

Kurt Volker
Interview for TV Slovenia, April 11, 2007
Conducted by Rok Zupanic and Ksenija Horvat

Note: Bolded text is portion of interview that aired on TV Slovenia's Globus program on April 14, 2007.

Zupancic: Mr. Volker, what is the main purpose of your visit to Slovenia?

Volker: I've come here in advance of Slovenia's EU presidency, which begins in January of next year, just for some informal consultations with the senior officials in the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office. We're going to be dealing with Slovenia's EU presidency over the next year, both before and while it's going on. We work very closely with the EU, of course, in every area of foreign policy, whether it's justice and home affairs, economic relations, political and security policy and we thought it would be important to have a chance to talk together in advance of Slovenia's presidency.

Zupancic: Do you have special recommendations for our Foreign Ministry, for our country?

Volker: Hold on tight. It will be a very busy time. It is a challenging thing for any country to do, I think, and we are all very excited to see Slovenia taking this on as one of the newest members of the European Union and one that has done a great job as the chairman office of the OSCE and looking very much forward to the EU presidency.

Horvat: So, Mr. Volker, why did the U.S.A. decide to place radar system and interceptor missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic? Why not, for instance, in Turkey or Greece, also NATO members and also the countries where possible missiles would be flying over first in case of attack?

Volker: When you think about missile defense, it's important to understand the layers that exist. So if you have a theater missile defense or a localized defense, like a Patriot missile system, and we have medium range like a THAAD missile defense system. These already exist and so there are Patriot missiles that Netherlands has, for example, or that Germany has. During the early days of the war in Iraq, the Dutch deployed Patriot missiles to Turkey as a means of missile defense within Turkey. **These operate at a theater level. What the U.S. is looking at is a national missile defense program for the United States which, by means of geography, means that you're really looking at strategic level distances, intercontinental distances. To be able to intercept missiles that are of that nature you can't be that close. You have to be a bit further back so that you can intercept the missiles in flight. That's why we looked at what is the optimum geography for a small number of missiles that might come from Iran or another rogue regime in the broader Middle East region and how it would be best placed to intercept that. That's how we came to the geography of Central**

Europe. Turkey, you could have a short-range system, like a Patriot missile system, but not something that would be effective for strategic public defense.

Horvat: Would Slovenia and other countries be any safer since such deployments of anti-missile shield would actually also be a perfect target for terrorist activities?

Volker: Well, we're all vulnerable to terrorism as it is. So whether or not there is a missile defense installation in a given country, whether the Czech Republic or not, we're all vulnerable to terrorism. Look at the attacks in London, or the attacks in Madrid, or the attempted bombings in Hamburg – this is already going on. Second, I think that you have to look at missiles and missile attacks as something that is principally in the realm of what states can carry out. So there is a connection, a potential connection, between terrorist groups and weapons of mass destruction technology, if they can acquire that from a state, but that is still yet another threshold to cross to be able to launch a medium-range or a long-range missile at a target.

Horvat: In the Czech Republic or Poland, there is quite strong public opinion against the anti-missile system and also political opposition is against it as well. Is that important?

Volker: Well, it's up to the countries themselves to decide for themselves: do they want to be a host to a missile defense system or not: what is the public opinion, how do they view that? So, that is something that we rely on these countries to decide for themselves. This is a U.S. national system because we have already interceptors in Alaska and radars in other places that provide coverage of North America. This would provide additional coverage further forward for a U.S. national system and, by virtue of being located in Central and Eastern Europe, also provide additional coverage for Europe that is not currently there. So that is advantage for the U.S., but also an advantage for NATO and for allies in Europe. Now, whether those countries feel that this is something they want to do, it is a decision they've made. We've been in consultation with them for a very long time – with all the allies in NATO for a very long time ... and also with Russia. And we continue to work together to identify how we could cooperate with Russia on missile defense as well because we feel that we all face similar threats. Of course, Russia has its own missile defense system already.

Horvat: Speaking of NATO first, according to NATO General Secretary, U.S.A. did not contact NATO, as such, regarding its plans for anti-missile shield. So, wouldn't it be easier to work through NATO?

Volker: Well, we're saying two different things here. We certainly did contact NATO and discuss missile defense at NATO. We did so several times. What we didn't do was make this a NATO program which would be different than a U.S. program in cooperation with several allies. Now, they can be made compatible so that a U.S.

program could be a contribution to NATO's broader security. Take an example: take again the Netherlands. The Netherlands have patriot missiles which are limited defense in a certain area. You get a perimeter of a circle around a point where you can provide some security. If you were to link that to some radars that would be deployed as part of a strategic missile defense system, a longer range system, that also extends the effectiveness of those Patriot missiles that already exist. And so this could be a contribution to a NATO policy of missile defense, but it is being developed at the first instance as a U.S. program together with a few of the other allies. I'd also say, that when you look at other defense programs, that's typically the way things have been done in the past. So that U.S. forces in Germany, or U.S. forces in Italy. or a bilateral arrangement between the U.S. and that country, but the fact of those military arrangements is a contribution to our collective defense within NATO.

Horvat: But also Russians – you mentioned Russians earlier – they are voicing strong opposition to the shield. Are you taking this into account?

Volker: Well, we are and it's very interesting because, first of all, we've been discussing this with Russia for over a year. And we had, I think we counted up, eleven or twelve formal consultations with Russia about missile defense. We only ever really got this level of criticism and concern from Russia beginning in February. And that took us a little bit by surprise – took a different direction. We have always, throughout, proposed cooperation on missile defense with Russia and we continue to support that and as a result of some of the more recent expressions of concern we had from Russia we are sending more officials to Russia for meetings in coming weeks, specifically with the purpose of discussing what could we do together on missile defense. We'll want to develop our own U.S. national missile defense system as we (inaudible), but we also could do additional things with Russia and see if there aren't ways that these could be compatible or connected to each other.

Horvat: What about the European Union? You have Paris, it is reluctant when it comes to the shield question, you have Berlin who'd prefer to deal with it totally through NATO. Are you not, again, opening this old Donald Rumsfeld rift between Old and New Europe?

Volker: Well, I don't think so, if you're putting Germany in one place and France in another.

Horvat: Of course, I am talking about Central Europe where you're actually deploying the anti-missile system.

Volker: No, I don't think that's it at all because I think that what you have is, NATO is the organization where we talk about our collective security and defense. We had discussed this in NATO many times and we will continue to do that. We want to be transparent. There's nothing to hide here, this is a . . . What's interesting is that this debate is very reminiscent in terms of the argumentation of arguments from the 1980s and the 1970s, but the situation in the world today has nothing to do

with that. We're talking about Iran that has today announced that it has industrial capacity for developing enriched uranium, that it is developing longer range missile systems. So this is a very different arrangement and a small number of missiles and where a deterrence, or not a deterrence, a defense against a limited number of missiles like that makes sense for security of people.

Horvat: But do you understand this European reasoning? You know critics coming from the European Union saying that this is now America actually dealing with one part of Europe and not with the European Union as a whole?

Volker: Well, it is not European Union matter per se; it's a security and defense matter which is what we do through NATO. The U.S. is not a member of the European Union. Our collective security defense arrangements are arranged through NATO and we are talking with everyone about that, so that I don't see it dividing anyone in that way.

Horvat: Could you tell us who will have authority over the red button in case of any attack?

Volker: Well, in the first instance, we're talking about a U.S. missile defense program and these are missiles presumably aimed at the United States and we would have the system set up so that the U.S. would be making decisions about the interception. We would do so through arrangements yet to be negotiated with the countries that are hosting the systems, Poland and the Czech Republic. They obviously are interested in this very question and that is something that has yet to be negotiated through with them. When you talk about would this link to other missile defense systems, would there be a layering of missile defense through NATO so that a combination of very short-range defense systems like a Patriot system, the medium-range ones like a THAAD system, would these integrate somehow? That is also to be determined and that can lead us to different conclusions about what that means. But for what we're talking about now, it's a U.S.-developed missile defense program where the primary purpose is defending the U.S. against the intercontinental attacks. A subsidiary benefit would be to also defend Europe against attacks that might be aimed at Europe.

Horvat: One final question regarding the new military base you are building in Vicenza. Why is that new military base important, why are you doing it? Aviano is quite near and it is a strong military base.

Volker: Well, that is just it. It is not a new military base; it is an expansion of an existing military base. What we have is: the 173rd Airborne Brigade is headquartered in Vicenza, but there are elements of that brigade that are deployed elsewhere, in two different sites in Germany. What we wanted to do is consolidate them in one place. Essentially what the U.S. is doing is what we are encouraging all of the allies to do as well; which is to increase the deployability of the forces that we have and to shorten the timelines so that we are able to deploy more quickly, which is something I think that all allies need to be developing their forces to do. Having

them co-located in one place makes the logistics of deployment easier, makes the decision making easier, and facilitates the deployability of that (inaudible).

Horvat: But again, there are 60% of local population against this extension of the military base. Is this again being taken into consideration?

Volker: Well, certainly it is because we want to be good neighbors working with the local population. It's a decision that is made by the government of Italy. The government of Italy has decided that it would approve the expansion of the facility that's there.

Horvat: But that was the previous government?

Volker: No, no this is the Prodi government that has said that they will approve this. And so we are going forward, we're hoping in the coming weeks, or days or weeks, to get formal notification of that. But they've taken the political decision already and it's a courageous decision for them because, as you say, in the local population there are people who are concerned. But at the same time, this is important to the U.S. and Italy because as allies sharing a defense relationship, it's important that we are able to work together to do things like this. The 173rd, which is the force that that will be consolidated in Vicenza, and the levels are going from about 2000 troops to about 4000 troops. That's going to be deploying this year to northeastern Afghanistan along the Pakistan border. So that's the nature of the force that's there. It will go for about six months, maybe longer, and then return to Italy.

Horvat: Thank you very much for the interview.

Volker: Thank you.