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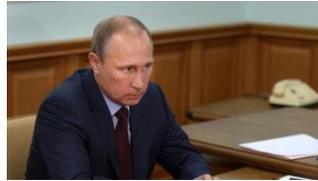
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<http://news.yahoo.com/putin-weapons-counter-threats-russia-132247477.html>

Putin promises new weapons to fend Western threats

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV

9/12/2014



Russia is developing an array of new nuclear and conventional weapons to counter recent moves by the U.S. and NATO, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday as the military successfully tested a new intercontinental ballistic missile launched from a nuclear submarine.

Putin accused the West of using the crisis in Ukraine to reinvigorate NATO, warning that Moscow will ponder a response to the alliance's decision to create a rapid-reaction "spearhead" force to protect Eastern Europe.

His comments came as Russia's relations with the West have plunged to their lowest point since the Cold War due to Russia's role in the crisis in Ukraine. They appear to show that the Russian leader is determined to pursue a tough course in the face of more Western sanctions.

Addressing a Kremlin meeting on weapons modernization, Putin ominously warned the West against getting "hysterical" about Moscow's re-arming efforts, in view of U.S. missile defense plans and other decisions he said have challenged Russia's security.

"We have warned many times that we would have to take corresponding countermeasures to ensure our security," Putin said, adding that he would now take personal charge of the government commission overseeing military industries.

He said Russia's weapons modernization program for 2016-2025 should focus on building a new array of offensive weapons to provide a "guaranteed nuclear deterrent;" re-arming strategic and long-range aviation; creating an aerospace defense system and developing high-precision conventional weapons.

Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting on weapons modernization plans in the Kremlin in M ...

The difficulties faced by the Russian arms industry have been highlighted by the long and painful development of the Bulava intercontinental ballistic missile, which has suffered repeated launch failures.

Its designers finally seem to have cured the glitches, and the navy boasted of a successful launch of the Bulava from a nuclear submarine on Wednesday. Two more launches are set for the fall.

Putin said potential threats must be thoroughly analyzed to avoid overburdening the economy with excessive military spending. He would not elaborate on prospective weapons, but he and other officials have repeatedly boasted about new Russian nuclear missiles' capability to penetrate any prospective missile shield.

Putin's emphasis on high-precision conventional weapons reflected government concerns about the U.S. and other NATO countries enjoying a significant edge in that area.

The comparative weakness of Russia's conventional arsenals have prompted Russia to rely increasingly on a nuclear deterrent, with the nation's military doctrine envisaging the possibility that Russia may use nuclear weapons first in response to a conventional aggression.

Talking about potential threats, the Russian president specifically pointed at the U.S. missile defense program and Washington's plans to develop new conventional weapons that could strike targets anywhere in the world in as little as an hour with deadly precision.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who is in charge of weapons industries, told reporters after the meeting that Russia will respond to the U.S. challenge by developing its strategic nuclear forces and aerospace defenses. Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov said the military

will focus on developing defensive systems to counter the new U.S. programs, according to the Interfax news agency.

Russia inherited most of its arsenal from the Soviet Union and has struggled to develop new weapons systems after the post-Soviet industrial meltdown. With hundreds of subcontractors going out of production, Russian arms manufacturers often had to make components themselves, swelling costs and affecting production quality.

Putin said Russian defense industries must rid themselves of a dependence on imports and quickly become capable of producing key components at home.

Faced with a pro-Russian insurgency in the east backed by Moscow, Ukraine has already cut arms exports to Russia. They include missile components, helicopter engines and turbines for naval ships that Russian arms makers may find hard to replace. Western nations also have cut exports of military components to Russia.