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International Missile Defense: Ensuring America's Safety and Its Global Alliances

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A comprehensive missile defense system offers protection to the United States, its forward-deployed troops, and its allies. An amendment by Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) to pull \$225 million from proposed "third site" ground missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic¹ will not only subject the plan to unnecessary delays but also give two of America's closest European allies the impression that their interests can be discarded at will. Congress must authorize the funds necessary for the Department of Defense to provide adequate protection against ballistic missile attack and ensure that America does not unnecessarily lose the diplomatic goodwill of its steadfast allies.

Missile Defense in Europe. Efforts to expand the U.S. missile defense shield into Europe by building additional installations in Poland and the Czech Republic represent the culmination of an idea first conceived in Europe during World War II.

When Nazi Germany launched the first successful ballistic missile attack on London in 1944, it began a reign of terror for which the Allied powers had no answer. A merciless onslaught by the silent, pilotless V-2 rockets leveled vast parts of London and exacted a huge loss of life.

It was in this desperate setting that Winston Churchill first envisaged a comprehensive ballistic missile defense.

Today, the situation is even more perilous, as the whole of the West faces threats from rogue states such as Iran and North Korea as well as non-state actors such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.

North Korea, one of the poorest and bleakest places on the planet, completed several missile tests last summer including a long-range Taepo-Dong-2 missile. Iran, subject to U.N. Security Council sanctions, already has the medium-range Shahab-3 ballistic missile, which can travel 1,250 miles. Hezbollah's estimated 13,000 missiles were its primary weapon of choice in the Israeli-Lebanon conflict last year.²

However, the West now has the ability to confront at least some of these challenges.

Ten long-range, ground-based missile defense interceptors in Poland and a mid-course radar in the Czech Republic will strengthen transatlantic security and counter the evolving Middle Eastern ballistic missile threat. The Dodd amendment, however, will delay the proposed construction date of 2008 and the operational target date of 2012.

Ground-based missile defense in Europe is a very good idea. Europe, like the United States, is vulnerable to terrorist attacks and aggressive acts of war. The suggestion that relatively modest U.S. installations in Poland and the Czech Republic would make those countries more vulnerable to attack misses the point completely.³ Terrorist atrocities

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committed by Islamic fascists in Washington, New York, Madrid, London, and Istanbul were attacks on the principles of freedom and liberty that define Western civilization, and so require a united transatlantic response. As Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek said: “The point is not only to site the facility in the Czech Republic, but this is about the joint will for defense of freedom. ... That’s why we want to be involved.”⁴

Building Alliances. Third site installations allow the United States to extend its own security umbrella and protect its European allies. For Warsaw and Prague, this would mark a milestone in their integration into the transatlantic security community. They would be providing a significant contribution to NATO and making a powerful statement in support of the alliance’s principle of mutual defense.

Hosting missile defense facilities would also offer Poland and the Czech Republic a special defense relationship with the United States. The project entails genuine cooperation between Washington and new, solid allies who have expressed an interest in building more enduring alliances with the United States. In his seminal 1946 “Sinews of Peace” speech, Churchill explained that interoperable capabilities, personnel exchanges, and doctrinal commonality were the lynchpins of the Anglo-American “Special Relationship.”⁵ The long-standing radar station at Fylingdales in the United Kingdom is a potent symbol of the enduring military alliance that contributes to the “Special Relationship.” If Poland and the Czech Republic really do aspire to closer military and diplomatic ties with the

United States, hosting third site installations would be a tangible sign of transatlantic alliance-building. As Martin Povejsil, member of the Czech negotiating team, said, “a concrete U.S. presence in the Czech Republic enhances the strategic importance of this country.”⁶

It would be unacceptable for the United States to subject its allies to a roller coaster of uncertainty about the future of its European bases. Poland has been a staunch ally of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan against a tremendous public backlash. The Topolánek Government of the Czech Republic has also staked enormous political capital in the missile defense project. Signs from Washington that it is backing out would confirm criticism from domestic opposition parties that the Kaczyński and Topolánek governments have become mere supplicants of Washington. That chain of events would do enormous damage to Washington’s bilateral relationships with both allies.

The success of the Dodd amendment and the failure of third site negotiations would also embolden those in Russia who believe that the United States is negotiating from a position of diplomatic and military weakness. Putin would claim—with some credibility—to have scored a diplomatic victory over the United States. Failure would also increase Russian boldness in intimidating former satellite states. Stronger defenses do not increase the risk of aggression; to deliberately make the United States and its allies vulnerable to rogue nations in the face of Russian pressure, however, would be deeply destabilizing.

1. Jen DiMascio, “Proposed Amendment Would Pull Missile Defense Funds for National Guard Reset,” *Defense Daily*, July 12, 2007.
2. Frank Gardner, “Hezbollah Missile Threat Assessed,” *BBC News Online*, August 3, 2006, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5242566.stm.
3. The approximate size is 275 hectares (680 acres) for an interceptor missile site and approximately 30 hectares (12 acres) for a single radar site. “Fact Sheet—United States Missile Defense: Technical Details,” Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, April 16, 2007.
4. “Old Comrades Harden EU Line Against Russia,” *Financial Times*, June 28, 2007.
5. Winston Churchill, “The Sinews of Peace,” speech given at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946, at www.nato.int/docu/speech/1946/s460305a_e.htm.
6. Tom Hundley, “European Voters Say No Thanks to U.S. Missile Plan: Ahead of Bush Visit, Symbolic Referendums Show Wide Opposition,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 4, 2007, at www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-referendumjun04,1,1827383.story.

Strengthening NATO. There is no reason to believe that the new systems will be anything other than a complement to NATO's three-track approach to missile defense.⁷ In fact, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stressed the threat from ballistic missile attack at a special meeting in Brussels in April.⁸

In that respect, Poland and the Czech Republic have an opportunity not only to demonstrate their commitment to NATO but also to lead the charge in rejecting the duplication and decoupling of NATO powers by the European Union through its European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). NATO is the most successful multilateral alliance in modern history and represents the United States' commitment to transatlantic security. The creation of duplicate military structures with autonomous decision-making powers independent of NATO represents a major geopolitical rupture between Europe and Washington which serves neither. As Prague's Deputy Prime Minister Sasha Vondra said: "Without the American umbrella over Europe, there will be further decoupling. We need this to keep the transatlantic alliance strong."⁹

A recommitment by Prague and Warsaw to NATO, and to their respective bilateral alliances with the United States, would send a powerful message in support of a European Union of independent, self-determining nation-states. The United States must play its part if new member states of the EU are to undertake this mammoth task.

Furthermore, the tangential economic gains resulting from high-level technological developments and increased research and development projects are not inconsequential. For growing economies like Poland that are trying to woo back the enormous number of emigrants following EU accession, a focus on big ticket industries is not a bad idea.

Conclusion. Representative Trent Franks (R-AR) recently stated: "While there may be disagreement between Democrats and Republicans regarding the circumstances under which our offensive military capabilities should be utilized, building a defense against looming threats should be a bipartisan effort."¹⁰ Removing key funding is a risky move by Congress on both the security and diplomatic fronts. As part of a multi-layered system, the third site installations will strengthen both U.S. and European security and protect against current and future threats, but they cannot be built overnight. Congress must display resolve and leadership by providing adequate funding to take this step toward solidifying the transatlantic security alliance.

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7. "NATO Agrees on Missile Defence Way Forward," NATO Web site, June 14, 2007, at www.nato.int/docu/update/2007/06-june/e0614a.html.

8. "NATO United on Missile Defence Approach," NATO Web site, April 19, 2007, at www.nato.int/docu/update/2007/04-april/e0419a.html.

9. Ian Traynor, "Villagers Revolt as Bohemian Hilltop Set to be Eyes and Ears of 'Star Wars': Pentagon Space Shield Plan Raises Stakes with Russia - And Local Czechs," *The Guardian*, June 13, 2007, at www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,,2101485,00.html.

10. Trent Franks, "Indefensible: An 800-Million-Dollar Mistake in the Making," *National Review Online*, May 14, 2007, at <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=MDg3YTJkM2QxMzVjYTg3ZGRiYThlYWVmMDJjZjc4YjI=>.