

## U.S. Shelves Eastern Europe

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On September 17, the 70th anniversary of the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland, the Obama Administration abandoned plans to install missile defenses at the "Third Site" in Poland and the Czech Republic, arguing that Iranian progress towards long-range ballistic missiles is not as mature or developing as rapidly as the Bush Administration suggested. President Obama proposes instead to deploy ship-based defenses and land-based Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) interceptors to meet the existing Iranian challenge. Will this decision will embolden Iran's missile development program and diminish U.S. credibility among our allies?

For more than twenty years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been developing ballistic missile technology, with significant assistance from North Korea. At present Iran has effective short-, medium- and long-range missiles; in February 2009 it launched a communications satellite on a Safir-2 rocket and in May, demonstrated huge strides in its program by launching a Sejil-2 missile capable of striking much of Europe and the Middle East. The National Air and Space Intelligence Center and other U.S. intelligence agencies believe Tehran will develop longer-range missiles by 2015. Iran also has a nuclear program which many suspect is a front for the creation of weapons of mass destruction; earlier this month, U.S. intelligence concluded that Iran now has enough fuel to make a nuclear weapon.

The Bush Administration chose sites in Poland and the Czech Republic as geographically suited to intercept a long-range missile launched from Iran and capable of defending both Europe and North America. Such a missile defense system would deter Iranian missile development by anticipating a long-range threat rather than waiting for it to mature and would signal the Iranians that the U.S. was serious about defending its allies and its homeland from missile attacks. Defenses against Tehran's increasingly sophisticated short- and medium-range missiles are certainly needed. A commitment by President Obama to addressing those threats would have been a welcome and essential compliment to the continual work on the Eastern European site. Together they would have offered a layered defense to protect *both* Europe and the United States.

What of America's commitment to the young democracies in Eastern Europe? In July, twenty-two former leaders of Eastern European nations including Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa petitioned President Obama not to abandon plans for a missile shield. The Polish and Czech governments both spent much political capital in forging a political agreement to host American missile defense systems. This decision is widely seen as a concession to Russia, their feared former occupier. Mirek Topolaneck, the former Prime Minister of Czech Republic, said this announcement showed that the Obama Administration had lost interest in Central Europe. Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski noted, "countries that have U.S. soldiers on their territory do not get invaded," and a spokeswoman for the Polish Ministry of Defense called the announcement "catastrophic for Poland." Mr. Obama called Polish and Czech leaders after the decision to "reaffirm our deep and close ties" including U.S. responsibility under

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NATO's Article V to defend both against attack. Will they believe him?

Russia has vehemently opposed the proposed U.S. missile defenses near its borders, in spite of their small number and defensive nature. While a Pentagon spokesman said the decision "has nothing to do with Russia," it is widely believed that the Administration felt that it could win Russian support in pressuring Iran to give up its nuclear program and in aiding anti-Taliban actions in Afghanistan by abandoning this defensive system. President Obama sent Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev a letter in February offering to end the Third Site in exchange for

Russian pressure on Iran. Russia has promised nothing in return for the cancellation and nothing should be expected. The same day that President Obama announced his decision, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov declared Russia's strong opposition to new sanctions against Iran.

Iran is working feverishly to extend the range of its missile arsenal. Can the new defense approach meet that challenge? Will it be ready before Iran is? We have already lost valuable time. And what of Poland and the Czech Republic? How will the U.S. repair those relationships? At what cost? The President's decision leaves us with more questions than answers.