

# EUROPEAN SECURITY FORUM

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A JOINT INITIATIVE OF CEPS, IISS, DCAF AND GCSP

## DOES EUROPE NEED A NEW MISSILE DEFENCE SYSTEM?

ESF WORKING PAPER NO. 27

NOVEMBER 2007

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

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ISBN 13: 078-92-9079-743-2



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# Does Europe Need a New Missile Defence System?

Working Paper No. 27  
of the  
European Security Forum

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# The US-Proposed European Missile Defence An American Perspective

Walter Slocombe\*

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**B**allistic missile defence has been controversial – technically, strategically and politically – almost since it was first proposed in the 1950s. The proposal by the US to add a European element to the deployment of a limited ballistic missile defence, which has been a key element of the Bush administration’s defence programme, is no exception. At one level, the US proposal is modest in scale and mission, but it has set off a major controversy because it touches on so many other issues. Among these are differences over the significance of Iranian actions and over how to respond to them, along with the growing tensions between a resurgent and assertive Russia and the US, the former satellites and the rest of Europe. In addition are the European suspicions of American unilateralism and militarism, internal strains within Europe between ‘old’ and ‘new’, long-standing controversies about ballistic missile defence and concerns about the future of arms control. There are also fears for the future of NATO, squeezed between American instincts to bypass it and act bilaterally and the EU project for a distinctly European defence capability. All of these issues are overlain by domestic political ones in practically every country concerned.

This paper attempts to address some of the main issues raised from an American, but certainly not an official administration, perspective.

## What is the US project?

The installation under consideration is, in effect, an extension of the deployments the US has in train on US territory, at Fort Greely in Alaska and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Under the ‘third site’ initiative, first broached with the Czech and Polish governments in 2002, an interceptor base would be built in Poland (tentatively at Gorsko in north-western Poland) that would have launchers and ground support equipment for 10 mid-course interceptors. The interceptors would be a modified version of the ground-based interceptors that the US is deploying in Alaska and California, adapted for the more rapid European engagement by removal of the third stage. A narrow-beam X-band radar, now being used as part of the test equipment at Kwajalein Island in the Pacific, would be moved to the Czech Republic (tentatively at Brdy, just south of Prague), to provide precise mid-course tracking and engagement control for the interceptor missiles. The configuration would also include a transportable X-band radar, based on the radar used with the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) theatre missile defence system, at a location nearer the expected threat to provide initial warning and tracking data. This ‘forward-based radar’ could either be moved to a forward location as the threat developed or be placed forward more or less permanently, presumably in a country bordering on Iran. There have been rumours that the US is considering deployment in the Caucasus, but the US denies that it has made any approach to any potential host country.

The system would, according to unclassified presentations of the US Defense Department, be constructed in 2011–13 and when operational it would be capable of intercepting long-range missiles launched from Iran against targets in either the US or Europe. The system would provide coverage for targets in Europe north and west of the line running roughly from northern Greece through central

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Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> The full cost – currently estimated at about \$4 billion – would be paid by the US, and command and control of the European site would be integrated with that of the US ballistic missile defence system as a whole.

## **Does Europe need a missile defence system at all?**

The stated purpose of the European element of the US missile defence programme – like the broader US long-range ballistic missile defence effort – is to counter the possibility that, over the next decade or so, a number of ‘rogue states’ will acquire both nuclear weapons and long-range missiles to deliver them. The US has been explicit in acknowledging that the European element is specifically designed to counter Iranian missiles. Although there is no question that Iran has a military missile programme, the pace and scale of Iranian missile efforts are disputed. Iranian authorities have themselves suggested that Iran is working on a 2,000 km range variant of the Shahab-3 intermediate-range ballistic missile, which could nearly reach Rome, Prague and Warsaw, but Iran denies any intention of developing longer-range missiles. The US dismisses the Iranian self-imposed limit and projects an Iranian intercontinental missile by as early as 2015 (just after the Polish site would become operational). Others, including Russia, maintain that the Iranian work is proceeding much more slowly. Whatever the exact pace and extent of its plans, Iran is on the road to a missile capability that would be a threat to Europe, as well as to the US (and Russia, Israel and other countries that might stand in the way of Iranian ambitions). A missile defence system, it is argued, would deny Iran the option of using its nuclear and missile arsenals for a high-confidence threat to respond with devastating effect to action by the US and its allies that Iran regarded as against its fundamental interests, particularly their resistance to regional aggression by Iran.

There is debate not only over the scale and pace of the Iranian programme to build nuclear weapons and delivery systems for them, but over the appropriate response from the international community. The US administration – along with the new French government and some other nations, including Israel – warns that the Iranian programmes are nearing the point where Iran will have the capability to threaten nuclear destruction of targets in much of the world. The administration also makes the point that, whatever the actual pace of the Iranian programme, it will take time to build a defence and it is better to be a bit early than far too late. Advocates of ballistic missile defence point out that if (as seems all too possible) neither diplomacy, sanctions nor even military force deflects Iran from this course, it would be very important to have a defence and the prospect of a workable defence would provide at least a partial neutralisation of the Iranian threat without the immense risks of military action. On the other hand, some outsiders – including the Russians but by no means them alone and by no means only apologists for the Tehran regime – argue that Iran is far from having an effective (or indeed) a nuclear weapon or means to deliver it by missiles to distant targets. They maintain that any military response, including passive defence as well as active pre-emption, is more likely to harden positions and increase risks than to eliminate the danger.

## **Will the defence work?**

Every missile defence initiative since the Nike Hercules programme in the 1950s has been met with questions about whether the defence offers a reasonable prospect of being effective at a simple technical level. The American proposal for a European site is no exception. The American position is that the interceptors to be deployed in Poland are substantially identical to the ground-based interceptors (GBIs) that have been tested with increasing success as part of the overall ballistic missile

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<sup>1</sup> The exact coverage area depends on the characteristics of the attacking missile trajectory. According to the Pentagon, the areas the system would defend against intermediate-range missiles would also include an additional belt (250 km wide) running south-east along the coverage area for longer-range missiles.

defence effort that, while still incomplete and far from fully developed, is basically on track technically. The US Missile Defense Agency, pleased with the successful July test, expresses confidence that the system to be deployed in Europe would be highly effective against the relatively primitive missiles that Iran could develop in the next decade or so and that technological improvements will keep that edge as hostile missile technology improves.

Critics point out that the US system is still far from having been shown successful in tests they regard as operationally realistic, especially those whose targets employ what the critics describe as countermeasures within the capacity of an adversary able to build long-range ballistic missiles. The Missile Defense Agency replies that the system is designed to discriminate decoys and that they will begin tests against countermeasures shortly, arguing that 'simple' countermeasures are far from simple.

A related line of criticism is that even if the defences work quite well, they will, by definition, do nothing against alternative means of delivery that do not rely on ballistic missiles. Ballistic missiles are a particularly effective vehicle, however – they (and their nuclear warheads) can be maintained under close control in a home territory until literally a few tens of minutes before use and, assuming the missile and weapon function properly, they are certain to be effective if there is no defence. All other options, from aircraft to agents, compromise either pre-launch control or the certainty of arrival at the target or both.

### **Should all of this have been done through NATO?**

The project is not a NATO effort, but a trilateral agreement among the US, Poland and the Czech Republic. Nor has the US committed to make it available to NATO. Rather, the US will exercise national command and control over the system and there has been no formal undertaking as to the standards by which the US would decide when and how to use the interceptors in cases where there was no direct threat to the US itself. The Bush administration rejects claims that it is slighting or bypassing NATO, referring to its extensive briefings on the subject and its undertaking to participate actively in parallel NATO measures to provide a defence against shorter-range missiles that the GBIs' deployment could not handle. Moreover, the US has pointed out that the US would pay the whole bill for a deployment that would strengthen European security by providing a defence for much of the territory of Europe.

It is, from NATO's point of view, no doubt regrettable that a major element of the defence of the European continent requiring the cooperation of three NATO allies is not more fully integrated into the alliance, but that is by no means unusual: practically every defence procurement decision made by a NATO member is ultimately made as a unilateral choice. While agreed NATO priorities are often a factor, the degree to which NATO's complex defence-planning mechanism actually influences any individual ally's programme is limited. NATO itself has almost no military assets of its own (with NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System, and of course, the integrated command structure being the main exceptions). Virtually all of the actual military power that the alliance could muster depends, as would access to the European-based missile defence, on national decisions to commit nationally-owned assets in particular circumstances.

But the issue of missile defence presents a particular challenge – and an opportunity – for the alliance. The site in Poland could not defend all of Europe, even if it worked perfectly. Areas south and east of the coverage line, including all or part of the territory of NATO allies Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania are too close to Iran to be attacked by long-range missiles, but they could be attacked by shorter-range systems. NATO has had under consideration for many years the goal of establishing a distinctively NATO-run missile defence for deployed forces and, more recently, for protection against short- and medium-range missiles. The US has been a vocal backer of that effort, but only as a complement to and not a replacement for US programmes, and it has indicated that it would provide

technology and assets to support a system that would defend those NATO allies that the Polish site could not cover. In June, NATO formally re-affirmed its commitment to these missile defence programmes. Whether these formal commitments translate into funding and hardware to make the forward defence system a reality remains to be seen.

### **Is the US seeking to deploy in Europe a system whose main purpose is to protect the US and not Europe?**

It is sometimes claimed that the interceptors in Europe are primarily designed to fill gaps in the protection of US territory. If the Pentagon's explanations are given any credit, this claim is false. To be sure, the European radar and interceptors would be capable of intercepting Iranian missiles heading for the US as well as those aimed at targets in Europe. Still, the US maintains that a European base is not necessary for the defence of the US itself, because the interceptors already being deployed in the US (supported by radars in Greenland and the UK) can engage missiles aimed at targets anywhere in the 50 states from the Middle East as well as from North Korea (their principal mission). The implication is that the Polish–Czech–US project would not only give the US the means to protect its allies, the US would have no need to withhold interceptors for the future protection of the US.

### **Why is Russia opposed?**

Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, has chosen to make the European element of the US missile defence plan a major issue. Were it not for the Russian opposition, it is hard to believe that the proposals would be nearly so big an issue. That opposition has a number of explicit dimensions and perhaps some hidden agendas as well.

**Is Russia back and standing tall?** The Russian opposition, some in the US claim, is simply muscle-flexing, which is perhaps understandable, but is not to be taken too seriously and certainly not to be encouraged by accommodation. The US initiative coincides with a sharp deterioration in US–Russian (and NATO–Russian) relations. Russia, under President Putin's robust leadership and strengthened by an influx of oil income has moved from the economic crisis, internal disorder and international weakness of the 1990s to reclaim its pride and reassert its position as a major world power. In the eyes of many Russians, one of the humiliations of the post-Soviet era was the entry of Poland and its Central European neighbours into NATO. The fact that these new military allies of the US are considering letting the US establish major military installations on their territories is, in Russian eyes, not merely a violation of promises made when a weak Russia had to acquiesce to Western insults, but also inconsistent with the respect such nations should show to a restored Russia.

**Does the defence threaten the Russian nuclear force?** Russian spokespersons have also advanced the far more concrete argument that the American proposal threatens the Russian nuclear deterrent, at least in the long term. If this were true, it would be a major concern, because for all its revival, Russian military power and to a considerable degree its international standing still depends heavily on its being the equal of the US in nuclear weaponry. Some Russian spokespersons, official and otherwise, have maintained that the US installations would pose a threat to Russian security because they could serve as a means of gathering intelligence<sup>2</sup> and eventually as the foundation for a larger, more capable system that would have the scale and sophistication to threaten the Russian nuclear force. On this point, the US argues that it is absurd for Russia, with many hundreds of missiles in its arsenal, to claim to see any danger in 10 interceptors, because any Russian attack could simply overwhelm the defence. The US has gone even farther and asserted that the radar and interceptors are so positioned that they

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<sup>2</sup> The Russian contention that the radar in the Czech Republic could monitor Russian space and missile activities is implausible technically because the narrow beam X-band radar (even if properly aimed) would be wholly unsuited to that task, for which the US has plenty of other and far better assets available.

would be incapable of supporting an engagement with Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) because the interceptors could not catch up with the Russian missiles in the tail chase that geography would impose.<sup>3</sup> As for the longer-term potential of a defence against the Russian force based on the current programme, the US argues that it has no intention of pursuing the ‘will of the wisp’ of a massive defence. Moreover, the US argues that if it tried, the current system is simply not capable of serving in any meaningful way as the base for a wholly hypothetical future US project to defend against Russian missiles, not just because of the numbers but also because of the technical limitations on the capacity of the radars and the capabilities of the interceptors.

**Are promises being broken?** The Russian government has also claimed that the deployments would violate assurances that Russia had been given when Poland and the Czech Republic joined NATO against the establishment of American military bases on their territories. The American response is that the 1999 NATO–Russian statement in question referred only to nuclear weapons and “additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces”,<sup>4</sup> neither of which are involved. Furthermore, the US argues, the 1999 statement was conditioned on the security situation remaining as it was then – a premise vitiated by Iranian nuclear and missile programmes (and perhaps by changes in Russian policies and behaviour). More broadly, the view in Washington – and in Central Europe – is that Russia cannot be permitted to assert a right to veto security cooperation between the US and sovereign countries, especially when, as the US insists, the cooperation poses no threat to Russian security.

**Is this a convenient issue?** President Putin and other senior Russian leaders have put forward a number of potential Russian actions to offset the supposed danger the European site poses to Russian interests. Some, like resuming long-range bomber surveillance of US Navy ships on the open ocean and reconnaissance flights near US and NATO borders seem to be primarily aspects of a Russian reassertiveness, unlinked to any specific US actions. Other ideas have been floated as ‘the’ Russian response to American plans, such as threats to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, to put missiles in the Kaliningrad enclave or to target Europe generally (and the bases). These ideas seem calculated mostly to appeal to European fears that Americans are always fomenting arms races and dragging Europe into their adventures and to foster US–European tensions in general. There are those in the US – and probably in other countries as well – who believe that Russian objections and particularly the brandishing of these sorts of responses have very little to do with any real concerns about Russian security, but rather derive from the realisation that criticising the US project as dragging us all back into cold war confrontation has easy payoffs for Russia. The very fact that Russia objects tends to make the project divisive within the alliance and within the domestic politics of all three partners. Linking its objections to professed doubts about the pace of the Iranian programmes helps Russia curry favour with an Iranian regime that needs advocates.

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<sup>3</sup> Some technically well-qualified American critics of the deployment proposal have disputed this claim, maintaining that it assumes an unrealistically long delay in launching the interceptors and a ‘dumbing down’ of the interceptors’ speed. Whether or not the assumed delay – up to five minutes – and/or the slower interceptor velocity (less than 7 km/sec) make the claims of complete incapability against Russian ICBMs misleading, the basic fact is that the numbers are tiny compared with the Russian force. Those same observers have also conducted analyses that tend to show that the system could intercept Russian missiles aimed at targets (such as British and French nuclear forces) in Western Europe. Whether the existence of a system with that capability would be a good thing or a legitimate cause for Russian complaint is, of course, a matter of opinion.

<sup>4</sup> The 1999 Founding Act includes the following statements:

The member States of NATO reiterate that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, nor any need to change any aspect of NATO’s nuclear posture or nuclear policy – and do not foresee any future need to do so...NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.

**Is there any way to convince the Russians?** Post-cold war discussion of missile defence with Moscow has been marked by repeated failures in hopefully-initiated efforts to build a US–Russian partnership on the subject. To Americans, and at least in the past to some Russians, missile defence looks like an ideal area for cooperation – both Russia and the US (as well as others) are threatened by rogue state missiles; only Russia and the US have any substantial, independent technological capacity to build a missile defence. Therefore, close coordination if not actual partnership should be easy to agree. But none of the specific concepts – whether the Bush 41 plan for a jointly managed defence, the Clinton team’s joint warning centre or the Bush 43 idea of cooperation against Iran – has gone much beyond the communiqué stage. All have foundered on issues of joint control, access to information and generally uneasy relations.

As the third site project has grown more controversial, the US administration has, possibly making up for lost past chances, sought to reach out to Russia. The most recent efforts are proposals outlined by US Defense Secretary Robert Gates in an otherwise frosty meeting in Moscow. These proposals include measures of transparency designed to assure the Russians of the limited and (to them) non-threatening character of the US deployments and an undertaking to not make the Polish base operational after its completion, unless and until it was clear that the Iranian threat had emerged. Although the details are vague (presumably in the hope of forestalling a quick Russian rejection), the proposals apparently involve the presence of Russian inspectors/observers at the interceptor and radar sites to enable the Russians to confirm the limited capabilities and missions of the installations. In addition is the possibility of agreeing on a set of milestones by which to measure the progress of the Iranian threat, e.g. whether tests have been conducted to longer ranges.

Russia, for its part, has carefully held open the door to some form of cooperative resolution. President Putin’s proposal that a Russian early warning radar in Azerbaijan replace the Czech radar site was no doubt calculated to gain the public relations initiative, but it also might have signalled some interest in making the project a symbol of US–Russian parity. Perhaps predictably, the US team that visited the radar site reported that it would at best be a partial supplement to the radars already included in the US plan, but the recent US offer seems to have included a proposal to set up a system to exchange data between the US and Russian sensor systems. Russia’s insistence that the Azeri site replace the Czech site and American insistence that it could at most be a distinctly secondary element illustrate both the technical and the political obstacles to agreement. Nonetheless, if both sides want to find a mutually tranquilising compromise, somehow incorporating the Azeri site (possibly as one although not necessarily the only early warning site) might be a way out. Other measures of transparency, such as Russian personnel at the site, inspections, joint exercises and joint warning arrangements, have been offered, which could also provide ways to both assuage the genuine Russian concerns and afford the means for a graceful compromise by both sides.

## **Do the Russians have a point about the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe?**

The one concrete step that President Putin has taken so far that he has directly linked to the missile defence proposal is his declared intention (which still has not received the State Duma approval he could presumably have whenever he wants) to ‘suspend’ Russian compliance with the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). This action – if not its linkage to the missile defence question – reflects Russian grievances that deserve to be addressed, as NATO has conceded in principle. Russia has long regarded CFE as an anomaly and an anachronism. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact fundamentally transformed the geopolitical landscape for conventional arms control in Europe. NATO can, however, fairly claim to have done a good deal to accommodate Russian objections, including agreeing in 1999 on substantial modification of the terms of the Treaty, which Russia has regarded as unfair in the post-Soviet context. NATO nations have



nevertheless refused to ratify those changes until Moscow completes the withdrawal of troops in Moldova and the Caucasus to which it committed itself when the CFE Treaty changes were agreed.

### **Will the Czechs and Poles agree?**

The project has had support from the Czech and (previous) Polish governments, as well as from some leading opposition parties. In early 2007, they agreed to start formal negotiations on such issues as the bilateral status of force agreements covering the US military personnel who would staff the installations. Still, public opinion polls indicate that a majority of the population in each country opposes the deployment, and the project has yet to receive final parliamentary approval in either country. Some of the public opposition is likely to be derived from a sense that the US has taken Central European support too much for granted and that the defence site will needlessly embroil the host countries in large geopolitical confrontations in which they have little direct interest. (Others in each country may well see their cooperation with the US on a bilateral basis as solidifying their security relationship with America, which many regard as more important than the NATO relationship per se.) It will probably take a continuing US effort – and a commitment from the new US administration in 2009 – for the project to be definitively approved. The new Polish government can be expected to review Poland's position and, assuming it decides Poland should continue to back the concept, insist on satisfactory terms. That effort in the Polish negotiations and in those with Prague as well will no doubt need to include satisfying some pending demands on bilateral issues, such as visa equality and trade, and renewed special security assurances, possibly including providing missile defences against shorter-range (i.e. Russian) attacks. (There are also some supposed concerns related to environmental issues, such as the mistaken notion that the radar will be a health hazard. The US and the two governments will need to reassure their publics on these subsidiary issues.)

### **Will the US Congress approve the system?**

The issue has not been a highly visible one in US debates, but it is becoming so as Russian objections grow more strident, and everything to do with missile defence is to some degree a battleground. In the newly Democratic-controlled Congress, approval of any Bush administration initiative cannot be taken for granted and many of the questions raised in Europe, including by Russia, find some resonance in the relevant committees. Moreover, the European missile defence initiative is seen by some as part of a package of initiatives: missile defence generally (including expanded cooperation with Japan and possible sales to Taiwan), the Reliable Replacement Warhead programme for a new nuclear weapon for the stockpile, the impending expiration of the Start I agreement and a plan to replace the nuclear warheads on a few Trident submarine missiles with non-nuclear warheads. Taken together, these initiatives are seen by some as a worrying (and ill-defined) overemphasis on nuclear and nuclear-related forces. In addition, the recent very troubling security failure when nuclear-armed cruise missiles were taken out of storage improperly and flown across the country, unguarded and unnoticed for many hours, will contribute to scepticism about all aspects of strategic programmes. Yet so far, the US Congress has limited itself to restricting appropriations to what is needed to keep the initiative alive, pending further tests and agreement with the host countries, while raising questions about alternative defence approaches, such as a sea-based system. Congress is unlikely to fund the project fully until there is definitive approval by the two host countries, but it is equally unlikely to kill the project if it continues to have the support of the administration. A broadly worded but non-binding resolution of support for building an effective defence of both the US and Europe against Iranian missiles was recently passed by the Senate, although the programme most probably will not need – or receive – full Congressional backing until the new administration takes a position.

## Why is there so much resistance from Europeans?

In a sense, it is no surprise that any initiative of the Bush administration should arouse deep scepticism in Europe, especially if, as is the case for the missile defence plan, it can be seen as yet another example of an American urge to find military solutions, needlessly exacerbating already difficult international relationships, ignoring international institutions, conjuring up exaggerated WMD threats under every bed and sabotaging arms control agreements, and doing so in the service of a long-standing ideological commitment (in this instance to ballistic missile defence schemes).

**What effect does the Russian dimension have?** Europeans have different views of the degree to which changes in Russia – including the establishment of the undemocratic and seemingly unchallengeable predominance of a strongly centralist, nationalist and security-focused leadership – should be met with conciliation or confrontation. A proposal that (in Russian eyes at least) seems to suggest a military response has unsurprisingly been both welcomed and condemned on just that ground.

**Is the US undermining European institutions?** Quite apart from the issues of how to deal with a changed Russia, this additional instance of the US dealing directly with what former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called “new Europe” on a major military initiative raises concerns at a time when the future of NATO is uncertain and Europe is in the process of building its own multinational defence institutions. What is more, while the US maintains that it has gone to great lengths to keep all allies informed about its missile defence plans and to take their concerns into account, the fact remains that the US has made its own decisions and worked on the issue bilaterally with Poland and the Czech Republic, and not through NATO, much less the EU. Accordingly, to some in Europe the European element of the missile defence project is yet another example of American unilateralism and insensitivity to European preferences for multilateral action and decision – while to some Americans, the European reaction is simply confirmation of European fecklessness and the necessity of bilateral action if security is to be preserved.

## Conclusion

The third site project has a solid military and strategic rationale. In the coming decades, it is all too likely that Europe (as well as the US and the rest of the world) will find itself living in a world in which dangerous regimes have nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them rapidly by long-range missiles. The technology exists and it can be further developed to provide a reasonably high-confidence defence against such a capability; it is hard to see a clear reason not to do so. Indeed, it could be argued that those who are (rightly) strongly opposed to an attempt to stop the Iranian programmes by military force should be the first to welcome an American idea that holds out the possibility of substantially neutralising the threat of an Iranian nuclear-armed missile capability, without a military attack or having to rely on sustained punitive sanctions.

The US has probably undertaken a good deal more consultation on this project than it gets credit for and the recent proposals will satisfy some critics. Nevertheless, the US still needs to do a vastly better job, not just of talking to allies and others about its plans in this and other regards, but also of taking into account their concerns and putting the project into a broader context of US concepts for dealing with Iran, with Russia and with nuclear weapons in the new century. The US should make clear that once built, the system would be presumptively available as a NATO asset when needed, just as all allies’ forces should be. And the US should strongly support the NATO programmes to cover those aspects of the missile defence mission that the third site would not. Russian objections are, to a large extent, overstated. Indeed, in many respects, they look contrived, but they nonetheless must be addressed by serious and bold proposals for transparency and cooperation, including a willingness to find a way to use the Azeri site as part of the package and to follow through on ideas for data exchange.

# Europe's Need for a Damage-Limitation Option

Oliver Thränert\*

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In his speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin strongly criticised US plans for constructing elements of its missile defence shield in Poland and in the Czech Republic. This missile defence system could protect both the US homeland and parts of Europe. President Putin, however, warned that these systems could cause a militarisation of outer space along with yet another arms race. Many European authors have also articulated negative views about the US missile defence project. Echoing Mr Putin's arguments, these critics point out that these US defences in Europe would pose a threat to Russia's strategic nuclear deterrence posture and therefore could cause an arms race between NATO and Russia. Paradoxically, the same analysts often doubt the technical feasibility of strategic missile defences. Moreover, many believe that Iran, as opposed to the arguments put forward by the Bush administration, would not become a major threat to Europe, even if Tehran were to develop nuclear weapons. The mullahs, so the argument goes, are not irrational and would not have any reason to attack Europe or the US. Even if they intended to do so, NATO's nuclear forces would successfully deter them.

In essence, we are witnessing a cleavage between two schools of thought. On the one hand are the traditionalists (who are more vocal in Europe), who prefer traditional approaches such as diplomacy, non-proliferation, arms control and deterrence. On the other hand are the modernists or missile-defence advocates, who believe that measures to meet new threats such as the proliferation of long-range missiles and nuclear weapons should also include missile defences. This latter line of thinking is more influential in the US and countries such as Israel and Japan, which are exposed to Iranian or North Korean missiles.

It was very unfortunate that President Putin's Munich speech activated the current missile defence debate. As a consequence, at least the European discussion has been framed along Russian arguments. But the central question has often been overlooked: Does Europe need a missile defence shield to protect its population against possible threats arising from the Middle East?

This paper first considers potential threats originating from the Middle East. It then looks at a scenario in which Iranian nuclear-tipped missiles might become a threat to transatlantic security. The main rationale for this scenario is to explain why classic nuclear deterrence, which we experienced during the cold war, would not be sufficient to meet possible new threats in the future. That section is followed by a brief analysis of Russian arguments concerning the planned US missile shield. The paper concludes with a few questions that need further discussion.

## Threat perception

When looking at the Middle East, current threat perceptions mainly focus on Iran. Indeed, Tehran has one of the most advanced missile programmes in the region. But before asking what this means for European and transatlantic security, we should first recall that missiles are not weapons of mass destruction. What is decisive is the combination of missiles and nuclear warheads. Therefore, Iranian missiles would only become really dangerous if Tehran were to pursue its current policy of aiming at having a nuclear weapon option. The jury is still out about whether the UN Security Council could

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convince Iran through its policy of incrementally increased sanctions to change course. If so, the entire issue of missile defence for defending Europe and the US against possible Iranian threats would look completely different.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, a threat is a combination of capacity and intention. But we do not exactly know the purposes for which Iran is developing its missiles. Is Tehran seeking the capacity to deter foreign invasion, or in other words, are its intentions more defensive in nature? Or is Iran intending to become more assertive vis-à-vis its neighbours and at the same time keep foreign powers at bay? At this juncture, it appears almost impossible to answer this question, not least because even if current Iranian motivations are more defensive, this stance might change once Tehran acquires a nuclear missile capability.

Finally, the future development of the Iranian missile programme is very hard to predict. The Iranian missile programme is among the best-kept state secrets. Western intelligence information is often fragmentary and controversial. Time and again, this situation causes dissensions within the intelligence community. For instance, in 2001, most US agencies argued that Iran would be able to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by 2010. The CIA did not share that view. Today, US intelligence services estimate that Iran might develop an ICBM by 2015. Yet, there is an important ‘known unknown’ in this equation: To what extent will Iran continue to receive foreign assistance from North Korea (with which it has very close ties concerning missile development) and from Russian or Chinese technicians (apparently still working in Iran but whose exact knowledge and skills are unknown)?

The answer to this question is probably more important today than it was in the past. Iran is now at a crossroads in its ballistic missile programme. If Iran really wants to extend ranges to more than 2,000 km (its newest, single-stage Shahab-3 has a range of about 1,500 km), it needs to master the multistage technology. That phase is very complicated and ambitious. Many doubt that North Korea, which certainly benefited from the assistance of Russian technicians, was successful in this regard. While Pyongyang successfully tested a three-stage Taepo-Dong-1 on a single occasion in 1998, to the extent that the first two stages worked, a test of the Taepo-Dong-2 in 2006 was a complete failure. Considering that all current Iranian ballistic missiles are based on North Korean models, it is therefore questionable whether Iran will develop its own multistage missile in the near future. While there is no doubt that Iranian leaders are willing to extend the ranges of their missiles, it will presumably take them much longer than the US intelligence community expects. Nevertheless, as noted above, there are many uncertainties surrounding the analysis of this issue.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Europeans should not neglect the possibility that Pakistan may also become part of the equation. Islamabad already possesses about 60 nuclear weapons, although their type is unknown. The country is steadily enhancing its nuclear capabilities. Its most advanced ballistic missile, the solid-fuelled, two-stage Shaheen-2, has a range of about 2,500 km. This system, although successfully tested on repeated occasions, has not yet become operational. In the past, Pakistan has heavily benefited from Chinese assistance. Whether Beijing will continue providing support for Pakistan’s missile developments remains to be seen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the negotiation process, see O. Thränert, “Sorting out the Iran Puzzle: The International Community’s Coordinated Iran Diplomacy has Opened Doors”, *Internationale Politik* (transatlantic edition), Vol. 7, No. 4, 2006, pp. 32–38.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Seaboyer and O. Thränert, “What Missile Proliferation Means for Europe”, *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2006, pp. 85–96.

<sup>3</sup> See R.S. Norris, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Forces, 2007”, Nuclear Notebook, Natural Resources Defense Council, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 63, No. 3, May/June, 2007, pp. 71–73, p. 74.

Today, the Pakistani leadership under President Pervez Musharraf is seen as a Western ally. At this time, however, his government is facing strong pressure from Islamic radicals. Therefore, many observers do not rule out the possibility that Pakistan sooner or later may become a failed state with nuclear weapons, or another Taliban-ruled (and this time nuclear-armed) country. Again, it is hard to predict what consequences this would imply for European and international security. It is possible, however, that missile defences could make sense as a damage-limitation option.

### Why not simply rely upon nuclear deterrence?

Deterrence optimists such as pundits of neo-realism often take the view that a nuclear Iran could be successfully deterred just like the Soviet Union was during the cold war. Yet today, the strategic context looks completely different. In his famous debate with Kenneth Waltz on potential threats associated with the spread of nuclear weapons, Scott Sagan challenges the optimist neo-realist view. Sagan argues that further nuclear proliferation could result in small states being easily invaded by their nuclear weapon-equipped neighbours, as the latter may believe their new weapons will deter intervention by outside powers.<sup>4</sup> This is exactly the situation we might face if Iran goes nuclear. Many states in the Middle East already fear that a nuclear Iran might turn more aggressive and provide a cover for proxies such as Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations. Leaders in Tehran may calculate that a foreign invasion to counter what may be perceived as Shia imperialism becomes less and less likely the more Iran's nuclear and missile capacities advance. In any event, many observers believe that for Iran, nuclear weapons are weapons of deterrence *and* power projection.<sup>5</sup> Against this background, the question is not whether the US, NATO or the international community could deter Iran from a nuclear attack. At stake is whether a nuclear Iran could deter international intervention aiming at re-establishing regional order against Iranian aggression or assertiveness. Observing recent history in Middle Eastern affairs, we might pose the question: Would the international community have sent troops to free Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991, if Saddam Hussein had already had nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching Europe or the US?<sup>6</sup>

In the past, during the cold war period, the main idea of deterrence was *not to use* military force in a relatively stable situation. In the future, in a world with more nuclear powers equipped with long-range ballistic missiles, countries feeling responsible for protecting international order would need to decide whether they want *to use* their forces against aggressions in a contingency that might result in severe damage caused by the use of nuclear weapons by the aggressor.<sup>7</sup>

Deliberately accepting one's own vulnerability, as the West did during the cold war, does not seem the appropriate strategic approach in such a context. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether missile defences could help the US and its European partners regain room for manoeuvre to intervene if there is a need to re-establish order in the Middle East or elsewhere. Missile defences of whatever nature will never work completely reliably. Still, even limited missile defences would have an impact on an aggressor's calculations, as he could not be certain actually to cause damage with his nuclear missiles. But for the country or coalition seeking to intervene against aggression by a nuclear newcomer, the important question is whether it could afford the damage possibly resulting from a

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<sup>4</sup> See S.D. Sagan, "Sagan Responds to Waltz", in S.D. Sagan and K.N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, New York, London: W.W. North & Company, 1995, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> See D. Dassa Kaye and F.M. Wehrey, "A Nuclear Iran: The Reactions of Neighbours", *Survival*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2007, pp. 111–28, p. 117; C. Dueck and R. Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 122, No. 2, 2007, pp. 189–205.

<sup>6</sup> See V.A. Utgoff, "Proliferation, Missile Defence and American Ambitions", *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 85–102.

<sup>7</sup> We should also not overlook the fact that nuclear deterrence during the cold war did not deter the Soviet Union from invading Afghanistan in 1979.

nuclear response despite the missile defences in place, or if it decides instead that it cannot afford the risk and thus chooses not to intervene with troops, thereby avoiding nuclear retaliation by the new nuclear state in the first place.

Here it is held that there would possibly be a significant difference between the calculations of the US and those of the European allies for at least two reasons. First, before the Iranians developed missiles that could reach US territory, they would already have such weapons at hand that could threaten European cities. Therefore, in such a contingency, it might be easier for Washington to decide to send troops to the Middle East than it would be for Europeans to do so, although the US would certainly not like to see its European allies taken hostage by Iran. Second, in contrast with Europe, the US reputation as a world power would be at stake in a severe crisis in the Middle East. If a country like Iran, with its current Islamic leadership, follows an aggressive approach directed against its neighbours, and Washington is unable to protect its friends and allies and re-establish order because Iran could threaten US cities with its ICBMs, this would significantly undermine the reliability of US security guarantees in the Middle East and elsewhere. As a consequence, Washington could be in danger of losing its status as a world power.

For these reasons, even limited missile defences could be more valuable to the US than to Europe. In a scenario in which Iranian missiles could reach European but not US territory, even limited defences protecting Europe would make it much easier for Washington to go to war against Iranian aggression. Even if Tehran could hit targets in the US with missiles, the damage limitation resulting from missile defences could better enable the US to protect friends and allies in the Middle East against Iranian aggression, thereby maintaining US world leadership.

From a European perspective, the situation could look quite different. Europe is not a world power and thus does not have such a status to lose. European governments would not like to see Iran becoming a dominant power in the Middle East and undertaking proxy wars. Yet they would have a hard time convincing their populations to intervene in the Middle East against Tehran's will if this action could result in an Iranian nuclear attack in response. It is true that Tehran would need to calculate that American as well as British and French nuclear forces could strike back. But could European governments be certain that deterrence works? More importantly, if they determine that it does, could European political leaders convince their constituencies of that view? Moreover, would European publics be convinced by the argument that if deterrence failed, the installed missile defences could limit the damage, and thus it is worth accepting the risk and participating in an invasion in the Middle East despite the possible consequences?

The argument put forward here is that missile defences are much more likely to provide Washington as a world leading power with more room for manoeuvre in the face of a crisis in the Middle East, caused for instance by a nuclear Iran, than they would for its European allies. Yet does this mean that missile defences do not make sense at all for Europe? Just because the US may have a different calculus and may intervene militarily, in such a situation it would still be perfectly appropriate for Europe to have a damage-limitation option at hand. As previously mentioned, this would also clearly be in Washington's interest, as the US needs to avoid the situation in which its European partners are taken hostage.

In addition, missile defences could contribute to stabilising crises. Iranian leaders are not irrational, but they may miscalculate in a crisis, as could any government. Given the nature of the Iranian leadership, it is also unlikely that it would establish crisis-management procedures such as hot lines or red telephones as the US and the former Soviet Union did, albeit only after their common experience of the Cuban missile crisis. Again, damage limitation through missile defences may make sense in the context of crisis mismanagement. Also, if the Iranians were to know that owing to missile defences the US or NATO (or both) would not be under great pressure to pre-emptively strike at Iran's nuclear weapons early on, Tehran might not find itself in a 'use them or lose them' situation. This prospect would again contribute to restoring stability.

Finally, missile defences can be seen as tools to support non-proliferation policies, not to weaken them. Such projects signal to countries interested in nuclear weapons and offensive long-range missiles that the states they want to threaten are capable of developing defences that could undermine the political aims the proliferators might be seeking to achieve through their weapons programmes. Therefore, missile defences would serve as disincentives to potential proliferators, thereby reducing their willingness to violate non-proliferation treaties.

To wrap up this section, missile defences are more likely to provide the US rather than Europe with more room for manoeuvre in the face of new nuclear adversaries. At the same time, damage limitation is an important option for Europe, because the US might choose to act in a crisis in which the Europeans might hesitate to do so, and because missile defences could contribute to crisis stability. They could also support non-proliferation regimes, which are especially seen by Europeans as an important element of their policies.

### **US missile defence and Russia**

The West has an interest in stable and reliable relations with Russia as a partner. One of the main obstacles on the way ahead is that Moscow still has not defined the role it wants to play in the world. Russia today perceives itself as a country that is back on the world scene and wishes to be respected as a great power. But what does Russia stand for, and what are its foreign policy priorities? Instead of dealing with these questions, many debates in Russian foreign policy circles currently focus on criticising the West for actions such as NATO enlargement.<sup>8</sup> If the West really wants to establish a longstanding and stable partnership with Russia, it should avoid taking all the arguments put forward by Russia at face value. This situation does not facilitate Russia finding its way in the future, a precondition for a fruitful relationship between Moscow and its Western partners. The present debate about missile defence is an interesting test case in that regard.

The planned US missile defences do not pose a threat to Russia. Although Russia and the West do not always share the same interests, the cold war and with it the ideological confrontation are gone. Today, the large conventional forces facing each other in Central Europe are obsolete. There is no longer a danger that a crisis could escalate from conventional to nuclear war.

As mentioned several times by the Bush administration, its current missile defence plans are not directed against Russia. Rather, the intention is to provide protection from single long-range missiles from Iran or North Korea. While the interceptors that are already stationed in Alaska and California as part of the ground-based midcourse defence system are well suited to defend the US homeland against possible attacks from North Korea, they are less well positioned to hit missiles originating from the Middle East. To that end, Washington wants to deploy 10 ground-based interceptors (GBIs) in Poland. These could intercept Iranian missiles either on their way to Central Europe or to the American east coast.

President Putin in effect accepted this line of the US argument when proposing that a Russian radar system stationed in Azerbaijan could be jointly used by Moscow and Washington in the future to detect Iranian missile launches. Such an approach would be better than using a new radar system to be built in the Czech Republic, the Russian president opined. Mr Putin also speculated about the positioning of US missile interceptors in Turkey rather than in Poland. This move would not threaten Russian interests. With these proposals, Mr Putin admitted that a missile threat from Iran could become real and that the US aim is to defend against threats originating from the Middle East, not to undermine Russia's strategic nuclear-deterrence posture.

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<sup>8</sup> See D. Trenin, *Russia's Strategic Choices*, Policy Brief No. 50, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., May 2007.

In fact, the planned US missile defences could not fulfil such an intention with respect to Russia. To achieve the purpose of intercepting a large proportion of Russia's still numerous strategic nuclear missiles, Washington would need to deploy several hundred missile interceptors in Europe. The present US plans are based on 54 GBIs – 44 in the US and 10 in Europe – through 2013. More importantly, some of the Russian missiles would not cross Europe in order to reach US territory, but would cross the North Pole region; therefore, they could not be intercepted by systems stationed in Poland. Even if future US presidents were to decide to intensify US missile defence efforts, these would never reach a point in which missile defences could be relied upon to destroy or intercept all Russian nuclear forces in a first strike. After all, why should a US president decide to attack Russia without the ability to be certain that New York City, for instance, could not be entirely destroyed by one large, Russian nuclear weapon in response? Indeed, if Russia were really concerned that US missile defences could endanger its second-strike capability, why has the Russian critique of US interceptors already stationed in Alaska and California thus far been rather lukewarm, while the rhetoric criticising the US plans to build up parts of its missile defences in Europe been so intense?

Prior to the June 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Russia had been escalating its campaign against the US missile shield. It warned of a possible new arms race – including the test firing of new Russian missiles. In addition, Moscow threatened to abrogate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which bans an entire class of US and Russian ballistic missiles, and to suspend compliance with the reductions agreed in the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. These statements almost led to the point where the struggle about missile defences became more important than the other items on the original G8 agenda such as global warming. In making them, Moscow intended to underscore its importance as part of the family of the world's leading countries.

The reasons for this Russian policy are based on both Russian domestic politics and Moscow's foreign policy goals. Both are interrelated. As far as domestic politics are concerned, President Putin seeks to portray himself as a great statesman who is not to shy to confront Western policies. In doing so, Mr Putin serves an anti-Western paranoia that is widespread not only among the Russian political elite but also among the Russian population.

In terms of foreign policy goals, President Putin aims at demonstrating that Russia is no longer as weak as it was during the 1990s. Therefore, the days of Moscow accepting Western policies that weaken the Russian position, such as NATO enlargement, are forever gone. The Russian leadership additionally wants to exploit ongoing transatlantic irritations. Furthermore, Moscow intends to negatively affect the European integration process and send a signal to new NATO members such as Poland and the Czech Republic, in whose national decision-making Russia still wants to have an influence. President Putin is aware that in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular – a country he understands very well owing to his excellent German language skills – the reputation of the Bush administration is very low. Mr Putin also realises that Washington missed explaining its missile defence intentions appropriately to European publics. By arguing that US missile defences could cause a nuclear arms race, the Russian president has hoped to diminish even further the reputation of the current US administration in Europe.

At the same time, by criticising the Polish and Czech governments, both of which are willing to allow Washington to base parts of its missile defences on their territories, President Putin has highlighted the different security policy orientations of European countries. These divergences are partly reflected in the criticism by other European governments that the new NATO members are relying too much on the US rather than being interested in developing European security and defence policies. Finally, by opposing missile defences in Poland and the Czech Republic – but not in Denmark or the UK, which have already passed decisions to contribute to respective US defence plans – and proposing that the US station these systems in Turkey, President Putin wants to underline that there is still a difference between old and new NATO members and that Moscow continues to have a say as far as former Warsaw Pact members are concerned.



Furthermore, Russia is in the process of modernising its strategic nuclear forces, which remain a priority for Russian defence planners. Moscow continues to deploy silo-based and road-mobile Topol-M (SS-27) intercontinental missiles. Russian engineers are also working on new ballistic missile submarines armed with the new Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile. Moreover, Moscow is pursuing programmes to develop new long-range cruise missiles. Further modernisation projects include the Igla manoeuvrable warhead and a reported hypersonic delivery vehicle. Finally, Russia is engaged in fourth-generation nuclear weapons research, such as precision low-yield nuclear weapons, clean nuclear weapons (earth penetrators and neutron weapons) and weapons tailored to create special effects such as an electro-magnetic pulse. Owing to budgetary constraints, Russia's strategic nuclear forces will decrease in numbers in the near future. Nevertheless, given the aforementioned modernisation programmes, Moscow intends to keep its forces up to date. Apparently, the goal is to have a strategic nuclear fleet that is "small, but beautiful" long into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

Some of these projects are motivated by US missile defence plans and aim at overcoming them. Yet, the main rationale for Russia to continue placing many of its defence eggs into the basket of strategic nuclear forces is different. Russian leaders are well aware of the central role these weapons play in Russia's status as a world power. Next, for Russia, modernising its strategic nuclear weapons is still less expensive than keeping its conventional forces up to date, not least because all of its plans to create an effective state-of-the-art professional army have failed so far. Russian strategic thinkers are now mimicking NATO's flexible response strategy of the cold war to the extent that they see nuclear forces as the only weapons able to counter NATO's conventional superiority. This argument has grown more influential, particularly since NATO's enlargement. This process might be pursued even into former Soviet territory. Finally, NATO's war against Serbia in 1999 indicated to Moscow that the transatlantic alliance does not hesitate to use force. Against this background, it seems fair to conclude that Moscow, in criticising US missile defence plans in Europe and warning against another arms race, is seeking to legitimise a strategic, nuclear modernisation programme that is already underway.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the West has an interest in a cooperative partnership with Russia. In fact, missile defences could become part of such a partnership. At present, the US Missile Defense Agency, together with Russia, conducts a Theatre Missile Defense Exercise Programme. The US has also invited Russia to cooperate on the development of defence technologies and share intelligence on common threats. Washington has even offered to permit Russian officials to inspect future US missile defence bases in Europe.<sup>10</sup> Discussions within the NATO–Russia Council to ensure transparency as well as to sort out possible joint endeavours in that regard should also be intensified. After all, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, especially in the Middle East, could turn out to be a threat for Russia as much as for the West. But before common missile defence projects can materialise, Moscow needs to decide whether it wants to cooperate in this field or whether it wants to continue to use the missile defence debate as a rhetorical tool to separate the Europeans from the Americans and create divisions within Europe.

Some believe that President Putin's proposal to use the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan jointly with the US in the future points in the right direction. This view seems questionable, however. The Gabala radar is part of the Russian early warning system. It could be useful for early warning purposes, but the Bush administration is mainly seeking an X-band radar capable of tracking and guiding defence interceptors towards Iranian offensive ballistic missiles. Therefore, it would be much better to install such a system in the Czech Republic as currently planned by Washington rather than in Azerbaijan, which is too close to the Iranian border. Many observers also believe the Gabala radar to be outmoded.

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<sup>9</sup> See P.I. Bernstein, J.P. Caves, Jr. and J.F. Reichert, *The Future Nuclear Landscape*, Occasional Paper No. 5, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., April 2007, pp. 25–27.

<sup>10</sup> See T. Shanker, "Pentagon Invites Kremlin to Link Missile Systems", *New York Times*, 21 April 2007.

Furthermore, the Gabala radar station is a significant element of Russia's national defence. Once the data from the Gabala radar as well as Russian space-based surveillance systems confirm a missile attack, it would trigger nuclear retaliation. Therefore, it seems rather unlikely that Moscow would completely share all its data with other nations such as the US. By the same token, if some cooperation between the US and Russia were to take place, particularly if a crisis erupted in the Middle East, Washington could never be sure that Moscow was indeed sharing all of its data. Against this background, the US could not entirely rely upon cooperation with Russia in terms of the Gabala radar. Therefore, it could not renounce its plans for its own radar in the Czech Republic as part of its missile defence system.<sup>11</sup>

### Issues that need further discussion

Even if one is in favour of the Bush administration's missile defence plans, some open questions remain. One concerns the technical feasibility of missile defence. Since 2002, when the flight test programme for the ground-based midcourse defence began, three out of six tests were successful intercepts. Still, many express doubts concerning the effectiveness of the system. They argue that those tests were not undertaken under realistic conditions. The GBIs to be deployed in Poland, which will consist of two rather than three stages, have not yet been tested. Given the fact that the US began intensifying its missile defence activities during the Reagan administration of the 1980s, one might ask how long it will continue to take to develop an effective strategic missile defence. Yet, exactly because it is so difficult and time-consuming to develop effective defences, it seems inappropriate not to increase the current efforts instead of waiting until today's potential missile threats develop into real ones.

Next, there is the issue of costs. The total estimated costs for the European missile defence project are \$4.04 billion for the fiscal years 2007 to 2013.<sup>12</sup> Because the planned US defence systems to be deployed in Poland and the Czech Republic would not only defend Europe but would mainly be part of the US national homeland defence, Washington will cover the expenses. Should Europeans in the future be expected to share the missile defence bill, this could cause trouble for many European governments. Their main problem would be how to reconcile the cost-expansive transformation of conventional forces already engaged in international contingencies such as Afghanistan with the expected missile defence costs.

Moreover, the planned radar station in the Czech Republic and the GBIs to be deployed in Poland would be part of a multilayered, US national missile-defence architecture. Washington considers forward-based missile defences in Europe an additional option to other US interceptors to defend against Iranian missiles crossing European territory in their mid-course flight. These defences could also intercept Iranian ballistic missiles that are targeted against Central Europe. Washington continues to insist, however, that it remains in full control of these defences and does not intend to give the Europeans a say insofar as command and control are concerned. In other words, the US project clearly lacks a NATO component. For the Europeans this means that they will completely depend upon the US on an issue of strategic proportions (including the problem of the debris falling on European

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<sup>11</sup> See A. Zagorski's comment in the Russia Profile Weekly Experts Panel, "Putin's Surprise", 15 June 2007 (retrieved from <http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=Experts%27+Panel&articleid=a1181909384>).

<sup>12</sup> See S.A. Hildreth and C. Ek, *Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe*, CRS Report for Congress, Code RL 34051, Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., updated 25 July 2007, p. 4.

territory from missiles intercepted on their way to the US). Whether proposals to deploy two GBI bases in Europe – one controlled by the US and one by NATO – could contribute to a solution to this problem needs further discussion.<sup>13</sup>

Notably, the US GBIs in Poland could protect Central Europe, but not the southern flank of NATO's territory. The Atlantic alliance needs to rely upon the concept of the indivisibility of security. This means that all NATO members need to have the same protection against missiles. So far, in its own missile defence efforts NATO has focused on the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Defense Programme, aiming at improving the protection of deployed NATO forces in out-of-area contingencies. NATO has also been deliberating strategic missile defences. A related feasibility study concluded that a long-range ballistic missile defence system to protect the alliance would be technically feasible. In June 2007, NATO defence ministers agreed to conduct a study of a complementary anti-missile capability that would protect the south-eastern part of the alliance territory, which would not be covered by the planned US interceptors. How these projects could be combined with the US GBIs in Poland, particularly in relation to command and control of a NATO-wide missile defence, remains an open question.

Finally, even if all these issues could be resolved, another central question would remain: What impact would a NATO missile defence capability providing protection for Americans as well as Europeans have on the European security and defence policy (ESDP)? If missile defence were seen as an indispensable strategic tool for Europe, operated by NATO, would that not imply a diminishing role for the ESDP? This question is especially of concern to countries such as France, which puts an emphasis on the development of Europe as a security and defence actor. Although it is true that the Bush administration has taken the initiative on missile defence and may be criticised for not consulting its European partners appropriately on the issue, the EU itself has failed to adopt a clear position on this security and defence matter.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

The discussion about a missile defence system that could protect both the European and American populations has just begun. Governments will have to take decisions while not exactly knowing how the missile threat, for instance from the Middle East, will evolve. The costs and technical feasibility of missile defences will also remain unclear. In any case, Europe as well as the US should continue engaging in missile defence projects because the option of damage limitation is of the essence at a time when further nuclear and missile proliferation is taking place. At the end of the day, this is a question of world order. Missile defences could provide at least the US with more room for manoeuvre to re-establish order. Cooperating with Russia in the area of missile defence should be a Western goal, but it should not be seen as a precondition. Some important questions affecting NATO, such as command and control issues, need further consideration. Still, the respective debates should not give room for a transatlantic struggle at a time when cooperation seems more needed than ever.

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<sup>13</sup> See S. Frühling and S. Sinjen, "NATO Missile Defense: The Political and Operational Case for a Two-Base Structure", *Rusi Journal*, December 2006, pp. 58–61.

<sup>14</sup> See T. Bauer and F. Baumann, *Missiles for Europe? U.S. plans expose Europe's strategic weaknesses*, CAP Policy Analysis No. 3, Centre for Applied Policy Research, Munich, July 2007.

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# Russia and Missile Defences

Alexander Pikayev\*

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Since late 2006, the debates about US plans to deploy the third site of its national missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic have been perceived as a major irritant in US–Russian and Russian–NATO relations. Although the issue is indeed one of a number of serious disagreements between Moscow and Washington, its role seems exaggerated by the media and some analysts. Nevertheless, the missile defence deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic do represent one of the most serious disagreements in recent US–Russian relations. The solutions to these disagreements seem remote, and they must be carefully managed in order to prevent relations between Moscow and Washington from slipping towards confrontation.

## Red line

Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, has mentioned two red lines on which Russia will not change its position – Kosovo and missile defences. On all other controversies in the Russian–Western relationship, including Iran and the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), Moscow has expressed its willingness to reach a deal. Strong and vocal Russian opposition to the plans to locate the third site of the US national missile-defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic could be explained by three major factors:

- Traditionally, missile defence systems have been the key controversy in the realm of US–Russian strategic nuclear relations, since they add uncertainty to nuclear planning and create additional pressure to increase nuclear arsenals.
- The choice of deployment on the territories of two NATO member states located close to Russia’s borders has exacerbated Russia’s disappointment over NATO’s eastward enlargement.
- Finally, the Kremlin might be interested in using the potential deployments as evidence of Western ‘aggressiveness’ in the context of Russian parliamentary and presidential electoral campaigns.

The dramatic weakening of Russia’s conventional deterrent since the Soviet collapse has forced the Russian military to pay more attention to the country’s still powerful nuclear forces. In contrast with the Soviet era, the nuclear forces are regarded as a deterrent not only against a potential nuclear attack, but also against large-scale conventional aggression. Therefore, the ability to inflict the ‘required damage’ to a potential adversary in such circumstances by nuclear forces has become a key factor in hard security calculations. As missile defences might hinder such a capability, they are thus considered threatening. In the eyes of some military planners, the US missile deployments could decrease the retaliatory capabilities of the strategic nuclear forces and enable better utilisation of conventional predominance in the European theatre of military operations.

Furthermore, the relatively rapid shrinking of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces, owing to the decommissioning of older missile systems built during the Soviet era together with the very low production of new missiles (fewer than 10 per year during most of the post-Soviet period), has led to increasing concerns that missile defences could become an element of the first-strike strategy. The

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majority of Russia's nuclear forces could be eliminated in the first strike made by nuclear and highly accurate conventional systems; those missiles that survived could be intercepted by the missile defences during an attempted retaliation.

Even limited missile defences might make the options for a limited nuclear response not credible. It is widely considered that an all-out nuclear response with a large number of strategic missiles as a reaction to, say, conventional aggression, seems unlikely. Such a decision would be suicidal given the imminent risk of an equally devastating second strike. Therefore, the warring side might try to limit an initial nuclear attack by using a small number of missiles in an effort to diminish the scale of its adversary's unavoidable retaliation. Yet, even limited missile defences are capable of intercepting missiles during such a restricted strike. As a result, a nuclear threshold would be increased together with the self-deterrence to cross it. A higher nuclear threshold would make it more difficult to use nuclear forces as a deterrent against conventional aggression.

The third site of the missile defence deployment would increase the general capabilities of the US national missile defence system, and therefore make the above-mentioned risks more realistic. According to some Russian experts, the potential deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic also possess some specific risks:

- The interceptors located in Poland might be capable of intercepting missiles launched from bases situated in western Russia during their flight to targets on the US east coast. Such a capability has been recognised by an authoritative non-governmental report recently published in the US.<sup>1</sup>
- The anti-missile system to be based in Poland could also undermine the nuclear deterrence between Russia and the Western European nuclear powers – the UK and France.
- The radar to be located in the Czech Republic would further develop US capabilities to detect and track Russian missiles, which might improve the efficiency of other elements of the nuclear missile defence system located on US soil to intercept such missiles.
- The second mobile radar could be deployed to enable the earlier detection of missile launches. If deployed in the Caucasus, it would be able to monitor activities in that region, which is the most sensitive one for Russia's security.
- The planned deployments could represent a first step for the system's potential enlargement. Later, more interceptors could be deployed and their velocity might be increased as well. Currently under development, a multiple-warhead anti-missile system could also be delivered within a few years. This expanded anti-missile system would significantly raise the risk posed to Russia's strategic deterrent.
- The interceptors would be deployed in silos. Traditionally, the silos have represented launchers for surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. This prospect triggers concerns that the silos might be secretly converted for deploying such ballistic missiles, which would be able to reach strategic targets in western Russia, including Moscow, within minutes. Thus, the disarming capabilities of the US could rise substantially.
- Even if the planned system did indeed aim at intercepting potential missile strikes from Iran, the interception might occur over Russia's territory. Consequently, it is possible that Russia could suffer from radioactive or toxic fallout (or both), or even a nuclear explosion in the atmosphere or on the ground.

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<sup>1</sup> See T.A. Postol and G.N. Lewes, *The Proposed US Missile Defense in Europe: Technological Issues Relevant to Policy*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C., 28 August 2007.

Certainly, these perceived risks are debated and some of them do not look very convincing for either the West or some Russian experts and decision-makers. Still, the pro and con arguments are usually of a complicated technical nature, and could be disputed by using similarly complex counterarguments. It is difficult for decision-makers who do not understand the technicalities to make an independent judgment. In this situation, they would likely have to base their decisions on worst-case assumptions, despite the fact that these assumptions are disputable.

The second set of concerns is linked to NATO enlargement. Russia, with its downsized conventional forces, feels insecure in the proximity of the most powerful military alliance in the world, which now directly borders Russia and in some areas is just a few hundred kilometres from its capital, Moscow, and a few dozen kilometres from its second capital, St Petersburg. The feeling of insecurity has been aggravated by the fact that the adopted CFE Treaty on limiting conventional forces in Europe, which partially alleviated Moscow's security concerns, has not been ratified by NATO countries, and the Baltic states – situated the most closely to the Russian heartland – have refused to accede to the agreement. In recent years, NATO enlargement has been followed by the move of its military infrastructure towards Russia's borders. Two US military bases have been opened in Bulgaria and Romania. Moscow believes that this represents a violation of the CFE Treaty, a charge that is rejected by NATO.

It should also be mentioned that the official US justification for the deployments – Iran – is itself controversial. This project could be viewed as sending the wrong message to Tehran at a time when the international efforts aimed at solving the Iranian nuclear issue might be entering a critical phase. The G6 countries – the US, China, Russia, France, Germany and the UK – are trying to convince the Iranians to give up the most controversial elements of their nuclear programme through a mixture of carrots and sticks. In that context, a demonstration of 'zero tolerance' towards the programme represents an important integral component of the efforts. Yet, a decision to deploy the missile defence for protection against Iranian nuclear missiles could be considered in Tehran as a willingness by the US tacitly to accept Iran's nuclear status. Under their possible logic, if Washington is developing the second echelon of its defence against a nuclear Iran, it seems ready to adapt itself to Iranian nuclear developments if the negotiations fail. Thus, the missile defence could induce Tehran to go nuclear rather than encourage it to show restraint.

From this perspective, the deployment of missile defences in Poland and the Czech Republic, together with the strategic nature of the planned system, have become the last straw in a chain of events provoking the currently tough Russian reaction. The Kremlin thinks that it has been deceived, at least three times. First, during German re-unification, Russia allegedly received assurances that NATO would not go eastward, yet the alliance made such a decision just a few years later when the circumstances changed. Second, in the 1997 Russia–NATO Founding Act, the alliance promised not to embark on new, significant conventional deployments on the territories of new member states. Although NATO does not recognise that the US bases in Bulgaria and Romania as well as the planned missile defence deployments could be characterised as 'significant', the Russians underline the strategic nature of missile defence systems, which thus makes them a significant factor in the NATO–Russia balance of forces.

Third, after the 2002 unilateral withdrawal by the US from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the US and Russia signed a Memorandum on Strategic Security, wherein they are obliged to consult on major issues related to strategic stability, including missile defences. This Memorandum has never been fulfilled by the Bush administration. The Russians were allegedly vaguely informed about the US missile defence plans in Europe, but consultations only began in 2007 – after the issue had already escalated into a serious crisis in the bilateral relationship and after the US had already made the deployment decision.

The fourth and the least considerable factor is represented by an electoral campaign. The Kremlin perceives that the West is trying to interfere in Russia's domestic politics in order to provoke a

Russian version of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. To neutralise such an attempt, some might think there is a need to discredit the West in the eyes of ordinary Russian voters as an 'aggressive' anti-Russian entity.

Potential missile defence deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic are a strong public relations argument favouring such a proposition. The system, supposed to be used against Iran, will be deployed much closer to Moscow than to Tehran, immediately at the Russian western border and far away from the possible launch sites of inexistent long-range Iranian missiles. This clear geographical fact discredits US arguments in the eyes of Russia's ordinary domestic audience. The contention that Poland is an ideal position from which to defend most of Europe is technically complex and cannot compete with the simple and clear geographical argumentation. Also, that contention could be disputed by using similar technical rationales, which are difficult for non-experts to understand.

Furthermore, the deployment would be made on the initiative of the US; no European country, including Poland and the Czech Republic, had asked Washington to protect it from a perceived threat of an Iranian missile attack before the decision to deploy the system was made in the US. This further undermines the credibility of the US arguments that the system is designed to protect Europe from the missile threat. The very fact that the anti-missile interceptors would be deployed in Poland – a determined critic of Russia that seeks to undermine EU–Russian relations – further helps to make the case to the Russian public that, in fact, the system has Russia in mind.

It should be noted that the electoral context has made the issue more visible in the Russian media. It should not be considered, however, that the electoral context is the only reason for Russian opposition to the project. The strategic nuclear and security factors are perceived as far too important to forget about the system after the elections are completed next spring.

## Countermeasures

Threat perceptions coming from the US nuclear missile defence system in general, and from the missile defence installations in Poland and the Czech Republic in particular, along with desires to improve the economy and a determination to protect national security make it almost inevitable that Russia will have to implement countermeasures against the future system if it really is deployed. There might be debates about the nature of the measures, those that should not be used and those that should be picked up from the available list. But some countermeasures will be implemented.

The Kremlin says that the countermeasures will be asymmetrical. Moscow wants to avoid the militarisation of the economy, which was one of the main reasons for the Soviet collapse. Therefore, it would likely concentrate on relatively inexpensive measures, aimed at neutralising the system. From the military viewpoint, the list of potential countermeasures is quite clear. Moreover, some of them have already been developed and tested.

First and most importantly, Russia will have to increase the survivability of its nuclear forces and improve their capabilities to penetrate through missile defences. There are indications that after the unilateral US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and Washington's refusal to go verifiably low in the levels of strategic nuclear forces, Russia has had to reconsider its own nuclear modernisation plans. Earlier, there were calculations that the Russian strategic nuclear forces might be reduced to a level of a few hundred warheads sometime in the 2010s. Now, it looks likely that Moscow would be able to maintain force numbers at the levels permitted by the 2002 US–Russian Moscow Treaty, i.e. at around 2,000. If the US–Russian agreement on strategic arms control collapses owing to the expiration of the Start I Treaty in 2009 and the Moscow Treaty in 2012, there would be no prohibition on Russia going for higher ceilings.

Reportedly, in 2001 the then US Secretary of State Colin Powell toured European capitals in an attempt to assuage criticism of the US decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. One of the



arguments he made to try to reassure Europeans was that Russia would not be able to build up its strategic nuclear forces as a countermeasure against the missile defence deployments because of economic reasons. This information was delivered to Russian leaders. It is likely that it has strengthened their determination to make such a build-up possible.

In 2002, as a result of the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, another arms control agreement – the Start II Treaty – ceased to exist. Among other things, it prohibited intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with multiple re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). Some experts believe that these represent the most effective countermeasure against missile defences. With them, it is cheaper to maintain higher nuclear ceilings than with single warhead missiles. The considerable throw weight of MIRVed ICBMs permits the deployment of a larger number of decoys in order to confuse the missile defences. Initially, to comply with the Start II Treaty, Russia developed a new single warhead ICBM – Topol-M. It did not develop new MIRVed missiles and under the terms of the Start II Treaty, the existing systems were to be dismantled.

Yet the collapse of the Start II Treaty has permitted Moscow to start developing a new MIRVed ICBM. In 2007, it was successfully flight-tested. Under the Start I Treaty provisions, the US was informed about the new system, which was named RS-25.

Simultaneously, Russia developed and tested a new warhead, especially designed for penetrating missile defences. According to Russian officials, it is a high-speed manoeuvrable warhead. Its deployment would make the task of intercepting a missile at the final stage of its trajectory much more difficult.

Russians have also started to pay more attention to two other components of its triad – submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and heavy bombers. These enable missiles to be launched from unexpected azimuths, making the task of their early detection more difficult. There are reports that Moscow has begun production of Sineva SLBMs, and it has developed and tested a new Bulava missile. Although earlier there were hints that the strategic submarines would only be based in northern Russia, recently there have been accounts that bases on the Pacific coast would also remain – which would not only permit maintaining survivability but would also increase the number of potential launch sites in the ocean. As a result, an interception task would become more complicated.

In 2007, it was announced that Russia had resumed limited production of the Tu-160 Blackjack heavy bombers. It has also resumed routine flights of the Tu-95 Bear bombers to train pilots for implementing higher alert missions. Strategic airports around the Russian territory have been deactivated for permitting the strategic bombers to disperse in order to increase their survivability.

This long list should not be interpreted as a real build-up. So far, Moscow is only trying to maintain operational all the legs of its strategic triad and to make qualitative improvements. The build-up is only relative and can be termed as such solely by comparing it to the levels predicted for the situation should the US have remained in the ABM Treaty. In real life, Russia's strategic nuclear capabilities continue to diminish along with the decommissioning of a large number of old Soviet systems and the small production of new missiles.

In addition, the military forces might need the capability to destroy threatening objects on the ground. Russian leaders have warned that they might retarget Russian nuclear missiles on European targets. They have not clarified what specific targets they have in mind, but most likely these are the components of the missile defences to be deployed in Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere. This retargeting might include of some strategic nuclear delivery vehicles – land- sea- and ground-based. Conventional sea- and air-based cruise missiles could also be used for implementing such a mission.

In 2007, Russia tested a new short-range, high-speed, ground-based cruise missile, which could be deployed on the Iskander missile launcher. It was further reported that the range of the cruise missile,

if necessary, could be increased. If deployed in the Kaliningrad oblast or in Belarus, it could potentially destroy interceptors in Poland and even the radar in the Czech Republic.

Militarily, the Russians might also be interested in intercepting the anti-missiles on their flight in two scenarios. First, if these were launched for intercepting Russia's own missiles. Second, if the anti-missiles attempted to hit a third-country missile above Russia's airspace. In the latter case, it is especially important to have the capability to intercept the anti-missile in the air, since destruction of the facilities on the ground is infeasible.

Finally, the deployments might trigger Russia's own efforts in the area of missile defence. In 2007, it was announced that new S-400 Triumph air-defence systems had been deployed around Moscow. The systems purportedly possess a capability to hit not only airplanes, but also cruise missiles and short-range ballistic missiles. This deployment could be considered the first step in efforts to improve the protection of vital strategic facilities if the silos in Poland were to be converted for housing surface-to-surface missiles.

The above-mentioned list of current and potential countermeasures is not complete and is based on publicly available information. New measures could be announced in the foreseeable future. Some measures remain hypothetical, while the scale of the deployment of others that have already been developed and tested remains uncertain and will depend on the state of overall political relations between Russia and the US, and Russia's relations with the West in general in the coming years.

## **Diplomatic context**

Moscow and Washington continue to disagree over the missile defence deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic. Both sides, however, seem interested in preventing the disagreement from reaching confrontation. Russia continues to maintain an interest in becoming a part of the West, and a significant proportion of the Russian political class still believes that their country belongs to the European civilisation. The US is experiencing problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, and cannot afford a confrontation with Russia, which would considerably undermine US interests in the Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan, South Asia, the Korean peninsula and possibly in other sensitive areas.

In order to decrease the tension, the Russians have delivered a proposal for the joint use of some elements of the Russian early warning system for monitoring missile risks. Initially, at the June 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm, President Vladimir Putin proposed that the US jointly use the phased-array radar built by the former Soviet Union and located at Gabala in Azerbaijan. Russia operates the facility, which is rented from Azerbaijan until 2011. There is a feeling that Moscow does not have plans to continue the rent beyond 2011 and is fulfilling a plan to construct a newer early warning facility on Russian soil as a substitute. Nevertheless, Moscow has made such use conditional on eliminating plans to deploy the US defences in Poland and the Czech Republic.

During the US–Russian informal summit at Kennebunkport in Maine, President Putin further developed his proposal. Beyond Gabala, he offered the joint use of the new radar in Armavir (Krasnodar Krai), which should be completed by 2008. Also, he returned to the idea of opening a joint data exchange centre (JDEC) in Moscow. The US–Russian JDEC agreement was achieved in the late 1990s. Under the agreement, American and Russian officers, sitting alongside one another, would receive limited and filtered data from the national early-warning systems of the two countries and provide the data to their respective militaries. So far, the Russians have selected a building for the centre in northern Moscow, but the two sides have subsequently lost interest in the initiative.

According to President Putin, the data received from Gabala and Armavir could go to the JDEC, and from there to the US and Russian militaries. He also suggested establishing a similar centre in Brussels, in order to share the data with non-NATO states.

Irrespective of the reasons underlying the Putin proposal, it has opened doors for discussing potential US–Russian cooperation with respect to strategic missile defence. Previously, Moscow had only accepted consultations on non-strategic missile defences within the NATO–Russia Council. It has also participated in missile defence simulations conducted on a bilateral basis with the US. In the current political context, the proposal has helped to limit damage in the bilateral relations inflicted by the US decision to deploy missile defences in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, in 2007 the US and Russia agreed to establish a 2+2 consultation mechanism at the level of ministers of defence and foreign affairs. Within the framework of this mechanism, several working groups have been established. One of them should deal especially with the missile defences. The groups gather on a regular basis, with the ministers meeting every six months. In fact, a permanent channel for bilateral political dialogue has been formed. It will help to maintain constant contact for discussing matters of mutual concern, including the missile defences. This contact might in turn help to manage tensions in the bilateral relationship during the electoral season in Russia and perhaps later in the US.

From its side, the US has also made some proposals aimed at alleviating Russia's militant rhetoric. During the 2+2 consultations in Moscow held in October 2007, Washington delivered a set of proposals to the Russians. Although they remain classified, it has become known that among other things, these proposals contain transparency and confidence-building measures intended to address Russia's concerns about the missile defences to be deployed in Poland and the Czech Republic. In particular, Russian inspectors would be permitted to visit the future sites. There are also hints that the deployment of the missile defences could be postponed. Some US officials have even alluded that the plans might be reconsidered if the threat from Iran does not materialise.

Obviously, a change in the US position has taken place because the Bush administration is facing difficulties in promoting the missile defence initiatives and because it needs a certain understanding with Russia on some sensitive issues, including a few regional ones. It is clear that the US is unlikely to gain unconditional permission from Prague on the radar deployment. Meanwhile, the US Congress has reduced expenditures for the missile defences and there is influential domestic opposition to the plans. Some Western European allies are far from enthusiastic about the US plans and how these have circumvented multilateral institutions and debates.

The Russian side suspects that the recent US proposals represent only a propagandistic effort aimed at reducing domestic and international opposition to the US project. First, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates did not bring to Moscow any proposal in its normal diplomatic form. There were only vague oral statements, which did not permit the Russians to understand the US ideas in full detail. Washington has promised to give the Russians a written proposal, but as of 6 November 2007, it has not yet been delivered. Second, the US reportedly promised to establish only the missile defence infrastructure; the deployment of the interceptors themselves would only be undertaken upon evaluation of the threat. Again, this proposed measure could be considered meaningless. The US could receive a go-ahead for the initial works and upon their completion, Washington could unilaterally decide that the time was ripe for deployment. As such, this measure would not amount to a substantive difference from the current situation. Finally, the US might offer the Russian military an opportunity to visit the sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, if both countries accept it. This measure per se could be an important step for confidence-building and transparency. It would be hostage, however, to historical hang-ups on the part of Warsaw and Prague. They could block such visits, perhaps with tacit US acquiescence or even inducement.

Regarding the future, the Russians would be unlikely to change their opposition to these US plans. There may be calculations to buy time until a new administration comes to power in the White House, which might be less ideological about defence. Also, a weak, centre-right cabinet of Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek could lose its fragile majority in parliament and be substituted by a centre-left coalition, which, together with a majority of Czech voters, opposes the US radar deployment.

The US opponents to the missile defences are also interested in a tough Russian position, and behind closed doors, they might even urge Moscow to remain firm. Russia's opposition would also force the Bush administration to pay a higher price both domestically and in US relations with some key European countries. Finally, the missile defence issue is increasing suspicions that Poland is playing the role of an American Trojan horse in European institutions and that it is pursuing the US line in order to slow down European integration.

## **Conclusion**

The plans of the Bush administration to deploy the third missile defence site in Poland and the Czech Republic represent a premature and ill-defined measure. The decision about it has been made at a time when the US and US-led institutions, as never before, need broad international support for their efforts to stabilise Iraq and Afghanistan. In that context, the inevitable alienating of Russia as a result of that decision may bring counterproductive consequences in the short term. In the longer run, the US action could trigger a counteraction, which has been in various phases of preparation since the US unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty and which might put an end to a unique situation of security that emerged in Europe with the end of the cold war. Fortunately, more recently the US and Russia have established diplomatic instruments for maintaining uninterrupted dialogue on the missile defence system and other critical issues on the bilateral agenda. This step brings with it the hope that their relations will remain manageable during the electoral campaigns in both countries, and that disagreements about the missile defence plans will not escalate into open animosity and confrontation.

# About the European Security Forum

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The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) joined forces late in the year 2000, to launch a new forum on European security policy in Brussels. The objective of this *European Security Forum* is to bring together senior officials and experts from EU and Euro-Atlantic Partnership countries, including the United States and Russia, to discuss security issues of strategic importance to Europe. The Forum is jointly directed by CEPS and the IISS and is hosted by CEPS in Brussels.

The Forum brings together a select group of personalities from the Brussels institutions (EU, NATO and diplomatic missions), national governments, parliaments, business, media and independent experts. The informal and confidential character of the Forum enables participants to exchange ideas freely.

The aim of the initiative is to think ahead about the strategic security agenda for Europe, treating both its European and transatlantic implications. The topics to be addressed are selected from an open list that includes crisis management, defence capabilities, security concepts, defence industries and institutional developments (including enlargement) of the EU and NATO.

The Forum has about 100 members, who are invited to all meetings and receive current information on the activities of the Forum. This group meets every other month in a closed session to discuss a pre-arranged topic under Chatham House rules. The Forum meetings are presided over by François Heisbourg, Chairman of the Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris. As a general rule, three short issue papers are commissioned from independent experts for each session presenting EU, US and Russian viewpoints on the topic.

**The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)** is an independent policy research institute founded in Brussels in 1983, with the aim of producing sound policy research leading to constructive solutions to the challenges facing Europe.

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