
Missile proliferation and missile defense

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Extract

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The global security environment is becoming increasingly volatile and dangerous. A new arms race is looming in the horizon. The international community's major achievements in international security, non-proliferation and disarmament are unraveling—withdrawal from the ABM—rejection

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of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)—veto of the protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), and strangulation of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Each of these would have constituted a formidable challenge, had they all not happened within the past six months to a year. And now, the bombshell; “The Nuclear Posture Review” flouts everything that was achieved in the 1995 and 2000 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Extension and Review Conferences and threatens the very foundation of the NPT and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The barbaric terrorist atrocities of September 11th proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that we all have one fundamental commonality: our vulnerability. The horror of that day illustrated that no country, however powerful, can be immune from the menaces that threaten the rest of the international community. It showed that global problems ranging from terrorism to environment, to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) require global and not unilateral responses. One would have expected that such recognition would lead to a search for common global responses to global challenges. But, in fact, the tragedy of September 11th is producing a policy tragedy with much more dangerous implications.

While the issue of missiles is complex enough, in and of itself, it is further complicated by these trends. Specific concerns about missiles is not only limited to the horizontal proliferation, but also includes vertical proliferation of all types of missiles, the question of stockpiles, deployments, targeting and anti-missile systems as well. Added to that is the broader issue of security and threat perception and the necessity to look at missiles taking into account various experiences and conditions.

The missile issue has become more controversial since the end of the cold war. In April 1999, the United

Nations Secretary General stressed the need to develop some multilaterally negotiated norms against missile proliferation. In response to that call, the Islamic Republic of Iran initiated a process by tabling a non-ambitious draft resolution on missiles in the UN General Assembly a few months later (resolution 54/54 F). Hence, the United Nations was drawn into considering the issue of missiles in all its aspects.

In 2000, the General Assembly adopted another resolution (55/33 A) requesting “the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a panel of governmental experts to be established in 2001, to prepare a report for consideration at its fifty-seventh session on the issue of “missiles in all its aspects”. It is hoped that this report will make the conceptual issues relevant to and priorities of the question of missiles clear and suggest a road map to increase international security.

To ensure the timely submission of the Secretary-General’s report to the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, the panel of governmental experts held three meetings: its first meeting from 30 July– 3 August 2001, its second from 1–5 April 2002 and a third from 1–9 July 2002.

Following the UN engagement with the overall issue of missiles, parallel steps were also initiated, albeit with a selective agenda and exclusive membership, and some even formulated a document, which, in the view of those exclusive members, represented the concerns of the entire international community on missiles.

Naturally, to many states not involved in the consideration of that restrictive agenda, the outcome document of the exclusive groups has only academic value. It is highly unlikely for this process to bear objective and realistic results, particularly on quintessentially important issues of national and international security.

Given the diversity of elements affecting the issue of missiles, the following are some ideas for further consideration and reflection in any genuine effort to address the issue of missiles in the broader context of security:

1. Missiles, threat perceptions and options

Opting for missiles is surely based on two major elements: the threat perception and the options available for delivery systems. It is natural to expect a state, with its vital population and economic centers within fire power of a potential enemy, to seek the ability to strike back in case of a war. In other words, various delivery systems available to a potential enemy have a definite role in the formulation and execution of the defense strategy of the other side.

At the regional level, modern tactical aircrafts are the most effective and efficient offensive and defensive means of delivery. They may even be capable of carrying larger payloads with much greater accuracy in targeting. More significantly, they are not disposable delivery systems like missiles and can theoretically continue to carry out missions one after another.

However, access to sophisticated tactical aircrafts is greatly skewed for many reasons, including disparate technological advancement, disparate financial ability, and disparate assessment of the “political correctness” of the would-be recipient states by the few manufacturing states. Under some of these scenarios, if a country considers itself under serious threat of an adversary and unable to acquire sufficient tactical aircrafts, it may feel compelled to acquire missiles regardless of their disadvantages.

2. Missile as means of delivery

There is a simplistic tendency to reduce the role of missiles, or at least ballistic missiles, to delivery vehicles only for WMD. This, in many respects, is like crying wolf. To use or not to use weapons of mass destruction relates to the fundamental principles of a state’s overall policies, including its foreign and defence policies.

In this context, it should not be forgotten that missiles do not have to carry non-conventional weapons to induce a psychological impact greater than deployment of all other types of conventional weapons. The sheer impression, correctly or erroneously, that missiles can penetrate any defense system and that there is no reliable means of diversion or destruction of ballistic or cruise missiles make them a potentially strong and effective weapon to affect the psyche of the enemy. In many ways, such psychological impact would begin to decline as missiles are actually deployed.

Missiles have therefore become the strong weapon of the poor and the discriminated against who find themselves vulnerable to outside threat. They believe missiles may prove instrumental in deterring the enemy from beginning a full scale war. Deterrence, after all, must be the perpetual goal of the military strategies of such states that have had to settle for inferior military hardware.

3. Lack of discipline

There is no international discipline on missiles. Legally binding international instruments dealing with weapons of mass destruction do have references to their means of delivery, which do not necessarily include missiles. And the interpretations that limit the role of ballistic missiles and ballistic technology to only a means of delivery of WMD is too arbitrary to command respect and general acceptability.

It might not need much reasoning to prove that attempts within closed non-transparent export control regimes to counter acquisition of missiles and missile technology have not been successful. The deliberate neglect of the security requirements of other countries as well as the negative implications of such restrictive regimes on economic and technical development of targeted countries have depicted them more as a political tool at the disposal of the haves against the have-nots.

4. Missile defense: security or chaos?

The issue of missiles can hardly be fully considered without having an eye on the relationships among the big players and on the general progress, or lack thereof, and trend in the larger field of disarmament.

The impact of the unilateral withdrawal from and practical abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) Treaty has not yet been fully absorbed. For decades, the ABM has been considered the cornerstone of the international strategic stability and the basis for many follow-up instruments and agreements governing the state of security today.

The acquisition of the capability to deny one's rival(s) the possibility of a counter attack will eventually compel it (them) to seek not only comparable capabilities, but also to devise new systems to infiltrate one's defensive shield. This would naturally end up with a new round of arms race, which could even expand to outer space. Should it be the case, one could not expect the effects of such setbacks to remain limited only to the parties to the ABM treaty.

The entrance of other nuclear-weapon states into this race is bound to adversely affect the regional security environment and provoke a new round of arms race at the regional level too.

The prospect

The unilateral approaches and tendencies of a major power in the field of arms control and disarmament, which has thus far hampered several international initiatives and endeavors to achieve agreed results, have caused setbacks in all fields of arms control and disarmament. The present circumstances do not allow for a great deal of optimism for at least the near future. Some argue that we are in the midst of post September 11th shock and we may snap out of it as times go on.

On the other hand, the engagement of all states at the UN in the issue of missiles, through the panel of governmental experts, and the new idea of exploring the subject in the Conference on Disarmament do provide a dim light at the end of the tunnel. The reference of all initiatives to the panel of governmental experts and the readiness of all parties to engage in a truly deliberative process could surely be instrumental in the search to find the right answer that meets everyone's concern about missiles.

In conclusion, the following issues are presented as salient factors that, in view of the author, must be further considered in any serious deliberative process on issues of security, including that on missiles:

- The international community is yet to develop the complexity and sophistication to embark on a comprehensive, yet variegated approach to non-proliferation of missiles. The panel of governmental experts assisting the UN Secretary-General to prepare the report on missiles on all its aspects is a modest first step in that direction.
- It is important to develop greater focus on major components of defense strategies in various regions and draw distinction, where appropriate,

between missile programs designed to deliver weapons of mass destruction from those that are conventional. The threat and destructive capability of missiles carrying conventional weapons should be compared to those of other delivery systems such as tactical aircrafts to allow for a full picture of threat, its perception and possible responses. Contrary to missiles, tactical aircrafts are not disposable delivery systems with greater military potentials.

- Access to tactical aircrafts is not objectively distributed on the basis of security threat, but on technological advancement first and political alliance second. This fact of today's international life has direct bearing on the degree of success in efforts to control missile proliferation.
- Efforts at non-proliferation of missiles are more likely to succeed when viewed as an integral part of a global and comprehensive negotiation and progress in other areas of disarmament.
- The extent of missile proliferation and its control are dependent less on adversarial and selective means of control like export controls and more on the degree of the international community's preparedness to be responsive to a process of integration, political engagement and to the differing requirements of each region and state in terms of its particular security concerns.

The two latter points apply to international security and disarmament agenda as a whole. It requires a change of approach and indeed a paradigm shift in global security considerations. Permit me to repeat here what I proposed to the

Conference on Disarmament three years ago and again last week:

“We cannot seek to establish a civilized community of human beings and States without accepting the premise that all peoples and States have an equal right to survive and to guarantee peace and security for their citizen. ... It is high time to change [the] predominant yet erroneous security paradigm. Fundamental to this is adoption of a new approach towards international security going beyond the boundaries of the residuals of the bipolar system, which is fixated in the past. It is no longer acceptable or even practical to divide the international community into two distinct groupings. One is living behind the walls of fortresses of alliances and weapons of mass destruction, while the security concerns of others are completely neglected as they are depicted as the source of possible threat and worthy of containment and deprivation. It is especially alarming that pseudo-scientific theories of clash are advanced in order to perpetuate the policies of rivalry and exclusion and to even sanctify them as the unavoidable consequences of civilizational disharmony. The time has come to replace military block security umbrellas with a new and innovative concept of *Global Security Networking*; a truly global networking mechanism for an inclusive and participatory global security, which uses the existing mechanisms in a complimentary rather than competing scheme.”

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