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## Security Challenges

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# The Influence of NATO Regional Missile Defense on European Security

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**Abstract**—The problem of missile defense is considered by Russian researchers, first of all, as part of the strategic stability problem in relations between Russia and the United States. At the same time, the impact of regional missile defense (theater missile defense) on regional security remains largely unexplored. The US and NATO leadership continue to claim that Russia has deployed intermediate-range missiles in the European part of the country. As a response to this step, in addition to other measures of regional deterrence towards Russia, it is planned to strengthen NATO's regional missile defense system. The purpose of this article is to determine the potential impact of enhancing NATO's theater missile defense on regional security. The answer to this question is important for understanding the prospects for European security. This article provides a critical analysis of Western experts' scenarios of actions of Russia and NATO around the Baltic countries the place and role of theater missile defense in these scenarios and compares the doctrinal guidelines of the United States and Russia regarding regional nonnuclear deterrence. There are situations in which NATO's enhanced regional missile defense could strengthen regional deterrence, and there are situations where this is less likely. Taking into account the doctrinal guidelines of both sides, conclusions are drawn about the destabilizing potential of NATO's regional missile defense enhancement and that, in strengthening regional stability, there is no alternative to arms control and transparency regimes.

**Keywords:** regional missile defense, theater missile defense, NATO, Russia, deterrence, political–military crisis, nonnuclear deterrence, left-of-launch, escalate-to-de-escalate

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### INTRODUCTION

An important part of the problem of international security is the issue of European security. Relations between Russia and NATO, and between Russia and the United States, are at their lowest point since the Cold War. The expert community is intensively looking for ways to reduce the risks of a direct military clash between both sides.<sup>1</sup> One of the central places

among many issues in relations between Russia and NATO is the problem of missile defense. Official Moscow speaks of the *Aegis Ashore* missile defense systems in Europe as part of the problem of strategic stability, as a potential threat to the strategic nuclear forces of the Russian Federation. The Russian side is also considering missile defense as part of the issue of bringing NATO's infrastructure closer to Russia's borders. The missile defense problem has a very important regional dimension. The collapse of the INF Treaty increased the likelihood of the deployment of intermediate and shorter-range missiles in Europe. In this context, the role of regional missile defense systems (theater missile defense) is growing.

The problem of missile defense is mainly studied by scientists and experts in Russia and the United States as part of the strategic stability in Russian–American relations (Rogov, 2021; Esin, 2017; Thielmann, 2020). Such an impact of theater missile defense on regional stability is much less discussed (Dvorkin, 2019). Unlike strategic missile defense systems, theater missile defense systems have much more successful intercepts during tests. The interpretation of this fact as an

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendations of the Participants of the Expert Dialogue on Reducing the Risks of a Military Confrontation between Russia and NATO in Europe, Institute for US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, December 2020. <http://iskran.ru/rossiya-nato-novye-rekomendacii-ekspertov/>. Cited February 1, 2022. Expert dialogue on reducing the risks of military confrontation between Russia and NATO in Europe. Seven recommendations, Institute for US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, February 2022. <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/group-statement/the-expert-dialogue-on-nato-russia-risk-reduction-seven-recommendations/>. Cited February 1, 2022.

indicator of the higher reliability of these systems is one of the reasons why the stabilizing potential of the theater missile defense for the regional situation is hardly called into question. Another reason is the view of missile defense as a purely defensive tool that contributes to stabilization, especially in a nonstrategic, regional context.

Many experts admit that a nuclear conflict between the Russian Federation and the US/NATO is possible as a result of the escalation of a nonnuclear conflict in the development of a political–military crisis in Europe. In the array of research literature on this topic, there are a number of articles that mention the factor of theater missile defense. Almost everywhere this mention goes at the level of separate theses within the framework of articles devoted to more general issues. For example, within the framework of relations between the US and allies in Europe (Früling, 2016; Kühn, 2018), prospects for deploying intermediate-range missiles (Kühn, 2019; Simon, Lanoszka, 2020), Russian long-range high-precision weapons (Johnson, 2017), and the escalate-to-de-escalate doctrine (Kort et al., 2019; Anderson, McCue, 2021; Kroenig, 2018; Kofman, Fink, Edmonds, 2020). There are practically no studies specifically devoted to analysis of the factor of regional missile defense in the context of the actions of the United States and NATO aimed at regional deterrence of Russia in Europe. This article is a development of the author’s research on the impact of US regional missile defense architectures on regional stability (Krivolapov, 2021).

The purpose of this article is to determine how the strengthening of the NATO missile defense architecture can affect regional security. In this regard, it is necessary to answer the following questions: (1) Will the strengthening of the regional missile defense (a) help to deter the offensive operation of the Russian troops in the region, presumed by Western experts and NATO leadership, carried out by Moscow using non-nuclear missiles and with the subsequent threat of using nuclear weapons within the framework of the Russia’s alleged escalate-to-de-escalate doctrine? or (b) deter the use of nuclear missiles by Russia in the framework of the above scenario? (2) Will strengthening theater missile defense of the NATO bloc destroy or strengthen regional stability? Outside the scope of this article are topics such as the impact of missile defense in Europe on the strategic balance between the Russian Federation and the United States, as well as the ways of escalating the nuclear conflict between Russia and the United States/NATO from the regional to the strategic level.

We will only talk about the regional missile defense of NATO, which refers to systems designed to protect against ballistic missiles with a range of less than 5500 km, as well as against cruise missiles of various

ranges.<sup>2</sup> They could be used to strengthen the theater missile defense architecture. The need to take into account the missile defense systems of NATO countries (including the American missile defense systems present in Europe) is due to the existence of long-term US plans to integrate them into a single architecture through the NATO missile defense command and control center at Ramstein Air Base (Germany).<sup>3</sup> The offensive missiles of the Russian Federation, which will be discussed in this article, include operational–tactical missiles (range of 100–500 km), sea- and air-launched cruise missiles (SLCM, ALCM), hypersonic aeroballistic missiles, and being developed ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles and hypersonic sea-, air-, and ground-launched missiles (range of less than 5500 km).

The concept of “deterrence,” which is one of the main ones for this study, has two interpretations. The first is *deterrence by punishment*. The second is *deterrence by denial*, namely, the creation of military capabilities to prevent the success of potential aggression (Mazarr et al., 2018, pp. 7–8). The former is most often associated with the deployment of offensive weapons, the latter with defensive ones.

“Regional deterrence” is associated with the actions of the parties in the framework of a regional confrontation. The region refers to Europe, in particular, its Baltic subregion. Unlike strategic deterrence, regional deterrence involving theater missile defense and nonnuclear missiles does not imply the destruction of Russia or the NATO bloc as such as a result of first and retaliatory strikes. Since there is the risk of escalation of a conventional armed conflict between Russia and NATO to the nuclear level, answers to the above questions about the effectiveness of deterrence of offensive deterrence and missile launches are also required in the regional context.

Another key concept is a “political–military crisis.” Its main components are the risk of an armed clash (including an inadvertent one, as a result of a misunderstanding of the intentions of one of the parties or both parties due to a lack of information and poor communication between them), psychological pressure from outside on the leadership of a country involved in the crisis, an exceptionally low level of trust between the parties in confrontation with each

<sup>2</sup> Taking into account the missile systems available to Russia, we mean the following missile defense and air defense/missile defense systems of NATO countries: *Aegis*, *Patriot*, *SAMP/T* with the corresponding models of anti-missiles *SM-2*, *SM-6*, *PAC-3*, and *Aster*. NATO documents only talk about air and missile defense, which includes all these systems. In addition, the SM-6 interceptor is officially declared as part of the potential in the field of defense against hypersonic weapons (See Vice Admiral Jon A. Hill, Director, Missile Defense Agency Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, June 9, 2021, p. 16). It can also be used as an offensive missile to destroy ground and surface targets at ranges up to 240 km.

<sup>3</sup> Missile Defense Review, U.S. Department of Defense, 2019, pp. 71, 77.

other, and fear of a sudden attack by at least one of the parties (Schelling, 2008, pp. 95–101). Accordingly, “regional stability” in this article refers to the situation of the absence of a political-military crisis.

### THE CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL DETERRENCE

Russian missiles with a range of less than 5500 km were officially named among the missile threats to US troops and their allies in the 2019 Missile Defense Review. Representatives of the administration of J. Biden at the hearings in Congress repeated this position. The June 2021 NATO Brussels Communiqué reflects in this regard the intention to strengthen NATO air defense/missile defense.<sup>4</sup> Washington considers these offensive missiles to be part of the Russian potential of *anti-access/area denial*, *A2/AD*, which in the event of a regional political and military crisis in Europe will give Russia an advantage.<sup>5</sup> Although the US military calls air defense/missile defense systems and coastal defense missile systems the basis of the *A2/AD* potential, offensive missiles have an auxiliary role, consisting in preventing the free movement of NATO troops and the arrival of reinforcements to Europe from the United States. Accordingly, one of the tasks of regional missile defense, including NATO air defense/missile defense, is to impede the *A2/AD* strategy.<sup>6</sup>

As the most likely scenario for the use of these missiles and anti-missile weapons in Europe, military and civilian experts of the NATO countries considered Russian aggression against the Baltic countries (Kelly, Gompert and Long, 2017, pp. 140–163, 167–180; Hodges et al., 2020; Brauß and Rácz, 2021). According to their estimates, although the total number of conventional armed forces (CAFs) of NATO countries is higher than the total number of Russian CAFs, in the Baltic subregion Russia has a numerical superiority over NATO forces, and many *A2/AD* assets are deployed there. This, according to Western experts, creates the conditions for a rapid local Russian offensive against the Baltic countries, and to support such an offensive, Moscow will use nonnuclear sea-, air-, and ground-launched missiles with a range of less than 5500 km. According to the authors of the reports and representatives of the military–political leadership of the United States and NATO, Russia, having taken control of a certain territory in the Baltic states, will threaten to use tactical nuclear weapons in order to

prevent the rest of NATO countries from interfering in what is happening and pushing Russian troops back.

Regional missile defense in Europe is officially a tool for maintaining not only nonnuclear, but also nuclear deterrence, as it is written in the main current NATO policy documents.<sup>7</sup> In the United States, Strategic Command officers and Defense Department officials place theater missile defense among the tools to counter Russia’s alleged “escalate-to-de-escalate” doctrine (Kort et al., 2019: 78; Anderson, McCue, 2021: 44, 45). A number of civilian experts agree that theater missile defense can be quite successfully used as a means of countering the escalate-to-de-escalate doctrine (Kroenig, 2018, pp. 17–18; Kofman, Fink, Edmonds, 2020, pp. 26, 65, 75).

In analyzing the possible role of a regional missile defense system in deterring the use of short- and intermediate-range nuclear missiles, one should take into account the conditions under which the Russian Federation can use nuclear weapons. Official representatives of the Russian Federation deny that Russia has the escalate-to-de-escalate doctrine.<sup>8</sup> According to the Fundamentals of Russian Nuclear Deterrence Policy of 2020, Moscow will use nuclear weapons in one of four situations.<sup>9</sup> Considering the nature of the situations described, the presence of a regional missile defense system in the adversary is unlikely to become a deterrent to the use of, for example, nuclear operational-tactical missiles.

Even if we adhere to the scenario proposed by the NATO leadership and Western experts and assume that Russia has the escalate-to-de-escalate doctrine, it is necessary to take into account the fact that if even one nuclear warhead overcomes such a missile defense system, this could lead to severe consequences for the defending side. Building an effective missile defense (including regional) from nuclear missiles is still questionable (Zolotarev, 2019). Accordingly, it is hardly possible to deter the use of these nuclear-armed missiles effectively with the help of theater missile defense.

Much more complicated is the situation with the role of a regional missile defense system in deterring an offensive by the Russian Federation using nonnuclear weapons in the framework of the scenario under consideration.

According to the 2019 Missile Defense Review, a regional missile defense system will deter missile

<sup>4</sup> Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, June 14, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Missile Defense Review, US Department of Defense, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Ms. Leonor Tomero, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Missile Defense, June 9, 2021. p. 6; Missile Defense Review, U.S. Department of Defense, 2019, pp. 71, 77.

<sup>7</sup> See Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 2012; Brussels Summit Communiqué ... 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Ambassador Antonov called the words about the development of the escalate-to-de-escalate doctrine by the Russian Federation erroneous, TASS, Apr. 9 (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 355 of June 2, 2020 “On the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the field of nuclear deterrence,” paragraph 19.

attacks against the United States and its allies deployed in various regions of the world and give Washington additional time and options to respond to aggression, beside striking.<sup>10</sup> Civilian experts argue that the presence of a regional missile defense system will raise the threshold for aggression using nonnuclear weapons, in particular, from the Russian side.<sup>11</sup> It is concluded that regional missile defense is among the tools for controlling escalation along with intermediate-range missiles (Kaushal, 2019, p. vi; Fröling, 2016, p. 93; Karako, 2016). Accordingly, the success of the entire deterrence of the alleged Russian aggression depends on the success of deterring the use of these missiles by Russia.

Theater missile defense systems are proposed to be deployed in such a way as to protect only command centers, forward deployed troops, military bases, warehouses, *Aegis Ashore* systems, transport hubs, and large population centers (Karako, 2016, pp. 6–7; Fröling, 2016, p. 91; Kuhn, 2018, pp. 60, 69).

In view of the foregoing, it is possible to answer questions about the contribution of theater missile defense to deterring the use of nonnuclear missiles by Russia in the framework of the scenario envisaged by NATO. For the purposes of this analysis, we will accept the thesis that the Russian leadership has both the intention to attack and enough time to prepare it.<sup>12</sup> To guarantee success, the Russian side will carry out a quick operation only if there are sufficient means to overcome the NATO missile defense system.

Although tests of theater missile defense systems are much more successful than tests of strategic missile defense, taking into account the experience of the combat use of the *Patriot* systems by Saudi Arabia in 2015–2020 (Williams, Shaikh, 2020, pp. 24–25), the Russian side may well proceed from the possibility of overcoming this system with the missiles that Russia has.<sup>13</sup> This means that NATO's theater missile defense systems will not be able to deter the use of these nonnuclear missiles in such a scenario if the Russian Federation has a clear offensive intention and confidence in overcoming these missile defense systems. This is the confidence that the number of missiles available to

Russia is sufficient to guarantee the destruction of the intended targets, and its hypersonic missiles are even more likely to overcome the existing NATO regional missile defense systems. This takes into account that hypersonic missiles are very expensive and there cannot be a large number of them.

In theory, a situation is also possible where the Russian side does not have the opportunity to allocate the required amount of any part of the missile arsenal (either hypersonic or other missiles) to accomplish tasks of guaranteed destruction of a limited number of the most important targets within the framework of support the specified attack. Based on the logic of Western experts, Moscow is interested in a quick operation. Thus, NATO's theater missile defense systems, which outnumber Russia's missile system capabilities, could deter a Russian offensive. Then Russia will continue the corresponding missile systems' buildup in the subregion. In such a situation, another question arises: will a regional missile defense system enhance regional stability?

### IMPACT ON STABILITY

In the works of T. Schelling and other deterrence theorists, situations are analyzed where the steps described in the scenarios of Western experts (invasion, missile strikes) are not always the result of a unilateral initiative. Sometimes this is a consequence of a situation where the alleged aggressor finds itself in conditions that it, for some reason, perceives as hopeless for itself (Mazarr et al., 2018, pp. 1–2). There is a risk of sliding into war due to actions that are originally designed to deter the aggressor (Schelling, 2008, p. 225).

Deterrence as such is associated primarily with the obstruction of the intention, which has already been formed by a potential aggressor. Stability implies situations where neither side has an incentive for aggression, that is, the absence of a crisis. Consider a situation where Russia initially has no intention of either invading or launching missile strikes. In this case, its armed forces near the Baltics are built only to provide protection against potential aggression from the alliance. In the immediate vicinity are St. Petersburg, the base of the Baltic Fleet in Kronstadt, and Kaliningrad oblast, which is vulnerable to blockade. With this in mind, will the strengthening of the theater missile defense architecture by NATO in the Baltic countries and Poland lead to tension?

On the one hand, this strengthening may not lead to an aggravation of the situation. According to Western experts, in the units of the armed forces of the Russian Federation near St. Petersburg, near the border with Estonia and Latvia, as well as in Kaliningrad oblast, there are a total of 33 batteries of air defense/missile defense systems (S-300 and S-400).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Details are available in (Muzyka, 2021, pp. 39, 50).

<sup>10</sup>See Missile Defense Review, U.S. Department of Defense, 2019, pp. 27, 29–30.

<sup>11</sup>The expert community of Western countries has different views on the effectiveness of theater missile defense as part of regional deterrence. A detailed analysis of these discussions and a critical analysis of the arguments of the US administration and various expert groups was given by the author earlier (Krivolapov, 2021).

<sup>12</sup>Western experts, generally do not consider situations that Moscow may perceive as threatening to the national security of the Russian Federation. For example, the emergence of NATO plans to deploy nonnuclear short-range and intermediate-range missiles or elements of strategic missile defense in the Baltic states.

<sup>13</sup>The potentially low effectiveness of the *Patriot* systems against the Kalibr and Iskander missiles was discussed by some Western experts. For example, (Kühn, 2019, p. 158; Simon and Lanozka, 2020, p. 20).

Comparable Patriot systems have not yet been deployed in this subregion. In 2022, the delivery of two *Patriot* batteries purchased by Poland is expected (Friesel et al., 2021, p. 91). Germany already has these systems (up to 14 batteries) (Friesel et al., 2021, p. 103), as does the United States (up to 12 batteries in Germany). The other countries of the alliance have fewer such missile defense systems. Thus, in total, NATO has about 26 batteries theoretically available for a quick transfer to the Baltic countries.<sup>15</sup> Russia has a numerical superiority in these systems in the subregion under consideration. Based on this, it can be assumed that a small addition of such complexes to the area by NATO may not lead to tension. For example, Russia practically did not react in any way to the purchase of *Patriot* systems by Poland and Sweden.

At the same time, deployment of a larger number (more than four batteries) of such systems to the area in order to equalize the air and missile defense capabilities of the parties can be perceived by Moscow as preparation for more decisive actions or an attempt to exert pressure.<sup>16</sup> Then this will lead to pulling in additional Russian missiles to the region (Kühn, 2019: 158), including, possibly, hypersonic ones.<sup>17</sup>

Additional deployment of these offensive missiles by Russia may be dictated by support for the concept of nonnuclear deterrence. According to the military doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2014, nonnuclear deterrence is a set of foreign policy, military, and military–technical measures aimed at preventing aggression against the Russian Federation by nonnuclear means.<sup>18</sup> This includes “demonstration of readiness to fulfil the threat of causing damage in retaliatory or preemptive actions by nonnuclear means to the vital interests and facilities of potential aggressor states, which obviously exceeds the benefits from the implementation of aggression” (Burenok and Achasov, 2007, p. 12). As Western experts admit, theater missile defense can limit or exclude some options for nonnuclear deterrence for Moscow at the regional level, in particular, “violate the principle of ‘dosing’ and guaranteed fulfilment of assigned ‘de-escalatory’ activities” (Johnson, 2017, p. 74). Overcoming air defense/mis-

sile defense is an important factor in ensuring nonnuclear deterrence (Kokoshin, 2014, p. 201).

Thus, two scenarios are possible. If the Russian side is confident in the ability of its offensive missiles already available near the Baltic to overcome NATO’s regional missile defense systems to carry out nonnuclear deterrence, the likelihood of additional deployment of Russian offensive missiles in the region is objectively reduced, as is the likelihood of escalation. If there is no such confidence in Moscow (for example, a low number of missiles), then the likelihood of additional deployment of Russian missiles in the region increases.

In a crisis situation, there is a high probability of misunderstanding of each other’s intentions. There may be fears in NATO about the Baltic states, and in Moscow there may be fears about the possibility of blockading Kaliningrad, even if neither is the intention of the respective party. Under these conditions, the actions of any of them to pull in forces and capabilities to the subregion will be interpreted precisely as the preparation of aggression. So, the action–reaction cycle will continue.

During a crisis, if the leadership of the Russian Federation considers that the enemy is ready to deliver a strike (including a limited one), then, within the framework of the concept of nonnuclear deterrence, a decision can be made to deliver “highly effective selective strikes, not associated with losses of population and manpower of the enemy” (Burenok and Achasov, 2007, p. 13). Among the possible targets of these nonnuclear strikes may be such objects in NATO countries as ships and aircrafts with SLCMs and ALCMs, ships with missile defense systems, radars (Ponomarev, Poddubny and Polegaev, 2019, p. 100), ground-based electronic intelligence centers, large ships of a similar functions, communication and control centers (Kokoshin, 2014, p. 201). The decision on demonstration strikes will be made only if the current situation is perceived as extremely dangerous, and then the presence of missile defense systems at these objects will not be able to deter the use of nonnuclear missiles against them.

The volume of this article does not allow a full study in this context of the factor of deployment of short- and intermediate-range missiles in NATO countries. For a more complete picture of the doctrines of both sides in the field of nonnuclear regional deterrence, it is necessary to point out that the United States also has a concept that provides for the use of nonnuclear high-precision weapons against an enemy prepared for a missile attack (left-of-launch measures as part of missile defense strategy).<sup>19</sup> It also applies to regional missile defense.<sup>20</sup> The employment of these

<sup>15</sup>This scenario does not consider the possibility of pulling in additional ships with *Aegis* systems and SM-2 and SM-6 interceptors to the Baltic Sea to cover ports, since the alleged presence of SLCMs makes them a priori a more de-stabilizing factor than *Patriot* systems.

<sup>16</sup>For comparison, during the most dangerous periods of confrontation with Iran (May 2019 and March 2020), the United States deployed only 1–3 additional batteries in the Middle East to cover key facilities.

<sup>17</sup>The appearance of hypersonic weapons in the region during a crisis in itself can de-stabilize the situation. Because when using hypersonic missiles in a regional context, the opposing side (1) has practically no time to react, (2) the target of these missiles is unknown, and (3) the equipment of such missiles is not known for certain, whether it is nuclear or nonnuclear.

<sup>18</sup>Military doctrine of the Russian Federation, November 2014, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>Missile Defense Review, US Department of Defense, 2019, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup>US Missile Defense Policy, Prepared Remarks by Dr. Robert M. Sofer before the Senate Armed Services Committee, June 9, 2021, p. 2.

measures is possible both after the immediate start of the conflict and before its start.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the analysis of the scenario of the Russian offensive in the Baltics presented by Western experts, the strengthening of NATO's regional missile defense system (including air defense/missile defense) will not help deter the use of these nuclear-armed missiles by Russia as a response to one of the four conditions described in the Fundamentals of Russian Policy in the field of nuclear deterrence of 2020, and even as a response within the framework of the Russia's alleged escalate-to-de-escalate concept. The positions of Western military officials and civilian experts are not convincing here. At the same time, such a strengthening of NATO's theater missile defense in most cases will help deter the use of nonnuclear missiles by Russia. Here, the views of representatives of the military-political leadership and the expert community of NATO countries are more well-reasoned. However, it must be taken into account that, in a situation where the potential of theater missile defense exceeds the potential of offensive missiles, a threat to regional stability is still created.

On the one hand, a large number of Russian air defense/missile defense systems near the Baltic and the low assessment of the effectiveness of NATO missile defense against Russian missiles may reduce the likelihood of a sharp response from Moscow to strengthening this missile defense system. On the other hand, a comparison of the doctrinal provisions of the United States and the Russian Federation in the field of regional nonnuclear deterrence showed that a significant strengthening of the air and missile defense architecture (more than four additional batteries of the Patriot systems) can be perceived in Moscow as a preparation to counter its concept of nonnuclear deterrence and demand additional deployment of missile systems to the subregion.

At the same time, Western experts and the military-political leadership of NATO periodically repeat that for the effectiveness of Russia's regional deterrence, it is necessary not only to strengthen the theater missile defense system, but also nonnuclear offensive missiles with a range of less than 5500 km. Despite the fact that both sides have the concept of preemptive nonnuclear strikes against an enemy ready to attack, and there is also a misunderstanding in the field of nuclear doctrines of at least one of the parties (for example, disputes about escalate-to-de-escalate), the strengthening of the NATO regional missile defense architecture (including air defense/missile defense)

will rather have a negative effect on regional stability. There is a risk of an action-reaction cycle in the area of arms buildup in the region, and in the area of an exchange of limited nonnuclear missile strikes against the enemy. Thus, despite at first glance, the purely defensive nature of theater missile defense systems, these systems cannot be recognized as a reliable means of stabilization in the region under consideration. This means that there is no reasonable alternative for strengthening the regional stability than arms control options and transparency regimes.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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<sup>21</sup>Unclassified Report to Congress, Declaratory Policy, Concept of Operations, and Employment Guidelines for Left-of-Launch Capability, U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 10, 2017, p. 1.

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