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International Missile Defense: Challenges for Europe

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Efforts to expand the U.S. missile defense shield into Europe by locating 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. Vast parts of London were leveled and huge loss of life was exacted as the silent, pilot-less V-2 rockets continued their merciless onslaught.

It was in this desperate situation 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. Iran, subject to U.N. Security Council sanctions, already has the medium-range Shahab-3 ballistic missile, capable of a range of 1,250 miles. Hezbollah's estimated 13,000 missiles were its primary weapon of choice in the Israeli-Lebanon conflict last year.¹

Now, however, the West has the ability to confront at least some of these challenges. Defense is the best offense to respond to the profound proliferation of medium- and long-range missiles.

Ten long-range ground-based missile defense interceptors in Poland and a mid-course radar in the Czech Republic—the U.S.'s "third site" ground missile defense installation—will strengthen transatlantic security and counter the evolving Middle Eastern ballistic missile threat. Subject to adequate congressional funding and a smooth legislative run in Warsaw and Prague, major construction could start in 2008, with operations commencing by 2012.

Ground missile defense in Europe is a very good idea. Europe, like America, is vulnerable to terrorist attacks and aggressive acts of war. Terrorist atrocities in Washington, New York, Madrid, London, and Istanbul were attacks on the principles of freedom and liberty and so require a united transatlantic response.

Third site installations allow America to extend its own security umbrella and protect its European allies at the same time. For Warsaw and Prague, this would be a milestone in marking their integration into the transatlantic security community. They would be providing a significant contribution to the NATO Alliance and a making powerful statement in support of NATO's principle of mutual defense.

Hosting missile defense facilities would also bring Poland and the Czech Republic a special

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defense relationship 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.² 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 U.S, their hosting third site installations would be a tangible sign of transatlantic alliance-building.

The suggestion that these relatively modest American installations would make Poland and the Czech Republic more vulnerable to Islamic terrorism misses the point completely.³ Islamic fascism is not an attack on American foreign policy, but rather an attack on the freedoms and liberty enjoyed by Western civilization. Besides which, al-Qaeda will have won a profound victory if it becomes capable of dictating the foreign policy agenda of democratic countries.

There is also no reason to believe that these systems will be anything other than a complement to NATO and its own work on missile defense.

In that respect, Poland and the Czech Republic have an opportunity to demonstrate not only their commitment to NATO, but to also lead the charge in rejecting the duplication and decoupling of NATO powers by the European Union, through the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP).

NATO is the most successful multilateral alliance in modern history and represents America’s solid commitment to transatlantic security. The creation of duplicate military structures with autonomous decision-making powers independent of NATO represents a major geo-political rupture between Europe and Washington which serves neither. A recommitment by Prague and Warsaw to NATO, and their respective bilateral alliances with the United States, would send a powerful message to Brussels’s elites in favor of a European Union of independent, self-determining nation-states.

The tangential economic gains, from high-level technological developments and increased research and development projects, are not inconsequential either. 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.

The third sites will increase all of Europe’s security and protect against both current and future threats. The governments involved must make a serious effort to overcome public hostility and misunderstanding about these installations. Equally, the Polish Sejm, the Czech Parliament, and the U.S. Congress will require resolve and will need to appropriate adequate funding to take this step toward solidifying the transatlantic security alliance.

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1. Frank Gardner, “Hezbollah Missile Threat Assessed,” BBC News Online, August 3, 2006 at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5242566.stm.
2. Winston Churchill, *The Sinews of Peace*, Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946, at www.nato.int/docu/speech/1946/s460305a_e.htm.
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.