

Russia: NATO Missile System Could End New START Treaty

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Global Research, November 17, 2011

[Deutsche Presse-Agentur](#) 17 November 2011

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

Moscow – A senior Russian general on Thursday said a missile shield planned for the NATO region could force Moscow to quit a strategic nuclear arms treaty with the US, possibly triggering a nuclear arms race.

Army General Nikolai Makarov, chief of Russia's general staff, made the remarks, which were reported by the Interfax news agency, in a Moscow speech.

'The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) has several points that allow us, if necessary, to quit the agreement,' Makarov said. 'And you know, the problem of the European missile shield is quite serious.'

Makarov's comments marked the first time a top Kremlin official has, in a public statement, linked a planned NATO missile shield with Russia's participation in a nuclear arms limitation treaty with the US.

NATO officials have said the defence system is needed to protect the region from a possible missile strike from the Middle East, and that it is not aimed against Russia.

The European missile defence network would give NATO the ability to shoot down elements of Russia's nuclear deterrence force, and so give Washington a dangerous advantage in a confrontation with Moscow, Russian officials have said.

The New Start treaty, signed in Prague in April 2010 by US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, established maximum numbers of nuclear-capable missiles and bombers both sides might keep in inventory, and set out a rigorous inspection regime to monitor compliance.

Article 14 of the agreement allows either signer to quit the agreement 'if extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests.'

An abrogation of the New Start treaty would allow Russia and the US to field new nuclear weapons in unlimited quantity – a situation similar to the early years of the Cold War.

Other threatened Russian retaliatory measures for the NATO missile shield have included: deployment of nuclear weapons to the Baltic region; construction of a missile defence network across Russia; and an increase of conventional forces in Russia's western provinces.

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