Missile Defence in Turkey

Ms Debalina Chatterjee*

The Phase Adaptive Approach

According to the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, one of the fundamental jobs of the NATO was to 'deter and defeat' any threat of aggression against a NATO member state's periphery. The Bush administration had proposed a missile defence to protect European countries and the United States from long range missiles especially from Iran. In 2009, the Obama administration decided to deploy a ship based missile interceptor in the Mediterranean Sea, and cancelled plans of deploying the missile defences in Poland and Czech Republic as was planned earlier. Fielding Standard Missile 3 Interceptors in the Eastern European nations is a 'phased adaptive approach' of the Washington. The Standard Missile 3 Interceptors, an upper tier ballistic missile defence weapon, is a derivative of the RIM-156 Standard SM-2 ER Block IV Missile and is the missile component of the US Navy's forthcoming theatre wide ballistic missile defence system called NTW- TBMD (Navy Theatre Wide- Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence).1 The SM-3 is less expensive than ground based interceptors and its mobility with similar sea based systems is very effective against Medium Range Ballistic Missiles. Obama had made it clear that the missile defence in the Mediterranean Sea is to provide "optimal protection against ballistic missile threats from the Middle East, from Iran in particular".2

Turkey's Concerns

Turkey is threatened from weapons of mass destruction and air and missile attacks in the south eastern borders. Some important regions in Turkey including Ankara, Adana, Iskenderun and other important sites like airbases, power stations, military headquarters are within the reach of ballistic missiles from Syria, Iran and Iraq. During the Gulf War in 1991, Turkey had been apprehensive about a possible Scud missile attack from Iraq for supporting the West against Iraq. The USA had proposed to deploy the radar in a military base in Kurecik which is 435 miles away from Iran. This radar along with the deployment of the USS *Monterey* armed with Standard Missile-3 IA missile interceptors to the Mediterranean Sea would "complete the first phase of the administration's missile defense plans".3 Washington wants a missile interceptor radar system to be deployed in the forward area near Iran for "early warning and cueing information".4 The information would then be transferred to large X-band radar or the European Midcourse Radar to enable US defences to discriminate, track and identify an incoming missile.

In December 2009, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Erdogan had "ruled out the prospect that Ankara would host missile defence systems to intercept an Iranian attack".5 This move of the Prime Minister was backed by the Turkish military. Turkey feared that any kind of missile defence against Iran would make Turkey susceptible to a possible missile attack from Iran and also Syria, Iran's ally. In 2011, Iran has developed cruise missile called Qadr which can fly "undetected by the most advanced radar systems and one of a destructive power enough to sink any battleship"*6* and is a prowess of the Iranian Navy.

Progress in Turkey

In 2011, Turkey agreed to host long range radar system and this deal was "the most significant cooperation"*7* between Turkey and the USA. Both Turkey and the US had agreed to deploy the X-Band or AN-TPY2 radar. It is a "high power, transportable X-Band radar designed to detect, track and discriminate ballistic missile threats" and it could provide a ballistic missile defence as per the phase adaptive approach. The AN- TPY2 and some parts of Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system are the main components on the Phase Adaptive Approach.*8* It is a "phased array, capable of search, threat detection, classification, discrimination and precision tracking at extremely long ranges."9 It was claimed to be the "biggest strategic decision between the US and Turkey in the past 15 or 20 years" 10 especially after 2003 when Turkey refused to allow an armoured division of the US to cross Turkey to invade Iraq. According to the US plans, Turkey would host mobile radar detection system AN-TPY2 and by 2015, there would be new sea based and land based modifications of the SM-3.11

Playing the Political Cards

Though Turkey has developed warm relations with Iran, and has even clarified that the missile defence shield does not target any particular country, yet it is apprehensive of Iran's growing missile threats and the threats from Syria. Iran had warned that if the US or Israel attacked Iran, it would target NATO's missile defence installations in Turkey. Iran felt that deploying missile interceptors in Turkey was aimed to "protect Israel against Iranian missile attacks"12 in case of a war between Iran and Israel. Turkey is not only apprehensive of Iran's ballistic missiles but also its cruise missile like the 18 Kh-55. But at present Turkey has no plans to counter cruise missile threats, though there are option like the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter which have Active Electronically Scanned Array which could track low flying cruise missiles. Iran had criticised Turkey for allowing NATO to station an early warning radar in the southeast which will also be a part of NATO's missile defence systems and this could jeopardise Turkey's nascent economic relations with Iran. However, a senior military officer of Iran had also clarified that missile defence shield in Turkey would "pose a threat to Russia".13 Syria had also been a bone of contention for the two countries. The decision to host advanced radar systems could jeopardise relations between Ankara and Tehran especially at a time when Turkey is trying to improve its relations with Iraq, Iran, Russia and Greece. Turkey had decided to remove these countries from its 'Red Book' which includes names of countries that pose a threat to Turkey.

Turkey is trying to follow a policy of 'zero problem with neighbours' and the missile interceptors in Turkey could not only jeopardise its relations with Iran, but also with Russia who has time and again been doubtful about the missile interceptors being placed in East European countries, even though the US keeps assuring them that they are meant to counter missile threats from Iran. Turkey had also assured that the new radar system would not be against any country but "will allow the country to contribute to the development of a new security system of the NATO".14 However, Russia still feels that the US and NATO continue to follow the policy of encirclement of Russia through their 'Anaconda Loop'.

Technical Challenges of Placing Missile Interceptor in Turkey

If Iran is the real threat to the USA, then Turkey would not be the best option for the deployment of missile interceptors. This is because placing missile interceptors in Turkey would give it short warning times. This means that the use would seek to intercept the ballistic missile from Iran at the boost phase itself, but this is not possible as boost phase interceptors have not yet been developed. Even radars could face serious technical limitations.

The Other Options

The US Republican Party Senators like Jon Kyl, James Risch, Mark Kirk and James Inhofe felt that Georgia should be hosting the missile interceptor radars rather than Turkey hosting them. Other Senators like John McCain, Joe Lieberman, and Richard Lugar had also supported the option. This was in reaction to Turkey's demand of not sharing radar information with non NATO states like Israel in particular. Turkey had also claimed for command and control over the radar and does not want the West to tag it as a response to threats from Iran. However, the concerns regarding placing the interceptor radars in Georgia is that Georgia is not a NATO country and hence, it could have serious complications in the relations between the US and Russia and also between the NATO and Russia. Georgia and Russia had been entangled in a conflict regarding the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. South Ossetia wanted to be independent from Georgia but, Georgia attacked the capital of South Ossetia, Tshkinvali. The next day Russian military engaged Georgia in South Ossetia. After five days of engaging each other in conflict, Russia gained dominance over Georgian cities, Poti and Gori. Later on, cease fire agreement was reached and buffer zones were formed by Russia against Georgia around Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia were independent and were recognised by Russia, but this intensified the rift between them and Georgia.

The NATO and the US had also thought of Bulgaria as an option in case Turkey refused to place missile interceptor radars in its territory. This could be due to the fact that Turkey is not interested to place missile interceptor radar against Tehran. However, Bulgaria could be a good option for the US and NATO. However, it could further make the Russians wary of the interceptor radars.

Back to the Cuban Missile Crisis?

The present situation does remind readers of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 when a similar incident happened. The US had deployed their Jupiter missiles in Turkey which could strike almost any place in the erstwhile Soviet Union; to which, President Krushchev responded by demanding removal of the missile from Turkey. He feared that the US could be tempted to launch a first strike as the Americans were far behind the Soviets in nuclear capabilities. Soviets also placed surface to air missiles in Cuba which had been a cause of worry for President Kennedy too. Both the super powers were almost on the verge of a nuclear brinkmanship. It leaves a fear in mind if the world would see another incident similar to Cuban Missile Crisis. Russia feels that the US still considers them to be a strategic threat.

Russia's Concerns

Russia has felt that the USA and NATO are trying to "neutralise" Russia's nuclear weapons in order to push them out of the "major areas of the world's oceans".15 Russia had not been supportive of European Midcourse Radar but instead had proposed for a Theatre High Altitude Area Defence and Aegis initially. This is because the SM-3s have a longer reach than the current THAAD system. Though ground based interceptors, sea based Aegis and radar placed in countries like Turkey and Bulgaria close to Iran are a threat to Iran and not to Russia; however, the interceptors placed in Poland could be a threat to Russian ICBMs. Russia had always opposed the deployment of missile interceptors in Eastern European countries as this would have a "negative impact upon the Russian nuclear deterrent".16 Russia also faces threats from the US Submarine Launch Ballistic Missiles and the US Minuteman Man III Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. Russia tried to convert the ICBM arsenals into single warhead, but the missile defence could upset the plan. At present the radars are technically not feasible. For 120 sq m of antenna face, there could be 30,000 transmit/receive modules while the US called for just 20,000. For this modernisation, there has to be an alternative and the antennas need to be reconstructed. Once the 'effective area' of the antenna is proportional to the transmit/ receive modules, the number of targets that could be engaged by the radar would also increase. With modernisation programmes, the X-band could target more missiles which could be a concern for the Russians. The operating frequency of the X band radars would be higher than the early warning radars of Russia. Long back, President Vladmir Putin had raised concerns that with the missile defences being deployed, the "(nuclear) balance will be upset".17 The ground based interceptors resemble the Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and they are large, two stage ballistic missiles, which weighed heavily and could carry a kill vehicle moving faster than the ICBMs trajectory from Russia to the USA. Russia had also claimed that deployment of no anti missile near its border could prevent a retaliatory strike from Russian missiles which are capable of evading an Anti Ballistic Missile. Russia had warned that it could target the 'Third sites' with nuclear missiles and also withdraw any time from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.18 Russia has developed operational tactical missile systems, Iskander-M which is a response to the "deployment of the US missile defence system in Europe" and is taking part in tactical exercises, and is expected to replace the outdated Tochka tactical missile. 19 It could hit ground targets like "command centres, large groups of troops, fire attack means, air and missile defence facilities, aircraft and helicopter on ground" and could be equipped with either conventional or nuclear warhead.20

Russia had also developed an Intercontinental ballistic missile named Topol RS-12M which could avoid being detected by a missile defence.21 Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergey Ryabkov that Moscow would want a formal agreement with NATO that neither side would "target the other's offensive missiles with missile defense interceptors".22

USA's Steps

The USA had decided to provide information on the Standard Missile-3 interceptors to Russia. This would be "a bid to address Moscow's concerns that the technology is a threat to its long range nuclear forces".23 It would give Russia

information on the ‘missile burn out velocity’ or the VBO. However, Washington has not been able to guarantee Russia that the missile interceptors would not be aimed at Russian nuclear forces. SM-3 interceptors have been the right decision for the US politically as Ground Based Interceptors deployed with nuclear warhead could act as an MRBM which could “upset” Moscow and could lead to conflict over the Strategic Defence Initiative.24

Turkey’s New Friends

China and Russia had been bidding for Turkey’s new air defence missile project. China’s Precision Machinery Import and Export Corporation planned to sell the FD-2000 anti aircraft missiles capable of ‘cold launch’. Turkey had also showed interest in the Russian S-400 surface to air missiles. NATO had objected to Turkey’s interest in Chinese and Russian missile defence systems and has refused to share any intelligence information on incoming ballistic missiles. The growing ties between China and Turkey and improved relations between Iran and Turkey are becoming a cause of concern for the US and Israel. China has also developed surface to surface rocket launching system together with Turkey.

The Future

It would be a matter of time to see how Turkey manages to keep good relations with both NATO and its non-NATO allies. ‘Collective defence’ is a basic right recognised by Article 51 of the UN Charter and Turkey is now looking for new allies for this. Many analysts are confused with the fact that the US defences could be easily defeated by simple decoys that could look like Mylar balloons and other forms of counter measures. Hence, the missile defence system might not be a viable option. Turkey had also shown keen interest in acquiring indigenous nuclear weapons which the West had not been supportive of as they feel it would be “critical to international security”.25 Even if Turkey decided to go for the Chinese missile defences, it is less likely that the US could take much serious action as the US needs Turkey as a geostrategic ally to counter any threat from Tehran. Tactical nuclear weapons are less likely to be removed from Turkey by the US. The US would need Turkey also to counter any ballistic or cruise missile threats from Russia too.

The Sino Turkey Honeymoon

However, relations between Turkey and China and Turkey and Iran have started improving, which would be the new twist in international security. In the present context, friendship with Iran would benefit Turkey as Turkey needs more natural gas from Iran. In 2010, Turkey had voted against US sanctions on Iran which was a “slap in the face”26 of the Americans. Chinese aircraft had refuelled in Iran during their flight to Turkey for a military exercise in Anatolia. Turkey’s new defence relations with Pakistan would also have serious impact on its relations with the West. But with new allies in Turkey’s basket, the dependency on the West would reduce and Turkey being a sovereign country could have the sovereign right to choose its own allies than being dictated by the US. With Turkey developing its first air launched cruise missiles, it is making it clear; that while NATO is an ally, but it would now not want to be completely dependant on them. The West however, waits with palpitated hearts to see if the Sino-Turkey deal on missile defence takes place as that could lead to exposure of crucial information of NATO’s missile defence technologies, thereby, making it easier for the Chinese to develop counter measures. Is the growing Sino-Turkey defence relation another aspect of China’s Assassin’s Mace Weapons Strategy whereby China is befriending US’s allies to defeat the US?

Endnotes

1. “Raytheon RIM-161 Standard SM-3", http://www.darkgovernment.com/news/sm-3-interceptor/

2. “Poland, US Begin Implementing Missile Interceptor Deal”, *NTI Reports,* September, 26, 2011.

3. Tom Z.Collina, “Turkey to Host NATO Missile Defense Radar”, *Arms Control Association,* http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2011_10/Turkey_to_Host_NATO_Missile_Defense_Radar

4. George N. Lewis, Theodore N. Postol, “Target Russia?”, http://www.spokesmanbooks.com/Spokesman/PDF/99lewis.pdf,

5. “Turkey Rebuffed Obama on Missile Defense Shield”, *World Tribune,* February 17, 2010.

6. “Stealth Missiles Join Iran’s Arsenal”, *PRESS TV,* September 29, 2011.

7. Thom Shanker, “U.S. Hails Deal With Turkey on Missile Shield”, *The New York Times,* September 15, 2011.

8. Tim Glaeser, “Diverse Portfolio Aligned With Global Customer Needs”, *Military Technology,* Volume XXXV, Issue 8/2011.

9. Ibid

10. Thom Shanker.

11. Vadim Trukhachev, “The Encirclement of Russia: US-NATO Interceptor Missile Ananconda Loop Around Russia”, *Global Research*, September 16, 2011.

12. Associated Press, “Iran threatens to target NATO missile shield in Turkey if attacked by US or Israel”, *The Washington Post,* November 26, 2011.

13. “NATO missile defense shield in Turkey a threat to Russia”, *Tehran Times, September 26, 2011 (Online).*

14. Vadim Trukhachev.

15. Vladmir Trukachev, “The Encirclement of Russia: US- NATO Interceptor Missile Anaconda Loop Around Russia”,

Global Research, September 16, 2011.

16. Michael Mates, “179 STC 07 E bis- THE MISSILE DEFENCE DEBATE”, *NATO Parliamentary Assemby,* 2007 Annual Session.

17. George N Lewis and Theodore A. Postol, “European Missile Defense: The Technological Basis of Russia’s Concerns”, *Arms Control Association,* http://www.armscontrol.org/print/2616

18. Michael Mates.

19. Lyudmila Alexandria, “Iskander complexes may prove Russia’s response to US missile defense in Europe”, *Itar-Tass, October 20, 2011.*

20. Ibid

21. Alexander Osipovich, “Russia Tests ICBM Designed to Overcome Missile Shield”, *Defense News,* August 28, 2011.

22. Tom Z. Collina, “Russia Makes New Proposal on Missile Defense”, *Arms Control Today,* April 2011.

23. “U.S. May Offer Russia Some Data on SM-3 Interceptor”, *NTI,* November 17, 2011.

24. Andy Oppenheimer, “Missile Defense Status”, *Military Technology,* Volume XXXV, Issue 8/2011.

25. Alexandra Bell, Benjamin Loehrke, “The Status of U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Turkey”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* November 23, 2009.

26. Natasha Mozgovaya, “U.S. sources: Turkey vote against Iran sanctions- a slap in the face”, *HAARETZ.com,* June 10, 2010.

* **Ms Debalina Chatterjee** is working as a Research Associate at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CXLI, No. 587, January-March 2012.