

Russia's Last Warnings to Washington

By [The Moscow Times](#)

May 04, 2012

The  Moscow Times

On the eve of this week's international conference on missile defense in Moscow, the Defense Ministry promised to present "irrefutable evidence" to the world's 200 leading security experts in attendance that U.S. missile defense systems to be deployed in Europe will undermine Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent by 2020.

Few were convinced.

To be fair, the giant-screen computer graphics showing a massive barrage of U.S. interceptors shooting down Russian intercontinental missiles in flight was an impressive video presentation. The last time we saw such dramatic imagery was in the late 1980s, when the U.S. Defense Department unleashed a massive PR campaign to convince both U.S. taxpayers and the Soviet Politburo that the Star Wars program could provide complete protection against an attack by the Soviet Union's huge nuclear arsenal.

Little did the Kremlin know at the time that it was only a bluff orchestrated by President Ronald Reagan.

Strangely enough, now the Kremlin is doing all the bluffing, trying to convince the world that an advanced U.S. missile defense system poses a major security threat to Russia. But Russian officials aren't doing a very good job at it.

First, given that Russia will have 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads by 2018, according to the terms of the New START treaty, the United States would have to deploy more than 15,000 GBI interceptors in the United States to weaken Russia's nuclear deterrent.

According to most independent experts, the 10:1 ratio is the minimum required given the fact that Russian decoys and advanced multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles make hitting an oncoming warhead difficult at best.

Although the proposed U.S. missile defense system would be effective against a few primitive missiles launched from a pariah state, some critics believe that it would be useless against Russia's modern arsenal of strategic missiles, decoys and maneuverable warheads — like trying to hit an oncoming bullet with a bullet.

Second, in terms of the European installations of the U.S. missile defense system, the same 10:1 ratio applies. The 200 advanced SM-3 Block IIB interceptors that are planned to be deployed during the fourth phase after 2020 would, in the best of circumstances, be able to take out no more than 20 Russian strategic warheads — and only if they were to be deployed in a forward position, such as in the Baltic Sea, along the missile trajectory from Russia to the United States. These interceptors deployed in rear positions, such as Poland or Romania, would not have the speed to reach Russian ICBMs already in flight — even if the interceptors were able to reach a speed of 4.5 kilometers a second, which Moscow considers critical.

Nonetheless, on Thursday at the missile defense conference, General Staff head Nikolai Makarov repeated President Dmitry Medvedev's stern warning in November that if Russia believes that U.S. missile defense systems poses a threat to the country, it may launch preemptive strikes against U.S. radar and interceptor installations that are located close to Russia's borders.

But few in Washington take Makarov's or Medvedev's "last Chinese warnings" seriously, if for no other reason than everyone — including among Russia's leaders and top brass — understands perfectly well that missile defense poses no threat to Russia.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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