

New US anti-missile system in Israel, Azerbaijan to replace scrapped shield in E. Europe

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US may put missile shield in Israel, Turkey instead of E. Europe - Polish report

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DEBKAFfile Special Report
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US X-Band radar based in Israeli Negev

Deputy US army chief, Gen. James Cartwright and defense secretary Robert Gates amplified President Barack Obama's statement on the US missile shield in East Europe in Washington Thursday, Sept. 17, by announcing that a new and better anti-missile missile system would be deployed in Israel and the Caucasus.

DEBKAFfile discloses exclusively that the site would be a Russian military base in Azerbaijan. Referring to the Israeli component, he said: "It is already working perfectly."

DEBKAFfile's military sources disclose he was referring to the advanced American FBX-T radar system deployed last year in Israel's Negev base at Nevatim, which is capable of tracking a missile launched from the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and beyond. The system, product of Raytheon, is mobile and capable of detecting incoming bodies the size of a baseball from a distance of 4,700 km, determining its speed and angle of flight and transmitting the data to an interceptor at any point on earth.

DEBKAFfile reported earlier Thursday:

The Obama administration's decision to shelve the plan to install US missile interceptors and radar systems in Poland and the Czech Republic was released Thursday, Sept. 17. The shield was promoted by the Bush administration in the face of strong Russian opposition for the purpose of shielding Europe from long-range Iranian ballistic missile attack.

DEBKAFfile reports that Barack Obama's decision prompted Russian president Dmitry Medvedev's surprise comment Monday, Sept. 14, that his government no longer rules out further sanctions against Iran - although the Kremlin has always denied its cooperation with the US on the Iranian nuclear issue was contingent on the removal of the US missile shield plan.

DEBKA-Net-Weekly in its coming issue (out Friday) will reveal how the shared US-Russian wish to avert an Israeli military strike against Iran produced Obama's decision to ditch the missile shield in East Europe.

Our Washington sources report that the decision follows a 60-day assessment of the issue announced by Obama.

On Aug. 29, DEBKAFfile reported exclusively from East European sources that Washington was considering the transfer of its missile plan from Poland and the Czech Republic possibly to Israel and Turkey.

This decision is an important foreign policy step for Obama; it is a prize for Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin, who fought the US shield plan on Russia's doorstep tooth and nail, and a major strategic reversal for Iran. Moscow's cooperation removes a key obstacle on the road to harsh sanctions against Iran. Acting in concert with Moscow, Washington can dispense with Beijing's endorsement.

Nonetheless, DEBKAFfile's Moscow sources stress, it is not entirely clear how far the Kremlin is willing to go in partnering the US drive against Iran. Russian leaders will take good care not to appear to the Muslim and Arab world as Iran's enemy or a trading and diplomatic partner who reneges on its commitments.

Our Washington sources note the Obama administration cleverly presented its surrender to Moscow as an upgrade and reorganization of US missile defenses into a more advanced, faster, and deadlier system.

Gates said Iran's short and medium range program is not advancing as US intelligence originally estimated, and therefore the US can base its operations for now on mobile defense systems, mainly at sea, and on intercept missiles to be stationed closer to where the source of the threats. "Anyone who says we are abandoning our plans for missile

defense in Europe does not understand how we operate,"said the defense secretary.

Gen. Cartwright presented the time schedule for the new system as not before 2015, meaning in six years.

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According to the Warsaw newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza, Washington plans to scrap its plans to deploy anti-missile bases in Poland and the Czech Republic for defense against attacks from Iran. In deference to adamant opposition from Moscow, the Obama administration is looking at alternatives including Israel and Turkey. No immediate comment was available from US, Polish or Czech officials on this disclosure, but the Polish paper cited unnamed US officials on Aug. 27 as affirming that Washington was now considering deploying anti-missile interceptors on naval vessels and at bases in Israel and Turkey, as well as potentially in the Balkans.

According to a Pentagon spokesman the missile shield plans were still being reviewed. No final decisions have been made regarding missile defense in Europe, he said. DEBKAFfile's Washington sources do not view this statement as an out-and-out denial of the Polish news report.

A pro-missile lobbyist Riki Ellison added: Signals from the Pentagon were "absolutely clear," with the US scouting for alternative sites. A source in the US Congress confirmed that Washington had been "testing the water" among lawmakers for weeks after scrapping the eastern European part of the plan. During his Moscow visit on July 6-7, US president Barack Obama found Russian leaders still flatly opposed to the deployment of US missiles "on its doorstep" and promised to review the project.

DEBKAFfile's military analysts report that basing parts of the missile shield in Israel would have far-reaching strategic effects:

1. Moscow would owe the Obama administration a quid pro quo for removing the planned missile interceptor and radar station from its borders and ought to be more amenable to lining up behind America for tough sanctions against Iran, including the sale of gasoline and refined petroleum products.
2. The longstanding close cooperation between the US Missile Defense Agency and the Israel Air Force's space and missile wings would be upgraded and acknowledged publicly.
3. Since the Arrow anti-missile system developed jointly by the US and Israel is already an integral part of American missile defenses in Europe and the Middle East, Jerusalem is unlikely to object to a US request in this regard.
4. Anyway, for almost a year now, a key element of the US missile defense array has been deployed on Israeli soil, namely the advanced US FBX-T radar system for which an off-limits compound accessible only to US personnel has been allotted at Israel's Negev Air Force base at Nevatim.

Using the infrastructure already present in Israel would substantially cut down the financial and manpower costs of building a missile shield against Iran.

5. Israel would be integrated in the American missile umbrella guarding the Middle East and Persian Gulf nations against Iranian missile attack.
6. Since all US diplomatic overtures for thawing relations with the Assad regime in Damascus have come to naught, an American interceptor base in Israel would also be a shield against Syrian missiles and the missile batteries Moscow is planning to install for defending the Russian naval bases under construction in the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartous.
7. The new US bases in Israel will not fundamentally change the nature of Israel-Russia relations. Moscow has always regarded the Jewish state anyway as a part of America's military and intelligence machinery in the Middle East.

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