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With Missile Shield Change, National Interests Get a Leg Up on the Military-Industrial Complex

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Accusing an American president of "appeasing" Russia and of "betraying" the Poles and the Czechs, the way critics have been reacting to the Obama Administration's announcement that it was scrapping a planned missile defense shield in Eastern Europe, had the effect of enveloping Washington in a Cold War time-warp.

Remember the good-old days when the perceived Soviet threat had served as an opportunity for politicians, bureaucrats and interest groups, encompassing what President Dwight Eisenhower called the Military-Industrial Complex, to stimulate new arms races in the name of protecting U.S. interests and defending its allies?

Indeed, Republican lawmakers and neoconservative pundits depicted the shelving of Bush-era plans for the deployment of 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic as nothing short of capitulating to pressure from Moscow by abandoning two key eastern European allies, warning in somewhat apocalyptic terms that the move weakens U.S. status in the region and encourages Russian aggression.

Expect the sounding of the alarm by the same critics in the coming days: Beware. The Spirit of Yalta is haunting Eastern Europe and could bring about the "Finlandization" of Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, the Baltic states.

But according to Bush Administration officials and its allies in Congress, the U.S. defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic was not aimed at defending these two countries against a potential threat from Russia -- but was intended to protect Europe against future missiles from Iran. Now that the Obama Administration, with the full support of the U.S. military, has proposed to replace the Eastern European based missile defense shield with a more mobile, agile and cheaper naval-based missile defense system, the Republicans and neoconservatives who are deploring this decision seem to be admitting that the main strategic rationale behind the deployment of the missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic was, in fact, to keep Russia - and not Iran -- in check.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the Russians -- who lest we forget had already dissolved the Warsaw Pact and the entire Soviet Union and withdrawn their military forces from Eastern Europe -- have regarded the planned defense system in Eastern Europe, coming after the continuing extension of NATO to their borders, as part of an aggressive American posture. After all, Russia has no plans to deploy a similar system in Cuba.

Those who disregard these genuine Russian concerns tend to draw attention to the alleged fears among Poles and Czechs over the Russian threat to their security and, hence, the need to deploy the U.S. missiles in Eastern Europe. But then, according to opinion polls, majorities in Poland and the Czech Republic have been opposed to the plan.

And if, indeed, both the Poles and the Czechs are so worried about Russia's military might, why is it that in the list of countries ranked by order of military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, Poland and the Czech Republic are respectively in the 95th place and 135th places (according to the World Fact Book 2008 published by the CIA)?

These numbers indicate the relatively low priority these countries place on military expenditure and suggests that their leaders are either not really worried about the threat from Russia; or more likely, they are expecting the U.S. to serve as their protectors. Indeed, reflecting the strategic goals espoused by some of the elites in Washington and in capitals in Eastern Europe, the planned missile defense shield would have served as a "trip-wire" -- not unlike the American troops stationed in the divided city of Berlin during the Cold War who were expected to lead to U.S. military retaliation if and when the Soviets attacked West Germany.

But while the American people and Congress had conducted an extensive debate over U.S. strategy in Europe during the Cold War, and the American commitment to protect West Germany from Soviet aggression enjoyed wide bipartisan and public support, the notion that Americans were going to die defending Poland and the Czech Republic against real or imagined Russian threat has never been introduced as part of the national conversation. Instead, those promoting the deployment of U.S. missiles in Eastern Europe had hoped to present the American people with a fait accompli in the form of this trip-wire.

The Obama Administration should be complimented for disrupting this planned sneaky move to press the U.S. into another long-term and costly military intervention at a time when American military forces are overstretched and its budgets are soaring to the stratosphere, and most important, America is not facing a geo-strategic and ideological threat in the form of the Soviet Union.

But as political economist F. A. Hayek warned in his 1944 book *The Road to Serfdom*, those who during a major war "have tasted the powers if coercive control" will always find it difficult "to reconcile themselves with the humbler roles they will then have to play" in the aftermath of the war. By scrapping the planned missile defense shield, Obama is helping to accelerate this process of reconciliation.

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Well said, sir, and this seems FAR more likely than ANYTHING coming out of the main stream media concerning the Eastern European plans for this system. Since the intentional failure at Tora Bora, it's been only TOO apparent republican'ts and neoCONS were doing everything they could to create perpetual enemies and perpetual wars. Another 'Cold War' would be used by them no differently, and was no doubt wanted as one more tactic of FEAR to keep OUR voters and taxpayers in line.

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