



NATO Missile Defence in the Context of Russia's War with Ukraine

Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski

Russia is widely using its conventional missile arsenal against Ukraine. The intense use of these weapons against targets in the western part of the country raises the risk of accidental strikes on NATO territory, although the possibility of intentional strikes cannot be excluded. NATO has implemented a few steps to strengthen missile defences on its Eastern Flank, but a much better explanation of its capabilities is needed to reassure Alliance publics, as are augmented capabilities to deter Russia from regional escalation.

How is Russia using its missile arsenal against Ukraine?

According to the U.S. government, between 24 February and 18 March, Russia fired more than 1,000 ballistic, cruise, or anti-aircraft missiles against Ukraine. Since the start of war, Russia has used mainly the ground-launched and mobile Tochka-U ballistic missile (120 km range) and the Iskander-M ballistic missile (500 km). On smaller scale, Russia is also using the Kalibr sea-launched cruise missile (1,500 km range) and various air-launched missiles—according to Russia, it has also conducted two strikes with Kinzhal missiles. [Despite Russia's many losses and problems with its military in Ukraine](#), it should be assumed that it is far from running out of conventional missile stocks. They were used most intensively on the first day of the war, mainly against civilian airports and Ukrainian military air bases (160 missiles) although on a smaller scale than expected by Western analysts. During the course of the war so far, Russia has frequently used missiles against Ukraine's biggest cities. There is also visible increase in the [use of bases in Belarus](#) for Iskander strategic strikes on the Kyiv agglomeration, and Tochka strikes in the north and east of Ukraine to support tactical operations by Russian troops. It is hard to assess in this context the effectiveness of the Ukrainian missile defence systems, such as the S-300V1, against ballistic missiles, or the S-300PS/PT, against cruise missiles launched by Russia.

Is NATO territory threatened by advanced Russian missiles?

The Alliance's European territories and U.S. forces in Europe have [for a long time been in range of Russia's missile arsenal](#). Given the substantial strengthening of NATO forces on the Eastern Flank, potential targets may include countries bordering Ukraine, especially Poland, [Slovakia](#), and Romania. Russia has publicly suggested the possibility such strikes in the context of these countries' giving aid and materiel support to Ukraine. On 13 March, a Russian missile hit the Ukrainian military base at Yavoriv, just 20 km from the border with Poland, which likely was intended to add more credibility to its warnings, although it failed to cause political fractures with NATO or the EU. The greater risk for Alliance countries is the possibility of an unintended Russian missile strike or violation of air space by Russian or Ukrainian drones due to malfunction. On 10 March, there was an incident involving a 6 tonne Tu-141 long-range reconnaissance drone that overflew Romania and Hungary and crashed in the capital of Croatia. This case is still being investigated, but it highlights the kind of incidents that NATO and individual member states might face. A less serious incident happened on 14 March when a very small Russian Orlan-10 artillery reconnaissance drone crashed in Romania.

PISM SPOTLIGHT

How has NATO strengthened the missile defence of the Eastern Flank states?

Eastern Flank states have limited missile defence capabilities. They are either lacking them entirely or, like Romania and Poland, are still introducing them into service. With the [surge in deployed NATO troops for deterrence of Russia](#), the Alliance has been strengthening its missile and air defence on the Eastern Flank. On 8-9 March, NATO states with Patriot (PAC) combat-proven missile defence systems announced they would send some of their batteries to the region to protect Allied troops there. The U.S. has already deployed two PAC batteries to the eastern part of Poland, and the Netherlands together with Germany are deploying their PAC batteries in Slovakia. These steps by NATO are similar to—but on a bigger scale—the allied aid to Turkey (PAC and SAMP/T missile defence systems) during the civil war in Syria. Of no less importance for NATO from the point of view of the need for surveillance of Russian cruise missiles is the allied fleet of 14 Air-Warning and Control System (AWACS) E-3A airplanes. Each mission of three AWACS E-3A planes provides comprehensive situational awareness on the Eastern Flank and up to 400 km from NATO's borders. The monitoring by NATO of the Russian missile threat also comes from the heavy, long-range RQ-4D Air-Ground Surveillance (AGS) drones. It also can be assumed that some aspects of the missile and air defence network in the Baltic Sea region are coordinated between NATO and its partner

countries Finland and Sweden (the latter has its own PAC batteries).

What should be NATO's next steps on missile defence?

Russia's aggression has confirmed the importance of ballistic and other missile systems in its offensive doctrine, and therefore the necessity of further investments by NATO states into missile defence systems. To achieve this goal, NATO since 2014 has been building what it calls Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD), which is to have effective warning, surveillance and defence against missile threats in Europe. An important contribution to the allied missile defence is the fleet of U.S. and NATO vessels with the Aegis system. In the long term, the IAMD system must be adapted to the [threat from Russia's hypersonic missiles](#). Independent of the threats from Russia, [NATO also must finalise its whole system of missile defence against threats from the Middle East](#), the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). In case Russia continues the war or expands it, there is also a need to maintain the readiness and flexibility of NATO through available PAC, SAMP/T, THAAD, Aegis, AWACS, and ASG systems for deterrence and defence in the region. As part of the now very frequent visits of high-level U.S. and NATO officials to the Eastern Flank, there is also a need for a more visible emphasis on strengthened missile defence in Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, with the possibility to augment this further, aimed at allied public opinion, but also on deterrence of Russia.