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Russian general threatens nuclear strike on Poland as Bush demands Moscow withdraws from Georgia

By Daily Mail Reporter

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Warning: Russian general Anatoly Nogovitsyn said Poland has made itself a nuclear target

Russia reacted furiously today to an announcement that Poland is to host an American global anti-missile shield.

General Anatoly Nogovitsyn said that by accepting the missile defence battery Poland "is exposing itself to a strike".

"By hosting these, Poland is making itself a target. This is 100 percent certain," Russia's Interfax news agency quoted General Anatoly Nogovitsyn as saying.

"It becomes a target for attack. Such targets are destroyed as a first priority."

The general's hawkish comments came amid Moscow's fears the missile shield makes Russia a target of the United States.

The two former Cold War superpowers are locking horns over fighting in Georgia.

Today American President George Bush warned Russia that it does not want "contentious relations" with the United States, demanding Moscow leave Georgia.

US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice echoed him from Tbilisi, where she was meeting with Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili: "Russian forces need to leave Georgia at once," she said. "This is no longer 1968."

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev responded cautiously, saying Moscow would strike back "in the same way we have responded" if it were further attacked.

Referring to the missile shield, General Nogovitsyn said that Russia's military doctrine sanctions the use of nuclear weapons "against the allies of countries having nuclear weapons if they in some way help them," Interfax said.



The US Patriot missile battery in Tel Aviv. Washington has agreed to move a similar battery from Germany to Poland

Medvedev said the deal "absolutely clearly demonstrates what we had said earlier - the deployment has the Russian Federation as its target."

However, speaking at news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel today, he appeared to take a softer position than Nogovitsyn's, saying "it is sad news for all who live on this densely populated continent, but it is not dramatic."

Tensions between Russia and the West have soared over the brutal fighting that erupted last week between Russian and Georgian forces over the separatist Georgian region of South Ossetia.

Today Bush warned Russia that "bullying and intimidation" are no longer acceptable methods of foreign policy.

He said Russia does not want "contentious relations" with the United States, demanding Moscow honour its commitment to a cease-fire in Georgia.



Enlarge

Abkhazian separatist soldiers stand in front of the debris of a Georgian military base

"Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected," said Bush, speaking at the White House before traveling to his Texas ranch for a two-week stay.

"Bullying and intimidation are not acceptable ways to conduct foreign policy in the 21st century," the president said.

"Moscow must honor its commitment to withdraw its invading forces from all Georgian territory."



Firm stand: US President George Bush speaks outside the White House today

In response Medvedev cautiously warned: "If someone continues to attack our citizens, our peacekeepers, we will of course respond in just the same way we have responded. There should be no doubt about this."

Even before the crisis in Georgia, tensions between Washington and Moscow have been rising over disputes such as the independence of Kosovo, NATO's expansion toward Russia's borders and U.S. plans for a missile defence system in Eastern Europe.

The Poland deal may appear to Russia as confirmation of its fears about that defence system as it swiftly responded with Cold War nuclear rhetoric today.

Still, Bush said, "The Cold War is over. The days of satellite states and spheres of influence are behind us."

Increasing diplomatic pressure on Moscow, German Chancellor Angela Merkel met Russian President Dmitry Medvedev today to tell him Russia's actions in Georgia had gone too far.

Pressure from Berlin is significant because Germany is Russia's biggest trading partner and Moscow generally regards it as reliable and sympathetic.

Medvedev hit back quickly against Merkel and Bush, however, saying cagily that Georgia's breakaway regions are "unlikely to live together with Georgia."

Russian forces went deep into Georgia in the fighting, raising wide concerns that Russia could be seeking to occupy parts of its small, pro-U.S. neighbor, which has vigorously lobbied to join NATO, or even to force its government to collapse.



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, right, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel meet in Sochi today where she applied diplomatic pressure

Under the agreement that Warsaw and Washington reached yesterday, Poland will accept an American

missile interceptor base.

Washington has agreed to move a battery of Patriot missiles from Germany to Poland as part of the deal. They would provide protection against short-range ballistic missiles such as the SS-21 system used by Russia in Georgia.

"We have crossed the Rubicon," Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said, referring to U.S. abrupt consent to Poland's demands after more than 18 months of negotiations.

Washington says the planned system, which is not yet operational, is needed to protect the U.S. and Europe from possible attacks by missile-armed "rogue states" like Iran or terrorist groups like al Qaeda.

Moscow still insists the shield is a threat to its security, despite US assurances to the contrary, and feels it will worsen tensions.



U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, left, and Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili meet in Tbilisi today where she has flown to give Georgia American support

Russia's envoy to Nato said the deal showed the system was aimed at Russia.

"The fact that this was signed in a period of very difficult crisis in the relations-between Russia and the US over the situation in Georgia shows that, of course, the missile defence system will be deployed not against Iran but against the strategic potential of Russia," Dmitri Rogozin said.

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov cancelled a trip to Warsaw. The deal, signed by deputy Polish foreign minister Andrzej Kremer and US chief negotiator John Rood, must be endorsed by both governments and Poland's parliament.

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Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk had insisted the US provide more military co-operation in return for consent to host 10 interceptor rockets.

In what appeared to be a first sign of Moscow's displeasure, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov cancelled a trip to Warsaw.



Refugees cross the bridge over the Inguri River as they enter the Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia

If everything goes to schedule, the interceptor base would be ready by about 2012.

In an interview on Poland's news channel TVN24, Tusk said the U.S. agreed to help augment Poland's defenses with Patriot missiles in exchange for placing 10 missile defense interceptors in the Eastern European country.

He said the deal also includes a "mutual commitment" between the two nations to come to each other's assistance "in case of trouble."

That clause appeared to be a direct reference to Russia.

Poland has all along been guided by fears of a newly resurgent Russia, an anxiety that has intensified with Russia's offensive in Georgia.

In past days, Polish leaders said that fighting justified Poland's demands that it get additional security guarantees from Washington in exchange for allowing the anti-missile base on its soil.

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