

WebMemo



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Obama Administration's New Missile Defense Plan Is a Losing Proposition

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Today, President Obama reneged on a long-standing agreement with America's allies and formally abandoned the "third site" missile defense plan. The U.S. will no longer be deploying 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic, a plan formerly regarded as necessary for defending America's friends and allies as well as the homeland from intercontinental and intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

The decision runs contrary to U.S. strategic interests and will undermine security commitments to America's allies. The new plan to focus on the short- and medium-range threats from Iran:

- Represents a major reversal in American strategic thinking on missile defense,
- Leaves America more vulnerable to the emerging nuclear threat from Iran and North Korea, and
- Betrays key allies in Eastern and Central Europe.

Only Russia has expressed satisfaction with the announcement, which is a public relations victory for Moscow and a green light to Russian aggression and interference in the region. Congress should reject this revised plan, which is based on no new intelligence, and amend the pending 2010 defense spending bill to fully fund missile defense capabilities—including those for the third site. America can indeed afford to spend what it takes to counter all potential Iranian nuclear threats, from short- to long-range.

Encouraging Iranian Nuclear Ambitions. Obama's decision may further encourage Iran, which

continues to defy the West and expand its nuclear program in the hopes of achieving regional hegemony and projecting its power across the globe by wielding the threat of nuclear attack. With the third-site plan altered, there will be a gap in security. Iran will be one step closer to having the far-reaching destructive capabilities it seeks. Further, the U.S. is scrapping its plan while there is no evidence that Iran has stopped its long-range missile program.

The third site commitment was designed as a primary means of halting an Iranian nuclear missile attack. If the President's goal in abandoning this capability was to secure Russian support for other means of containing Iran—such as imposing newer, tougher sanctions—the initiative has already failed. The Russians have said clearly that they will not cooperate with the U.S. on any new sanctions during United Nations discussions.

The Administration has proposed an alternative program that currently provides less capability: the Navy's Aegis-based missile defense system. The Pentagon is billing the system as an improvement on third-site capabilities, claiming it will be "stronger, smarter and swifter" and "counter the current threat more effectively." There is reason to be skeptical

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about the strength of this commitment. The alternative may go the same route as third site as soon as outrage over third site dies down.

Abandoning America's Allies. The Obama Administration has abandoned Poland and the Czech Republic, both of whom have been stalwart partners in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Poles have fought side by side with the Americans in both theaters, and they recently sent more troops to Afghanistan to help with the election. Similarly, the Czech Republic is running a large Provincial Reconstruction Team and advising the Afghanistan Air Corps. Both countries have a painful history of being abandoned by the international community to the totalitarian ambitions of belligerent neighbors.

As Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) stated this morning, the Obama Administration's betrayal "turns back the clock to the days of the Cold War, when Eastern Europe was considered the domain of Russia." He expects that this will be perceived as "a bitter disappointment, indeed, even a warning to the people of Eastern Europe."

Arms Control Agenda Trumps All Else. Today's announcement clearly places an arms control agenda atop U.S. foreign policy priorities. After making drastic cuts to missile defense already this year, the Administration will be left with a choice of two possible strategies: (1) multilateral application of the Cold War policy of mutually assured destruction (MAD), or (2) disarmament.

The President appears to have abandoned MAD and placed all of the U.S. eggs in the disarmament basket. President Obama has already made numerous commitments to reduce U.S. nuclear stockpiles and sign onto expanded disarmament treaties while doing nothing to shore up the nation's missile defenses.

As Representatives Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), Ileana Ros-Lentinen (R-FL), Michael Turner (R-OH), and Elton Gallegly (R-CA) recently wrote in a September 8 letter to the President:

Another area of deep concern is the limitation on missile defenses and conventional forces that the Administration appears to be consid-

ering as part of the START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] follow-on agreement. Although Administration officials have testified that defensive systems will not be covered, the Joint Understanding states that START will include, "a provision on the interrelationship of strategic offensive and strategic defensive arms." Russian leaders have suggested that Moscow may not sign the treaty unless the U.S. abandons its European missile defense plans. We are concerned that the Administration may be considering any such limitation on U.S. missile defense and are opposed to its inclusion in any agreement.

A High-Stakes Gamble. Obama appears to have traded away the third site as part of START follow-on negotiations. If so, the U.S. is giving away too much without getting anything of value in return. Further, the President is waging a risky bet with Members of Congress as he ignores requests by Senators that START should not compromise missile defense; for urgent nuclear modernization; and for U.S. defense capabilities in space.

Congress should be very skeptical of the President's plan to abandon the third site and demand access to all updated intelligence. Further, Congress should insist that the U.S. not give away one capability (long-range) at the expense of another (short- and medium-range). With the U.S. broadcasting a lack of investment in necessary long-range capabilities, Iran is more likely to put additional money and resources into long-range missiles. The U.S. can fully afford to keep its security commitments and to develop capabilities designed to counter a range of short- to long-range threats. Congress should restore missile defense funding when the Senate takes up the fiscal year 2010 defense appropriations bill later this month.

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