The Geopolitical Implications of NATO’s Missile Defense on European Strategic Stability

**Introduction**

In this paper, the author explores the impacts of missile defense on strategic stability on the dimension of geopolitics, based on the assumption that stability is dynamic process of construction. According to argument that geography is an integral element of strategic stability,[[1]](#footnote-1) not only the offense-defense relations, strategic stability represents dynamic geopolitical landscape, in which there are different factors contribute to regional in/stability. Based on the redefined strategic stability, as a condition where a conscientious management of political, military and economic interactions by one or more states towards a threatening adversary within a (regional or global) system retains an existing status quo or restores stability, the author holds ‘complex stability’ approach to connect regional security with the core concept ‘stability’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

With the end of the Cold War, the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) states launched social, economic and defense transformations to return to Europe. The efforts of CEE entry into NATO are relevant of more transnational identity and universal values than their historical memories on Russian aggression. For CEE and transatlantic alliance, membership of NATO is assurance not deterrence. From the mid of 1990s to Russian annexation of Crimea, there has no substantial United States military power made its way to CEE with the process of NATO’s east forward enlargement. To be worse, Moscow announced it was "completely" ending activities under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which has regarded as “cornerstone of European Security”. The deployments of missile defense system would have multiple strategic geopolitical implications, particularly, for security dynamics in CEE, Russia-US relations - arms control treaties. In the other words, missile defense will be an opportunity for altering European security architecture.

This paper includes the following sections:

* The analytical framework on the basis of the link of critical geopolitics and strategic stability;
* NATO’s claims on missile defense in Europe since the first decade of 21st century;
* Russian missile development as reaction against missile defense;
* Outlook and policy implications.

**Analysis framework**

Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 demonstrates the possibility of historical, peaceful change is decreasing. In this paper, through analyses the geopolitical changing on the European Continent based on spatial construction for NATO and EU enlargement, the author assumes missile defense deployed in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is and will play positive role to reach strategic stability in the dynamic geopolitical landscape.

The dynamic geopolitical changing represents spatial and power relations. [[3]](#footnote-3)Bradley Klein reminds strategic studies and the practice of deterrence throughout the Cold War was much more than the spatial containment of the Soviet Union.[[4]](#footnote-4) With the end of Cold War, the separated political space is not territorial, but spatial/categorical identities. Since the enlargements of European Union and NATO the Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) are said to finally make Europe 'whole and free'. This historical process can be assumed as spatialized identity, which is the people within the trans-territorial space pursuing ‘universal’ values (politics) and normative.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Among those countries of CEE (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovenia) which have strong historical ties with the west the desire to rejoin Europe is hardly surprising. However, a similar desire is also apparent among Eastern European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, The Baltic states and even Ukraine and Moldova) whose historical links with, and geographical proximity to, Western Europe are less strong.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The enlargement of NATO and EU, is framed in terms of teaching and learning community values and norms.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Our consultations and cooperation will focus on security and related issues where Allies can offer their experience and expertise, such as defence planning, democratic concepts of civilian-military relations, civil/military coordination of air traffic management and the conversion of defence production to civilian purposes NATO seeks ‘to build constructive partnerships with them in order further to promote security and stability in a free and undivided Europe’. [[8]](#footnote-8)

Critical geopolitics is about that ideological process of constructing spatial, political and cultural boundaries to demarcate the domestic space as separate from the threatening Other; to exclude Otherness and simultaneously to discipline and control the domestic political sphere.[[9]](#footnote-9) In the other words, critical geopolitics is about the construction of boundaries of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, the ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’.[[10]](#footnote-10)

On normative dimension of NATO-Russia relations, there has been litter development. From the early 2000s, the growing nationalism process has revived in Russia policy-making communities, inspired by ‘values gap’ of European and the U.S.[[11]](#footnote-11) In Russian view, the declining western world, led by the U.S dominates the international community:

attempts to create an international relations structure based on domination by developed Western countries in the international community, under US leadership and designed *for* unilateral solutions (primarily by the use of military force) to key issues in world politics in circumvention of the fundamental rules of international law.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The possibilities for the historic West to dominate the world economy and politics continue to decline … the Western powers wish to hold on to their traditional positions is tied to the increase in global competition, which can be seen in the rising instability in the field of international relations.[[13]](#footnote-13).

Global power and development potential is becoming decentralized, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers.[[14]](#footnote-14)

By the way, in Kremlin’s view, the west world is the origin of instability of regional and global order:

 The attempts made by western powers to maintain their positions in the world, including by imposing their point of view on global processes and conducting a policy to contain alternative centres of power, leads to a greater instability in international relations and growing turbulence on the global and regional levels.[[15]](#footnote-15)

NATO’s expansion into the CEE has been regarded as the main threat to international and Russian national security:

 the strengthening of military-political blocs and alliances, above all NATO's eastward expansion;[[16]](#footnote-16)

A determining factor in relations with NATO is still the unacceptability for the Russian Federation of alliance’s increased military activity and the approach of its military infrastructure toward Russia's borders, the building of a missile-defense system, and attempts to endow the bloc with global functions executed in violation of the provisions of international law. [[17]](#footnote-17)

Missile defense and NATO enlargement is intercorrelated in Russian security discourse, both of them are threaten to Russia. Any security commitments of NATO to its membership and further enlargement will be regarded as threat to Russian national security. The CEE has been included Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. Hence, the CEE is the periphery of Russia. In Russian President Vladimir Putin’s word, missile defense is ‘part of U.S. nuclear strategic potential brought onto a periphery. In this case, Eastern Europe is such periphery.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Russian self-perceived superpower status, despite all economic, technical, and military evidence to the contrary.

Throughout [its history, Russia] has been haunted by its relative backwardness, particularly in the military and industrial spheres. This has led to repeated frenzies of government activity designed to help the country catch up, with a familiar cycle of coercive state-led industrial growth followed by stagnation. Most analysts had assumed that this pattern had ended for good in the 1990s, with the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and the arrival of competitive elections and a buccaneer capitalist economy. But the impetus behind Russian grand strategy had not changed. And over the last decade, Russian President Vladimir Putin has returned to the trend of relying on the state to manage the gulf between Russia and the more powerful West.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Through the above-mentioned discourse, Russian self-constructed, historical, anti-western-values imagery in the CEE and the Western world has little tendency to be changed. Russia remains the ‘otherness’ of the regional security architecture in Europe. Russia continued to pursue a more assertive and unpredictable military posture in the post-Soviet space since it suspended Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in 2007. Russian use of force in Georgia in 2008, and again with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, has fundamentally challenged the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace and undermines the principles of international relations as agreed in the Helsinki Final Act. In a sense, facing assertive, unpredictable Russian, the strategic stability in Europe has been at the risk.

Strategic stability is a much-used, under-developed term since the Cold War, which had been long-term defined the balance of military nuclear-power, with the logic was to ‘stabilize the bipolar confrontation by ensuring that each side had the ability to strike back effectively even after an attempted disarming first strike by its opponent’. [[20]](#footnote-20) The traditional definition of Strategic stability is also reviewed as effective deterrence, which is “based on the inability of each of the sides to deliver a preemptive or a fixed-time strike capable of disabling the major part (if not all) of the nuclear forces that other side could use in the delivery of a retaliation strike”. [[21]](#footnote-21) During the Cold War, strategic stability describes the situation characterized as ‘balance of terror’, which focused on the possibility of a state launching large-scale damage-limit­ing first strike and ‘instabilities arising from the technical characteristics of each side’s strategic forces, that is, on *first strike sta­bility*’. [[22]](#footnote-22)

With the end of Cold War, the changing strategic environment with the new threats as such WMD & missile proliferation, cyber-attack launched by non-state actors, regional conflict, obviously, it is out-of-date and narrowed the conception of strategic stability limited within strategic nuclear balance between the nuclear powers.

Stability is an ambiguous concept, whether is on academic and practical dimensions. Generally, stability is ‘the condition in which a system does not produce too much disturbance on that system’. [[23]](#footnote-23) Such stable description obviously neglect the constructive, dynamic process from chaos to stability. Stability is linking of the term ‘equilibrium’. A stable equilibrium was one that, if disturbed, could recover; an unstable one, when disturbed, decomposed quickly. “Balance” was a synonym for “equilibrium”; and “delicate” was a synonym for “unstable.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Hence, stability, involves the restore capability of after a perturbation, also, the maintenance of peace in strategic usage.[[25]](#footnote-25)

In the discourse of International relations, power transition usually along with the changing equilibrium. A. F. K. Organski introduced "the power transition" in which "wars are most likely when there is an approaching balance of power between the dominant nation and a major challenger'.[[26]](#footnote-26) According to the balance-of-power, movement toward parity should reduce the chances of at least violent conflict; neither party will attack the other because each lacks a clear advantage. State power capabilities, alliances and geography have been understood the components for balance-of-power explanation.[[27]](#footnote-27)

With the border perspective, strategic stability should be the concept describes the dynamic process that is applicable to stability achieved through the balance in power transition among the related states vary over time. As C. Dale Walton & Colin S. Gray points**,** rescuing strategic stability requires that we broad­en the concept to reflect the myriad factors that impact political stability. They believe, ‘the conditions that might contribute to such instability are myriad—*social, economic, technological and other factors can create the conditions for international instability*, either brief or prolonged’. [[28]](#footnote-28)

In a word, with the power transition, the changing geopolitical landscapes construct regional strategic stability. From chaos to stability, the forming process is the spatializing values-based identity forms norm space. With the form process of the new normative space, the security discourse/practice in which has the function of self-other distinction. The threatening discourse/practice from external reinforce the adverse profile of otherness.

**The Evolution of Missile Defense in Europe & Russian Reaction since the end of Cold War**

In the Cold War, for depriving of second striking, missile defense always regarded as negative agenda to strategic stability. Hence, the U.S. and the former Soviet Union adopted restrictive attitude to sign the initial related treaty and agreement. The Interim Offensive Arms Agreement and ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty signed in June 1972, the latter prohibited the United States and Soviet Union from deploying a nationwide defense against strategic ballistic missiles and limited each side to two deployment sites, one near the national capital and one at an ICBM field. In 1974, President Gerald Ford and Brezhnev signed a protocol to the ABM Treaty that restricted each side to 100 ABM interceptor launchers at only one site.

Since the end of Cold War, weapon of mass destruction (WMD) and missile proliferation has increasingly threatened to regional stability and security. The motivations of developing missile program can be categorized as seeking asymmetric capability in the potential or practical conflicts, sovereign right, source of national pride, and economic returns through missile exports. [[29]](#footnote-29) As one of countermeasures, missile defense is an important adoption to maintain strategic stability.

In the early of 21st century, the accelerated development of ballistic missile program in Iran and the deals with North Korea have posed seriously threat to regional stability.[[30]](#footnote-30) In 2009, a joint threat assessment by the US and Russian technical experts suggested, with existing technology, “Iran could develop a ballistic missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead weighing 1,000 kg to a range of 2,000 km”. [[31]](#footnote-31) If the range reach to 2000 km, besides Turkey, NATO’s southeastern most member, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania will be covered by Ghadr-1 MRBM (Medium-Range Ballistic Missile). [[32]](#footnote-32)

On December 13, 2001, President George W. Bush gave Russia a 6-month notice of U.S. intent to withdraw from the ABM Treaty so that the United States could pursue development of the ongoing program at that time named National Missile Defense (NMD. In Bush’s mind, whether the US or Russia, the greatest threat was from the combination of terrorism, revisionist states with weapons of mass destruction, not each other as the Cold War.[[33]](#footnote-33) When the US official withdrawal the ABM treaty, a hostile reaction from Moscow was that it would no longer be bound by START II, a move that was largely symbolic, given that START II never entered into force and that it was effectively superseded by new Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) signed on May 24, 2002.

In the year of 2006, the Bush administration announced plans for the development of a third BMD site in Eastern Europe: a radar would be placed in the Czech Republic and 10 Ground-Based Interceptors (GBI) deployed in northeastern Poland, which served as countermeasures to the growing nuclear and ballistic missile threat facing Europe and the United States, as part of the global U.S. BMD capability. The governments of the Czech Republic and Poland welcomed the military presence of US on their territory as the symbolic of security guarantee. [[34]](#footnote-34) Besides discursive intimidation, Russian steps up the military build-up in Kaliningrad to threat the CEE, Nordic counties and Baltics.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Russian concerns on missile defense in the CEE have been considered by NATO. At Bucharest summit in 2008, NATO looked to Russia understand the deployment of missile defense in the CEE, through its narration, Russia is a negotiable object, plays constructive role in Euro-Atlantic security architecture,

‘We believe that United States-Russia bilateral discussions on missile defence and CFE, among other issues, can make an important contribution in this field.

We encourage Russian authorities to work cooperatively with us and other concerned CFE States Parties to reach agreement on the basis of the parallel actions package so that together we can preserve the benefits of this landmark regime.

We also commend the work already underway to strengthen NATO-Russia missile defence cooperation.  We are committed to maximum transparency and reciprocal confidence building measures to allay any concerns.  We encourage the Russian Federation to take advantage of United States missile defence cooperation proposals and we are ready to explore the potential for linking United States, NATO and Russian missile defence systems at an appropriate time’.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In September 2009, Obama administration stated that it intended to replace the Bush administration’ s third site plan with the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) – designed to provide a more comprehensive, adaptable and cost-effective response to the threat of ballistic missiles, and in which Russia would play a constructive role.

The EPAA missile defense system was to consist of four phases, beginning in 2011 and reaching full deployment in 2022, with interceptors stationed on Aegis ships in the Mediterranean Sea and at land sites in Deveselu, Romania, and Redzikowo, Poland, to defend against a variety of current and future Iranian missile threats. Phase 1 of the EPAA system consists of the SM-3 IA and SM-3 IB interceptors on Aegis ships in the Mediterranean Sea and a land-based radar in Turkey. In March 2011, the Aegis ship *USS* *Monterrey* was deployed, making the EPAA system operational. Phase 2 of the system has a planned deployment date of 2015, with the first Aegis Ashore interceptor site in Deveselu. Phase 3 of the system has a planned deployment date around 2018 and will involve deploying the more powerful SM-3 IIA interceptors (with a burnout velocity of 4.5 km/s) at the second Aegis Ashore site in Redzikowo. Phase 3 will substantially expand the coverage that EPAA provides for European allies. Finally, Phase 4 was planned to be operational around 2022 with the SM-3 IIB interceptors (with a burnout velocity between 5 and 5.5 km/s) deployed in Poland, was cancelled in March 2013 for the technical reason. SM-3 Block IIB interceptors undermine Russian strategic deterrence capabilities will not come into the existence.

Each NATO ally is contributing to the construction of an open command and control architecture of BMD, so that each nation’s sensors, interceptors, and command and control functions can be integrated. Other allies are providing their indigenously produced land, sea, and air-based sensor coverage and ship and shore-based, lower-tier interceptors that will be plugged into this architecture, so that all of NATO’s capabilities are interoperable and contributing to situational awareness, planning and tasking, and execution of the TBMD mission area. [[37]](#footnote-37) In September 2011, the Netherlands announced plans to upgrade four air-defence frigates with extended long-range missile defence early-warning radars as its national contribution to NATO’s ballistic missile defence capability. A similar announcement was made in August 2014 by Denmark, which decided to acquire a frigate-based radar system to enhance NATO BMD. In November 2015, the United Kingdom announced it would invest in a ground-based BMD radar, intended to enhance the coverage and effectiveness of the NATO BMD capability.[[38]](#footnote-38) In this sense, missile defense represent transatlantic security relations and solidarity of democratic communities.

In fact, the cooperation with Russia on missile defense never by gave up by NATO. A planned NATO-Russia theater missile defense command post exercise was for fall 2008 but cancelled for the downturn in NATO-Russia relations following the Russia-Georgia conflict. NATO and Russia conducted a computer-assisted missile defense exercise in late March 2012.

In 2010 summit in Lisbon, the NATO decided to significantly expand its ballistic missile defense program to “develop a missile defence capability to protect all NATO European populations, territory and forces.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The Lisbon summit declaration marked the official integration of existing NATO member BMD assets as part of the comprehensive alliance defensive posture.

the Alliance will develop a missile defense capability to pursue its core task of collective defense. The aim of a NATO missile defense capability is to provide full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces against the increasing threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missile. [[40]](#footnote-40)

Missile defense of NATO, “in principle…reassure U.S. friends and allies about the U.S. will and commitment to defend them, which contributes to other U.S. goals such as dissuading them from obtaining nuclear or other destabilizing retaliatory weapons”.[[41]](#footnote-41)

At the NATO summit in May 2012 in Chicago, the Alliance announced that it had achieved so-called interim ballistic defense capability. At the Warsaw summit, NATO declared the achievement of the NATO BMD Initial Operational Capability.[[42]](#footnote-42) In the subsequent summit in Wales and Warsaw, all of the narration of missile defense involved Russia, NATO called for the cooperation from Moscow, with the spirit of transparency and confidence.

Strategic dynamics in the Eastern European region has further become tense after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and Ukraine crisis. Romania, Poland and Baltic countries have openly voiced their concerns over alleged growing Russian assertion in the region. The ongoing Crimea Crisis further complicated NATO’s endeavors to defend against an Iranian ballistic missile threat while keeping the credibility and credence, at the same time, not excessively provoking Russian suspicion or mistrust.

In the past 3 years, the intensified exercises in the CEE and Baltics conducted by NATO. More than 30000 troops from 24 countries are involved in Anakonda 16 - in Poland from 6 to 17 June, 2016. The US provided 14000 troops, the largest military contingent, in the exercise. Poland has mobilized around 12000 troops.[[43]](#footnote-43) As deterrence and countermeasure, Russia has deployed nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles, S-400 air defense system in the Kaliningrad, which directly threated Poland and Lithuania.

Increasing military confrontation have the potential to affect arms control treaties between Russia and the US. General Paul Selva, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee, “We believe that the Russians have deployed a land-based cruise missile that violates the spirit and intent of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty”. “The system itself presents a risk to most of our facilities in Europe,” he added. “And we believe that the Russians have deliberately deployed it in order to pose a threat to NATO and to facilities within the NATO area of responsibility.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

**Conclusion & Policy Suggestions**

Russian holds its traditional geopolitical and foreign thinking to suspect the new normative space based democratic, peace universal values in the post-Soviet space. Kremlin miscalculated in its saber-rattling in the Baltics, conflict with Georgia in 2008, illegal annexation with Crimea in 2014, which constructs the adverse otherness of Russia in Europe security architecture. In the predictable future, the intensified military confrontation between Russia and NATO means the inclusive security and political architecture is no end in sight.

NATO missile defense is representation of the transatlantic security relations. Facing the uncertainties of Trump administration, the European alliance should invest more missile defense to deter Russian missile building up to survive the imbalance strategic stability at risk.

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