

Moscow Objects to U.S. Warship in Black Sea

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The Foreign Ministry has voiced concern about a U.S. warship now just off its shores in the Black Sea, saying the unexpected visit raised further questions about U.S. plans to create a missile shield in Europe.

The USS Monterey, which is capable of detecting and shooting down ballistic missiles, is taking part in annual joint military exercises conducted by NATO and Ukraine.

The guided-missile cruiser was sent in March from its home port of Norfolk, Virginia, to the Mediterranean Sea as the first part of a four-phase plan to create the European missile shield. The plan calls for placing land- and sea-based radars and interceptors in several European locations over the next decade.

Russia opposes the planned system, which it worries could threaten its own nuclear missiles or undermine their deterrence capability.

The Foreign Ministry issued a statement Sunday saying Russia "has repeatedly stressed that

we will not leave unnoticed any elements of U.S. strategic infrastructure in the immediate vicinity of our borders and will consider any such steps as a threat to our security."

It said the appearance of the USS Monterey caught Russia by surprise and gave it cause to distrust U.S. verbal assurances that the planned missile shield was not targeted at Russia.

"The reconnaissance by the American anti-missile personnel in the Black Sea once again proves the necessity of working out clear legal guarantees that the anti-missile defense system that is being deployed in Europe is not targeted against Russia's nuclear deterrence potential," the ministry said.

Russia agreed to consider NATO's proposal last fall to cooperate on the missile shield, but insisted the system be run jointly. NATO rejected that demand and no compromise has been found yet.

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