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RUSSIA CHALLENGES THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

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Moscow threw down the gauntlet to Barack Obama the day after he became president-elect. Russia threatens that unless the United States withdraws its 10 missile defense networks from Poland and the Czech Republic, it will install *Iskander* cruise missiles (which can be conventional or nuclear) in Kaliningrad on Poland's borders and jam the radars in the Czech Republic. Moscow makes several assertions to justify its threat. First, it claims that no Iranian missile or nuclear threat exists. Therefore, the only logical target for these systems is Russia and its missile complexes. Consequently, these systems can be used to threaten or neutralize Russian targets. Either Russian missiles would be attacked by a conventional air and space first strike, possibly involving these networks in Europe, or these missile defenses would frustrate a retaliatory second strike, leaving Russia defenseless. So while 10 systems do not constitute a threat, they do represent the first stage of a planned or potential U.S. buildup of a missile network in Europe that could neutralize Russia's first and/or second strike capabilities and shift the burden of prosecuting any war to Europe.

Second, stationing missile defenses at these locations constitutes a pretext for stationing offensive missiles there, also. That forces Moscow to assume the worst case scenario and could cause Russia to attempt to shoot them down, leading to a conflict with the United States. Therefore, these defenses rupture the fabric of strategic stability. In Moscow's concept of strategic stability, neither side has the freedom of action or margin of superiority that might encourage it to believe it could employ coercive diplomacy or military force with impunity. The strategic stability equation is critically important to Russia because, otherwise, Washington might be tempted to think it could strike at Russia with minimal consequence.

Russia's arguments are literally incredible. First, missile defenses do work as Japanese, Israeli, and U.S. tests have shown. Second, Iran's *Ashura* and *Sajil* missiles with a 2,000 kilometer range threaten not just Israel, Europe, and Russia. In fact, Russian officials frequently tell the U.S. Government in private of their apprehensions about the Iranian threat against which Moscow has no defense. Third, Russian officials know and admit that these 10 interceptors and radar systems are technically incapable of threatening their missiles and are not a threat to Russia.

Why, then, did Russia issue this ultimatum? Close examination of Russian policy reveals that these defenses entrench the United States in Eastern Europe's military defense and foreclose Russia's hope of intimidating Central and Eastern Europe or of reestablishing its hegemony there and possibly even in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). If missile defenses exist in Europe, Russian missile threats are greatly diminished, if not negated. Because empire and the creation of a fearsome domestic enemy justify and are the inextricable corollaries of internal autocracy, the end of empire allegedly entails Russia's irrevocable decline as a great power and—the crucial point—generates tremendous pressure for domestic reform.

Moscow cannot conceive of its security in terms other than those of an adversarial relationship with the United States and NATO. That relationship is based on both global and regional deterrence and what Moscow calls strategic stability—where both sides are locked into the Cold War relationship of mutually assured destruction at the global and regional level. For Russia to be secure, not only must the United States not be able to defend itself against missile threats, neither can Europe, for then Russia cannot intimidate it by the threat of missile strikes. Russia still believes that the condition of its security is the insecurity of its neighbors and partners. Consequently, to secure itself, Russia must have the right to supervise the limits of Europe's defense activity, thereby revising the settlements of 1989-91.

Paradoxically, Russia's threats of missile strikes against virtually every nation from the Baltic states to Georgia and even Germany, which *Iskanders* in Kaliningrad can target, arguably demonstrate the need for both missile defenses and for NATO's continuing robustness, if not enlargement. If Russia is so concerned about these missiles, it would be better advised to use its influence in Iran to stop that country from building nuclear weapons. The incoming administration would be equally well-advised to reject Russia's threats and deal directly with Iran, as President-Elect Obama promised to do during his campaign.

Yielding to Moscow's threats and demands for withdrawing these inoffensive systems would only divide Europe further and generate splits between European powers and the United States. Already states whose governments are enmeshed in lucrative business deals with Russia are calling for such negotiations and attempting to mediate between Washington and Moscow in the hope that they can increase their leverage vis-à-vis both capitals and continue to make money. Such efforts at appeasement undermine the structure of European security and only confirm Moscow's belief in the utility of its threatening behavior. Neither the United States nor European states can accept that Russia can decide the limits of sovereign independent governments' security in Eastern Europe. Numerous European officials have described Russia as a mafia state. Its penchant for trying to intimidate its neighbors and interlocutors, in this case with nuclear strikes, exemplifies the accuracy of that perception. The Obama administration and European governments should recognize these threats for what they are and act accordingly.

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