

Russia Expresses “Serious” Concerns regarding U.S. Missile Shield

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Russia said Friday it had “serious questions” regarding U.S. intentions in planning to field ballistic missile interceptors in Romania as part of the Obama administration’s broader program for European missile defense, the Associated Press reported (see [GSN](#), Feb. 23).

“We are worried that we find out about important decisions regarding the U.S. missile defense in Europe from the media rather than our official counterparts in Washington or Bucharest,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said to reporters.

Romania announced last month that it was prepared to participate in Washington’s revised plan for a European missile shield by hosting U.S. missile interceptors. The Obama administration plan involves installing land- and sea-based interceptors around Europe as protection from potential short- and medium-range missiles fired from Iran.

While Moscow at first hailed the Obama plan as an improvement over a Bush-era proposal, the Kremlin has increasingly criticized the possible deployment of missile defense apparatus in Eastern European countries. Russian leaders contend that Romanian involvement in the shield would negatively impact their nation’s security interests.

“Russia has serious questions regarding the true purpose of the U.S. missile defense in Romania,” Nesterenko said. “That is why we will consistently oppose any dubious unilateral actions in the missile defense field that could have a negative impact on the international security.”

He would not say whether disagreements with the United States on missile defense might impact negotiations on a successor nuclear arms control accord to the now-expired 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (see [GSN](#), Feb. 18). That possibility has been voiced by other officials in Moscow.

The U.S. missile shield would make a “fragile European security infrastructure hostage to the imaginary missile threats that are defined unilaterally,” Nesterenko said (Vladimir Isachenkov, Associated Press/[Yahoo!News](#), Feb. 26).

Romanian Foreign Minister Teodor Baconschi said Friday that his country was in discussions with Washington on hosting “20 interceptor devices at different locations in Romania,” Agence France-Presse reported.

“The talks will probably take a year and a half,” he said (Agence France-Presse I/[Spacewar.com](#), Feb. 26).

Meanwhile, Poland announced Saturday that it would receive the initial set of U.S. Patriot missiles next month, according to AFP.

Polish Defense Ministry spokesman Januz Sejmej said U.S. military personnel assigned to operate the surface-to-air-missiles would accompany the Patriots' arrival, according to the PAP news agency.

The interceptors are set to be fielded in northern Poland approximately 35 miles away from the Russian territory of Kaliningrad. Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich had previously said that the decision to place the missiles near Kaliningrad had "no political or strategic meaning — its good infrastructure is the only reason."

On Friday Polish President Lech Kaczynski, inked an agreement on the future status of U.S. military personnel in Poland, clearing the path for the missiles to arrive (Agence France-Presse II/[Focus Information Agency](#), Feb. 28).

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