

Russia ready for deep nuclear arms cuts

Russia is ready to dramatically cut its nuclear stockpiles in a new arms pact with the United States if Washington meets Russia's concerns over missile defence, President Dmitry Medvedev said on Saturday.

"We are ready to reduce by several times the number of nuclear delivery vehicles compared with the START-1 pact," he told a news conference in Amsterdam.

"As far as warheads are concerned, their numbers should be lower than envisaged by the Moscow 2002 pact," he added.

He was referring to an interim pact called the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) which commits the sides to further cuts in their arsenals to between 1,700 and 2,200 warheads by 2012.

A new arms pact to follow the 1991 START treaty, which expires on Dec. 5, is at the centre of efforts by Mr Medvedev and US President Barack Obama to improve bilateral ties which sank to post-Cold War lows under the previous U.S. administration.

A successor treaty aimed at cutting long-range nuclear weapons amassed by the former superpower rivals during the Cold War arms race will be a major topic at talks between Mr Medvedev and Mr Obama in Moscow next month.

Negotiators from both sides are expected to start a new round of consultations on a new pact next week, Mr Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalya Timakova told reporters.

START-1 stipulates that neither side can deploy more than 6,000 nuclear warheads and no more than 1,600 strategic delivery vehicles, which includes intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarines and bomber aircraft.

A Kremlin source said Mr Medvedev's remarks amounted to instructions to Russian arms negotiators.

But the Kremlin chief again made clear that progress on START was linked to the future of the US missile shield project.

Russia deplores US plans to deploy elements of its missile shield in Eastern Europe. It sees the move as a threat to Russia's national security and says it will not achieve its declared aim of averting a missile attack from Iran.

In a separate statement posted on the Kremlin web site and distributed by Kremlin officials to journalists, Mr Medvedev said: "We cannot agree to the US plans of a global Missile defence system."

"I would want to stress that cuts proposed by us are only possible if the United States lift Russia's concerns (about missile defence)," he added.

"In any case, the connection between offensive and defensive strategic weapons should be reflected in the new treaty," Mr Medvedev's statement said.

Russian leaders see signs of the Obama administration taking a more cautious approach to the missile defence project and feel some kind of compromise can be worked out.

Earlier, Russia has proposed to the United States to work on a joint missile defence system and use its radars in southern regions, which can monitor the Indian Ocean zone.

Mr Medvedev also said Russia was concerned about US plans to deploy non-nuclear warheads on strategic missiles, which it says reduces the chances of solid verification of any future treaty and increases security threats.

The Russian president also reiterated Russia's insistence that deployment of strategic weapons in outer space should be banned.

Financial Times, New York, June 20, 2009, Europe, online.

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais