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## **RUSSIA: NEW MISSILES IN KALININGRAD ANSWER US 'SHIELD'**

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Russia plans to install S-400 surface-to-air missiles and nuclear-capable Iskander systems in the exclave of Kaliningrad in retaliation for the NATO deployment of its so-called "defence shield" in eastern Europe.

Viktor Ozerov, chairman of the defence committee in the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, said in remarks reported by RIA news agency on Monday that Moscow was forced to react to the planned US missile shield erected so close to the country.

"As response measures to such threats we will have ... to deploy additional forces... This reinforcement includes deployment of S-400 and Iskander systems in Kaliningrad," Ozerov was quoted as saying.

Kaliningrad is located between Poland and Lithuania.

Also on Monday, President Vladimir Putin also raised the issue of how Russia should respond to what it perceives as the threat from US-led forces in eastern Europe.

"Why are we reacting to NATO expansion so emotionally? We are concerned by NATO's decision-making?" RIA quoted him as saying in an interview for a documentary to broadcast on Russian TV later on Monday.

"What should we do? We have, therefore, to take countermeasures, which means to target with our missile systems the facilities, that, in our opinion, start posing a threat to us," Putin said.

The Kremlin says the shield's aim is to neutralise Moscow's nuclear arsenal long enough for the United States to strike Russia in the event of war. Washington and NATO deny that.

Pavel Felgenhauer, defence analyst of Novaya Gazeta newspaper, told Al Jazeera from Moscow the decision on the deployment of the missiles was made years ago, and announcing it now could be aimed at creating "a bit of mischief".

"This deployment of ballistic missiles with longer range and anti-aircraft missiles with a longer range too was pre-planned years before, but announcing it now is maybe trying to create a bit more tension ... inside NATO," he said.

He also said the prospect of a good relationship with the incoming administration in Washington

was not as welcome in Moscow as it might be believed.

"There is a seriously very powerful party here in Moscow that doesn't want agreement with [US president-elect Donald] Trump. They want some level of continued confrontation with the United States to preserve the procurement and defence budget that is at present on high levels."

NATO's nuclear relapse

Russia has previously said it periodically sends Iskanders to Kaliningrad, but until now it has said these were routine drills. Moscow has not linked the moves explicitly with what it calls a NATO military build-up on its western borders.

The US launched a new ground-based missile defence system in Romania in May and an additional anti-missile platform is being built in Poland.

Russia says the missile system breaches a 1987 deal with the United States and threatens peace in Europe.

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Kaynak/Source: