

Medvedev Presses U.S. on Missile Defense

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President Dmitry Medvedev issued a new call for Russia to have an equal role in a European missile defense system Saturday, two weeks before the United States is expected to confirm Poland's role in the system.

"A European missile defense system can become truly effective and sustainable only in the case of equal participation of Russia," the Kremlin press service said in a statement Saturday, citing a letter by Medvedev to members of the NATO-Russia Council.

In November, after years of disagreement, NATO and Russia agreed to cooperate on building a common defense system against missiles fired by countries seen by the West as "rogue states," such as Iran.

But Russia and NATO remain in dispute over the implementation of the system. While NATO would like to see it and Russia develop two separate shields that exchange information, Russia argues for a single joint system.

President Barack Obama pleased Russia in 2009 by scrapping the previous U.S. administration's plans to base interceptors for long-range missiles in Poland and a powerful radar in the Czech Republic. The United States has said it plans to deploy shorter-range interceptors in Eastern Europe.

A surprise decision several weeks ago by Washington to base anti-missile interceptors in Romania angered Russian officials, who said Obama was pressing ahead with missile-shield plans despite promises of cooperation with Moscow.

Medvedev's statement on Saturday came two weeks before Obama is due to visit Poland, where he is expected to confirm a deployment of American fighter jets and discuss basing interceptor missiles there.

On Monday, a group of Russia's experts, headed by Moscow's envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, is to discuss the development of the European missile system.

Medvedev also said in the statement on Saturday that the deployed missile system cannot be directed against any of the parties and cannot undermine strategic stability.

Medvedev and Obama are likely to talk about the future of the European missile defense system on the sidelines of a Group of Eight summit in France later this month.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Friday that he and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had agreed at a meeting Thursday "that it is necessary to give a political impulse to the work of experts" discussing the issue in order to be able to report progress to Obama and Medvedev at the G8 summit.

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