

Ballistic Missile Defence in Europe: On the Cusp of a New Cold War?

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Following a period of tough political negotiations punctuated by not always successful technical development, the proposal to extend America's ballistic missile defence system to the European continent has moved closer to reality. Over the course of the last two years, formal negotiations between the United States and its Central European partners have resulted in substantive agreements for the deployment of radar facilities and a missile interceptor site in the Czech Republic and Poland respectively. The declared purpose of the European Capability Initiative (ECI) is to provide a pan-European defence against a limited ballistic missile strike originating from the Middle East, and to provide an additional layer to the defensive systems already in place in the United States. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) formally recognised the ECI at its April 2008 Bucharest Summit but it is not an active participant in the program, and agreements concerning missile defence emplacements are being bilaterally negotiated between the United States and the concerned parties.

However, questions of the technical feasibility of the system or of its continuation outside formal NATO structures may pale in comparison to the political ramifications of missile defence vis-à-vis Russia's stated opposition to it. Russia has stepped up

belligerent rhetoric against the parties involved threatening to redeploy its forces closer to NATO's borders, enlarge its offensive nuclear capability and even to target the system with nuclear weapons.¹ Clearly, deployment of missile defences, which will see a significant U.S. military presence in an area of former Russian influence, has already adversely impacted the Western/Russian dialogue.

Taking a broad overview, this paper proposes to synthesize two interrelated but distinct streams of thought: one concerning the philosophy behind ballistic missile defence and the other concerning the likelihood of a cold war re-emerging between Russia and the West. The two streams coexist but are not in a direct causal relationship. To be sure, the subject of missile defence has already prompted polemical exchanges between Moscow and Washington accompanied by alarmist headlines in the world's media, leading some to misidentify the chill in the air as a sure sign of a cold war.² But bombastic newspaper headlines and the like are cheap, and add little substance to the debate. Tempting as it may be to fall back on familiar concepts and modes of thinking, we must be careful not to confuse this type of *rhetorical* "cold war" with its historical full-spectrum antecedent.

Missile defences are as unlikely to precipitate a cold war as any monocausality is likely to account for the intricate processes of sovereign states acting within their own self-interest. Nevertheless, an assessment of missile defence within the context of deteriorating Western/Russian relations may be attempted. How might Russia be expected to respond in the future and is the missile defence system worth the apparent political cost? Why have NATO's Central European members embraced the initiative and how does this tie in to the broader debate on NATO unity?

America's vision for a missile defence network in Europe is today closer to reality but can still be derailed by legislators intimidated by Russian posturing or simply unconvinced of the system's merit. No matter the outcome, the subject will remain for the foreseeable future a major focus of Russian, American and European relations – it bears watching.

¹ Olivia Ward, "Eerie echoes of Cold War emerge," The Toronto Star, 23 September, 2008, AA5.

² "How to Stop a New Cold War," Time, Cdn. Ed., Vol. 172, No. 8, (25 August, 2008), Cover.

Ballistic Missile Defence – The Five “Ws”

Although it has gone through a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms and designations, ballistic missile defence is formally recognized as the Ballistic Missile Defence System (BMDS), which is managed by the Missile Defence Agency (MDA). As it is currently constituted, BMDS is a layered integrated system for countering a limited ballistic missile strike against the continental United States. It relies on a network of globally dispersed sensors and radars to effect the interception of the target missile by ground-launched and ship-launched interceptor missiles. The system is being worked up to eventually have the capability of intercepting the targeted missile throughout its three primary stages of flight: the *boost phase* occurring at launch, the *midcourse phase* during which the warhead is in exoatmospheric flight, and the last chance *re-entry phase*.³

As of 2008, the system is operational with a total of twenty-four ground-based interceptor missiles deployed in Fort Greely, Alaska and Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. In addition, there are eighteen Aegis equipped warships capable of surveillance, tracking and interception operations with the shorter-range Standard Missile-3 interceptor missiles. Radar facilities are located in the Aleutian Islands, Beale Air Force Base in California, Fylingdales, United Kingdom and at Shariki, Japan.⁴

A host of other systems remain in various stages of development. One such system is the Airborne Laser (ABL) designed to detect, track and destroy ballistic missiles while still in the boost phase. Employing a chemical oxygen iodine laser, the ABL will have an effective range of several hundred kilometres allowing it to maintain station in international airspace just outside of a potential threat location. Other systems nearing operational capability include the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) designed to intercept ballistic missiles in the last chance re-entry phase and effective against short and medium range ballistic missiles.⁵

³ Department of Defense, Missile Defense – Worldwide. BMDS Booklet, 5th Edition, Missile Defense Agency, pp. 1-3.

⁴ Department of Defense, Fact Sheet The Ballistic Missile Defense System. Washington: Missile Defense Agency, 08-FS-001, August 2008.

⁵ Department of Defense, Missile Defense – Worldwide. BMDS Booklet, 5th Edition, Missile Defense Agency, pp.18 and 26.

This brief, relatively straightforward technical description of missile defence masks what is an incredibly complex technological system still being worked up to an as yet unproven fully operational capability. Not to be outdone, the political aspects of missile defence have shown a similar propensity for complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. The political rationale for missile defence has waxed and waned since the cold war but found renewed vigour with the George W. Bush presidency. Bush believes, as did to an extent his predecessor William Clinton, that post-Cold War instability married with accelerating proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) contributes to a more complex and highly unpredictable global security environment.

To date, the sole countervailing strategy against nuclear blackmail has been to threaten massive retaliation in turn. The ideological linchpin of America's ballistic missile defence therefore has been the conviction that, in the age of nuclear weaponry, the moral imperative must favour the *defensive* over the *offensive*. Missile defence advocates point out that the theory of deterrence and its corollary, mutually assured destruction, under which nuclear arsenals have been managed for a half-century, is a nihilistic theory offering nothing less than a spastic all-out nuclear exchange. Derived not of rational thought, but a cold war era desperation and resignation, the continuation of the policy of mutually assured destruction in the post-cold war period is devoid of sense.⁶

Although the totality of ballistic missile defence research is almost a half-century long,⁷ the concept assumed earnest momentum in 1983, under president Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, popularly branded "Star Wars." Reagan rejected the rationales governing the existence of overgrown nuclear arsenals, and motivated by noble concerns and moral conviction, made the intuitive choice for a defensive missile shield. That the theories governing nuclear deterrence are anything but intuitive was lost on the president and perhaps his advisors, as were the finer points of the system's insurmountable technological complexity. Nevertheless, missile defence has remained a core Republican ideology ever since and it is hugely popular with recent Republican

⁶ Victor A. Utgoff, "Proliferation, Missile Defence, and American Ambitions," *Survival*. Vol. 44, No. 2, (Summer 2002), p. 90.

⁷ Richard Dean Burns and Lester H. Brune, *The Quest for Missile Defenses 1944-2003*. Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2003, pp. 18-19.

presidential candidate John McCain and the Bush administration, which would like to make it one of its defining legacies.⁸

The present system is far removed technologically and politically from Reagan's "Star Wars," yet its moral underpinnings remain similar. The BMDS originates with the findings of the Congressionally mandated Commission to Assess the Ballistic Threat to the United States, chaired by then-former secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld. The commission's report, submitted on July 15 1998, concluded that,

Concentrated efforts by a number of potentially hostile nations to acquire ballistic missiles with biological or nuclear payloads pose a growing threat to the United States, its deployed forces and its friends and allies...the threat to the U.S. posed by these emerging capabilities is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates and reports by the Intelligence Community.⁹

Nominally a bipartisan body, the commission's findings challenged prevailing intelligence community assessments of the state of global ballistic missile developments and were used by the Republican Congressional majority to pressure president Clinton to move forward on a ballistic missile defence of North America. The report's release coincided with test firings of ballistic missiles by North Korea and Iran, lending credence to its more pessimistic conclusions. Shortly thereafter, Clinton signed into law the National Missile Defence Act of July 1999, which outlined in its opening paragraph,

It is the policy of the United States to deploy as soon as is technologically possible an effective National Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack (whether accidental, unauthorized, or deliberate)...¹⁰

Although Clinton funded missile defence testing and development, he failed to give the program a production go-ahead, not the least because significant technological unknowns and test-failures put the viability of the whole undertaking into question. The incoming Bush administration harboured no such qualms nominating Donald Rumsfeld as defence secretary and accelerating the process of introducing into service operational missile defences. Bush discarded Clinton's objective of a limited national single-layered

⁸ Steven Lee Myers, "Bush Stands By His Plan for Missile Defense in Europe," New York Times, 24 Oct 2007. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D06E3DA1739F937A15753C1A9619C8B638&scp=2&sq=Bushmissile+defence+legacy&st=cse> accessed Oct 25, 2008

⁹ Donald H. Rumsfeld, "Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States," Washington D.C.: U.S. Congress, July 15, 1998. <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/bm-threat.htm> accessed 28 Oct 2008.

¹⁰ National Missile Defense Act, Public Law 106-38, 22 July 1999. http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/library/treaties/missile-defense/trty_missile-defense_NMD-act_1999-03-00.ht accessed 27 Oct 2008.

system and replaced it with a globally reaching multi-layered system capable of covering allies and countering the gamut of ballistic missiles from fairly simple short-range types on up to the most complex nuclear-armed ICBMs. He thus set out on a path of transforming missile defence into something more complex technologically, more expansive geographically and not uncoincidentally, more contentious politically. Within the first year of his presidency, Bush established the Missile Defence Agency, nearly doubled the funding available for missile defence,¹¹ and unilaterally abrogated the stalwart of missile defence control regimes, the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Of course, the 9/11 attacks against the United States strengthened Bush's conviction that governmental and non-governmental actors – the “rogue states” of Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda – were vigorously pursuing the acquisition of nuclear tipped ballistic missiles. In the thirty years prior to 9/11 the world had seen a threefold increase in the number of states possessing ballistic missiles, and a doubling of those possessing the longest ranged intercontinental ballistic missiles, which boded poorly, according to Bush, for the containment of key missile technologies.¹² The Bush administration's urgency to expand ballistic missile defences thus paralleled its assessment that global WMD and ballistic missile technologies were proliferating at a much greater pace than heretofore acknowledged.

The administration's concerns that “rogue” actors might “intimidate the United States...by potentially holding hostage hundreds of thousands of people” shaped an aggressive program of implementing an operational system as soon as was practicable.¹³ Under the leadership of Lt Gen Henry A. Obering, the Missile Defence Agency was given extraordinary leeway in achieving an initial operational capability in Autumn 2004 while it continued intense research and development to add additional layers to the system. As part of its mandate to increase the breadth and depth of missile defences, and to protect allies and friends, the MDA focused on the feasibility of forward-deploying the system to Europe as part of the European Capability Initiative.

¹¹ Josh Rogin, “Missile Agency Under Fire,” *CQ Politics*. 23 March 2008. <http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?parm1=5&docID=weeklyreport-000002691705> accessed 2 Nov 2008.

¹² Department of Defense, *Proposed U.S. Missile Defense Assets in Europe*. 07-MDA-2650, Washington, D.C.: Missile Defense Agency, 15 June 2007, p. 1.

¹³ Department of Defense, *Missile Defense – Worldwide*. BMDS Booklet, 5th Edition, Missile Defense Agency, p. 1.

The European Capability Initiative – Wither NATO?

However, NATO's response to the ECI has been lukewarm. Although it has remained an active discussant in various ballistic missile defence schemes not the least because Europe is in closer geographic proximity to potential threats, the bulk of Alliance programs have focused on shorter-ranged and more limited theatre ballistic missile defences. Such systems are often transportable and capable of supporting NATO's "out of area" operations concept which places its troops in regions that are presently within range of even rudimentary ballistic missile systems. Consequently, NATO's Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence Program (ALTBMD) to be fielded after 2010, and effective against short and medium range ballistic missiles has made some headway towards an operational capability.

But NATO has been reticent about a continent-wide system of the type being developed by the United States. Bush's first presidential tour of Europe in July 2001, conducted in part to sell the concept, met with little enthusiasm from long-established partners and allies, although it did garner interest among new and prospective NATO members. Matters changed to some extent following the 9/11 attacks. At the 2002 Prague Summit, NATO authorized a missile defence study, which resulted in a positive interim report in time for the 2006 Summit in Riga, but little concrete action has been taken since. Despite this year's unanimous NATO statement recognising the European Capability Initiative, it remains strictly an American programme that is being bilaterally negotiated with the concerned NATO partners. Similar bilateral agreements have recently been negotiated between the United States and its non-NATO partners, Japan and Israel. Notably, in 2005, Canada declined to enter a similar agreement within the context of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), but its decision has not materially affected the system's ability to cover the North American continent.

In Europe however, formal negotiations resulted in agreements to place ballistic missile defence components in two Central European locations. On July 8, 2008 agreement was reached between the governments of the United States and Czech Republic to place a tracking radar on Czech soil some sixty kilometres west of Prague.

Negotiations between the United States and Poland proved more laboured, but with the backdrop of the Russian intervention in Georgia, agreement was reached on August 20th to place ten interceptor missiles on the Baltic coast in northern Poland. Upon ratification by the respective national legislative bodies work will begin on the system as early as 2009 with an operational date of 2012-2015.

Expanding missile defence to Europe relies on the cold war era, yet still relevant logic of preventing the de-coupling of European and U.S. security. Speaking of the initiative in Warsaw, U.S. Undersecretary of State Dan Fried noted that the United States could defend itself without the European installations but that it believed the “security of NATO should be indivisible...we want to defend all of Europe from potential threats that may arise in the course of the next 10 and 20 years.”¹⁴ In these comments and others, the United States showed its anxiousness to avoid the optics of a “fortress America” or “fortress on a hill” that a U.S. only missile defence might engender. In the absence of European progress on a viable continent-wide missile defence, agreements between the U.S. and like-minded NATO partners will unilaterally provide a future European defence where none existed before while simultaneously adding another layer to the protection of the continental United States.

Czech Republic and Poland – Sacrificial Lambs?

The Czech Republic and Poland have shown an ostensibly puzzling level of enthusiasm for the system. After all, neither has reason to fear an imminent nuclear strike from Iran or North Korea. Yet, for Poland, Czech Republic and a host of former Warsaw Pact nations, strategic decision-making continues to be driven by perceptions of the inevitable resurgence of Russia. In an interview conducted shortly after Russia’s intervention in Georgia, Polish president Lech Kaczynski pointed to the growth of Russia’s unchecked imperial ambition, and its worsening relations with neighbouring

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, [Transcript - Press Conference with Undersecretary of State Dan Fried](http://poland.usembassy.gov/poland/official_texts_and_speeches/official-text-and-speeches-2008/press-confe), Warsaw, Poland. 17 January 2008. http://poland.usembassy.gov/poland/official_texts_and_speeches/official-text-and-speeches-2008/press-confe accessed on October 24, 2008.

states, noting “Russia showed the face it wanted to; an imperial face.” Sounding alarm bells, Kaczynski warned, “Ukraine is now threatened.”¹⁵

The Polish president’s arguments are founded upon a type of historical fatalism born of Central Eastern Europe’s difficult history. Standing in the shadows of giants to the East and West, Poland has suffered its fair share of national calamities. Although a full historical accounting is beyond the scope of this paper, it suffices to say that throughout much of the past two centuries, Germanic and Russian empires have subjugated, conquered and occupied the states of Central Eastern Europe. Not surprisingly then, regional security concerns remain very much tied to notions of territorial defence and territorial integrity at a time when many Western European NATO members have moved on to post-modern notions of security. Over sixty years of peaceful coexistence marked by nothing more challenging than bureaucratic infighting over agricultural subsidies has conditioned Western Europeans to perceive security in entirely different ways. Dissolution of hard borders between states, mutual interference in internal state affairs and the focus on non-traditional security issues have become hallmarks of Western European conceptions of security. As they are further integrated into Western institutions, Central Eastern Europeans are coming around to this view but not without continuing to keep a hawk-eye on developments in Russia.

The reality is that neither Poles nor Czechs view the EU or NATO as fully reliable bulwarks against a resurgent Russia or for that matter a rising Germany. The solution for them is a strong transatlantic relationship and a continued American military presence in Europe. Former Czech President Vaclav Havel’s well known assertion that “the greatest danger to Europe are Europeans themselves” contains more than a kernel of truth. President Kaczynski echoes Havel’s sentiments and makes clear that “It is in the interests of [Poland] to have the closest possible relations with the United States.” For Kaczynski, participation in the European Capability Initiative is part of the multi-pronged process of ensuring “that Americans do not become indifferent to any attempts to place Poland in Russia’s sphere of influence.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Andrew Nagorski, “How the West Got Georgia Wrong,” *Newsweek*, Polish Ed., 28 Aug 2008. <http://www.newsweek.pl/artykuly/artykul.asp?Artykul=29938> accessed 15 Oct 2008.

¹⁶ Andrew Nagorski, “How the West Got Georgia Wrong,” *Newsweek*, Polish Ed., 28 Aug 2008. <http://www.newsweek.pl/artykuly/artykul.asp?Artykul=29938> accessed 15 Oct 2008.

Accordingly, Poland, more so than the Czech Republic, has approached the placement of missile defences on its territory geostrategically hoping to leverage its acceptance of the U.S. system, and the additional insecurity that it has already brought upon itself, with compensatory security commitments from the US in the form of defence assistance and security guarantees above and beyond NATO's Article 5.¹⁷ In fact, as part of the agreement signed in August 2008, a Patriot anti-aircraft missile battery manned by US military personnel and currently stationed in Germany, will indeed be moved to Poland by 2012. Other defence assistance measures have been agreed to in principle but remain to be negotiated.

Russia's Capriciousness

Russia vigorously opposes missile defence in Poland and the Czech Republic on the grounds it represents a threat to the nuclear balance and its security. Russia has stepped up diplomatic efforts and belligerent rhetoric threatening to target the missile sites with nuclear weapons, accelerate its own strategic weapons development, and to deploy its new "Iskander" tactical missiles into the Kaliningrad district. But even a cursory analysis of the present system's capabilities vis-à-vis Russia's nuclear potential puts into question Russia's stated rationale. After all, Russia has hundreds of intercontinental ballistic missiles married with thousands of nuclear warheads, in addition to air and sea based assets, which can easily swamp the ten missile interceptors in Poland and the few dozen interceptors based in the continental U.S. But if the Russian military leadership remains wedded to the strategy of *deterrence*, itself inexorably linked to the credibility of respective nuclear forces, then substantive changes to the nuclear balance can be perceived as destabilizing. Retired Russian general Pavel Zolotarev insists that, "the system of mutual assured destruction must be maintained. Hence the inevitable need to keep the balance of strategic nuclear weapons."¹⁸

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Poland, Agreement Concerning the Deployment of Ballistic Missile Defense Interceptors in the Territory of the Republic of Poland. Warsaw, 20 Aug 2008. <http://www.msz.gov.pl/Agreement.regarding.the.placement.in.Poland.of.anti-ballistic.defensive.missile.interceptors.20825.html> accessed 12 Oct 2008.

¹⁸ Pavel Zolotarev, "Missile Defense Challenges: How to Make a Strategic Problem Into a Strategic Advantage," Russia in Global Affairs. Vol. 6, No. 3, (July-Sept 2008), p. 71.

Beyond its philosophical but also pragmatic adherence to deterrence, the Russian defence establishment, despite U.S. offers of collaboration, facilities inspections and program transparency, continues to ostensibly mistrust the stated motives behind missile defence. Although Russia has been kept abreast of developments through the NATO-Russia Council and active bilateral U.S. channels, it remains unconvinced that the system is not directed against itself and fears that the tracking radar in the Czech Republic will have the capability to monitor activities in western Russia including the Plesetsk cosmodrome and the airspace over Northern Fleet facilities. Concerns have also been expressed that the real-life capabilities of the system far exceed its published values and that the interceptor missiles might be capable of destroying Russian satellites in earth orbit, and disrupting missile launches originating from the Plesetsk, Saratov, Chelyabinsk, and Orenburg regions.¹⁹ Russia is also worried that the missile defence facilities in Poland are merely a Trojan horse for a more extensive system consisting of multiple emplacements in various NATO countries. Of course, Russian observers fail to point to credible motives which might make the above capabilities a threat to Russia, and herein lies the chief problem and irrational source of the rising Western/Russian tension.

Simply put, Russia is not being entirely honest about its motives. Russia remains a crippled but important power with a proud heritage that has suffered a precipitous decline in prestige since the dissolution of the Soviet empire now nearly twenty years ago. In addition to the economic indignities bestowed upon it by the collapse of communism, the entrenchment of NATO and the U.S. ever closer to its borders and areas of former influence – the near abroad – is becoming increasingly untenable. Russia's ham-fisted attempts at rebuilding a measure of regional influence, for instance in Belarus and in neighbouring NATO countries, and its failed overtures to China, India and Iran have underscored the limits of its power and influence and the continued clumsiness of its diplomacy.

Its formerly great defence industrial complex, once the armoury of the Communist world, was decimated by nearly twenty years of neglect and lags a generation or more behind its U.S. and European counterparts. It is true that Russia is rich in the key

¹⁹ Pavel Zolotarev, "Missile Defense Challenges: How to Make a Strategic Problem Into a Strategic Advantage," Russia in Global Affairs. Vol. 6, No. 3, (July-Sept 2008), p. 73.

resources of natural gas and crude oil, and so commands a measure of respect, but it has precious little else of substance to offer its neighbours. Still, Russia is not quite “Saudi Arabia with trees,” as it was once clumsily called by a Clinton-era diplomat, because the depth and breadth of its history, culture and society confer upon it a tremendous if unfulfilled potential. But since the collapse of communism, Russia has been unable to find the transformational “big idea” that could fill its ideological void and define and guide it in the post-communist period. Raging against the West and cultivating a national sense of victimhood, primarily for domestic political purposes, is a short-term political tactic but it is not a strategy upon which a confident society can be built.²⁰ No wonder then, that missile defence – a powerful manifestation of America’s global political, technological, and military leadership – is so undermining of Russian confidence even if Russian strategists know that the system cannot and will not change the fundamental nuclear balance.

On the Cusp of a New Cold War?

Is the world barreling like a runaway freight train towards a new cold war? As we shall see, an examination of all the issues must yield an answer in the negative. Above all, there is no credible direct military threat from Russia against the West nor does the West threaten Russia in turn. This is not just a consequence of Russia’s underfunded and dilapidated military which showed weakness even in the limited action against Georgia and would find power projection on any significant scale problematical.²¹ It is more about a strategic outlook that, according to U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice, regards Russia as “neither a permanent enemy nor a strategic threat.” At the declaratory level, the sentiment is mutual. Russian president Dmitry Medvedev echoes Rice when he states, “We do not have ideological differences around which a new cold or any other kind of war could start.”²² Hollow diplomatic courtesies perhaps but

²⁰ Roderic Lyne. “Russia and the West: Is Confrontation Inevitable?” *Russia in Global Affairs*. Vol. 6, No.1 (Jan-March 2008), p. 75.

²¹ For comparison, the Russian defence budget in 2007 totalled \$48 billion – the U.S. budget was \$522 billion. NATO is an Alliance of 26 nations with 900 million people, Russia is in demographic decline with a population of 145 million.

²² “No ground for war with U.S., president says” *Toronto Star*. 2 October 2008, AA2.

supported by the conspicuous absence of the ideological elements and cultural milestones so defining of the Cold War.²³

As we have seen, Russia's global influence pales in comparison to the broad international appeal it once commanded as revolutionary communism's ideological guiding light. Russia is resource-rich and can buy momentary influence but its ties with former client states and organisations have largely subsided as have the proxy conflicts so defining of the Cold War. One would be hard pressed to point to a contemporary analogue of the Korean, Vietnam or Yom Kippur wars. Nor is Russia actively conspiring against the United States and utilising third parties such as guerrilla movements and insurgencies to gain relative advantage.²⁴

No one believes Russia is an "evil empire" for the simple fact that it is no empire at all. The "iron curtain," drawn at the conclusion of the Cold War has remained drawn. With few exceptions, Central Eastern Europe is sovereign, autonomous, and integrated into western security, political and economic structures. Within Russia itself, the hallmark Western freedoms of consumption, religious choice, physical movement and others are scarcely questioned even if democracy and the economy remain state managed to a greater extent than Western sensibilities would permit. Russia remains a far more vital component of the global economic system than it ever was during the cold war and is an active participant in economic globalization even if it is itself reluctant to submit to some of its sovereignty erasing processes.

Several observers have conceded that while the return of a general cold war akin to its historical antecedent is unlikely in the near future, a phenomenon akin to a confined limited cold war may be emerging. Dmitry Furman, for example, agrees that Russia's "assertive expression of its regional interests is leading towards a local cold war."²⁵ Furman's idea is thought provoking but does not stand up to serious scrutiny. First, if the premise is to be accepted that the new cold war is a local phenomenon, then it is incorrect to assume that it is a new phenomenon. On the contrary, with few exceptions, the states

²³ U.S. State Department, Secretary Rice's Remarks with Acting Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Rood. 2008/T24-8. Warsaw, Poland. 20 August 2008. Released on August 20, 2008.

²⁴ Newsweek 12 May 2008.

²⁵ Furman, Dmitry. "The Fork in the Road in 2008," Russia in Global Affairs. Vol. 6, No.2, (April-June 2008), p.14.

of East Central Europe and the former Soviet Republics have consistently acted to isolate themselves from Russian influence by striving for NATO and EU membership and establishing strong bilateral relations with the United States. For these states, NATO enlargement was never about idealized notions of the “the end of history” or the “democratic peace” but rather military strength against a centuries old threat. This is not a “local” cold war but simply a function of a centuries old history.

Second, it is unconvincing to suggest that a local cold war is of lesser concern than a generalized global cold war. The ties that bind global security make distinction between *local* and *global* problematic, particularly as local interests in this case, remain connected to binding security arrangements with NATO and the United States, and are further intertwined economically through the European Union. Wherever NATO, the United States and the EU are engaged, there can be no *local* cold war. In this sense, the term local cold war is devoid of meaning. Either the cold war is global, encompassing all spheres of cultural, economic, political and military activity, or it is none at all.

Yet the emplacement of missile defences in Central Europe indisputably remains a thorn in the side of Russia’s relations with the West. To better understand the tension, a more comprehensive explanation of U.S. motivations for missile defence is required. The stated objective of missile defence is the reduction of America’s and its ally’s vulnerability to ballistic missiles. This is the clear and undisputed technical explanation of the system’s purpose. But the philosophy and motivations contained within this objective go far beyond its narrow definition.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Bush declared a powerful new unilateralist and pre-emptive strategy by declaring, “the course of this nation does not depend upon the decisions of others,” and warning, “the United States will act, if necessary, pre-emptively, in exercising [its] inherent right of self-defence.”²⁶ Addressing the 2002 graduating class at West Point, he described how the right to act pre-emptively might be translated into action. He noted, “the military must be ready to strike at a moment’s notice in any dark corner of the world. All nations that decide for aggression and terror

²⁶ George W. Bush, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Washington, D.C.: White House, March 2006, p.18.

will pay a price.”²⁷ In these and other statements, Bush thus declared not only independence from the world, friendly or otherwise, but asserted the unilateral right to a strategy that relied on self-sufficiency through strategic, political, technological and military superiority.

Missile defences ensures that should the “dark corners of the world” be occupied by nuclear-armed ballistic missiles toting despots, the US will not be self-deterred from exercising its self-appointed authority to act. How can America’s goals, as outlined in the National Security Strategy, of the promotion of global democracy and free-market economy remain consistent with its actions if it finds itself deterred at every turn for fear of nuclear retaliation? How can its security commitments to Japan, for instance, remain credible in the face of a nuclear armed, ballistic missile toting North Korea? This is the Bush vision of Pax Americana; a benevolent but assertive vision that makes enemies and allies alike at times uneasy, but is clearly not directed at Russia. By extending credible missile defences to all corners of the globe, the United States hopes also to reduce the utility of ballistic missiles and thus their desirability and ultimately their proliferation. Missile defences are thus a necessary part of the effort to stop nuclear proliferation by assuring non-nuclear states that the United States is willing to guarantee their security, even from potentially nuclear-armed aggressors.²⁸

Clearly also not aimed at Russia is the missile defence system’s ability to attract vast amounts of research and development funding. Missile defences have been on the US defence budget agenda for nearly fifty years having produced remarkably little “product” for the investment. Missile defence is arguably the greatest military R&D project in the history of the United States – not only is the single biggest line item in the defence budget, it is exempt from the normal budgeting and reporting requirements used to hold major programs accountable for costs and results. Missile defence’s halo effects however are widespread and include America’s lead in space (itself identified by the

²⁷ George W. Bush, “Graduation Speech at West Point,” Office of the Press Secretary, Washington D.C.: White House, 1 June 2002.

²⁸ Victor A. Utgoff, “Proliferation, Missile Defence, and American Ambitions,” *Survival*. Vol. 44, No. 2, (Summer 2002), p. 98.

Bush administration as a top U.S. national security priority²⁹), its revolution in military affairs (RMA), its continued domination of the global arms market, and its development of a knowledge-based economy.

As we have seen, missile defence will not start a new Cold War but it is already contributing to a worsening of relations between the West and Russia. We must however be realistic about the nature of these relations. The Western approach to Russia is full of paradoxes and inconsistencies. Russia cannot, at present, be integrated into the EU, NATO or a host of other multilateral institutions, even if it expressed a desire to, for any number of structural and practical reasons. When it gets down to the administrative and bureaucratic details, Russia remains worlds apart from the West. Yet it is at the same time vitally important to stability in Europe and beyond that it in some agreeable way reaches a lasting accord with the West. How to do this is one of the questions of our time.

To begin with, the West's relations with Russia have for almost a century followed a binary approach which can no longer be productive, if indeed it ever was. Our strategic conception of Russia cannot be reduced that of cold war enemy on the one hand or strategic ally and friend on the other. There are a host of values and relationships in between under which the Western/Russian dialogue can remain constructive and indeed under which the worsening relations between the West and Russia can be managed. We must stop the illusory quest for democratization in Russia even if it is this quest that is the defining characteristic of post-modern Western civilizational thought. Not only is Russia unlikely to become more democratic in the foreseeable future but the overwhelming majority of Russians remain entirely unconcerned with Russia's lack of progress in this field – a recent poll indicates that only one in five Russians favour a truly free democracy and market economy.³⁰

Moreover, lamenting the decline of democracy in Russia is misleading because the democracy that existed even in the heady days of Boris Yeltsin was far more “imitational” that many Western leaders were willing to admit. Russian democratic

²⁹ Tarja Cronberg, “US Missile Defence: Technological Primacy in Action,” in Missile Defence: International, Regional, and National Implications. Bertel Heurlin and Sten Rynning eds. London: Routledge, 2005, p. 43.

³⁰ John, Chipman ed., IISS Strategic Survey 2007: The Annual Overview of World Affairs. London: IISS, 2007, p. 201.

development, in opposition to its Central Eastern European counterparts, was always a top-down exercise devoid of the significant populist elements seen, for example, in Vaclav Havel's "Velvet Revolution" or Lech Walesa's "Solidarity" movement. Although relations between Boris Yeltsin and his Western counterparts were generally cordial, and therefore subject to less scrutiny, his frequent meddling in Russia's domestic laws to benefit the office of the president was hardly in keeping with a democratizing agenda.

The Western obsession with democratization aside, Russia remains an important partner in America's global war on terrorism, its efforts to curb nuclear proliferation, its energy security policies, and its development of common relations towards China. Russia on the other hand desires American support in its fight against regional Moslem terrorism, an acceptance of its special role in the post-Soviet space, and help in integrating the Russian economy into the global economic system and the World Trade Organisation. There is clearly room for substantive cooperation. The West may find that rather than attempting to shape and mould Russia into a strategic partner, it might be more useful to pragmatically seek out common ground on specific strategic issues.

Likewise, Western leaders would do well to recall that despite recent tensions, the objectives of Russian foreign and defence policies have remained fundamentally unchanged since the break up of the Soviet Union.³¹ First, Russia endeavours to be recognised as a regional power with regional aspirations. Its persistent opposition to NATO's enlargement, dating back to the early 1990s, is consistent with this goal as is its recent intervention in Georgia. Second, it has attempted to maintain its status as a global nuclear superpower. Russia retains a little less than half of the world's nuclear stockpile in its strategic nuclear arsenal of ballistic missiles, bomber aircraft and nuclear submarines.³² The renewal of strategic bomber flights of late is entirely consistent with this goal having only recently been made possible by a defence establishment flush with petrodollar fortified funding. Third and finally, it has attempted to position itself as *one of the great global economic powers*. Its membership in the G8 group and its aspirations to the World Trade Organisation are consistent with these goals.

³¹ Leon Aron, "U.S.-Russia Relations Through the Prism of Ideology," Russia in Global Affairs, Vol. 4, No.3, (July-Sept 2008), p. 97.

³² Richard Haass, "How to Manage Moscow," Newsweek, 1 Sept, 2008, p 64.

While some or all of these goals may occasionally come into hard contact with Western interests and activities, this need not be construed as inherently negative. After all, legitimate competition and the pursuit of national interests should not be mistaken for confrontation, underhandedness and the beginnings of something sinister. So long as Russia does not seek to be a belligerent global superpower politically competing with the U.S. in every sphere everywhere, as it did during the Cold War, the space for compromise, sober appraisal and pursuit of avenues of cooperation will remain open.

In the meantime, the West may find that a spoonful of respect and a trifle of equal treatment – producing the perception of parity with America in no matter in how trivial a field – can go a long way in appeasing Russian domestic political opinion. This held true under Leonid Brezhnev as it did under Boris Yeltsin and as it does now under Dmitry Medvedev. The big payoff today is the continuing growth of the Russian middle class and the institutions that support and nurture it. Democracy will not happen overnight, and Western sermonizing will not make it come about any quicker, but the West's slow and steady hand, meaningful cooperation and partnership in select areas will allow the democratic process to entrench itself firmly and naturally.

Already, both sides are beginning to back off on the issue of missile defences. In a recent statement, U.S. secretary of defence Robert Gates suggested the interceptor missiles in Poland might not be activated until such a time that a credible threat is detected. Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski has recently admitted, to everyone's surprise, the possibility of allowing a "near constant" presence of Russian inspection personnel at the missile interceptor site in Poland. And the Russian military leadership itself is backtracking suggesting it will not take any of the countervailing steps against the missile defence sites until the sites themselves become operational, some years from now. It is too early to tell whether the cackle of polemical fusillades so apparent to everyone just a few short months ago has subsided for good, but the steps being taken by all sides reflect a certain maturity and historical foresight that bodes well for the future.

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