

Putin Links Nuclear Cuts to U.S. Shield

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President Vladimir Putin said he was open to the idea of new nuclear arms cuts on a reciprocal basis if the United States addresses his concerns about a U.S.-led missile defense system in Europe.

Putin said that preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is “a key issue on the world agenda,” and that Russian compliance with the 2010 New START treaty, which cut U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, was proof of Moscow’s commitment to disarmament.

“Russia is open to new joint initiatives in this area,” Putin said Friday in a written address sent to a meeting of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War in Hiroshima, Japan.

“At the same time, their realization is clearly possible only on a fair, mutual basis and if all factors affecting international security and strategic stability are taken into account,” the Russian president said.

Those factors include what he called “the unilateral and totally unlimited deployment of a global U.S. missile defense system,” as well as the possibility of the deployment of weapons in

space and a lack of parity in conventional weapons in Europe.

The United States' plans for a missile defense shield in Europe, which Washington has already begun to deploy, have been a major irritant to U.S.-Russia relations despite a decision by President Barack Obama to scale back the original plans.

Washington says the shield is meant to counter a potential threat from Iran and will pose no risk to Russia.

But Moscow says the system's interceptors will be able to destroy Russian warheads in flight by about 2018, upsetting the post-Cold War balance of power and weakening Russia's nuclear arsenal.

In a foreign policy decree issued on May 7, the day his inauguration ceremony for a six-year presidential term took place, Putin reiterated Moscow's demands for firm U.S. guarantees that the shield is not directed against Russia.

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