

‘Like Reagan, I Talked to Russia About Sharing Anti-Missile Technology’

Former President Bill Clinton told an audience of high-level West European, Ukrainian, and Russian representatives at the 4th Yalta Annual Meeting of the Yalta European Strategy (YES) organization, held June 29-30, that he had seconded President Ronald Reagan, in proposing that the United States and Russia work together on strategic anti-missile defense. “I told first President Yeltsin, and then President Putin, that I would feel morally bound, if we ever developed one that worked, to share the technology with Russia and everybody else!”

Only fragments of these remarks have been reported in the West, while in Russia, RIA Novosti gave its readers a headline (“Clinton supports placement of BMD in Poland and the Czech Republic”) that was directly opposite to what President Clinton said.

In the audience were former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, former Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski, and former Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, who is now Russia’s Ambassador to Ukraine.

Clinton was answering a question from Charles Grant of the Center for European Reform, in London, concerning the U.S. Administration’s plan to install missile-defense systems in Europe. EIR has transcribed this important passage from Clinton’s remarks, a video recording of which was posted on the YES website. In this text, phrases in square brackets were difficult to transcribe with certainty.

President Clinton: First of all, we didn’t... Sandy Berger, who was my National Security Advisor, is here, so if I screw this up, correct me. We didn’t see any need for any American military installations, because one of the conditions of getting into NATO, was that every country had to [operate] its own military capacity, [such that we’d] have very close coordination and cooperation, and use each other’s assets, if necessary.

Keep in mind, we also had a partnership with Russia; NATO had signed an agreement with Russia, as well as with Ukraine. We weren’t thinking about it in that way.

And I wasn’t committed to even deploy a missile-defense system at the time—that was inconsistent with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty—because I didn’t think that we had one that would work. And I told first President Yeltsin, and then

President Putin, that I would feel morally bound, if we ever developed one that worked, to share the technology with Russia and everybody else!

I mean, you know, I’m more worried about nuclear launches coming from suicidal fanatics. And we have theater missile defenses, which are legal, that is, it will stop small missiles coming in. They will. Under the ABM Treaty, you can have a local missile-defense system, so Moscow has one, of some level of effectiveness, although if you explode a nuclear weapon high in the air, there’s going to be horrible nuclear fallout.

First, let me say: I’ve not been in office a long time. I have not seen any recent, classified information. My facts may be wrong. But, my impression is that we are creating a crisis here, where none is necessary. I do not believe that this missile-defense system is reliable enough to put up and have a predictable impact. If it were, I would come back to what Ronald Reagan said about Star Wars. He said, if he ever developed it, he wanted the Russians to have it. He wanted everybody to have it, and we ought to share it. You know, we’re trying to keep people from getting killed here.

But my impression is that they have spent an enormous amount of money on a technology that is not sufficiently adequate to put up anywhere, much less to have a big fight with the Russians over Poland and the Czech Republic. And so, I don’t know why we’re doing this now, but, like I said, I haven’t seen any classified information. Maybe they’ve done something I’m not aware of, but I don’t think so.

I still believe, obviously, if we could develop such a protective shield, it would remove the last incentive [sic] people have for what I think is necessary, which is a big reduction in nuclear weapons that exist, and a dramatically increased effort, as a bipartisan coalition in America—Sen. Sam Nunn, and my former Defense Secretary Bill Perry, and a lot of Republicans—have said: We need a real effort here, to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, to reduce the stockpiles, and to increase the security. That, in my opinion, would be a much better expenditure of money, would be much more cost-effective, than getting into the fight over putting up these missile defenses now.

And, I don’t blame the Russians for raising a lot of sand, but if I were them, I’d be tempted to let us do it, because—unless they work better than I think they do—it’s a colossal waste of money.