

New START Will Not Affect Missile Shield Plans, Says Tusk

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The new START 2 nuclear arms reduction treaty will not affect the planned US missile shield in Europe, said PM Donald Tusk following a meeting with President Barack Obama in Prague, Thursday.

"I came with some concerns, I leave with confidence," Tusk said after the working dinner attended by 11 central and eastern European nations and Barack Obama in the Czech capital, after America had signed a new nuclear reduction treaty with Russian president Dmitry Medvedev.

The new treaty sets a limit of 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads for each side, down from 2,200.

"From the perspective of [President Obama] and the U.S. the signing of the START 2 treaty has no influence on the work on the SM3 anti-missile shield," Tusk said, referring to the new anti-missile shield announced by Washington last September.

Around the table for the dinner in Prague sat leaders from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovenia, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Latvia, Estonia, Romania and the Czech Republic.

PM Tusk said that the dinner was dominated by Poles' and Czechs' concerns that the New START II will hamper the construction of an anti-missile shield and will weaken NATO. "American defence policy in Europe needs to be consistent," said Tusk.

He also said he had not spoken with Obama about the stationing of Patriot missiles in Poland, with the addition of 100 American troops, scheduled to arrive this year.

Not a zero sum game

A White House official told Reuters that a better working relationship with Moscow did not mean a weaker relationship with Poland and other countries in the region.

"This notion that somehow working with Russia is to the disadvantage of our allies, [...] is absolutely absurd," Michael McFaul, a senior Russia adviser to Obama, said.

"I think if you looked at where things are today in terms of European security and Russia generally, they have advanced since we've been in office. And that the president can come here to Prague and sign a major arms control agreement with the Russian president and have dinner with 11 NATO allies that night underscores the fact that these relationships in

no way come at the expense of the others," he said. (pg)

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