



BULLETIN

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Modifications of the U.S. Missile Defence Plans in Europe

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The U.S. has resigned from the development of the SM-3 IIB interceptor, which was supposed to play a key role in the fourth phase of the U.S. missile defence system in Europe (European Phased Adaptive Approach, EPAA). This means the U.S. has abandoned a plan to directly augment protection of its territory using a site in Poland. Crucial for Poland, however, is that the cancellation of the SM-3 IIB should not endanger plans to deploy SM-3 IIA interceptors at the Redzikowo base.

On 15 March 2013, U.S. Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel announced changes in U.S. missile defence (MD) plans. From the perspective of Europe, the most important decision was the cancellation of the development of the SM-3 IIB interceptor, which was a key element of the fourth phase of EPAA. Originally, the SM-3 IIB was envisaged to be a more effective, affordable and less politically controversial alternative to the Bush administration's plans to deploy 10 Ground Base Interceptors (GBI) in Poland. Its main function was to augment protection of U.S. territory against intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), currently provided by GBIs based in Alaska and California. Additionally, SM-3 IIB would have strengthened the defence of Europe against intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBM), with 3,000–5,500 km ranges.

From the outset, the SM-3 IIB was the most uncertain part of EPAA. The U.S. Congress preferred to authorise funds for other MD systems. Because of a lack of sufficient financing, the operational readiness of the interceptor planned initially for 2020 was delayed an additional two years. The concept design of the interceptor, apart from its compatibility with the SM-3 missile launcher, had not yet been selected. The fact that the original SM-3 IIB project was not mature seems to have been confirmed by changes in location plans. Initially it was intended to be deployed at two land-based sites, Poland and Romania. According to the last plans, only the site in Poland was being considered, as well as deployment on Aegis-equipped ships.

Reasons for Cancellation. The U.S. decision resulted from considerations of how to be most efficient in defending U.S. territory, its allies, and U.S. forces worldwide given current and prospective fiscal constraints, available technologies, and the threat level. It was also influenced by a desire to reach agreement with Russia.

Abandonment of the SM-3 IIB was justified by the need to more quickly augment defences of U.S. territory (before 2022), especially against threats from North Korea, which has been improving its ballistic missile capabilities and has recently conducted a third nuclear test. As a result, the U.S. will increase the number of deployed GBIs from 30 to 44 by 2017. Also, the U.S. will deploy an additional MD radar station in Japan and conduct studies of a possible third GBI site in the U.S. The fate of the SM-3 IIB was also decided by analyses of its operational effectiveness. The feasibility of its deployment in Poland as an optimal location to enhance U.S. defence was questioned by U.S. government and independent reports.

Planned U.S. defence budget cuts were also significant. Instead of developing the SM-3 IIB from scratch, the U.S. decided it would be cheaper to further develop and improve GBI, for example, a next-generation kill vehicle. Also, during the next decade the U.S. probably would have had to replace deployed GBIs (end of lifecycle). Scrapping the SM-3 IIB might free additional resources for this purpose.

Russian Factor. Agreement with Russia on MD is one of the most important priorities for President Barack Obama during his second term. It is also important through the prism of a broader U.S. political agenda, especially America's

efforts to further reduce U.S. and Russian nuclear forces and Russia's potential role in solving the conflict in Syria and problems related to Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programmes. The U.S. decision to abandon the SM-3 IIB might be influenced by the U.S.'s desire to assure Russia that EPAA is not a threat and its efforts to improve the climate of bilateral relations.

It is unlikely, however, that resigning from the SM-3 IIB will change Russia's negative position towards EPAA Phase III. Also, it would not remove Russia's concerns related to future development of the U.S. system. The U.S. will have to present Moscow some additional proposals. The most probable is an offer to create an MD transparency regime. It could encompass annual exchanges of numbers of specific types of interceptors that the U.S. plans to acquire and a mechanism for notification of any changes. It would be aimed at providing Russia with predictability without any formally binding limitations. The U.S. could also provide Russia more detailed technical data. Room for the Obama administration to manoeuvre here, though, would be minimised by Congress' reluctance to share sensitive information such as telemetric data with Russia.

Consequences for NATO. EPAA is the crucial national contribution to the NATO territorial MD system. The U.S. administration emphasises that the implementation of the second and third phases of EPAA are not threatened. Additionally, it seems that ending SM-3 IIB does not have to lead to abandonment of the fourth phase of EPAA. The modified Phase IV could involve the deployment in Europe of additional sensors and Aegis ships, increasing the number of launchers and interceptors at the land-based sites, or installing at a future date a more-advanced kill vehicle atop the SM-3 IIA. Such modifications could be presented as consistent with the original goals of Phase IV. By protecting U.S. Early Warning Radar at Fylingdales (UK) and Thule, Greenland (Denmark), it would strengthen the EPAA contribution to U.S. defence against a ballistic missile threat from the Middle East. Also, it would enlarge the defended area of Europe against IRBMs. The third phase as currently envisaged may not provide full coverage of Europe (for example, part of the territories of some Northern European NATO members).

The cancellation of the SM-3 IIB will force NATO to conduct analyses of its impact on the Alliance's MD architecture. The major concern, however, is how it would impact EPAA financing. The U.S. Congress may be reluctant to authorise funds for a system in Europe that could not be directly used to intercept ballistic missiles in flight towards the U.S. The case can be made, though, that the first three phases of EPAA provide protection of U.S. forces and citizens in Europe as well as U.S. radar stations critical to the defence of the U.S. Of growing importance for Congress would be the European contributions to NATO MD.

Conclusions for Poland. The most important issue is that the completion of the third EPAA phase is currently not endangered. The change of plans related to SM-3 IIB should not undermine the deployment of SM-3 IIA in Poland. The site seems to be optimal for the long-term defence of European NATO members. The relocation of the SM-3 base from Redzikowo to the south or west would decrease EPAA capability to defend Northern European NATO members against currently emerging ballistic missile threats. In addition, the further west from Redzikowo the SM-3 site would be deployed the smaller its capability to tackle a wide range of possible missile threats from the Middle East and North Africa. Poland, together with the U.S., should to the maximum extent possible use the next four years of Obama's presidency to prepare the SM-3 site in Redzikowo. The further the joint works advance, the smaller the probability of radical changes. The U.S. plans might be delayed, however, as a result of fiscal constraints or further problems with SM-3 IIA development. Also, changes in Middle East ballistic missile threat assessments may slow or accelerate EPAA implementation.

The cancellation of SM-3 IIB means that the U.S. has abandoned a plan to directly augment protection of its territory with a site in Poland. It should not mean, however, that the U.S. in the future will refrain from upgrading EPAA sites, including the one in Redzikowo. It should be expected that all U.S. MD capabilities will evolve to keep pace with the level of threat and technological developments. It would be desirable that as a result of the U.S. decision, Russia would alter its negative stance towards the site in Poland. There is, however, a risk that Russia will perceive the aborted SM-3 IIB as a policy success, which would only strengthen its negative rhetoric against the third phase of EPAA.