



By: TA | AP Insight

# The war with Iran caused a shortage of Patriot missiles in Europe



The U.S. military is experiencing a “beyond critical” shortage of advanced missile interceptors in Europe largely driven by President Donald Trump’s **war with Iran**, a U.S. defense official in Europe and a NATO official told The Associated Press, raising concerns about vulnerabilities in NATO countries to a **potential Russian attack**.

The U.S. defense official said the most **concerning shortfall** involves Patriot missile interceptors, which can shoot down Russia’s high-speed ballistic missiles.

The NATO official confirmed the low inventories of Patriots among American and NATO forces in Europe. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters.

In the event of a Russian ballistic missile assault on, for example, a military headquarters or power plant, NATO could be in a similar position to **Patriot-starved Ukraine** and be forced “to take punch after punch in the mouth,” the U.S. defense official said.

In Europe, the American military “definitely” does not have enough Patriots to stop any possible sustained ballistic missile attack and would have “very limited” capability to defend against a single ballistic missile strike or a stray Russian missile that goes off course, the U.S. official said.

It illustrates the cascading fallout from Trump’s decision to launch a war against Iran, a conflict that reaches the six-month mark on Friday.

U.S. missile stocks in Europe have been **moved to the Middle East**, where U.S. and Gulf allies have fired off significant numbers of interceptors, including Patriots, to thwart Iran’s drones and missiles. Some of those attacks have **killed and wounded American troops**.

Though a Russian ballistic missile attack against NATO countries is not **imminently expected**, CIA Director **John Ratcliffe** went to Moscow this week to warn Russia not to

attack, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Trump played down the significance of the rare and secretive trip, saying it was “sort of semi-routine.”

European and NATO officials say Russia could be in a position to **attack countries** in the alliance by 2030. Patriot **stockpiles** are projected to rebound by then.

In the meantime, Russia’s war in Ukraine could hinder its ability to carry out any missile attack on Europe as it would be a challenge for Moscow to fight an air war on two fronts.

## US Patriot transfers to Ukraine played a role in the drawdown

The Patriot missile shortage is most acutely felt in **Ukraine**, where officials are begging for more air defense support and where previous U.S. transfers also have drawn down some supply.

Kyiv says only U.S.-made Patriots can stop Russia’s advanced ballistic missiles, which increasingly are getting through Ukrainian defenses, including as part of a barrage overnight into Thursday.

The U.S. supplied hundreds of Patriot missiles to Ukraine over the course of the 4 1/2-year-long conflict, but the Iran war was the tipping point for shrinking inventories, said Ed Arnold, senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, a military think tank in London.

The supply to Ukraine was planned for and reasonably measured, he said, whereas stocks in the Middle East have been unexpectedly and quickly drained, exposing supply chain constraints.

**The U.S. military in Europe also is grappling with critical shortages of the Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS**

The U.S. military in Europe also is grappling with critical shortages of the Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS, a medium-range ballistic missile designed to strike behind enemy lines, the two officials said.

But the overall munitions picture in Europe is less dire than on air defenses alone because some European militaries have their own offensive missiles, such as the Taurus and Storm Shadow, which are both long-range air-launched bunker-busting missiles.

U.S. Army Col. Martin O'Donnell, a senior NATO military spokesperson, said it is "simply not the case" that the number of Patriot missiles in Europe is beyond critical.

NATO, he said, is able to "block punches" and has enough air defense munitions available to defend itself as well as to donate to Ukraine.

Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement Thursday that claims of U.S. munition shortages "are false."

"We have everything required to strike at the time and place of the President's choosing," Parnell said. "Across multiple combatant commands, we have already executed successful operations while maintaining a deep, ready arsenal to defend our people and our interests."

## Europe has few alternatives while stocks are low

The dearth of Patriot interceptors in Europe would leave few alternatives for shooting down Russia's more advanced ballistic missiles, which can be combined with swarms of inexpensive drones to overwhelm defenses, experts say.

Ukraine and some allies already use systems that can destroy slower-moving drones without expensive missiles.

But ballistic missiles are a challenge because they dive steeply toward targets at more than

five times the speed of sound, leaving little time to stop them.

The Patriot system tracks the missile, predicts its path and launches within minutes, all while carrying out complex calculations to ensure the interceptor finds its target.

One Patriot battery can only cover a **limited area**: for example, a small military base but not a whole city.



*One alternative could be France and Italy's SAMP/T NG air defense system*

One alternative could be France and Italy's SAMP/T NG air defense system.

France has promised to speed up the delivery of the system — the upgraded version of the current SAMP/T — to Ukraine, which the manufacturer says is better able to counter ballistics.

The new iteration, however, has not yet been battle tested and the current version of the SAMP/T has a smaller range than the Patriot.

While U.S. and European militaries have warships that can serve as mobile air defense, they may be too far from a target to protect it and could risk getting sunk.

## Patriot stocks have plunged during the Iran war

Ukraine has received Patriots from American and European stockpiles since Russia's 2022 invasion, with the U.S. providing about 600 of

the interceptors during the Biden administration, said Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel who is now senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

air defense that we have is Russian constraints,” Arnold said.

But the greatest expenditure has been during the Iran conflict, which has used up 65% of U.S. Patriots, amounting to roughly 1,500 of the nation's 2,330 interceptors, CSIS says.

About 600 missiles, including those destined for Europe, should be made this year, with a production goal of 2,000 Patriot missiles a year set for 2030, Cancian said.

Europe's first Patriot missile production facility is expected to open in Germany in September, with deliveries possibly beginning early next year

NATO says Europe's first Patriot missile production facility is expected to open in Germany in September, with deliveries possibly beginning early next year.

The first deliveries should go to countries that have already placed orders, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Spain, the U.S. defense official said.

But for now, that means some countries, such as Germany, have bought expensive Patriot systems but are in the “ridiculous” position of not having any ammunition to fire from them, said Arnold of the London think tank.

Germany's defense ministry said it does not comment on stockpiles.

Moscow likely cannot carry out a sustained air assault on a NATO target while it launches almost nightly attacks on Ukraine, Arnold said.

Ukraine's recent **strikes into Russia** also have exposed weaknesses in Russia's air defenses, which could prompt Putin to think twice about provoking a retaliatory attack.

“The uncomfortable truth is possibly the best