

*To the Honorable Ambassadors of
the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland,*

Regarding Nuclear Weapons and Missile Defenses

Your Excellencies,

We, the three signatory organizations, work for the elimination of nuclear weapons. We are opposed to missile defenses because they threaten the process of nuclear disarmament. Missile defenses are ineffective, spur nuclear arms races, and impede cooperation to reduce the nuclear threat. The net effect is a loss of security.

New hope for nuclear abolition. In the US, both the previously high ranking proponents of nuclear deterrence Shultz, Perry, Kissinger and Nunn^{1,2}, and a group of 95 scientists, including 23 Nobel Prize laureates³, have recently called for drastic reductions and eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Their argument is that with the spread of nuclear weapons to a multitude of countries, everybody, including the US, would be safer if nuclear weapons were abolished. In the 2007 UNGA, 127 nations voted in support of the so-called Malaysia resolution, calling for negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention (only Russia, Israel and NATO countries voted against). In February 2008 the Norwegian government organized the Oslo conference *Achieving the Vision of a World Free of Nuclear Weapons*. In June the new Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who was elected on a program supportive of a nuclear weapons convention, announced the establishment of a *Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament*. Nuclear disarmament and abolition has gained momentum in the international debate. Suddenly, ‘everybody’ is talking about it.

Missile defenses counteract the positive trend. Although presented as a purely defensive weapon, the missile defenses *do* stand the risk of upsetting the geopolitical balance and spur new arms races – including a race towards weaponisation of space.^{4,5} The 95 US scientists urge the next president of the US not to deploy the missile defenses, because in their view the result may be a net decrease in security. Examples of adverse effects on nuclear disarmament are the Reykjavik summit 1986 where Reagan’s Space Defense Initiative precluded a real step towards elimination of nuclear weapons, and the US-Russian agreement of 2000 allowing Russia to keep forces on high alert, and large enough to penetrate the US defense system.^{4,5} For the NPT, the missile defenses are a recipe for disaster.⁴ Missile defenses could deliver a final blow to the restraint mechanisms of the non-proliferation regime, and a confirmation of indefinite retention of nuclear arms, *i.e.*, a spiral almost certainly ending in catastrophe.

Do missile defenses work? The irony of the story is that for now they do not. From a critical, scientific point of view there is little or no prospect of the US developing a defense against real, long-range missiles in the foreseeable future.^{5,6} Missile defenses are vulnerable to countermeasures such as balloons and jammers, and realistic tests in this regard are still pending.⁵ The radar to be deployed in the Czech Republic is unlikely to discriminate warheads from decoys, even after upgrading.⁶ Missile defenses would never work against other kinds of delivery systems more likely to be used by non-state actors. Few resources are allocated to these latter problems, while enormous amounts are being spent on missile defenses. However, the greatest costs are the security costs.⁵ Adversaries will increase their arsenals to overcome the “shield”, while the mistaken impression that it could reliably stop incoming missiles would undermine diplomatic efforts to reduce the nuclear threat.

What is the real motivation for Poland and the Czech Republic? During the signing of the deal in Prague on July 8th, both Foreign Ministers Schwarzenberg and Rice insisted that this deal - and the missile defense - is important for the whole region.⁷ Though, if regional security were at the heart of the matter, there is no reason why the Czech government should not approach this under the umbrella of either NATO or the EU. By signing a *bilateral* treaty with the US, the Czech Republic is taking a geopolitically crucial decision on behalf of the whole of Europe. Such a mandate has never been given to the Czech Republic. This was also pointed out in the debates in the European Parliament. Loss of security would not be limited to the few European countries with US installations, but would be shared by people all over the continent. We believe in the democratic principle that the opinion of all affected people should be heard, both in the countries directly involved and elsewhere.

Our understanding is that the Iranian missiles are merely a convenient cover for the real motivation of the Czech government; a strategic, political shift away from Russia and towards the US. Prime Minister Topolánek’s note during the signing of the deal supports this assumption.⁸ He said that to refuse the missile defense plan would be as grave a mistake as to refuse the Marshall Plan. Our concern is not that the Czech Republic prefers the wings of Bush to the wings of Putin and Medvedev, but that they risk spurring a nuclear arms race in the process.

Much of the same reasoning applies to Poland and to the proposed launch sites. Prime Minister Tusk is not merely negotiating over the security of Poland, but over a strategic decision that will affect the whole region. On this regard we have greeted with optimism the shift in policy observed since Tusk assumed office, with a willingness to discuss the issue both with NATO and Russia. Nevertheless, the deal is not off the table and Foreign Minister Sikorski seems bent on continuing negotiations with the US administration, despite the rejection by Prime Minister Tusk of the proposal presented in early July. It is our firm opinion that the demands from Poland on further security guarantees do *not* legitimize a missile defense deal. On the contrary, it is a frightening example of how this Bush-lead initiative creates a new armament spiral. Assuming that additional US Patriot missiles in Poland along with billions of dollars in defense aid will deter Russia from any future attack is not just un-historical – it is plainly naïve.

We understand and empathize with the skepticism of the Polish people regarding its territorial security. In the course of history, few countries in Europe have had more reason to feel threatened by its neighbors, both east and west, than Poland. But history has also shown that deterrence and strong defenses repeatedly lead to increased conflict. The security of Europe today

is built on interaction, not deterrence, and only by interaction and cooperation can we continue to build a safe and prosperous Europe. Only by interaction and dialogue can the threat posed by hostile countries and non-state actors be dealt with. This applies to Iran as well.

So what are the alternatives? Instead of fooling oneself with a missile defense, one should use the existing momentum to work towards real security – towards a world free of nuclear weapons, in which missile defenses will be superfluous. On a regional basis, one should establish a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone from the North Pole through Europe and the Middle East to the Persian Gulf, including Iran. This would meet ElBaradei's quest for an integrated security policy to substitute for the need of a missile defense wall around the Middle East.⁹ On a global scale, one should join the physicians' International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and work for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The only complete defense is the elimination of nuclear weapons and assurance that they will never be produced again.¹⁰

Oslo August 19, 2008

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No to nuclear weapons

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References

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⁴ Defence as the Best Offence? Missile Defences and Nuclear Non-proliferation, Lars van Dassen and Morten Bremer Mærli, Den Norske Atlanterhavskomite 4-2007, pp 35, available at www.dnak.org/Publikasjoner/Sikkerhetspolitisk_bibliotek/Arkiv/2007

⁵ What are the Prospects, What are the Costs? Oversight of Missile Defense (Part 2). Testimony of Lisbeth Gronlund before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, National Security & Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. April 16, 2008, available at www.ucsusa.org/global_defense/lisbeth-gronlund-testimony-4.html

⁶ The European missile defense folly. The United States plans to protect itself from emerging missile threats by building a Europe-based missile defense system. Like its predecessors, the system has serious technological deficiencies. George N. Lewis and Theodore A. Postol, Bull. Atomic Scientist May/June 2008, Vol 64, No.2, p. 32-39, 61, available at <http://www.thebulletin.org/files/064002009.pdf>

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⁸ Ceske Noviny (2008) "Czech PM compares U.S.-Czech radar treaty to Marshall Plan", available at http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_view.php?id=322201

⁹ ElBaradei's keynote address to the Oslo Conference (Feb 2008), available at http://disarmament.nrpa.no/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/Keynote_ElBaradei.pdf

¹⁰ Report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Commonwealth of Australia 1996, pp.120.