

The U.S. Anti-missile Project in Romania Threatens Russian Security

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Global Research, February 25, 2010

[RIA Novosti](#) 24 February 2010

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

MOSCOW — This month Romania has been a source of unpleasant news for Moscow. President Traian Basescu agreed to host ground-based medium-range missile interceptors on Romanian territory as part of the U.S. missile defense project. The plans call for the ground-based version of the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System (Aegis BMD) with SM-3 missiles to be deployed in Romania by 2015.

This system cannot be said to threaten Russia's security interests since Russia has no ground-based medium-range (1,000km-5,500km) or short-range (500km-1,000km) ballistic and cruise missiles. These missiles were all scrapped by June 1991 under an agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, Moscow has expressed concern over this issue based on the following grounds.

First, Washington appears to have abandoned its policy of resetting U.S.-Russian relations and has presented Moscow with a *fait accompli* instead. U.S. actions contradict the joint statements made by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama on April 1 and July 6, 2009 regarding the need for equitable international cooperation on anti-missile defense. The latter agreement proposed a joint effort to analyse possible missile threats and develop relevant recommendations, primarily for politicians and diplomats. In addition, Moscow and Washington agreed to speed up work to establish the Joint Data Exchange Center (JDEC) whose members could notify each other of missile launches. Instead, the current U.S. administration has chosen the path taken by their Republican predecessors, who sought to deploy forward-based missile defense systems at any price. Consequently, Moscow now doubts Washington's willingness to establish a true partnership.

Second, Washington has not provided any information about the number of missile interceptors to be deployed, deployment locations, interception altitudes and missile targeting methods. The lack of information makes it very difficult to speak about the actual contours of the future system. However, it is reasonable to assume that the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) mobile ground-based radar system will be deployed in Romania instead of the SM-3 missile system, which hasn't been created yet. This system includes a radar station with a direction range of 1,000 kilometers, which could be deployed in Bulgaria, for example, as well as anti-ballistic missiles that can intercept targets within a radius of 200 kilometers at an altitude of 100-150 kilometers.

Third, the U.S. plans to deploy mobile batteries with SM-3 missiles in Poland by 2018. However, the soundness of this decision is questionable, given that the THAAD system is incapable of intercepting the warheads of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which is

essential to protect the U.S. against an extremely unlikely but possible Iranian missile attack. If the deployment of THAAD batteries to Romania is to be justified by invoking European security threats in the face of the deteriorating Iranian nuclear crisis, it must be noted that similar batteries in Poland will not be able to protect Europe from Iranian missiles, only Russian missiles. It's hard to conceive of a situation in which such protection would be needed.

One can view the decision of the Polish Defense Ministry to host U.S. Patriot missile air defense systems in the town of Morag near the Russian border in the same light. Initial plans called for modified PAC-2 and PAC-3 guidance systems to be located outside of Warsaw, which would have allowed the Patriot systems to address missile defense tasks effectively. Given the lack of critical facilities in the vicinity, the current position of the Patriot battery renders it essentially useless as a means of missile defense, which confirms that Warsaw's foreign policy is directed against Russia and that Washington backs this policy.

Fourth, one has to admit that deploying elements of the U.S. missile defense system in Romania will neither pose a threat to Russia nor change the strategic balance between Moscow and Washington. However, the U.S. plans to deploy more powerful anti-ballistic missiles in Europe by 2018-2020. These will probably be silo-based missiles, for example upgraded SM-3 missiles with high runway speeds and interception altitudes exceeding 1,000 kilometers, making it possible to destroy not only ICBM warheads but also ballistic missiles launched by Russia. In the latter case, interception will have to occur automatically since the launch phase of the Russian solid-fuel ICBM Topol-M missile lasts only two minutes, which lowers the application threshold of nuclear weapons considerably.

Unfortunately, the decisions of the Obama administration do not leave room for the participation of Russia and its closest allies in the creation of a European security system, which ultimately weakens security and betrays an anti-Russian orientation. It would be far wiser to build a common Euro-Atlantic security system by moving forward on the anti-missile defense project jointly with Russia, rather than push Moscow to the European periphery.

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