



UK's BMD Policy

a personal view

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UK's BMD Policy

- Some History
- Evolution of a Policy
- The Main Policy Issues
- Possible Futures

These are personal views
not those of RUSI or MoD



A Quarter Century of BMD in UK (1)

- Margaret Thatcher supported President Reagan's SDI initiative, set up SDIPO
- SDI MoU signed in 1985
 - enabled technical dialogue and research cooperation with US (SDIO→BMDO→MDA)
- UK has never – then or since - committed to procurement or budgeted much beyond research (never more than 0.1% of US spend)
- Political interest tailed off through the John Major years
- UK policymakers have never been won over by US enthusiasm for BMD
- PMs since Thatcher have 'supported' US Presidents without committing to procurement



A Quarter Century of BMD in UK (2)

- MoD undertook many national studies, including a Pre-Feasibility Study (early 90s) & TRRAP (late 90s).
- New MoU (June 2003) followed US deployment decisions and ABM Treaty withdrawal
- Agreements to allow US the use of Fylingdales (early warning radar) and Menwith Hill site (downlink of early warning data from US satellites, DSP & SBIRS)
- MoD set up a Missile Defence Centre
- Third Site – did the US offer to UK? Did UK refuse?
 - Likely to remain for ever unclear
 - *“No discussions of this nature have taken place”*
- UK deeply involved in NATO discussions over Third Site



Considerations in UK policy making (1)

- National threat assessments
 - Threat = capability x intention
 - Iran now principal concern
- Threat is the dominant policy consideration
 - but UK does not recognise an imminent threat to homeland
- US relationship central, mainly technical
- “Active” measures one of many possible responses
 - diplomacy, deterrence, “passive” means, pre-emption
- Cost & ‘Balance of Investment’
 - costs can be affordable if shared
- Weak (non-existent?) military advocacy
- Little UK public pressure, for or against
 - Parliamentary impact minimal
- UK industry has been offered little support by MoD



Considerations in UK policy making (2)

- NATO and Theatre Missile Defence are the priorities
- NATO's key role in European, continental defence
 - achieving European consensus still challenging
- Tepid commitment to Third Site; alternatives possible, but
 - *“the UK welcomes the US expansion of [BMD] into Europe”*
- No substantive European consensus, except ...
 - NATO progress on TBMD
 - studies on continental defence – slow progress
- SE of NATO should be defended first; spread defence North Westerly if threat evolves
- Russian reaction to Third Site the most recent policy challenge
- BMD and deterrence
 - Trident decision & BMD kept separate
 - importance of BMD if nuclear weapon numbers reduced?



A Recent Parliamentary Question

On 4 February 2009, Labour MP, Peter Kilfoyle (ex-Minister in the MoD) questioned Quentin Davies (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence – he was a Conservative MP for 20 years, switching to Labour in 2007).

- On locating systems in UK, Minister Davies said – “.. *no such decision .. is in prospect at the present time*”
- On having BMD – “ .. *it provides an alternative to that*” [i.e. “*to sitting and waiting for ... Armageddon*”]
 - Translate: we like the idea of BMD (but we’ll let the Americans do it)
- On effectiveness – “*There have been 47 successes against 37 failures. The system is .. making progress, so that any assumption that it is technically non-viable would be rather a rash one to make.*”
 - Translate: 1. we believe what MDA tells us
2. an adversary should do the same



Policy Summary

Priority

- Threat
- US Connection
- Theatre above Homeland
- Cost
- Alliance consensus

Secondary

- Deterrence relationship
- Support without commitment



Possible Futures for UK Policy

- Deployed force defence, through NATO, will be the top priority
- NATO's approach to continental defence likely to be UK's favoured route to homeland defence
 - UK delegations will be prominent in NATO policy making
- Diplomatic approaches, including supporting non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, preferred to active homeland defence
 - especially having to pay for it!
- High level of dependence on US initiatives
- Potential support for mobile options
 - use of Type 45 Destroyer? (possible in long term)



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