

Why Moscow does not Trust Washington on Missile Defense. Towards a Pre-emptive Nuclear War?

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Most in the civilized world are blissfully unaware that we are marching ineluctably towards an increasingly likely pre-emptive nuclear war. No, it's not at all about Iran and Israel. It's about the decision of Washington and the Pentagon to push Moscow up against the wall with what is euphemistically called Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD).

On November 23, a normally low-keyed Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told the world in clear terms that Russia was prepared to deploy its missiles on the border to the EU between Poland and Lithuania, and possibly in the south near Georgia and NATO member Turkey to counter the advanced construction process of the US ballistic missile defense shield: "The Russian Federation will deploy in the west and the south of the country modern weapons systems that could be used to destroy the European component of the US missile defense," he announced on Russian television. "One of these steps could be the deployment of the Iskander missile systems in Kaliningrad."¹ Those would be theatre ballistic missile systems. The latest version of Iskander, the Iskander-K, whose details remain top secret, reportedly has a range up to 2000 km and carries cruise missiles and a target accuracy to 7 meters or less.

Medvedev declared he has ordered the Russian defense ministry to "immediately" put radar systems in Kaliningrad that warn of incoming missile attacks on a state of combat readiness. He called for extending the targeting range of Russia's strategic nuclear missile forces and re-equipping Russia's nuclear arsenal with new warheads capable of piercing the US/NATO defense shield due to become operational in six years, by 2018. Medvedev also threatened to pull Russia out of the New START missile reduction treaty if the United States moves as announced.

Medvedev then correctly pointed to the inevitable link between "defensive" missiles and "offensive" missiles: "Given the intrinsic link between strategic offensive and defensive arms, conditions for our withdrawal from the New Start treaty could also arise," he said.²

The Russian President didn't mince words: "I have ordered the armed forces to develop measures to ensure, if necessary, that we can destroy the command and control systems" of the US shield, Medvedev said. "These measures are appropriate, effective and low-cost." Russia has repeatedly warned that the US BMD global shield is designed to destabilize the nuclear balance and risks provoking a new arms race. The Russian President said that rather than take the Russian concerns seriously, Washington has instead been "accelerating" its BMD development.³

It was not the first time Medvedev threatened to take countermeasures to the increasing

Pentagon military encirclement pressure on Russia. Back in November 2008 as the US BMD threat was first made known to the world, Medvedev made a televised address to the Russian people in which he declared, "I would add something about what we have had to face in recent years: what is it? It is the construction of a global missile defense system, the installation of military bases around Russia, the unbridled expansion of NATO and other similar 'presents' for Russia we therefore have every reason to believe that they are simply testing our strength." 4 That threat was dropped some months later when the Obama Administration offered the now-clearly deceptive olive branch of reversing the BMD decision to deploy in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Russia is threatening to deploy its Iskander anti-BMD missiles in Kaliningrad

This time around Washington lost no time signaling it was in the developing game of thermonuclear chicken to stay. No more pretty words about "reset" in US-Russia relations. A spokesman for the Obama National Security Council declared, "we will not in any way limit or change our deployment plans for Europe." The US Administration continues to insist on the implausible argument that the missile defense installations are aimed at a threat from a possible Iranian nuclear launch, something hardly credible. The real risk of Iranian nuclear missile attack on Europe given the reality of the global US as well as Israeli BMD installations and the reality of Iran's nuclear delivery capabilities, is by best impartial accounts, near zero.

Two days earlier on November 21, Washington had thrown a small carrot to Moscow. US Undersecretary of State for Arms Control Ellen Tauscher said that Washington was ready to provide information about the missile's speed after it uses up all of its fuel. This information, referred to as burnout velocity (VBO), helps to determine how to target it.⁵ That clearly was not seen as a serious concession by Moscow, which demands a full hands-on partnership with the US/NATO missile deployment to insure it will never be used against Russia. After all, given Washington's track record of lies and broken promises, there is no guarantee the speeds would even be true.

After the early October Brussels NATO defense ministers meeting, NATO head Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in regard to the nominally NATO European Missile Defense Program, "We would expect it to be fully operational in 2018." Spain just announced it plans to join the US-controlled missile program, joining Romania, Poland, the Netherlands and Turkey, which have already agreed to deploy key components of the future missile defense network on their territories.⁶

The concerns of Russia are caused by the dramatic improvement of an entire system of missile defense by Washington, which is taking the form of a global BMD system encircling Russia on all sides.

Full Spectrum Dominance...

The last time Washington's Missile Defense "Shield" made headlines was in September 2009 early in the Obama Administration when the US President offered to downgrade the provocative stationing of US special radar and anti-missile missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic. That was a clear tactic to prepare the way for what Hillary Clinton ludicrously called the "reset" in US-Russian relations from the tense Bush-Putin days. However the strategic goal of encircling the one nuclear potential opponent in the world with credible missile defense remained US strategy.

Barack Obama announced back then that the US was altering Bush Administration plans to station US anti-ballistic missiles in Poland and sophisticated radar in the Czech Republic. The news was greeted in Moscow as an important concession.⁷ Subsequent developments clearly show that far from ditching its plans for a missile shield that could cripple any potential Russian nuclear launch, the US was merely opting for a more effective global system, whose feasibility had been proven in the meantime.

To assuage the Poles, the Obama Administration also agreed to provide Poland with US Patriot missiles. Poland's Foreign Minister then and now is Radek Sikorski. From 2002 to 2005 he was in Washington as a resident fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, a noted neo-conservative hawkish think-tank, and executive director of the New Atlantic Initiative, a project to bring as many former communist countries of eastern Europe into NATO as possible. Little wonder Moscow did not view US missiles in Poland as friendly, nor does it today.

In May 2011 the Obama Administration announced that the missiles it would now give Poland consisted of new Raytheon (RTN) SM-3 missile defense systems at the Redzikowo military base in Poland (see map), roughly 50 miles from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, a unique piece of Russian real estate not connected to mainland Russia, but adjacent to the Baltic Sea and Lithuania. That puts US missiles closer to Russia than during the 1961 Cuba Missile Crisis when Washington placed ICBM's at sites in Turkey aimed at key Soviet nuclear sites.⁸

The new Raytheon SM-3 missile is part of the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System that will be aimed at intercepting short to intermediate range ballistic missiles. The SM-3 Kinetic Warhead intercepts incoming ballistic missiles outside the earth's atmosphere. Lockheed Martin Maritime Systems and Sensors developed the Aegis BMD Weapon System. The SM-3 comes from Raytheon Missile Systems.

The Polish SM-3 missile deployment is but one part of a global web encircling Russia's nuclear capacities. One should not forget that official Pentagon military strategy is called Full Spectrum Dominance—control of pretty much the entire universe. This past September the US and Romania, another new NATO member, signed an agreement to deploy a US-controlled Missile Defense System on the Deveselu Air Base in Romania using the SM-3 missiles.

As well Washington has signed an agreement with NATO member Turkey to place a sophisticated missile tracking radar atop a high mountain in the Kuluncak district of Malatya province in south-eastern Turkey. Though the Pentagon insists its radar is pointed at Iran, a look at a map reveals how easily the focal direction could cover key Russian nuclear sites such as Sevastopol where the bulk of the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet is stationed or to the vital Russian Krasnodar radar installation.⁹

The Malatya radar will send data to US ships equipped with the Aegis combat system that will intercept "Iranian" ballistic missiles. According to Russian military experts, one of the main aims of that radar, which targets at a range up to 2000 kilometers, will also be the surveillance and control of the air space of the South Caucasus, part of Central Asia as well as the south of Russia, in particular tracking the experimental launches of the Russian missiles at their test ranges.¹⁰

Further, the US-controlled BMD deployment now also includes sea-based “Aegis” systems in the Black Sea near Russia’s Sevastopol Naval Base, as well as possible deployment of intermediate range missiles in Black Sea and Caspian region.¹¹

But the European BMS deployments of the US Pentagon are but a part of a huge global web. At the Fort Greeley Alaska Missile Field the US has installed BMD ground-based missile interceptors, as well as at the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. And the Pentagon just opened two missile sites at the Pacific Missile Range Facility in Hawaii. To add to it, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force has joined formally with the US Missile Defense Agency to develop a system of so-called Aegis BMD deploying the SM-3 Raytheon missiles on Japanese naval ships.¹² That gives the US a Pacific platform from which it can hit both China and Russia’s Far East as well as the Korean Peninsula. These are all a pretty long and curious way to reach any Iranian threat.

Origins of US Missile Defense

The US program to build a global network of ‘defense’ against possible enemy ballistic missile attacks began back in March 23, 1983 when then-President Ronald Reagan proposed the program popularly known as Star Wars, formally called then the Strategic Defense Initiative.

In 1994 at a private dinner discussion with this author in Moscow, the former head of economic studies for the Soviet Union’s Institute of World Economy & International Relations, IMEMO, declared that it had been the huge financial demands required by Russia to keep pace with the multi-billion dollar US Star Wars effort that finally led to the economic collapse of the Warsaw Pact and to German reunification in 1990. With a losing war in Afghanistan, collapsing oil revenues caused by a 1986 US policy of flooding the world market with Saudi oil, the military economy of the USSR was unable to keep pace, short of risking massive civilian unrest across the Warsaw Pact nations.¹³

This time around the US BMD deployment is designed to bring Russia to her knees as well, only in the context of a US creation of what military strategists call “Nuclear Primacy.”

Nuclear Primacy: Thinking the Unthinkable

While the Soviet era armed forces have undergone a drastic shrinking down since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia has tenaciously held on to the core of its strategic nuclear deterrent. That is something that gives Washington pause when considering how to deal with Russia. The potential for Russia to deepen its military and economic cooperation with its Central Asian partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, above all with China, is something Washington has gone to great lengths to frustrate. Such a strategic cooperation is becoming increasingly a matter of life-or-death for both China and Russia. China’s nuclear arsenal is not yet strategic as is Russia’s.

What the Pentagon is going for is what it has dreamed of since the Soviets developed intercontinental ballistic missiles during the 1950’s. Weapons professionals term it Nuclear Primacy. Translated into layman’s language, Nuclear Primacy means that if one of two evenly-matched nuclear foes is able to deploy even a crude anti-ballistic missile defense system that can seriously damage the nuclear strike capacity of the other, while he launches a full-scale nuclear barrage against that foe, he has won the nuclear war.

The darker side of that military-strategic Nuclear Primacy coin is that the side without adequate offsetting BMD anti-missile defenses, as he watches his national security vanish with each new BMD missile and radar installation, is under growing pressure to launch a preemptive nuclear or other devastating strike before the window closes. That in simple words means that far from being “defensive” as Washington claims, BMD is offensive and destabilizing in the extreme. Moreover, those nations blissfully deluding themselves that by granting the Pentagon rights to install BMS infrastructure, that they are buying the security umbrella of the mighty United States Armed Forces, find that they have allowed their territory to become a potential nuclear field of battle in an ever more likely confrontation between Washington and Moscow.

Dr. Robert Bowman, a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the US Air Force and former head of President Reagan’s BMD effort of the 1980’s, then dubbed derisively “Star Wars,” noted the true nature of Washington’s current ballistic missile “defense” under what is today called the Department of Defense Missile Defense Agency:

“Under Reagan and Bush I, it was the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO). Under Clinton, it became the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO). Now Bush II has made it the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) and given it the freedom from oversight and audit previously enjoyed only by the black programs. If Congress doesn’t act soon, this new independent agency may take their essentially unlimited budget and spend it outside of public and Congressional scrutiny on weapons that we won’t know anything about until they’re in space. In theory, then, the space warriors would rule the world, able to destroy any target on earth without warning. Will these new super weapons bring the American people security? Hardly.”¹⁴

During the Cold War, the ability of both sides—the Warsaw Pact and NATO—to mutually annihilate one another, had led to a nuclear stalemate dubbed by military strategists, MAD—Mutually Assured Destruction. It was scary but, in a bizarre sense, more stable than what Washington now pursues relentlessly with its Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe, Asia and globally in unilateral pursuit of US nuclear primacy. MAD was based on the prospect of mutual nuclear annihilation with no decisive advantage for either side; it led to a world in which nuclear war had been ‘unthinkable.’ Now, the US was pursuing the possibility of nuclear war as ‘thinkable.’

Lt. Colonel Bowman, in a telephone interview with this author called missile defense, “the missing link to a First Strike.”¹⁵

The fact is that Washington hides behind a NATO facade with its deployment of the European BMD, while keeping absolute US control over it. Russia’s NATO envoy Dmitry Rogozin recently called the European portion of the US BMD a fig leaf for “a missile defense umbrella that says ‘Made in USA. European NATO members will have neither a button to push nor a finger to push it with.’”¹⁶

That’s clearly why Russia continues to insist on guarantees – from the United States – that the shield is not directed against Russia. Worryingly enough, to date Washington has categorically refused that. Could it be that the dear souls in Washington entrusted with maintaining world peace have gone bonkers? In any case the fact that Washington continues to tear up solemn international arms treaties and illegally proceed to install its global missile shield is basis enough for those in Moscow, Beijing or elsewhere to regard US

promises, even treaties as not worth the paper they were written on.

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Notes

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