

Spoiling U.S. Missile Defense at All Costs

By [Alexander Golts](#)

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Russian diplomacy has scored another victory as a spoiler. Once again, the Kremlin has thwarted a U.S. initiative aimed at breaking the deadlock on missile defense by accusing the West of using missile defense to "undermine Russia's national security."

The first step in Washington's cunning plan was in March, when it canceled the fourth stage of its European missile defense system — the stage that Kremlin specialists had claimed would give the U.S. the ability to destroy Russia's strategic missiles.

Then, in April, U.S. National Security Adviser Tom Donilon came to Moscow with a proposal that Washington thought would end the impasse on missile defense: an agreement for the ongoing exchange of technical information on U.S. missile defense systems. He also proposed further cutbacks in strategic nuclear arsenals, perhaps to as low as 1,000 deployed warheads for each side. (The New START treaty set limits for deployed strategic warheads to 1,550.)

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The Kremlin tried hard to find a way to rebuff Obama's peaceful overtures. Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev delivered the Kremlin's message during his visit to Washington last week, saying the U.S. was on the generally right path with these concessions, but its initiatives did not go far enough to win over the Kremlin. Moscow demanded a legally binding agreement in which both sides would guarantee that their missile defense systems would never be aimed at each other. At some point, Russia may extend its demands to include limiting the speed of U.S. interceptors to no more than 5 kilometers per second, or that U.S. missile defense bases must be located at a significant distance from Russia's borders.

Russian defense officials played the same spoiler role at an international conference on European security in Moscow on Thursday. Presidential administration head Sergei Ivanov casually announced that Moscow was very dissatisfied with Washington's "vague" proposals on missile defense. "Guarantees are needed that, first, the European missile defense system will not undermine Russia's strategic potential," Ivanov said. "Second, we must be assured that the U.S. system can only defend against possible attacks by countries outside the Euro--Atlantic region."

At the conference, Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov explained to U.S. Assistant Secretary for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Rose Gottemoeller and Evelyn Farkas, deputy assistant secretary at the U.S. Defense Department, why Russia was dissatisfied with the U.S. proposal for an exchange of information on missile defense. "You ladies might have a wide variety of dresses in your closet," was his basic line of reasoning, "and even if they are just gathering dust, tomorrow you might buy or make more. And even if you inform us of the fact, how would that change the overall situation?"

The Kremlin is basically demanding that it have the final say in the location and architecture of the U.S. missile defense system in Europe.

If Washington does not agree with Russia's firm conditions, the Kremlin is more than ready to dispense with all these "diplomatic niceties" and get really tough. Head of the General Staff Vladimir Gerasimov said at Thursday's security conference that "Russia has already developed the military and technical means for neutralizing whatever negative impact the U.S. global missile defense system might have on Russia's nuclear forces." In other words, this could mean that Russia may want to destroy elements of the U.S. missile defense system if they are considered to be a threat to Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent. This threat sounded much like the one former President Dmitry Medvedev made five years ago to deploy Iskander

missiles in Kaliningrad in response to U.S. missile defense plans.

The focus of Moscow's conference on European security, it would seem, was to give the Defense Ministry another chance to rebuff the West. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe was declared to be an outdated relic of the Cold War. At the same time, Russian military chiefs constantly referred to the "balance of power" on the European continent. But if the political and military confrontation has ended, why are Russian military and political leaders still using the Cold War-era language of "balance of power"? Or is Russia positioning itself not merely as the former Soviet Union, but as the entire Warsaw Pact standing in opposition to NATO? If so, then why should the West comply with Russia's demands on missile defense?

Amid all of the bluster and spoiling, Russia's top brass has not made a single concrete proposal for cooperation. They are determined to obstruct the West, not cooperate with it. What's more, even if the West were to comply with all of Russia's demands — including the most unreasonable ones — Moscow would certainly announce a new set of demands shortly thereafter. For example, the Kremlin might demand that Russian singers never place lower than second in the Eurovision song contest. After all, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov promised to retaliate for the West's seeming conspiracy against Dina Garipova, Russia's entry in this year's Eurovision competition, whose votes were allegedly stolen.

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