
Russia alarmed by planned US bases in Central Asia

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MOSCOW, December 16 (RIA Novosti) - A senior Russian military official expressed concern on Tuesday about what he said were U.S. plans to set up military bases in the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

"American military bases are dotted throughout the world," said Gen. Nikolai Makarov, chief of the General Staff of Russia's Armed Forces. "The U.S. has opened bases in Romania and Bulgaria, and according to our information plans to establish them in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan."

Former Soviet republics in Central Asia have seen increased rivalry between Moscow and Washington of late.

The United States has recently stepped up ties with oil-rich Kazakhstan, which allowed U.S. planes to fly over its territory during the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and also contributed troops to Iraq.

Observers in Russia say that Washington will need more bases in countries neighboring Afghanistan due to president-elect Barack Obama's plans to increase the U.S. military presence in the war-ravaged country by 20,000 troops.

The U.S. has run an airbase in Kyrgyzstan since the war in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan expelled U.S. troops from its airbase in 2005, but has recently sought closer ties with the U.S. and other Western powers.

General Makarov also blamed Washington for pushing Georgia and Ukraine toward NATO membership. He said Russia had been surrounded by the military alliance's forces.

The statement came amid an ongoing dispute over Washington's plans to place a missile base in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic. Moscow opposes the plans as a threat to its national security. The U.S. says the missile defenses are needed to counter possible strikes from "rogue" states.
