

Behind the Russo-American Anti-Missiles' Controversy

by Charles Rault*

What Russia wonders is: does this U.S. ambition to install Anti-Missiles system in the Czech Republic and Poland is precursory to a greater plan which roots would be the current project the United States introduces as vital in order to counter the threat Iran is allegedly to pose within the next 25 years? Moscow considers Iran is not a serious threat enough to justify such a project. Thus, the latter would result from other reasons like an undisclosed but a real ambition on U.S.' behalf to surround Russia militarily. Within the U.S. administration some believe that such Anti-Missiles project is to test Russia's capacity to resist a more aggressive policy. If there are some officials who believe that Tehran is to be a serious threat to Europe within a few years, some remain doubtful as for the effectivity of an Anti-Missiles system which tests have proven mixed if not unsuccessful. Also, another suggestion has emerged as a more credible explanation: the U.S. administration's goal would be to improve the military and the political integration of eastern Europe (one means former Warsaw Pact's members) into the West and NATO. By installing its Anti-Missiles system, Washington would like to make such integration almost unquestionable in the future; to sum up, building a renewed transatlantic bond for the next 50 years at least.

By reinforcing its main military alliance, the United States would achieve various objectives which some are clearly visionary and others rather controversial. Surprisingly, the key of this strategy is the EU membership of Czech Republic and Poland. By making the two countries a vital part of the system, the United States preserves the whole European Union as a long-term asset of its military strategy for the 21st century. This scheme somehow contradicts with recent ideas saying Europe would lose its strategic importance to the benefit of the Asia-Pacific region within the U.S. global security policy. If the United States adopts such a challenging policy with the Anti-Missiles shield, Russia and its president Wladimir Putin also hold some responsibility. Ongoing tensions over Kosovo and Iran along with a deliberate policy dedicated to remake Russia a top world power, all this within somekind of a pro-soviet nostalgia, may have played an important role in the american wish to go ever further. On one hand, President Putin may be right when he says that Iran isn't as threatening as the United States says it is. Clandestine operations assisted by serious efforts in the field of intelligence related to Iran which would range from regime's destabilization to nuclear developments-related sabotage are best means to disrupt iranian ambitions and to eliminate the threat.

On the other hand, President Putin may be wrong when he affirms that Anti-Missiles project is a threat to the security of Russia. Unless he doesn't trust the efficiency of russian missiles, he perfectly knows that Anti-Missiles system wouldn't resist any russian counter-attack in case an unlikely delirious U.S. administration decided to attack Russia. If President Putin really has such concern in mind, then instead of his proposal of an Azerbaijan-based joint system, he would rather propose a joint verification system which would let Russia have guarantees that the U.S. Anti-Missiles system doesn't aim at Russia. Except if the United States secretly fears that someday terrorists could launch missiles from the russian soil. Or if the United States has growing concerns over how Russia is to evolve politically; apart from the current 'no-cold-war' diplomacy. President Putin or his successor would serve the U.S. interests by installing missiles in Kaliningrad, an enclave in the heart of Europe between Poland and Lithuania. Such a move would be quickly interpreted as a clear provocation against the European Union which would respond by reinforcing its military ties with the United States. The European Union doesn't want to be the ground of a new russo-american confrontation but it has no means to decide and would necessarily join the United States into its efforts to deter Iran (and Russia); let alone the economic consequences this would have on EU-Russia trade. The United States would become even more powerful and the emergence of an independent military European Union would be definitely compromised.

Moscow knows that it has more to lose than to win by confronting the West which is at the height of its power despite growing terrorism and the emergence of new world powers like China. Besides, China is a country on which Russia should keep an eye given this 'friend' could turn into a terrific competitor on the international stage to the detriment of russian ambitions. One can't be sure that the Anti-Missiles controversy is being used as a political argument for 2008 presidential elections in the United States and Russia. Such issue has deep-rooted causes and long-term consequences: this is serious. Washington as Moscow have good arguments to defend their interests: the former wants to definitely establish east-european countries' independence and to prepare its 21st century's military superiority; the latter wants to defend its views on its former sphere of influence and not to contradict with its ambition to become a great power again. To ease tensions, the United States could clarify whether such Anti-Missiles system is to be under NATO or exclusive U.S. control as NATO could be the place towards a more comprehensive russo-american cooperation in order to counter potential and future ballistic threats.

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