

Russia Denounces U.S. Missile Defense Test

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The successful U.S. test of a prototype missile interceptor over the Pacific Ocean was denounced yesterday by Russia's Foreign Ministry as a threat to the global system of arms control.

Reacting to the Saturday night test, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said it contributes to a situation "which threatens all international treaties in the sphere of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation which are based on the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty."

The test, in which a dummy warhead launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California was intercepted by a projectile fired from Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, followed two failures and a success in previous tests.

A White House spokeswoman said President Bush was pleased with the results.

But U.S. officials also cautioned against reading too much into the results, noting that more complicated tests lie ahead. "This test is just one step on a journey," Air Force Lt. Gen. Ronald T. Kadish, director of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, told reporters at the Pentagon shortly after the successful intercept.

Russian criticism of the test comes after Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed last month during a meeting in Slovenia to consult on missile defenses. They are expected to discuss the issue again when they meet next Sunday at the G-8 summit of industrialized nations in Genoa, Italy.

While Moscow defends the ABM treaty as a cornerstone of global stability, the Bush administration wants to revise or replace it with an arrangement allowing testing and deployment of a defense system to protect against missiles from nations such as North Korea, Iraq and Iran.

In his statement yesterday, Yakovenko said Russia was open to an early dialogue on the ABM and strategic arms reduction treaties and "other Russian-American actions on the basis of understandings" reached during the Bush-Putin talks in Slovenia.

On "Fox News Sunday," Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) said the test shows that missile defenses will work. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) said it was "a first step, . . . a positive step" but not a "real-world test" based on genuine threats.

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