

Question & Answer

The Secretary-General of NATO, Rasmussen, said yesterday, 23/10/2009, that NATO welcomes the plans for missile defense in accordance with Obama's plan, as the Czech Republic confirmed that she is ready to be part of this defense system, only two days after Poland's accepted. How is that?! Did not President Obama announce his plans to abandon installation of interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar site in the Czech Republic on 17/9/2009? Or was Obama's declaration to abandon not real, rather to trick Russia to lower her guard temporarily? If this is so, has America under Obama come to account for the growing strength of Russia and designed to appease Russia's security concerns? And does this also mean that America's military been shaken such that her control of the international situation has weakened?

The Answer:

Obama has abandoned the missile defense system of the form that Bush adopted, but he has replaced it with a new form of missile defense system which is stronger in some aspects than Bush's system, even though it is in a less provocative mould than that of Bush's. To answer the above-mentioned question, we must take into account the following points:

1. Ever since the 1950's American politicians and scientists have explored various ways of defending America from the threat of Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). These efforts were bracketed under National Missile Defense (NMD) and essentially consisted of providing a shield against a Soviet nuclear attack. America devised a program which advocated the use of nuclear missiles to intercept Soviet ICBMs. However, in 1961 the programme was abandoned because of technical shortcomings. It was replaced by a combination of programmes, but the new programmes longevity was compromised as it could not absolutely guarantee the destruction of Soviet ICBMs, was very expensive and suffered from major technological problems. Nonetheless, these programmes succeeded in pushing both the Americans and the Soviets to conclude the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in 1972. Under the treaty each country was allowed to create a so-called missile shield for incoming ICBMs. But it was limited both in geographical scope and the number of interceptor missiles each country could deploy to defend itself. For instance the Soviets deployed a system named the A-35 "Galosh" missile system, and it was deployed to protect only Moscow. The US deployed the Safeguard system to defend the ICBM launch sites around the country.

2- The launch of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) on March 23, 1983 undermined the ABM treaty and instigated the Soviets into a new arms race with the Americans. This is what led to the economic pressure on the Soviet Union, which with other factors led to its collapse. The SDI or Star Wars as it was commonly known was more ambitious than any previous attempt undertaken by the US to create a missile shield. It was an ambitious attempt to deploy missiles, radars and interceptors on land, air, sea and space. SDI included many space-based laser battle stations, nuclear-powered laser satellites and very sophisticated command and control systems. But unlike the previous programmes, SDI was designed to offer protection to US allies from incoming Soviet ICBMs. It was no longer an ambition of the US to limit NMD to its shores, but was touted as an effective defense for Europe. After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 the SDI initiative lost momentum and was eventually discarded—

but NMD still remained a priority. Under Bill Clinton's term in office the NMD went through a few modifications and a phased approach to NMD was pursued. However, it was not until George Bush Junior's term in office that the NMD became the focal point for US-Russian tensions. On December 13, 2001, George Bush granted Russia notice that the US was withdrawing from the ABM treaty. In recent history, it was a first for the US to withdraw from a major international arms treaty. This led to the eventual creation of America's Missile Defense Agency followed by ambitious plans to revamp NMD.

3- On December 16 2002 Bush signed National Security Presidential Directive 23 which outlined plans to commence deployment of operational ballistic missile defense systems. The following day the U.S. formally requested from the UK and Denmark use of facilities in Fylingdales, England, and Thule, Greenland, respectively, as a part of the revamped NMD programme. The Bush administration gave a new name to NMD and called it Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) which was effectively the land component of the NMD programme. In reality the NMD also consists of space-based and sea-based intercept programmes. In February 2007, the US started formal negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic concerning construction of missile shield installations to facilitate America's GMD System. The US justified its pursuit of GMD in these countries based on intelligence estimates that rogue countries, like North Korea and in particular Iran, were developing long range missiles that could carry nuclear war heads and threaten US interests in Europe and Israel. But the true objective was the encirclement of Russia and keeping it within the threat the U.S. missile shield. Russia immediately dismissed such assertions and viewed GMD as a grave threat to its own security. In November 2008, Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin remarked that U.S. missiles in Poland could hit Moscow in four minutes. And to embarrass America and show the falsity of her claims that the missile shield is for Iran, Russia has offered America to be deployed her radars next to the Russians radar in her base in, "Gabala" in Azerbaijan, because the base is closer to Iran from Poland and Czech Republic, if the target is indeed Iran! America did not agree because the goal was to set up bases in Eastern Europe to threaten Russia ... and America did not want Russia to participate in its base so she will not be under the Russian observation as long as the target is Russia itself! Thus, Russia was aware that the missile shield is directed against her and not against those rogue states!

Thus In April 2007, Putin warned of a new Cold War if America proceeded to deploy its missile shield Central Europe. Moreover, notwithstanding this threat, Putin also pledged to abandon Russia's obligations under a Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987 with the United States. Then he threatened to deploy missiles in Kaliningrad Province (Kaliningrad) on the Baltic Sea, near Poland. One Russian general even went as far as threatening to nuke Poland for its enthusiasm to be part of America's missile shield. On August 15 2008, General Anatoly Nogovitsyn said, "By hosting these, Poland is making itself a target. This is 100 per cent certain. It becomes a target for attack. Such targets are destroyed as a first priority."

4- Way before Obama's official announcement of abandoning plans to extend America's missile shield to Poland and Czech Republic, Obama had publicly stated in September 2009 that he would terminate plans for missile defense sites in Eastern Europe, in favor of missile defense systems located on American Navy warships. So his announcement in 17/9/2009 was anticipated, and it came after he had ordered a comprehensive review of Bush's GMD programme.

5- What is important is to ascertain whether the announcement is a complete abandonment of Bush's GMD programme or a ploy designed to appease Russia's security concerns. It can be understood that from the review of the following:

- A- Speaking about the new approach, US President Obama said, "I have approved the unanimous recommendations of my Secretary of Defense and my Joint Chiefs of Staff to strengthen America's defenses against ballistic missile attack. This new approach will provide capabilities sooner, build on proven systems, and offer greater defenses against the threat of missile attack than the 2007 European missile defense program." Obama further revealed: "We have made specific and proven advances in our missile defense technology, particularly with regard to land- and sea-based interceptors and the sensors that support them. Our new approach will, therefore, deploy technologies that are proven [and] do so sooner than the previous program...new missile defense architecture in Europe [that] will provide stronger, smarter, and swifter defenses of American forces and America's allies. It is more comprehensive than the previous program; it deploys capabilities that are proven and cost-effective; and it sustains and builds upon our commitment to protect the U.S. homeland against long-range ballistic missile threats; and it ensures and enhances the protection of all our NATO allies."
- B- US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates deflected wide spread criticism and said, "Those who say we are scrapping missile defense in Europe are either misinformed or misrepresenting the reality of what we are doing." Gates asserted that the new system "provides a better missile defense capability...than the program I recommended almost three years ago." Gates further stated that "We have now the opportunity to deploy new sensors and interceptors in northern and southern Europe that near term can provide missile defense coverage against more immediate threats from Iran or others."
- C- Clearly both Obama and his Defense Secretary Gates are not talking about the desertion of his predecessor's GMD Programme, on the contrary they have scrupulously outlined a more sophisticated version. Gates further laid out his plans for the next generation NMD system in stating, "The second phase, about 2015, will involve fielded, upgraded, land-based SM-3s." Euronet quoted General James Cartwright, vice-chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a feature on a proposed missile surveillance deployment, saying "It's probably more likely to be in the Caucasus that we would base [the radar], because it's to get the early tracks."

6-In other words GMDs abandonment in Poland and Czech Republic is at best a temporary reprieve for Russia. Gates was obliging enough to reveal that the Pentagon has already opened negotiations with the two nations "about hosting a land-based version of the SM-3 and other components of the system." Speculation is rife that Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan could be possible sites for US missile deployment. In other words, the US is contemplating moving ground base components of its missile shield directly into Russia's its back yard i.e. the post-Soviet space. Despite Obama's new speech and that of his Secretary of Defense, which were less provocative, and despite Russia's welcoming of Obama's decision to abandon installation on 17/9/2009 with the statement of the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in the 25/9/2009 that he will withdraw his decision to deploy missiles in Kaliningrad, it is not surprising to find that despite the warm public response to Obama's speech, Russia is wary of these new developments. Reacting to Obama's speech, Russian Information Agency Novosti

stated, "As expected, when President Obama spoke in 24/9/2009 to the press, he did not speak about shelving or abandoning anything, but adopting a 'new missile defense program,' based on 'proven and cost effective technology' that will 'better counter the current threat.' It was, he said, 'more extensive' than the previous program involving the Czech Republic and Poland."

7- As for the decline of America's military and thus her control to the international situation, and if she is accounting for the growing strength of Russia's military: It is true that America does not enjoy the same primacy as it enjoyed before the invasion of Iraq. The two open wounds of Afghanistan and Iraq have sapped her strength and depleted her resources. The economic crisis has further exacerbated America's standing in the world. But despite all of these set-backs the US still remains the dominant super power, sets the world agenda and controls the international situation. Nevertheless, America faces challenges and competition from other major powers. As a result of her apparent weakness the challenges stemming from her competitors have grown much stronger. As for Russia, she managed to take advantage of America's weakness and the high oil prices to translate some of the economic wealth into military resources and political capital. It has used this newfound vigor to pose challenges to America in Central America, Caucasus, Europe, and Central Asia. Hence, some have used the term 'the resurgent Russian bear'. However, present day Russia is far away from the heydays of its glorious past. It suffers from a bruised ego as well as many structural weaknesses that render it incapable of posing a head to head challenge to the international world order in the near future.

5 Dhul-Qa'adah 1430
24/10/2009 CE