

[Home](#) » [World](#) » Article

Putin warns of new US missile crisis



Controversial comments: Russian President Vladimir Putin is reflected in the glass panels of Lisbon's Oceanarium during his visit for a European Union summit.

Photo: Reuters

Ian Traynor, Lisbon
October 28, 2007

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin has stirred the ghosts of the Cold War by comparing the Pentagon's plan to place parts of its missile shield in Europe to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 when the US and the Soviet Union went to the brink of nuclear war.

Mr Putin, speaking at a summit with European Union leaders outside Lisbon, said the Kremlin was confronted with a similar threat to that faced by the White House 45 years ago when Nikita Khrushchev stared down John F. Kennedy before blinking and removing nuclear missiles from Cuba, 145 kilometres from the US coast.

The Bush Administration was copying Khrushchev and his politburo, said Mr Putin, in what may have been a calculated attempt to scare EU countries into opposing the plans to deploy parts of the missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

"Analogous actions by the Soviet Union when it deployed rockets on Cuba provoked the Cuban missile crisis," Mr Putin said after the EU-Russia summit. "For us, technologically, the situation is very similar. Such threats to our country are being created on our borders ... I would remind you how relations were developing in an analogous situation in the middle of the 1960s."

Historians say the Kremlin's decision to challenge Kennedy in 1962 triggered the worst confrontation of the Cold War and brought the world within a hair's breadth of nuclear war.

The US insists the plan to install a radar station south of Prague and silos with 10 interceptor rockets in north-west Poland was not directed against Russia, whose nuclear arsenal could easily overpower the proposed shield.

Mr Putin's verbal onslaught signalled a hardening of his anti-Western rhetoric in the last six months of his eight-year term as President, which ends in March.

The comments on Friday were the latest in a series of uncompromising speeches or declarations since February when he stunned Western leaders at a security conference in Munich by accusing the Bush Administration of trying to take over the world. Since then he has threatened to point nuclear missiles at Europe and to scrap a treaty limiting conventional force deployments.

Mr Putin arrived in Portugal on Thursday and promptly denounced the US sanctions against Tehran announced by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He likened the US Administration to "a madman running around with a razor blade".

The resurrection of Cold War spectres may encourage opposition to the US missile shield plans in parts of Europe. But it is also likely to harden Polish and Czech resolve in favour of the Americans' plan since they feel they are being blackmailed by Moscow. The Czech Parliament voted on Friday against holding a referendum on the radar deployment. The Polish Government, meanwhile, worried that the US rocket silos will expose it to Russian intimidation, is likely to expand its demands on Washington.

In Washington, US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack rejected Mr Putin's comparison of the US missile shield proposal and the Cuban crisis.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said: "I don't know quite what to make of the strong remarks. Even within his comments ... (Putin) still acknowledged that we had made some positive proposals and put forward some interesting ideas."

GUARDIAN, REUTERS

When you see news happening: SMS/MMS: 0406 THE AGE (0406 843 243), or [email us](#). [More](#)

[Subscribe to The Age for your chance to win a trip to Italy and southern France with Peregrine!](#)

Copyright © 2007. The Age Company Ltd.