



Vladimir Putin Condemns U.S. Nuclear Defense

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is calling for drastic reductions in planned U.S. missile defense as U.S. and Russian officials spend the last week of the year negotiating a new nuclear disarmament treaty in Geneva, Switzerland. The most recent agreement, the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), expired on December 5, but both countries have agreed to continue observing it until a new accord is settled. They are also bound by the 2002 Moscow treaty which limits nuclear warheads.



The [BBC](#) says Moscow will only sign a new treaty that limits the scope and scale of a U.S. defense shield. Putin claims U.S. plans for a sea-based defense system are holding up talks. “The problem is that our American partners are building an anti-missile shield, and we are not building one,” he said. “By building such an umbrella over themselves, our [U.S.] partners could feel themselves fully secure and will do whatever they want, which upsets the balance.”

Putin made these comments at a press conference Monday in Vladivostok. [CNN](#) reports he called for a balance between offensive and defensive systems maintained by Russia and the U.S. The Russian premier issued the challenge, “Let the U.S. partners provide us information on [their] missile defense while we give them information on [our] offensive weapons.” He said such a balance preserved peace during the Cold War and is necessary now since Russia is not developing defensive measures. He did call for Russia to produce new “offensive strike systems” to preserve the balance.

Last week in his [year-end report](#) on Russian television, President Dmitry Medvedev told reporters Russia will continue to develop strategic offensive missiles sufficient to protect national interests. “This is normal; the whole world is doing this,” he said, as government officials work toward a “nuclear-free world.” Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama met briefly at the U.N. Climate Conference in Copenhagen earlier this month to speak about disarmament plans, but nothing was settled, according to Voice of America. The two presidents had agreed in July on a framework for the new treaty, specifying reductions in deployed strategic warheads to under 1,700. The Obama Administration has also reversed plans to put interceptor missiles in eastern Europe, a move praised by Moscow.

Paul Lettow, senior fellow with the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), expects Obama’s focus in 2010 will be on the U.S. nuclear agenda. He points out the Administration’s support of updates to START as well as its backing of the [comprehensive test-ban treaty](#) and the [Non-Proliferation Treaty](#). The president is also planning a nuclear security conference in April. Lettow said Obama wants to abolish nuclear weapons



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on December 29, 2009

altogether, though he does not think it will happen in his lifetime. When asked what to expect from current negotiations in Geneva, Lettow predicted, “You’ll have a treaty that will set limits on strategic warheads, set limits on delivery vehicles — sea-launched ballistic missiles, inter-continental ballistic missiles, and long-range bombers. The third piece it will address is verification measures.”

Critics of the current Geneva negotiations warn of Russia’s past violations of START and expect more of the same under any new treaty. As [reported here](#) in November, the U.S. State Department has expressed concern over “a significant number of longstanding compliance issues” that “remain unresolved.” Russia’s START violations could stonewall efforts to pass the new treaty through the Senate. News reports predict negotiations between the U.S. and Russia will continue into the new year. Currently, the two countries together maintain more than 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, as the U.S. plans to cripple its national security, other countries such as China continue to stockpile weapons without limitations set by START or its successor treaty.

Photo of Vladimir Putin: AP Images



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