

US exploits Georgia crisis to push through Polish missile deal

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The agreement signed Wednesday by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski to establish a missile defence shield on Polish soil marks a major turning point in international political relations.

The deal permits the US to set up a new missile system in the heart of Europe. In addition, Poland will receive 96 Patriot missiles, a permanent garrison of American troops and, most significantly, Washington's commitment to come to the country's defence, independently of the NATO alliance.

From its inception, the US government has insisted that the proposal to set up a missile defence system in Eastern Europe was strictly of a defensive character. The circumstances under which the deal was rushed through last week—after 18 months of intense negotiations between Washington and Warsaw—only serves to confirm the opposite: the missile system is of an offensive character and is designed for use against Russia.

The pact signed by Rice and Sikorski dramatically increases the possibility of a confrontation between the two nations with the world's biggest arsenals of nuclear weapons—Russia and the US—with central Europe as a primary battlefield.

Both Warsaw and Washington have sought to deny that the closing of the deal last week was bound up with the conflict between Georgia and Russia. Following its finalisation last Thursday, the chief US negotiator, John Rood, told the press: "This is not linked to the situation in Georgia".

In Washington, White House spokesperson Dana Perino assured journalists that the timing of the deal was not meant to further antagonise Russia. "In no way is the president's plan for missile defence aimed at Russia," she said. "The purpose of missile defence is to protect our European allies from any rogue threats."

Just before signing the missile deal, Rice reiterated that the system was designed to counter threats from Iran and North Korea and told reporters: "It is not aimed in any way at Russia." Following the signing of the agreement on Wednesday, Polish President Lech Kaczynski again declared that the missile shield was of purely a defensive system and not a threat to its neighbours.

None of these claims are credible.

The deal was reached between the Polish and US governments last Thursday, just days after the outbreak of hostilities in Georgia and on the heels of a concerted anti-Russian campaign led by the Polish President Lech Kaczynski. Just two days before the finalisation of the missile pact, Kaczynski appeared alongside Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili at an anti-Russian rally in

Tbilisi to proclaim, "We are here to take up the fight (against Russia)."

For its part, the conservative Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which welcomes the missile system, pointed candidly to the direct link between the deal and the conflict in the Caucasus: "Contrary to the official version presented by Prime Minister Tusk and the US State Department, the war in Georgia played a key role in accelerating the Polish-American negotiations on the defence shield. It is the war that has prompted Tusk to give the go-ahead for the signing of the agreement."

In fact, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has himself made it clear that the US pledge to back Warsaw in the event of Russian aggression was decisive in winning Polish acceptance of the deal. Tusk declared that he only agreed to host the US defence shield on the condition that the US augment Poland's defences with Patriot missiles, which are intended to combat any threat from Russia. At one time touted as possible alternatives to the rabidly nationalist Polish President Kaczynski, Prime Minister Tusk and Foreign Minister Sikorski have revealed themselves to be politicians of the same stripe.

The American State Department has always insisted that the 10 interceptor missiles that are to be installed at a base in Poland, just 115 miles from Russia's westernmost frontier, are aimed at countering potential missile attacks from so called "rogue states" such as Iran and North Korea. Washington has already reached an agreement with Prague to place the second component of the missile defence shield, a radar tracking system, in the Czech Republic to Poland's south-west.

US claims that the missiles system is directed at Iran were recently debunked in an article published in the *Blätter für deutsche and internationale Politik*, Germany's most widely read political and foreign policy journal.

In a section of his essay entitled "The strategic logic of the missile shield," author Hauke Ritz stresses that the stationing of the system in Poland and the Czech Republic "is not at all designed to intercept Iranian missiles".

Ritz points out that the Iranian military lacks any missiles with a range capable of reaching Europe and that it would require a long period of time to develop and build them. He also notes that the US State Department ruled out a Russian proposal for setting up a joint US-Russian anti-missile system in Azerbaijan, which could intercept and destroy any Iranian missile at the start of its flight path.

The author concludes: “The fact that the US ruled out this compromise proposal permits only one conclusion: that the missile shield is directed first and foremost not against Iran, but against Russia. This is underlined by the fact that the other bases for the missile system are also located in border regions to Russia, for example Alaska.”

In describing the role of the missile system, the article establishes that it is intended not as a deterrent against nuclear attack—along the lines of the Cold War build-up of a system of “mutually assured destruction” (MAD) - but rather as an essential component of a US first-strike strategy.

“The strategic significance of the system consists of intercepting those few dozen missiles Moscow is capable of launching following an American first strike,” Ritz writes. “The missile system is therefore a crucial element in the attempt to develop a nuclear first strike capacity against Russia. The original plan is for the stationing of just ten interceptor missiles in Poland. But once the system is established, their number could be easily increased.”

Finally, the author refers to an article in the US magazine *Foreign Affairs* in 2006 entitled “The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy,” which argues that the US currently has unique advantages in conducting nuclear war. Ritz concludes: “This article makes very clear the actual function of the missile system: it is to guarantee the US the capacity to carry out nuclear war without the risk of a counter-strike. If this capacity can be achieved then it can be employed as a geopolitical argument, in order to implement national interests.”

Ritz’s analysis of the missile shield system as an essential component of a first-strike strategy underscores the enormous and growing danger that the escalating conflict between the US and Russia could unleash a nuclear conflagration.

Leading Russian military figures and politicians have reacted furiously to the missile shield agreement. Last Friday, General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, the Russian armed forces’ deputy chief of staff, described the pact as an act of aggression against Russia and warned Poland that it was leaving itself open to retaliation—and possibly even a nuclear attack. “Poland, by deploying [the system] is exposing itself to a strike—100 per cent,” he said.

In his talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel last Friday, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev repeated the charge that the Polish missile deployment “has the Russian Federation as its target”.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Washington has followed a policy of systematically encroaching on former Soviet territory to establish a string of military bases and governments friendly to the US. The purpose of this policy was to undermine the influence of Russia in the energy-rich regions of central Asia, while seeking to divide and weaken Europe.

The consequences of Washington’s intervention in the former Soviet bloc have included the installation of a number of authoritarian regimes which lack any genuine broad popular base such as those of Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia and Viktor Yushchenko in the Ukraine, as well as the regime in Poland. The most common characteristics of these administrations are rabid anti-communism, national chauvinism, contempt for genuine democratic processes and an unwavering adherence to the precepts

of the free market.

Such regimes are inherently unstable, both internally and in relation to their neighbours. Now, the US administration has agreed to install a new weapons system in Poland directed against its biggest neighbour, while at the same time guaranteeing to come to the military assistance of the Polish government when necessary. This is a recipe for new conflict and war. Nothing could more clearly express the utter recklessness of US foreign policy.

The dramatic increase of tensions in Eastern Europe eerily recalls the build up to the Second World War. Throughout the 1930s, the German dictator Adolf Hitler professed his peaceful intentions while at the same time undertaking a series of provocations as part of his plan to fundamentally redraw the map of Europe in Germany’s interests. It was precisely in Poland where a global war that would claim over 70 million lives broke out in September 1939.

Prior to leaving for Brussels for a meeting of NATO foreign ministers on Tuesday, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, wagged her finger and warned that Russia was playing a “dangerous game” in Georgia. The US and its NATO allies would not allow Russia to draw a “new line” through Europe, she declared.

Then, following the summit on Tuesday, Rice returned to the theme and declared with reference to Russia’s military presence in Georgia that there would not be a new line between “those who want to be within and those outside the Atlantic structure.”

Such comments are utterly hypocritical. Russia’s intervention over the past two decades in the states of the former Soviet Union - as in its brutal war in Chechnya—have been of a reactionary character and should be condemned, but there cannot be the least doubt that the main power intent on establishing new power blocs and spheres of influence in the region is the US. This is the significance of the network of military bases and installations established in Eastern and Central Europe by successive US administrations since 1991 with the aim of encircling Russia.

Moreover, it was Rice’s colleague, former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who in 2003 sought to draw a dividing line between “old” and “new” Europe, on the basis of which European countries were prepared to support the US in its war against Iraq. Now in its missile deal with Poland, it is the US which has agreed to a clause that subverts the traditional structures of the NATO alliance in order to further Washington’s unilateral militarist policy in the region.

The increasingly aggressive penetration of the US into central and eastern Europe is causing alarm in Paris, Berlin and Rome. At the same time, Washington is only able to press ahead with its reckless offensive because of the cowardly stance adopted by the European bourgeoisie, which watches as tensions on the continent escalate to boiling point, but is not prepared to challenge the US administration.



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