
NATO ACCUSES RUSSIA OF STOKING TENSIONS IN EUROPE OVER BALTIC DEPLOYMENT OF ANTI-SHIP MISSILES

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Nato accused Russia on Tuesday of stoking tensions in Europe with the deployment of anti-ship missiles to its westernmost Baltic region.

The alliance described Moscows decision to send state-of-the-art Bastion missile-launchers to Kaliningrad, which borders Nato members Poland and Lithuania, as aggressive military posturing".

It said the Kremlins move would do nothing to lower tensions or restore predictability to our relations", in a statement to AP news agency.

It came shortly after John Kirby, US State Department spokesman, called Russias plans to permanently deploy its S-400 air missile defense system and ballistic Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad destabilising to European security.

Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, hit back at Mr Kirbys comments on Tuesday, calling Nato an aggressive military alliance.

Russia does what it has to do. It has every sovereign right to take necessary measures throughout the territory of the Russian Federation, Mr Peskov said.

On Monday, Viktor Ozerov, chairman of the defense committee in the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, said that Moscows deployment of the Iskander missiles was a response to the US missile shield in eastern Europe.

The United States activated the first phase of its land-based missile defense system in Romania in May. Another stage is due to come into operation in Poland in 2018.

Russia has long been opposed to the missile shield, which it calls a danger to its national security. Nato says the missile shield is intended to guard against attack by rogue states such as North Korea.

Russia also criticised a report that claimed Russian tankers had smuggled jet fuel to Syria through EU waters in contravention of European sanctions.

At least two Russian-flagged ships made deliveries, an intelligence source with a European Union government told Reuters.

The source said the jet fuel was delivered to war-torn Syria via Cyprus.

Russias defense ministry said its tankers had been taking the fuel to its forces in Syria and that EU sanctions did not concern Moscow.

Russia, like Britain of late, is not a member of the European Union, read the defence ministry statement, in reference to Brexit.

Tensions were also mounting on Tuesday between Russia and Ukraine, after Moscow accused the Ukrainian security service of abducting two of its soldiers near the border between Russian-annexed Crimea and Ukraine.

Kiev said the men, named as Ensign Maxim Odintsov and Junior Sergeant Alexander Baranov by the Russian defence ministry, served in the Ukrainian army before deserting to Russia following Moscows seizure of Crimea in March 2014.

It said they were detained on Sunday after crossing the Chongar checkpoint into Ukrainian-controlled territory.

Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, called the men's capture "an unlawful act of provocation carried out by Ukrainian special services towards Russian citizens on Russian soil."

Kaynak/Source: