

Romania: U.S. Escalates Missile Brinkmanship Against Russia

By [Rick Rozoff](#)
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On June 29 U.S. European Command announced the signing of new accords with the government of Romania for the stationing of American interceptor missiles in the country, a senior Russian diplomat stated that further talks with the U.S. on cuts in conventional and nuclear arms will not occur until Washington changes its stance on the U.S.-NATO missile shield project in Europe, and a top Russian official pledged to develop the means of circumventing the interceptor system on earth and in space.

At a joint committee meeting in the Bucharest, Major General Mark Schissler, Director of Plans and Policy at Headquarters U.S. European Command, and the Romanian Defense Ministry's State Secretary for Defense Policy and Planning Sebastian Hulaban signed two implementing arrangements and three amendments to existing implementing arrangements related to the construction and operation of an American interceptor missile facility at a former air base in Deveselu. The new implementing arrangements pertain to the use of land surrounding the base and the use of air space over it for Phase II of the European Phased Adaptive Approach, the first phase of which was announced to be operational at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit in Chicago in May.

Also present for the signing were Rear Admiral Randall Hendrickson, Deputy Director of the Missile Defense Agency, and Brigadier General Thomas Sharpy, Director of Plans, Programs and Analyses for U.S. Air Forces in Europe.

The new codicils follow the Ballistic Missile Defense Agreement between the two nations which was signed in September of last year and entered into force in December. That pact in turn succeeded Romania's announcement in February 2010 that it would host U.S. missiles as part of the Barack Obama administration's Phased Adaptive Approach system to deploy scores of interceptors on land and sea in Eastern Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea along Russia's western flank.

Construction on the Romanian site will begin next year and in 2014 24 Standard Missile-3 interceptors will be deployed to the country, to be followed by as many, of a more advanced model, in Poland three years later.

Earlier in June U.S. representatives participated in an industry day in Romania, announcing that ground would be broken for the missile facility within months and dangling the prospect of contracts before local businesses, although Missile Defense Agency facilities require an American prime contractor for the military components.

The American representatives said they expected two contracts to be approved, one for

developing the facilities of the Missile Defense Agency and one for the U.S. Navy component that is included in the Deveselu site. The involvement of the Navy, which will gain an access control center and facilities for 250 personnel, could indicate that the U.S. and NATO will not limit themselves to the placing of land-based Standard Missile-3s but may add the deployment of the sea-based version on American guided missile cruisers and destroyers in the Black Sea.

Commenting on the above, the press officer at the American embassy in Romania, Kenneth Wetzell, said, "This project reaffirms Romania's commitments to NATO and reflects the very strong relations between our two countries."

The missile shield facility will initially be a bilateral U.S.-Romanian undertaking until it is transferred to NATO control. Bogdan Aurescu of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Romanian companies have gained considerable experience in NATO and NATO-interoperable projects since joining the U.S.-led military bloc in 2004 that permits the country to be the first to host longer-range, higher-velocity interceptors in Europe. (Two years ago the Pentagon moved a Patriot Advanced Capability-3 battery and approximately 100 military personnel to Poland.)

The 2011 agreement on basing U.S. interceptor missiles in Romania begins with these words:

"Having in mind the United States-Romanian Strategic Partnership and the further development thereof, and recognizing that a very important pillar of the United States-Romanian relationship is the solidarity embodied in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the United States and Romania recognize the importance of enhancing their individual and collective national security by working within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. ..

"Reaffirming their strong will to work together towards contributing to, in accordance with the principle of the indivisibility of the security of NATO and with the principle of NATO solidarity, the NATO missile defense capability, as a key mission of the Alliance, with the aim of providing full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces, as well as to shaping NATO's central role in missile defense in Europe..."

In 2005, the year after Romania joined NATO, the U.S. signed a comprehensive defense cooperation agreement with the country that provided the Pentagon its first military bases in a former Warsaw Pact country, including the Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base which had been used for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent to that has been employed for the wars in that nation, Afghanistan and Libya.

On June 18 the above-cited Romanian official Aurescu met with Poland's presidential adviser on security matters Stanislaw Koziej to share Romania's experience in regard to hosting American Standard Missile-3 interceptors. The U.S. will deploy the new Standard Missile-3 Block 1B, to go into production this fall, to Romania in 2015 and the more advanced Block 11A to Poland in 2018.

The missile system will be controlled by NATO from the U.S. air base in Ramstein, Germany and connected with the Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance X-band missile radar put into operation in Turkey in January, which an Obama administration official last autumn described as "probably the biggest strategic decision between the United States and Turkey

in the past 15 or 20 years.”

On June 29 Grigory Berdennikov, the Russian envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency, stated that Russia will not continue talks with the U.S. on conventional and nuclear arms reductions until, as cited by Russian Information Agency Novosti, “Washington changes its stance on the global deployment of U.S. missile defenses.”

The news agency quoted Berdennikov as warning:

“[H]ow are we supposed to move forward if the United States refuses to curb its missile defenses?”

“We are certainly hoping that they will change their stance on missile defense, because at this point there is no progress (in missile defense talks) whatsoever. We cannot do anything else while there is no clarity on missile defense issues.”

On the same day Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin told a Russian radio station that Russia will develop a response to the U.S.-NATO missile interception system that will allow for it being confronted and overcome. He said, “Our task is to create a real guarantee of security for the Russian Federation by arming Russian forces with equipment capable of countering any attempts to offset the strategic balance.”

According to a Xinhua News Agency account of his statement, Russia will “create defensive systems capable of intercepting incoming missiles or upgrade its own first-strike nuclear forces so as to overcome any anti-missile umbrella.”

Rogozin added: “We, of course, will create a system of overcoming and suppressing any anti-missile defense. If somebody thinks it is possible to surround us with an anti-missile fence, we will break down everything, the entire wall, if someone would attempt to isolate us or make us kneel down.”

In anticipating the next step in U.S. and NATO missile interception plans – the inevitable expansion into space – the Russian official said that his nation will also “give an adequate response” to the threat of military attacks from that domain.

He explained Russia’s concerns regarding the militarization of space: “Obviously, long-term space stations will be created not only for civilian but, perhaps, for military purposes. Today it is impossible to draw the line between civilian and military space (programs).”

The deployment of interceptor missiles in Romania and Poland will mark the beginning and not the end of U.S. and NATO plans for an international – and beyond, to space – missile system for potential first-strike use against Russia and other nations, a system that can prove the greatest threat to humanity since the end of the Cold War.

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