

## MISSILE DEFENSE

## NATO beyond NATO Territory

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Last year representatives of NATO's 28 member states gathered in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon, in November to decide on the future orientation of the military alliance. One of the topics that, inevitably, was prominently discussed, was the ongoing war in Afghanistan, pitting all of NATO's members against Afghan insurgents, i.e. the Taliban. Here, NATO ominously opted in favor of prolongation of its presence, ostensibly until 2014. There further raged a controversy in Lisbon over President Obama's plans for reduced reliance on nuclear deterrence. Here, the two leading powers of Europe, France and Germany, stated diametrically opposed views. NATO's newly integrated member France insisted on the relevance of the traditional concept of nuclear deterrence. Germany instead went along with the US's idea of winding down nuclear tensions with Russia via abandonment of the concept of deterrence. But the topic that decisively shaped the outcome of the Lisbon Summit was that regarding construction of a missile defense shield by NATO, against unspecified enemies. Officially proposed by NATO's Secretary-General Rasmussen, the missile defense plan was for the first time approved by the alliance's member states. Equally significant was Russia's reaction to NATO's new plans. Whereas Russia in the past waged fierce opposition against the missile defense shield that was championed by US President George W Bush, Russia's President Medvedev, who attended the Summit, expressed a guarded interest in cooperation with NATO's missile defense plan.

At the end of the Summit, NATO's chief Rasmussen was euphoric over the outcome, calling it 'historic'. The given characterization is justified, although it appears that most sections of the world press failed to pinpoint in what sense NATO's decision was unprecedented, and how it impacts on the rest of the world. Here, it needs to be noted first that the US government of President Obama enthusiastically patronizes NATO's new plans. Rasmussen was clearly acting at the behest of NATO's dominant member state. Yet Obama only one year ago, and in fulfilment of electoral pledges, had called off his precursor's plans for the building of a shield as protection of US territory against any incoming missiles. Instead, he had opted for a more modest version, one that was closer to the kind of missile shield which NATO has already put in place towards defense of its field troops, the system known as *Theatre Missile Defense* (THAAD). This Obama position too is now past. Hence, the US's promotion of a NATO missile shield represents a dramatic reversal in the position held by the US's President. The missiles which reportedly are central to the new plans are SM-3 rockets, which are already stationed on and can be fired from US war ships. They are a part of the US's Aegis armament system, and are reportedly manufactured by Raytheon, one of the five giant armament corporations heading the US military sector. There is thus, prima facie evidence showing that in advising NATO to adopt common plans for missile defense, the US government is promoting the interests of its own armament corporations, which hope to benefit from future orders by NATO's expanded membership.

However, an analysis that limits itself to noting this fact still misses the most crucial point. For NATO's Lisbon decision entails a marriage of two forms of *atlanticism*. The cooperation between industrial powers located on the two sides of the Atlantic ocean from now on takes both the form of military and of military-industrial cooperation. Towards highlighting the latter point, it is necessary to take a longer view regarding the evolution in US government policymaking vis-a-vis its own military sector. During the 1990s, when the US was ruled by Clinton—who belonged to the same Democratic Party as the current American President—the US's military sector went through several phases of restructuring. In the first phase, the sector underwent an *internal* process of restructuring. Many then existing arms

manufacturers either merged with hitherto competitors, or were taken over by other corporations. The end result was that the sector by 1998 was dominated by merely five corporations, i.e. Martin-Lockheed, Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman. From then onwards, however, the US government which itself had advocated the internal restructuring, continued moving forward. It now started promoting yet another form of capital concentration. This time, the concentrations would entail mergers and joint ventures across the Atlantic, between US and European armament manufacturers.

This latter form of *atlanticism* was and is novel in historical terms, for the US in the past had neither facilitated nor aspired anything resembling cross-Atlantic alliance building by armament corporations. It further needs to be registered that the strategic orientation which the US government decided upon in the late 1990s dramatically impacted on restructuring inside Western Europe. Where historically each major European state strenuously guarded its defense sector as its own preserve, Clinton's new form of *transatlanticism* pushed, or contributed to the push for cross-border integration between Europe-based armament corporations. Here again, the end result was greatly increased capital concentration, and the formation of a few corporate giants. Be it that most European armament corporations, except the UK-based BAE Systems, are relatively smaller in size than their US counterparts. In any case, each major US- and each Europe-based armament manufacturer since the beginning of the millennium has formed one or more alliances with military corporations based on the other side of the Atlantic : Martin Lockheed has lined up with BAEs, the US's Boeing Corporation has opted for close cooperation with the Paris-based corporation Thales, etc. Hence, the idea of a *new atlanticism* has not remained a dead letter, but has indeed borne the result which the US aimed at: formation of a global defense industry, in which US corporations by and large play the hegemonic role.

Lastly, skeptical analysts will argue that the mentioned re-alignments have little bearing on the discussion regarding missile defense. After all, it is precisely in the area of missile construction where (most) leading European armament corporations have built their own, European consortium. This is the case of MBDA, a company formed seven years ago which by 2007 had a recorded turn-over of 3 Billion Euros. When formed, corporate ownership in MBDA was shared by BEA Systems (37.5%), EADS (37.5%) and Finmeccanica (25%). Surely, MBDA will canvas in Brussels to obtain a sizeable share in the pie of new orders that will arise from NATO's decision taken in Portugal. Yet it would be wrong to presume that MBDA's existence is entirely extraneous to the *new transatlanticism* described above. On the contrary: MBDA reportedly has signed a special security agreement with the Pentagon, and has in the past signed at least two 'teaming'-agreements with US Corporation Boeing. One of which was concerned with global missile defense (2004)! Hence, the case of MBDA does not contradict, but appears to confirm, this writer's interpretations of the significance of the Lisbon Summit. Here, one witnesses the consummation of a wedding between two types of *atlanticism*, i.e. NATO's traditional form of *atlanticism*, in which the armies of atlantic states join forces - and the *atlanticism* in which armament corporations are interlinked. And whereas Russia's rulers who are being wooed by NATO have perhaps not much to fear from the wedding, states like China and Brazil belonging to the Global South have little reason to be re-assured. For NATO is now committed to playing a military role well beyond the territory it historically assigned itself. War in Afghanistan is a case in point. One wonders about the *offensive* significance which the combination of two *atlanticisms* in the future will have. □