

Russia Condemns US Move to Put Missiles in Romania

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Russia has attacked a US decision to site interceptor missiles in Romania, saying the move imperils Barack Obama's much-vaunted "reset" of relations between the two countries and the final stages of nuclear arms reduction talks.

The Kremlin said it was taken aback by news that Romania's top military body had agreed to host US SM-3 interceptor missiles and other military infrastructure in response to an alleged missile threat from Iran. Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, said he had demanded an "exhaustive explanation" from Washington, citing a treaty that would prevent US ships delivering the necessary equipment via the Black Sea.

"How can we stay calm when alien military infrastructure, US military infrastructure, has come to the Black Sea area?" Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's ambassador to Nato, told Russian state TV separately.

Mr Obama last year dropped a Bush-era plan to install a missile defence shield in the Czech Republic and Poland. Russia at the time hailed that decision as "brave", viewing it as a diplomatic victory. But a few months later, Kremlin officials say they are deeply disappointed that Washington did not consult Moscow about the Romanian missiles. They were similarly nonplussed last month when the US confirmed it was planning to place Patriot missiles in Poland close to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

The disagreement comes as Russian and US negotiators finalise a pact that will make deep cuts in their nuclear arsenals.

Sergey Ivanov, Russia's deputy prime minister, warned the Romanian move would complicate those talks. "It is impossible to talk seriously about a reduction of nuclear capabilities when a nuclear power is working to deploy defensive systems against nuclear warheads possessed by other countries," he said.

Military experts warned the interceptor missiles could be upgraded to pose a threat to the Kremlin's intercontinental nuclear missiles. Colonel Igor Korotchenko, editor of Russia's National Defence magazine, urged the Kremlin to retaliate. "Russia should warn Romania that if elements of a US missile shield are sited in the country they will be viewed as legitimate targets for Russian missile attack."

On Sunday the head of Nato said the alliance should develop closer ties with China, India, Pakistan and Russia and become the forum for consultation on global security.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Nato secretary-general, said: "What would be the harm if countries such as China, India, Pakistan and others were to develop closer ties with Nato? I think, in fact, there would only be a benefit, in terms of trust, confidence and co-operation ... Nato can be the place where views, concerns and best practices on security are shared by Nato's global partners."

But Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Russian Duma's International Affairs Committee, reacted with scepticism, saying Nato first had to think globally, and complained that Russia had not been involved in the process.

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