
Russia unconvinced by US reassurances on missile defense plans.

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MOSCOW, February 27 (RIA Novosti) - Russia's foreign minister said Moscow remained unconvinced by the reasons the United States cites for its expanding missile defense plans.

Sergei Lavrov said he had discussed the U.S. intention to deploy components of its missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

"The secretary of state told me the 10 missiles, which will be deployed as the third missile defense ring, are nothing compared to the potential of Russian missile forces," Lavrov said.

The U.S. insists that the European missile shield is meant to counter possible attacks from Iran or North Korea, but Moscow strongly opposes the deployment of a missile shield in its former backyard in Central Europe, describing the plans as a threat to Russian national security.

The minister said Russia was mostly alarmed by U.S. plans to place more missile defense elements on the Aleutian Islands, and by Britain's interest in missile deployment.

"Every separate component poses no military strategic threat on its own, but the number of these components is increasing rapidly," he said, adding that Russia could not turn a blind eye to this trend and wait for the moment when "somebody is tempted to backtrack on the commitment not to use this system against Russia."

Lavrov quoted Russian writer Anton Chekhov as saying that if a gun is put up on a wall, it will fire one day.

The minister said Moscow had been keeping in touch with Washington over its missile plans for several months.

"Our experts, armed with a pair of compasses and a globe, have tried to show [to their American colleagues] the range of Iranian missiles and persuade them that [Washington] does not need to place radars and missile defenses in the proposed countries to neutralize a hypothetical threat from Iran," Lavrov said.

Washington said in January it planned to build a radar installation in the Czech Republic and a missile interceptor base in Poland in the next five years.
