

THE ‘MISSILE SHIELD’, NATO AND TURKEY*

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Introduction

The development of the anti-ballistic missile defence system, commonly known as the ‘Missile Shield’, by the United States of America (USA) has led to widespread discussions among the American public and the rest of the world. The discussions relate to two issues. The first concerns the reasons put forward by the US for the development of the Missile Shield and the second relates to how the policies of Russia, China and certain European countries, which sharply oppose the American project, will affect international security and stability.

First of all, this article will outline the reasons put forward by American security experts for the deployment of the American anti-ballistic missile defence system and explain the kind of structure intended. Later, the reasons for the opposition, especially in previous years, of Russia, China and certain European allies of the USA within NATO will be discussed with references to the Cold War period. Within this framework, the effects of developments on Turkey, which is among the countries that will inevitably be affected by changes to international security and stability if the US realizes its Missile Shield deployment plans, will also be discussed.

Reasons behind the American National Defence System

One of the arguments of international security experts that developed after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and found acceptance, was that East-West antagonism would be replaced with North-South conflict.¹ It was argued that in such an international environment, conflicts between certain northern countries – with their developed economies and strong armies – and countries of the south – which are less developed but in possession of chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons, and the ballistic missiles capable of delivering these to their targets – would continue in a different atmosphere and dimension. Indeed, the developments of the past fifteen years have justified this view to a large extent.

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¹ Within the context of this debate, the whole of Western Europe, the USA, Canada and Japan – located in the northern hemisphere – are identified as the developed ‘North’. The less developed states of Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and South Asia are identified as the ‘South’.

During the Cold War years when the East–West bloc system was observed, the Soviet Union worked extensively to develop and improve chemical, biological and specifically nuclear weapons. Following mass production, some of these weapons were deployed in certain Union Republics ready for use, and some were stockpiled in others. Thousands of scientists, experts and technicians worked in hundreds of scientific research centres and laboratories in nearly all of the Soviet Union Republics for the improvement of these weapons. All the information, material and technology used in a classified environment by the scientists and technicians for the development of weapons of mass destruction was under the strict supervision of Soviet central authority in high-security zones.

However, due to political, economic and social developments and the erosion of central authority following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these nuclear, chemical and biological materials, which even used in small amounts are capable of ending the lives of many, have been left in easily accessed, unsafe and unsupervised environments. Thus, the equipment, technology and information, left in the former Soviet territories under unsuitable economic and social conditions without adequate security, has become the focus of attention for those countries wanting to develop weapons of mass destruction, but which lack the necessary scientific and technical infrastructure to do so. Many cases have confirmed that such equipment, technology and information are being illegally transported to less developed countries in the south.²

Throughout the Cold War years, under the bipolar system and the ‘balance of nuclear terror’, certain countries, unable to develop sufficient capacity to match the military power of larger states due to scientific, technical and financial inadequacies, could not pursue assertive foreign policies. When the Cold War ended, these countries began to work on developing weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles to deliver them to distant targets, as if committed to a vendetta. Iran and North Korea’s development of ballistic missiles particularly, which have ranges of approximately 1400 km, and their unstoppable efforts to improve them, have given rise to the possibility that in the near future these countries could develop intercontinental ballistic missiles with ranges between 5000–6000 km.³

At present, Iran and North Korea’s progress in developing ballistic missile projects, and their efforts to acquire the capability to place weapons of mass destruction in these missiles and send them longer distances, have led some countries – primarily the USA and Israel – to want to develop effective defence systems against potential missile threats that could be faced in the near future. It is this perceived threat that is emphasized as the reason for America’s efforts to develop a national ‘Missile Shield’, which is considered an effective defence against intercontinental ballistic missiles.

² For detailed information on this issue see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/nukes>.

³ In August 1998, North Korea sent its Taepo-Dong missile, with a range of 1360 km, over Japan to a target in the Pacific Ocean. During the same period, Iran tested its 1340 km-range Shahab-3 missile in the Persian Gulf. Iran stated that it conducted a second test in July 2000.

Problems with the ‘Missile Shield’ Project

The USA faces two fundamental problems in ensuring the effectiveness of the planned anti-ballistic missile defence system: Firstly, although such an air defence system is theoretically feasible, scientists cannot guarantee its one hundred per cent effectiveness in practice, despite numerous tests; secondly, states may demonstrate reactionary attitudes towards the American project based on legal and political grounds.

Technical Problems

In theory, the Missile Shield targets short-, medium- and long-range enemy missiles with a speed of 4–6 km per second, which are destroyed in mid-air by colliding with missiles launched against them, at approximately the same speed, at a certain point in their trajectories. In other words, it is like shooting a bullet with a bullet, which requires considerable means and an extremely high level of scientific and technological capability. On account of the potential threats calculated following the disruption of the Cold War balance, the USA, which is the most developed country in terms of the military weapons industry, provided huge incentives to its science and technology institutes, arms development laboratories and companies in order to rapidly progress in this field.

The USA made its first politico-strategic goal the deployment of a 100-battery anti-ballistic missile defence system in the Alaska region, to counter the potential threat of countries like North Korea and Iran developing intercontinental ballistic missiles. The first planning phase of the project, which came on the agenda for discussion in the second half of the 1990s, envisaged the system would be effective by 2005. The first step for the missile defence system was the deployment of 20 batteries; the deployment of all remaining batteries would take place over the following years, and according to the plan, the entire US territory would be protected against intercontinental missile attack. Furthermore, it was stressed that in order for the missile batteries to be used effectively, worldwide early warning systems and an extensive radar network must be created. The projected total cost for the system was 60 billion dollars.

The first air defence system test was successfully completed in October 1999. However, following the failure of two tests conducted in January and July 2000, some military experts opposed conducting further tests before first receiving sufficiently reliable results from navigation system simulations. These experts were concerned that if tests were prematurely conducted for political reasons – rather than technical purposes – and failed, this could strengthen those sentiments opposing the system. Following these developments, Bill Clinton, who was US President at the time, refrained from making a decision on the project before the end of his term, stressing that the decision should be left to the new president who would be elected at the end of 2000.

Following his election as US President in November 2000, George W. Bush had to turn his attention to Afghanistan and Iraq after the attacks of 11 September, while accelerating development of the Missile Shield project in response to the level of

international threat he considered to be increasing. The 'Ballistic Missile Defense Organization', the authority responsible for the 'Strategic Defense Initiative' (SDI) more commonly known in the 1980s as the 'Star Wars Project' when Ronald Reagan was the US president, was restructured as the 'Missile Defense Agency' in January 2002. Theoretical, scientific, technical and laboratory studies were accelerated, sizeable funds were allocated from the budget and in a short period of time consecutive 'successful' tests were being conducted. Although these tests were usually performed in the Pacific Ocean within the maritime borders of US state Hawaii, tests were also conducted in other regions of the country. Joint drills were conducted with Japan during the spring of 2008, and it is claimed that tests of missile shields deployed on ships have been successful. As of the second half of 2008 efforts continue apace.

It is expected that the system, which can be deployed on land, sea or air platforms, will be fully operational in a few months.⁴ Although many of the problems related to science and technology have been overcome as a result of extensive studies, the main problems that remain to be solved before the system can be employed are considered to be of a legal and political nature. The USA is attempting to convey its resolve to overcome these problems with high-level official commentaries and by moving forward without considering the opposition to the project.

Legal and Political Problems

In 1972 the USA and Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), which declared and guaranteed not to establish any kind of air defence system within those territories outlined in the articles of the treaty. Consequently, Russian leaders and experts have strongly opposed US demands to renegotiate the restrictive clauses of the ABM in order to establish a national air defence system. As a result, the USA declared that it would withdraw from the treaty. In response, Russian Federation officials stated that they might withdraw from several disarmament and weapons control treaties they had signed with the USA and end their effective contribution to and cooperation with various multilateral international weapons control treaties. In order to understand Russia's unwillingness to modify the ABM Treaty, the developments that led to the signing and the past and present importance of this agreement be underlined.

The 'Balance of Terror' and the ABM Treaty

Although the deadly and destructive effects of the nuclear bomb – which was developed during the Second World War and used in Japan for the first and last time during wartime – were clearly evident, it was impossible to prevent the improvement and proliferation of this weapon.⁵ In fact, following the United States of America, which first developed the weapon in 1945, the Soviet Union (1949), England (1952), France (1960) and People's Republic of China (1964) acquired the capability to

⁴ See US Department of Defense Missile Defense Agency website:
<http://www.mda.mil/mdalink/html/mdalink.html>.

⁵ The atom bombs dropped in Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945) were first tested in the Alamogordo Desert in the US state of New Mexico on 16 July 1945 during the so-called 'Trinity Test'.

develop and use nuclear weapons. Moreover, in the following years Israel, India, South Africa and Pakistan also developed this capability.⁶

In the nuclear arms race the Soviet Union and USA stood out as the two superpowers. In a short period of time, both were in possession of tens of thousands of nuclear warheads and had the means and capability to send warheads with intercontinental range.⁷ In addition to the increase in the number of nuclear weapons there has also been an extraordinary increase in their power. Nuclear and thermo-nuclear warheads have been produced which are thousands of times stronger than the 'primitive' atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁸ This period in particular saw the US and the Soviet Union improve the efficiency and accuracy of their nuclear weapons and develop the capacity to deploy their weapons in more secure zones by diversifying their methods of delivering these warheads to their targets.

The fast-paced nuclear arms race continued during periods such as the Korean War and the Cuban Crisis. However, by the 1960s, due to the number of nuclear weapons that America and the Soviet Union possessed, and the protection of these weapons in ultra high-security zones on various platforms, the possibility of any kind of victory in a nuclear conflict had been eliminated; it was calculated that if either territory were to come under nuclear attack, their weapons systems would to a large extent remain unharmed.

Long-range nuclear missile submarines that can remain undetected for months submerged under an ice cap, intercontinental ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads ready for launch in silos tens of metres underground, and heavy (nuclear) bombardment squadrons with half the fleet in the air and on red alert at all times, would allow the side under attack to safely preserve a military force large enough to effectively retaliate. As a result, it became clear that even in the case of a surprise attack, it would be impossible for either the United States of America or the Soviet Union to win a clear victory. Under these circumstances, the only remaining reasons for a nuclear conflict to start were either momentary madness or technical error.

⁶ However, South Africa has stated that as of 1993 it had completely destroyed its nuclear weapons and the infrastructure to improve them, thereby becoming a nuclear weapons-free state. For detailed information on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons see Mustafa Kibaroglu, 'Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılması Sorunu ve Japonya'nın Güvenliği', *Avrasya Dosyası - Japonya Özel*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 1999, Ankara, pp. 23–39.

⁷ During the intense period of the Cold War the nuclear warheads owned by the USA and Soviet Union totalled approximately 70,000. It is stated that since the late 1980s, as a result of the rapidly signed nuclear disarmament treaties (INF, START I & II) and the parties' unilateral decisions, the total number of tactical, medium-range and strategic nuclear warheads in the parties' possession amounts to approximately 10,000. England and France, which also have nuclear weapons, keep their already limited nuclear weapons to a few hundred warheads. China is not decreasing the number of its nuclear warheads which amount to approximately 400, of which 20 can be deployed on missiles with strategic range.

⁸ The amount of energy released by the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was determined as 16 and 20 kilotons (kt) respectively. This is equal to the impact that would be created by the simultaneous explosion of 2000 10-ton trucks full of dynamite. It has been determined that the power of the single thermo-nuclear bomb developed by the Soviet Union in 1952, nicknamed 'Czar's Bomb', is 6500 times that of the one dropped on Hiroshima.

Despite the USA and Soviet Union's awareness that due to this mutually achieved 'balance of terror'⁹ there would not be any victors, they were not blind to the slight possibility that technological developments on one side could disturb the balance and result in one dominating the other. Thus, the two superpowers commenced efforts to lower the risk of nuclear conflict to a minimum; the result of these efforts was the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 1972.

The ABM Treaty aimed to make permanent the balance of terror and mutual deterrence that was reached as a result of the arms race between America and the Soviet Union. In accordance with the ABM Treaty, America and the Soviet Union agreed not to establish air defence systems in their territories except for two locations (their capitals and one intercontinental missile silo). Thus it was envisaged that hundreds of cities and millions of people over the vast territories of both countries would be exposed to nuclear attack.

In principle, this situation – which can only be explained as a strategic military paradox – aimed to prevent the parties from carrying out surprise attacks against each other by purposefully leaving vulnerable that which is most valuable to them. It was believed that the party intending to gain advantage with a surprise attack would in the end refrain from doing so, since, in accordance with the articles of the ABM Treaty, the other party could retaliate against their defenceless cities and people with their well-protected nuclear weapons. The ABM Treaty was a result of the Cold War's fragile balance of deterrence, which forced the USA and the Soviet Union to trust neither each other nor themselves, and consequently neither side could risk an attack that would certainly be met with efficient retaliation.

Russia's Reaction to the 'Missile Shield' Project and Its Reasons

The good relations established between Russia and the USA following the dissolution of the Soviet Union minimized the possibility of hot conflict. With this facilitation of confidence and stability, the parties began to destroy large numbers of their nuclear warheads. Important steps were taken towards disarmament, at least in the long-term: The INF Treaty (1987) required the elimination of intermediate-range nuclear missiles (defined as between 1500 and 5500 km), and the START I (1991) and START II (1993) treaties required the number of nuclear warheads that could be delivered by intercontinental missiles to be gradually decreased to 6000–6500 and then 3000–3500.¹⁰

⁹ Following the rapid arms race between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, a balance was reached that stopped the possibility of a conflict that could destroy the whole world. In 1956, security expert Albert Wohlstetter, who was conducting research at the RAND Corporation, defined this as a 'delicate balance of terror'.

¹⁰ Although nuclear disarmament is desired, it also leads to some negative developments. One of these is the potential for unauthorized individuals to take possession of hundreds of tons of plutonium and enriched uranium (HEU) from nuclear weapons that have been rendered useless, as a result of the erosion of central authority and weak security in the former Soviet territories. The second major problem is the need to preserve these materials, which emit high levels of radiation, in secure and well-isolated zones in order to avoid damage to the environment and human health. Efforts towards this goal are not very advanced; only temporary solutions have been found.

In spite of these developments, due to concerns dominating national security, both Russia and the USA want to preserve the balance reached during the Cold War, and closely follow each other's developments in the military field. The goal is to observe the balance. It is argued that the USA – which wants to ensure full protection by establishing a Missile Shield – might threaten Russia with assertive and repressive policies that could not be implemented during the Cold War years. Russia considers this unacceptable and has voiced its threats to withdraw from the aforementioned treaties and decrease its support of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons regimes. In fact, the INF Treaty has been suspended. After this strong response to the USA, Russia does not want to be forced to reestablish the equilibrium by developing a system similar to the Missile Shield, which if deployed could arguably disturb the post-Cold War strategic balance.

China's Reaction to the 'Missile Shield' Project and Its Reasons

Like Russia, China strongly opposes US efforts to develop the Missile Shield. Having successfully tested a nuclear warhead for the first time in 1964, the People's Republic of China produced 400 of them, only 20 of which are strategic warheads deployed on intercontinental missiles. However, because China's weapons are not held in high-security zones it is argued that in the case of an attack by the USA, which would be protected by a national defence system, China could lose its nuclear power very quickly. It is a matter of concern that in such a situation, China would be vulnerable to India, its historical enemy, which is known to possess nuclear weapons and continues to arm itself rapidly. China is severely criticized by the US Government and the American public for its human rights violations and problems with Taiwan. In terms of these three issues it is argued that one of the most important reasons for the US Government not to impose harsh sanctions on China is its nuclear weapons capacity.¹¹

China has declared that if the USA insists on carrying out its plans for a national air defence system it will decrease its support for the effective implementation of international non-proliferation treaties and will continue if necessary to improve the quality and increase the number of its nuclear weapons. It is known that China possesses all kinds of equipment, technology and the knowledge to produce weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and exports these to countries such as Iran, Pakistan and North Korea. In response to pressure from the American Government, China has decreased the level of its exports; however, since the Missile Shield issue has been on the agenda, China has implied that it will lift the restrictions on its export regime. It is feared that such a situation would serve to accelerate the production of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and as such, poses a serious dilemma for the USA. On one hand, the USA argues that its reason for the deployment of a Missile Shield is to protect its people and territory from the ballistic missiles that countries like Iran and North Korea could develop in the near future; on the other hand, Russia and China's negative attitudes, which are the result of US policies, allow these states to produce ballistic missiles more easily and more rapidly.

¹¹ It must be remembered that China has a population of over one billion and great economic potential. It is also a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with the power of veto.

The European Allies' Position on the 'Missile Shield'

Although common ground with Russia and China is limited and the reasons for their opposition are different, America's NATO-member allies have strongly opposed its Missile Shield deployment initiative for a long time. It has been emphasized that countries such as France, England and Germany essentially oppose the plan on principle; the efforts of a country, under common defence obligations within the NATO alliance, to develop an independent defence mechanism suited to its own conditions, provokes a reaction of principle. It is an issue that has been politicized and discussed on political platforms. Moreover, European NATO members worry that if the USA deploys the NMD, their Cold War concerns would be revived. The USA's European allies are of the opinion that if the USA realizes its Missile Shield plans, which will enable it to become self-sufficiently secure, it would be less concerned about European defence.

To overcome these concerns the US Government has stated that if the Missile Shield project is successfully realized it would share the technology and knowledge with its European allies; this offer, however, did not create any excitement among them. First of all, the US promise to share technology and knowledge in the future is only verbal; there have been no legally binding guarantees. Secondly, the prevailing perspective in Europe is that because the possibility of successfully realizing the development of the Missile Shield with a reliable system is limited, the USA has attracted unnecessary criticism from Russia and led Russia to take a tougher stance on issues of international security, thereby increasing the level of threat.

However, disagreements between the USA and its European allies have largely been overcome as a result of successfully conducted tests that have attested to the system's feasibility and thus increased the plan's attractiveness. Moreover, the USA has moved towards a more solid scheme of cooperation. The most concrete development has been the official statements made during the NATO Presidents Summit on 2–4 April 2008 in Romania's capital Bucharest, which promised serious and extensive efforts to develop the Missile Shield project within NATO.

In terms of the two key steps in the Missile Shield project, which are the deployment of a radar system in the Czech Republic and missile batteries in Poland, the USA prefers to proceed by means of bilateral treaties; an agreement between the USA and the Czech Republic was signed on 8 July 2008, and a similar treaty was signed with Poland on 14 August 2008 in Warsaw. It is thought that the Russian military operation against Georgia has been influential in the successful conclusion of the almost two-year long negotiations with Poland. Both the Czech Republic and Poland faced difficulties when making these political decisions; they encountered threats from former ally Russia, and the issue provoked strong public reaction in both countries, which put the decision-makers in a tough position. However, these two countries – which not so long ago were under the Soviet yoke, and had been for many years – reason that to counter the Russian threats they have no other alternative than US protection and deterrence, for a strong and reliable European (Union) army does not currently exist.

The Effects of the ‘Missile Shield’ Project on Turkey’s Security

Due to Turkey’s close military and political relations with the USA, the development of an efficient missile defence system by the USA could be considered to impact positively on Turkey’s security. It is widely known that many countries close to Turkey possess weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles to deliver them, and want to improve their capabilities; thus, if the US Government chooses to share the Missile Shield technology with its allies, it could have a positive effect on Turkey’s security.

On the other hand, there are potential negative developments that need to be stressed. The US Government’s offer to share Missile Shield technology in the future is no more than a statement made during the Bucharest Summit; that the offer is not legally binding must be taken into consideration. Moreover, such sharing of technology is not expected to occur before the system is fully developed and its function within the structure of US defence is observed, which equates to a long period of time.

The American air defence system is being developed to counter intercontinental ballistic missiles with minimum ranges of 5000–6000km. Turkey is not under threat from a country located that far away. It could be more beneficial for Turkey to utilize air defence systems such the Patriot, Arrow or S-300 series, effective against short-range ballistic missiles to counter nearby threats.

Russia and China may take a tougher stance, and the potential effects on Turkey’s security of the reactionary policies they will pursue if the US Government maintains its determination to develop and deploy the Missile Shield should also be taken into account. It should not be forgotten that when the project was put on the agenda in the 1990s, Russia’s reaction led to termination of the INF Treaty, which had required the elimination of all medium-range nuclear missiles. Turkey is under threat from Russian missiles in this category and does not have an efficient defence system in place. These missiles may also have adverse effects on the efforts of Turkic republics in Central Asia, which are located within the ranges of these missiles, to develop their democracies and market economies independently from Russia. This could lead to unacceptable consequences for Turkey, both politically and militarily.

If either Chinese or Russian support of the non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles regimes is withdrawn, the enforceability and effectiveness of these regimes will be in doubt; it may even lead to their collapse. If countries like Russia and China, which are leaders in the science, technology and export of these types of weapons, lift export restrictions in reaction to US efforts to develop the Missile Shield, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction would be inevitable. That many of the countries wanting to take advantage of such a situation are located near Turkey only intensifies the threat.

Conclusion

Although the US Missile Shield Project, which has occupied the agenda intensely for over ten years, has technically reached the final phase, it would be unrealistic to expect the political discussions to end soon. Throughout his eight years in office, US President George W. Bush, who considers his country to be the ‘sole superpower’ of

international relations, has ascribed great importance to the project in terms of long-term global dominance and reinforcement of US national security. It would also be unrealistic to expect the new president, who will take office after the November 2008 elections, to make a decision that will fundamentally alter the process.

The discovery of the extent of Iran's nuclear program and, despite all diplomatic efforts, its determination to continue improving the scientific and technological capacity that will eventually allow it to produce nuclear weapons, and North Korea's various nuclear weapons tests, are developments that affirm US views on the level of ballistic missile threat they could potentially be subjected to. Creating concurrence on this issue, these developments have led to the American public's increased support for the project. The statements of presidential candidates based on these developments indicate a state policy has been formed, which will be implemented to a large degree. Tone and style may differ, but only in terms of avoiding tough stances and potential harsh reactions. However, it should be expected that the core issue will continue to be discussed on international platforms.

It is possible that developments expected to take a negative turn may not lead to the foreseen adversity. Since the early 1990s, Russia has made very harsh statements and declared that it would take various steps in opposition to a range of US policies such as NATO expansion and military intervention in the Balkans. However, the policies implemented were not considered harmful to key US interests or capable of constituting a threat to US security. For this reason, the dominant view in the US with regard to Russia has been that it is not too serious a concern. Also, the common interests that developed between Russia and the USA after 11 September 2001, in terms of the 'fight against terrorism', should not be forgotten. Meanwhile, despite China's opposition to the US Missile Shield project, it has not yet implied that it would take serious, harsh steps. China wants to prioritize economic development and tries to refrain from actions that would trigger another arms race. Recent improvements in Chinese-US relations and the positive steps taken on the Taiwan issue have eased political relations.

Sharing the same cultural background, Europe has taken a similar stance to the USA on issues of global security. Since leading European countries replaced socialist parties with right-wing parties following the September 11 attack, the sense of unity and understanding between the USA and Europe has increased. It is a fact that the change of government in France and Germany, which have been described as 'old Europe' by former US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, has greatly influenced this accord. More so than in the past, these circles are taking very seriously countries like Iran, which are labelled 'radical Islamist' and currently own or will soon acquire weapons systems. It could be said that the decision on the Missile Project, made during the NATO Summit, was a result of these developments.

Together with these observations, it should be taken into consideration that projects like the US Missile Shield, which lead to very high-tech improvements, serve an additional purpose to military protection. It is widely understood that the scientific circles investing their sizeable budgets in such military projects are able to observe their colleagues' development of products that in due course may benefit the public

and bring considerable economic and commercial advantages. From this perspective, the Missile Shield project is indispensable for the USA.

The issue is also extremely important for Turkey. However, when the USA's purpose and targets are considered it could be said that, from the perspective of the American Government, Turkey is not the *sine qua non* of the Missile Shield project. The US welcomes Turkey's contribution to the project because it serves to increase international political support of the project and extension of its scope.

The political, military, economic and scientific aspects of this issue must be thoroughly discussed and a decision must be made giving due consideration to their long-term effects. Unlike the Czech Republic or Poland, the situation does not require Turkey to make urgent decisions. This advantage must be exploited and all aspects of the issue must be considered. The possibility of air defence systems that would counter the threat of weapons of mass destruction, and the ballistic missiles possessed by countries close to Turkey must be discussed. Undersecretary of Defence Industries Murat Bayar stated on 10 August 2008 that in order to establish an efficient defence system against ballistic missiles, Turkey is negotiating with the USA, Russia, China and Israel.¹² Mobile or immobile land-to-air anti-ballistic missile defence systems should not be the only alternative. Due to the nature of its geography and changing threat perceptions in different regions, Turkey needs to focus on improving its air forces. With its attacking capabilities, an air force is both an efficient defence system and deterrence mechanism. This is an issue that should be discussed in joint meetings of military staff and members of academia.

¹² *Türkiye, kapsamlı bir hava savunma şemsiyesi kurmaya hazırlanıyor*, 10 August 2008, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/455803.asp>.