
A Radar In The Face.

by Albert Yeremjan, Demis Polandov

Translated by A. Ignatkin

Agency WPS What the Papers Say Part B (Russia)

Gazeta, 15/3/2007

How long before Georgia is hosting American missile defense radars?; Ukrainian-American consultations on deployment of US missile defense system elements in the Czech Republic and Poland took place at the Ukrainian Defense Ministry in Kiev yesterday. America was represented by Lieutenant-General Henry Obering, director of the US Missile Defense Agency.

The lower house of the Czech parliament killed the draft law that would have arranged a nationwide referendum on the issue of deployment of a radar of the American missile defense system on the territory of the republic. It is common knowledge that Mirek Topolánek's government is all for the deployment. General public is not convinced that the American radar is what the Czech Republic really needs, but it doesn't matter anymore. There will be no referendum on the issue, and so the matter is all but settled.

Ukrainian-American consultations on deployment of US missile defense system elements in the Czech Republic and Poland took place at the Ukrainian Defense Ministry in Kiev yesterday. America was represented by Lieutenant-General Henry Obering, director of the US Missile Defense Agency.

Obering is well known in Russia - best of all for his recent remark to the effect that the Pentagon would like to have a radar in the Caucasus. According to Obering, this additional radar would be quite useful but not exactly crucial for the future missile defense system.

It would only relay information to a more powerful radar, to be built in the Czech Republic.

Obering all but took it back yesterday. He said that the United States had never discussed establishment of elements of the missile defense with any country but the Czech Republic and Poland. Obering then proceeded to deny reports that some elements of the system were to be installed in the Caucasus.

Obering was late. President Eduard Kokoity of South Ossetia exposed "the Pentagon's plot" yesterday in the morning. "Preparations for installing a powerful military radar are under way in the Kazbeg district of Georgia, not far from Russia's borders," Kokoity said. He added that another radar would be built on the territory of Georgia in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone.

Konstantin Gabashvili, chairman of the Georgian parliament's foreign relations committee, described Kokoity's statements as "nonsense."

Gabashvili said that had this decision been made, he would have been certainly informed of it. Senior Deputy Defense Minister Levan Nikoleishvili denied consultations with the Americans over installation of US radars in Georgia. "Georgia isn't the only country in the Caucasus, is it?" he said.

But Nikoleishvili isn't being entirely honest, is he? Out of three

countries in the southern part of the Caucasus, Russia has military contingents in two. It has a military base in the Armenian city of Gyumri. It has a radar in Gabala, Azerbaijan, and official Baku doesn't demand that it should be closed down. Deployment of American missile defense elements alongside Russian military facilities is unlikely. That leaves Georgia - and Russian military bases are to be pulled out of Georgia by late 2008.

Commenting on South Ossetian president's statements is essentially a waste of time. When the matter concerns Georgia, he isn't exactly an impartial observer. On the other hand, neither do contradictory statements from the Pentagon inspire trust. Add here the voting in the parliament of Georgia the day before yesterday - it voted in favor of joining NATO - and all this makes appearance of US radars near the Russian borders a distinct possibility.

Moreover, Obering's remarks on the possibility of missile defense elements in the Caucasus are more than just speculation. It would be logical. If a missile defense system is to be established against Iranian missiles, then the Czech Republic and Poland alone won't suffice. Something will have to be installed in Ukraine and Georgia as well. Even if no preparations for it are under way in Georgia at this point, then their beginning is only a matter of time.
