

Navy Successfully Tests New Bulava Missile

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The Navy on Thursday successfully test-fired an advanced ballistic missile from a nuclear submarine, giving a boost to the nation's top weapons program that has been haunted by a string of failures.

The successful launch of the Bulava intercontinental ballistic missile follows 12 previous tests over the past few years, most of which were failures. The failed launches raised doubts about the military's most expensive weapons program and left a newly commissioned nuclear submarine weaponless.

Defense Ministry spokesman Alexei Kuznetsov said the Bulava was launched Thursday from the Dmitry Donskoi nuclear submarine underwater in the White Sea. The missile's warheads successfully hit a designated area on the Kura testing range on the far eastern Kamchatka Peninsula, he said.

The Bulava has been described by authorities as a future cornerstone of Russia's nuclear arsenal as older Soviet-built nuclear missiles are gradually retired.

Russian officials billed the Bulava as a new-generation weapon, capable of dodging any potential missile defenses, thanks to its quick start and an ability to perform unusual maneuvers in flight.

But the Bulava program has consumed a large chunk of the Russian military budget without much success. Only five of the previous 12 launches of the missile since 2004 were officially pronounced successful, and some military analysts said that even some of those were actually flawed in one way or another.

Officials have insisted the Bulava's concept is fine and have blamed the failed launches on manufacturing flaws resulting from post-Soviet industrial degradation. They have said it is difficult to control the quality of all the parts supplied by hundreds of subcontractors involved in the program.

As the tests dragged on, the Navy already has commissioned the first of a new series of nuclear-powered submarines to be armed with the new missile: the Yury Dolgoruky. Several other such submarines are under construction, and officials have said they could not be adapted to carry another type of missile if the Bulava program fails.

Thursday's launch followed wide-ranging quality checks at subcontractors involved in the program to make sure that they strictly observe all technological requirements.

The military said it would conduct another two tests of the Bulava later this year.

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