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CONTROVERSIES OVER MISSILE DEFENSE IN EUROPE

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CONTROVERSIES OVER MISSILE DEFENSE IN EUROPE

Introduction

The plan to deploy an anti-missile system in Central Europe has been one of the most controversial security policy issues in the past few years. The Bush Administration pushed hard for the deployment of the radar site in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland, largely because it would provide an additional layer in the global anti-ballistic missile defense of the United States. In both of these countries, public opinion has been against the deployments and the governments have had to negotiate between external and internal pressures pushing them in different policy directions. Russia has been adamantly opposed to the missile defense plan, issuing both threats and suggesting alternative ways to diminish the threat that the United States feels from Iran. The result has been a political stalemate that has further complicated otherwise tense relations between Moscow and Washington, D.C. With the arrival of the Obama Administration, there is a pause in the missile dispute, but no permanent resolution of the conflict is in sight.

Strategic missile defense and the arms race

Strategic missile defense has a history of its own from the conclusion of the ABM Treaty in 1972, preceded by a fierce debate in the late 1960s especially in the United States, through the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) by the Reagan Administration in 1982 to the abrogation of the ABM Treaty by the Bush Administration in 2002. This history suggests a political cycle in which the search for stability through nuclear deterrence (Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD) interacts with efforts to replace such deterrence by developing on either side an offensive strike capability. If the missile defense of a nuclear-weapon power can be made effective and reliable enough, the preventive strike against another nuclear-armed power can be carried out with impunity.

In recent years, the U.S. nuclear policy has been in disarray. Even in official circles in Washington there have been different schools of thought on the issue, ranging from the demand for a higher reliance on nuclear weapons in military strategy to the gradual and even total abolition of them (as advocated by George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, among others). In nuclear strategic debates, those supporting the Missile Defense Initiative (MDI) in Central Europe have usually belonged to the hardliners of the Bush Administration. Walter B. Slocombe is among those who seem to fully subscribe to the official arguments in favor of the missile defense system in Central Europe.

Thus, in the nuclear era, effective defense can facilitate offense. Missile defense can also attain ideological overtones as shown by Ronald Reagan's statement in 1983: "what if free people would live secure in the knowledge… that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil". Keeping in mind Reagan's earlier belligerent statements on the Soviet Union, calling it the "evil empire", and his readiness to even destroy that target, the protection of freedom by means of missile defenses can easily be converted into a crusade to eliminate one's enemies.

These tenets of defensive policy have also been echoed in the choices made by the Bush Administration, which adopted into its policy some of the elements of the nuclear war-fighting strategy. The Bush Administration, undisturbed by major technical difficulties, attempted to complete Reagan's plan of building an "astrodome" for the United States. Such a defensive shield would protect Americans from the nuclear-tipped missiles of a hostile power. Mr. Bush restarted, after a certain hiatus during the Clinton Administration, investing considerable amounts of money and technological effort – a total of $100 billion so far - in the development of the national missile defense system (NMD).

Historically, the U.S. strategic missile defenses were primarily set up against the Soviet Union/Russia because of their large inventory of intercontinental missiles (ICBMs and SLBMs) aimed at the United States.

This has been called the counterforce strategy which, with the increasing accuracy of strategic offensive missiles, came to replace the countervalue strategy of destroying urban centers. Today, the U.S. nuclear inventory amounts to a total of 1,125 launchers and some 5,900 warheads. The comparable figures for Russia are 848 and 4,150, respectively. Both sides have been modernizing their nuclear arsenals (though, especially in Russia, only with limited technological success as many tests have failed and thus resulted in political embarrassment).

It is worth noting that even though Moscow criticized Washington for withdrawing from the ABM regime in 2002, it has not been particularly vocal in its opposition. The Russians well know how technically incomplete the U.S. missile defense system still is, but to be on the safe side, they have started to strengthen their own offensive strategic missile capabilities. For instance, in May 2007 Russia tested a new RS-24 intercontinental missile intended to replace the ageing models of similar missiles (RS-18 and RS-20), and tests have continued since then. Moscow has also restarted patrol flights of its strategic bombers over both the Arctic and the Pacific coasts. In addition, its military and political representatives have occasionally issued threats over the use of nuclear weapons against targets in Europe that Moscow considers to be potentially offensive.

The secondary focus of the U.S. missile defenses has been China, whose strategic nuclear arsenal is also growing, although it is still rather modest and vulnerable. Beijing has been visibly worried that even limited advances in the U.S. strategic missile defense capabilities would undermine, at the margin, the military and political effectiveness of its own strategic missiles. Yet, the Chinese government seems to have decided against starting any political controversy with the United States over the NMD. Rather, it has launched efforts to decrease the vulnerability of its own strategic arsenal.

China has been more worried about the U.S. plans to extend over Taiwan a regional theater missile defense (TMD) which already protects Japan. Such a defensive shield would diminish the political potential of Beijing's military threats against Taiwan. With missile defense, Taiwan would become even more explicitly a strategic protectorate of the United States, which would, in turn, increase its political leeway in advocating independence, should the government in Taipei so decide. While such options may belong to a make-believe world, in sensitive political conditions they can shape strategic planning.

Missile defense and the international order

Strategic missile defense policy originates from and has been tailored to a bipolar (or possibly even tripolar) world order where its military and political effects can be calculated with relative certainty. The continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons has changed this equation as new nuclear powers have emerged (and there may be more of them coming down the pipeline). This new complexity can be demonstrated by the simple fact that in an international system comprising five nuclear-weapon states there are ten potential bilateral deterrence relationships, but the number of such relationships increases to forty-five in a system of ten nuclear-weapon powers.

Originally, a country tended to develop its nuclear capability with a particular enemy in mind. The United States and the Soviet Union were arming themselves against each other, although Moscow also had to take the limited British and French nuclear arsenals into account. The development of India's nuclear capability was originally aimed to counterbalance China's capability, but in more recent times Pakistan's nuclear weapons have been its main concern. Israel's nuclear arsenal is aimed solely at the Islamic countries, nowadays primarily Iran. Brazil's plans to acquire nuclear weapons, now since canceled, were clearly motivated by the corresponding plans of Argentina.

No consensus exists on the emerging structure of international relations. There is, however, a common view that the winds of change are blowing towards multipolarity in the distribution of power and the growing importance of non-state transnational economic and political relations. The process of globalization has been only partially able to mitigate the traditional power struggles. The key phenomenon has been the rise of China, India, and other new power centers, but their short-term political impact on the international order has remained limited (although their long-term impact may be formidable). Over the short term, the more politically relevant issue has been the acquisition of nuclear weapons, or plans to that effect, by the outcast states, especially Iran and North Korea. Their political relevance is derived from both their own stubborn policies and the American political interpretation of their evil intentions.

In recent years, changes in the structure of international relations have probably affected the political stature and influence of the United States more than any other power. The main reason for this has not been its objective economic and military decline, as it is still the leading power controlling all of the military "commons" – sea, air, and space – and the most influential actor in the world economy, despite its deepening internal and external imbalances, financial turmoil, and the economic recession. The decline of the U.S. has been, to a large degree, self-inflicted; the conduct of

its foreign policy has been inept and it has been slow to adjust to new international circumstances and to exploit opportunities.

The Bush Administration internalized a highly polarized view of the world that divided other countries, with little hesitation, into (semi)permanent allies and adversaries. This Weltanschauung has become even more polarized with the rise of new nuclear-weapon powers. It is deeply ironic that the harsh attitude of the Bush Administration towards the "axis of evil" has, in reality, been associated with a more lax policy on nuclear proliferation than that of any other U.S. administration since World War II. This became obvious in its flexible attitude vis-à-vis the nuclear capabilities of India and Pakistan. In both cases politics rather than principles shaped Washington's policy.

In the strategic imagination of the Bush Administration, its main new adversaries were North Korea and Iran. North Korea detonated a nuclear device already in 2006 and it has tested missiles of longer and longer range, though with only limited technical success. In early 2009, North Korea has been said to prepare to test the long-range Taepodong-2 missile using its space program as a smokescreen for building up its ballistic missile arsenal. The six-power talks aimed at halting the further development of nuclear weapons by North Korea have shown some progress. However, its enigmatic behavior and the understandable reluctance of the United States to make all of the concessions required by North Korea have made the advance of these talks slow, if there has been any at all.

The Bush Administration has long argued that Iran – as it also claimed in the case of Iraq – is on the way to becoming a nuclear-weapon power. There have been mixed assessments in Washington, including the diverging views taken by the intelligence community, on whether Iran really is seeking a nuclear-weapon capability. Today, however, there is little disagreement in the West on whether Iran is pursuing the capacity to produce fissile material and develop missiles to deliver explosives to desired targets. As Mark Fitzpatrick and other analysts have said, the main challenge now is to find the political means by which Iran can be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons or, at a minimum, limit the damage of its potential exercise of that option.

My interim conclusion is that the United States' strong commitment to build the strategic missile defenses and the associated Central European system mainly results from the combination of two factors. Washington is worried that, in general, the global balance of power is turning against it and, in the course of this process, that the "rogue states" are capable of posing new threats to its security. There are two main kinds of nuclear threats: they either emanate from terrorist organizations, possibly sponsored by an unfriendly government, or from outcast countries that are developing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and the vehicles to deliver them to targets on U.S. soil. This conclusion is obviously based on the assumption

that a nuclear war between the United States and any other "mature" nuclear-weapon power is highly unlikely.

In the case of the European missile defense, contrary to Washington's claims, its only and not even main objective is not to protect U.S. allies in Central Europe against the potential Iranian threat, but to establish a new leg in the American strategic capabilities. Thus, the primary aim of the missile defense is not to challenge Russia and its offensive capabilities, as argued in Moscow, but to eliminate potential new strategic threats against the United States. These threats may be exacerbated by changing international power relations and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The report of the Congressional Research Service on "Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe" in 2008 summarizes the policy of the Bush Administration well. It states that the Administration plans to deploy "a long-range missile defense system in Europe to defend U.S. forward deployed forces in Europe, friends and allies, and the United States against long-range ballistic missile threats" (italics mine). In effect, this summary of the official policy repeats the established policy of Washington which aims to combine global and regional missile defense systems into a whole to protect the U.S. homeland.

The deployment of the long-range missile interceptors in Alaska and California in 2004 coincided with Washington's announcement of a policy for a "layered" missile defense capacity. As another report by the Congressional Research Service suggests, this policy turn signified the start of the missile defense initiative in Europe. Further evidence on the integration of the European system into the larger U.S. ballistic missile defense is provided by a fact sheet of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency in August 2008. It states that "the interceptor configuration planned for Poland is nearly identical to those in Alaska and California" with the caveat that, due to the different geographical range, it has only two boosters instead of three. The same fact sheet also says that the "radar proposed for deployment to the Czech Republic is currently located at Kwajalein Atoll…where it has been used to support missile defense tests over the past 10 years". In other words, the equipment to be deployed in Central Europe has been tested in strategic usage.

The European initiative was started by the Bush Administration on the premise that there are potential nuclear threats against the United States that would jeopardize the security of the homeland from afar. Initially, that peril was equated with the terrorist threat of using nuclear devices that would be smuggled into the United States through its borders. The perception of there being a threat at a distance was caused by the evolving nuclear capabilities of Iran and North Korea, which were beyond the immediate political control of the U.S. and were therefore unpredictable. In the early phases of the deployment of anti-missile capabilities, the European allies of the U.S. did not share its threat perception. They barely do so even today.

In other words, the construction of missile defenses in Europe is based on the conviction that there are, now and in the future, hostile powers which are ready to launch "their" missiles against "us". Thus, "we" have the right to defend ourselves against such a threat. The critical thing in the threat perception constructed to justify the deployment of anti-ballistic missile defense is the unclear definition of "us". It is obvious from the political experience that "us" do not include significant segments of the European population and not necessarily even all the European governments. For instance President Sarkozy of France has declared publicly the European missile defense system to be unnecessary and even counterproductive.

In the ideal case, deterrence provided by countervailing military capabilities is a collective good that can be shared by everyone without its "consumption", which would reduce the opportunity of others benefiting from it. However, if deterrence is complemented by defensive arrangements, the collective character of the security good is diminished.

From the U.S. point of view, hostile states are now dispersed into more parts of the world than before and, therefore, no single missile shield is able to defend its territory. Hence, what is needed is an integrated missile defense system that would provide both global and regional protection against incoming ballistic missiles, Europe and East Asia in particular as regards regions. The requirement of global coverage complicates the technical specifications facing the defensive systems, putting primacy on the destruction of incoming missiles as early in their trajectory as possible. The strategic rationale of the U.S. policy is simply that if the forward defense against incoming ballistic missiles from a new hostile power fails, then there will be a second line of defense in Alaska and California. So, in addition to defensive missile systems on its soil, the U.S. needs to place them on the territory of its allies - as well as in space.

One of the political problems arising from the deployment plan in Europe is that the strategic defense systems do not protect against short- and medium-range missiles. Rather, their main function is to keep the homeland of the dominant power safe from intercontinental threats. In addition, the strategic defense would also make the allies safer if they were truly threatened by potential ballistic missile strikes. The key issue is whether the dominant power in the alliance and the other members share the same threat perception. I have expressed above doubts on this issue for the very simple reason that the strategic cultures and the political ways of thinking are quite different in the United States and Europe; the U.S. security concerns are global, Europe's regional.

From the standpoint of a country on whose soil defensive systems are to be deployed, there is a critical difference between whether they are intended for the tactical (theater) protection of its own territory and people, or of the strategic protection of a distant ally. Mr. Radosław Sikorski, the present Foreign Minister of Poland, stated in an earlier phase of the process that

Poland's security would be better served by defending Warsaw with the tactical Patriot missiles, now also in use in Japan and South Korea. His point is obvious: in Poland the Russian tactical nuclear missiles are considered to be a bigger potential threat than the Iranian ballistic missiles which, if they were actually fired, would fly over Poland to a destination overseas. The difference is between the diverging perceptions of the present and the future, the imminent and the contingent.

In sum, the potential security benefits provided by the strategic deterrence of the leading power for its allies are contradicted by the risks involved in local deployments. The Russian Foreign Minister and other influential political and military leaders have threatened to redeploy nuclear weapons in Belarus as a countermove to Western missile defense plans. Some have even talked about using nuclear strikes against the planned facilities once finished. These statements, as ill-considered and irresponsible as they may be, provide evidence of the dangers embedded in the deployment of anti-missile defensive systems and on the possible initiation of the offense-defense race.

Russians even hinted that they might withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, which was concluded in 1987 by the United States and the then Soviet Union to eliminate the 500-5,500 mile range ground-launched missiles. The Russian hints are obviously intended to send the message, especially to the U.S. allies in Central Europe that, if they deploy strategic defense systems on their territory, they should not expect Moscow to be indifferent to or to habitually comply with the old treaties agreed upon during the years of Soviet and Russian weakness.

In Europe, the Bush Administration worked hard to reach an agreement with two of its new NATO allies, the Czech Republic and Poland, on deploying a radar system and silo-based long-range interceptor missiles on their territories. The alleged mission of this system is to destroy the nuclear-tipped missiles that may be launched some day by Iran and possibly other states. In the foreseeable future such a risk is very unlikely, but it cannot obviously be totally excluded in calculations of the future.

Still, the U.S. plans of deploying missile defenses in Central Europe cannot be explained by Iran's potential nuclear threat alone. To obtain a more credible explanation, one has to understand that the emphasis on Iran's threat is in fact only a tiny element in a much larger and ambitious strategic plan. As pointed out above, the U.S. Department of State has clearly stated that the missile defense radar In the Czech Republic is a part of the "U.S. ballistic missile defense" and it will be linked to "other U.S. missile defense facilities in Europe and the United States".

To link the promotion of America's global strategic interests to the concerns of its European allies, the State Department has argued that the deployment in the Czech Republic will make a "substantial contribution to NATO's collective capability to counter existing and future threats … and

will be an integral part of any future NATO-wide missile defense architecture”. This statement has two important connotations: first, it tries to put the best face forward as regards the genuine alliance dilemma that exists between the United States and its European allies, and, second, it assures that the deployments in Central Europe serve NATO’s collective interests.

Lt. Gen. Henry “Trey” Oberling, director, Missile Defense Agency USAF, has publicly made the role of the European deployments in the U.S. global strategy very clear. In his words, the missile defense system in Central Europe fields “an initial capability to defend the U.S. and our allies against ballistic missile attacks which we will expand to meet warfighter needs and future uncertainties” (italics mine). According to Oberling, this aim can be accomplished by building “a layered, integrated system of land, sea, and space elements”.

The true purpose of the Europe-based missile defense system is corroborated by another official report issued jointly by the Department of State and the Department of Defense. According to the report, the first priority is to develop “an improved capability to defend the United States against ballistic missile attack from the Middle East”. Only thereafter a reference is made to the capability to “extend defensive coverage to Europe against longer-range ballistic missiles which would enhance the collective security of the NATO Alliance, strengthen transatlantic unity, reaffirm America’s commitments to European security, and avoid the decoupling of European and American security interests”. As we will see later on, this official statement contains a major internal contradiction.

Theoretically, the NMD scheme is intended to provide global protection for the United States against nuclear-weapon strikes from any geographical location in the world. As suggested above, with comprehensive geographical coverage the U.S. aims to respond to the redistribution of power in the international system, including the rise of new nuclear-weapon states. By acquiring nuclear devices, the new powers upset the traditional balance of power-politics, as these weapons provide asymmetric benefits for their owners. Effective nuclear defense does not require a conventional balance of power between the parties. Missile defenses can provide a relatively inexpensive counterweight to the new offensive nuclear capabilities of the emerging centers of power – or desperate authoritarian regimes.

US-Russian relations

The missile defense deployment plan in Central Europe cannot be extricated from the recent tense Russian-U.S. relations that were further exacerbated by the Georgian crisis in August 2008. Moscow has repeatedly stated that it

considers the Czech-Polish missile defense system to be directed against Russia (it has even threatened to target them with nuclear weapons in a crisis). Russia's fears may not only be of a military character; Russia is also afraid of the political consequences of Western assertiveness.

The missile defense system could in some circumstances be used to diminish Russia's capacity to strike Central and Western Europe with missiles. More importantly, the defense system would tie the Czech Republic and Poland more closely to the integrated military command of NATO led by the United States. In the West it has been argued that if the U.S. missile defense system were really targeted at Russia's strategic missiles, it would have been deployed in Britain or Iceland. Lt. Gen. Oberling has stated in no uncertain terms that the "proposed European ground-based interceptors would have no capability to defend the United States from Russian launches".

The standard U.S. response to Moscow's claims has been that ten bunker-based interceptor missiles in Poland could stop only a very small number of Russian missiles, even if a decision were made to use them against the West. In other words, according to the official view, "any prospective U.S. missile defense assets deployed in Europe would not be directed at Russia". Moreover, it is argued, that the European missile defense system would not have "sufficient time to detect, track, and intercept ballistic missiles launched from Western Russia toward the United States" (italics mine).

A contrarian view has been expressed by George Lewis and Theodore Postol, who argue that the interceptors could engage a significant number of Russian strategic missiles deployed west of the Urals. In particular, if the United States were to carry out a first strike against the Russian missiles, Russia's ability to retaliate would be seriously hampered by the capability of the missile defenses to prevent the Russian missiles from reaching their targets. In other words, the missile defense systems in Central Europe would diminish the force of the Russian retaliatory strike and thus upset the existing balance of deterrence.

The negative Russian reaction would be more understandable if the silos in Poland were also to be equipped with offensive missiles in the future, as some experts - including Mr. Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia - have claimed. In other words, Moscow may fear that the present plans to deploy anti-missile defenses in Europe are just a beginning of a longer process, and will be upgraded in the future. Such fears can only be assuaged by building more confidence between Moscow and Washington, an effort that was made, for instance, during the visit of Secretaries Rice and Gates to Moscow in March 2008.

So far Moscow has remained adamant in its criticism of the deployment plan, even though at the same time it has been conducting discussions with Washington for almost two years now. Americans claim that they have

utilized both bilateral and multilateral (NATO-Russia Council) channels to assure the Russians that the missile defense plan is in no way intended against them. Nevertheless, Moscow seems to remain unconvinced. To mitigate their concerns the U.S. military have even invited their Russian counterparts to observe relevant missile tests in the United States.

To undermine the political rationale for the U.S. missile defense plan in Europe, President Putin proposed in June 2007 that for their defensive efforts the Americans could rely on the missile-launch information from Gabala radar station that Russia leases from Azerbaijan. Some U.S. experts have assessed, however, that this station is geographically too close to Iran to be effective and, perhaps more importantly, it is under Russian rather than American control. Iran, too, has taken a critical view on the use of the Gabala station. Its stance may not be so much due to the station's potential challenge to Iran's own missiles, but to its suspicion that, when it comes to this issue, Russia and the United States are striking a deal behind Tehran's back (a fear that is not entirely unfounded).

Russia has been quite flexible in its counterproposals to the U.S. initiatives. Mr. Putin has also promised to make the data collected by the early-warning radar at Armavir, Russia, available to the Americans. Moscow has also hinted that it would not have any objections if Washington decided to deploy missile defense interceptors in Iraq or Turkey. It would also accept the use of mobile ship-based Aegis interceptors, for instance, on the Black Sea. One thing that Moscow would certainly not approve is the proposal made by the Georgian foreign minister in May 2007 that Tbilisi would be prepared to receive U.S. radar system on its territory. As Federico Bordonaro has pointed out, the obvious aim of the Georgian government was to strengthen the strategic link with the United States and inch towards NATO membership without caring about the consequences for the security of the country.

The key issue in the deployment of the radar station has been that neither the Gabala station nor other fixed or mobile solutions suggested by Moscow would provide the United States the capability to observe and track Russian ICBMs early on in their trajectory. The Gabala radar station covers a vast area from China to Africa, but it is unable to track missile launches from Russia. This again raises the question of whether the United States is, after all, planning an operational role for the Central European system: not to destroy Russian missiles by using interceptors placed in Poland, but to use the radar station deployed in the Czech Republic to track potential launches of Russian missiles and thus provide itself a longer warning time. The Russian aim is, in turn, to avoid any eventuality in which the United States could jeopardize the independent operability of its strategic offensive arsenals.

Intra-alliance games and dilemmas

In the general context, the present situation offers nothing new, as plans for missile defense have always fuelled two types of games: the adversary games and the alliance games. In adversarial relations, the country launching the potential first strike fears that the missile defense system of the opponent would help it to launch a first nuclear strike with devastating consequences. Because of the defensive capabilities of the initiator, the impact of the retaliatory strike would be significantly diminished.

Therefore, the responding country would either have to construct its own defensive system or strengthen its offensive missile fleet to penetrate the adversary's defense. Such an offense-defense competition would undermine the robustness of nuclear deterrence. Although a war of conquest in the nuclear era is unlikely, one has to born in mind the analysis by Karen Ruth Adams, that in the defense-dominant international systems wars are much less frequent than when the offense dominates. Defense promotes peace unless it is combined with offensive capabilities that would overwhelm the adversary.

Indeed, this strategic equation relies on the classical model of the offense-defense competition between adversaries. This kind of competition prevailed in the U.S.-Soviet military relations until the conclusion of the ABM Treaty in 1972, which limited anti-missile defenses to a maximum number of 100 interceptors per site around a capital or some other population center. The Soviet Union built such a defensive system around Moscow but the United States did not exercise this option at all when the ABM Treaty was in force. The ABM Treaty was based on both sides giving up the countervalue strategy with the growing accuracy of strategic nuclear weapons and the building nuclear deterrence upon the counterforce targeting.

The prospect of returning to such a competition was in evidence in the famous speech delivered by President Putin in Munich in 2007 where he asked: "who needs the next step of what would be an inevitable arms race?" Indeed, with the U.S. abrogation of the ABM treaty and the Russian reinvestment in strategic forces in recent years, the door has been opened to the renewal of offense-defense competition. The prospects for a cooperative solution are dimmed by the expiration in the end of 2009 of the agreement limiting the number of the Russian and U.S. strategic nuclear forces.

Obviously, the parties to the agreement recognize the potential dangers involved in its expiration, as they have taken preliminary steps to start discussions either on its extension or the conclusion of a new treaty that would further reduce the number of strategic warheads. In March 2009 it seems that Moscow and Washington aim to conclude a new successor treaty

for the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty concluded in Moscow in 2002. The Joint Statement associated with this Treaty reducing nuclear warheads promised to increase transparency, the exchange of information, and explore the potential areas of cooperation in missile defense.

The alliance game is fuelled by a security dilemma that has two different manifestations, as Glenn Snyder has spelled out. Military alliances are formed either because some states want to increase their security and isolation or because others want to avoid isolation. According to this reasoning, each state prefers to join the most powerful alliance and maximize its own share of its net benefits. Especially in a bipolar international system, that prevailed during the Cold War, the establishment of an alliance tends to fuel the establishment of a counter-alliance. The present system in Europe has still features of a bipolar competition between NATO and Russia even though the latter does not have allies in the same way it had during the Cold War. The remaining bipolarity hinges on the nuclear-weapon capabilities of both sides and their contention for the territorial control.

The formation of competitive coalitions among states leads to a secondary alliance dilemma which has two main dimensions: entrapment and abandonment. The alliance leader wants to avoid a situation in which it would be entrapped against its own interests in a local confrontation initiated by its smaller allies and which could subsequently escalate into a general war. On the other hand, smaller allies are fearful that the leader, in protecting its own interests, could abandon them in a case where the adversary launches a military attack. In other words, is the alliance leader ready to start a war for the sake of systemic interests if its own territory and population are not threatened.

In a nuclear alliance, the dilemma contains yet another dimension. If the alliance leader pursues offensive or otherwise expansive policies, such as enlarging the membership of the alliance or deliberately aiming to weaken the position of the adversary, these could spawn counteractions. Such actions may not expose the smaller alliance members as long the collective deterrence provided by the alliance leader is perceived to be credible and the fear of abandonment does not spread among the allies. However, if the leader pursues unilateral and offensive policies that leave the allies exposed, threats issued by the adversary, in particular if they are propped up by adequate offensive capabilities, have to be taken seriously. The expansion of the alliance may diminish its relative value to the old members as the resources of the leader become overstretched.

The only credible response that the leader can make in such a situation is to recommit itself to the protection of its allies through appropriate political and military actions, particularly if threats against their security arise. The allies are left in limbo by the pursuit of strategies – such as Christopher Layne's offshore balancing – that imply the withdrawal of the

leader from exposed regions and its return from cooperative and/or hegemonistic global policies to a more isolated international position.

In the nuclear game, if the alliance leader is protected by a strategic missile defense, it may not want to respond via massive retaliation to an attack against its ally because this could lead to its own destruction. Thus, the possibility of a non-response to the military threat against the allies grows if the alliance leader is protected by a missile shield. In other words, the strategic invulnerability of the leader, due to the lack of compulsion to respond, poses perhaps the most critical test to the reliability of intra-alliance defense commitments. In reality, one has to keep in mind, however, the observations made by Robert Powell that the ballistic missile defense does not have much value, and may be even counterproductive, if it is not "extremely effective".

On the other hand, in a crisis situation the deployment of anti-missile facilities on one's own territory may prompt the adversary to physically destroy them. The reason for this is simply that a defensive capability may reduce the impact of the offensive forces of the other side and the temptation of the pre-emptive strike may increase. It is important to keep in mind that offense-defense calculations are not only specific and time-limited processes, but they are also based on expectations of future events and the estimated probability of their occurrence. Through such calculations expectations can become political facts. If a party to the strategic game anticipates that its offensive capacity can be diminished, it may react by enhancing its capacity to overcome new defensive systems. Therefore, the security implications of missile defense can be a mixed blessing as it offers prospects for both protection and destruction.

In other words, the missile defense issue is also a case study in alliance politics. In practical terms, the deployment of radars and interceptors is a bilateral issue between Washington, on the one hand, and Prague and Warsaw on the other. These systems will be built and controlled by the United States; there will be American servicemen in Poland and the Czech Republic, and only American fingers will be on the interceptors' launch buttons. The opportunities of the deploying governments to participate will be extremely limited. As I will describe below, the negotiations between the United States and the Czech and Polish governments have been difficult and complex as both political perspectives and security interests of the parties have differed, especially, in the Polish-U.S. relations.

Once more, one has to keep in mind that the missile shield planned for Central Europe is intended foremost to protect the United States against strategic missiles of adversaries. The new system is different from the long-discussed theater missile defense now under preparation within NATO. For quite some time the integration of Central European and NATO-based missile defense systems has been a major political headache within NATO,

which has only been made worse by trying to link the former system with the strategic missile defense of the United States.

NATO has been working for years to develop a theater missile defense system in Europe, officially called the Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD). One of its aims is to integrate various national capabilities for defending targets in European member states against ballistic missiles with a range of up to 3,000 kilometers. The development of the ALTBMD in the NATO framework has progressed rapidly and it is expected to reach initial operational capability (IOC) in 2010. From the European point of view, this project is the central element in the defense against Russian missiles, whereas the U.S. deployment plans in the Czech Republic and Poland are perceived as a diversion from the main concerns. However, as Russia has scrapped its intermediate range missiles pursuant to the INF Treaty of 1991, there is today only a limited missile threat to European countries.

This seems to explain why Russia has promised to cooperate with NATO in developing ALTBMD-type defensive systems. Russians themselves may be concerned with the potential threat of medium range ballistic missiles that can be launched, for instance, from Iran, Syria, and Libya. On the other hand, Moscow has occasionally threatened to withdraw from the INF Treaty in response to U.S. and NATO anti-missile policies. In any case, the missile defense systems in Central Europe would not be able to protect several NATO countries – including Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and even France and Italy - against missile threats emanating from the areas bordering Europe. Moscow has tried to exploit this fact by questioning the indivisibility of the Alliance's security and by trying to divide the ranks of NATO countries with regard to the missile defense issue.

The United States has preferred to keep the deployments in the Czech Republic and Poland a bilateral issue. The main reason for this policy seems to be related to the command and control of the radar and interceptors. Washington has wanted to underline its strategic primacy and autonomy by not involving European members of NATO and the SACEUR in decision-making on the Central European system, for which they have expressed a preference, however. On the other hand, Germany and some other NATO members have been reluctant to start an open dispute with the United States on this issue as it would damage transatlantic cooperation which have gone through political difficulties in recent years but are perceived as important.

For this and maybe other reasons, the European members of NATO assented to the U.S. policy to build up missile defenses in the Bucharest summit in April 2008 and accepted the bilateral nature of Washington's deals with Prague and Warsaw. In the communiqué from the summit, the Alliance members recognized the "substantial contribution to the protection of allies from long range ballistic missiles to be provided by the planned deployment of European based United States missile defence assets". The communiqué

also tried to provide a solution for the problem of the (in)divisibility of the Alliance's security by calling for the development of "options for a comprehensive missile defence architecture to extend coverage to all Allied territory and populations not otherwise covered by the United States system". These issues will be reviewed again in the next NATO summit in early April 2009.

The agreement in the Bucharest summit was preceded by a decision reached by NATO defense ministers in June 2007. The ministers approved in principle the deployment of the U.S. missile shield, mostly to show a united front against Russian pressure. The decision did not, however, end the debate at that time. There have been repeated demands that NATO, as an organization, be actively and collectively engaged in decision-making on the missile shield in Central Europe.

These voices have been quite vocal in Berlin where the government's coalition partners, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, harbor different views on missile defense; while the former have been cautiously in favor of it, many leaders of the latter have been opposed to the entire plan. In the grand coalition a compromise was reached, though only reluctantly in the case of the SPD, that a joint stance in support of the bilateral treaties to deploy the radar and interceptors should be adopted within NATO.

The Central European missile defense system is intended to expand the U.S. nuclear deterrence against new sources of strategic threats. This helps to explain why Britain and France, themselves equipped with strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, have accepted the U.S. rationale for deployment (though France less enthusiastically so). They do not seem to be much bothered by the fact that the new missile shield, as with all missile defenses, can also enable the first use of nuclear weapons and thus potentially increase strategic instability in East-West relations. Earlier on, the Blair government was eager to deploy missile interceptors on British soil in addition to those which are already on an RAF base at Fylingdales.

Due to the bilateral nature of the missile defense deal, resistance in the Czech public opinion and the more critical opinion of the new Polish government, headed by Donald Tusk, have carried particular significance. Domestic political volatility and popular hesitation in both countries have plagued the discussions between Washington, Prague and Warsaw from the very start.

Negotiations

The Bush Administration used quite heavy-handed means to convince the Czech and Polish governments that agreements should be quickly concluded

so as to be able to start deployments in 2011 (or more likely in 2012). The advocacy to deploy the mid-course radar system there was the main reason why President Bush visited the Czech Republic right before the G8 summit in Heiligendam in June 2007, and why Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek made a visit to Washington in February 2008. The radar issue was very high on the visit agenda.

After these talks, it was announced that the deal on the deployment of the radars in Brdy military zone in the Czech Republic was near to completion. Political agreement between the two governments was reached in April 2008 and the treaty was signed in July 2008. After the ceremony, the statement from the State Department stressed that the two key elements of the entire project from the U.S. perspective were as follows: radars will be "linked to other U.S. missile defense facilities in Europe and the United States" and they will make a "substantial contribution to NATO's collective capability to counter existing and future threats… and be an integral part of any future NATO-wide missile defense architecture".

However, the ratification of the agreement by the Czech Parliament has been facing an uphill struggle. In opinion polls, some two-thirds of the people and thirty-odd mayors in the vicinity of the radar site have opposed it, largely due to the fear of Russian reprisals in a crisis as well as the unpopularity of the Bush Administration and the shaky position of the Topolánek government in the Chamber of Deputies. In late November 2008 the Czech Senate finally approved the treaty with the United States by 49 votes against 32 votes. In the Chamber of Deputies, however, the treaty is facing additional difficulties.

The opposition, consisting primarily of the Social Democrats (CSSD) and the Communists (KSCM), has succeeded in preventing the decision on the Czech-U.S. agreement. Moreover, Mr. Topolánek's minority government, headed by the Civic Democratic Party (OSD), has not been strong enough to push the matter through. In addition, among the smaller government parties, the Greens have been divided as regards their attitude toward the radar system. The turbulent nature of the Czech domestic politics is illustrated by the non-confidence vote that the Topolanek government received in the parliament in late March 2009. The deployment of the radar system was one of the factors that the opposition used against the government.

In a rather desperate move the OSD suggested in its party congress in early December 2008 that it would be ready to support the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty if the CSSD was prepared to accept the missile defense treaty. Normally, this would be rather unusual horse trading, although not unheard of in Czech politics, in which unrelated issues are at times packaged together. The policy pursued by the OSD aims to put pressure on the Europe-friendly Social Democrats to accept the radar deal. But it is also intended to tie the hands of the OSD's own president, Václav Klaus, who is known to support the radar agreement but oppose the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, even to

an embarrassing degree. In typical Czech style, there have also been initiatives to take the Czech-U.S. Treaty to the constitutional court to check whether, in particular, its status-of-forces (SOFA) element, permitting the deployment of the U.S. military on Czech soil, is anti-constitutional.

The legal counterargument in the Czech debate has been that the deployment of the radar station, and especially the presence of U.S. soldiers and experts, undermines Czech sovereignty. The deployment of foreign troops on Czech soil is still in the fresh memory of many people. This semi-legal counterargument was refuted in a statement issued at the signing event between Secretary Rice and Minister Schwarzenberg in July 2008. The statement from the ceremony assures that "the Czech Republic retains full sovereignty over the site".

The agreement between Prague and Washington broke the political link between the radar and interceptor deployments as Warsaw continued its efforts to extract a higher price from the Americans. At one point it also looked like the United States would lose the luxury of bilateral deals with the Czech Republic and Poland. Some member states of NATO, such as Slovakia, started questioning the need for the entire missile defense system. Other members demanded that the decision be made within NATO, rather than bilaterally between the United States and two countries in Central Europe. This demand was partly inspired by Russian opposition and the effort by some NATO members to take NATO's theater missile defense more seriously and connect it with the American plans for global strategic defenses.

The main reason for political friction and even disagreements within the Alliance seems to have been different threat perceptions. Poles, and in fact many other members of NATO as well, have felt that Russia, rather than Iran, remains the main threat because Moscow's policy has become more expansive and it has suggested that the new deployments could become in a crisis targets of Russian military strikes. While the Kaczyński government set practically no conditions for the U.S. deployments, the Tusk cabinet succeeding it demanded several types of side payments to reach an agreement.

For instance, Warsaw insisted on U.S. assistance to strengthen its air defenses by means of deploying Patriot missiles on Polish soil. These would defend Poland against Russia's potential use of missiles and also assure a more effective offense-defense balance with Russia. Another reason for the tough negotiating stance adopted by the Poles was their conviction that they have not been sufficiently compensated for their critical and costly military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan. In general, the Polish U.S.-talks on the deployment of interceptors were characterized by arm-twisting between allies who share some common goals but, at least over the short term, have different interests.

Upgrading the Polish air defenses has been estimated at costing several billion dollars, whereas the U.S. Congress in May 2008 only granted 20 million dollars for that purpose. The total bill for the Central European missile defense system is estimated to amount to $4 billion. This does not include bilateral U.S. military assistance to the Czech Republic and Poland.

In the spring of 2008 Polish-U.S. relations became so tense that Washington threatened to deploy the interceptors in some other NATO country, most likely Lithuania, although discussions were not broken off with Warsaw. The mere reference to the Lithuanian option made the Russians even angrier as the deployment plans now concerned former Soviet territory.

The Georgian War changed the political situation in an abrupt manner, and contrary to Russian interests. In NATO, the Polish government joined the strong condemnation of Russian actions in Georgia, obviously also seeing the negative implications for its own security. The differences of opinion and diverging interest on the deployment of interceptors were pushed aside and the Polish and U.S. governments reached a deal on the bilateral treaty post-haste. On August 20, 2008 Secretary Rice and Minister Sikorski issued a Declaration on Strategic Cooperation between the United States of America and the Republic of Poland.

In the Declaration, the United States committed itself to boosting Poland's security and improving the U.S. facilities located on its territory. The importance of political and military cooperation between the countries was repeatedly stressed and references were made with regard to the need for new bilateral agreements. The Declaration, however, failed to make a specific and firm commitment to conclude a treaty on the deployment of interceptors. It merely stated that the two governments intend to "conclude a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Framework Agreement that would enable parties to explore opportunities for cooperative research, development, testing, and evaluation, including industry-to-industry cooperation, related to ballistic missile defense systems". This can hardly be considered a politically, and even less so a legally, binding commitment.

The Russian end game

As has been stated above, political and military circles in Russia have several times threatened to reciprocate the American deployment plans with retaliatory strikes against the radar and interceptor sites, or other targets. A political climax was reached on November 5, 2008, the day Barack Obama was declared the winner of the U.S. presidential election. Just a few hours after his acceptance speech, President Medvedev of Russia threatened to

deploy tactical range Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad (the old German city of Königsberg).

Global and regional strategy games always have local implications. Even though Kaliningrad is a Russian geographical enclave and political outpost as well as a military city, it is, because of its history, also a European city and a cradle of civilization as Jürgen Manthey has so very well shown. Reports from Kaliningrad indicate that its inhabitants received President Medvedev's message with mixed feelings. Fewer and fewer of them want to see their city as a Russian geopolitical outpost and military stronghold. Instead, they prefer to become more integrated in the European economy, primarily through neighboring Lithuania and Poland, both of which are members of the European Union and NATO.

Forgetting for a while the political context of the statement, Mr. Medvedev's announcement to neutralize the U.S. defensive arrangements was a standard offensive threat to remind the other side that defensive systems cannot protect it from the counterforce capability of the adversary. In the United States it was widely perceived that the Russian threat was intended to test the mettle of the new president even before he had assumed office.

President Medvedev's warning was both ill-considered and short-sighted. According to some expert assessments it can be perhaps traced back to the fact that although in the 1980s the Soviet navy was stronger than NATO's naval presence in the Baltic Sea, the 1990s saw its collapse. Since then the Russian navy in the Baltic Sea has been gradually strengthened and a more active naval strategy has been in the making. One cannot exclude the possibility that the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons in the area is an element of this development. Such a move could be a part of a broader strategy that includes the establishment of air and naval bases in Abkhazia, the conclusion of an air defense treaty with Belarus, and the effort to oust the U.S. military base from Manas in Kyrgyzstan.

These initiatives have obviously been intended to block the expansion of U.S. military influence and the enlargement of NATO to Russia's neighboring territories. Perhaps the most important single motivation for Moscow's resistance to the missile defense system is its fear that it is just an additional step towards the Ukrainian and Georgian membership of NATO, even though the two issues are, in substantive terms, unrelated.

However, Moscow quickly retreated from its rather belligerent statements about the missile threats and made them conditional. On November 15, 2008 President Medvedev said that Russia will not be the first to retaliate against NATO without a reason. It would only do so if the United States made the first move by physically deploying radars and interceptors. Mr. Medvedev also expressed the hope that the United States would be open to negotiations on the issue. A similar cooperative tone characterized the

speech that Prime Minister Putin delivered in the Davos meeting in February 2009.

There may have been two main reasons for this partial change of mind in Moscow. First, with the coming of the new U.S. administration, there are even more important security issues than the European missile defense on the agenda, such as the future of the START agreement limiting strategic nuclear weapons that will expire at the end of 2009. It is in the best interest of both Russia and the United States to extend this treaty and perhaps cut back the number of strategic warheads to roughly one half of their current levels. Second, the Russian leadership finally began to admit that the global financial and economic crisis is also weakening their own position in a serious way and that the downturn does not only concern the United States, as they originally had argued.

The United States and NATO have also gradually softened their stance on future political relations with Russia. The Georgian War has been placed, at least temporarily, on the backburner and NATO has decided to resume the work of the NATO-Russia Council. It should also be noted that the tone of the speech delivered by Vice President Biden at the Munich security conference in February 2009 was rather conciliatory towards Russia and that he said the U.S. would “press the reset button” to expand cooperation with Russia.

Some experts had expected Mr. Biden to announce a strategic review of the missile defense system in Munich. However, he defended the plan, though with caveats such as: “we will continue to develop missile defenses to counter a growing Iranian capability, provided the technology is proven and it is cost-effective”. It was too early to change the course on this issue.

After Mr. Medvedev’s statement on the deployment of missiles in Kaliningrad, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, criticized it in strong terms. In commenting on the statement, he even characterized it as “stupid”. One obvious reason for the tone of Mr. Barroso’s remark was to show political solidarity and support to the affected EU members in a situation in which the policies of the Union itself have been in disarray.

Conclusion

The days of the Bush Administration are over, as are its unrelenting ambitions to deploy ballistic missile defenses in Central Europe as soon as possible. Until late February 2009, the Obama Administration was cautious in taking a stand on the issue. Yet, it sent signals that it was considering future options. As is typical to the new U.S. administration, it decided to

move quickly also on the missile defense issue even though its plate was full of more pressing economic and political affairs.

In an obvious effort to test the Russian foreign policies in general, President Obama sent in March 2009 a confidential letter to President Medvedev suggesting a quid pro quo: the United States would be ready to reconsider the schedule of the deployment of the missile defense systems if Russia was prepared to contain Iran's effort in acquiring nuclear weapons. This proposal by the Obama Administration obviously goes further than the cooperative gestures offered by the Bush Administration. It is significant, though, that while Washington does not promise to give up its missile defense plan, it expects Moscow to redefine its relationship with Iran in return for limited U.S. concessions. According to one source, Mr. Obama's letter offers the "regulation of the development of the missile defense", not the abolition of the plan.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Russia rejected the U.S. proposal. Moscow welcomed Washington's willingness to talk, but said that it would not become involved in any deal over the issue. In response, President Obama denied that he had proposed any deal to the Russians. However, he left the strong impression that Iran and missile defenses continue to be interrelated in the U.S. policy, thus endorsing the key argument of his predecessor. In Mr. Obama's own words: "to the extent we are lessening Iran's commitment to nuclear weapons, then that reduces the pressure for or the need for a missile defense system". Clearly, there is a new phase in the U.S.-Russia dialogue on the missile defense in Europe, but it is difficult to anticipate its next steps.

The United States is constrained by the strong emphasis of the Bush Administration on the bilateral nature of agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic and, especially, by the promises it made to the Poles. Any U.S. decision to abandon the missile defense plan or even to make it an object of haggling between Moscow and Washington would place the Czech and Polish governments in an awkward position. After having stood against Russia and signed unpopular agreements, they would suddenly be told that, because of a new deal with Russia, the radars and interceptors were no longer needed.

It is now wonder that the Poles have been concerned about Washington's potential abandonment of the deployment, although President Kaczynski and Prime Minister Tusk have formulated their comments differently. Kaczynski has stated that scrapping the system would represent an unfriendly gesture towards Poland, while Tusk has shown more understanding to Washington's effort to find a new modus vivendi with Moscow.

The political situation in Warsaw continues to be complicated and not even the government does not want to hand over too easy a victory to the domestic opponents of the missile defense. Partly for this reason, the

government has stated that it would need the Patriot anti-missile battery from the United States irrespective of the deployment of systems defending the United States against intercontinental strikes by Iran or other powers. To avert the return of the alliance dilemma, Poland would thus need additional protection against potential Russian threats. The deployment of U.S. troops and technicians in the Czech Republic and Poland would provide such an additional assurance to their security.

The future of the missile defense in Central Europe obviously depends on at least two issues: the development of overall relations between Russia and the United States, and trends in the international strategic environment. In the first instance, the United States cannot give up missile defense, due to the Russian threats to retaliate, without first reaching a comprehensive strategic framework between the two countries. Such a framework should integrate the future limitations on the strategic missiles, other aspects of nuclear arms control, and the global and regional missile defense systems under a limited common regime.

In the second instance, the most important single issue concerns Iran both in terms of its own policy and the evolution of Russian policy towards Tehran. The choices made in Iran's domestic policy obviously have an influence on how intensely it wants to challenge the West. In that regard the forthcoming presidential elections carry some significance.

Tehran did not make matters easier by testing its capacity to launch the Omid satellite into orbit in early February 2009. Today, Iran's missiles are medium-range and it is expected to acquire long-range missiles in 2012, at the earliest. If deployed, these missiles could pose a potential threat to the United States, especially, if fitted with nuclear warheads. In the United States, the expert communities continue to be at odds on how significant on the development of missiles and their launch capacity are for the security of the West and in what time period their threats might materialize.

Any prudent threat analysis in Washington should, however, take the prospect of the Iranian strategic capabilities into account. It would strengthen the rationale to deploy radars and interceptors in the Czech Republic and Poland as a defense against the limited fleet of intercontinental missiles that Iran might acquire in the future. If such a critical situation emerges, Moscow should understand that a nuclear-armed Iran is not in its interest either because it would not only complicate relations with Washington and its allies, it would also lead to the further proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

As Etel Solingen has shown, the history of the Iranian quest for nuclear weapons has had no single target; efforts at their development have been influenced by the hostility with Iraq, the establishment of a counterbalance to Israel's "bomb in the basement", the search of regional predominance vis-à-vis the Western influence, and the ideological motivation to develop an

"Islamic bomb". As Iran's motivations have been politically variable, it is ultimate aim in the quest for nuclear weapons is difficult to predict.

In other words, Russia and the United States share interests in preventing the spread of nuclear capabilities and political instability in the Middle East and in together managing major developments in the region. The missile defense plans have implications for the U.S.-Russia relations in Europe, but their repercussions in the Middle East may, over the long term, be even more significant.

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