



America's ABM Shield in Europe and Russia's Response

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Theme: Washington's decision to deploy the third phase of its global anti-missile defence system in two Eastern European countries is being regarded in Moscow as the most serious external threat to Russia's security system since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Summary: The US is negotiating the deployment of 10 missile interceptors in Poland and radar units in the Czech Republic as part of the enlargement of its Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) shield. If the two countries agree, the deployment could be operational in 2011 to counter ballistic missiles from Iran or North Korea. Russia has strongly rejected the initiative and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, suggested to the US President, George W. Bush, the joint use of the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan as an alternative. This ARI analyses the Russian approach to the implications of the last ABM initiative for Europe, the political, military and technological countermeasures which have been used or can be used by Moscow to counteract the US plans, as well as the possible variants of any Russian-American compromise.

Analysis:

Arguments and Counter Pleas

Sharp controversy about the American ABM system in Europe has reached a peak in the last few months. President Putin suggested to President Bush during the G-8 Summit in the German city of Heiligendamm on 7 June 2007 that they should begin to work together in this field with the joint use of the Gabala radar installation, which Russia rents in Azerbaijan. At the next bilateral meeting of the two Presidents in Kennebunkport, Maine, Putin extended his offer to include the use of the radar installation near Armavir in Russia, which is under construction, as well as the creation of ABM information exchange centres in Moscow and Brussels. The proposals, according to the Russian view, would make the deployment useless and reduce the risk of an escalating crisis. President Bush promised to consider all Russian suggestions but did not rule out the idea of ABM deployments in Europe, a position that was soon confirmed by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in an interview to NBC TV.

When the US left the ABM treaty in 2002, some experts considered it a 'silent victory' of the first Bush Administration because it destroyed a 'Cold War' agreement to permit the first radar stationing facilities in Alaska and California. As there is not much time left until the end of Bush's term in office, and given the lack of positive results in Iraq and Afghanistan, the deployment of the ABM system on Eastern European soil could be his last chance to avoid entering the history books as the nation's leader who lost in all he attempted; hence the persistent need to gain at least one 'victory'. According to US official statements the radar installation in the Czech Republic and the 10 antimissile systems in Poland are being deployed to prevent future ballistic missile attacks from rogue states such as Iran and North Korea. The American interceptors' minimum boost distance is 1,000 km, so antimissile deployment in Turkey or Israel is impossible from a technical point of

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view. At the same time, US representatives underline that the new deployment is not for use against the Russian Federation.

The Russian counterarguments are quite reasonable too. Iran has no long-range missiles but it does have 20 'Shahab-3' missiles –with a range of up to 1,500 km and suboptimal accuracy– while its new 'Shahab-4' missile –with a range of around 2,000 km– is still under development. It is very doubtful that Teheran will possess a serious missile potential with a range of up to 5,000-6,000 km by 2015. There is no substantial proof for US claims, as they are based on the same kind of erroneous intelligence assessments that led to the war in Iraq to prevent Saddam Hussein from using weapons of mass destruction and from which the US is now unsure how to extricate itself. The assessment is also mistaken regarding North Korea's launching of its 'Taepodong' missiles. Even if it were to improve its missiles and decide to strike, why would it aim them over Europe instead of over the Pacific, which is a shorter distance to the US? Thus the argument about the willingness of Iran and North Korea to attack the US and Europe using ballistic missiles is unsound. It would be absolute insanity, as a reciprocal strike would leave them like the surface of the Moon.

The Russian Approach

All these discrepancies in US plans have raised suspicions about their anti-Russian bias. On the whole, Russia's attitude towards this problem is twofold: military and political. From the military viewpoint, the deployment of an ABM system is a real threat to Russian security. The Russian Government was informed about the negotiations with the Polish and the Czech Governments with no previous consultation and the fact that Russia's objection was taken by Moscow as a direct insult. Besides, the deployment of US military bases closer to the Russian border through bilateral agreements with anti-Russian governments could be followed by Georgia or the Baltic countries and, under certain political conditions, by the Ukraine.

From a technical standpoint, the only way for antimissile systems to destroy ballistic missiles is to hit them in their boosting stage. But with an antimissile speed of 4.5 km/second it would be difficult to destroy them within a range of up to 2,500 km, where the main Russian launching pads are located. In any case, in the event of a full-scale conflict the Russian Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) would head for targets in the US by transpolar routes. Dozens of American interceptors –forced to attack on parallel-overtaking courses– would be unable to cause damage to the attacking wave of Russian ICBMs because even in ideal conditions they would only intercept 2,5 mono-block warheads unequipped with false targets.

Finally, whatever the Pentagon's intentions, the initiative creates surface infrastructure that could be easily developed in the future. There are currently only ten missiles, but a hundred could be deployed more easily than if they started from zero. The proposed deployment in Eastern Europe, the existing facilities in Alaska and California and the potential addition of a space element could, in combination, alter the strategic balance with Russia. For instance, the Czech radar (with a range of up to 5,000 km) would be able to scan Russia's entire European territory, including the Kapustin Yar rocket range. As missile test launchings from the main range in Plesetsk and from the Northern Fleet's submarines are also tracked by the Norwegian radar installation in Vardo –which is integrated in the American ABM system– it is no surprise that high-ranking Russian officers have requested a strict and asymmetric response.

Seen from a political perspective, the initiative is part of a US strategy to regain control over the 'Old Europe', which is becoming more independent in military and political terms. On the one hand, the EU is creating its own military capabilities –like the Rapid Reaction Force, the EU Military Staff and the Battle Groups–. On the other, a poll carried out in five European countries in June 2007 by the Harris Company for the *Financial Times* revealed that 36% of Europeans consider the US the main threat to global stability, followed by Iran (30%), China (28%) and then North Korea, with Russia last. Mutual rhetoric remains very sharp and the strategic community is concerned about the emergence of Cold War language. However, the announcement of the US

intention to deploy ABM elements in Eastern Europe caused a very strong reaction only in Moscow, while NATO and the EU ruled out any open controversy. The US has used the anti-Russian mood in Poland and the Czech Republic for its own purposes, exploiting their recent memory of communist times and their fear of Russian military and economic power. Both Governments have readily agreed to the deployment will not find it so easy to cope with potential Russian countermeasures, when they might have to choose between searching for the European solidarity which they are not practicing or deepening their 'special' relationship with the US.

Russia's Counterargument

With no clear understanding of the rationale of the US global ABM system, Russian anxiety about its deployment in Europe is fully justified because it will affect the Russian-American nuclear balance. At the end of 2006 Russia had 762 launchers with 3,373 nuclear warheads, while the US had 986 launchers and 4,116 warheads. Russia and the US have not regarded each other as enemies for a long time, but the military-technical balance is returning to the levels of the period of nuclear containment, when the missiles were ready to respond to any strike. It was only the shared rejection of the existence of antimissile defence zones that restrained both countries from aggression.

Bilateral negotiations will continue in the autumn of 2007 but Russia has sufficient countermeasures if diplomacy fails. Initially, Russia has no plans to withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty. However, some politician and generals, including in particular the Chief of the Joint Staff, Yuri Baluevskiy, advocate the deployment of intermediate range missiles because other countries like North Korea, South Korea, India, Iran, Pakistan and Israel possess them. Though only Russia and the US are parties to the INF Treaty and despite Putin's preference for Russia to have a 'peacemaking' image, a Russian withdrawal from the Treaty would spur the global arms race by weakening the resolve of third countries to comply with the various nuclear non-proliferation regimes. On the one hand, the resumption of the production of the Soviet Pioneer (SS-20) medium-range missile would be too expensive for Russia's military budget. On the other, massive financial expenses would be needed for the research, development and production of a new generation of such missiles. Another option would be to resort to the Iskander-M operational-tactical missile, which was successfully tested by Russia in May of 2007. The Iskander-M has been designed to reduce its radar-screen visibility, which makes it very difficult to detect. It is able to manoeuvre throughout its entire trajectory, even in the middle stage, and it does not come under the limitations imposed by the INF Treaty (500-5,000 km), because its range is slightly under 500 km. The Russian Army has only one battalion of Iskander-M but will have three more (60 launchers) at the end of 2007, reaching a total of five brigades by 2015, according to the announcement made in February by the first Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov. Should these Iskander-M be deployed in the Kaliningrad Special District, the ABM facilities in Poland and Czech Republic would be within their reach.

Nevertheless, the main efforts to neutralise the American ABM system will be aimed at improving Russia's strategic offensive weapons, especially their capability to break through any further antimissile defence systems. The Russian Army will receive its first seven Topol-M (SS-27) ballistic missiles in 2007 and the Commander of the Strategic Missile Forces, Colonel-General Nikolai Solovtsov, hopes that the complete replacement of the old generation will be completed by 2016. Finally, Russia could improve its Multiple Independent Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) missiles and their equipment with decoy devices, a possibility confirmed by the latest tests on the new RS-24 missiles with up of to six warheads. The improvement of the ballistic missiles will also pay attention to their survivability in the acceleration area, where they are the most vulnerable. It is still necessary to reduce their acceleration phase to less than two minutes and to enhance their manoeuvrability in the same phase to make them less vulnerable to kinetic interceptors.

The Russian Political Response in the European Context

The ABM deployment is also highly sensitive for European security. Russia does not wish to separate itself from Europe but President Putin suspended the observance of Russia's obligations within the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) on 14 July 2007 after a 150-day moratorium in response to the stalemate on the ratification of the 1999 Agreement on the Treaty's adaptation (CFE-II) to the new strategic balance. The Treaty was signed in 1990 when the Warsaw Pact was still in existence as NATO's main enemy. It was aimed to balance and scale down the military potential of the two blocks, but the situation is now quite different given the entry of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in NATO as fully-fledged members. This makes it possible, for instance, to include the Baltic countries –which are not parties to the CFE Treaty– in the NATO verification teams that can inspect Russian forces in the Kaliningrad Special District without any reciprocity.

The Russian disaffection with the CFE Treaty has also grown with NATO's reluctance to ratify its adaptation. Only Russia, Kazakhstan, Belorussia and the Ukraine ratified the Adaptation Treaty while the Western parties have subordinated its ratification to the withdrawal of Russian military bases and equipment from Moldavia and Georgia as set out in the so-called Istanbul agreements signed by Boris Yeltsin in 1999. Russia has repeatedly underlined that there is no connexion between the two questions. In fact, Russia is withdrawing its troops from Georgia, while in Moldova their departure is contingent upon the Moldavian Government signing the Memorandum on the constitutional principles of the united state (Moldova and Transdnistria). The diplomatic deadlock has so far prevented the troops' pull-out and the dismantling of the huge ammunition depots in the region. President Putin called an extraordinary CFE conference in Vienna on 12-15 June 2007 that ended with no agreement on the Russian proposals. After the suspension's entry into force, Russia could reject the flank restrictions and strengthen the Kaliningrad Region, the Leningrad military district and the North Caucasus army groups. However, the possibility might be postponed if the US changes its stance on the ABM deployment on European soil.

The European governments must realise that the deployment of ABM elements will force Russia to modify its nuclear planning to include new targets. Thus, the initiative could bring conflict situations within the NATO alliance and the EU. First, in the event of interception, missile debris will fall on European soil with the potential risk of nuclear fragments. Secondly, the ABM deployment works against Russian-NATO cooperation to achieve a non-strategic Theatre Missile Defence (TMD). A joint TMD group has developed force application concepts and computer training but is still in the stage of negotiation. The Alliance is developing its own TMD against short-range missiles to cope with potential attacks to its southern flank. Meanwhile, it has decided to focus not on developing or purchasing specialised Missile Defence systems, but on updating its anti-aircraft defence systems (which have antimissile interception potential) in a number of NATO countries. Russia's S-300PMU-1 and S-300PMU-2 anti-aircraft missile complexes were also mentioned as a possible base for a European ABM system, but they do not match NATO standards –Greece, however, has S-300PMU-1 and Thor-M1 in its inventory–.

The ABM deployment will sharpen the tension between the 'old' and the 'new' members of the Alliance. US compensation to the Czech Republic and Poland will heighten their status in NATO and also their military importance. Together with the significant amount of money to be invested in the local authorities, industrial corporations will gain access to new technologies in the ABM area and armed forces will receive additional equipment, such as Patriot surface-to-air missile systems. This special relation with the Eastern members of the 'New Europe' will aggravate the controversies within the Alliance and will also affect EU coherence, given the persistence of 'Atlanticist' and 'Europeanist' sub-groupings within both organisations.

Finally, according to the Congressional Budget Office's preliminary estimates, the creation of the North American Missile Defense system would cost around US\$60 billion, although the could be almost double by 2015 if expenditure remains at current levels: US\$7 billion in 2003, US\$7.7 billion in 2004, US\$7.6 billion in 2005, US\$7.8 billion in 2006, US\$9.3 billion in 2007 and

US\$10.85 billion requested for 2008. Regardless of its great cost, the ABM system is far from cost-effective. According to the famous physicist Theodore Postal, of the Massachusetts Technological Institute, test results are nothing but 'scientific cheating' because in the few cases where interceptor missiles hit the 'enemy' target the tests were conducted in ideal conditions. So nobody knows how the system will perform in real battle conditions.

Conclusions: The Russian suggestions concerning the Gabala radar installation are in accord with the aim of bilateral cooperation, but the US has refused the offer on the grounds that its early missile-notification radar provides no target designation for the US ABM Command Centre. President Putin's suggestion does not intend to change the American project's geography, but its very concept. However, the situation could vary if his suggestions were to include radar equal to the X-range radar, which the US is planning to deploy in the Czech Republic. This shows that there is still the scope for mutually beneficial agreements, despite Washington's mistaken refusal to engage in political and technological cooperation.

The potential access of terrorist groups to ballistic missiles could become a major source of risk for international security over the next decade, as well as the proliferation of launching sites. Hence the need for bilateral cooperation between the US and Russia to overcome their current differences. The first step could be a common assessment of the existing global threats in the NATO-Russia Council, which is the main venue for such an analysis. The second would be the multilateral research, development and deployment of joint ABM elements under collective control to increase the responsibility of the European allies in the decision-making process and to increase the guarantees for Moscow that the system is not at Russia.

The easiest solution for the US would be to create a joint All-European ABM system with Russia. Certainly, the media would declare it a 'historical event' and President Bush would gain the great 'victory' he is seeking. However, it all depends on the approval of the global AMD project, which is still very much open to doubt. The US Senate's Armed Services Committee advocates the reduction of budgetary expenditure on the project because of Russia's opposition to the deployment of ABM elements in Europe. The Senate has also pointed out that the programme's implementation without NATO participation will cost US\$4 billion, and NATO has made no decision on creating ABM systems in its territory. However, NATO will feel reluctant to share the financial burden, especially because of doubts on its technical feasibility.

Furthermore, September 11 2001 has proved that intercontinental missiles can be easily replaced by hijacked civilian aircraft and a gang of suicide bombers.

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