

# WebMemo



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## Putin's Missile Defense Proposal Leaves Key Questions Unanswered

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Today at the G-8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, President George W. Bush announced that the United States and Russia are opening consultations on locating missile defense systems in Europe.<sup>1</sup> This comes in response to a Russian proposal to include a Russian radar in Azerbaijan in the mix of missile defense facilities that the U.S. had proposed to locate in the Czech Republic and Poland. The proposal may indicate a new openness on the part of Russia to missile defense facilities in Europe.

While the appearance of Russian openness may be encouraging, it is important for the American public and Congress to understand that the new consultations are the beginning of a process, not the conclusion of an agreement. As such, they raise important questions that only the consultations themselves can answer. Congress in particular needs to be aware of these important questions and to seek answers to ensure that any future agreement serves the national security interests of the U.S. and its allies.

Among the important questions raised by today's announcements are the following:

**Question #1: Is Russia seeking a veto over U.S. missile defense plans for Europe?** If so, then the consultation process will not serve U.S. and allied interests. Congress should seek assurances from the Bush Administration that the consultations will not result in giving Russia a veto over U.S. missile defense plans for Europe.

**Question #2: Is Russia using the consultation process as a means to exercise undue influence over U.S. allies in Eastern Europe?** Previous Russian opposition to the fielding of a missile defense in Europe seemed to be driven more by Russia's foreign policy interests in Europe than concerns about its national security. In short, it appeared that the Russians were using the issue to intimidate Eastern Europe. It is possible that the consultation process could serve the same purpose in a different guise. The Bush Administration and its allies should establish a negotiating policy that serves to block Russian attempts to exercise undue influence in Eastern Europe.

**Question #3: Is Russia's proposal to furnish access to a radar facility in Azerbaijan designed to augment the systems planned for the Czech Republic and Poland or to replace them?** The Bush Administration has proposed to field radar and interceptors in the Czech Republic and Poland. This combination will provide protection against long-range missiles launched from states like Iran in the direction of Europe or the U.S. A missile defense radar facility in Azerbaijan alone would not provide this protection. National Security Advisor Stephen

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Hadley, in his press briefing, seemed to indicate that Russia's offer would augment the other facilities.<sup>2</sup> The Bush Administration should clarify that the Russians share this understanding.

**Question #4: Does the Russian proposal indicate that Russia is now taking Iran's nuclear program seriously?** A positive interpretation of Russia's proposal is that Russia is growing increasingly wary of Iran's pursuit of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. Though missile defense assets in Europe would address more than just the Iranian threat, the Bush Administration should use the consultation process to clarify Russia's interest in collaboration to address the kind of shared security concerns presented by Iran's behavior. Specifically, the Bush Administration should encourage the Russians to assess the nuclear stability challenges of a proliferated environment and should seek to arrive at an understanding of how to maintain stability in such an environment.

**Question #5: Is the U.S. prepared to negotiate from a position of strength?** The capabilities of the missile defense systems planned for the Czech Republic and Poland are extremely limited. If the Russians ask for significant concessions on future missile defense capabilities in Europe, the result could easily be a token defense. Obtaining sufficient negotiating strength requires that the U.S. pursue a global missile defense capability that includes Europe and is unfettered in terms of the technology

that it uses. This is where Congress must play a positive role. It should not impose technological or undue funding restrictions on the missile defense program. If Congress undercuts the U.S. negotiating position, the talks with Russia will fail. Likewise, the Bush Administration will need to reassure U.S. allies as a part of this process. Allied cooperation will also enhance the U.S. position, but it can come only from a shared approach that assures allies that their interests will not be abandoned in the pursuit of an expedient agreement with Russia.

**Conclusion.** Successful diplomacy requires a clear understanding of the national interest, a determined policy to negotiate from a position of strength, and an unbending determination to realize the essential goals of the diplomatic exchange. Consultations with Russia about missile defenses in Europe will require these three things. This does not mean that the United States must be confrontational, just persuasive. President Bush's announcement in Germany may mark a historic breakthrough with Russia on missile defense. Whether this is so will depend on what the Bush Administration, Congress, and U.S. allies do in the course of the consultation process.

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1. The White House, "President Bush Meets with President Vladimir Putin of Russia," Press Release, June 7, 2007, at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/06/print/20070607-7.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/06/print/20070607-7.html).
2. The White House, "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley," Press Release, June 7, 2007, at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/06/print/20070607-6.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/06/print/20070607-6.html).