

Putin Promises Stronger Nuclear Navy

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SEVERODVINSK, Arkhangelsk Region — President Vladimir Putin oversaw the start of construction of one of Russia's newest generation submarines on Monday and vowed to boost nuclear naval forces to safeguard the country's position as a leading sea power.

Warning that its Navy would protect Russia's interests in the oil-rich Arctic, Putin led the ceremony to begin building the submarine Prince Vladimir, named after the ruler who founded a precursor state to modern Russia.

The vessel is the fourth Borei class submarine, designed to carry one of the country's newest and most powerful intercontinental nuclear missiles, the Bulava, or Mace.

"We believe that our country should maintain its status of one of the leading naval powers," Putin told a meeting of naval commanders and government officials at the sprawling Sevmash shipbuilding yard.

Invoking Cold War rhetoric, Putin took a stab at the United States nuclear submarine forces. "First of all we are talking about the development of the naval part of our strategic nuclear forces, about the Navy's role in maintaining the strategic nuclear parity," he said.

Putin said that Russia would have eight such Borei submarines by 2020, by which time the Navy will have received 51 new ships.

In a reference to Russia's ambitions in the Arctic, where Moscow plans to expand its claims, Putin said the Navy would protect Moscow's interests in the icy North.

"Obviously, the Navy is an instrument to protect national economic interests, including in such regions as Arctic where some of the world's richest biological resources, mineral resources are concentrated," he said.

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