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Putin Says Missiles Not Yet Deployed to Kaliningrad Region

By The Moscow Times

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Sergei Lavrov, right, and his Polish counterpart shaking hands in Warsaw. **Alik Keplicz**

President Vladimir Putin sought to reassure the West about Russia's military movements on Thursday, saying Moscow had not yet decided whether to deploy Iskander missiles near NATO nations in the western exclave of Kaliningrad.

NATO nations and officials of the Western alliance voiced alarm over recent reports that Russia had deployed Iskanders, which have a range of about 400 kilometers and can carry nuclear warheads, in the region bordering Poland and Lithuania.

Speaking at his annual news conference, Putin reiterated Moscow's position that an anti-missile shield that the U.S. is building in Europe, with help from NATO nations, poses a threat to Russia and that it must respond.

"One of the possible responses is to deploy Iskander complexes in Kaliningrad ... but I want

to draw your attention to the fact that we have not yet made this decision yet, let them calm down."

Nuclear-armed Russia says it fears the anti-missile shield, which is to include interceptor missiles based in Poland, is meant to undermine its security, upsetting the post-Cold War strategic balance.

The U.S. says it is not directed against Russia and is meant to counter potential threats from the Middle East.

In Warsaw on Thursday, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with his Polish counterpart, Radek Sikorski, for talks that touched upon the reports regarding Moscow's deployment of Iskander missiles in western Russia.

Material from the Associated Press is included in this report.

Russia is developing a new intercontinental ballistic missile mounted on a railway car in a bid to counterbalance prospective U.S. weapons, a senior military officer has said.

Colonel General Sergei Karakayev, the chief of the military's Strategic Rocket Forces, said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies on Wednesday that the new weapon would be much easier to camouflage than its predecessor. The Soviet-designed railway missiles were scrapped in 2005.

Karakayev said the Yars missile intended for the project was much lighter than the Soviet-built system and could be put inside a regular refrigerator car unlike its predecessor, which required a heavier and bigger car that could be detected by enemy intelligence.

The Kremlin has vowed to develop new types of weapons in response to U.S.-led NATO missile defense in Europe. *(AP)*

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