

Chicago Summit: NATO To Announce Activation Of European Missile Shield

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On April 30 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen informed the Associated Press that the military bloc he leads will announce initial operational capability for the joint U.S.-NATO interceptor missile system in Europe at the NATO summit in Chicago on May 20-21.

Identifying the progression from European theater interceptor missile systems like NATO's Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) and the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS) and the U.S. Patriot Advanced Capability-3 battery deployed to Poland two years ago to current continent-wide territorial coverage with the integration of those systems with Washington's European Phased Adaptive Approach, the alliance chief said, "As far as NATO is concerned, we have tested the systems and they work."

The U.S.-controlled military organization recently announced that simulated tests on April 4-5 established the integrated system's viability and prepared the groundwork for successive, qualitatively more advanced, stages of development and deployment.

On the day Rasmussen addressed the issue, the Obama administration's National Security Council senior director for European affairs, Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, gave a presentation titled "Revitalizing NATO: From Lisbon to Chicago" at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. in which she confirmed the NATO chief's assertion by stating, "At Chicago, it is our intent to declare an interim capability for NATO missile defense based on the ability to employ U.S. assets under NATO command..."

Sherwood-Randall, the Pentagon's deputy assistant secretary for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia during the middle 1990s and a veteran of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution, highlighted the fact that "the best example of the President's commitment to NATO's capabilities of the future is our work on missile defense."

She verified that the first phase of the missile system endorsed by NATO at its last summit in Portugal in November 2010 had been achieved with the deployment of an Aegis class warship, the USS Monterey guided missile cruiser, equipped with Standard Missile-3 interceptors in the Mediterranean Sea and the deployment of an American X-band radar system in Turkey, adding that "now additional work is underway on the next phase."

The next three stages of the Phased Adaptive Approach will consist of progressively more advanced versions of the Standard Missile-3 interceptors hitherto deployed on ships for both sea and land use. (The second is known as Aegis Ashore.) The current ship-based interceptor missile is the Standard Missile-3 Block IA. Its successors will be Block IB, Block IIA

and Block IIB models to be stationed in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions, in Poland and Romania on land (24 Block IBs in Romania, as many Block IIAs in Poland), and in the Mediterranean on U.S. guided missile destroyers and cruisers, including four U.S. Aegis class destroyers to be based at the Naval Station Rota in Spain. The naval component could later be deployed in the Black, Baltic, Barents and Norwegian Seas as well.

Each more advanced model will extend the velocity of the missile and the range of the intercept, from short- to medium- and intermediate- range, with the Block IIB expected to be capable of intercepting long-range – intercontinental – ballistic missiles. Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon were awarded first phase competition contracts for the Block IIB last year.

After the comments of NATO's Rasmussen and the White House's Sherwood-Randall on April 30, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov spoke to one of his nation's newspapers and warned, "When the Americans begin constructing the third stage of their missile defense plans in Europe and the effectiveness of our strategic nuclear forces is jeopardized, serious issues will arise regarding Russia's appropriate reaction."

While emphasizing the third phase of the U.S.-NATO European missile system as posing a particular threat, he also said that the first and second phases were causes for serious concern, adding: "This is the time the foundation for the modernization of the US missile defense system will be laid. Furthermore, no one is saying there will be no fifth, sixth, and seventh stages."

Retired Lieutenant-General Evgeny Buzhinsky was recently quoted by Voice of Russia as stating: "We've been told about a defense system against an Iranian threat, as well as against so-called 'rogue states.' All this is quite doubtful. Why spend hundreds of billions of dollars just to intercept 3-4 Iranian missiles? And why would Iran attack Europe when 70% of its foreign trade is with the EU?"

The source cited the same official mentioning that the Russian Defense Ministry has conducted computer-simulated tests that demonstrated once U.S. interceptor missiles in Eastern Europe reach a velocity of 5 kilometers per second they will pose a threat to Russia's nuclear deterrence forces.

In January Russian Information Agency Novosti cited Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin warning that U.S. interceptor missiles now cover all of European Russia to the Ural Mountains and are capable of not only shooting down short- and medium-range missiles from so-called rogue states but of destroying Russian intercontinental missiles.

The Russian official was quoted stating: "Along with allies, whom the U.S. now persuades to buy ships equipped with the Aegis Combat System, the overall potential can be estimated at about 1,000 interceptor missiles...The fact that the missile defense system can hit strategic missiles and the fact that those bases and fleets are deployed in northern seas demonstrate the evident...anti- Russian nature of the missile defense."

The U.S. has 61 Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyers, each capable of firing 90 missiles, and 22 Ticonderoga class guided missile cruisers that are built for the Aegis Combat System and are already equipped for or can be upgraded to accommodate Standard Missile-3 interceptors. Combined. the 83 warships could be equipped to fire thousands of Standard Missile-3 interceptors.

Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin also warned, as his nation's deputy defense minister did this week: "There are no guarantees that after the first, second, third phases are completed, there will be no fourth, fifth and sixth. Do you really think they will halt all their technologies after 2020? That's nonsense! They will go ahead with developing and boosting the technical parameters of their interceptor missiles and performance capabilities of their warning (missile defense) systems."

The last NATO summit committed all 28 member states to participation in the most ambitious interceptor missile system ever envisioned. The upcoming summit will mark the official announcement of its initial activation, fraught as the system is with the threats of attempted blackmail, fatal miscalculation and the West contemplating first strike options.

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