

## Policy Watch: Russia's double standards

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Russian officials and commentators frequently complain that Washington applies double standards regarding its own behavior and Moscow's. America, these Russians claim, calls upon Moscow not to do things that Washington permits itself to do. Moscow's vitriolic opposition to the American proposal to deploy ballistic missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic, though, suggests that it is actually these Russian officials who are guilty of applying double standards.

The Bush administration seeks to deploy missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic in order to defend against a possible attack on America and Europe emanating from Iran. Russian officials, though, have scoffed at this, claiming that any Iranian missile attack on America or Europe is unlikely, and that it would not traverse Poland or the Czech Republic even if it did occur. Instead, they claim these facilities are actually directed at Russia.

The chief of the Russian missile forces, Gen. Nikolai Solovtsov, even threatened that if American missile defense facilities are established in Poland and the Czech Republic, the Russian "Strategic Missile Forces will be capable of targeting these facilities if a relevant decision is made." Solovtsov went on to state that Russia might respond by deploying upgraded intermediate-range missiles.

American officials have responded by pointing out that the missile defense facilities being contemplated are only useful for responding to a limited attack such as Iran might make, and not an overwhelming one such as Russia is capable of. Russian officials, though, fear that these "limited" facilities could be expanded and upgraded to the point that they could degrade Moscow's ability to respond to a (presumably) American missile attack against Russia. The Kremlin, then, claims that any enhanced American ability to defend itself and its allies against an offensive missile attack is actually threatening to Russia.

But Moscow employs a very different logic to justify its sales of missile defense systems to Syria and Iran. Moscow claims that these systems are only useful for defensive purposes and cannot be employed for offensive ones. They will not be used, then, unless Syria and Iran are attacked.

During his visit to Israel in April 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin himself stated, "To come into contact with these missiles [that Russia agreed to provide to Syria], you would have to attack Syria." Objections that any increased Syrian and Iranian ability to defend themselves against America or Israel might embolden Damascus and Tehran to behave more offensively are simply dismissed by Moscow.

The Kremlin then claims that Damascus and Tehran are incapable of doing what it accuses Washington of being willing to do. This, of course, is a double standard.

If Moscow really wants Washington not to set up missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic, it should offer to halt all missile defense system sales (as well as cooperation on the systems already sold) to Iran and Syria. But if Moscow is unwilling to halt these sales to Syria and Iran, then it should drop its objections to America setting up missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Moscow, of course, will not adopt either course of action. It will instead continue to sell missile defense systems to unstable regimes in the Middle East while loudly objecting to the establishment of American missile defense facilities in East European democracies that would not dare attack Russia.

This being the case, it would be nice if the Kremlin would at least cease its childish chatter about America employing double standards when Russia regularly and routinely exercises them itself. But this, of course, is too much to hope for from Moscow.

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