

News that Mainstream Media Hides

by Mark Seddon via amnesia - Al Jazeera *Thursday, Dec 4 2008, 8:19pm*

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Polish fears over US 'defence shield'

A small and disused former Warsaw Pact air base in a remote corner of northwest Poland may soon become the focus of a new conflict between Russia and the US.



Rice ratifies massive monetary 'incentive' [bribe]

George Bush, the US president, and his administration have chosen the Redzikowo Base as the site of Washington's new missile defence shield, which the Americans say is designed to intercept incoming rockets from "rogue states" such as Iran.

Victor Ashe, the US ambassador to Poland, visited the site recently, dropping by the nearby town of Slupsk to see the local mayor, but avoiding lunch at the local McDonalds just around the corner from the town hall.

The ambassador's visit was seen by Russia as yet another provocation.

In rhetoric reminiscent of the Cuban missile crisis, Russia claimed that it is being targeted by the proposed shield, and will respond accordingly.

Recently, Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian president, rained on Barack Obama's parade within days of the US president-elect election victory, promising an equal and opposite reaction.

Medvedev said Russia would move its own missiles to the Kaliningrad enclave, which it controls, along the Polish border.

When I went to meet Vladimir Grinin, the Russian ambassador in Warsaw, he struck an even tougher line.

"Of course our relations with Poland are important," Grinin told Al Jazeera.

"We hope that Obama will listen to our concerns, and not go ahead. But in the worse-case scenario, if the Americans do proceed, we will also target the new radar systems in the Czech Republic, and will place missiles on ships in the Baltic."

Arms race

Bronislaw Nowak is a former Warsaw Pact fighter pilot who used to be stationed at Redzikowo.

I met him just outside the gates of the base on a bitterly cold, grey day, a rusting MiG fighter standing as a sentinel guarding the entrance.

Now a member of the local council in Slupsk, Nowak is unenthusiastic about the missile defence shield.

"It makes us a target; it starts a new arms race. Did you know that it would take all of two minutes for a Russian missile launched from Kaliningrad to land here?" he said.

Nowak, like most Poles, does not hanker for the old days, yet wants to avoid antagonising Moscow.

I wondered what the rest of the town of Slupsk think of the defence shield.

Poland had been one of the first to shake off the old Soviet yoke, it is an enthusiastic member of both the European Union and Nato, and has spent the past decade removing any visible traces of its Communist past.

Re-dedicated

In Slupsk, the war memorial to the Red Army soldiers who cleared this former German town, first of the Wehrmacht [German army], and then of its German citizens, has been re-dedicated to the Polish war dead of World War Two.

If the Americans move into the nearby base as planned, there will be a hundred or so service personnel with their families boosting the local economy.

The roads will be re-built, and lots more money - I put to Slupsk's deputy mayor - would surely flow into the local economy.

But no; sitting in his impressive, mock-Gothic office, he was less than optimistic.

"It will make us a target, and we have seen enough of conflicts in the past to know that we do not want to become the centre of another.

"Of course we like the Americans, we know about them, but them coming here will make little difference to our economy".

The attitude among local shoppers, or at least those happy to talk, was equally negative.

Democracy ignored

Back in Warsaw, I went to meet Radoslaw Sikorski, the Polish foreign minister, considered a swashbuckling Anglophile, who is married to Anne Applebaum, the journalist.

Sikorski was upbeat about the missile defence shield, and was anxious to dispel Russia's fears that it would be targeted.

"What you have to understand is that this is purely defensive in nature. The system will only react if we, Nato, are at all threatened. Should we be fearful of Russia's response? Well, we have always

lived in the shadow of Russia," he said.

Fearful of Russia or not, what Sikorski, the Russian ambassador, and Slupsk's local leadership all had in common, was a belief that the real decision to proceed with the deployment of the missile defence shield would ultimately be taken in Washington, rather than Warsaw.

Obama has bought a breathing space by saying that America needs more time to see if the system can function properly.

In doing so, perhaps he might also find time to listen to ordinary Poles, who fear that they are now set to become a target.

"We wanted a referendum, but we couldn't have one," says Nowak, his eyes tear-streaked with the cold.

"So we organised our own. Sixty-nine per cent of our townspeople said 'no'."

That's an exercise in democracy that Obama is surely familiar with.

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<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2008/12/2008123174615133151.html>

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