



BULLETIN

No. 1 (454), 3 January 2013 © PISM

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Russian Debate on Missile Defence in Europe

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Despite the deadlock in official talks between Russia and the U.S. and NATO on the development of missile defence (MD), there is an ongoing debate in the Russian expert community on the possibilities of reaching an agreement. Although most of the proposals are just modifications of Russia's official stance, it is worth seeing them as probing for a possible compromise with NATO members. Thus, Poland and other Central European NATO member states should carefully watch this exchange of opinions in Russia, paying attention particularly to the proposals for territorial limits to the MD system as well as to the issue of transparency.

According to the position of Russia's highest officials, the formation of a global MD system constitutes a key obstacle in the development of the relationship between Russia and the U.S. and NATO. Moreover, the Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs has pointed to agreement on this issue as one of the conditions for a strategic and tactical nuclear weapons reduction.

Russian diplomats have described the current state of negotiations as deadlock, at the same time emphasising that their country will not resign from demands to secure legal guarantees from the U.S. that not only the European but also other elements of the global missile defence system would not pose a threat to the potential of Russia's strategic nuclear forces.

Intensification of the Debate amongst Russian Experts. Progress in the development of missile defence as well as the presidential elections in the U.S. have resulted in an intensification of the debate about MD in Russian expert circles in recent months. Specialists from the most prominent research institutions have taken part in it, including those from the Carnegie Moscow Center; Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies; Institute of Global Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences; Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; Moscow State Institute of International Relations; PIR Center; and, Russia's Institute for Strategic Studies.

Hopes to overcome the deadlock are primarily associated with U.S. President Barack Obama's second term. His "promise" of more flexibility in negotiations with the Russian side is often recalled. In this context, the option that the American administration would delay implementation of the project as well as consent to greater transparency (such as in the form of monitoring the system's deployed elements), has been indicated.

Some specialists expect Obama not only to take into account the Russian interests in the construction of a missile defence system but also to develop cooperation in the North Pacific and Arctic regions. In such a scenario the U.S. would benefit not only from cooperation in these three areas but also in regard to U.S.–China relations and in problems related to nuclear weapons (such as arms reduction or the resolution of proliferation crises).

The Problem of Strategic Stability. The starting point for the experts' discussion concerns the issue of the current meaning of the strategic stability between Russia and the U.S., which is linked with the question of the threat missile defence may pose to Russia's deterrence potential.

The majority of Russian experts believe that the rule of "mutually assured destruction" remains the core of the strategic stability between Russia and U.S. Thus, all factors that may negatively impact Russia's potential for

a retaliatory strike—primarily the development of missile defence, but also conventional strategic weapons—are seen as elements destabilising U.S.–Russia relations.

Nevertheless, opinions have been voiced that such a perception of strategic stability does not correspond to contemporary security challenges. Moreover, it constitutes obstacles to the development of cooperation in countering the most urgent threats, such as nuclear terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. The capabilities to weaken Russia's deterrence potential through missile defence have also been called into question. In this context, the technological advancement of Russia's intercontinental ballistic missiles, as well as the unconfirmed effectiveness of the American systems, are pointed to as mitigating factors.

Compromise Proposals. In the experts' discussion, specific proposals for compromise have been put forward, including cooperation with the US/NATO European systems and Russia on data exchange and early warning against an attack by short- and medium-range missiles. The proposal to create centres monitoring missile threats has also been put forward. The proposals also call for cooperation on measures to reduce the danger of using missiles, including those related to accidental launch and the capabilities to conduct pre-emptive strike.

In order to further strengthen, this cooperation could involve the deployment in space of a joint early warning system. To this end, the use of heavy ballistic missiles, such as those used by the Russian–Ukrainian “Dnepr” programme, has been proposed. Apart from data exchange, Russian experts propose broadening the range of joint exercises beyond theatre MD systems.

Another element of a compromise solution would concern constraints on minimising the impact of the development of the system in Europe on Russia's nuclear potential. First, NATO would pledge to limit the deployment of ground-based missile systems to no more than two bases—in Poland and Romania—where a fixed number of SM-3 missiles would be stationed. Under the proposal, the U.S. would also oblige itself not to arm these missiles with nuclear warheads.

A second constraint regards the marine component of missile defence, the development of which seems to present more and more concern to the Russian side. According to the experts' proposals, the U.S. and NATO would deploy to the North Sea and Mediterranean Sea a maximum of four to six vessels equipped with Aegis systems. Vessels armed with SM-3 missiles would not be allowed in the Baltic, Barents, Black or White seas, though these waters would be open to Russian vessels armed with its new C-400 and C-500 missile defence systems. Installations with these arms would also be located in the European part of Russia.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Poland. A number of proposals originate or are promoted by individuals as well as institutions that have links to the Russian administration and may be aimed at probing U.S. and other NATO members as well as shaping the discussion in these countries.

Most of the proposals do not substantially differ from the official stance of the Russian authorities, and to a high degree they are modifications of the primary Russian demands—restricting the potential of interceptors and their localisation—which have not been accepted within NATO. Several ideas recall an earlier proposal (such as one worked out in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative). Some concepts, such as those concerning joint early warning systems, have remained unfulfilled for many years.

Nevertheless, a positive sign for future talks between the U.S.-NATO side and Russia is the fact that many Russian experts, at least to some extent, have revised their objections to the planned construction of a missile defence system base in Central Europe, including in Poland and Romania. Other proposals may still pose a challenge to the key rule (from the CEE's point of view) about equal status for all NATO members. The adoption of suggestions regarding the non-deployment of U.S. vessels to the Baltic and Black seas could endanger that standard.

Increasing the level of transparency in the construction and operation of the missile defence system seems to be the element on which cooperation with Russia does not threaten the Alliance's interests, including the interests of the Central European countries, and which may help reach compromise with Russia. For this reason, Poland should engage in the discussion on this issue, which could be facilitated by an organisation of an international experts conference in Warsaw with the participation of the Russian specialists. It also seems advisable to intensify intergovernmental consultations with other NATO members on the desired level of transparency and exchange of information with Russia, particularly a dialogue with the U.S. and Romania, which the latter will be the first country to host an SM-3 base.