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Obama Revives Rumsfeld's Missile Scheme, Risks Nuke War

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The Obama administration is poised to take up one of the more dangerous and hare-brained schemes of the Rumsfeld-era Pentagon. *The New York Times* is reporting that the Defense Department is once again looking to [equip intercontinental ballistic missiles with conventional warheads](#). The missiles could then, in theory, destroy fleeing targets a half a world away — a no-notice “bolt from the blue,” striking in a matter of hours. There’s just one teeny-tiny problem: [the launches could very well start World War III](#).

Over and over again, the Bush administration tried to push the idea of these conventional ICBMs. Over and over again, [Congress refused to provide the funds for it](#). The reason was pretty simple: those anti-terror missiles look and fly *exactly* like the nuclear missiles we’d launch at Russia or China, in the event of Armageddon. “For many minutes during their flight patterns, these missiles might appear to be headed towards targets in these nations,” a [congressional study](#) notes. That could have world-changing consequences. “The launch of such a missile,” then-Russian president Vladimir Putin said in a state of the nation address after the announcement of the Bush-era plan, “[could provoke a full-scale counterattack using strategic nuclear forces](#).”

The Pentagon mumbled all kinds of assurances that Beijing or Moscow would never, ever, never misinterpret one kind of ICBM for the other. But the core of their argument essentially came down to this: [Trust us, Vlad Putin! That ballistic missile we just launched in your direction isn’t nuclear. We swear!](#)

Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld couldn't even muster that coherent of a defense.

"Everyone in the world would know that [the missile] was conventional," he said in a press conference, "[after it hit within 30 minutes.](#)"

The new "Prompt Global Strike" plan is a little different from the old one. It relies on land-based missiles, instead of sub-based ones. The idea is that these conventional missiles sites would be open to Russian inspection, and wouldn't accidentally drop debris on a superpower.

But Moscow doesn't exactly seem soothed by this new plan. "World states will hardly accept a situation in which nuclear weapons disappear, [but weapons that are no less destabilizing](#) emerge in the hands of certain members of the international community," Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said earlier this month.

When the idea of Prompt Global Strike was first proposed, the goal was to hit anywhere on the planet in under an hour. Old-school weapons had proved ineffective at catch terrorists on the move. Newer, quicker arms might be able to do the job, instead. Flight tests for some of those weapons — like a [hypersonic cruise missile](#) — are just getting underway. Until then, relying on conventional ICBMs to do the job, and risking a nuclear showdown, is just plain crazy.