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Strategic Defensive Weapons and Evolution of Intra-war Deterrence: Assessing Missile Defense Trends in the Middle East

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In a U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute monograph, Andrew Terrill defines the term *intra-war deterrence* as “a process of explicit or tacit bargaining within an ongoing war that still has key limits or thresholds that have not been crossed”¹. Such a bargaining capacity is directly related to escalation and de-escalation trajectories in the course of an armed conflict.

Without a doubt, offensive strategic weapons play an important role in maintaining intra-war deterrence. These weapon systems could function as an asset for deterring adversaries, as well as outsiders in the course of a conflict. Furthermore, offensive strategic weapons are seen as tool of regime security by many authoritarian regimes and dictatorships, as they are terror weapons that pose the very threat of immense and indiscriminate destruction.

Principally, managing intra-war deterrence through offensive strategic weapons depends on the adversary’s strategic vulnerabilities, capacity for second-strike, retaliation means, and decision-making style. At this point, our work draws attention to the very calculus that paved the ground for the 1972 ABM Treaty which had kept the Cold War military balance for decades. This calculus was formulated as: *Offensive and defensive weapons are inextricably linked; and robust defense can vastly complicate the calculation of strategic stability*².

Notably, the Middle East could be seen as a focal point for War Studies discipline due to the correlation between strategic weapons and intra-war deterrence. Firstly, most of the regional actors see strategic weapons as a quick fix solution to overcome conventional shortcomings³. Secondly, since the

¹ W. Andrew Terrill, *Escalation and Intra-war Deterrence during Limited Wars in the Middle East*, The U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks-Pennsylvania, 2009, p.4

² Nikolai Sokov, “Nuclear Weapons in Russian National Security Strategy”, Stephan J. Blank [ed.], *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present, and Future*, The U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks-Pennsylvania, pp. 201-202.

³ Richard L. Russel, “The Middle East’s Nuclear Future”, *The Next Arms Race*, Henry D. Sokolski [ed.], The

1973 Yom Kippur War, which marked the first war-time Scud missile launch in military history⁴, the region has witnessed an uninterrupted battlefield-use record of strategic weapons, especially with regard to ballistic missiles and biological & chemical weapons.

As a response to the aforementioned threats, we see an important defensive strategic weapons trend in the Middle East. While the Gulf Cooperation Council members have been heavily investing in procuring missile defense systems, Turkey has been running its national missile defense tender, the T-Loramids, which ignited reactions from its NATO allies as Ankara showed early signs of opting for the Chinese HQ-9 system⁵.

Conceptualizing missile defense within the framework of war and strategy theory is not easy. On the one hand, as conceptualized by Clausewitz, defense is the stronger form of conducting war, albeit it has a negative object. On the other hand, this paper argues that in WMD-tipped ballistic missile versus missile defense scenarios, defense cannot be perfectly characterized as the “stronger form of conducting war”, but a strategic tool of mitigating strategic vulnerabilities.

Establishing missile defense architectures is a complex task. From a military standpoint, it necessitates multi-layered interception capabilities. Especially for eliminating WMD-tipped warheads, exoatmospheric interception capabilities come into the picture, because the risk of contamination could theoretically threaten strategic targets and major population centers in case of endo-atmospheric interception⁶. Moreover, in numerical calculus, the saturation factor looms large as a major threat to missile defenses.

Building missile defense has many hardships. Firstly, it is a sophisticated system of systems, or C4ISR (*command-control-communications-computers-intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance*) networks, that only a few nations could rely on their indigenous military industry complexes. Secondly, investing in missile defense capabilities stresses defense economics to a considerable extent.

In the Gulf Cooperation Council area, the aforementioned reality translates into a unique defense architecture, depicted as “multilateral bilateralism”⁷. The multilateral bilateralism approach follows two tracks in the Gulf. For some GCC members, as with Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, multilateral bilateralism means exclusively relying on the United States’ forward deployed missile defense assets; while Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE have procured American systems (i.e. THAAD and the Patriot variants), yet, they still need Washington for a complete missile defense umbrella.⁸ Although the GCC members finally managed to form a Unified Military Command in 2013 with a special focus

U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks- Pennsylvania, 2012, pp. 185-186.

⁴ W. Andrew Terril, *Escalation and Intra-war Deterrence during Limited Wars in the Middle East*, The U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks-Pennsylvania, 2009, pp. 44-50.

⁵ For a comprehensive assessment see: Can Kasapoglu, *The Military Strategic Rationale of Turkey’s T-Loramids Project and the Eurosam Offer*, FRS, Paris, 2014.

⁶ UNIDIR and Wilton Park, *Missile Defense, Deterrence and Arms Control: Contradictory Aims or Compatible Goals*, United Nations, 2002, pp. 9-10

⁷ DB Des Roches, “Missile Defense: A Way Forward in the Gulf”, *the National Interest*, 15 April 2014

⁸ Ibid.

on missile defense along with other critical issues⁹, still, disagreements between the Gulf nations and the aforementioned “multilateral bilateralism” comfort-zone constitute and impediment to an integrated GCC missile defense capability.

Apart from the GCC, another key example of missile defense planning remains the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 2010 Lisbon Summit, the allied nations decided to pursue ballistic missile defense capability to foster the Alliance’s collective defense. This was major development since the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense program which has been initiated in 2005 and aimed to protect the deployed NATO forces against ballistic missiles up to 3,000km range¹⁰. As a result of the 2010 Lisbon Summit and the 2012 Chicago Summit, NATO has graduated its priorities to a new level of protecting the European territory, populations, and forces as a whole. Accordingly, within the framework of the European Phased Adaptive Approach, several members of the alliance, such as Turkey, Spain, Poland, and Romania, have been playing key roles to form allied, multilayered missile defense architecture¹¹.

In the light of a comparative assessment on the GCC and the NATO cases, interoperability comes into the picture as a critical factor. Since 2006, when the Bush administration launched the Gulf Security Dialogue, interoperability was underlined as a key issue for fostering the GCC military capabilities¹². Since then, Washington’s top priority in the region has been encouraging a “Gulf-wide, interoperable missile defense architecture”, as reiterated by the 2014 the GCC – US Strategic Cooperation Forum’s joint communiqué¹³.

Finally, the Israel case shows the importance of multilayering, not only against missiles, but rockets and projectiles at the same time. Thus, this study also sheds light on the “Iron Dome phenomenon” in recent military endeavors of the Israeli Defense Forces.

⁹ <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2014/10/gulf-cooperation-councils-unified-military-command>, Accessed on: April 22, 2015.

¹⁰ NATO, “Ballistic Missile Defence”, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49635.htm, Accessed on: April 21, 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Christopher, M. Blanchard and Richard, F. Grimmett, *The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sale Proposals*, CRS Report for Congress, (updated) October, 2008.

¹³ The U.S. Department of State, Media Note, 25 September 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/232169.htm>, Accessed on: April 22, 2015.