
Poland and Ballistic Missile Defense **The Limits of Atlanticism**

Łukasz Kulesa



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Abstract

Since Poland first expressed its willingness to host a critical part of the US Ballistic Missile Defense architecture, in 2002, the program has undergone several setbacks. Today, while Poland is still expected to host key elements of the US BMD capabilities, contributing to NATO's territorial defense against ballistic missile threats, Warsaw does not enjoy the kind of special bilateral relationship that it was trying to secure with Washington. Domestic politics, changing threat assessments, the US 'reset' policy vis-à-vis Russia and the latter's critics of BMD's destabilizing character all contributed to this change, which, in turn, had strong consequences for Poland's strategic posture. It sparked the recent Polish decision to acquire national air and missile defense capabilities, both as a strategic asset for the country's own deterrence posture and as a national contribution to the NATO BMD system. It also influenced Poland's attempt to reconcile its long-term national interests and threat perception with BMD's greater role within the Alliance, both by emphasizing NATO's collective defense mission and by ensuring that nuclear weapons would remain at the heart of NATO's deterrence posture.

* * *

Depuis que la Pologne a manifesté son intention d'accueillir une composante essentielle de l'architecture de défense antimissile balistique (DAMB) américaine en 2002, le programme a connu plusieurs soubresauts. Aujourd'hui, même si le pays doit encore accueillir des éléments-clefs des capacités DAMB américaines, ceux-ci reflètent moins le renforcement du partenariat stratégique particulier bilatéral recherché par Varsovie qu'une contribution à la protection de l'OTAN face à la menace balistique. La politique intérieure, une réévaluation de la menace balistique, la stratégie américaine de reset vis-à-vis de la Russie et les critiques de cette dernière quant au caractère déstabilisateur de la DAMB ont contribué à façonner cette évolution, avec des conséquences significatives pour la posture stratégique de Varsovie. Tout d'abord, cette expérience tumultueuse a ainsi incité Varsovie à acquérir des capacités nationales de défense antiaérienne et antimissile. Par ailleurs, la Pologne a dû tenter d'accommoder ses intérêts nationaux et sa perception des menaces avec le rôle plus important dévolu à la DAMB au sein de l'Alliance, en insistant sur sa mission de défense collective des membres d'une part, et en s'assurant que les armes nucléaires demeureraient au cœur de la posture de dissuasion de l'OTAN d'autre part.

Introduction

Over the last decade, Poland's willingness to host the United States Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system in Europe has left it in the most precarious of positions. Not only did it generate an angry backlash from Russia, it also prompted negative reactions from a number of European partners. Negotiating with the United States, Poland started by conveying its interest in US "boots on the ground", but later added a wide range of demands that were to strengthen its privileged position as a major European partner of Washington.

Having agreed the terms of deployment of US Ground-Based Interceptors in Poland in 2008, Warsaw was disappointed to see the configuration of the BMD system changed during the following year by President Barack Obama. It decided to become a part of the new European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) and host an SM-3 missiles base in the 2018 framework, but expectations for the impact of missile defense cooperation with the United States on the long-term security of Poland were scaled down significantly. The March 2013 US decision to cancel Phase IV of the EPAA (which was to give the base in Poland a direct role in protecting US territory) seemed to confirm the view that the importance of the future BMD installation in Poland would be greatly diminished as compared with the original plans.

Partly as a result of the "rollercoaster ride" experience of dealing with the United States on Missile Defense, Poland decided that its own plans for the modernization of the armed forces should include a limited missile defense component. The projected Polish air and missile defense system would be developed in the next decade, operating in parallel with the US EPAA to provide protection against lower-tier threats. These capabilities could be used as a contribution to NATO operations or integrated into the national defense posture in case of a major deterioration of the regional security environment.

Despite its early preferences for bilateral relations with the United States (as opposed to acting mainly through a NATO framework), Poland had to adjust to the change in US policy and the upgrade of NATO's role in territorial ballistic missile protection. Since Warsaw traditionally favored a credible retaliatory potential over denial capabilities as the basis of deterrence, doubts remain regarding the added value of BMD capabilities for the overall deterrence posture of the Alliance.

This paper begins by presenting the history and rationale for Poland's involvement in the US BMD project. The second section analyses the reasons for the development of the Polish national air- and missile defense system. Finally, the paper discusses the wider strategic significance of missile defense for Poland, both nationally and in terms of its impact on NATO and its deterrence policy.

Poland in the US and NATO BMD Systems

While BMD has been an area of significant investment by the United States for several decades, only during George W. Bush's term in office was Poland involved in US plans to develop and, more importantly, field adequate capabilities to counter the ballistic threat. Warsaw's high expectations regarding what appeared to be the key to stronger bilateral relations with the United States suffered a blow in 2009 when the Obama administration reconsidered the European component of its missile defense policy. This change, as well as the recent decision to cancel phase IV of the EPAA, led Warsaw to reassess the value of BMD cooperation with Washington, its significance to the US and its longer-term prospects.

Negotiations with the George W. Bush Administration

The Ballistic Missile Defense program, as conceived by the administration of George W. Bush, presumed the need for increased cooperation with selected partners worldwide, including Europe.¹ Acting on the assumption that the system should provide protection for US territory against limited ICBM strikes from the Middle East, the US planned both to upgrade the early-warning radar in the United Kingdom and Denmark (Greenland), and to deploy an additional tracking radar and a Ground-Based Interceptors (GBI) facility (the so-called "third site", following the establishment of interceptor sites in Alaska and California). Several countries were considered as potential hosts of the two new installations, but Poland and the Czech Republic were finally selected as preferred partners for negotiations.

From the US viewpoint, choosing the two Central European allies was justified not only by technical reasons, but also by political considerations. The traditional Atlanticist approach of the decision-making elites in Poland and the Czech Republic, their interest in strengthening the bilateral relationship, and their active support for the foreign and security policy of George W. Bush's administration made more likely the prompt conclusion of negotiations and deployment of US assets.

¹ On the history of the program before G.W. Bush's presidency, see e.g. "National Missile Defense. What Does It All Mean?" Center for Defense Information Issue Brief, September 2000. President Bush outlined his approach to the role of missile defense in a May 2001 speech at the National Defense University, available at: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/abmt/news/010501bush.html>

Poland's readiness to enter into talks with the United States had little to do with the assessment of a growing ballistic missile threat from the Middle East.² Warsaw consistently and diligently listed the proliferation of ballistic missiles, especially coupled with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as one of the security threats facing Poland and the North Atlantic Alliance as a whole.³ Still, widespread doubts remained about the willingness of Iran or other Middle Eastern countries to launch or threaten to launch ballistic missiles against European targets. In discussing ballistic missile threats, emphasis was put rather on the military capabilities of the Russian Federation.⁴ Even with conventional warheads, short-range ballistic missiles such as *Tochka-U* and *Iskander* could strike strategic targets on Polish territory, including airforce bases and ports, which would be crucial entry points for NATO reinforcements during a crisis. Given the lack of national missile defense assets, vulnerability to such a degrading attack was considered as a weakness that Russia could exploit during any future crisis. Entering the negotiations on Missile Defense, Poland therefore hoped to significantly upgrade its own air and missile defense capabilities, simplified in public debate as the demand for US "Patriots" (PAC-3 missile systems).

The willingness to engage into negotiations on BMD was also motivated by the need to strengthen the bilateral relationship with Washington and upgrade it to "strategic partnership" status.⁵ A number of decisions taken by the Polish governments in the 2001-2005 framework, prior to the BMD negotiations, had already indicated its eagerness to position the country as a reliable US ally and a staunch Atlanticist.⁶ These decisions included providing active support for the US actions against Al Qaeda after the 11 September attacks (including taking part in the operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan), as well as political and military backing of the 2003 war against Iraq. The December 2002 choice of Lockheed Martin's F-16 as the principal fighter jet of the Polish Air Forces (at the expense of French and Swedish companies) also showed clearly the strategic preferences of Poland.

The perspective of a lasting presence of US troops on Polish territory and the construction of strategically important US military installations could be seen as the next step toward placing Poland permanently on the map of US strategic partners. Within the Polish

² Marek Madej, "Obama's missile defense rethink: The Polish reaction", 30 September 2009, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, available at: <http://www.thebulletin.org/obamas-missile-defense-rethink-polish-reaction>

³ As reflected by the National Security Strategies of 2003 and 2007.

⁴ Maria Wągrowka, "Poland behind an American shield? Possible deployment of the MD system and national interest", *Center for International Relations report*, Warsaw, 2007, available at: http://csm.org.pl/fileadmin/files/Biblioteka_CSM/Raport_y_i_analizy.pdf, pp. 3-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See: Andrzej Kapiszewski, Chris Davis, "Poland's Security and Transatlantic Relations", in Tom Lansford, Blagovest Tashev (eds.), *Old Europe, New Europe and the US: Renegotiating Transatlantic Security in the Post 9/11 Era*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2005; Kerry Longhurst, Marcin Zaborowski, *The New Atlanticist: Poland's Foreign and Security Policy Priorities*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

administration, however, it was understood that any decision to host elements of the US BMD system would need to be taken after careful consideration of all relevant aspects. As early as December 2004, a dedicated interagency taskforce was created, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense. Following the initial US overtures, and confirming the readiness to quickly reach an agreement, the right-wing coalition government of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, formed after the 2005 parliamentary elections, pledged in its program to work toward the inclusion of Poland in the US system.⁷ The newly elected Polish president Lech Kaczyński also emerged as a strong supporter of BMD as a means of strengthening the relationship with the US.

Almost immediately after the United States announced its interest in concluding an agreement, important opinion leaders within the Polish strategic community started to question the rationale for the speedy conclusion of an agreement on BMD with the US.⁸ It was argued that, since the European-based elements of the BMD system would only be configured to safeguard US territory against an ICBM threat, Poland would not gain any additional protection against the most likely future military challenges involving the Russian military (the critics questioned the assumption that US troops in Poland would have a “tripwire” role, automatically leading to US involvement in a Polish-Russian conflict). In their view, support for the project would negatively affect the relationship with Russia. It was also pointed out that, since a number of European countries – especially Germany and France – opposed the project, such a decision could also weaken the Polish position in the Alliance. Besides, hosting a US base ran the risk of making Poland a target for any state or non-state entity willing to strike the United States.

Most critics of the government’s approach did not call for the rejection of negotiations with the United States. However, they recommended that the government clearly define a list of conditions as a prerequisite for Poland’s assent. This demand for some form of compensation from the US resonated well with Polish public opinion, which did not see any tangible benefits from the previous decisions to support the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. The most important political demand was the inclusion of an explicit additional US security guarantee (beyond the formulation of Article 5 of NATO’s Washington Treaty) in the bilateral agreement on the deployment of the MD base. That was considered as a potential foundation of a long-lasting special relationship with the US, and was supposed to provide more robust protection for Poland than the ambivalent language of Article 5.

⁷ *Solidarne Państwo (A State Founded on Solidarity)*, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz’s government program, Warsaw, Polish Press Agency, 10 November 2005, § 60.

⁸ See the arguments of one of the most vocal critics of the official policy: Roman Kuźniar, *Poland’s Foreign Policy after 1989*, Warsaw, Scholar, 2009, pp. 333-335.

Additionally, a number of measures were brought up in the Polish debate as possible ways for the United States to induce Warsaw to agree to host a missile defense installation. They included:

- increased US assistance to the Polish armed forces, including the delivery of shorter-range air and missile defense systems (*Patriot* and THAAD);
- overall strengthening of the military-to-military cooperation;
- US support for Polish energy security-related projects (to decrease its dependence on Russian gas and oil deliveries);
- increased intelligence-sharing and access to data relevant to Polish security, including from early-warning systems;
- involvement of Polish companies and technology providers in the development of the system and the construction of the MD base;
- US support for Poland's bid to host the main base of NATO's Allied Ground Surveillance system.

As a consequence, intensified Polish-American dialogue conducted in the years 2005-2006 had two principal aims. First, it was intended to give Polish authorities a clear picture of the place of US MD installations in Europe in the overall architecture of the system, their characteristics, the durability of US congressional support, and the specific role envisioned for Poland.⁹ Second, they were used as an opportunity to signal the intention of the Polish side to seek an adequate set of additional measures (legal guarantees and "incentives") accompanying the agreement on a MD base. The US expressed reservations as it considered the MD deployment to be intrinsically beneficial to the Polish-US relationship, and understood the negative implications of providing more support for Polish armed forces for its relations with Russia. During that period, US experts identified a number of potential sites on Polish territory for the construction of the facilities, among others a former military airfield in Redzikowo (north-western Poland).

In January 2007, the US government formally proposed to Poland that they enter into negotiations on an agreement to host a base with 10 GBIs, defending the United States and parts of Western Europe against long-range and intercontinental ballistic missiles launched from the Middle

⁹ At that point it was unclear which elements of the system would be proposed by the US to be deployed in Poland, and which in the Czech Republic. There were also recurring news reports about other candidates ready to host the US installations in case of difficulties in obtaining the agreement of Warsaw and Prague.

East.¹⁰ The European GBIs would be a two-stage variant of the three-stage missiles deployed in two bases in the United States (Fort Greely, Alaska and Vandenberg Air Force Base, California). Similarly to the three-stage GBIs, they would be equipped with an Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle (EKV) for the kinetic intercept of a missile, and be placed in underground silos. Their location in Poland was seen by US planners as the most advantageous in order to maximize the likelihood of a successful intercept of an ICBM launched from the Middle East, while also providing coverage for part of Europe.¹¹ The negotiations were formally launched in May 2007.

The Polish parliamentary elections in the fall of 2007 brought a change in government that affected the Polish position on missile defense. Public opinion polls showed that the proposal to place MD installations in Poland had more opponents (56%) than supporters (28%), but the issue did not figure prominently in the campaign.¹² Still, the new coalition of Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party sought to distance itself from the instinctive pro-Americanism of the previous governments and presented itself as a staunch defender of Polish national interests in dealing with Washington.¹³ The government also promised to discuss more closely the BMD issue with its NATO partners, and reach out to Russia in order to dispel its concerns about the installation of a BMD base in Poland. While the intense European debate over missile defense deployment had an impact on the decisions of the new government, it was also a method to distinguish the negotiation style of the new government from the position of the main opposition Law and Justice Party and President Lech Kaczyński, who supported an early conclusion of the negotiations.

During the negotiations, the Polish side re-emphasized the need to obtain additional US assistance for the Polish armed forces, in the context of a bilateral agreement on long-term military cooperation.¹⁴ Specific items on the Polish "wish list" included *Patriot* and THAAD systems, either deployed permanently among US units on Polish territory or transferred to the Polish army. The government most probably concluded that the US administration, facing the deadline of the presidential elections in the United States, would be more willing to offer concessions in order to make sure that the development of BMD would follow the path drawn during the

¹⁰ Bruce I. Konviser, "U.S. Missiles in E. Europe Opposed by Locals, Russia", *The Washington Post*, 28 January 2007. The Czech Republic was asked to host a mid-course X-Band radar crucial for tracking ballistic missiles and providing data for intercepting them.

¹¹ See, e.g., "Proposed U.S. Missile Defense Assets in Europe", Missile Defense Agency, 2007, p. 6.

¹² Polish opinion poll cited in: "Majority of Poles oppose hosting U.S. missile defense base", Associated Press, 24 August 2007.

¹³ On the differences between the administrations, see: Daria W. Dylla, "The Polish Missile Defense Decision: Reviewing the 'Strapping' of the Bush-Era Missile Defense Plan", *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, Volume 4, No. 2, 2010, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴ Parallel negotiations on the terms of functioning of the US base and the status of the personnel generated less controversy, except for the issue of legal responsibility for any damage caused by the combat employment of the system, e.g. damage caused by warhead and interceptor debris.

presidency of George W. Bush. Some US commentators saw the Polish position as deliberate stalling tactics meant to preserve its freedom of action if the next US administration changed the configuration of the system – which seemed increasingly likely considering the skeptical position taken by the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate Barack Obama on the third BMD site.

The Polish tactics of increasing pressure on the US brought limited results. By the spring of 2008, the US administration started indicating that the window for concluding the agreement was closing – a thinly veiled warning that it might seek last-minute replacement of Poland as a host of the GBI base.¹⁵ Grudgingly, the Bush administration agreed to include the issue of military modernization in the framework of the agreement on the MD base. However, instead of accepting transferring specific weapon systems, Washington sought to launch a process of joint assessment of the modernization needs of the Polish armed forces, with the prospect of US assistance in the future. To sweeten the deal, it was agreed that a US *Patriot* system battery would be deployed to Poland, first on a rotational basis and then permanently from 2012. Additionally, compromise language was found regarding the US commitment to the security of Poland, and specifically the commitment to defend Polish territory against ballistic missile attacks: in both cases the US would assist Poland “within the context” of the North Atlantic Treaty. Such language would partly address the Polish demand for additional security guarantees. Internally, President Lech Kaczyński was putting strong pressure on the government to sign the agreement, and the main negotiator (Deputy Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski) was dismissed after criticizing the government’s indecisiveness.

In late July 2008, the Polish government concluded that the US offer would not be improved further, and decided to move forward with the agreement despite doubts about its implementation. The agreement on the GBI facility and the declaration on strategic cooperation were signed on 20 August 2008 in Warsaw by Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.¹⁶ Signing of the agreement coincided with heightened tensions with Russia over its military operation in Georgia. The US and Polish officials involved in the negotiations both insisted that the developments in Georgia had no impact on the decision-making in Warsaw and Washington, but it seems that the crisis in South Caucasus gave additional urgency to the task of finishing the negotiations promptly, especially from Poland’s viewpoint.

The declaration envisaged intensification of cooperation in three areas: political-military (including strategic dialogue in the framework of the Strategic Cooperation Consultative Group, support for the modernization of the Polish armed forces, deployment of the *Patriot* battery), information-sharing (including BMD situational awareness), and defense industry and

¹⁵ In July 2008 the US and the Czech Republic agreed the terms of the agreement on the deployment of the US radar.

¹⁶ Nicolas Kulish, Tom Rachman, “Rice Signs Missile Deal with Poland”, *The New York Times*, 20 August 2008.

research.¹⁷ The agreement regulated the deployment and operation of the “non-nuclear ground-based ballistic missile defense interceptors” at the Redzikowo base.¹⁸ Taking into account the upcoming US presidential elections in November 2008, Poland declared that it would not rush the ratification process of the agreement in parliament.

Obama’s European Phased Adaptive Approach

It was almost certain that the critical stance of President-elect Barack Obama regarding the approach of the previous administration to the development of BMD would have an impact on the implementation of the August 2008 agreement. While Obama did not object in principle to the need to field an MD system in the context of the threats facing the United States and its allies, he argued that the US had set wrong priorities by remaining focused solely on the ICBM threat (which was far from imminent), and being willing to rely on unproven technologies. The costs of MD development programs also played a role. The new administration was perceived to be more willing to take into account the negative geopolitical consequences of pursuing BMD plans for relations with Russia, China and other partners.

The efforts of the Obama administration to launch a “reset” in relations with Russia involved attempts to reach an understanding on the future of BMD in Europe. The US linked the deployment of BMD elements in Europe with the Russian stance on the Iranian nuclear program, and its readiness to support US policy through increasing pressure on Tehran and refraining from further delivery of weapons. This perspective of a quid pro quo intensified the anxiety of the Polish side. A complete reversal of the US decisions on European deployments would have left Warsaw as the main political victim of the BMD saga in Europe. The fallout would be damaging for all the main political forces in the country that supported the conclusion of the talks with the United States. Therefore, while Poland took into account the possibility of modifying the arrangements, it highlighted that any US pullout from European BMD would diminish the credibility of the United States internationally, and be seen as a major unilateral concession to Russia.¹⁹

Poland signaled also that, regardless of the decisions on the BMD installation itself, it expected full implementation of the declaration on strategic cooperation, including the deployment of a *Patriot* battery on

¹⁷ “Declaration on Strategic Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Poland”, available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/aug/108661.htm>

¹⁸ “Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Poland Concerning the Deployment of Ground-Based Ballistic Missile Defense Interceptors in the Territory of the Republic of Poland”, available at: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/ca169cf2-ba48-4196-afa9-c6bc438ba3e5>

¹⁹ Thinking reflected e.g. in the “Open letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe”, signed by 22 high-ranking former politicians and diplomats, July 2009, available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/An_Open_Letter_To_The_Obama_Administration_From_Central_And_Eastern_Europe/1778449.html

Polish territory and agreeing on the legal framework (the so-called Supplemental Status of Force Agreement) of the stationing of US personnel. In May 2009, the new administration confirmed the deployment of a US Army *Patriot* unit, to be rotated from Germany on a quarterly basis for one month. The battery was supposed to be engaged only in joint training with the Polish command and control and air defense units, without being linked to the Polish air defense system. From the US standpoint, the deployment of a combat-ready unit could not be justified by the security situation in Europe and could provoke an unnecessary crisis in relations with Russia. In Poland, hosting an “unarmed” unit was commonly considered as going against the spirit of the 2008 Declaration.²⁰

The results of the MD policy review initiated by President Obama were announced on 17 September 2009.²¹ The change to the new configuration was justified by the latest assessment of threats (with a primary focus on defense against short- and medium-range missiles from the Middle East) and a new technological approach based on “proven and cost-effective” systems (primarily the further development of the naval *Standard Missile*). The President also emphasized that the new approach was consistent with US commitment to NATO and the Alliance’s plans for missile defense. The extensive rationale for the new US policy was put forward in the subsequent Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report, prepared by the US Department of Defense.²²

In practice, the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) cancelled the plans to place GBI silos and an X-band radar in Central Europe. Instead, it envisioned a sequence starting with the deployment of US ships with the *Aegis* radar system and armed with SM-3 missiles to defend Southern Europe, and proceeding with the deployment of both SM-3 interceptors (the *Aegis Ashore* concept) and sensors in various locations on the continent. Crucially, US officials indicated that Poland and the Czech Republic would be consulted about hosting “a land-based version of the SM-3 and other components of the system”.²³

The initial confusion and the mostly negative reactions following the US announcement stemmed primarily from the lack of advance warning

²⁰ US Embassy in Warsaw cables revealed by Wikileaks confirm that the two sides held widely divergent views on the interpretation of the understanding reached in 2008 on *Patriot* deployment; see: “US embassy cables: Poland wanted operational *Patriot* missiles, not ‘potted plants’”, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/192114?guni=Article:in%20body%20link>

²¹ “Remarks of the President on Strengthening Missile Defense in Europe”, The White House, 17 September 2009, available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-strengthening-missile-defense-europe>

²² *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, US Department of Defense, February 2010, available at: http://www.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20as%20of%2026JAN10%200630_for%20web.pdf

²³ DoD News Briefing with Secretary Gates and Gen. Cartwright from the Pentagon, US Department of Defense, 17 September 2009, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4479>

and coordination with allies in unveiling the new policy.²⁴ The announcement of the US decisions took the Polish and Czech authorities by surprise. The change was perceived mainly through the prism of the US reset of relations with Russia.²⁵ While it was obvious that the GBI base was no longer part of the US plans, it was unclear which elements of the new system (and in what timeframe) would be offered to Poland. Speculation pointed to a command and control center or an SM-3 maintenance facility. After the visit of US Vice-President Joseph Biden to Warsaw and talks with President Kaczyński and Prime Minister Tusk on 21 October 2009, it was confirmed that Poland was invited to host an SM-3 Block IIA interceptors installation, to be activated during Phase 3 of the EPAA (2018). The base was to provide defense coverage for Northern Europe against long-range missiles from the Middle East, and later be upgraded to host SM-3 Block IIB interceptors capable of destroying ICBMs launched from the same region (Phase 4 of the EPAA, to be completed by 2020). At the time of the US announcement, the SM-3 Block IIA system was already being developed as a US-Japan cooperative project, while SM-3 Block IIB remained in the concept phase.

The main dilemma for Poland centered on the credibility of the US offer. It was universally assumed that Russian opposition to MD bases in Central Europe played a role in shaping the US administration's decisions. Facing opposition from Moscow, would the United States be willing to adapt the configuration further to placate Russia? In addition, the perspective of EPAA's Phase 3 (2018)²⁶ fell beyond the second presidential term of Barack Obama, and the delivery timetables of SM-3 Block II technology were open to changes. Despite these question marks, Warsaw decided to respond positively to the US proposal.

On closer scrutiny, the new configuration appeared better grounded in the threat assessment for Europe, and provided wider defense coverage for the continent. It was thus more defensible against outside criticism. More crucially, the EPAA approach promised to become a platform uniting all NATO allies and providing a new opening with Russia.²⁷ While the location of the BMD installation remained unchanged (Redzikowo airfield), the switch from GBI to SM-3 interceptors – which could not be placed in silos – necessitated introducing minor amendments to the agreement signed in August 2008. These were agreed in February 2010, and the protocol changing the agreement was signed in July 2010. The document

²⁴ Awkwardly, the date of the BMD announcement (17 September) is the anniversary of the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland in 1939. The coincidence provoked additional negative comments about a lack of sensitivity on the part of the US officials.

²⁵ See e.g.: Ronald D. Asmus, "Shattered Confidence in Europe", *The Washington Post*, 19 September 2009.

²⁶ "Donald Tusk and Joe Biden on the new missile defense program", Prime Minister's Office Press Release, 21 October 2009, available at: <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/donald-tusk-and-joe-biden-on-the-new-missile-defence-programme.html>

²⁷ Beata Górká-Winter, Robert Śmigielski, "Prospects for Joint Russia-NATO Missile Defense System", Bulletin No. 129 (205), 29 October 2010, Polish Institute of International Affairs.

was ratified by the Polish Parliament and entered into force in September 2011. The Czech Republic, which “lost” the radar site and was offered a minor role in the new system, decided against active participation in the EPAA.

Poland’s loss of a privileged position as a crucial US partner in the construction of the system was to be compensated by increased emphasis on the need to implement the key elements of the 2008 US-Polish strategic cooperation declaration. In December 2009 the two sides agreed on the Supplemental Status of Forces agreement, opening the way for the stationing of US forces on Polish territory. The first rotation of the *Patriot* missiles – a battery from the 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery Regiment (Kaiserslautern, Germany) – arrived in Poland in May 2010, and was stationed in military barracks in Moraq, in the north-eastern part of the country, close to the border with Russia and Belarus. Undoubtedly, the choice of location served as a signal to Russia regarding US willingness to deliver on its promises to place the US troops on Polish territory.²⁸ However, at the end of 2010 the *Patriot* battery site was switched to Toruń (central Poland), and later to Ustka training grounds (north-western Poland); this was justified by the need to maximize the benefits of the training program. Taking into account the fact that Poland did not have its own *Patriot* systems, the value-added of the training was diminished, together with the rationale for the rotational presence of the unit, which was not linked with the Polish air defense system.

As an alternative option, the United States brought up the idea of deploying to Poland a US Permanent Air Detachment, supporting periodical joint training of US and Polish aircraft (F-16 and C-130). This was to serve as a substitute for the creation of the “garrison to support the US Army *Patriot* battery”, stipulated in the 2008 declaration. Poland agreed to the proposal.²⁹ On 13 June 2012 a memorandum of understanding on the activation of an air detachment was signed. In November 2012, the last (11th) rotation of the *Patriot* battery concluded its training at the Ustka training center, while the first rotation of the US F-16 fighters started their training stint in Poland.

²⁸ The effect of the deployment was, however, weakened when it was revealed to journalists that the first rotations would only involve launchers configured for training purposes, with no missiles in the containers.

²⁹ Steve Holland, Gareth Jones, “Obama to reassure Poland with air base deal”, *Reuters*, 27 May 2011.

Cancellation of EPAA Phase IV (2013) and Prospects for the Future

Even as the US representatives repeatedly confirmed the plans for the construction of an MD base in Poland, two aspects remained a source of concern. The first was the prospect of the EPAA schedule being altered due to pressures on the US defense budget, delays in deploying crucial technologies, refocusing on capabilities for the protection of US territory, and/or reassessment of the feasibility of constructing the site in Poland. Phase 4 of the European Phased Adaptive Approach was to rely on SM-3 Block IIB interceptors, but the development of the system had not started, and it was assessed that its earliest availability would be delayed from 2020 to at least 2022. The Polish observers also took note of negative assessments of the feasibility of developing SM-3 Block IIB and the value-added of their deployment in Poland for the defense of the territory of the United States.³⁰ The additional factor was mounting pressure from some members of the US Congress to force the Administration to construct a BMD facility on the east coast of the United States, using a modified Ground-Based Interceptor technology. The construction of the east coast facility would make redundant the deployment of SM-3 Block IIBs in Europe.

The other aspect of the US debate raising anxiety in Poland had to do with the terms of a possible agreement with Russia on missile defense. Between 2009 and 2012, the United States consistently refused to limit the scope of the EPAA or to offer legally binding concessions on the deployment of the system. During the March 2012 nuclear security summit in Seoul, however, President Obama hinted to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that the United States could offer “more flexibility” to Russia regarding the missile defense issue after the US presidential elections.³¹ That remark was interpreted as confirmation that the EPAA framework could be modified to make it more acceptable to Moscow.

Poland opposed any proposal of the cooperative BMD framework with Russia that would cancel or limit the planned BMD system deployments in Central Europe. The Russian arguments about the potential of using the installation in Redzikowo to intercept its strategic missiles and thus destabilize the strategic relationship between the US and Russia were seen as a cover for more traditional “spheres of influence” considerations by Moscow. According to this reading, Russian opposition to the BMD installations in Central Europe was fuelled by the desire to establish limits on freedom of action by the countries of the region in the security sphere. It was therefore a repetition of the long-standing Russian demand to limit deployment of outside forces and build-up of military installations in the

³⁰ Including the National Academy of Sciences study: *Making Sense of Ballistic Missile Defense. An Assessment of Concepts and Systems for U.S. Boost-Phase Missile Defense in Comparison to Other Alternatives*, National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences, 2012. See: Philip E. Coyle, “Back to the Drawing Board: The Need for Sound Science in U.S. Missile Defense”, *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2013.

³¹ “Obama tells Russia’s Medvedev more flexibility after election”, Reuters, 26 March 2012.

countries of the former Warsaw Pact. Polish authorities were concerned that accepting the Russian logic on missile defense would create a precedent that could later be used to block other conventional deployments by NATO countries to Poland and Central Europe. Giving in to Russian demands on legally binding guarantees limiting NATO BMD deployment could, for example, bring back the issue of prohibiting “substantial combat forces” of other NATO countries being stationed on the territories of the new NATO member states.³² Therefore, progress in the US-Russia and NATO-Russia talks on missile defense was carefully scrutinized in Poland with a view to safeguarding the deployment of a BMD installation on Polish soil within the 2018 framework.

The announcement on missile defense made by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on 15 March 2013 during a security crisis involving North Korea confirmed that Polish anxieties over the future of EPAA were justified. Among the four steps intended to align the MD program development with the latest assessments on threats and available capabilities, one measure involved the “restructuring” of the SM-3 Block IIB program.³³ Secretary Hagel announced the switching of financial resources to the development of the additional GBIs and improved warheads for SM-3 and GBI missiles – in practice eliminating EPAA Phase 4. Contrary to the aftermath of the September 2009 decision, the Polish reaction was calm.³⁴ It focused on highlighting the positive aspects, i.e. the “ironclad” US commitment to implement EPAA Phases 1-3, including the BMD facility in Poland. According to the Polish MFA press release, Warsaw noted the US intention to move forward with the construction of the BMD facilities in Central Europe. Markedly, it added that the Polish government “realistically assessed” that the implementation of the EPAA would be “determined by the changing international security situation”.³⁵ The cancellation of EPAA Phase IV seemed to increase the prospects of a US-Russia agreement on BMD, as the main argument about the threat to Russian strategic forces from SM-3 Block IIB interceptors stationed in Poland lost its relevance. From the Polish viewpoint, the next months were to be a test: Did the Russian opposition to the EPAA indeed stem primarily from concerns over its strategic forces’ retaliatory potential, or was it related to the need to establish “red lines” on the deployment of military installations in the vicinity of Russian territory? The Russian response to the US overture pointed toward the latter explanation.

The most important consequence of the March 2013 decision for Poland seemed to be a change in perception of the value of the missile defense cooperation with the United States. An MD base with interceptors

³² Such a political pledge was given by NATO in the process of preparing its Eastern enlargement, but Russia insisted on making it legally binding.

³³ Missile Defense Announcement, as delivered by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, 15 March 2013, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1759>

³⁴ Contrary to the 2009 EPAA announcements, in 2013 the Polish authorities were given advance information on the planned changes.

³⁵ Statement on US missile defense program, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland, 15 March 2013, available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/statement_on_us_missile_defence_system

capable of defending Northern Europe against ballistic missiles would not have the same strategic importance for the US as a facility that would directly contribute to the defense of the US homeland. According to US officials, the Redzikowo base would still play an important role in safeguarding US security by providing protection for the early-warning radars in the United Kingdom, as well as protecting major US military bases in Germany. Still, the lack of a direct link to the protection of US territory would decrease the level of influence that Poland expected to gain over US security policy through hosting the MD installation. Additionally, this change made the funding for the Redzikowo base potentially more vulnerable to Congressional interference, as it could be portrayed as an example of the United States' excess contribution to the defense of European Allies.

The Polish authorities responded to the March 2013 decisions by pointing to the wider context in which the US-Polish security cooperation was taking place. Poland highlighted the importance of implementing the 2010 agreement on the permanent stationing of a small US air detachment (at Łask Air Base) and the deployment, on a quarterly basis, of the US F-16 and C-130 aircraft to Poland. This "new realism" of the government was confirmed by Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski during the March 2013 foreign policy debate in parliament. According to him, "the concept of anchoring the Polish security strategy on the [deployment of the BMD] shield was a dangerous delusion", as the United States would not be willing to support Poland only on the basis of the fact that it hosted an important military installation.³⁶

As of January 2014, the preparations for hosting a US *Aegis Ashore* base in Poland are ongoing, based on the target date of reaching operational readiness in 2018. This date was reconfirmed during the visit of US Secretary of State John Kerry to Poland in November 2013.³⁷ The major elements of the legal framework supporting the operation of the base have already been agreed. Experts from the US Missile Defense Agency, US European Command and US Army Corps of Engineers visited Redzikowo base in November 2012 and February 2013, to prepare the design and groundwork at the site.³⁸ While originally the base was meant to host SM-3 Block IIA and IIB interceptors, the current plans seem to envisage the use of SM-3 Block IB (undergoing trials, to be deployed first by 2015 in the Romanian *Aegis Ashore* base in Deveselu) and SM-3 Block IIA interceptors.³⁹ This modification increases the prospects of having the technology ready for deployment in the agreed timeframe. The main

³⁶ "Minister Radosław Sikorski odpowiada na pytania posłów dotyczące polityki zagranicznej" (Minister Radosław Sikorski replies to questions from members of parliament on foreign policy), 21 March 2013, available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/minister_radoslaw_sikorski_odpowiada_na_pytania_poslo_w_dotyczace_polityki_zagranicznej

³⁷ John Kerry, Joint Press Availability with Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, 5 November 2013, available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/11/216255.htm>

³⁸ "U.S. Military Experts Visit Redzikowo", 22 February 2013, available at: <http://poland.usembassy.gov/redzikowo2.html>

³⁹ "Aegis Ashore fact sheet", Missile Defense Agency, available at: http://www.mda.mil/system/aegis_ashore.html

challenges remain political: first, assessment of the urgency of countering the ballistic missile threat to the Euro-Atlantic area; second, the readiness of NATO countries to pursue BMD development despite Russia's criticism and possible counter-actions. Regarding the former aspect, the prospect of achieving agreement on limiting the Iranian nuclear program puts on the agenda the issue of a possible change in or slow-down of the pace of construction of the EPAA.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Jacek Durkalec, "The Impact of a Possible Agreement on the Iranian Nuclear Programme on NATO Missile Defence", Bulletin No. 116 (569), 29 October 2013, Polish Institute of International Affairs; Marcel Dickow, Oliver Meier, Max Mutschler, Michael Paul, "The case for rethinking NATO missile defense plans", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 26 November 2013, <http://thebulletin.org/case-rethinking-nato-missile-defense-plans>; Steven Pifer, "Would an Iran Deal Obviate Missile Defense in Europe?", Brookings Blog Post, 2 December 2013; <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/12/02-iran-deal-obviate-missile-defense-europe-pifer#>

Air and Missile Defense Capabilities for the Polish Armed Forces

The turbulent history of the US missile defense system deployment in Poland was one of the main factors driving the recent Polish decision to acquire a national air and missile defense system (AMD). The issue of upgrading the national AMD system was in previous years pushed aside, partly on the assumption that the United States and other NATO Allies would be willing and able to augment Polish defense during a crisis. One of the main practical arguments for entering into negotiations on BMD was that the United States would need to protect the strategic BMD installation on Polish territory against air and short-range ballistic and cruise missile attacks. As shown in the previous chapter, Poland tried – unsuccessfully – to lobby for direct transfer of low-tier US BMD assets (*Patriot* and THAAD systems) to the Polish armed forces. After the ideas of outsourcing air and missile defense to NATO or obtaining AMD capabilities on the cheap ended in disappointment, Poland embarked on a difficult and costly process of building up its national capabilities.

Rationale for Acquiring National AMD Capabilities

The most obvious motivation for acquiring new systems is the inadequacy of current capabilities. Poland's air defense remains seriously limited by the characteristics of the weapons systems at its disposal. Modernization of its air defense assets had been appearing on the list of priorities since NATO membership in 1999, but due to the costs involved and the precedence of other tasks (including air and land force modernization in the context of engagement in expeditionary operations) limited progress was achieved. Poland relies on Soviet-era systems, which, despite modernization efforts, remain ill-suited for the challenges of the contemporary battlefield and would need to be phased out (mostly later this decade or in the early 2020s). The Polish air defense system currently includes one long-range S-200C *Vega* (SA-5 *Gammon*) battery and 17 short-range *Neva* SC (modified S-125, SA-3 *Goa*) batteries. Very short-range protection is provided by MANPADS (including Polish-manufactured *Grom* system) and anti-aircraft artillery systems.⁴¹

⁴¹ Additionally, the land forces use the *Kub* (SA-6 *Gainful*) and *Osa* (SA-8 *Gecko*) mobile air defense systems.

While the weaknesses of the current air defense system may explain the need to seek new capabilities, the scale and directions of the new modernization program are driven by the perception of the threats to Poland and NATO territory. In official discourse, the issue of future threats is usually discussed in a generic fashion. The Polish decision is presented in the context of the growing ballistic missile threat to Euro-Atlantic territory and population recognized by NATO at the Lisbon summit.⁴² The decisive role of airpower as well as long-range strike capabilities in most modern interstate conflicts are also underlined. Finally, Poland's status as a "borderline" NATO country, with additional responsibility for defending the Alliance's eastern approaches, is invoked.

Polish officials have been rather careful to avoid constructing publicly a direct link between the build-up of Polish air and missile defense and the potential security challenges coming from Russia or Belarus. The Polish strategic community, however, has been more open in raising concerns about the scenarios of a future military crisis involving Russia, which would either come too fast to secure reinforcements from other NATO Allies or develop in such a way that a unanimous NATO decision on supporting Poland could not be reached. The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 provided some foundations for such fears. Despite all the differences (Georgia was not a member of NATO, the crisis developed over a part of Georgian territory controlled by Russia), the crisis brought home to Poland two basic lessons. First, Russia would be ready to escalate a crisis with its neighbor to the point of using military force. Second, despite Georgia's status of candidate for NATO membership, it received little support during the run-up to the war and during the conflict itself. Therefore, it was argued by some in Poland that its NATO partners could not be assumed to support it unless their core security interests were threatened.

In assessing its security environment, Poland attaches special attention to the processes of modernizing the Russian and Belarusian armed forces, especially those elements of the reform that would increase the possibility of rapidly deploying forces or conducting short, high-intensity air and missile campaigns. The prospect of the deployment by Russia of high-precision Iskander short-range missiles in the vicinity of Poland has generated most attention, including in the media, but Polish analysts take a more comprehensive view of the Russian military build-up, not treating the introduction of any specific weapon system as a radical game-changer.⁴³

⁴² See, e.g., the speech by Deputy Minister of Defense at the March 2013 conference, "Maximizing National Security: The Framework for U.S.-Polish Strategic Cooperation on Missile Defense", Robert Kupiecki, *Polish Perspectives on Missile Defense*, 7 March 2013, available at: <http://missilethreat.com/polish-perspectives-on-missile-defense/>

⁴³ Polish officials reacted calmly to December 2013 media reports about the deployment of *Iskander* missiles in the Kaliningrad region bordering Poland (later denied by President Vladimir Putin), pointing however to the fact that Russian short-range missiles have been taken into account as a factor in the development of the Polish national air and missile defense system. See, e.g., the interview with the head of the National Security Bureau: "Iskandery w Rosji i tak beda – trzeba budowac obrone przeciwrakietowa (They will still have Iskanders in Russia – we

Nevertheless, it is assumed that Poland would need to be able to counter at least partially the threat of an air and missile attack against its territory and display credible deterrence potential if faced with an escalating crisis or a demonstration of force from Russia. Air and missile defense should form an important part of such a deterrence posture.

The third main argument focuses on the role of the BMD assets to be acquired by Poland as a part of the NATO air and missile defense architecture. It is underlined that the Polish BMD systems would constitute a national contribution to the NATO-wide efforts to build a multi-layer ballistic missiles defense and be available for the protection of other NATO members – through redeployment or projection of theater defenses. Poland is careful to present its decisions as fully consistent with the emphasis that the Alliance put on missile defense, and as a response to US complaints about the unwillingness of European allies to contribute more to common defense. It is also underlined that the implementation of the US-Polish agreement on the construction of the Redzikowo base would not be affected by the decisions on an AMD system.

Acquisition Challenges

The crucial role of acquiring national AMD capabilities was repeatedly underlined by President Bronisław Komorowski, who took office in 2010. The goal of “strengthening the operational capabilities to defend the national airspace” became one of the priorities set in November 2011 in “Main directions of the armed forces development for the years 2013-2022”, a document prepared by the government and signed by the president. The president was vocal in expressing his conviction that the AMD should be considered a top priority, with an assured long-term source of funding. In a wide-ranging August 2012 interview with the Polish media, he elaborated on the need to create “a Polish part of the NATO [BMD] shield, capable of defending our country and our airspace”.⁴⁴ Since the same interview included the president’s critical assessment of the decision to sign the 2008 BMD agreement with the United States (which Komorowski considered as premature, considering the change in US policy that occurred after the 2008 presidential election), many commentators assumed that Poland would commence acquiring its own missile defense system, which would replace the US installation in Redzikowo. In reality, the Polish authorities assumed from the beginning that the two processes (acquisition of national assets and building the Polish segment of the EPAA) would run in parallel.⁴⁵ Whereas the EPAA would provide cover against long-range

need to continue building missile defense system), PAP News Agency, 19 December 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview with President Bronisław Komorowski for Wprost weekly, 6 August 2012.

⁴⁵ The context of the president’s initiative is explained in: Michał Baranowski, “Polish Missile Defense Plan Puts Poland First”, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 11 August 2012, available at:

http://blog.gmfus.org/2012/08/11/polish-missile-defense-plan-puts-poland-first/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=polish-missile-defense-plan-puts-poland-first

ballistic missile threats, the Polish AMD system would offer a more comprehensive protection against lower-tier challenges.

The failure to guarantee adequate financial resources for the acquisition of the air and missile defense assets contributed to the demise of the previous plans to upgrade the Polish AMD system. Therefore, the launch of the new program was accompanied by the inclusion of a special budgetary measure in the 2001 act of parliament on restructuring, technical modernization and funding of the Polish armed forces (which set the annual level of defense spending at 1.95 percent of GDP from the previous year). According to the new version of the bill, in the years 2014-2023, the yearly “natural” increase of the defense budget (as a consequence of overall growth in Poland’s GDP) should be entirely devoted to the funding of the AMD program. Additionally, the share of the AMD program’s financing in the overall level of spending on technical modernization of the armed forces cannot fall below 20%. According to the official estimates, based on GDP growth forecasts, adopting such a formula would guarantee a stable foundation for financing the program at between 8 and 12 billion PLN during the coming decade (1.9 and 2.8 billion euro).⁴⁶ Additional funds (most likely doubling the minimal figure) will be needed to fully cover the upgrade of all elements of the system, including short- and very short-range surface-to-air missiles, as well as radars. Symbolically, the signing ceremony for the new amendment took place in April 2013 at a radar facility situated in the north-eastern part of Poland, next to the border with Russia and Belarus. President Komorowski noted that this was “a fine vantage point to assess all the potential threats” to Poland.⁴⁷

Regarding the scope of the program, the most important element from the BMD perspective would be the purchase of six batteries of the medium-range (up to 100 km) air and missile defense systems, to be acquired by 2022, a program codenamed “Wisła” [Vistula]. The first modules of the system are expected to become operational by 2017.⁴⁸ In addition, Poland plans to acquire 11 short-range air defense batteries and 77 very short-range mobile air defense launchers. It is estimated that these capabilities would be sufficient to provide multi-layered protection to the selected areas in defense of Polish territory, as well as giving Poland an option to deploy AMD batteries in collective defense and out-of-area operations in the framework of NATO.

In order to cope with an ambitious acquisition schedule for the six medium-range systems, Poland’s Ministry of Defense in June 2013 invited interested parties to engage in technical dialogue aimed at testing the Polish armed forces’ general requirements against the capabilities

⁴⁶ According to the background material presented by the National Security Bureau of the President’s Office.

⁴⁷ “Bronisław Komorowski podpisał ustawę gwarantującą finansowanie tarczy antyrakietowej” (Bronisław Komorowski signs law guaranteeing financing of missile defense shield), PAP News Agency, 12 April 2013.

⁴⁸ Information on acquisitions provided by the Ministry of National Defense during December 2012 briefings on the 2013-2022 armed forces modernization plan.

offered.⁴⁹ The news of the major AMD acquisition project generated widespread interest among the producers and the governments supporting their bids, with 14 companies signaling their intention to engage in the project. In January 2014, Poland announced it had selected five partners for further in-depth talks: American Raytheon, French Thales, European MBDA (presenting a joint offer with the Polish Defence Holding), the US-German-Italian MEADS consortium, and the Israeli government presenting the offer of its defence industry (Rafael).

Poland has struggled to avoid displaying any national preferences regarding the provider of the system. Apart from the optimal operational capabilities of the system, the authorities underline the requirement to involve the Polish defense sector in the research of, production of and life-cycle support for the AMD systems. As put by the Deputy Minister of Defense Robert Kupiecki, “the industrial partnership should involve real technology transfers and an innovative involvement of the Polish defense industry in the production and further upgrades of the weaponry”.⁵⁰ The choice of the partner(s) for the mid-range air and missile defense systems would, however, also have political-strategic significance. Certainly, choosing a non-US option would be seen as confirmation of Poland’s disappointment with the state of its partnership with Washington, and signal either willingness to integrate closer with the European partners (MBDA or MEADS option), or to seek a new “special relationship” with Israel (Rafael option).

⁴⁹ Jarosław Adamowski, Tom Kington, “Building the Shield”, *Defense News*, 26 November 2013, available at: <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20131126/DEFREG01/311250029/Building-Shield>

⁵⁰ Robert Kupiecki, *Polish Priorities*, *op. cit.*

BMD's Strategic Challenges for Poland

Development of ballistic missile defense capabilities by the United States has brought a number of wider strategic problems for Poland. The first question concerns the desired level of NATO commitment to BMD. Initially, Warsaw was eager to retain an exclusive relationship with the United States on BMD. It soon realized that, in the interest of NATO unity, Poland should become a supporter of making territorial missile defense a core task for the whole Alliance. The second question concerns the acceptable level of engagement of Russia in NATO's BMD project. Here, Poland was clearly trying to keep Moscow as far from the Alliance's decision-making forum as possible. Finally, the Polish security community had to address the impact of BMD capabilities on its national deterrence posture as well as NATO's, and decide whether they should only complement other tools of deterrence, or whether BMD could in some instances replace them.

NATO Cohesion and the Russian Factor

When making initial decisions about its participation in the missile defense system, Poland treated the bilateral relationship with Washington as more beneficial than acting through NATO. This drew criticism for ignoring the need to ensure Alliance-wide solidarity and an equal level of security among its members.⁵¹ Poland, however, aligned itself with the US position, which emphasized that, while the US BMD capabilities could contribute to the defense of NATO countries, the development of "national" BMD was to be conducted in parallel with the NATO efforts focused on providing missile defense capabilities for the forces deployed in operations (the ALTBMD system). According to what was represented as official Polish thinking, the development of missile defense capabilities in partnership with the US system would increase the level of security for Europe as a whole by guaranteeing closer US involvement in the defense of the continent. That, in turn, should be beneficial for the health of the Alliance.

In reality, Poland was afraid that any attempts to develop territorial missile defense through NATO would be either blocked or diluted by the skeptical Allies, or limited according to Russia's demands. Warsaw's reluctance to seek engagement with NATO contrasted with the Czech Republic's willingness to directly link its involvement in the BMD program

⁵¹ See, e.g., Alexander Bitter, "NATO and Missile Defense", SWP Research Paper, December 2007, p.11. Available at: http://www.swpberlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2007_RP13_btt_ks.pdf

with its goal of “NATOisation” of the US plans.⁵² At the same time, a number of Polish analysts brought to the attention of decision-makers the fact that an agreement with the US cannot be a substitute for deeper engagement within NATO.

Poland was satisfied with the formula agreed by all the Allies at the 2008 Bucharest summit, which endorsed the US plans for the facilities in the Czech Republic and Poland as a “substantial contribution to the protection of Allies from long-range ballistic missiles”, while also promising to seek to explore the link with the work in NATO on theatre-level missile defense in order to ensure a comprehensive defense architecture.⁵³

The change of plans in the US BMD architecture announced in September 2009 meant that the Alliance was to gain a much more prominent role in the development of the system. Warsaw had no choice but to endorse it. At the 2010 Lisbon summit, NATO members adopted a new Strategic Concept that included a pledge to “develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defense”.⁵⁴ The decisions taken by NATO during the summit had official justification in the perceived importance of the threat of ballistic missile attack, in particular by those carrying nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. The overall risk assessment consisted of the analysis of current and projected capabilities of potential adversaries, their intentions, and possible conflicts with the participation of NATO. Political considerations make it difficult to include in the public documents of the Alliance any references to specific countries with this type of potential.⁵⁵ NATO's Strategic Concept emphasizes, however, that the proliferation of ballistic missiles poses “a real and growing threat to the Euro-Atlantic area”.⁵⁶ At the same time, the document made clear the desire to cooperate with Russia on the development of the BMD system.

The US retained a dominant role in the development of NATO's territorial missile defense, as its European Phased Adaptive Approach emerged as a key national contribution to the system. At the NATO level, the main task to be funded by the Allies was the extension of the Active Layered Theatre BMD command and control architecture to enable it to deal with territorial defense tasks and to “plug in” the assets of individual countries. A number of other NATO states announced their decisions on

⁵² Nik Hynek, Vit Stritecky, “The rise and fall of the Third Site of Ballistic Missile Defense”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 43 (2010), pp. 183-184. The Czech Republic was more eager to emphasize the NATO dimension of its involvement in missile defense also, to make public opinion more supportive toward the negotiations with the US.

⁵³ *Bucharest Summit Declaration*, 3 April 2008, § 37. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

⁵⁴ *Active Engagement, Modern Defense*, Adopted by Heads of States and Governments at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, November 2010, § 19.

⁵⁵ Turkey reportedly objected to singling out the Iranian ballistic missile program, which was cited in the US threat assessments as justifying the need for fielding MD capability in Europe.

⁵⁶ *Active Engagement, Modern Defense*, *op. cit.*

national contributions to the BMD system (Germany and the Netherlands: making available *Patriot* batteries; the Netherlands: adding ballistic missile defense functions to the Thales *Smart-L* radar deployed on ships; France: readiness to make available space early-warning assets). Still, the pace of work on BMD capabilities was dictated by US actions such as the deployment of the *Aegis* ship in the Mediterranean, negotiating and bringing into force agreements with Romania on the Deveselu base, with Turkey on an AN/TPY-2 radar at Kürecik, and with Spain on the stationing of additional *Aegis* ships at a naval base in Rota.⁵⁷

From the viewpoint of Poland, bringing the EPAA under the aegis of NATO brought one basic disadvantage: the loss of privileged status as a principal US partner in implementing the project. But this development brought also a number of benefits. Most importantly, Warsaw could “rebrand” its commitment to BMD from an egoistic quest to secure US attention to a far-sighted investment in the protection of the territories of all member states against ballistic missile threats. Poland could present its willingness to host an installation in Redzikowo as a national contribution to a commonly agreed core task of the Alliance. Secondly, Poland could more easily deflect Russia’s criticism of the deployment by pointing to the unified NATO members’ position as the basis for the construction of the system. Thirdly, having other NATO Allies involved in the project could decrease the possibility of another unilateral US change in the architecture of the system.

Maintaining NATO’s cohesion in implementing the agenda agreed in Lisbon remained the biggest challenge from Poland’s viewpoint. Warsaw wanted to avoid a situation in which the prospect of reaching an agreement with Russia on a collaborative MD system development would entice some member states to demand that the United States and Poland change the timetable of building the Redzikowo facility, or even question the utility of the installation itself. The 2010 consensus on the development of territorial MD within NATO was fragile and (unlike the EPAA) did not involve a specific commitment to build a facility in Poland.

Warsaw was ready to accept making BMD development more transparent to Russia, and also to implement a set of confidence-building measures for inspecting the missiles deployed at Redzikowo.⁵⁸ Still, Russia adopted a maximalist approach to possible BMD cooperation with NATO. During the Lisbon summit, President Medvedev proposed a “sectoral” approach to the defense of NATO countries and Russia, which would divide responsibility for the protection of Europe, leaving some NATO member states within the Russia-protected “sector”.⁵⁹ That would be a rather radical departure from the main principle of the North Atlantic Alliance, i.e. joint

⁵⁷ Summarized in: Frank A. Rose, “Missile Defense and European Security”, remarks at the 8th International Conference on Missile Defense, Paris, 3 July 2012, available at: <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/194453.htm>

⁵⁸ Poland’s red line was permanent stationing of Russian inspectors / observers on Polish soil, which would be difficult to accept for historical and symbolic reasons

⁵⁹ Nikolai Sokov, “NATO-Russia Disputes and Cooperation on Missile Defense”, 14 May 2012, available at: http://cns.miis.edu/stories/120514_nato_russia_missile_defense.htm

development of collective defense by the members. As a complementary demand, Russia insisted on putting legal guarantees on the deployment areas and capabilities of the BMD system. Further limiting the likelihood of a positive response from the Alliance, Russia announced in November 2011 that it would take “appropriate measures”, including the deployment of offensive weaponry in the vicinity of NATO territory, if Russia’s demands were not met.⁶⁰ These statements and actions by Russia seemed to solidify the consensus among member states to follow US leadership in moving ahead with work on territorial missile defense. As a consequence, Poland’s actions can now be tied to a broader NATO stance on missile defense.

Missile Defense and Deterrence

By taking the decision to become part of the US-led MD project, Poland clearly counted on boosting its deterrence potential, albeit in an indirect way. The capabilities of the BMD system and its ability to intercept ballistic missiles aimed at Poland only played a secondary role. The Polish decision-makers did not consider it likely that Poland could become a target of a strike originating from the Middle East. It was nevertheless assumed that the presence of a BMD facility manned by American personnel would strengthen US extended deterrence vis-à-vis Poland. Potential adversaries would not be deterred from taking aggressive actions by the supposition that their attack might be thwarted by the US interceptors, but rather by the fact that such an action would be more likely to cause US reaction, with the BMD facility acting as a “trip-wire” of American engagement. In line with this logic, the performance and reliability of the system itself and its relationship with other deterrence capabilities (defensive and offensive) were not at the center of attention.

The question of BMD’s impact on deterrence gained more importance after the introduction of the EPAA and NATO’s decision on developing territorial missile defense capabilities. At the 2010 Lisbon summit, the Allies decided to initiate the Defense and Deterrence Posture Review, which aimed at reassessing the policy of the Alliance and the instruments used for deterrence purposes. Two aspects stood out for closer scrutiny.⁶¹ First, could support for missile defense be interpreted as an element of transforming the deterrence concept itself, moving from the primacy of deterrence by punishment towards deterrence by denial? Second, would the deployment of BMD lead to reassessment of the role of other elements of the deterrence posture of NATO, especially the nuclear component? These two issues could impact on the conceptualization of the collective defense function of the Alliance, which for Poland remained the main *raison d’être* of NATO.

⁶⁰ For a summary of the Russian positions, see: Steven Pifer, “Missile Defense in Europe: Cooperation or Contention”, *Brookings Arms Control Series*, Paper no. 8, May 2012.

⁶¹ See: Jacek Durkalec, “The Role of Missile Defense in NATO Deterrence”, in: Marcin A. Piotrowski (ed.), *Regional Approaches to the Role of Missile Defence in Reducing Nuclear Threats*, post-conference report, Warsaw, Polish Institute of International Affairs, July 2013.

Poland remained attached to the notion that a credible NATO defense and deterrence policy depended on the potential not only to defend the territory of the Alliance, but also to threaten an adequate conventional or nuclear response.⁶² Poland was consistently pressing for the issue of reactivating planning and joint training for Article 5-related missions to be part of NATO's post-ISAF agenda. Warsaw's aim was to bring NATO back to its origin as a collective security organization. The advent of territorial MD was beneficial for Poland in the sense of putting the issue of protection of NATO's populations and territories at the center. It could, however, challenge the traditional approaches to deterrence – by punishment – that Poland was determined to defend.

As a consequence, Warsaw took a cautious stance regarding the potential of missile defense to transform the deterrence policy of the Alliance.⁶³ During the DDPR process, it remained within the group of countries that emphasized the need to maintain the primacy of deterrence by punishment. Warsaw rejected also any direct relationship between the development of BMD capabilities and the possible reduction of the reliance on nuclear weapons, including the proposition that a robust BMD system in Europe (with significant US contribution) could replace the stationing of US tactical nuclear weapons as a symbol of the transatlantic link. While not denying the benefits of developing missile defense as a joint US-European project strengthening the cohesion of the Alliance, Poland subscribed to the notion that it would have a complementary role in deterrence as compared with nuclear weapons.⁶⁴ Protection provided by missile defense is limited to one category of offensive weapon systems, and its technical reliability would always be questioned. Additionally, it is open to debate to what extent an effective BMD system would lead to the reduction of requirements for other deterrence instruments. Potential opponents should not assume that the Alliance would not retaliate adequately against the use of ballistic missiles, even if they were intercepted by the defense system.

For Poland, the usefulness of missile defense for deterrence purposes is further reduced by the fact that a BMD system would have only limited utility in some scenarios involving a security challenge emanating from Russia. The current configuration of the missile defense system was designed to counter a limited ballistic missile attack, but would not be a credible instrument to signal the resolve to defend NATO territory to a country with a vast nuclear and missile potential, such as Russia. In the

⁶² More generally, Warsaw was concerned about the erosion of strategic thinking within the Alliance, including the lack of willingness to discuss openly defense and deterrence in relations with outside actors. The problem has been analyzed recently in: Lawrence Freedman, "The Primacy of Alliance: Deterrence and European Security", *Proliferation Papers*, No. 46, Ifri Security Studies Center, March-April 2013. Available at: www.ifri.org/downloads/pp46freedman.pdf

⁶³ Reflecting its overall approach to the DDPR exercise; see: Simon Lunn, Ian Kearns, "NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review", A Status Report, NATO Policy Brief, European Leadership Network, February 2012, available at: <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2012/02/20.pdf>

⁶⁴ Such a formula was adopted in the final document: "Deterrence and Defence Posture Review", press release (2012) 063, 20 May 2012, § 20, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm?mode=pressrelease

highly unlikely scenario of a major crisis or hostilities, nuclear deterrence would need to remain at the center of the relationship with Russia. At the other end of the spectrum, for dealing with a limited crisis involving armed coercion or demonstration of force by Russia, NATO territorial MD would also be inadequate. In such a scenario, the countries affected would need first and foremost an exhibition of NATO solidarity and resolve – for example, the deployment of the land, air or maritime elements of the NATO Response Force.⁶⁵ Air and missile defense assets could be a part of such a demonstration of solidarity (as shown currently in the NATO theatre BMD deployment in Turkey), but Poland would most likely expect the activation of other NATO assets proportional to the threat.

Support for the development of missile defense in NATO as an element of a wider array of capabilities useful for general deterrence purposes is consistent with the Polish national approach to the modernization of the armed forces. The acquisition of the air and missile defense systems was presented by the Polish government as an element of a strategy meant to maximize the deterrence potential of the Polish armed forces, i.e. ability to prevent the potential adversary from achieving its goals quickly and at low cost.⁶⁶ Apart from the AMD development, other elements of the deterrence posture would include equipping F-16 aircraft and the future submarines with cruise missiles, strengthening coastal defense, expanding rapid-reaction special forces, acquiring armed UAVs, and offensive cyber-warfare capabilities.⁶⁷ At the national level, as in NATO, Poland treats missile defense as one of the instruments needed to strengthen the capabilities of the armed forces to deal with a wider range of military threats. Such a diversity of means would enable Poland to react to the specific contingency (e.g. deployment of additional military units or equipment close to the Polish border) with a tailored set of deterrence measures, signaling the activation of capabilities needed for both deterrence by denial and retaliation. Still, in some instances, the Polish national potential would clearly be inadequate to deter actions by the opponent because of severe imbalances of forces (e.g. threat of nuclear strike, large-scale attack), and support from its NATO and EU allies would be required.

⁶⁵ As practiced during the *Steadfast Jazz* 2013 NATO exercises in November 2013 conducted on the territory of Poland and the Baltic States.

⁶⁶ This approach was dubbed the “Polish Fangs” by the Polish Prime Minister.

⁶⁷ For an overview, see: Dominik P. Jankowski, “Beyond Air and Missile Defense: Modernization of the Polish Armed Forces”, Issue Brief no. 132, Center for European Policy Analysis, 5 September 2013, available at: http://cepa.org/sites/default/files/documents/CEPA%20Issue%20Brief%20No.%20132_Beyond%20air%20and%20missile%20defense.pdf

Conclusion

Poland has been traditionally considered as one of the European states most supportive of US foreign and security policy. Therefore, it seemed a natural choice to forge a long-term partnership with the US on the development of ballistic missile defense assets on the continent. However, even between such close allies, the process of reaching agreement on BMD cooperation has been marred by difficulties. This was partly connected with the nature of the BMD program itself; changes in the core concepts underlying the system forced diplomats on both sides to adjust accordingly the scope of negotiations. More importantly, the US and Poland held diverging expectations regarding the talks: whereas many in Washington assumed that Poland would be thankful for the mere offer to host a US military installation, part of the Polish security establishment saw it as a chance to reap additional benefits from the United States. While an agreement on building an SM-3 facility in Poland was finally reached, the BMD saga was one of the factors that pushed Poland to put greater emphasis on the development of national air and missile defense capabilities in its defense planning.

In the future, one can expect from Warsaw a multifaceted policy. It will cooperate with the United States on the construction of the SM-3 base in the country. At the same time, given the history of the program, Polish decision-makers may not necessarily see the current US commitments and plans regarding Poland as ironclad. Therefore, Warsaw may simultaneously increase its own independent capabilities to counter air and missile threats, considered both as an element of national deterrence posture and as a contribution to the NATO work on territorial BMD architecture.

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