
RUSSIA AND CHINA TEAM UP OVER US MISSILE SHIELD

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Russia and China joined forces yesterday as they vowed to confront American missile defence projects in Europe and Asia.

A Russian general accused Washington of building a Nato-operated missile shield in Europe to enable it to launch a first-strike nuclear attack on Russia or China. Lieutenant-General Viktor Poznikhir said that the United States would then use the shield to shoot down any retaliatory missiles.

Relations between Russia and the US have become fraught after a series of disputes over the conflict in Syria.

The lieutenant-general, speaking at a security conference in Beijing, said: Russian military experts believe that the US hopes to gain the capability to strike any region of the world, including Russia and China, with nuclear-tipped missiles with impunity.

The United States activated the first stage of its land-based missile defence system in Romania in May. Another stage of the missile shield project is being developed in Poland, and is expected to become operational in 2018.

The Kremlin has voiced its opposition to the shield, which it says poses a major threat to its national security. Washington has said that it is needed to protect the US and Europe from a nuclear attack by rogue states such as North Korea, and that it is not directed against Russia.

Major-General Cai Jun, of China, said that the European missile shield represented a direct threat to Russia. He added that Moscow and Beijing were both opposed to unilateral missile shields. The Peoples Daily, the official newspaper of Chinas Communist Party, wrote that the shield reflected

Americas desire to achieve global military superiority.

He also said that a planned US missile defence shield in South Korea could lead to a new arms race, but the US insisted that the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system was a response to the repeated nuclear and missile tests by North Korea.

China and Russia announced yesterday (Tuesday) that they would hold anti-missile exercises next year. The countries held joint drills last month to practise a unified response to a nuclear attack by an enemy using a missile shield.

General Poznikhir accused the US yesterday (Tuesday) of triggering a new arms race with its development of the European missile shield, likening Moscow and Washington to gladiators seeking bigger and better weapons.

If one of the gladiators takes up a shield, it will give him a marked advantage and make him think that he would be able to win, particularly if he strikes first, he said.

What would another gladiator do? Naturally, he also would pick up a shield and also a longer and stronger sword. This is what is happening now as a result of the US missile deployment.

The possibility of nuclear confrontation with the United States over the crisis in Syria has featured heavily on Russian state media over the past months. On Sunday Dmitri Kiselyov, the presenter of Russias top current affairs show, warned that Americas impudence towards Russia could result in a nuclear response. Kiselyov also said that Moscows relations with Washington had undergone a radical change in recent weeks, as the two biggest nuclear powers face off over the Kremains support for the Assad regime.

Such rhetoric has become almost commonplace on television. This summer, a state TV weatherman speculated about the effects that exploding a nuclear weapon in the atmosphere above the US would have.

Russia said last week that it would shoot down American warplanes if they attacked forces loyal to President Assad. It has also begun transporting nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad, a Russian outpost that borders Poland and Lithuania.

On Monday, the Kremlin announced that it would establish a permanent naval presence in Syria by upgrading its supply base in the port city of Tartus. It is also considering reopening military bases in Cuba and Vietnam.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet leader, has warned that tensions between Russia and the US had reached a dangerous point and urged both sides to reopen talks aimed at bringing peace to Syria.

President Putin has postponed a visit to Paris that was planned for next week to discuss the crisis in Aleppo. President Hollande said that Russia could face war crimes charges over its aerial assault on the city. Human rights activists claimed that Russia has killed almost 4,000 civilians, including 900 children, since its troops intervened in the conflict just over a year ago.

Kaynak/Source: