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U.S. EXTENDS PARTNERSHIP OFFER TO RUSSIA ON MISSILE DEFENSE

Washington, DC (April 23, 2007) - At a missile defense conference at the Atlantic Council of the United States, Deputy Director of the Missile Defense Agency Patrick O’Rielly described his recent discussions with Russian counterparts in Moscow as “serious, open and very productive. They went on for hours.” Both he and Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Dan Fried struck an optimistic tone about eventual Russian acceptance of a third ballistic missile defense site in Europe. According to Fried, the Russians seem “impressed and maybe surprised” that the US is interested in cooperation with them on missile defense.

General O’Rielly outlined the possible cooperative initiatives discussed with the Russians on Wednesday as part of a US effort to reassure them that not only will the US site not threaten them, but that they could participate in US efforts. The General said the US offered during “partnership-type discussions” a wide spectrum of proposals for US-Russian cooperation, from fundamental research in technology to actual integration of US systems, so that both sides can find opportunity to work together better for near term and long term improvement of missile defense. General O’Rielly suggested more discussions were in the offing, saying that there is a need for further discussions to go issue by issue with them so they can demonstrate to themselves that the system does not threaten their arsenal.

Assistant Secretary Fried said that he did not find Russian arguments persuasive that a European missile defense site threatened them, but did find persuasive the Russian view that if the US system was not threatening, then the US should be willing to cooperate. Fried pointed to the US offer to do just that as underscoring why Russia should not oppose a ballistic missile defense site.

The Administration is discussing with Czech and Polish governments the establishment of a US ballistic missile defense site in Europe to enhance protection of the US and Europe from ballistic missiles fired from the Middle East, especially from Iran. Current plans call for a midcourse radar to be established in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles to be based in Poland.

The Atlantic Council's missile defense conference, which was held on Thursday, April 19, focused on this ballistic missile defense site being discussed for Europe, and brought together leading experts from inside and outside the Administration, the Czech Republic and Poland to discuss the issues associated with building a third site and European reactions to the initiative, especially those of Russia.

*The Atlantic Council of the United States promotes constructive U.S. leadership in international affairs based on the central role of the Atlantic Community in meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century.
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