

Putin Just Pulled a Bush on “Missile Defense Shield”. Russia’s Dominance in Hypersonic Missiles

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Despite almost two decades of criticizing the Bush-era missile defense shield plans for threatening to disrupt the sensitive strategic balance between the US and Russia, Putin now wants his country to be the world leader in hypersonic missile defense technology in order to retain its global dominance in this field, essentially embodying the exact same principle that he previously railed against for years.

Putin tried to pull a fast one on the world earlier this week when he thought that nobody would notice the hypocrisy of him calling for Russia to deploy a hypersonic missile defense shield before its rivals catch up to it and develop hypersonic armaments too. [RT](#) quoted the Russian President as saying that

“we also have a perfect understanding that the world’s leading nations will develop such weapons sooner or later(, therefore) we must obtain the means of protection against such systems, before hypersonic weapons are put in service by the [foreign] militaries.”

In other words, Russia wants to retain its global dominance in the field of hypersonic missiles by being the first state to deploy both offensive and defensive systems related to this technology, the first of which provides it with a credible nuclear second-strike capability that can pierce through the US’ missile defense shield while the second ensures that it can thwart others’ efforts to do the same against it.

It shouldn’t be forgotten that the Bush-era missile defense shield plans have been fiercely criticized by almost all of Russia’s state representatives over nearly the past two decades since they were announced, with none other than President Putin regularly railing against them for disrupting the sensitive strategic balance between the US and his country. His government was entirely right in pointing out that the US aimed to undercut Russia’s nuclear second-strike capabilities in order to eventually place it in a position of nuclear blackmail, ergo why Moscow made the decision to urgently prioritize the research and development of hypersonic missile technology in the first place. Now that it’s the world leader in this field, it doesn’t want to risk losing its position by being unprepared for the eventual deployment of these armaments by its rivals and unable to defend itself from them in the same way that the US isn’t able to do at this moment.

In other words, the Neo-Realist theory of International Relations is especially apt in explaining what’s happening here because Russia and its rivals seem to be trapped in the so-called “security dilemma” whereby outwardly defensive moves by one state (such as Russia’s development of hypersonic missiles and shields) are interpreted by others as

offensive ones because they're seen as occurring at the zero-sum expense of their own security since they don't trust that the leading state won't abuse its dominant position. Interestingly, this is very similar to what happened back during the Bush Administration when the US originally sought to roll out conventional missile defense technology all across the world in order to preserve its dominant position in that sphere, which in turn provoked Russia into making rapid advancements in hypersonic missile technology to offset the expected disadvantages that the success of the US' plans would have for its security.

Therefore, in terms of the Neo-Realist theory of International Relations, there's no difference between the US and Russia in this respect, unless one incorporates the Constructivist theory of (changing) perceptions and begins to differentiate the grand strategic intent being pursued by both Great Powers.

Whether objectively the case or only subjectively so, there's a prevailing notion that the US wanted to deploy its conventional missile defense shield for aggressive reasons related to preserving its unipolar hegemony across the world, while Russia is doing this in the hypersonic sense in order to maintain the strategic balance that it restored through this technology. In any case, there's no avoiding the uncomfortable optics that Putin just pulled a Bush on missile defense, so Russia should launch a supportive information campaign in parallel with the development of its hypersonic missile defense shield in order to explain to the world how its intentions differ from the US'.

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