

US Senate Confronts Russia: Senators call for NATO missile defense in Georgia

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Four Republican senators are calling on the Obama administration to place a sensitive missile defense-related radar site in Georgia, rather than in Turkey, as is currently planned.

“We believe that the U.S. should deploy the most effective missile defenses possible – in partnership with our allies – that provide for the protection of the U.S. homeland, our deployed forces, and our allies,” began a Feb. 3 letter to Defense Secretary Robert Gates signed by Sens. Jon Kyl (R-AZ), James Risch (R-ID), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and James Inhofe (R-OK).

The senators are responding to statements from the Turkish government that it would only agree to host the new radar, known as TPY-2, if the United States agrees not to share with Israel any of the information gathered by the radar site, which is part of a NATO system discussed at the recent Lisbon summit. Turkey also wants command and control over the radar, and wants NATO to remove any references to Iran as the threat targeted by the missile shield.

For all these reasons, the senators think Georgia would be a better option.

“We believe that the Republic of Georgia’s geographic location would make it an ideal site for a missile defense radar aimed at Iran, and would offer clear advantages for the protection of the United States from a long range missile as compared to Turkey,” the senators wrote. “What’s more, the Republic of Georgia should be a significant partner for future defense cooperation with the U.S.”

The senators asked Gates to tell them if Georgia was under consideration as a possible host for the radar site and, if not, what other alternatives the Pentagon is considering.

The prospects of NATO or the Obama administration actually placing a missile defense radar site in Georgia are slim, considering that Georgia is not in NATO and that the consequences for U.S. -Russia and NATO-Russia relations could be devastating.

But the letter is a sure sign that the new Congress is prepared to ramp up its advocacy of restoring defense cooperation with Georgia, which has slowed to a crawl since the 2008 Russian invasion. Other senators who are calling for more military support and cooperation for Georgia include John McCain (R-AZ), Joe Lieberman (I-CT), and Richard Lugar (R-IN), the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

“The United States, under substantial Russian diplomatic pressure, has paused the transfer of lethal military articles to Georgia, and no U.S. assistance since the war has been directly provided to the Georgian Ministry of Defense,” Lugar wrote in a December 2009 report.

“Consequently, Georgia lacks basic capacity for territorial defense.”

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