

NATO Calls Russia Threat 'Waste'

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BRUSSELS — Progress toward a missile defense deal between NATO and Russia has been slower than expected but Russia would be wasting money by investing in counter-measures against an imaginary threat from the West, the head of NATO said Wednesday.

✕Despite a rise in anti-NATO rhetoric from Moscow in recent months, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said progress had been made in developing practical cooperation with Russia in the past year. ✕

"I expect further progress in the coming year," he told reporters ahead of a meeting between NATO foreign ministers and their Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Brussels on Thursday. ✕

"As far as missile defense is concerned, progress has been slower than I had hoped or expected," he said. ✕

Rasmussen said he was pleased that President Dmitry Medvedev had kept the door open to dialogue on missile defense.

"I hope that we can reach an agreement at (NATO's) Chicago summit in May. ... It would definitely be a waste of valuable money if Russia started to invest in counter-measures against an artificial enemy that doesn't exist," he said.

✖Russia seeks legal guarantees from NATO that its missile defense system is not aimed at limiting Russia's strategic nuclear capability and wants joint control of how such a system is used. ✖✖Last month, Medvedev said he would arm Russia with missiles capable of countering the U.S. shield and set up an early-warning radar system in its Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. ✖

Speaking to reporters in Vilnius on Wednesday, Lavrov said Russian concerns must be taken into account. ✖

"What we are worried about is that foreign weapons, foreign military infrastructure is being created around the Russian Federation on the territory of our neighbors," he said. ✖✖Analysts say Russia is overstating the threat from the missile defense system to use the issue as a bargaining chip with the West. Recent anti-Western rhetoric has appeared aimed at a Russian domestic audience in an election period.

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