

The Intersection of Czech and American Defense Policies: The Case of the Proposed Missile Shield

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Introduction

Why should there be an intersection between Czech and American defense policies? As I begin the writing of this paper on September 22, exactly two months before delivering it in Philadelphia, the contours of an answer to that question emerge. At 2 am on September 22, a rocket attack in Afghanistan's Logar Province wounded three Czech soldiers. They worked at a base there as part of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). That particular PRT had the primary mission of restoring health and educational institutions in a ravaged part of the country. Secondly, they also worked to secure the only functioning dam in the province, as infrastructure also had been severely damaged. This attack served as a reminder that three other Czech soldiers had previously lost their lives in Afghanistan (*iDNES*, 2008a). At 9 pm on the same day, the body of Mr. Ivo Žďárek arrived at the airport in Prague. He was the Ambassador to Pakistan, and he lost his life two days earlier along with fifty-nine other persons in a terrorist attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan. Tragically, after a four-year stint as Ambassador to Vietnam, he had only moved into his position in Pakistan earlier in the year (*iDNES*, 2008b). These losses clearly would not have occurred had there been no linkage between Czech and American defense policies.

Although the 9/11 attacks had affected only the United States in a direct way, seven years later it was evident that America's fate had become intertwined with that of a host of other states. The leadership and public in many of those nations would later have serious doubts about the wisdom and appropriateness of invading Iraq as a response to the 9/11 attack by al Qaeda on two leading American cities. However, in many of the same nations, there was also support for the destruction of the Taliban sanctuary for al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Thus, countries like the Czech Republic saw common cause with

the ensuing American-led struggle in Afghanistan. Many of them took the concrete step of sending troops to that country to participate in the effort to restore stability and infrastructure in many areas of the nation. When a majority of the troops in Afghanistan were transferred to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command in October 2006, alliance obligations strengthened the early commitments to the Afghanistan mission of new NATO partners like the Czechs. However, there were costs to this initially consensual commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the accompanying destruction of Taliban/al Qaeda forces there. Those Czech soldiers who were wounded in Logar Province were only in that location because of the bin Laden-directed attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon in the fall of 2001. Similarly, the top Czech diplomat in Pakistan lost his life because the Marriott Hotel symbolized the injection of increased American influence into an Islamic nation with the objective of creating a counterweight to the terrorist remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban, who operated clandestinely along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The American-proposed missile shield has the potential to take Czech and Polish involvement in American defense policy to an entirely new level. While the Poles would be the hosts to ten anti-missile interceptors, the Czechs site at Brda would be the location for the accompanying radar capability. The two units would presumably operate in tandem to fend off attacks from rogue states such as Iran or more remotely North Korea. The potential linkage between this technology and the 9/11 threat was the potential Iranian sponsorship of those forces that American intervention was seeking to destroy. Much controversy in both Poland and the Czech Republic accompanied these new American proposals. However, the Czechs finally signed the agreement in July 2008. The Polish signature came one month later, quickly following the Russian invasion of Georgia. While the missile shield had no link to a threat from Russia, the aggressive move into Georgia by Putin/Medvedev increased the threat level,

particularly for smaller nations in the immediate Russian neighborhood. Legislative approval remained a necessity in both countries.

In this paper, the main spotlight will be on the Czech response to the American proposal for the radar site in their nation. The central hypothesis will be that past Czech-American connections in the area of defense policy have made such a proposal likely if not inevitable. The secondary hypothesis will be that new agreements of some durability are forming in the post-9/11 world that may limit national autonomy in the near future. The first section of the paper will address historic American security goals toward Central Europe. In the second section, the complicated matter of Czech security goals in relation to American objectives will receive due attention. In the third part, domestic Czech political considerations and conflicts over defense policy will form the centerpiece of analysis. Fourth, analysis of both the actual negotiating process and the formal signing of the defense agreements will take place. In the conclusion, the examination will turn again to the primary and secondary hypotheses of the study. How strong is Czech-American web of security interests, and did that web pre-ordain in some way the enactment of the eventual agreement? In the future, to what extent will Czech leaders possess the freedom to design their defense policies, and to what extent will they encounter limits to that autonomy?

American Security Goals in Central Europe

The security goals of the United States in Central Europe since the end of the Cold War have centered on a number of key objectives. In part, the goal has been to nurture the growth of capitalist economies in the former countries of the communist bloc with an eye on development of strong partnerships with countries in the West. Stimulation of the democratic process has been an additional target of concern, in light of the four decades under autocratic control. Both of these initial processes

offered the promise of a more dependable integration into the West. In addition, stability has been a principal value whose importance the chaotic Balkan Wars of the 1990s underlined. A further goal throughout the period has been expansion of NATO to include these post-communist nations into a cohesive military alliance. Finally, creation of a buffer against post-9/11 terrorism has been a pressing and urgent need early in the twenty-first century. Taken as a whole, this set of five American security goals sets the table for examination of the two hypotheses. First, it was in the environment of this mix of objectives that the decision to advocate creation of the missile shield took place. Second, as this web of pressures tugged on the Czech Republic, substantial questions about Czech autonomy emerged in a glaring way.

In the early years after the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe, American policy supported the conversion to capitalist economies. In part, this meant the fostering of connections between western companies and their counterparts in Central Europe. For example, the Czechs entered into a cooperative arrangement with French companies to rebuild their main airport in Prague. Injection of western financial resources and know-how was directed at re-starting the economies that had labored under communist controlled central planning and quotas for so many decades. In part, the policy of the United States was to encourage the move to free market capitalism within a reasonable period of time. For Romania, this meant a prolonged process that stretched into the late 1990s (Gledhill and King, 2008, pp. 326-7). For the Hungarians it meant a moderately paced transition, while for the Poles it entailed “shock therapy” for several years (Argentieri, 2008, pp. 225-7). American policy also supported the exchange of economic specialists. Central European economists came to western universities to learn of the most advanced techniques, while American and West European academics traveled to Central Europe to share their expertise. In these ways, American policy more or less engaged with the economic

transition in the region. Thereby, an economic base could potentially underpin a sense of security in the region rather than a vacuum that could invite trouble.

Stoking of the fires of democracy has been another security-related goal of American policy in the region. One motivation for creation of democracy is simply that it has been a NATO entry requirement. NATO and eventually the European Union (EU) required basic establishment of democratic procedures prior to entry. The logic of such a requirement is the necessity of extending a long-standing security alliance on the basis of common values. In addition, the idea of the “democratic peace” received much attention in the 1990s. Countries that established functioning democracies seemed safer and less prone to provocative attacks on their neighbors that led to continuing battles with one another (Jentleson, 2007, pp. 519-25). In contrast, those countries that hung on to autocratic forms were more suspect and more likely to lash out militarily against border countries. Variations in the region were apparent. On the one hand, the Baltic states were quick to enact democratic reforms after 1991. All three simply restored the Constitutions that had governed them in the 1920s and 1930s, prior to their absorption into the Soviet Union in 1940 (Eglitis, 2008, p. 241). Admission to both NATO and the EU came for all three as a partial consequence in 2004. On the other hand, several of the Yugoslav successor states were reluctant to yield communist era autocratic political patterns, and thus their fate was quite different. Serbia loomed as a NATO enemy in the Bosnian War and Kosovo crisis, while Croatia produced a nationalist leadership whose features for some years bore striking resemblance to those of its communist predecessors (Baskin and Pickering, 2008, pp. 295-98). Overall, under American leadership, the West integrated new democracies into its security structures more quickly than it did unchanging, authoritarian regimes.

Promotion of a stable region is implicit in the previously mentioned American objectives, but such a goal is also a separate part of a larger historical tapestry. After World War I, Central Europe

became a political vacuum. Collapse of the old empires resulted in creation of fledgling democracies. Most of those systems gave way to more authoritarian variants within a decade (Wolchik and Curry, 2008, pp. 10-11). As a result, Nazi ambitions capitalized on that vacuum and moved in to dominate the region for the duration of World War II. This pattern of vulnerability repeated itself after World War II. This time it was the Soviet Union that exploited the lack of effective political governance. In such a highly volatile and unstable atmosphere, the region fell under communist influence for a full four decades (Hesli, 2007, p. 49, 245). It certainly seemed apparent that the post-1989 situation was a less dangerous one for the region. However, the rise of rogue leadership in the Balkans and nearby Middle East made the risk of another vacuum further to the north too great. While Central Europe was no longer the primary theater that it had been during the Cold War, its strategic location required priority treatment.

It is clear that the American plan for emplacement of a radar station in the Czech Republic fitted into this priority of increased stability. For example, President Bush visited Prague in June, 2007, while Secretary of Defense Robert Gates followed up with a visit in October. Both emphasized the importance of this facility in the strengthening regional security in light of threats further to the east (iDNES, 2007a). NATO Jaap de Hoop Scheffer underlined the regional security theme on a visit to Romania in the fall of 2007. He stated that the principle of security was indivisible and that the missile shield capability should protect equally each NATO partner (iDNES, 2007b). Even if Iran stopped its work on a nuclear program, security against conventional weapons would also be advanced by the radar system (iDNES, 2007c). By the end of 2007, arguments by Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg on behalf of the radar shield emphasized its ability to protect both Western and Central Europe (iDNES, 2007d). His American counterpart Condoleezza Rice expanded the application of the shield to the entire Euro-Atlantic region

(iDNES, 2008c). Thus, the Czech component of the missile shield was an important device for furthering the security of Central Europe as well as its immediate environs.

Expansion of NATO to include many of the post-communist nations would buttress regional security in important ways. The Clinton Administration, with its Partnership for Peace (P4P) program offered observer status to qualified post-communist states by the middle of the 1990s. In the immediate aftermath of the first Persian Gulf War, and at the time of the tragic Bosnian War, a widened military alliance made much sense. By 1999, just months before the NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo, NATO deemed three nations ready for full membership. In that year the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland all became full members of the alliance. After more years of negotiation, in 2004 NATO admitted Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. With ten Central European nations within the alliance, a potential vacuum was filled and security broadened. Particularly difficult was the decision to bring in the three Baltic nations. As they became part of this western military alliance, their potential to provoke Russian reactions was very real (Michta, 2006, p. 18). However, Russian reactions to the admission of all ten softened over time. Instead of opposing NATO expansion per se, Putin became more selective and reacted mainly to issues that engaged Russian interests (Webber, 2007, pp. 270-3). The proposed missile shield was certainly one of those.

American security interests also incorporate a view of Central Europe as a buffer against hostile regimes and terrorist groups that emanate from the east. For example, the 2002 NATO Summit approved the Prague Capabilities Commitment. That document in part focused on creation of a common barrier against a potential threat from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats. The Summit participants also agreed on four categories of action to counteract future terrorist acts. Further, they laid plans for future creation of a Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit (Terzuolo, 2006, pp. 107-10). Changes in intelligence procedures included common projects in four distinct areas. Those

areas consisted of firmer airline security, barriers against terrorist funding, border controls, and exchange of intelligence itself (Rees, 2004. pp. 178-9). Of course, the Central European nations would share in those projects, and the missile shield proposal would contribute to creation of the needed buffer.

In the end, Iran came to be a central figure in the threats that American leaders used to justify the missile shield project. President Bush estimated, in a speech at the National Defense University, that Iran might possess the ability to strike a number of European allies by 2015 (USA TODAY, 2007a). Concerns about Russian reactions were always on the table. For example, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates followed up the Bush speech with comments intended to reassure Russia. He indicated that, with the agreement of the Czech leadership, Russia might have an invitation to inspect the military sites that were part of the missile shield (iDNES, 2007e). Thus, the security plans of the United States included a vision of Central Europe as a key player in the double effort to fend off terrorism and to reassure Russia that its interests would not be sacrificed.

Czech Security Goals in Relation to American Objectives

Czech goals in defense policy meshed with American objectives in a number of important respects. Participation in the broad transatlantic partnership was beneficial to most nations on the European continent, particularly the Czechs. At critical points in the history of Czechoslovakia, particularly in 1918 and then again during the World War II era, America provided key assistance in development of the nation. Further, in 1999, membership in NATO also brought the two closer together and created in the Czech leadership a conviction that they should take the new alliance obligations seriously. Then, following the catastrophe of the 9/11 attacks, Czechs perceived the common linkage with the American effort to combat the global, intensified terrorist threat.

Czechs perceived in many ways that Europe as a whole shared common values with the United States. One such set of values consisted of building a framework of stability, democracy, and attention to nations in the developing world. Economic goals were also similar across the Atlantic partnership. Steady economic growth, low inflation, full employment, growth of the market economy, and development of the world market were high on that agenda. It is also true that these transatlantic partners had a similar view of emerging global threats. Combating the spread of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was a top priority on the list of anxious concerns. Both containing regional conflicts and checking rogue states also entered into common views about coping with threat perceptions. Joint work to stabilize the Middle East was a major topic of concern. Finally, the historic transatlantic partnership had a value of its own that required protection and nurturing (Černíková, 2008, pp. 41-43).

Another writer perceived American-European friendship as a significant national interest of the Czech Republic. Even though the United States was not a European state, in some sense it was a European power. In contrast to other powers, the United States had never made claims to European territory. When one European power historically had threatened the rest, the United States had been there to help contain such ambitions. The simple fact of the heavy U.S. economic and military involvement in Europe served as a sort of deterrent to non-European powers who might have had designs on European interests or even territory. While many Europeans became alienated from the United States after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, there were risks attendant on excessive anti-Americanism. A reversion by the United States to isolationism would not be in the interests of Europe more broadly or more specifically of the Czech Republic (Joch, 2007). Such observations reinforced Czech participation in NATO and also Czech receptiveness to American initiatives such as the missile shield proposal.

Historical links between the Czech Republic and America were important in knitting the two together on common twenty-first century projects. In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson had played an important role in the founding of the Czechoslovak state. Of course the entire West had let Czechoslovakia down by signing the Munich Pact in 1938. However, the United States was unique in its unwillingness to recognize the Munich appeasement of the Hitler Regime. During the World War II period, America had been the most consistent supporter of Czechoslovak independence. Again, in 1945 at Yalta the entire West sold out the Czechs and Slovaks. However, America's participation in the concessions to Stalin was no more extensive than that of the West European nations, and the U.S. did offer Marshall Plan aid. Thus, the American request for Czech participation in the missile shield was rooted in deep historical connections. While Russian hostility to the proposed Czech radar site was an immense problem, it made sense to cast the lot with the Americans rather than with those who had betrayed or occupied the country (Klaban, 2007, pp. 19-21). In sum, historical connections made acceptance of the radar site a natural step rather than an unusual policy initiative with no precedent in the nation's experience.

With regard to the new NATO linkage and the emerging terrorist threats, some Czechs perceived the old link to the United States to be the best bet for the future. In fact, the sense of security for Czechs in the post-9/11 world was no greater than it had been during the Cold War. Although terrorists had not hit the Czech Republic yet, it was true that terrorists tended to strike nations that underestimated regional insecurity and chose to live in a false state of security. The Czech nation was additionally unprepared to cope by itself with this threat due to its long-standing suspicion of the military. Occupation by Warsaw Pact forces after 1968 reinforced an ingrained skepticism about permitting growth of a powerful military of their own in post-communist times. For these reasons, it was necessary for the Czech Republic to rely in the near future on American leadership of the NATO

alliance. The United States had demonstrated a willingness to take on responsibility in major crises, while the EU was only slowly developing a common foreign policy (Vondra, 2006, pp. 16-19). The capabilities in support of its Common Foreign and Security Policy were not yet consequential. Therefore, there was a significant set of Czech leadership attitudes and conclusions that sought to build on the historic transatlantic partnership. From that point of view, participation in the radar site was a logical outgrowth of NATO membership, reliance on the tested senior partner of that alliance, and acute awareness of the potential impact of the emergent terrorist movements on Czech territory and its population.

External/Internal Politics and the Radar Site Proposal

In an ideal world the intersection of American and Czech security goals would be unaffected by old fashioned politics. In fact, both global and domestic political pressures have impinged on the policy process. Russian reactions to the proposal constitute the key international political pressure. Even though the new system would be directed against rogue states such as Iran and perhaps North Korea, the Russian leadership interpreted it as potentially useable against their nation. Thus, they raised many objections both to the U.S. proposal as well as to Polish and Czech receptivity to it. Domestic pressures also flowed from contrasting stands of the Czech political parties. The Czech and Moravian Communist Party (KSČM), a party that was seeking to cut the losses in its public support, hopped on the bandwagon of opposition to the radar site. The Social Democratic Party was opposed to it as well. Public opinion polls taken throughout the period of consideration of the plan typically showed strong majority preference to defeat the plan. In addition, protests in the area around Brda, the radar site, occurred on a number of occasions. A key question would be how successful the coalition leadership would be in navigating through these tricky political waters.

The Politics of Russian Attitudes

Russian opposition was forceful and frequent. One observer has suggested that Russia has recently been flexing its military muscle in an effort to restore its great power status. Part of that effort to strengthen its military posture entailed a public relations campaign that would renew emphasis on the nuclear component of national security. The public relations focus had become a more immediate priority after Russian leaders observed the role nuclear weapons played in the U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003. Instability in nations on its border that were close to potential nuclear powers in the Middle East reinforced the logic of renewed emphasis on the nuclear equation (Baev, 2008, pp. 83-85). For example, the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan certainly shocked Russia and made it more aware of the soft conditions in the buffer between its own territory and that of the more troublesome nations further south. The 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine touched the same nerves but involved a geopolitical location a bit further from that center of trouble but closer to Central Europe. This overall perspective both about the direction of Russian foreign policy and about the link between its nuclear priority and search for international greatness offers a useful backdrop to consideration of its responses to the radar site proposal. The American plan for a missile shield in Central Europe basically put a dagger in the heart of Russian efforts to expand their global impact through elevation of the nuclear component of their military capability.

Russian reactions became part of the Czech political calculations right away. Some in the Czech Republic were concerned that Russia might react by trying itself to provide more assistance to Iran. On the one hand, a future scenario might be one in which Iran's growing regional power approximated that of Pakistan, India, and China. A potential, although less likely, prospect was an expanded Iran that included a break-away Shiite sector of Iraq. On the other hand, Russian persuasive powers might convince Iran to back down in its nuclear ambitions. This eventuality could lead to a situation in which

Russia itself would gain diplomatic stature as a world power (Suja, 2008, pp. 32-35). Neither the emergence of Iran as a regional power nor the rise of Russia in global political respect would benefit Czech security interests.

Other Czech analysts concluded that Russia overstated its own vulnerability and hence the threat posed by the missile shield. Those scholars doubted that Russia was trailing that badly in the global balance of power. Suchý (2007, pp. 4-6) presented the following data in support of his contention that Russian fears were overstated.

<i>Category of Weapons</i>	<i>Russia's Strategic Power (2007)</i>	<i>America's Strategic Power</i>
ICBMs	489	500
ICBM Warheads	1788	1050
SLBMs	173	336
SLBM Warheads	609	2016
Strategic Bombers	79	115
Strategic Warheads	884	1955

Although the United States maintained a lead of 951 to 741 in the total number of strategic weapons and a lead of 5021 to 3281 in total warheads, still Russia was a strong nuclear power. Its numerical capabilities certainly offered a degree of protection that undermined the credibility of its seemingly nervous concerns about the missile shield.

At one point in the missile shield debate, Russia had also come up with a proposal to locate the missile shield at the Gabala site in Azerbaidzhan. Placement of a shield there would take care of the potential Iranian problem and could increase Russian leverage on regional politics. Of course, this Putin proposal was predicated on the assumption that the Czech-Polish system would then no longer be

necessary. In Suchý's estimation, one result might be increased leverage by Azerbaijan over Russian policy. He averred that a Russian site such as Gabla should supplement rather than replace the American proposal for Central Europe. Again, he concluded that there was no pressing need to overestimate Russian pressure or to react to each of their provocative statements (pp. 4-6).

In light of increased tension on the issue, American and Russian leaders developed initiatives to defuse the growing tension. For example, in May 2007, America and Russia agreed to hold a joint meeting of their defense and foreign ministers (iDNES 2007f). One month later Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov suggested that the NATO-Russia Council was the best vehicle for discussion of the issues that divided the two. The proximity of the proposed site to the Russian border was the factor that activated Russian concern at that time. Lavrov contended that it was natural for Russia to apply pressure against that extension of American influence into Central Europe (iDNES 2007g). Russia may also have feared that its own radar defense capabilities would not match the ones proposed for Poland and the Czech Republic. In fact, later in the summer of 2007, Russia apparently dismantled two aging, Cold War radar stations in Ukraine (sme 2007a). On the anniversary day of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Chief of the Russian Army Jurij Balujevskij called upon the Czechs to postpone their decision about the missile site until after the American elections at the end of 2008. Ironically, even American politics were entering the discussion about the Brda site. The Russian commander also threatened to aim Russian ballistic missiles at points in the Czech Republic, if the radar site plans materialized (iDNES 2007h). It was obviously very difficult to keep tension out of any discussions about these sites.

The American side also sent up trial balloons on occasions. In late October 2007, Defense Secretary Robert Gates seemed to be considering the possibility of constructing the sites but delaying their "activation" until Iran made its missiles a more definitive threat. Simultaneously, he presented a

plan to Russia to permit them physical access to the bases. Czech willingness to accept the presence again of Russian troops on its soil was problematic (USA TODAY 2007b). However, Moscow rejected that concession as unacceptable; the Czech Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanová was skeptical as she recalled serving on the parliamentary commission that oversaw the departure of Soviet troops after 1989; and an American Defense spokesperson backed off from Gates' earlier comments to say that they had only constituted thoughts rather than a concrete proposal (iDNES 2007i). In fact, Russia escalated the rhetoric one month later by including Belarus in retaliatory plans. For some time, Belarus had desired to strengthen its army with the Russian rocket Iskander (iDNES 2007j). Nearly a year later, Belarus again entered the dialogue by making an agreement with Russia for a joint space defense system as a reaction against agreements signed by NATO states. This agreement would build on the Union that they formed earlier in 1997 (sme 2008a).

At the end of the year, Russia decided to retaliate in another way, by pulling out of the 1990 Conventional Forces Agreement/Europe (CFE). The status of that existing agreement was somewhat unusual, for Russia had updated it in 1999, in order to take account of the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, Russia was the only country that signed the 1999 modification. All NATO nations refused to sign, because they disagreed with the continued presence of Russian soldiers in both Moldova and Georgia. In any event, Russia justified its abrogation of that agreement on the basis of American plans to build the missile shield (sme 2007b).

In early 2008, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek continued to work on plans with the American government with an eye on signing the radar agreement sometime in the middle of the year. President Putin continued to protest that emplacement of such a system so close to the Russian border would destabilize the European balance of power. In fact, he compared the project to the Cuban Missile Crisis in reverse (iDNES 2008d). In the spring of the year, the matter of a physical Russian presence at

the base surfaced again as an issue. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates clarified the American proposal to mean that Russian personnel could be present at the sites in both Poland and the Czech Republic, but he suggested that their location there would not be a continuous one (USATODAY 2008). Moscow's clear preference was for a permanent presence at those two sites. Minister of Defense Sergej Lavrov was agitated that the written agreement seemed to be at odds with the verbal promises made by the Americans. He had heard talk of a permanent presence on the sites, but the written agreement outlined a situation in which Russians would be located at the embassies in Prague and Warsaw. On occasion, they would have the right to visit the bases (iDNES 2008e).

Russian signals continued to be mixed in the fall of 2008, even after the Americans had signed the agreements with the Czechs and Poles. On the one hand, Nikolaj Solovcov, Commander of Russian Rocket Forces, seemed somewhat calmer about the proposed missile shield. He said that he was reconciled to the existing program, as long as no expansion or spreading of it occurred. He acknowledged the force of the argument that the proposed system could not really threaten hundreds of Russian rockets with multiple warheads. At the same time, he could not help but point out that there was still a possibility of aiming Russian rockets at Poland and the Czech Republic (iDNES 2008f). On the other hand, Dmitrij Rogozin, Russian Ambassador to NATO, spoke in more ominous tones. In his view, the Czechs were in the process of selling out the security of their people on behalf of a new game. He did not see any difference between defensive and offensive weapons. Russia needed to assume the worst, when it confronted strengthened defenses in suspect countries (iDNES 2008g). In the midst of all of this discussion, Russia tested a new guided missile called Bulava. It was designed to evade the type of missile shield being planned for Central Europe (dagensnyheter 2008). This test served as a reminder of Russian capabilities. When rumors about Russian soldiers in the area around Brda surfaced at about the same time, more suspicions on both sides were fueled (iDNES 2008h).

Clearly, there was no way of predicting or guessing what the Russian reactions would be on a given day. Their attitudes over time combined bold posturing, anxious defensiveness, and rational argument. In all situations they remained a potent factor influencing both the dialogue and the decision-making process.

Czech Party Politics

Domestic politics in the Czech Republic also influenced the conversation about the proposed joint military project. Prime Minister Topolánek strongly favored the new system. He sometimes spoke in dramatic terms. Inattention to a country's defense could result in a threat to civilization. In his view, Europe slumbered into a rosy dream after the end of the Cold War. He could not comprehend how the events of 9/11 and the Madrid bombings did not have the capability to awaken the Europeans from that slumber (iDNES 2007k). At the same time, he held firm to the belief that America should foot the bill for the entire project. He also expressed concern for popular anxiety that the radar itself might jeopardize public health (iDNES 2007l). President Klaus also offered his thoughts about the agreement on occasion. For example, in the summer of 2007, he said he would give consideration to such opposition proposals as the call for a referendum on the matter. However, he simultaneously warned against the danger of stirring up "cheap populism" through referendum campaigns (iDNES 2007m). One issue that opposition leaders continually brought up was the possibility of hooking the new facility to NATO rather than to the United States. Karel Schwarzenberg, Minister of Foreign Affairs, agreed that the facility should be incorporated into NATO. However, he pointed out that Americans should still possess control over usage of the system. In particular, his speech stirred up the Green Party that was part of the government coalition. They saw him as departing too much from the Green platforms (iDNES 2007n).

Czech politicians became quite animated when American leaders offered the surprising conclusion that their intelligence indicated that Iran stopped work on its nuclear facilities in 2003.

Opposition leader Jiří Paroubek immediately called for termination of the radar site proposal (iDNES 2007o). The ČSSD leader followed up a few months later by writing a letter to the Prime Minister. He called upon the Prime Minister to cancel his trip to the U.S. and any plans to sign the agreement. In his letter he asked whether the radar site would strengthen or weaken Czech security. Might the plans worsen Czech relations with other European countries? In his view, the Czech nation needed to have the right to vote on the radar site via a referendum (iDNES 2008i). Prior to Polish acceptance of the American plans for them, there was a minor debate in the Czech Republic over the meaning of Polish rejection of the ten interceptors. Minister of Defense Vlasta Parkanová quickly suggested that Polish rejection would send plans back to the drawing board. Prime Minister Topolánek thought that her statement was courageous but premature. A spokesman for the Minister of Foreign Affairs countered that the radar system by itself would strengthen Czech security (iDNES 2008j). Czechs should not be concerned about what the Poles were doing.

Former President Václav Havel brought another factor to the discussion table, one that supported the American initiative. He took the long historical perspective by observing that the Americans had supported Czechs in the founding of their state in 1918, during World War II, and then at the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain. For the first time America was asking something of the Czechs, and the nation had an opportunity to repay its obligation to the United States. He compared the pacifists who opposed the project to those who called for doing nothing against Hitler prior to the Munich Agreement of 1938 (iDNES 2008k).

On additional political issue that appeared was linking the signing of the radar site accord with ratification of the Lisbon Treaty that was a special project of the EU. Opposition political leaders threatened to take the radar agreement to the Constitutional Court for a ruling on its legality. If that happened, key ODS members of the Senate threatened to take the Lisbon Treaty to the courts for

consideration. Thus, there was an attempt by the government to make the Lisbon Treaty a hostage of the decision on the radar base. In fact, it was the Communists (KSČM) who had the most interest in taking the radar agreement to the courts. Without the support of the Social Democrats, however, they would not have had enough legislative votes to meet the threshold required for submission to the Court (iDNES 2008l).

Thus, all the key political forces had views about how to handle this controversial issue. There was no possibility of reconciling all of those points of view. However, the range of issues demonstrates how extensive the discussion was.

Political Role of the Public

Public opinion polls in the Czech Republic were another key factor in the political process. As early as December 2006, one key poll (Ivan Gabal Analysis & Consulting) revealed that a majority of Czechs favored the system if it included only the radar component. However, if missiles were connected with the radar, then a majority opposed construction or approval. The poll also revealed that those who supported NATO in general were more supportive of the radar site than those whose trust in the alliance was small. In addition, support and opposition to a referendum about the site was about equal. In general, Czechs did see nuclear activity by Iran and North Korea as dangerous, but mostly they preferred economic and diplomatic pressure to military solutions (iDNES 2006a). By the middle of 2007, however, public opposition to the project had grown. CVVM's research revealed that two-thirds of Czech respondents were in opposition by that time, and the opponents were beginning to fasten on the referendum as a logical next step in the discussion. Perhaps another expression of public opinion was a study done by Czech experts with information provided by the Americans. They concluded that the base would not endanger the health of persons living near the site (iDNES 2007p). The impact of such a study on the population remained to be seen.

Protests at the Brda site were another occasional expression of one segment of opinion about the missile shield proposal. In September 2007, the protestors carried out a symbolic blockade of fourteen villages near Brda. The plan was to send five protestors to each village with the objective of talking with citizens and distributing leaflets. They were also going to present a document to a meeting at which the leader of the Communists, Vojtěch Filip would be in attendance (iDNES 2007q). Iniciativa NE Základnám was one Czech group that had overwhelmingly opposed the new base. However, they dismissed the planned protest as the work of only the communists (iDNES 2007r). Another group called the Humanist Party called for a boycott of American goods, in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Its leader Jan Tamáš called for a series of concerts, festivals, and meetings with prominent personalities in order to magnify the opposition (iDNES 2007s).

By the spring of 2008, the protests had increased in size. In May, several hundred people protested in Prague against the radar site. This time Iniciativa NE Základnám organized the demonstrations. Iniciativa also supported the movement Greenpeace which had already been at Brda for a week. About the same time, SC & C did another public opinion survey that reinforced the conclusion that a majority of Czechs opposed the base. That survey discovered that the typical supporter of the base was a male with a high school education who lived in a city of more than 100,000 inhabitants. In contrast, the typical opponent was a woman over sixty years of age with only a lower school education (iDNES 2008m).

Protests continued even into July, the month of the signing ceremony and the of the visit by American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Iniciativa NE Základnám set up a tent on Wenceslaus Square and planned at least one demonstration. Visitors to their tent would be able to vote on a virtual referendum on the radar plan. Greenpeace was also planning to organize a demonstration (iDNES 2008n). Some wondered if threatening events might throw public opinion back towards support for the

base. However, there was no evidence of that. CVVM did a survey of opinion one month after the invasion by Russia of Georgia. Still, opposition to the base by Czech citizens amounted to 67%. It was expected that such controversy would continue and that politics would not cease on this controversial proposal (iDNES 2008o).

At Last, the Signing Ceremony

A number of NATO Summit Meetings of Heads of State had given some discussion to the proposed missile shield. For example, the Prague Summit in 2002 listed such a project of anti-missile defense as one of its main priorities (iDNES 2006b). In November 2006, the leaders had put the missile shield proposal on their agenda at their Riga Summit. They decided to give further study to its feasibility. In preparations for the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, there was a much higher priority placed on that project. In the fall of 2007, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer observed that the anti-missile system would be one of the main themes at the upcoming April Summit (iDNES 2007t). In fact, it was at that summit that Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg announced both that the Czechs had accepted the American proposal and that they were planning the official signing ceremony. Alliance leaders noted further that they supported the project and expected that in the future it would actually become a NATO system. This official NATO support for the system was a surprising summit result for the Czechs. However, some issues were still hanging in suspension. One was the so-called SOFA Agreement, which pertained to the movement of American soldiers on Czech soil. Another was a tougher upcoming discussion about controls over potential Russian officers and experts in the area of the radar base (iDNES 2008p).

Planning for the actual signing ceremony intensified soon after conclusion of the Bucharest Summit. Initial plans focused on a invitation to American Secretary of State Rice for a May signing. Eventually, the ceremony would be postponed until the month of July. At the time of these

preparations, the political landscape and political party divisions were clear. Public opinion polls still demonstrated that a majority of Czechs opposed the plans. Both the opposition Social Democrats and the Communists were opposed and demanded the holding of a referendum. Within the governing coalition, the ODS led the support for the radar base. Part of the Green coalition partner was supportive, and part was opposed. The Lidovci, the other coalition party, were still registering misgivings about the new plans (iDNES 2008q).

There was a minor setback for the project in the time frame between the Bucharest Summit in April and the official signing ceremony in July. Leaders of the EU nations held their summit in Slovenia, and they considered the question of support for the missile shield. In the end, they voted “no” and commented that the matter really fell within the competence of NATO (sme 2008b).

In early July, the signing ceremony finally took place, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice finally traveled to Prague for the occasion. In spite of the finality of this ceremony, many unfinished issues lingered in the atmosphere. The Poles had not yet signed their agreement to accept the ten anti-missile interceptors. The SOFA Agreement on movement of American troops was not yet ready, and plans for inspections by Russian troops were not close to being in final form. Also, the parliamentary vote had not yet been scheduled (iDNES 2008r). In spite of those unresolved matters, Prime Minister Topolánek was forceful in defending the project. He did not see the threat of ballistic missiles as an imaginary one, and he warned his countrymen and countrywomen not to repeat the earlier Czechoslovak failure to accept Marshall Plan aid after World War II (iDNES 2008s). Minister of Foreign Affairs Schwarzenberg pointed out that the missile shield would protect not only the Czech Republic but also Europe and the whole euroatlantic sector (iDNES 2008t). President Klaus, a recovering surgery patient, expressed no doubts and stated that he would sign the agreement, as long as the legislature

first approved it. In his view, the Czech Republic needed to stand on two legs, the American and the European (iDNES 2008u).

Another piece of the puzzle fell into place in September, when the parties finally signed the SOFA Agreement. One important condition of that agreement that permitted American soldiers to operate on the base was the proviso that the land and physical property on the base remain in Czech hands. Czechs would be responsible for security outside the station and the Americans for security within it. That signing ceremony was planned for September 19th, on the occasion of a meeting of NATO Ministers of Defense in London. American Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Czech Minister of Defense Vlasta Parkanová were the persons who ended up signing that document (iDNES 2008v). On the American side, the defense bill that President Bush had sent to Congress at that time included \$466 million to develop the missile shield system in both Poland and the Czech Republic (CQ Today, September 24, 2008). One important footnote to these two agreements was an additional agreement that treated the process of actually building the base. The Prime Minister proposed to the Cabinet an agreement that accorded Czech industry a primary role in construction of the facility. Czechs would benefit from participation in the research and development of the components of the site. In addition, the Czechs would learn from exchange of specialists between the two countries (iDNES 2008w).

In sum, such additional agreements made the details of the agreements much more concrete. It would remain to be seen if revelation of these last agreements would firm up the opposition to or the support for the base. Much would depend on media interpretation and stands taken by the various political party leaders.

Conclusion

What evidence does the foregoing analysis cast on the initial two hypotheses? The first suggested that past historical connections between the United States and Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic laid the basis for the radar site agreement signed by the leaders from the two countries in the middle of 2008. The second suggested that current and future Czech foreign policy decisions will be sharply constrained by the web of obligations and alliance memberships acquired since 1989.

With regard to the first hypothesis, it is clear that Czech leaders stressed all sorts of historical experiences in arguing in favor of the radar site. Former President Havel couched his support for the agreement in the broadest historical framework. He reminded Czechs of past American support for Czech interests in 1918, in the 1940s, and in 1989. Prime Minister Topolánek indicated that Czechs needed to recall what they lost by not accepting Marshall Plan aid at the end of World War II. At other times, he spoke about the lessons learned from the 9/11 attacks and parallel ones in Europe. Both Minister of Foreign Affairs Schwarzenberg and Minister of Defense Parkanová framed their support for the agreement in terms of obligations to the wider world of Europe and the transatlantic partners, both of whose ties to the Czech Republic had deep roots in the historical past. A common history of mutual connections underlay support for the missile shield system.

Similarly, many of the political currents that swirled around the issue reinforce the second hypothesis. For instance, NATO obligations were compelling to a certain extent in this case. Soon after joining the military alliance in 1999, Czechs participated to a limited extent in the NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo. Following 9/11, they contributed to the struggle in Afghanistan. Their troops roamed the northeastern mountains in search of al Qaeda figures, and they had units in Logar and Helmand provinces in the south of the country. By late 2008, three of their soldiers had died in Afghanistan, and their Ambassador to Pakistan lost his life in the bombing of the Marriott Hotel. Even in

Iraq their services supported some of the operations. They took part in a twelve-nation CBRN (Chemical-Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) Battalion in the theater of operations. They also sent their well-respected field hospital to Kuwait to be on hand right after the Iraq War started. In light of those activities, the willingness of the government to accept the American proposal is not surprising. In the future, it may be the case that participation in the EU will lead to another dimension of security obligations. As the EU develops a stronger defense component, Czechs may be pressured from that direction more than from NATO and the U.S.

Once the missile shield is operational in both Poland and the Czech Republic, it is likely that the evidence will actually continue to reinforce both hypotheses even more strongly. New historical connections will emerge as Czechs and Americans cooperate in building the facility and as Czechs acquire know-how and expertise in the process. Just as the Cold War history of linkages between the United States and European nations that hosted American bases took on a life of its own, so will the Czech-American cooperation in connection with the radar site. Further, the presence of the radar site on Czech territory will make that nation as well as Poland unique within the Central European region. It is likely that the new physical linkages, first to American policy and perhaps later to NATO policy, will create a higher profile for the Czech Republic on defense matters. Whether their leaders are participating in NATO discussions, EU talks, or conversations with American counterparts, their views and conclusions will carry more weight. History and present day collective action will weave a web within which their foreign policy will be located. The irony of the web is that it will be both constraining and empowering.

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