

MIT Scientist Explains: Why U.S. Missile Defense Threatens Russia

by Marsha Freeman

The announcement in February 2007 by the Bush Administration that the United States had proposed to, and had already been in discussions with Poland and the Czech Republic to host components of an American ballistic missile defense (BMD) system, brought immediate and strong protests from Russia. High-ranking military officials, as well as the political leadership of Russia, insisted that such a deployment—of ten interceptor missiles in Poland, and an early-warning radar in the Czech Republic—threatens to compromise the strategic military and nuclear deterrence capabilities of their nation.

In response to the U.S. missile defense deployment plan, in his July meeting with President Bush at Kennebunkport, Russian President Vladimir Putin offered, instead, a joint program, which would use the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan, which the Russians lease, and a new, next-generation radar, being built in southern Russia. Putin's offer was made as a substitute for the Poland-Czech deployment, not as a complement.

While some U.S. military and political officials have expressed a positive response to the Russian proposal, the Administration has insisted that it will not back down on the Polish/Czech deployment, in part because it claims that whatever Russia can offer does not negate the advantages of those proposed sites.

The U.S. Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has protested that it is not the case that the proposed U.S. deployment in Europe is a threat to Russia, because it is limited in scope, and could not undermine Russia's numerically overwhelmingly superior strategic missile arsenal. Representatives of the Agency have travelled throughout Europe, to try to convince our allies that they will not be damaging their relations with Russia by supporting the eastern European U.S. missile defense deployment, because what the Russians are saying about it, is not true.

In the meantime, President Putin and Chief of Staff Gen. Col. Yuri Baluyevsky, have promised that there will be an "asymmetric response" to the U.S. ballistic missile defense deployment in Europe, including withdrawal from arms control agreements, the development of new generations of intercontinental ballistic missiles, and upgraded missile defenses to protect Russia. Most recently, Russian sources have hinted about forward-basing nuclear missiles in Belarus. The media, particularly in Great Britain, has tried to fan the flames of con-

frontation, describing the Russian response as the start of a "new Cold War."

To bring technically competent clarity to what has been reduced, in some cases, to the level of unsubstantiated accusations, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held a briefing on Capitol Hill Aug. 28, addressed by Dr. Ted Postol, professor of Science, Technology, and National Security Policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and former scientific advisor to the Chief of Naval Operations. Although Congress was not in session, the standing-room-only attendance at the briefing indicated the importance given to a scientific examination of the BMD question.

Discussions on BMD cooperation are continuing between U.S. and Russian experts. Later this month, American military officials will visit the Gabala radar site in Azerbaijan, with their Russian counterparts. Next month, a high-level so-called 2+2 meeting will take place in Russia, between the state and defense secretaries of both nations.

Dr. Postol's briefing was critically necessary, because Congress must be in an informed position to weigh in on this policy question, as the talks with Russia continue. Strategic relations between the U.S. and Russia hang in the balance.

Intercepting Russian ICBMs

In his presentation to Congressional staff, held in the hearing room of the House Armed Services Committee, Dr. Postol explained why the proposed U.S. ballistic missile defense system *is* a threat to Russia, and also proposed alternatives. He posed a series of questions that Congress should be asking, to be answered not with rhetoric, but with rigorous analysis.

Dr. Postol began his discussion by advising that Congress's "choices have to be made based on technical reality." What's at stake, he stated, is a "policy confrontation with Russia, if Russian complaints are technically legitimate."

During March, Postol reported, Lt. Gen. Trey Obering, director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, presented a briefing in Europe titled, "Missile Defense for U.S. Allies and Friends." It was designed to assure "allies and friends" that the U.S. missile defense deployment in Europe would protect them from Iranian missile attacks, but that it was not a threat to Russia.

During General Obering's presentation, a map titled, "In-



White House/Joyce N. Boghosian

In response to the U.S. plan to station a missile defense system in Poland, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a counter-offer, during his meeting July 2, with President Bush at Kennebunkport (shown here). Unfortunately, Bush refused to shake hands on the Putin proposal.

ceptors Cannot Catch Russian Missiles,” was shown, giving the trajectories for the Poland-based interceptors and Russian-launched ICBMs, to make that point (**Figure 1**). However, Dr. Postol’s analysis, taking into account the starting location of the western Russia-based ICBMs; the time it would take for the launch of Russia missiles to be acquired by the proposed Czech radar; and the known speed of the Russian ICBMs and of the prospective Poland-based interceptors, clearly shows that a Russian missile heading toward Washington, D.C., could be intercepted and destroyed by the missiles launched from Poland (**Figure 2**).

For some reason, Dr. Postol stated, the National Missile Defense (NMD) office used numbers that are incorrect, for the speed of the Russian ICBMs and of the interceptors, and the relative distances involved. He explained that, using the correct numbers, it is clear that, minutes after a Russian ICBM launch, the missile could be intercepted from behind by a Polish-based missile, which would be travelling at a slower speed. “The bottom line” he said, is that a “two-stage interceptor placed in Poland, could take on all [Russian] ICBMs [stationed] east of the Ural Mountains, launched toward the East Coast of the United States.” He charitably described the MDA slides in the presentation as “misleading.”

The point is, as Russian military authors have emphasized (see “Putin Moves To Outflank ‘Ring Around Russia’ Provocations,” *EIR*, June 15, 2007), that the role of these Europe-based anti-missile systems would be to suppress Russia’s retaliatory capability following a U.S. attack, hitting Russian second-strike missiles in their boost phase.

But the objection is raised that the proposed system consists of only ten interceptor missiles in Poland, and Russia has an overwhelming numerical advantage, in terms of ballistic missiles, so why all the fuss? Leaving aside the fact that the interception of even *one* Russian nuclear-tipped ICBM would be an act of war, in fact, it is not this near-term deployment that is of the greatest concern to Russia.

Dr. Postol, among many others, has serious concerns about the effectiveness of this U.S. ground-based interceptor system, which, after all, has a less than stellar test record. “It is not clear this thing is going to work,” he said. For that reason, “the current system is not a threat at all, but could be perceived as the leading edge of a more advanced system.” The point he stressed is that while this near-term system is only marginal, the Administration’s plan is to “substantially upgrade it” in the future. If I know this, the Russians certainly know it, he asserted.

To substantiate this point, Dr. Postol quoted from sections of Presidential National Security Directive 23, promulgated on Dec. 6, 2002. It states that the United States would begin to deploy missile defenses in 2004, “as a starting point for fielding *improved and expanded missile defenses later*” [emphasis by Postol]. The ultimate goals, PNSD-23 states, are missile defenses “not only capable of protecting the United States and our deployed forces, but also friends and allies,” presumably, wherever they may be.

This “would indicate to the Russians that the current defense deployment in Europe is only the *leading edge* of a much larger and more capable future deployment,” Postol emphasized, and it undercuts the argument that Russia is “over-reacting” to the proposed deployment.

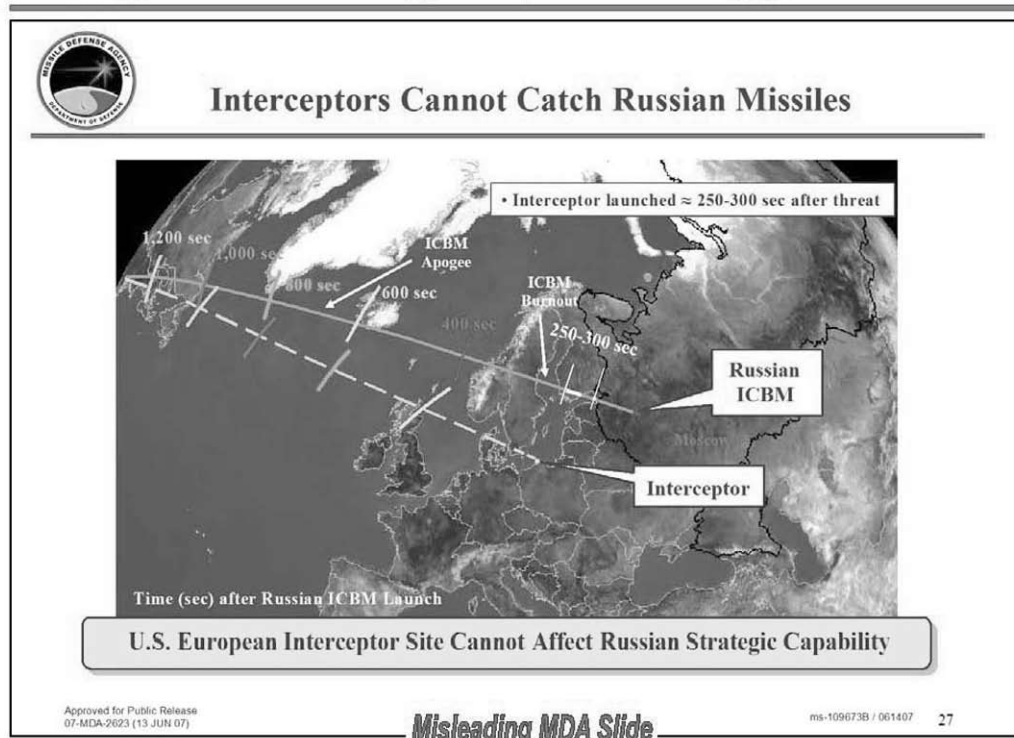
Revolution in Preemptive War

Two other points should be made on this question of the intent of the U.S. ballistic missile system, which were not included in Dr. Postol’s briefing. When the Bush Administration came into office, it offered Vice President Cheney the opportunity to reshape U.S. strategic policy, which he had proposed as Defense Secretary in 1991, but had not been implemented.

As documented by *EIR* earlier this year (see “Missile Defense: Cheney’s Nuclear War Doctrine,” by Carl Osgood, June 29, 2007), this “revolution” in strategy has shifted U.S. nuclear policy from deterrence to nuclear war fighting. From a “weapon of last resort,” in this Administration, nuclear bombs became “an option that is always on the table.” In 2002, the National Security Strategy made preemptive war

FIGURE 1

Misleading MDA Slide Indicating Interceptors Cannot Engage Russian ICBMs



This graphic, which was described as “misleading” by Dr. Ted Postol, was prepared by the Missile Defense Agency, and shown to European allies, in order to convince them that the proposed European-based elements of the U.S. ballistic missile system do not threaten Russian’s strategic defense. This graphic purports to show that the interceptor missile, launched from Poland, does not “catch” the Russian ICBM.

Courtesy of Dr. Theodore Postol

part of U.S. security doctrine, and that same year, the change was codified, when U.S. Space Command was merged with U.S. Strategic Command, overseen by Stratcom commander Marine Gen. James Cartright. The objective was to be able to go to war any time, anywhere, with any kinds of weapons.

Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 11, 2004, Adm. James Ellis, Cartright’s predecessor as Stratcom chief, made clear the Bush Administration’s link between missile defense and offense, stating: “An active missile defense provides a broader range of options to senior leadership decision-makers, while adding additional strategic deterrent capability.” In other words, if we have a defense to protect ourselves, we can pre-emptively bomb whomever we please, without worry of second-strike retaliation.

The second reshaping of strategic policy which is indicative of this “revolution,” is the “space policy” that was released by the White House very quietly in October 2006. The misnamed U.S. National Space Policy paper has virtually nothing to do with space policy, but is an extension of this Administration’s assertion of unilateral military power. In order to “preserve its rights, capabilities, and freedom of action in space,” the United States will “dissuade or *deter* others from either impeding those rights or *developing capabilities* intended to do so” (emphasis added). This is a remarkable assertion, i.e., that the United States could know what the inten-

tion is of a nation that is developing space capabilities. While this policy shift was immediately seen by China as a provocation, it certainly did not escape the attention of other space-faring nations, especially Russia.

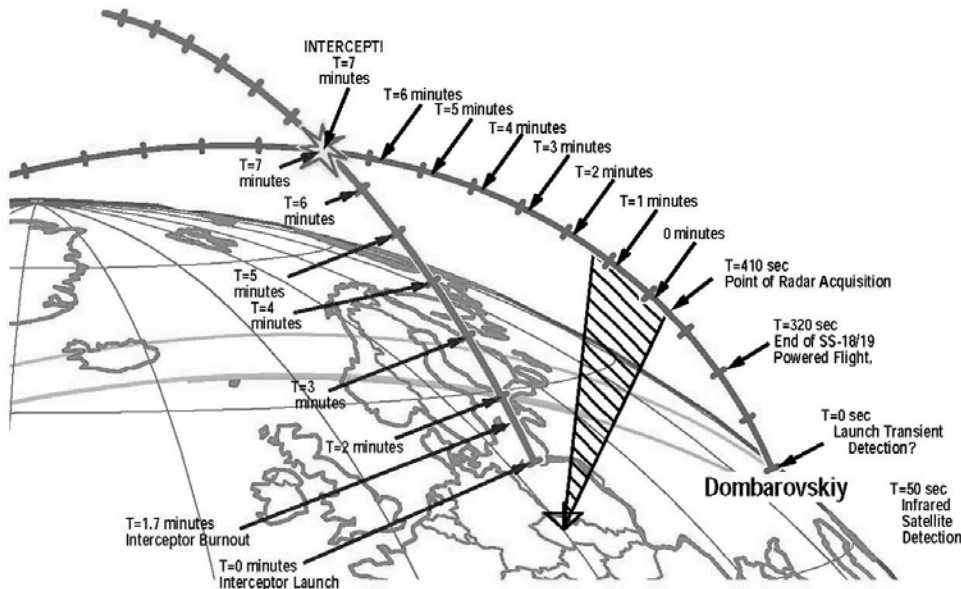
In the “space policy” document, cooperation in space is proposed as a way to “protect and promote freedom around the world,” rather than to study the Earth and explore the heavens. And if a country has a government that the U.S. decides is not “protecting and promoting freedom,” does it now have the right to deny that country access to space, if it is developing a capability the U.S. believes can be “hostile to U.S. interests?”

Skepticism that the proposed missile defense system will work, and fear of antagonizing near-by Russia, has been expressed by a number of European governments. Nor has it been easy to convince the Polish and Czech people that they should become “ground zero” in a possible future nuclear exchange. On Aug. 30, the Czech government announced that it had hired a public relations firm to win over the two-thirds of the populace that is opposed to stationing a BMD radar, and attendant foreign military camp, on their soil.

In public statements, MDA head Obering has repeated that the Azeri radar, that is leased by Russia, is too close to Iran to serve as a mid-course radar, and that the Czech deployment is, therefore, necessary. He added, on Aug. 16, at a mis-

FIGURE 2

Engagement Event Timeline for Engagement of SS-18/19 from Dombarovskiy with 2-Stage Missile Defense Interceptor



Using the correct data for the speed of the ICBM and interceptor, and the distances to be covered by both, at seven minutes after the ICBM is launched from western Russia, Dr. Postol demonstrated that it can be intercepted by the Poland-based missile, with help from the U.S. radar proposed to be based in the Czech Republic.

Courtesy of Dr. Theodore Postol

sile defense conference in Huntsville, Alabama, that he “can’t judge” whether the Russians “are serious or not” about their proposal, but that talks are continuing between the two sides.

Are There Alternatives?

If the goal is truly to defend our “friends and allies” in Europe from Iranian missile attacks, is there an effective and efficient way to do that, without threatening Russia’s nuclear arsenal?

Dr. Postol presented an exhaustive technical analysis of the capabilities and limitations of the variety of radar systems that are already deployed by the U.S. and Russia, and those that are being proposed, and are under development. His conclusion is that it is not necessary to place a provocative European Midcourse Radar in the Czech Republic, which would be able to track the early flight of Russian ICBMs. He explained that there are two fundamentally different types of radar—lower frequency, early warning radars, suited for acquiring targets and wide-area surveillance, as offered by Russia; and shorter wavelength, X-band radars for tracking, which can be cued by the early warning systems, and have been developed by the U.S.

Were the U.S. to place multiple forward-based X-band radars strategically between Iran and Europe, and use the Russian radar in Azerbaijan and at Armavir in southern Russia, and/or one placed in Turkey, a system of equal or greater ca-

pability than what is being proposed, would result, without posing a threat to Russian ICBMs. Similarly, Dr. Postol explained that interceptors placed in Greece or Turkey, or in Albania or Bulgaria, would be as, or more, effective as any placed in Poland, but without threatening Russia.

Moreover, ground-based interceptors, which have the disadvantage of making the host country a target (or sitting duck), could be replaced by Aegis ship-based interceptors. Dr. Postol proposed that if the Aegis SM-3 interceptors work, as has been claimed by the Missile Defense Agency, they could be used to intercept ballistic missile warheads aimed at Europe. President Putin has stated he could “live with” such an approach, as Postol described it.

Dr. Postol expressed his concern that there are “fundamental problems that are not being aired to policy-makers” in Washington. In addition to the strategic policy questions, he said, “engineering problems are not being solved.” One reason is, that over the last 15 years, we have “almost destroyed our aerospace capability,” and have gotten rid of the senior people who were experienced. “We gutted them,” he said.

Dr. Postol has provided a thorough, extensively documented, and compelling case for Congress to study, in its deliberations on the issue of ballistic missile defense. “We will lose the trust of our allies if the system doesn’t perform as promised,” he warned. And we will lose the chance for a strategic relationship with Russia, if we do not change course.