

U.S. Missile Shield Plans: Retreat Or Advance?

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On September 17 the White House and the Pentagon, Barack Obama and Robert Gates, announced that after a sixty-day review of the project, the U.S. is going to abandon plans to station ten ground-based interceptor missiles in Poland and a forward-based X-band missile radar installation in the Czech Republic.

The deployments were negotiated with both prospective host countries by the preceding George W. Bush administration under the guise of protecting the United States from alleged long-range missile attacks by what were described as rogue states: Iran and North Korea.

Interceptor missiles in Poland would only be of use in protecting the U.S. if Iran possessed intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of being fired over the Arctic Ocean. No serious person has ever suggested Iran has such a capability or ever will.

But Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin remarked last November that U.S. missiles in Poland could hit his nation's capital of Moscow in four minutes, as NATO warplanes that have patrolled the skies over the Baltic Sea since 2004 could reach Russia's second largest city, St. Petersburg, in five minutes.

Leading Russian officials, political and military, have unanimously accused Washington of targeting their own nation and its strategic forces rather than Iran with its third position missile shield plans.

Surveys have consistently demonstrated that a majority of Poles oppose the stationing of American missiles and the troops that would accompany them in their nation. Polls in the Czech Republic show over two-thirds opposition to the basing of interceptor missile radar in that country.

Much of the world, then, was relieved to read the news that the U.S. was reversing course and renouncing designs to base missile shield facilities in Eastern Europe.

What Washington has stated, though, is not so straightforward.

President Obama's statement began with "President Bush was right that Iran's ballistic missile program poses a significant threat. And that's why I'm committed to deploying strong missile defense systems which are adaptable to the threats of the 21st century."

The second sentence confirms the position on so-called missile defense that his administration has repeatedly and unswervingly voiced since coming to power in January: A global interceptor missile system will be deployed when and exactly where it is proven to be most capable of achieving its purpose and in the most cost-effective manner. In American vernacular, the White House and the Pentagon want more bang for the buck.

The underlying motive for a universal interceptor missile system – based on land, at sea, in the air and in space – is to secure uncontested American international military superiority by making itself and key allies impenetrable to retaliation by nations like Russia and China.

Obama also said, “I have approved the unanimous recommendations of my Secretary of Defense and my Joint Chiefs of Staff to strengthen America’s defenses against ballistic missile attack. This new approach will provide capabilities sooner, build on proven systems, and offer greater defenses against the threat of missile attack than the 2007 European missile defense program.”

There is nothing equivocal about that pledge. Obama is promising a missile shield system not only more effective but more ambitious than the one he has rejected.

The major drawback of ground-based missiles in Poland is that they would be fixed-site deployments. For several years now Russia has warned that it was prepared to base Iskander theater ballistic missiles in its Kaliningrad region, which borders Poland, should Washington deploy its missiles to that nation.

Obama and his defense secretary Robert Gates have suggested a more mobile, less detectable system that cannot be as easily monitored and if need be neutralized.

The American president boasted that “we have made specific and proven advances in our missile defense technology, particularly with regard to land- and sea-based interceptors and the sensors that support them. Our new approach will, therefore, deploy technologies that are proven [and] do so sooner than the previous program.” That is, he proposed an alternative that in no manner indicates a retreat from his predecessor’s plan.

Perhaps quite the contrary, as he announced a “new missile defense architecture in Europe [that] will provide stronger, smarter, and swifter defenses of American forces and America’s allies. It is more comprehensive than the previous program; it deploys capabilities that are proven and cost-effective; and it sustains and builds upon our commitment to protect the U.S. homeland against long-range ballistic missile threats; and it ensures and enhances the protection of all our NATO allies.”

The last eleven words are key to understanding why the U.S. is preparing to abandon bilateral arrangements with Poland and the Czech Republic. The shift in policy is one of emphasis and not essence and portends the expansion and not the constriction of missile deployment plans in Europe.

The following words of Obama’s clarify the situation yet further:

“This approach is also consistent with NATO missile – NATO’s missile defense efforts and provides opportunities for enhanced international collaboration going forward. We will continue to work cooperatively with our close friends and allies, the Czech Republic and Poland....Together we are committed to a broad range of cooperative efforts to strengthen our collective defense, and we are bound by the solemn commitment of NATO’s Article V that an attack on one is an attack on all.”

To invoke NATO’s Article 5 is to speak of war. The North Atlantic Treaty founding document of 1949 describes it as follows:

“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North

America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

The reference to United Nations Article 51 was a Cold War concession to the norms of international law, one which NATO cast off in 1999 with its war against Yugoslavia.

Article 5 was first employed after September 11, 2001 and used for the invasion of Afghanistan and military operations throughout the Mediterranean Sea and the Horn of Africa, all of which continue to this day, eight years later, and in the first and third cases have been escalated dramatically over the past year.

For the last two years leading American elected officials have clamored for the application of Article 5 in defense of Estonia against alleged cyber attacks and even non-NATO members like Georgia and Israel. With Georgia, the calls were made during and after the five-day war with Russia it provoked in August of 2008.

Estonia and Georgia cannot even pretend to be threatened by Iran much less North Korea and Syria, so Obama’s mention of NATO’s Article 5 pertains to another nation. Russia.

A major Russian news site responded to the news of September 17 with this observation:

“As expected, when President Obama spoke to the press on Thursday evening Moscow time, he did not speak about shelving or abandoning anything, but adopting a ‘new missile defense program,’ based on ‘proven and cost effective technology’ that will ‘better counter the current threat.’ It was, he said, ‘more extensive’ than the previous program involving the Czech Republic and Poland.” [1]

The same source quoted an analyst at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, Oksana Antonenko, as saying the former plans for the Czech Republic and Poland “wouldn’t cover the whole territory of Europe, and even from the American point of view the location was not ideal.” Instead, deployments would be focused closer to Iran: “Israel, or possibly Turkey...these are areas where missile systems with existing capabilities would make more sense.” [2]

Previous articles in this series have examined Washington’s plans to extend its global interceptor missile system into Israel, Turkey and the Balkans. [3]

And the South Caucasus. Another Russian news site quoted Dmitry Polikanov, an analyst at Russia’s Center for Political Studies: “I assume that if further statements by the US administration are made – like the movement of sea-based systems closer to Iranian territory, or like the statement that was made about the possible deployment of a missile defense system in the Caucasus – this of course can cause some concerns for Moscow.” [4]

Obama’s Pentagon chief Robert Gates, inherited from the Bush administration, stated on September 17 that “Those who say we are scrapping missile defense in Europe are either misinformed or misrepresenting the reality of what we are doing.”

Gates asserted that the new system “provides a better missile defense capability...than the program I recommended almost three years ago.” [5]

The Defense Secretary, then, has not indicated a change of course but rather a more sophisticated version of his previous plans.

He further stated that “We have now the opportunity to deploy new sensors and interceptors in northern and southern Europe that near term can provide missile defense coverage against more immediate threats from Iran or others.”

Or others.

He specified the deployment of Aegis class warships equipped with SM-3 [Standard Missile-3] interceptors which “provide the flexibility to move interceptors from one region to another if needed.” [6]

The U.S. currently has fifteen destroyers and three cruisers equipped with the Aegis combat system and has incorporated Norway, Spain, Australia, Japan and South Korea into what is developing as a worldwide, sea-based, rapid deployable missile shield structure. The USS Lake Erie, an Aegis class guided-missile cruiser, shot down an American satellite in space in February of 2008 with an SM-3 missile in what some in Russia saw as the opening salvo in American plans for war in space.

Gates further laid out his plans for the next generation Star Wars system in stating, “The second phase, about 2015, will involve fielded, upgraded, land-based SM-3s.”

Lest anyone believe that Washington’s new plans are an abandonment rather than a refinement of previous ones with Poland and the Czech Republic, Gates was obliging enough to reveal that the Pentagon has already opened negotiations with the two nations “about hosting a land-based version of the SM-3 and other components of the system.” [7]

Nothing has been said about reversing U.S. designs to deploy 96 Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missiles in Poland, ones “accurate enough to select, target, and home in on the warhead portion of an inbound ballistic missile.” [8]

In fact all indications are that more PAC-3s are headed to Europe to be integrated into a multi-layered NATO missile shield grid to cover the entire continent.

On the same day that Obama and Gates made their pronouncements, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said, “It is my clear impression that the American plans on missile defense will involve NATO as such to a higher degree in the future concerning the establishment of missile defense. I highly appreciate that. I think it is in full accordance with the principle of solidarity within the alliance and the indivisibility of security in Europe.” Rasmussen gave particular attention to “our eastern allies within the NATO alliance.” [9]

Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kohout said that although the U.S. will not locate the X-band missile radar in his country that it originally intended to, “the Czech Republic will be able to join the new system that the USA wants to create within NATO,” a new system that is “to be more flexible, more efficient and cheaper” and “is to protect the whole of Europe.” [10]

As to what aspects the new system could include, former chief of the Russian General Staff Leonid Ivanov was cited as speculating “the U.S. could use military satellites and aircraft

carrying laser weapons instead of the radar and interceptor missile base.” [11]

Previous articles in this series have dealt with the Pentagon’s Airborne Laser (ABL) missile interception program as well as all other facets of global and space-based missile shield components [12]. In August the Pentagon’s Missile Defense Agency announced that it had successfully deployed a modified Boeing 747-400F prototype airplane with laser weapons and that it “found, tracked, engaged and simulated an intercept with a missile seconds after liftoff. It was the first time the Agency used an ‘instrumented’ missile to confirm the laser works as expected. Next up this fall will be the first live attempt to bring down a ballistic missile....” [13]

Shortly after the test described above, the Wall Street Journal applauded it in these terms:

“Along with space-based weapons, the Airborne Laser is the next defense frontier. The modified Boeing 747 is supposed to send an intense beam of light over hundreds of miles to destroy missiles in the ‘boost phase,’ before they can release decoys and at a point in their trajectory when they would fall back down on enemy territory....The laser complements the sea- and ground-based missile defenses that keep proving themselves in tests.

“Never has Ronald Reagan’s dream of layered missile defenses – Star Wars, for short – been as...close, at least technologically, to becoming realized.” [14]

The Missile Defense Agency conducted a Space and Missile Defense Conference from August 17-20 of this year and during the proceedings the Boeing Company’s vice president and general manager for missile defense Greg Hyslop presented a design for a “47,500-pound interceptor that could be flown to NATO bases as needed on Boeing-built C-17 cargo planes, erected quickly on a 60-foot trailer stand and taken home when judged safe to do so.” One that would be “globally deployable within 24 hours....” [15]

A nearly 50,000-pound mobile interceptor missile launcher deployable within hours, along with laser weapons and SM-3s, would fit in nicely with plans for a joint U.S.-NATO layered missile shield to take in the entire European continent except for Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Though former director of the Missile Defense Agency Lieutenant General Henry Obering also mentioned Ukraine for inclusion in the system during his tenure at the agency.

When U.S. President Barack Obama, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kohout – seemingly in unison and at practically the same time – spoke of enhanced missile shield cooperation between Washington and Brussels, the foundation of what such a system would entail is indicated by the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS).

MEADS is a joint U.S.-German-Italian-NATO theater interceptor missile program to upgrade current Patriot and Nike Hercules systems in Europe under NATO command and “will provide capabilities beyond any other fielded or planned air and missile defense system. It will be easily deployed to a theater of operation.” [16] It includes forward-based X-band radar, 360 degree surveillance radar, missile launchers and next-generation Patriot interceptor missiles.

“MEADS is interoperable with other defense systems....It can work in association with other missile defense systems, including the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and the Aegis sea-based missile defense systems....MEADS...may be able to make a

material contribution the Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense system that NATO planners are currently designing.” [17]

Foreshadowing the news of September 17, last month the White House requested almost \$600 million in funding for MEADS for next year and “Congress is on track to support the Administration’s request.” [18]

The Times of London responded to the news about Poland and the Czech Republic with a feature detailing the advancement of the Star Wars program since Ronald Reagan first announced it in 1983. It mentioned, inter alia, Aegis class warships “fitted with Standard [SM-3] missiles that are capable of intercepting enemy rockets, just like the systems based at Fort Greely in Alaska and at Vandenberg airbase in California” and “an airborne laser...that can destroy ballistic missiles by heating them until they fail structurally,” and situated these 21st Century innovations within a broader perspective:

“[T]he Americans have been installing [worldwide missile-tracking radar facilities] in locations around the globe: notably, upgrading the radar early-warning site at RAF Fylingdales in North Yorkshire and deploying X-band radar in Japan and Israel.” [19]

To which should be added the U.S. missile-tracking base in Vardo, Norway, forty miles from the Russian border, and a comparable facility at the Thule Air Base in Greenland.

The news about the cancellation of plans for deploying a missile radar base in the Czech Republic was hailed by the No To Bases organization, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), all opponents of the project.

But the Czech Social Democrats, who currently have 32% support in the polls and are poised to win next year’s federal elections, differ from other radar opponents in that they have no objection to missile shield components in their country per se but instead are in favor of bringing the Czech Republic into a continent-wide NATO system rather than into a bilateral U.S.-Czech one.

Obama’s and Gates’ statements should satisfy that preference, one which prefigures a wider and permanent interceptor missile system that takes in most all of Europe and North America. If that scenario continues to materialize the relief and enthusiasm that greeted September 17th’s news in many parts of the world may prove to be short-lived.

Notes

- 1) Russian Information Agency Novosti, September 17, 2009
- 2) Ibid
- 3) U.S. Expands Global Missile Shield Into Middle East, Balkans
Stop NATO, September 11, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/11/u-s-expands-global-missile-shield-into-middle-east-balkans/>

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Stop NATO, September 14, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/14/266/>

- 4) Russia Today, September 17, 2009
- 5) New York Times, September 17, 2009

- 6) Russia Today, September 17, 2009
- 7) Ibid
- 8) Wikipedia
- 9) Reuters, September 17, 2009
- 10) Czech News Agency, September 17, 2009
- 11) Russian Information Agency Novosti, September 17, 2009
- 12) Pentagon Intensifies Plans For Global Military Supremacy: U.S., NATO Could Deploy Mobile Missiles Launchers To Europe
Stop NATO, August 22, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/02/pentagon-intensifies-plans-for-global-military-supremacy-u-s-nato-could-deploy-mobile-missiles-launchers-to-europe/>

U.S. Accelerates First Strike Global Missile Shield System
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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/02/u-s-accelerates-first-strike-global-missile-shield-system/>

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21st Century Star Wars And NATO's 60th Anniversary
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- 13) Wall Street Journal, August 14, 2009
- 14) Wall Street Journal, August 14, 2009
- 15) Reuters, August 20, 2009
- 16) Wikipedia
- 17) Heritage Foundation, August 17, 2009
- 18) Ibid
- 19) The Times, September 17, 2009

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