

Russia Invited to Size Up U.S. Missiles

October 19, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

WASHINGTON — The United States has invited Russia to use its own radars and other sensors to size up one or more U.S. missile defense flight tests as part of a new push to persuade Moscow that the system poses it no threat, a Pentagon official said.

The idea is to let Russia measure for itself the performance of U.S. interceptor missiles being deployed in and around Europe in what Washington says is a layered shield against missiles that could be fired by countries like Iran.

"These are smaller missiles," Army Lieutenant General Patrick O'Reilly, director of the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency, told a forum hosted by the Atlantic Council. He referred to current and planned Standard Missile-3 interceptors built by Raytheon Co.

They would be ineffective as anti-missile interceptors against a country like Russia, whose strategic deterrent missiles are launched from deep inside its territory, he said. The SM-3 interceptor, to be based on land and at sea, "can't reach that far."

But Moscow responded coolly on Wednesday to the U.S. invitation to monitor the flight tests, saying the gesture would not dispel its concerns that a planned NATO missile shield in Europe

would compromise Russia's security.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made clear that the offer fell far short of Moscow's calls for a role in planning a missile shield and a binding guarantee that the system would not weaken Russia.

"We are being invited to monitor the realization of a plan that we see as creating a risk to our forces of deterrence," Lavrov said.

Lavrov reiterated Russia's complaint that the United States is pushing ahead with its own plans instead of giving Moscow a say in how a European missile shield should look.

"It would be better to ... first collectively create a missile defense architecture that would be guaranteed to be directed outside Europe and would not create threats for anyone inside Europe — and only then to start putting this system in place and inviting one another to monitor," he said.

Ellen Tauscher, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, said the United States was prepared to offer Moscow written assurances that the system being built is not directed against Moscow.

But Tauscher, who held talks in Moscow last week on the issue with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, added: "We cannot provide legally binding commitments, nor can we agree to limitations on missile defense, which must necessarily keep pace with the evolution of the threat."

She said she could not predict whether Russia and NATO would reach an agreement on missile defense cooperation in time for a NATO alliance summit next May that is due to consider the system's progress. The United States would like to partner with Moscow to boost its performance, including by using Russian radar systems.

"As time goes on it gets harder [to tie in Russia]," Tauscher said, "because the aperture to join this system will close eventually. It's not an infinite opportunity."

The Missile Defense Agency, in a follow-up e-mail, said it had not yet determined which test or tests it would open to active Russian participation.

Russia would not receive any classified performance data on the U.S. system, said Richard Lehner, an MDA spokesman, but would be welcome to use its own radars, sensors and other know-how to measure interceptor speed, altitude, distance and other parameters.

Tauscher said the planned missile shield would be robust enough to manage the threats that Washington projects in the Middle East but "certainly would only chase the tail of a Russian ICBM or SLBM." Those are the acronyms for long-range missiles fired from land or from submarines.

"And that's the truth," she said. "Perhaps only with their eyes and ears will Russians embrace that."

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