such a system would cope not only with cruise missiles but also enable countering other means of air attack, such as drones. The document is clear about the continuation of plans for strengthened missile defence of Guam Island, which is not covered by the GMD. The island is a key base for U.S. naval and air force units in the Indo-Pacific area, and it is already within range of the intermediate-range ballistic missiles of China and North Korea. It can be expected that the architecture of the U.S. defence will take into account also the cruise missile and hypersonic weapons threats from both countries. Currently, Guam is defended by a THAAD system, but within a few years it may be possible to expand that defence with additional layers, based on Aegis Ashore, SM-6, PAC-3, and Iron Dome systems. Moreover, the MDR does not mention the plans initiated by the Trump administration for testing and deploying kinetic missile defence systems in space by 2030.

Defence of U.S. Overseas Bases and Allies. The MDR reiterates the assumption of the NSS and NDS about the vital

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importance of the Indo-Pacific area for American interests, followed by Europe. In both regions, the U.S. is trying to build an Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) system. Apart from the defence of Guam, the review highlights the need to develop U.S. missile defence cooperation with Japan, Australia, and South Korea. The reason for these countries is [China's vast arsenal of medium- and intermediate-range missiles](#), which are a threat to U.S. Asian bases and Taiwan. U.S. close cooperation with Japan and South Korea is also motivated by North Korea's smaller arsenal of short- and medium range missiles. Moreover, the MDR declares a strengthening of U.S. capabilities to protect bases and allies from threats of airplane attack and different types of drones. It assumes further [research by the Pentagon into hypersonic defence](#). Currently, [China and Russia have hypersonic weapon systems](#), and research and development of them is carried out by North Korea. In this context, the MDR suggests the priority for the development of U.S. hypersonic defences at the regional level, stressing the need to cooperate with allies in this regard.

The review confirms the importance of building missile defence capabilities within the framework of NATO. It is currently based on the systems protecting U.S. bases and allies in Europe against missile threats from Russia and the Middle East. The MDR emphasises the integration of various systems in order to defend against Russian short- and medium-range missiles, although it also notes Russia's shrinking offensive potential due to the war with Ukraine. The document also points to the need to strengthen the capabilities of U.S. NATO allies to combat cheap, armed drones of potential state or non-state aggressors.

The MDR refers to the future of European defence against Iranian missiles. It stresses the essential [U.S. contribution to the NATO-EPAA system](#), currently based on radars in Turkey, an operational Romanian base for SM-3IA interceptors (Aegis Ashore system), and U.S. ships with the Aegis-BMD system in Spain (the number of vessels with it will increase from four to six). The review declares full construction of a base in Polish Redzikowo for the Aegis Ashore system with SM-3IIA interceptors. Its previous edition declared that this installation would be commissioned in 2020, but the new document does not specify a date.

Implications for NATO Plans. The Biden administration's MDR does not contain an element that will surprise the European allies. However, it is a much shorter and more general document than its two previous editions. It announces the continuation of the main U.S. missile defence projects, but gives the administration flexibility for more costly projects like space kinetic and hypersonic defence. As in previous editions, the MDR emphasises the role of cooperation and projects within NATO for the defence of Europe. It is worth stressing here that in the last decade, the approach by the majority of European states to missile

defence issues has changed significantly. They are no longer a controversial topic in transatlantic relations, like it was during the presidency of George W. Bush. This creates the opportunity to accelerate the development of common systems in NATO.

Russian threats against NATO members increase the risk of a deliberate or accidental missile strike on Alliance territory. The war between Russia and Ukraine has already brought two serious incidents—a heavy drone crashed in Croatia in March, and the recent explosion of a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile in Poland. Both threats and incidents confirm the need for multi-layered defence of NATO, however, the capabilities of European states at the disposal of the IAMD are still inadequate to counter the full spectrum of threats from Russia. Although the [Allies deployed PAC-3 systems to Poland and Slovakia at the beginning of war](#), there is no similar capability in the Baltic states. And with the enlargement of NATO with Finland and Sweden, there will be the necessity to develop additional Alliance missile defence capabilities and integration of air defence assets in this region. The limited number of American THAAD and PAC systems with growing missile threats in Asia may therefore require much greater efforts from Europeans, as Biden's strategic documents suggests. At the moment, it is difficult to judge the future of the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI), which is based on three layers and the Israeli Arrow-3, the American PAC-3, and the German IRIS-T systems. The advantage of ESSI is the possibility of connecting it with the NATO IAMD and reducing the costs of interceptors if the majority of the 15 signatories decide to do so. On the other hand, unknown are the timelines and scale of production capacities of IRIS-T in large numbers, as well the questionable U.S. approval for the transfer of Arrow-3 technology from Israel to Europe—a system financed and developed with American participation. Russia's failings in the war with Ukraine may also induce some European decision-makers to underestimate the risk of the rapid reconstruction of the Russian missile arsenal and to thus prefer to reduce the funds for ESSI in the future. Regardless of the fate of this initiative, it is necessary to study the possibilities of a reconstituted Russian missile arsenal, [especially in the context of its nuclear doctrine](#).

Another Pentagon delay in the deployment of SM-3IIA interceptor missiles to Redzikowo should not be ruled out completely, especially when used as a bargaining chip in the future U.S.-Russian strategic arms and stability dialogue. Contrary to the cancellation of plans for GBI interceptors in Poland in 2009, this time a similar decision by the U.S. would be without major impact on Polish security and bilateral relations. However, the [lack of compromise between the U.S. and Iran on its nuclear programme](#) seems to reinforce the need to complete the whole NATO-EPAA project.