

Missile Defense Dossier The Polish Perspective

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Poland has found itself in the centre of a growing controversy over the US initiative to deploy elements of the Missile Defence (MD) system to Europe. In January 2007, the U.S. government formally proposed Poland to host a base with 10 interceptors, defending the United States and a part of Europe against long-range and intercontinental ballistic missiles launched from the Middle East. Together with an X-band tracking radar based in the Czech Republic, these two permanent sites would form the European part of the MD midcourse defences, designed to intercept a ballistic missile after it has stopped propelling but before its re-entry into the atmosphere. Poland announced its willingness to start the negotiations, which the US hopes to conclude by the end of 2007.

The Polish Debate

Initial consultations on the possible deployment of the MD site in Poland started in 2003, but even before that date the issue had been on the agenda of a number of Polish-U.S. meetings. Those 'talks about potential talks' were mainly meant to provide the Polish side with information on the concept of the system, its operational developments and options for participations. At the beginning of 2005, dedicated MD task forces were created at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defence. At the level of public discussion, however, little consideration was given to the potential consequences of hosting an MD base in Poland. The issue was seen mostly in the light of potential benefits of the increased American presence in the country, a logical strengthening of the much-touted strategic relationship between Warsaw and Washington. Hence, after the Parliamentary elections of September 2005, the new

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government's programme manifesto included a general pledge to "work towards the inclusion of Poland" in the US Missile Defence system.

The public debate which followed that announcement revealed divergent opinions on the issue within the Polish strategic community – analysts and foreign policy experts. The critics pointed to the dangers of aligning Poland's security policy too closely with the United States in such a way. Development of the missile defence system was portrayed as a sign of the US willingness to secure strategic domination against present and future opponents. It was argued that the system's characteristics might be defensive, but its presence would encourage the United States to try offensive strategies, possibly involving the use of force, in the confrontations with states armed with ballistic missiles and WMD capabilities. Since the MD facilities is a logical target for an enemy's first strike, Poland would find itself in grave danger on account of the US deployment. Bilateral arrangements on the Missile Defence would also, according to the critics, put into question Poland's credentials as a member of NATO and the European Union, not to mention the unavoidable deterioration of the relations with Russia. It was argued that any benefits obtained from the Americans could not compensate for the overall worsening of the security of Poland.

The proponents of the systems found themselves facing an uphill struggle, mainly because the representatives of the Polish government were reluctant to engage wholeheartedly in the discussion. The administration argued that since a formal US proposal to enter into negotiations was not issued, there is not much point in revealing the details of the Polish position or beginning an information campaign in the media.

The main argument of the majority of MD supporters stemmed not from the analysis of the missile threats against Europe or the United States, but from the perception of the Washington's role in the Polish security policy. The United States occupies a special place in Poland's strategic culture. From the historical perspective, starting with the Wilsonian idealism, through the US involvement in World War II, the Cold War struggle with communism, to the enlargement of NATO, the US is seen as a solid supporter of free and democratic Poland, ready to commit its own resources for the security of its friends and allies. No matter how suspicious parts of this narrative may appear (after all, the US President was also present at the Jalta conference, which sanctioned putting Poland under communist rule), it nevertheless influences the discussion on the Missile Defence. It may be added that in comparison to the US, in this narrative, 'Europe' is seen mainly through the history of its appeasement of Hitler, indifference towards Stalin and the abandonment of Poland in 1939. Hence, close alignment with the United States is seen as a far more credible security guarantee than reliance on the vague concept of European defence or even the North Atlantic Treaty's Article V. Since the wording of this clause means that there is no automatic common response for an armed attack, everything depends on the political unity of the Allies.

Many in Poland perceived the Turkish crisis in NATO in 2003 as a clear sign that if, in future, security of Poland is compromised, it may be difficult to count on the whole Alliance to act. By having a US base on the Polish territory, it is claimed, Poland could secure not only close political and security relationship with Washington, but also put a potential aggressor in a situation where any action against our country would also physically threaten the American soldiers on the ground.

Which threat is so potent that it requires the US base as an 'insurance policy' against aggression? Most of the supporters of Poland's involvement in the Missile Defence project point unanimously at Russia and the possible future course of its policy. With the new strength coming from gas and oil revenues, Russia looks determined to increase its influence not only in the 'near abroad' (i.e. former USSR), but also globally. At home, the Kremlin-devised concept of 'sovereign democracy' provides a basis for a stable system political which has most of the attributes of a democracy (e.g. periodic elections), but little of its spirit (no real choices for the voters). According to some commentators, the new over-confident Russia may, in the medium to long-term perspective, try to use not only the energy weapon, but also the threat of military force as a foreign policy tool.

The middle ground in the Polish debate is occupied by those who view as highly unlikely both the scenario of a trigger-happy America provoking Iranians to fire a nuclear missile on Poland, and the perspective of Russia threatening Warsaw with the use of force. For them, the Polish decision should not be based on the assumption that the strategic fate of the country hangs on the simple 'yes' or 'no'. Instead of that, a realistic analysis of advantages and disadvantages of accepting the American offer must be made.

The contents of a package of incentives put forward by the United States in the negotiations would, of course, greatly influence the results of such analysis. Tangible benefits mentioned in the Polish debate include:

- assistance in upgrading the Polish air and missile defence system (a handful of *Patriot* batteries supplied by the US, as well as the THAAD system),
- an increased level intelligence sharing, and access to the data relevant for Polish security, including from early warning systems,
- strengthening of the military-to-military cooperation,
- US support for the Polish energy security-related projects (diversification of suppliers),
- the involvement of Polish companies and technology providers in the development of the system and the construction of the base on our territory,
- US support for Poland's bid to host the main base of the NATO's Allied Ground Surveillance system.

For some commentators, it would be also a good opportunity to press the US authorities on the abolishment of visa requirement for Polish citizens entering the United States.

Equally important for the advantages/disadvantages equation is the outcome of the debate within NATO and, to some extent, the European Union. If the price to pay for going along with the US is to face total isolation in either of these fora, or to permanently become a lightning rod for all sorts of critics of the United States, this would seriously undermine the situation of Poland and complicate the conduct of its foreign policy. At the same time, no-one in Poland would accept giving outside actors (states or organizations) the power of veto over Polish decisions.

The end of the Polish – American honeymoon

The discussion on the Missile Defence in Poland has confirmed a major shift in the attitudes of the public opinion vis-à-vis the United States. It is safe to assume that if the offer to host an MD base had been made in 2002-2003, it would have faced opposition only from a small fraction of the society and some radical political forces. Since then, a number of factors have contributed to the erosion of the American 'soft power' over the Polish public. The intervention in Iraq has turned into a prolonged and bloody confrontation, with Poland contributing troops (2,500 at the peak) and suffering casualties without, in the widely shared opinion, receiving proper 'compensation' from the United States, be it the abolishment of visas, new equipment for the military, or the reconstruction-related contracts. The recent arrival of the first F-16 fighters, bought from the US in 2003, was marred with the media reports showing that the much-hyped offset arrangement with Lockheed Martin brought to Poland much less investments and modern technologies than expected. At the same time, the 'Europeanization' of the society accelerated, with the strengthening of the European identity upon the entry to the EU, the influx of money from the structural funds and the Common Agricultural Policy, and the increased possibilities to study or work in other European countries. All of these contributed to a much more critical attitude towards the US initiative on Missile Defence. According to an opinion poll from February 2007, 55% respondents were against the establishment of the US anti-missile base in Poland, and only 28% supported the idea.

The attitude of the public opinion has to be taken into account by the political class. The title of a recent article published in *The Washington Post* by the former Defence Minister Radek Sikorski puts it neatly: 'Don't Take Poland for Granted'. Even though the referendum on the issue is unlikely, any future agreement with the United States will need to be approved by the Parliament. Many politicians have already voiced their concerns about the MD deployment, with the junior coalition partner League of Polish Families and oppositional Alliance of Democratic Left going openly against it (the second lambasting the government for lack of credible information on the issue). Other main players, including the

largest opposition party, the Civic Platform, decided to wait with the final judgment, noting that they could support the agreement only if Poland's position would be substantially strengthened as a result. Both the President and the Prime Minister also stipulated that they would only accept an outcome of the negotiations which would 'increase the level of security' of Poland. Needless to say, the intentional vagueness of such statements is supposed to give the Polish negotiators room for maneuver in the talks with the United States.

What are the objectives of a US MD deployment in Europe? What are the possible consequences?

The present concept of multi-layered Missile Defence stems from the combination of the unique US threat perception and the unique US capabilities. Taken the United States' potential, position in the international system, wide range of interests in all regions of the world, and the mode of conducting foreign policy, its military posture must reflect challenges arising from the advances of potential adversaries in ballistic missile technology and WMD programs. Even back in the 1950s, the 'missile gap' became for John F. Kennedy a battle cry in his critique of the Republican administration for seemingly letting the Soviets advance ahead in this category of weaponry. In 1998, the so-called Rumsfeld Commission let out another battle cry, claiming that Iran and North Korea can produce an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM, range +5,500 km) within five years upon deciding to do so. The 1998 test launches of the 1,300 km Iranian Shahab-3 missile and the multi-stage North Korean Taepo Dong 1, which flew over Japan, seemed to confirm the prediction that it is only a question of time before both countries would have missiles capable of striking the continental United States. Since the US had been engaged in a prolonged confrontation with these two adversaries, which were also struggling to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities, the logical conclusion was that the potential future outbreak of hostilities would put the American cities in danger on nuclear annihilation.

Terrorists attacks of 9/11 added urgency to the claims that in some cases relying on the old-fashioned deterrence and assured destruction of the attacker is not enough, and the ability to intercept an incoming missile should become the tool available to the US policymakers. Hence, the 'undeterrable terrorists' argument melted with the 'undeterrable rogue states' logic. Even though other countries had had their doubts, the US position was widely acknowledged, even in Russia, which reacted rather calmly to the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in December 2001.

For many countries, the perspective of having a shield protecting its territory against long-range ballistic missiles may be attractive (the Russians only have a system protecting Moscow, using nuclear warheads), but only for the United States that option has become both technically achievable and affordable. An impressive work has been done on the development and integration of the MD system of sensors (including space

assets and radars), weapons (maritime and ground component) and command & control architecture – all thanks to the US technological potential and industrial prowess. Technical problems and failed tests notwithstanding, it seems now that the system will indeed offer high chances of intercepting a simple, non-decoys-included, ballistic missile. And in the gargantuan US military budget, the money spend on Missile Defence (almost 100 billion USD so far) is just a fraction of the overall expenses.

To put it simple, the Americans **feel** they need to have an MD system and **are able** to build it. The decision to field a European MD component comes directly from this logic, and it appears futile to look for some hidden motives (for example, an attempt to divide the European Union). The radar is meant to provide better tracking of Iranian missiles, and the interceptor base would give the US additional interception opportunities of an ICBM aimed at the US, plus some rudimentary level of protection for their bases in Europe and parts of European territory (excluding south-eastern part of the continent). On this last point, it is worth to point out that spending lots of money and efforts on protecting someone else's territory makes in this case perfect strategic sense. After all, if the US is protected by the anti-missile shield, what would be the 'next best thing' for Iranian planners wishing to deter *the West* from interfering in Iran's affairs?

Arguments pointing to the slow pace of the Iranian missile developments, lack of strategic rationale for Iran to build an arsenal for striking Europe or the United States when better targets are available in the neighbourhood (e.g. American bases across the Gulf), or the availability of other means of transporting WMD to the target, will have no impact on the United States. Scrapping the system would be equal with admitting the fundamental flaws of the 'undeterrable rogue states' doctrine. Neither this, nor any next administration seems prepared to make such a move. Of course, as with every major armaments programme, there is also the self-perpetuating internal logic of 'we have advanced so far, and cannot stop here...'.

The fact that something is useful for the United States, does not make it equally useful for its partners. For Europe, even assuming that Iran would eventually have ballistic missiles with nuclear weapons, the strategic utility of some part of the continent being in the range of the American interceptors is close to zero. First of all, since command and control of the system stays with the United States, there can only be a certain level of confidence, never a certainty, that the interceptors will be launched upon Iranian attack. It is sufficient to think of a future Iranian arsenal of, lets say, about 10 ICBMs to reach the US and 30-40 missiles capable of reaching Paris, London, Berlin or Warsaw. With multiple launch of only part of those missile at different targets, the question of intercept priorities could become rather disturbing. Secondly, the Iranians may be willing to strike (or threaten to strike) a target outside the perimeter covered by the MD base. The perspective of destruction of Athens, Ankara or Sophia is as

unacceptable to the European leaders as any city of Central or Western Europe. Thirdly, regardless of the technical advances of the MD, there cannot be a 100% guarantee that the system would work in the combat conditions. Taken all this into account, even with the complete system in place, it would be prudent for European countries not to count on the Missile Defence cover when drafting their Iranian policy. Which may actually be a good thing, since it would quash any temptations of military adventurism vis-à-vis Iran.

The strategic consequences of the **controversy** over the European MD deployment may turn out to be much more serious. Unfortunately, many politicians and commentators across Europe saw the US proposal as an excellent opportunity to repeat their criticism of the US foreign policy in general and the current administration in particular. In the eyes of the critics, here is yet another (after Iraq) example of American unilateralism, compromising the global security. Another group of the opponents of the MD deployment in Europe point at Poland and the Czech Republic as countries which are somehow *not European enough*, willing to betray the unity of the continent for the promise of closer relations with Washington. Russia is skillfully providing additional arguments to all those MD critics, threatening to take 'necessary actions' in response (like the withdrawal from the INF treaty or putting the bases on the target list of its strategic forces) but, at the same time, expressing regret at the lack of the US willingness to adopt a 'multilateral approach'.

Predictably, all these arguments are firmly rejected in Warsaw and Prague. The patronizing tone of many commentaries, suggesting that Poland or the Czech Republic should ask the 'wise men' of Western Europe for permission before engaging in talks with the Americans, has exactly the opposite effects – no country enjoys being lectured on its own foreign and security policy by others. The argument of alternative 'multilateral' approach is also seen as somehow demagogical. Since there is no common defence policy in the European Union, it is hard to conceive how it can be involved in building a missile defence on its own. With regards to NATO, the work done so far on the concept of territorial missile defence, including the feasibility study, has not led to any major decisions (as opposed to the NATO theater MD system, to be ready by 2010) – and for good reasons. For many Allies, territorial MD is simply not a priority for NATO, at least not at the times of small defence budgets and burdens connected with the ongoing operations. The Atlantic Alliance is not in a very good shape, and adding another controversial issue (with a big price tag) to the pile of existing problems (incl. the conduct of the mission in Afghanistan, funding of NATO Response Force, possible further Eastern enlargement) does not seem like a particularly wise move.

All these controversies can create a vicious cycle of accusations and counter-accusations, similar to the atmosphere of the 2003 crisis over the support of the US operation in Iraq. The stronger the pressure on the United States, Poland and the Czech Republic to reconsider their actions,

the more they will be inclined to move forward and prove their critics wrong. It is worth remembering that the issue will be decided, at the end of the day, on a bilateral basis – in negotiations between the US and the two Central European countries. There is obviously room for explanatory talks or consultations with other states or within organizations such as NATO, but heating up the atmosphere with inflammatory rhetoric can only lead to needlessly creating bitter divisions within Europe.

Should the US negotiate with Russia on MD deployment?

The Russian opposition to the Missile Defence project has had little to do with the direct threat to the strategic nuclear balance between the US and Russia. The proposed 10 interceptors in Poland, together with the projected 44 interceptors in the United States, will be no match for over 700 Russian strategic missiles deployed in silos, on mobile launchers and submarines. In addition, it would not be possible for the interceptors in Poland to strike down missiles fired from central Russia towards the US over the North Pole (the best trajectory) – they would simply be too slow to catch those missiles after they are launched.

The Russians are quick to point out that the present project is just the first step towards a beefed-up system capable of striking down their (and Chinese) missiles. It is true that it would be much easier for the United States to start building such a system now, taken into account the advances in technology and weapons systems achieved in the process of developing the present architecture of Missile Defence. However, the fundamental question is why the US would want to embark on such a project, knowing that it would lead to a gigantic crisis in relations with Russia and China, a near-universal condemnation of the international society and, without doubt, to the acquisition of a large number of new missiles and anti-missile technology (e.g. decoys) by these two countries?

Since it is clear that the Russian security is not compromised, directly or indirectly, by the possible deployments of the MD bases in Central Europe, there can be no subject for any negotiations between the United States and Russia, or between Russia and Poland, which would involve giving Russia a veto power over the matter. The idea that the Russians need to be persuaded to agree to the Missile Defence bases in Europe can only be justified as either the legacy of treating Central and Eastern Europe as the 'traditional' Russian sphere of influence, or as the sign of strength of the belief that the West should refrain from taking steps which could 'irritate' Moscow. But those who appeal for showing understanding for Russian fears and sensibilities seem to forget that we are no longer dealing with a Yeltsin-era fragile state, but with a powerful country with global aspirations. Russia should not be treated like a spoiled child, used to drawing everyone's attentions with loud screams.

The United States has been engaged in numerous rounds of talks with Russia, aimed at explaining the technical aspects of the system and at

providing answers to the question put forward by Russian experts. However, no matter how detailed those briefings are, it is unlikely that they would lead to a change in Russia's attitudes. The political potential of opposing the US initiative is considerable. It allows Russia to portray itself as a rational actor on the international stage, in stark contrast with the American 'bully'. It also makes it easier to create political divisions between the European countries ('old' and 'new' Europe *à rebours*), which can be helpful in conducting Russian policy, e.g. towards NATO and the European Union. For those reasons, Russia would probably refuse the US proposals to cooperate in the development of the Missile Defence system, which could be an interesting subject for serious negotiations. On the other hand, inviting Russia to co-decide on Missile Defence would be a disturbing precedent of allowing a third party to have voting rights on the issue which is firmly within the sovereign realm of the two countries involved in the negotiations with the US.

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