

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1966  
June 24, 2008

## Missile Defense in Europe: The Window of Opportunity Is Closing

*Sally McNamara and Baker Spring*

Despite a number of positive signals regarding America's plan to field a U.S. missile defense system in Europe, two setbacks now threaten the possibility of concluding a final deal before the end of the Bush Presidency:

1. Despite NATO's emphatic endorsement of America's plan to field 10 long-range, ground-based missile defense interceptors in Poland, negotiations between Warsaw and Washington remain stalled over the question of America's long-term military assistance to Poland.
2. Recent press reports indicate that Congress will insist on additional testing for the rockets that are proposed to be located in Poland. Such a demand would significantly delay the fielding of the operational system until later than the 2013 target date.

A comprehensive missile defense system offers protection to America, its forward deployed troops, and its allies. Such a system would also bolster transatlantic security by protecting both the United States and Europe from the growing danger of long-range ballistic missiles and the evolving Middle Eastern threat. However, mired bilateral negotiations and unbending congressional limitations represent a serious threat to the future of a final deal on the "third site."

**Stalled Negotiations.** America's missile defense plans for a "third site" in Europe—10 interceptors in Poland and a mid-course radar in the Czech Republic—had been boosted in recent months. At their

annual summit in Bucharest in April, NATO leaders endorsed America's plans in what Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described as a "breakthrough agreement."<sup>1</sup> The communiqué issued by the NATO alliance states:

Ballistic missile proliferation poses an increasing threat to Allies' forces, territory and populations. Missile defence forms part of a broader response to counter this threat. We therefore recognise 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.<sup>2</sup>

Washington has also concluded its negotiations with the Czech Republic over the stationing of the radar in Brdy, and pursuant to final approval in Prague, Secretary Rice will likely sign the missile defense agreement in Prague in July.

However, negotiations with Warsaw have not run so smoothly. Despite Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski's statement in Washington in February that "the impasse in the negotiations over the anti-missile shield has been broken," significant

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/BallisticMissileDefense/wm1966.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/BallisticMissileDefense/wm1966.cfm)

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 • [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

progress has not been made since then.<sup>3</sup> A flurry of high-level meetings, offers and counter-offers have failed to kick-start the negotiations, and Poland remains entrenched in its position, calling for a substantial package of aid for Polish military transformation, including a billion-dollar mobile air defense system. Recent news reports—vigorously denied by the Bush Administration—indicate that America conducted surreptitious negotiations with the Baltic state of Lithuania in May as an alternative option for the stationing of the interceptors. The White House does not, however, deny that Administration officials visited Lithuania to update them on missile defense *per se*.<sup>4</sup>

Lithuania stands as a viable, practical alternate location for hosting the interceptors in terms of the availability of suitable sites, the area of coverage and the level of protection provided for America and its European allies.<sup>5</sup> Although Poland remains Washington's primary choice, it is not inconceivable that Washington has quietly enquired elsewhere. While negotiations between Washington and Vilnius have not been formalized, it is likely that informal discussions have taken place, if not merely to gently push Warsaw closer to the negotiating table.

The Administration is keen to make progress on the third site as soon as possible, and time is pressing in two respects:

1. If a deal fails to be concluded by the end of the summer, it is unlikely that the Administration will be able to conclude a deal before President Bush leaves office. Any missile defense deal would then be dependant on the political ideology of the next administration.
2. The Iranian threat is time-critical, with their long-range missile development and clandestine nuclear weapons programs projected for initial operating capability in the 2013–2015 time-

frame—or even earlier with the support of rogue regimes such as North Korea.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the above-cited factors, a new stage has been reached in third-site negotiations with Warsaw. Although not quite at the stage of brinkmanship, the opportunity for agreement is tightening. The Administration is operating under severe time constraints, so it is plausible—and sensible—that it is not putting all its missile defense eggs in one basket. However, failed negotiations with Warsaw, coupled with a quickly concluded deal with Lithuania, will greatly damage this new era in Polish–American relations. Such failure will also draw further ire from Moscow, who will declare a victory over Warsaw while simultaneously claiming American provocation. Warsaw must not underestimate the long-term implications of failing to reach an agreement over the positioning of interceptor missiles in Poland.

**Congressional Demand for Testing.** The 2013 target date for having the third site operational will suffer a second setback if Congress insists on following traditional acquisition procedure while pursuing a third-site location. The traditional acquisitions procedure demands successful operational testing in advance of deploying a system in the field—an approach that would be inappropriate and unwise.

The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has established that the overall missile defense program aims to field an integrated system of systems. In order to be tested, such a multi-component system must first be constructed. Accordingly, the MDA has used a spiral development approach—that is, testing and fielding activities will run concurrently, not sequentially, making the traditional acquisition approach inappropriate.

The traditional acquisition approach is also unwise because the ballistic missile capabilities of

1. Matthew Lee, "Bush Wins NATO Nod on Missile Defense," Associated Press, April 3, 2008.
2. Bucharest Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on April 3, 2008, at [www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html](http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html) (June 24, 2008).
3. MDA Digest, Missile Defense Agency, February 4, 2008.
4. Vanessa Gera, "US talks missile defense with Vilnius," Associated Press, June 18, 2008
5. Geoff Morrell, U.S. Department of Defense News Briefing, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, June 17, 2008
6. The Defense Intelligence Agency predicts Iran could have intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) by 2015.

countries like Iran continue to advance. Every day the fielding of missile defense is delayed is another day the U.S. and its allies remain vulnerable to attack from rogue states pursuing ballistic missile capability.

Regrettably, Congress is currently insisting on the traditional acquisition approach for the interceptors to be placed in Europe. Section 222 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (H.R. 5658) limits the availability of acquisition funds for the interceptor program until the Secretary of Defense certifies that certain operational tests have been completed.<sup>7</sup> There is no good reason for Congress to insist on this restriction. The interceptor missile in question does not represent a dramatic advancement in technology. It simply involves modifying the existing three-stage missile already in the field in Alaska and California into a two-stage missile.

A better approach would be for Congress to permit the fielding of the modified missiles and insist that the Missile Defense Agency take periodic steps under the spiral development approach to upgrade the missiles over time and undertake operational tests in that context. Such an approach would real-

ize the 2013 fielding goal for missile defenses in Europe and close what otherwise could be a gap in U.S. and allied defenses.

**Urgent Need for Action.** On both sides of the Atlantic, there remain significant obstacles to deploying a U.S. missile defense system in Europe. But President Bush is right that the need for missile defense in Europe is both real and urgent.<sup>8</sup> The number of nuclear weapons states is increasing, as is the number of states with ballistic missiles. The United States has rightly decided that it must not leave itself vulnerable to any weapons system or state and that comprehensive missile defense, including Europe, will significantly enhance mutual national security. However, the window of opportunity is slowly closing, and incredible political capital and leadership are required if Washington and Warsaw are going to reach a deal before the end of the summer.

—Sally McNamara is Senior Policy Analyst in European Affairs for the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom. Baker Spring is E.M. Kirby Research Fellow in National Security Policy in The Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies.

7. Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, H.R. 5658, 110th Cong., at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-5658> (June 24, 2008).

8. President George W. Bush, Remarks Before the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2007, at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071023-3.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071023-3.html) (June 24, 2008).