

Australian prime minister says his country will not host U.S. missiles



Brisbane, August 6 (RHC)-- Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison says the United States has not requested to deploy intermediate-range missiles in his country, stressing that such a request will be met with rejection.

"It's not been asked to us, not being considered, not been put to us. I think I can rule a line under that," Morrison told reporters in Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland, on Monday. He also stressed that Australia would decline such a request if it was made in the future.

The speculation that Canberra had been asked to host the missiles came after U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said during a visit to Australia on Saturday that he favored the deployment of ground-to-ground missiles in Asia possibly within months. Esper's remarks followed Washington's formal withdrawal from a landmark Cold War-era arms control pact.

The U.S. claims Russia breached the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) by developing a missile known as the 9M729. Russia denies the accusation. In January, it publicized the missile's specifications to prove that it was allowed under the INF.

Under the treaty, both sides had been banned from developing ground-launched nuclear missiles with ranges from 500 to 5,500 kilometers. Esper's remarks prompted Russia and China to pledge to take countermeasures if Washington stationed land-based missiles in Asia.

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