

Missile Proliferation: Threat, Cause and Response

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The proliferation of missiles, especially those capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction, is a growing problem for international peace, regional stability and human security. The accelerated accumulation and use of missiles by states over the past two decades have caused great damage and loss of life. Fear of their use reinforces tensions in many areas. The possibility of acquisition of missile systems by terrorists and other non-state actors only sharpens concern. In analysing what can be done about this situation, we need to examine a chain of factors: threat, cause and response.

The missile threat

The threat posed by missiles has changed significantly over the past few years. This is broadly agreed, but the nature of the change remains subject to debate. My own analysis is that deterioration has been largely qualitative rather than quantitative at the state level. Compared to the end of the Cold War, there are about the same number of states with significant holdings and/or development programs involving medium or longer-range missiles. There are also fewer actual missiles of this kind (thanks in large part to US and Russian build-downs). This is offset by the increasing sophistication, range and destructive capability of the missiles that remain. Generational shifts in production and export capability at the advanced and basic levels of national development are driven by both horizontal and vertical proliferation of technology.

The states about which we tend to express concern on the missile proliferation front have remained largely the same – India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iraq prominent among them. There have also however been increased expressions of concern by some states over the impact of missile use by a wider range of countries, including some in conflicts where Canada has been involved, such as the Gulf War and NATO actions in the Balkans.

Beyond these shifting parameters in classic state-to-state concerns lies the increasingly worrisome dynamic of missile proliferation to non-state actors. In post-September 11 geo-political dialogue, this is applied especially to terrorists, but in fact the concerns are appropriate across the whole spectrum of para-military forces and individuals of all descriptions. The result has been increasing attention on whether our state-centred non-proliferation approaches can also effectively be applied to this new problem. This new challenge to control is reflected, for one thing, in the fact that the missiles of interest to terrorists are often short-range rather than the medium to long-range types of main concern at the state level; this includes for example both the

shoulder-fired ground-to-air weapons used recently against civilian airliners and the ground-to-ground models favoured by paramilitary groups in the Middle East and elsewhere.

In considering the question of missile threat, it is important to consider the dynamics of threat analysis, which should be, but often is not, value-free. Sound threat analysis focuses on both capabilities and intentions, to produce an estimate of likelihood of use by one country (or other actor) against another. Capabilities are easier to assess than intentions, and it is argued by some that capabilities are therefore the only factor that matters. Such an evaluation overlooks the fact that some of our closest allies are major missile-possessors; based on a strict capability analysis, this should surely worry us, but our analysis of their intentions mitigates such an evaluation. Intentions are also a necessary part of the analysis of causation outlined later. Rational threat analysis must in addition take into account a calculus of anticipated response to any attack and the deterrent effect of that factor on likelihood of aggression. Again, this is not always easy to calculate, but must not simply be ignored for that reason.

It should also be noted that the “global” missile threat is very different for different states – for the US, for Japan, for the European Union and for Canada, to cite but a few examples. Only a comparatively small part of the missile threat is actually global, for one thing, and this tends to apply mainly to the traditional five nuclear-weapon States. Other missile threats are largely regional in nature, although there is some degree of overlap (eg North Korean missiles possibly capable of hitting the westernmost reaches of North America or missiles launched from the Middle East against Europe). One should therefore be cautious about accepting a “one size fits all” threat analysis, but should rather stress the importance of independent intelligence-gathering and analysis on a national basis. This is reinforced by the fact that, in some cases, national threat analyses (concerning missile proliferation *inter alia*) have clearly been cast in response to a perceived need to shape the domestic or international perceptions favourably to a certain course of action.

Causal factors

Analysis of cause is the necessary link between threat and response. Without it, we are likely to respond more to short-term symptoms than to long-term dysfunction, resulting in palliation (at best) rather than cure of the problem. For our current purposes, we need to know *why* states and other actors want to acquire and accumulate missiles. Again, these reasons are specific and largely regional in nature. They are also highly varied.

Military use: the most obvious reason to have missiles is because you intend to use them in defensive or offensive operations should the military need arise. On the evidence of the past two decades, this has applied to several NATO states, Iran, Iraq, Lybia and a variety of non-state actors, to cite but a few examples.

Threat of use or deterrence: as a variation of actual use, missiles have also been used to threaten damage on another state. Sometimes such a threat can be explicit, as in the mutual deterrence (significantly based on missile delivery vehicles) that exists among

various combinations of the five nuclear weapons states. Less formal missile-related threat/deterrence equations have clearly also existed at the regional level, especially in the Middle East (involving Israel/Iraq for example) or India/Pakistan.

International status and political credibility: in some cases, it appears that one significant rationale for acquiring missiles has been the perception that they increase a state's geopolitical "weight". Many experts for example consider that a desire to reinforce perceptions of regional power status are a significant factor (although not the only one) in India's missile development program. In parallel fashion on the domestic side, there are cases where it is apparent that missile-related programs have become important elements in national politics (eg missile defence in the US).

Economics: in some countries (for example North Korea), missile development programs are explicitly acknowledged to be major sources of export earnings, and are justified as such. In some states, such programs are seen as part of a comprehensive national S&T-based economic development effort, often linked to civilian space launch programs. There are also many states, at all points on the geographic, ideological and development spectrum, where the arms production and export industry (including its missile wing) has a big impact on political and military decision-making.

Demonstration effect: as a secondary cause, it must be noted that the possession of missiles by some states has an impact on others. In particular, the more that missiles are proven effective in terms of actual military use or coercion, and the more they are claimed in military doctrine to be central to one state's security, the more that "have-not" states, especially those in regions of high tension, will desire to develop or acquire missile systems, and the less they will consider pressure to give up those they already possess.

In any given country, of course, many causative factors may apply simultaneously. These factors will affect (*inter alia*) the numbers and characteristics of missiles sought, the perceived importance of an indigenous development program and the intensity of opposition to reversing decisions on acquisition and accumulation. The basic bottom line, however, is that measures to respond to a perceived missile threat from a given state must take into account the individual driver or combination of drivers pertinent to that state, if these measures are to prove effective. Again, no "one size fits all" approach will work.

Multi-sided response

Given the wide disparity evident in both threat and causation, it is fortunate that a wide range of responses are both possible and being considered by the international community, reflecting concern and activism on the part of governments and civil society. These responses can be considered in three basic clusters: supply side, direct response and demand side.

Supply side: in this cluster, the focus is on stopping proliferation before it takes place, or at least making it more difficult. The main tools involved are national export controls and the multilateral regimes that exist to coordinate them. Prominent among the latter is the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which provides shared technical expertise, intelligence sharing and coordination among the export control programs of its members as well as carrying out outreach activities to non-members. Other supply-side approaches include UN sanctions such as those against Iraq (which target *inter alia* missiles of a range greater than 150 km) and the counter-terrorism principles adopted at Kananaskis by the G-8 and endorsed by the UN General Assembly. The main challenges here are to ensure that control mechanisms are kept up to date in terms of technological, commercial, military and political developments, and to encourage all states to develop and implement tighter control procedures.

Direct response: responses in this cluster accept that proliferation has taken place and proposes ways to deal with it. Traditional deterrence is one example – make your opponent afraid to use his missiles against you. Missile defence is another – seek to make his missile arsenal useless by developing a counter-missile force (if the technology works). Counter-proliferation involves pre-emptive military attack on an opponent's forces before they can be used; this has been little employed to date on the missile front, but was used by Israel against Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor. A fourth response is disarmament under UN enforcement, which in the missile field has been applied to Iraq under the UNSCOM and UNMOVIC mandates. Finally, there are a range of possible "special case" options applying to individual countries, such as proposals simply to buy out North Korea's missile development and export programs.

Demand side: here the goal is to ameliorate the causal factors that engender missile programs, so as to reduce the pressures to develop and acquire missiles, encourage restraint in their accumulation and promote missile disarmament. The first aspect must clearly be to address the basic security concerns that lie behind the drive to possess these military tools. Success has been achieved in some cases in this regard, notably in the late- and post-Cold War missile agreements between the US and the USSR/Russia and in the Argentine/ Brazilian agreement to build down their missile programs as part of broader security understandings. Perhaps there might be lessons to apply to the Middle East? At the multilateral level, the success of the International Code of Conduct (ICOC) against ballistic missiles, earlier Russian proposals for a Global Control System (GCS) and the report to the UNGA last fall of the UN experts group on missiles all reflect the increasing support for multilateral approaches to shared security on the missile front. Such developments can (with luck) be regarded as the first building blocks in an eventual comprehensive, universal and legally-binding treaty on all types of missiles covering development, testing, production, deployment, transfer, acquisition and use. Such a treaty will not be agreed anytime soon but is a worthwhile goal. Meanwhile, confidence-building measures such as those found in the ICOC, in US-Russia accords and in the Lahore agreement between India and Pakistan represent a practical start on reducing missile-related security concerns. Working to decouple military missile development

from civilian space programs is also a road worth exploring.

Each of these approaches has its opponents and critics. The MTCR is for example accused of discrimination on the part of states already possessing missile technology. The ICOC is criticised for “legitimising” existing programs and for an inadequately open negotiating procedure. Missile defence is opposed for undermining deterrence and promoting the growth of missile arsenals. Counter-proliferation is seen as unilateralist and has mixed international support as a general concept. Even the UN experts group, the most universal forum to consider missile-related issues so far, found itself dominated by three main groupings: states with missile systems that opposed disarmament or restrictions for existing holdings but favoured non-proliferation to others, states without missile systems who didn’t want to be stopped from acquiring them and states who favoured creation of a multilateral system to promote both disarmament and non-proliferation for all sides.

The situation is further complicated by lack of international agreement on some basic questions:

First, is there really a “problem” in terms of missiles? Why should they be singled out for attention from arms controllers?

Secondly, will the international community accept that it bears a corporate responsibility to address this problem?

Third, if the answer to the first two questions is “yes”, what is the nature of the problem? What missiles does it cover – ballistic? cruise? Whose missiles are the problem? Can missile non-proliferation be separated from missile disarmament?

Such a situation, replete with misunderstandings, cross-purposes and lack of consensus, is inevitable at this stage in the missile debate, as it has been early in every debate on multilateral arms control measures. We must apply patience and perseverance to building up the necessary consensus, first on the basic issues and later on the details.

Conclusions

Let me summarise by underlining five points:

First, the need for independent national threat analysis of “the missile problem”.

Secondly, recognition that both threat and causal factors are largely national and regional in nature, meaning that a uniform global response is unlikely to succeed.

Thirdly, therefore, the need to consider different approaches for different missile-related situations, reflecting varying security conditions, levels of technological development and the goals of pertinent state and non-state actors.

Fourthly, the importance of continuing to building consensus among government and civil society actors on the fundamental issues.

Finally, meanwhile, the benefits of exploring different avenues simultaneously and adopting a “building block” approach toward a comprehensive multilateral approach on missiles, combining non-proliferation and disarmament aspects.

Looked at one way, the mountain is high and the road to the top long. On the other hand, there is real excitement in being able to take that vital first step in the journey.