

Russia develops weapons able to evade defense systems

Russian officials say the new warheads will be ready by 2010 at the very latest, but should not alarm America

By Alex Rodriguez
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

MOSCOW — Russia is developing a new generation of warheads that can elude any kind of missile defense, though a Russian general stressed Thursday that the technology was not aimed at thwarting U.S. deployment of a new missile defense system.

Missiles equipped with the new warheads would be able to evade sophisticated defense systems by changing trajectory to avoid the range of interceptor missiles, said Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, first deputy chief of the Russian armed forces' General Staff.

A prototype was tested during military exercises this week, Russia's biggest since the Soviet era. Baluyevsky said the warhead technology would be ready for deployment no later than 2010.

Baluyevsky's remarks shed light on cryptic comments made by Russian President Vladimir Putin Wednesday, after he observed a second day of exercises aimed at testing Russia's strategic missile capabilities. Submarine-launched missile failures Tuesday and Wednesday marred the exercises.

Putin mentioned Russia's development of new strategic weapon technology, but he did not say what that technology was, in what way it was advanced or when it might be deployed.

"The trick is very simple," Baluyevsky said. "The missile can skirt zones of a regional missile defense, bypass areas where a defense system has the capacity and range to intercept it and thus penetrate a

future anti-missile defense system." Alexander Golts, a military analyst with the Russian publication Yezhenedelny Zhurnal, called the warhead technology a formidable achievement in defense research. "If it can change trajectory, it's absolutely revolutionary," he said.

Later this year, Washington is planning to deploy its new missile defense system, designed to thwart ballistic missiles aimed at the continental United States. Six interceptor missiles will be stationed in Alaska and four in California. Another 10 will be deployed in Alaska next year.

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In late 2002, when President Bush announced his plans for a new missile defense system, the Kremlin reacted angrily by warning that the move would sidetrack the war on terrorism and restart an arms race.

Bush's move was preceded by U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which prohibited the testing or deployment of missile defense systems like the one Bush envisions.

The Bush administration has said

that a new missile defense system would focus on rogue states such as North Korea, which according to intelligence officials is working to develop long-range missile technology. Washington is also concerned that states like North Korea could provide such missile technology to other hostile countries.

Right now, only China and Russia have the ability to strike the continental United States with intercontinental ballistic missiles. Russia was especially concerned that interceptor missiles were being placed across the Bering Strait in Alaska.

However, Baluyevsky stressed that Russia does not have America in mind as it continues work on the warheads.

"The experiment conducted by us must not be interpreted as a warning to the Americans not to build their missile defense because we designed this thing," Baluyevsky said.

Golts said Russia's new warhead technology isn't likely to pose a threat to the United States, since Russia can already overcome the new U.S. missile defense system because of the sheer number of intercontinental ballistic missiles it has in its arsenal.

What is driving the Kremlin to forge ahead with the new technology and discuss it publicly is its desire to appear to the Russian public as if it is working hard to restore the country's military parity with America, especially three weeks before Putin's bid for re-election.

"We have an election campaign coming up," Golts said, "and it's important to Putin to send a signal that Russia is still on par with the U.S. at least militarily."

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