The missile defense scheme and the sharpening of US-Russian geopolitical tensions

Vladimir Volkov
18 July 2008

The US and the Czech Republic signed an agreement July 8 in Prague for the deployment of radar and anti-missile systems on the territory of this Eastern European country. The pact has become one more step in sharpening geopolitical tensions between the United States and Russia. It evoked a stormy response from Moscow.

Signed by American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg, the agreement is opposed by about 70 percent of Czech citizens. Its defenders justify the agreement by pointing to the need to defend Europe from possible Iranian missile attacks. However, the Russian side insists that the true target of creating an infrastructure of anti-missile defense in Eastern Europe is not Iran, but Russia. If the plan is realized, then the military and political positions of Russia would be weakened.

A statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published on the next day said that "the Russian side in such a situation will take adequate measures to compensate for potential threats to its national security." This statement referred not to "diplomatic, but military-technological methods."

Speaking on July 15 in the Kremlin at a meeting with representatives of the diplomatic corps, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said: "Placing elements of a global anti-missile system by the US in Eastern Europe only deepens the situation, and we will be forced to react to this adequately."

He declared that Russia's national security could not be maintained simply by the good word of its partners, and he accused Washington of "gradually undermining... the strategic stability in relations between our countries."

Besides radar in the Czech Republic, deploying elements of an American anti-missile system in Eastern Europe includes placing tens of anti-missile rockets on the territory of Poland. However, talks between the US and Warsaw were halted after the Polish government proposed a number of conditions, chief among them being a request for $20 billion in aid for modernizing the Polish army and air defense.

In the opinion of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, the deployment of elements of an anti-missile system enhances the security of the US, but not that of Poland. "Key in the question of Polish negotiations with the United States has been and remains a real increase in Poland's security through political guarantees, but also through definite military guarantees," he stated.

After encountering opposition from the Polish leaders, the US began preliminary negotiations over deployment of anti-missile rockets with the government of Lithuania. However, this variant appears to be more of a way of pressuring Warsaw—among other reasons because it would provoke an even more furious reaction from Moscow.

The "adequate measures" Russia envisions include deployment of modern weapons in the Kaliningrad area and the re-targeting of its nuclear missiles toward territories where elements of the American missile defenses will be placed.

On April 14, the *Times* of London published an article by its Moscow correspondent Mark Franchetti, reporting on the impending placement of Russian ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads in the Kaliningrad area. Franchetti cited a source in the Russian defense establishment.

Such plans could be real, insofar as they fully correspond to the logic of statements recently made by representatives of the Russian regime.

Last year, first Vice-Premier Sergei Ivanov said that Russia is ready to develop a new base of missile forces in Kaliningrad in order to counteract military threats from the US. And the former head of the General Staff, Yuri Baluevsky, promised that in response to American anti-missile plans Russia would withdraw from the Agreement on Liquidation of Medium- and Short-Range Missiles.

As an immediate diplomatic reaction to the signing of the pact in Prague, on July11 Russia joined with China in vetoing the draft of a resolution before the UN Security Council about sanctions against the leaders of Zimbabwe for using repression. The sanctions were intended to prevent President Robert Mugabe from running in the elections.

A few days before this veto, while he was in Tokyo at a meeting of world leaders, Dmitry Medvedev supported a proposal to adopt a resolution regarding Zimbabwe. The swift change in Russia's position was seen by the West as evidence of its "unreliability" as a member of the "G-8."

One more response by Russia was the decision to "punish" the Czech Republic economically. On July 8, the supply of oil to the Czech Republic through the "Friendship" pipeline was cut by half. Officially, the reduction was attributed to profound economic considerations, however the Russian mass media unequivocally pointed to a direct linkage between this decision and the issue of the radar system in the Czech Republic.

It is not the first time that the Russian regime has used an "economic weapon" to exert pressure on its neighbors and partners.

During the first days of 2005, gas supplies to Ukraine were halted for several days; similar threats were made against Belarussia. In the spring of 2006, a ban was placed on the import into Russia of Moldavian and Georgian wine, which painfully affected the

© World Socialist Web Site

economies of both republics.

In the summer of 2006, Russia halted the supply of oil to the Mazheikyaisky oil refinery in Lithuania. This occurred after Vilnius declared the Polish oil company PKN Orlen, rather than Russian companies, the winner in competition for privatizing the refinery and transferring stock shares.

The present suspension of the export of Russian oil to the Czech Republic has caused great concern in this country. The major Czech oil-refining company, Unipetrol AS, promised that it would not allow a shortage of fuel oil or a rise in prices. Strategic reserves would be used and more oil would be supplied through a pipeline from Germany. However, if the Russian "blockade" continues, it might cause serious difficulties in supplying the Czech economy with petroleum products.

All these moves, however, cannot prevent the realization of US plans, which are based on the strategic interests of the American ruling elite. These interests demand increased control over the most important supply routes of energy resources to the world market and expansion of geopolitical influence in Eastern Europe and on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the United States has been consistently strengthening its position in this vast and previously inaccessible region. This process accelerated especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which were used by American imperialism as a pretext for realizing longstanding plans for expansion.

Military bases were placed in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (the base in Uzbekistan was closed after the West condemned reprisals by the government of Islam Karimov against the wave of protests in Anizhan in the spring of 2005).

In 2004, the three Baltic republics became members of NATO.

Pro-American governments came to power as a result of the "colored revolutions" in Georgia (fall of 2003) and Ukraine (fall of 2004).

At the NATO summit in Bucharest in the spring of this year, there was discussion of adding Georgia and Ukraine to the Membership Action Plan (MAP). This decision was not made. However, at least with regard to Georgia, Secretary of State Rice declared during her visit to Tbilisi last week that "the US will try to achieve the addition of Georgia to the MAP" in December of this year.

Finally, at the end of June, the question arose of the entry of Azerbaijan into NATO. Ann Dersey, US ambassador to Azerbaijan, announced this perspective. Her words were supported by Turkey's ambassador to Azerbaijan, Khulusi Kilij, who said, "Turkey is ready to act as a mediator in Azerbaijan's integration to NATO."

The US geopolitical offensive has forced the Kremlin to issue significant correctives to Russian diplomatic and military policy in favor of adopting a more independent and aggressive stance.

A turning point was the Munich speech of Vladimir Putin in February 2007. There he condemned the United States for "ever-growing disregard for basic principles of international law" and spoke against the "unrestrained and hypertrophied use of force in international affairs, of military force which was plunging the world into one conflict after another."

Despite the obvious hypocrisy of this condemnation—the behavior of Russia's ruling elite is a mirror, although weaker, image of Washington's own actions—it is completely justified in essence.

The consequences of this milestone were not long in coming:

* In August of 2007, for the first time in 15 years, Russian Tu-160 and Tu-95 bombers carrying strategic nuclear weapons began patrolling the skies, flying to the borders of Britain;

* In the summer there were military exercises with countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). For the first time on the territory of Russia (in the South Urals) there were 1,700 Chinese troops with armor, helicopters and planes;

* At the end of the year, Russia began supplying nuclear fuel again to Iran's Bushehr plant, allowing Tehran to continue its nuclear program;

* In December 2007, a moratorium was placed on the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, which gives Russia an opportunity to increase its military forces in the western regions of the nation bordering on Europe.

Russia's relations with neighbors in the "near abroad" have begun to be more aggressive. Sergei Karaganov, one of the influential architects of Russia's foreign policy, explained the rebirth of this old imperial tradition of *realpolitik* in the government *Russian Gazette* on May 5, 2006: "We can and must demonstrate our right to a buffer of countries on our borders that are friendly to us and not to other nations."

Although Russia's current military doctrine proceeds from the position that the use of nuclear weapons is permissible only in response to an attack, leading representatives of the military command are raising the question of their possible use in preventative strikes.

General Baluevsky, former head of the General Staff of the Russian Federation (RF), said in Moscow in January of this year: "In order to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the RF and its allies, armed forces will be used, including preventatively, including the use of nuclear weapons in instances stipulated in documents of the RF's doctrine."

In the opinion of General Leonid Ivashov, who heads the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, national security is "Russia's main national project." Speaking as a hardliner with regard to the US and NATO, he wrote in the *Independent Gazette* on June 6, 2008:

"The world is militarizing, and hydrocarbons are the main object of global conflicts; in the struggle to possess them, the West is prepared to use all means on a broad scale, up to nuclear weapons. As a source of hydrocarbons and other resources, Russia is one of the first objectives of the new re-division of the world. A restraining element against attack on Russia is what remains of the nuclear potential of the USSR."

"A new arms race in on the march, a cold war, and, it seems, humanity is seriously preparing for a 'hot' war," he stressed, demonstrating with his words the determination of Russia's ruling elite to resort to any measures, no matter how destructive and catastrophic they might be, to defend their interests.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site