

# Working Paper

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## Missile Defense: A View from Warsaw

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**The current American administration has decided to examine the costs and reliability of deploying elements of Missile Defense system in Central Europe. When last August, the Polish centre-right government under Prime Minister Donald Tusk signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Washington together with a Missile Defense accord, it could have hoped that the entire plan to deploy an anti-missile system in Central Europe would not become subject to a complex re-examination. Not only did the former U.S. administration work hard to reach an agreement with Warsaw, which would have resulted in the deployment of 10 Ground-Based Interceptor (GBI) missiles on Polish soil, the Polish government was also hoping that its far-reaching demands for U.S. military assistance would have been met and the Polish military modernized. While Warsaw appeared to be well aware of the controversies that American plans would stir up among the Russians and even some in Europe, which have been evident ever since the start of official negotiations in May 2007, Warsaw, nonetheless decided to use the opportunity to push hard for an agreement on the stationing of Patriot missiles near the Polish capital by the end of 2009, as the declaration on strategic cooperation from 2008 had indeed stated. Yet, there appears to be a link between Iran's nuclear program, the importance of the Afghan mission to the Obama administration, nuclear disarmament, Moscow's opposition to the installations and the scrapping of plans for elements of Missile Defense system in Poland. Cooperation with Moscow on the above issues is, therefore, crucial for Washington. Finally, it is reasonable to suggest that the Tusk government should not rush the Obama administration, especially as it needs to consider negative public opinion at home.**

On 20 August 2008 representatives from both the American and Polish governments signed the declaration on strategic cooperation, together with a Missile Defense accord. Both documents were supposed to lay out the path for further American-Polish cooperation in three main fields: political-military cooperation, information sharing and finally, research and technology cooperation. Further, most of Warsaw's demands were accepted by Washington. This was inspired by the idea of a 'strategic partnership' between Poland and the U.S. and so complement the bilateral historical and cultural bonds, and set the stage for joint activities in the region. Such joint activities were to create additional security guarantees on top of collective defense provided by NATO. Therefore apart

from the Polish agreement to host interceptor missiles, the deal also included the stationing of Patriot missiles outside the Polish capital, as well as \$20 billion for the modernization of the Polish military. For the Americans, according to official statements by the American Department of State and the Department of Defense, the first priority was to develop an improved capability to defend the territory of the United States and its citizens from all enemies and, to a lesser extent Europe against a ballistic missile attack emanating from the Middle East. Despite official assurances, it is contentious to claim that at that time, anyone in Warsaw actually believed in America's intentions. Defending 'American friends and allies' against a potential Iranian missile strike, whether such threats were taken seriously or not in Europe, did not appear high on America's list of priorities. For that matter, it is no surprise that Warsaw did not perceive the Iranian missile threat in terms of its primary or direct concern, at least until recently.

### **An Offer You Can't Refuse**

The U.S.-Polish agreements constitute proof that Poland is hoping to be among the countries, that would benefit, in the long-term from the U.S. military industry and some of its technologies. First, the declaration on strategic cooperation between the U.S and Poland of August last year sets the ground for a binding strategic cooperation. Among other declarations, Washington has made a political commitment to ensure both Polish national security and that of American bases in Poland. Further, both signatories declared that they shall take the necessary action to stop any potential military or non-military threat generators as well as establish a Strategic Cooperation Consultative Group (SCCG), which would serve as the primary mechanism for furthering the U.S.-Poland strategic relationship. In relation to the deployment of 10 U.S. Ground-Based Interceptor missiles in Poland, a Missile Defense agreement was signed. The Agreement between Warsaw and Washington concerning their deployment on Polish territory confirmed Słupsk-Redzikowo in North-Western Poland as the location, as well as enhanced and complemented the existing security relationship between the two countries. However, there is still several creases to ironed out before the Agreement can be made official. First, a side agreement ("Poland-U.S. Supplemental SOFA"), which addresses the status of U.S. armed forces on Polish soil

needs to be finalized. Second, Sejm, the lower house of the Polish Parliament still needs to ratify both agreements. After which they would require the Presidential seal of approval. The latter causes little concern, as the Law and Justice (PiS) party of President, Lech Kaczyński has always favored the plans, the Civic Platform (PO) party however, to which Prime Minister Tusk is associated, is determined to stall their decision until the Obama administration makes up its mind.

The issue remains highly controversial, especially in the context of the U.S.-Russia START-1 negotiations. Incidentally, upon signing the agreements last August, more than half of Poles (according to the survey conducted by one of the Polish internet portals 53%) polled approved the government's decision to stall ratification of the U.S. Missile Defense deal until the decision of the new American administration. Since then, public approval has been dropping. It is reasonable to suppose that, the American decision to maintain the project in some form, while, at the same time doing everything to overturn the agreement has significantly influenced those perceptions as well as Moscow's objection.

### **Behind an American Shield?**

With the controversial U.S. Missile Defense grabbing the headlines, the Polish government was not in the best position to ignore the internal pressures and rush ratification. After months of wrangling, first over the elements of the Missile Defense system to be deployed on Polish soil, and then Patriot missiles along with provisions to support the modernization of the Polish military, the number of critics has grown considerably. According to the March 2009 report of the Warsaw-based Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), only 29% of the interviewees support the establishment of an American military base, which would include missile launchers on Polish soil. The report also indicates that more than half of Poles (again 53%) oppose the U.S. Missile Defense base in Poland. What is interesting to note, is the link between the interest in politics and public affairs and support for the American Missile Defense in Poland. The more the interviewee is interested in politics and public affairs, the more supportive of the agreements' arrangements he or she tends to be. The same applies to political preferences. Law and Justice voters are less reluctant to support the deployments. Moreover, 56% of the interviewees affirmed that the American plans for Poland

should be renounced in the event that Iran halts its armament plans and the nuclear program. However, those declaring an interest in politics and public affairs perceive such a link between American and Iranian plans as less important when declaring their support or not. Finally, a similar report from May 2008 polled opinions concerning a Russia's threat assessment. While 45% of the interviewees say that Moscow's objection cannot be justified, 31% of those believe that Russian fears are valid. To refer to the idea of Russia monitoring the construction of the American base in Poland, the previous Polish government was twitchy, but the Tusk government appears willing to accept Russian monitors. However, it should also be noted that more than half of Poles (61%) are against any Russian snooping. On the whole, this should not be surprising given that such a proposal evokes recent memories of Soviet troops on Polish soil, the last having left only in 1993.

### **Russian Objection: Keeping Cool**

There is no doubt that Moscow opposes the agreement on Missile Defense. As a matter of fact, Washington's wish to place interceptors for the system in Poland has provoked a rather furious response from Russia. The Kremlin has claimed that American military bases close enough to the Russian border risk starting a new cold war and as such amounted to a remilitarization of Europe. They have even gone as far as to threaten to station new short-range missiles in Kaliningrad – a Russian exclave situated between Poland and Lithuania – and to target existing Russian nuclear warheads on American installations in Poland. In addition to these threats, and also to weaken favor for the plans in Western Europe, themselves unhappy with the foreign policy of the Bush Administration and overall domination of Europe, Moscow pleaded the destructive paranoia of the ex-communist countries of Central Europe. According to Moscow, the Polish government's acquiescence to host a foreign military presence reflects excessive Polish fears and anxieties towards Russia. To put it another way, Moscow has been trying hard to convince the Americans that renouncing the Missile Defense in Central Europe is the best solution, particularly if they want Russian help in dissuading Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon capability, toppling the regime of Afghanistan or curb arms proliferation. This is how Russia has linked the issue of nuclear-arms control to the subject of the

opposed American Missile Defense and the deployment of 10 GBI missiles in Poland.

On the Polish part, Warsaw's stance on that matter has become a waiting game, that is waiting for Washington to make up its mind. Having, in the meantime realized that the planned interceptors would in the first place offer protection to American rather than Polish territory, the Tusk government has shifted its attention to the promise of military modernization and financial assistance. Therefore Warsaw is pushing hard to reach an agreement over the stationing of Patriot missiles, preferably PAC-3, outside the Polish capital by the years end. In addition, the Obama administration's waning commitment to Missile Defense, which, incidentally has been cut in the 2010 budget, has increased Polish concerns. The deployment of the Patriot missiles in Poland, agreed, in principle last August during the Georgia crisis – which to some extent aggravated fears of possible Russian aggression – would certainly provide extra reassurance to Poland's security arrangements. But above all, it has been suggested that in order to reach an agreement, further negotiations as regards a status of forces agreement (SOFA), which would regulate the legal and judicial status of any U.S. troops in Poland along with the projects financing would have to occur. These are planned for July 2009. This would certainly constitute a clear signal for Warsaw that last year's agreements are not proven to be empty promises.

### **Great Expectations: Perspectives on the Future of Planned Missile Defense in Central Europe**

Over the last twenty years, Poland has sought to advance its security status and international guarantees through active membership in NATO and later, accession to the EU. An example of this is the some 2,000 Polish troops stationed in Afghanistan, the sixth-largest contingent. According to the 2007 National Security Strategy, both organizations are the bedrock of Poland's security arrangements and yet, the U.S. remains the most important international security provider. As specified in the last year's agreements, the U.S. and Poland would work together to counter military as well as non-military threats. Essentially, bilateral cooperation in the framework of the agreement, which would provide for "the development of a durable and long-term strategic partnership" with the biggest NATO member was concluded in the belief

that it would add an extra security layer. However, striking the right balance between the partnership with the U.S. and European commitments may become a key challenge for the present government. While trying to re-negotiate the terms of the last year's agreements along with the deployment of Patriots in Poland, Warsaw would probably be confronted with Washington's reluctance to meet all of its substantial demands. Indeed for Tusk, the stakes are high. Even if Americans, officially speaking are offering reassurance that they are not willing to make concessions to Russia over Missile Defense, American-Russian cooperation has recently become a political reality. Despite the fact that the final decision on Missile Defense has not been made yet, Warsaw seems to be more concerned with the question of the modernization of the Polish military, including its obsolete air-defense system. The success of the July negotiations, that is the deployment of 100-110 U.S. soldiers and 196 missiles by the year-end, a quarter of what would be permanently deployed from 2012, is crucial, not only in the context of the increasing level of European commitments and past critics in terms of Polish "unconditional support for U.S. policies" and the status and prestige of the country being at risk, but also internal pressures. As official polls suggest, Polish public opinion is increasing less willing to support, without hesitation American foreign policy decisions.