

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2173
December 12, 2008

Abandoning Third-Site Missile Defenses Would Threaten Transatlantic Security

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When President-elect Barack Obama finally makes his decision about whether to proceed with deployment of U.S. missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic, he should know that the implications of that decision will reach far beyond Warsaw and Prague: It is a decision on which the future of the transatlantic security alliance itself rests. If the United States chooses to abandon its Central and Eastern European allies as well as its obligations to NATO, it will hand the European Union a blank check to pursue an autonomous defense identity, independent of NATO, and will reduce America's influence within the transatlantic alliance significantly.

NATO. At NATO's foreign ministerial summit in Brussels last week, all 26 members of the alliance re-endorsed the "third site" deployment of 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic. The communiqué stated:

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.¹

NATO's initial and unequivocal backing for these missile-defense assets at the Bucharest Summit in April was described by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as a "breakthrough agreement."² She was correct. Since the Bucharest Summit, there has been a solid acknowledgment within the alliance that missile defenses add to European security, and that NATO should pursue its own NATO-wide mis-

sile defense system in conjunction with the third-site installations.³ It would now verge on diplomatic suicide for Obama to begin his Presidency by tearing up the Bucharest communiqué, and such action would seriously undermine Mr. Obama's vow to rebuild a strong NATO.⁴

If Mr. Obama is serious about reasserting America's leadership within NATO and rallying European support within the alliance, it is important that he starts off on the right foot. The Bucharest Summit was a fairly successful summit in spite of the alliance's differences on enlargement and Afghanistan. To turn this success into a failure would deal a massive blow both to the alliance and to Obama's personal leadership within NATO.

The Threat. Iran recently reported a successful launch of a two-stage, solid-fuel rocket, capable of hitting Europe.⁵ With Tehran's long-range missile development program, and on-going clandestine nuclear weapons program, the transatlantic alliance can not afford to ignore or downplay the threat posed by the world's number-one state sponsor of terrorism.

Although Obama will likely implement a new policy with regard to Iran, it must not impinge upon the

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm2173.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

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United States' determination to proceed with European-based U.S. missile defenses. The United States can no longer rely on the principle of mutually assured destruction for its protection and therefore requires a greater mix of offensive and defensive capabilities to defend against rogue states and non-state actors seeking to attack the United States and her allies with ballistic missiles. Delaying the third-site deal in order to negotiate with Iran or verify their ballistic missile capabilities would allow U.S. national security—and that of America's allies—to potentially be held hostage by Iranian duplicity.

President Sarkozy and Europe. Standing next to Russian President Dmitri Medvedev last month, French President Nicholas Sarkozy called for a temporary moratorium on the planned missile defense deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic.⁶ Speaking to the European Parliament immediately before the NATO Summit last week, French defense minister Hervé Morin also questioned the need for, and the costs of, deploying missile defenses in Europe.⁷ Having engineered a return to “business as usual” between the EU and Russia, Sarkozy has sent a clear message to the United States that he intends to push for a closer relationship between Brussels and Moscow regardless of Washington's or NATO's interests.

The French position however, should not be interpreted as speaking for Europe as a whole. Although it has been a long and at times arduous journey, the third-site deal has revealed Poland and the Czech Republic to be solid American allies. Indeed, both Poland and the Czech Republic continue to stand behind their commitment on third-site deployment, and both have invested incredible political and diplomatic capital in holding up their ends of the bargain. If Mr. Obama wishes to see these friendships prosper, it would be unwise to casually disregard them in favor of the European Union's “Russia first” policy.

Mr. Obama would also be wise to make a decision on his position sooner rather than later. Shortly after Obama's election victory, Polish President Lech Kaczynski congratulated him and stated that “the missile defence project would continue.”⁸ However, the Obama camp quickly clarified that position, saying that no commitment had been made to the deal, and Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski has since said that Warsaw does not know which position the new Administration will adopt on missile defense.⁹

Such ambiguity does not build confidence. Also, it further strains an already-contentious legislative battle over missile defense in Prague, where the governing ODS-coalition does not have enough seats in

1. Press Release, “Final Communiqué of the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers, NATO, December 3, 2008, at <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/pr08-153e.html> (December 8, 2008).
2. Matthew Lee, “Bush Wins NATO Nod on Missile Defense,” Associated Press, April 3, 2008, at http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8VQFLM01&show_article=1.
3. “NATO: Euro Missile Shield Worth Pursuing,” United International Press, November 25, 2008, at http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/11/25/NATO_Euro_missile_shield_worth_pursuing/UPI-84441227627985 (December 8, 2008).
4. Barack Obama stated during his campaign that he is committed to “rebuilding a strong NATO and rallying European support for Afghanistan.” See “Barack Obama and Joe Biden: A Stronger Partnership with Europe for a Safer America,” at <http://www.barackobama.com> (December 8, 2008).
5. Borzou Daragahi, “U.S. Denounces Iran over Long-Range Missile Test,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2008, at <http://www.latimes.com/news/print/edition/asection/la-fg-iran13-2008nov13,0,4051889.story> (November 18, 2008).
6. Marc Champion, “Sarkozy Urges U.S., Russia to Delay Missile Defense,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122671339527430157.html> (December 8, 2008).
7. Julian Hale, “French DM Casts Doubt on Need for Missile Defense,” *Defense News*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3846066> (December 8, 2008).
8. Walter Pincus, “Poland Won't Lobby Obama on Missile Defence,” *The Washington Post*, November 20, 2008, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/19/AR2008111903737_pf.html (December 8, 2008).
9. “Polish FM Wants Missile Defence Signal from Obama,” The Associated Press, November 20, 2008, at <http://www.ihf.com/bin/printfriendly.php?id=17979624> (November 25, 2008).

the lower chamber to guarantee approval of the third-site deal. The law of unintended consequences has shown that delay means disadvantage for U.S. interests. Furthermore, the lack of decisive action on this issue risks alienating America's closest allies in favor of strengthening those forces against missile defenses *per se*.

The European Union. Although Sarkozy went far beyond his limited mandate as president of the European Union to criticize third-site deployment, his position neatly encapsulates the wider issues at stake in the debate over missile defense. In a relentless pursuit for a common foreign and security policy, Sarkozy is seeking to diminish "new" Europe's sovereignty by questioning its temerity to exercise it in the first place. At the start of his presidency, Sarkozy said at that one of his primary goals was the rapid advancement of an EU defense identity separate from, and independent of, NATO.¹⁰ In the absence of additional European defense dollars or European soldiers, this separate defense identity is only possible at NATO's expense.

In its dying months, the Bush Administration acquiesced to the concept of an autonomous EU military identity while simultaneously entertaining the prospect of welcoming Paris back into NATO's integrated military command. This wrong-headed approach needs to be rethought. The issue poses the central question of whether primacy is to be given to NATO or the EU on questions of transatlantic security. The Obama Administration should only agree to French reintegration if Paris is willing to uphold the primacy of NATO in European defense

cooperation and if the NATO alliance is confident Paris will be a cooperative rather than a confrontational partner.

What Message to Send? On the issue of missile defense, specifically the third-site deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic, Obama has successfully—and probably deliberately—provided enough ambiguity to make a decision either way. On the one hand, he has pledged to field defenses against WMD attacks but on the other he has implied that ballistic missile defense programs are either ineffective, too costly, or both.¹¹

Moscow can already smell blood in the water. In his first state-of-the-nation speech, given within hours of Obama's election victory, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev threatened to deploy Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad if the third-site deal goes ahead.¹² If Obama now abandons the third-site missile defense program, his Administration will be forced to negotiate with Moscow from an inherent position of weakness for the rest of its term. He will also send a message to new members of the NATO alliance that their concerns matter less than those of continental Europe's traditional big powers. Abandoning the third-site deal on missile defense would have profoundly negative implications for the United States, its allies in Europe, and for the NATO Alliance.

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10. French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Work Programme, Ue2008.fr, July 1–December 31 2008, pp. 23–25, at http://www.ue2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/ProgrammePFUE/Programme_EN.pdf (December 8, 2008).

11. "Barack Obama and Joe Biden on Defense Issues," at <http://www.barackobama.com> (December 8, 2008).

12. Tony Halpin, "President Dmitri Medvedev orders missiles deployed in Europe as world hails Obama," *The Times*, November 6, 2008, at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article5090077.ece> (December 8, 2008).