

Lavrov Calls for Missile Defense Guarantees

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UNITED NATIONS — Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov voiced concern Tuesday about U.S. missile defense plans and said Russia needs "solid legal guarantees" that American deployments will not upset the strategic and regional nuclear balance.

Lavrov further told the United Nations General Assembly that the world community must support the resumption of diplomatic efforts to defuse tensions over the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea.

"We call on all partners to address these tasks with the utmost responsibility," Lavrov told the world body.

U.S. plans to deploy missile defenses aimed at intercepting any attacks by Iran on U.S. allies in Europe or the Middle East have proved an extreme irritant in relations with the Kremlin, which has insisted that the installations might also upset the carefully negotiated nuclear balance that still exists between the two former Cold War enemies.

The United States insists that the defense shield is not designed to use against Russia, but Lavrov said the Kremlin is not satisfied.

"It is not enough to make statements that the increase in global missile defense capabilities would not undermine the basics of strategic stability. The issue is way too serious. We need solid legal guarantees," Lavrov said.

On Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, Lavrov acknowledged the dangerous international stalemate and said Russia sees "no alternative to their political and diplomatic settlement and [will] take concrete steps to create conditions for the resumption of negotiations."

Russia has cooperated closely with Iran — building for it a nuclear reactor for electricity generation — but has voiced concerns along with the United States and Western Europe over Tehran's suspected attempts to build nuclear weapons.

Russia also has sought to work with the West in attempts to convince North Korea to end its nuclear weapons program.

Attempts to budge both countries are stalemated.

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