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US missile defence system

The Governments of Poland, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom are in negotiations with the United States over deployment of elements for a US anti-ballistic missile shield. Security threats from Iran have been advanced by the US as the main reason to justify the plans. According to the US, the defence system is intended to protect Europe as well as the United States against missile attacks, and the decision for its deployment bears important consequences for all members of the European Union and its neighbours.

The recent assessment by the United States intelligence agencies - the National Intelligence Estimate - on Iran's nuclear intentions and capacities comes to the conclusion that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons programme in 2003 and that it has not restarted it as of mid-2007. The agencies further state that 'Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005.' In consequence, the main argument in favour of the missile shield has faltered.

The new Polish Government announced this week that the benefits and risks of the system have to be discussed fully before a decision is made.

Have the new US security estimates and their consequences for the missile defence system been discussed in Council meetings? Is the Council being consulted and kept informed about the ongoing bilateral negotiations between the US and the concerned governments? Is the planned anti-missile system compatible with the goals of the European Security Strategy and does the Council believe it to be the right answer to counter international terrorism? Does the Council see a relevance of the missile defence plans for EU relations with its neighbours, notably Russia? Does the Council share the concern of many observers that the planned missile defence will contribute to a renewed technological arms race (for example, Russia's recent decision to deploy short-range missiles at the Belarus border with Poland)?