

CHAPTER 4

MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM IN EUROPE

The issue of the United States' proposal to install a missile defense system in Europe prompted further tension between the two countries. The missile defense system was a major security policy drive of Washington, and its implementation required Washington to withdraw from the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty. During the early period of his administration, George W. Bush declared American disinterest in START II and the ABM Treaty and its determination to pursue robust missile defense.

This policy was met with resistance from Moscow, but the administration stuck to its goals. In December 2001, the Bush administration gave Moscow official notification of its intention to renounce the ABM Treaty within six months. Russia called the U.S. decision a mistake, but said that it would not cause a major disruption in relations. Similarly, in January 2002, Moscow reacted negatively to the Bush administration's proposed plans to put many of the nuclear warheads it was to withdraw from deployment in storage rather than destroy them.¹

In response to the United States' self-liberation from the ABM Treaty obligations on June 13, Russia announced that it would no longer consider itself bound by the provisions of the (unratified) START II Treaty on the same day. Furthermore, the

¹ Stuart D. Goldman, "Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* Code RL33407 (updated 31 May 2007): 18.

commander of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces announced that Russia would prolong the life of its MIRVed ICBM force, which, he said, could be extended another 10-15 years.²

Nevertheless, the dispute seemed to be subsiding in June 2003 when Presidents Bush and Putin exchanged instruments of ratification allowing the Treaty of Moscow, which sought to limit deployed strategic nuclear warheads with no interim timetable, no limits on the mix or types of weapons, and no requirement for destroying rather than storing warheads, to enter into force. They also agreed to cooperate in missile defense.³

A. 2007 Missile Defense System Proposal and Response from Russia

The difference over the missile defense system erupted again, however, in January 2007 when President George W. Bush declared that the U.S. government would start formal negotiations with the Polish and Czech governments to install an anti-missile defense system in their territory. The proposed plan is composed of 10 silo-based interceptors in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic and is expected to be completed in 2010. The purpose of the system is to protect American allies in Europe from possible missile attack launched from rouge states, especially those in the Middle East. \$10.4 million was allotted to construct the system. Although a 2006 poll by the Czech Center for Public Opinion Research revealed that 62% of the Czech population was against the system, the governments of both countries seemed to welcome the U.S.

² "Russian Political," 18.

³ Ibid., 18-19.

proposal.⁴ Since neither NATO nor the EU can efficiently counter such threats, a security blanket from Washington has become a desirable option.⁵

Again, the plan triggered harsh response from Moscow. On 10 February 2007, Putin said in a conference in Munich that the United States risked provoking a nuclear arms race by developing a ballistic missile defense system, that it was undermining international institutions, and that it had “overstepped its national boundaries in every way”.⁶ To Russia, the threat of any missiles from Iran and North Korea was largely symbolic since both of them are still incapable of producing 5,000-8,000 km. Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). Hence, the deterrence was actually directed towards Russia, not the rouge states. The tension was compounded by statements from Russian military officers, and later Putin himself, that all Russian missiles will be turned towards Eastern Europe if the system is to be installed.⁷

In an interview with journalists from the other G-8 countries in June 2007, Putin reaffirmed Russia’s assertion. He said Russia would not stand back and allow the United States to expand its nuclear potential in Europe, even though the interceptors that Washington intends to deploy in Poland would not carry nuclear warheads.

"If American nuclear potential grows in European territory, we have to give ourselves new targets in Europe," Putin was quoted as saying. "It is up to our military to

⁴ Judy Dempsey, “Poles and Czechs to talk with U.S. about missile defense system,” *International Herald Tribune* (24 January 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/01/24/news/germany.php>.

⁵ Judy Dempsey, “Poland wants U.S. to be 3rd leg of its security plan,” *International Herald Tribune* (21 April 2008), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/04/21/europe/poland.php>.

⁶ Brian Knowlton, “A top aide to Bush heads to Moscow after Putin criticism,” *International Herald Tribune* (20 February 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/02/20/news/shield.php>.

⁷ Ibid.

define these targets, in addition to defining the choice between ballistic and cruise missiles. But this is just a technical aspect."⁸

Furthermore, Russia threatened to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987 (INF), the first nuclear weapons agreement requiring the United States and the Soviet Union to remove 859 U.S. and 1,752 Soviet short- and intermediate-range missiles and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), which required 30 NATO and Warsaw Pact members to reduce and limit their military equipment. Putin further claimed that both treaties were unfair to Russia since Russia was to reduce a greater number of missiles under the INF treaty and was only one of the four countries that ratified the CFE treaty. On 7 November 2007, the Duma endorsed the suspension of Russia's membership to the CFE.

American officials insisted that the 10 interceptor missiles to be installed in Poland and the radar facility to be constructed in the Czech Republic would aim to block any eventual Iranian missile threat, while remaining inadequate to defend against any attack by Russia.⁹

⁸ Judy Dempsey, "Tough talk from Putin before G-8 meeting," *International Herald Tribune* (3 June 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/06/03/sports/putin.php>.

⁹ Ibid.

B. The Sphere of Influence

The issue was inevitably linked with the competition between the United States and Russia for supremacy over the CIS members. Anatoly Safonov, Putin's special envoy on counterterrorism, told a Reuters' interviewer in Brussels that the eastward expansion was the reason why the United States planned the deployments as NATO had pledged not to build military bases on former Warsaw Pact territory.¹⁰ Moscow viewed the plan as a violation of the 1990 agreements regarding German unification and of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, arrangements made to reassure Russia that NATO would not expand eastward.¹¹

In June 2007, Russia sought for a compromise. Putin made a proposal to share a Russian early warning radar in Gabala, Azerbaijan, a Central Asian country with boundaries adjacent to both Iran and Russia, and Washington's response will be held accountable for its sincerity. General Yuri Baluyevsky, chief of the general staff of the Russian armed forces, said that with Iran posing no immediate missile threat, the planned U.S. sites in Poland and the Czech Republic appeared to be aimed at the Russian nuclear missile arsenal, and if Washington were to reject this proposal, that would reveal America's real intention. Baluyevsky's statement was based on a conviction that the U.S. was endeavoring to weaken Russia's nuclear deterrent and deprive Russia of the ability to

¹⁰ "Tough talk from Putin."

¹¹ Celeste A. Wallander, "US-Russian Relations: Between Realism and Reality," *Current History* 102 issue 666 (October 2003): 310.

retaliate. He also believed that the Azerbaijan radar facility would keep the Iranian missile program in check and leave enough time for a response if a real threat evolved.¹²

In his meeting with Bush in July 2007, Putin once again made a compromise proposal. He offered to modernize the capabilities of the Azerbaijan radar as well as link the system to a new radar facility being built in southern Russia. He also proposed to bring in NATO and set up joint early warning missile launch centers, one already agreed to in Moscow and another in a European capital such as Brussels.¹³

In November 2007, American military officers visited the Russian facility in Azerbaijan. Although they were impressed by its magnitude, which is about twice the size of the similar American facility, and also by the upgrades and maintenance the Russians had performed since the 1970s, the Americans refused to use the facility due to its outdated vacuum-tube technology.¹⁴ The Russian system offers a broad view of the horizon and is useful for early warning, while the American system is designed to have rather narrow view but be very detailed and exact.¹⁵

To a large extent, Russia's concerns can be traced back to its shifting defense strategy. Russia's economic downturn compelled Putin to reform his defense policy by

¹² The Associated Press, "Russia warns U.S. against rejecting joint missile defense," *International Herald Tribune* (21 June 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/06/21/europe/EU-GEN-Russia-Us.php>.

¹³ The Associated Press, "Despite friendly veneer, policy differences chill Bush-Putin relationship," *International Herald Tribune* (1 July 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/07/02/america/NA-GEN-US-Bush-Putin.php>.

¹⁴ Thom Shanker, "U.S. Official calls Russian radar good, but not exact enough for tracking plan," *International Herald Tribune* (5 November 2007), <http://www.iht.com/bin/printfriendly.php?id=8186808>.

¹⁵ Thom Shanker, "Russia radar in Azerbaijan is unacceptable, missile defense chief says," *International Herald Tribune* (18 September 2007), <http://www.iht.com/bin/printfriendly.php?id=7557538>.

reducing Russia's strategic nuclear forces (from 6,000 to 1,500 deployed warheads) and shifting its focus from strategic to conventional forces. Still, because of the deterioration of its conventional forces, Russia has to rely increasingly on its nuclear forces to maintain its status as a major power.¹⁶ Hence, the missile defense was feasibly proposed to limit Russia's strategic intimidation of Eastern Europe.

The system also sharpened the division in Europe. Initially, Germany, France, and Spain opposed the proposal.¹⁷ However, internal political changes, especially the election of the pro-U.S. candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, for the French presidency, have caused these countries to moderate their stance. Furthermore, although the United States had tried to attain Russia's approval by inviting Russia to join the U.S. as a full partner in designing and operating the system, Poland still maintains strong opposition to the proposal.¹⁸

On the other hand, the Russians were able to gain new friends because of the proposal. The Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko, expressed his support for Moscow by saying that "the eastward movement of NATO's military infrastructure and the planned deployment of American missile-defense system elements in states neighboring Belarus seriously complicate the military-political situation near our borders... The unilateral disarmament or weakening of the security and defense

¹⁶ "Russian Political," 18.

¹⁷ Judy Dempsey, "Putin's harsh speech is seen as falling flat in Europe," *International Herald Tribune* (15 February 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/02/15/news/poland.php>.

¹⁸ The Associated Press, "NATO fails to sway Russia on U.S. missile plan," *International Herald Tribune* (25 October 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/10/25/america/shield.php>.

capability of Belarus and Russia cannot be permitted.”¹⁹ Other states, especially in Russia’s “near abroad” region, have also shown support in favor of Russia, which is largely due to their political and energy considerations.

C. Overall Analysis

According to a report by the Congressional Research Service, Russian objections include the following arguments: a) the proposed GMD, situated close to Russia’s borders, poses a threat to Russia’s strategic nuclear deterrent and retaliatory capabilities and is really directed against Russia, not against some non-existent Iranian or North Korean threat; b) Russia was not adequately consulted about the GMD deployment; c) the GMD system, if deployed, will spur a renewed nuclear arms race; d) the proposed deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic violate earlier U.S./NATO pledges to Moscow not to establish new military bases in those countries; e) the missiles deployed in Poland could have offensive capability to strike targets in Russia; f) the radar in the Czech Republic could be used to “spy” on Russia.²⁰

Many U.S. and European observers believe, however, that Russia’s objections to the GMD have other motives: a) to drive a wedge between the United States and its European allies; b) to drive a wedge between new NATO members such as Poland and the Czech Republic, which view Russia as unfriendly and potentially threatening, and West European NATO members such as Germany and France, which seek cooperation

¹⁹ The Associated Press, “Belarus leader lashes out at NATO, US missile defense plans,” *International Herald Tribune* (3 July 2007), <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/07/03/europe/EU-GEN-Belarus-Independence-Day.php>.

²⁰ “Russian Political,” 18.

and partnership with Russia; c) to use GMD as an excuse to renounce certain arms control agreements that Moscow now finds militarily constraining, and; d) to use GMD to “change the subject” from western criticism of various Russian domestic and foreign policies to criticism of U.S. “militarism” and “unilateralism”.²¹

It seems that the issue can be viewed in two ways: geography and strategy. From a geographic standpoint, Azerbaijan would be a more suitable location for the missile defense system. Given its location, a missile defense system in Azerbaijan would be more effective in intercepting missiles from the Middle East at an early stage and would be able to protect a larger area of Europe. Although the radar facility in Azerbaijan functions in a different manner, cooperative improvement of the already constructed system with Russia would be more economical and effective. Having the current radar system in Azerbaijan and the system proposed by Washington would provide both horizontal and detailed detection of any missile threat. On the other hand, such a system in Poland or the Czech Republic, situated in the northern part of Central Europe, would be less effective at protecting American allies in Eastern Europe, such as Ukraine, and in Southern Europe, such as Spain, since the distance from Central Asia to both areas is greater.

However, a strategic consideration leads to a different conclusion. The United States had already established its military presence in Azerbaijan, especially in the form of energy pipeline protection in the Caspian Guard Initiative. Furthermore, Azerbaijan

²¹ Ibid., 19.

was the only country free of Russian military bases.²² Meanwhile, an American military presence in Central Asia was absent even though Poland and Czech Republic had become NATO members. Hence, the missile defense system could serve as a cause for an initial American presence. Apart from protecting both allies from Russia's intimidation, Washington would be able to limit Russia's influence in Central Asia with the installation of a missile defense system in Europe.

²² "Russian Political," 15.