

Putin claims new 'invincible' missile can pierce US defenses

By Nathan Hodge, Barbara Starr, Matthew Chance and Emma Burrows, CNN

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Moscow (CNN) Russian President Vladimir Putin boasted Thursday of new weaponry he claims will render NATO defenses "completely useless," delivering a warning to the world about Russia's resurgent military might.

In an annual address to the Russian Parliament, the Kremlin leader said Russia had developed a new, nuclear-capable cruise missile with "unlimited" range that is capable of eluding air-defense systems. He also said Russia had developed an "invincible" missile that can deliver a warhead at hypersonic speed.

Putin is running for re-election in mid-March on a platform that emphasizes his strength as a leader. Thursday's speech was an occasion for the Russian President to showcase his country's strides in military technology.

"Russia still has the greatest nuclear potential in the world, but nobody listened to us," he said. "Listen now."

One new development: The creation of a low-flying cruise missile capable of stealthy operation. Putin said the missile would be nuclear-powered and showed a video simulating its flight.

"Since the range is unlimited, it can maneuver as much as necessary," Putin said.

Another military development, Putin said, was a weapon capable of flying "like a meteorite" at several times the speed of sound.

"It will be practically invulnerable," he said. "The speed will be hypersonic."

The missile, called the Avangard, has been successfully tested, Russia Strategic Missile Force Commander Sergei Karakayev told the state news agency Tass.

"Creating the strategic missile system Avangard, equipped with a glide vehicle, has become a no less efficient response to the deployment of the American anti-missile defenses," Karakayev said, according to Tass. "Its testing has been successfully completed."

Russia's Defense Ministry has launched a web page seeking the public's help with naming its new arsenal.

US casts doubt on Putin's claims

A US official with knowledge of the latest Russian military assessment expressed doubt to CNN that

the weapons Putin described were anywhere near operational, and said that if Russia ever attacked the United States it would be met with overwhelming force.

The official said the United States had observed a small number of Russian tests of its nuclear-powered cruise missile and seen them all crash.

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders told reporters that Putin's remarks confirmed what the United States has long known. "Russia has been developing destabilizing weapons systems for over a decade, in direct violation of its treaty obligations," she said.

"President Trump understands the threats facing America and our allies in this century and is determined to protect our homeland and preserve peace through strength," she added. "US defense capabilities are and will remain second to none."

US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said department officials watched Putin's speech -- which included an animation of a nuclear strike against the United States -- with interest.

"It was certainly unfortunate to have watched the video animation that depicted a nuclear attack on the United States," she said. "That's certainly something that we did not enjoy watching. We don't regard that as the behavior of a responsible international player."

While Putin has said his new weapons would be able to evade US missile defenses, US officials have long pointed out that their system is designed to respond to a missile launch from a rogue nation such as North Korea or Iran. US nuclear policy is aimed at deterring Russia through the modernization of the US arsenal.

The official CNN spoke to said the United States believes Putin's remarks were made largely for domestic political consumption ahead of elections on March 18.

In his remarks, the Russian President said Moscow's new arsenal had been developed in response to Washington's moves. Putin has long fumed over the decision of President George W. Bush to [withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty](#) and deploy missile defenses.

"We are creating state-of-the-art systems for Russia's strategic weapons in response to the unilateral US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty," Putin said.

Putin said Russia has developed other new weaponry, including unmanned underwater vehicles capable of moving at great speeds. The Russian President also responded to the Trump administration's recent [Nuclear Posture Review](#), which calls for enhancing the flexibility of the US nuclear deterrent.

The US review is "of great concern," Putin said, asserting that it potentially lowers the bar for the use of nuclear weapons.

The United States remains the world's largest military spender. According to the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#), the United States outspends Russia by a factor of around 10, according to its latest figures online.

A defense expert described Putin's talk of high-tech rearmament Thursday as "all a bit Potemkin village-y."

"Nobody knows how much is bluster," said Richard Aboulafia, vice president of analysis at Teal Group, an aerospace and defense consultancy.

"But there's probably the lack of commitment of solid resources to make it deployable. There's probably enough there to make it a long-term threat, but they've got a real issue with not committing defense resources."

Russia's foreign policy has been much more muscular in recent years, however. Putin deployed his air force to Syria in autumn 2015 to back the forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, turning the tide of war in favor of the regime.

Russia's Syria intervention has also become an occasion for Russia to showcase some of its latest conventional weaponry, including new aircraft.

Noting reports that Russia has sent [its most advanced fighter jet](#), the Su-57, to Syria, Aboulafia said: "It's not really clear that they have plans to produce significant numbers of fully developed variants versus a prototype."

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Thursday confirmed for the first time the recent deployment of Su-57 fighters to Syria, where they carried out a range of tests.

"I can say that the tests were successful," he said. "The planes returned home a week ago."

In his remarks, Putin maintained that Russia's military posture is purely defensive in nature.

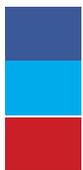
"We've never had an intention of attacking anybody," he said. "Russia will only retaliate if it is attacked."

Russia remains "interested in normal constructive relationship with the EU and America," he added. *CNN's Ray Sanchez contributed to this report.*

Putin is brandishing his new arsenal -- but what does Russia have?

Analysis by Nathan Hodge, CNN

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Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers his annual address to the Federal Assembly on Thursday.

Moscow (CNN) Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised hackles in Washington with his claim -- [unveiled Thursday](#) -- that Russia is fielding a formidable new arsenal that can thwart US ballistic missile defenses.

So what new strategic weaponry does Russia have, and how does this it enhance its military power? And does this mean a new Cold War is in the offing?

Here are the basics about the new weaponry revealed by Putin as he gave his annual address to the Russian Parliament.

A new generation of intercontinental ballistic missile: The Sarmat would be a more capable rocket designed to replace the Voevoda ICBM, known by the NATO designation SS-18 Satan. It could loft its payload over a longer distance -- capable of crossing the South Pole as well as the North Pole, the shortest route between Russia and the United States.

Is it deployed? No. Putin said the Russian military has begun the "active phase" for testing the new missile. Russian state news agency RIA-Novosti Friday cited a Russian lawmaker saying pre-production versions of the rocket would enter the inventory soon.

A nuclear-powered cruise missile: Putin boasted that the Russians had developed a low-flying cruise missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead that could stay aloft indefinitely: It would be powered by a nuclear power plant.

Is it fully operational? No. At the end of 2017, Putin said, Russia conducted a successful launch of the missile.



A unmanned underwater vehicle: Putin said the Russian military had been developing a stealthy underwater vehicle that can target a wide range of targets, including carrier groups or coastal bases. Deployed? Not yet. The [2018 US Nuclear Posture Review](#) notes that Russia is developing a "new intercontinental, nuclear armed, nuclear-powered, undersea autonomous torpedo" as a new nuclear-weapons delivery system. Putin said trials began in December.

A new air-launched missile: Putin said Russia has developed an air-launched missile capable of flying at several times the speed of sound, capable of overcoming air-defense systems. "Russia has such weapons already," he said.

Fully operational? Apparently. Putin said the system -- called Kinzhal, or Dagger -- had successfully completed testing and had been deployed operationally beginning on December 1 at the airfields of Russia's Southern Military District.



Journalists watch as Russian President Vladimir Putin gives his annual state of the nation address in Manezh in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, March 1, 2018.

A hypersonic glide vehicle: Putin said Russia had developed a missile system with a weapon capable of flying "like a meteorite" at several times the speed of sound.

Is it deployed? Unclear. The Nuclear Posture Review says Russia "is developing" a hypersonic glide vehicle. Russian state news agency Tass cited Russia's Strategic Missile Force Commander as saying that testing of the system "has been successfully completed."

So does this mean a new Cold War-style arms race is underway? According to Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, no.

"The President noted that this in no way can be considered as the start of an arms race, because it's nothing but a Russian response to the breaking of the ABM treaty," Peskov told reporters Friday, referring to the decision by former US President George W. Bush to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and deploy missile defenses.



Russia's 'invincible' missile is chilling for everyone

That grievance is nothing new. But observers are still worried.

In comments Thursday on Twitter, Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, said: "Giving half the time in the annual address to the Russian parliament to a graphic description of new weapons' capabilities is a measure of how close the US and Russia have moved toward military collision."

He added: "For the foreseeable future, it looks that the US-Russia agenda will be limited to just one item: war prevention. Good luck to us all."

Russia's 'invincible' missile is chilling for everyone

By [Nic Robertson](#), CNN

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Putin announces 'invincible' new missile 00:55

"Nic Robertson is CNN's international diplomatic editor. The opinions in this article belong to the author."

In his two-hour annual State of Nation speech, Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) was preening himself, preparing his gullible masses to vote for him later this month.

And what was his largest boast? [Russia's new nuclear-powered cruise missile](#), which he says can defy the US missile-defense shield.

It is bombastic talk in the extreme: a wagging of military parts in the faces of other nations, most likely right now the United States, whose own commander in chief is massively ramping up defense spending while downsizing his diplomatic power.

[China has reportedly](#) an electromagnetic gun mounted on a battleship capable of firing shells at seven times the speed of sound, hitting targets over the horizon before conventional defense systems can respond.

This isn't just a problem for the Western arms industry -- which suddenly looks very flatfooted, tooled up for wars from history -- but a problem for the world at large.

At last month's Munich Security Conference, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg spoke passionately about an arms race he sees unfolding.

The problem, he said, is Russia's ballistic missile testing, which is seen in DC as an abrogation of the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the US and the Soviet Union. [He added](#): "We see that Russia is modernizing its nuclear capabilities, developing new nuclear systems and increasing the role of nuclear weapons in its military strategy. This is a cause for real concern."

It sounds like a chicken and egg scenario. But regardless of what came first, Putin now seems to have upped the stakes by claiming to have bigger and better weapons than anyone else on earth.

Over the past few months, Trump has called for a \$75 billion dollar increase in defense spending while slashing the State Departments budget by more than a third.



But the fact that the world's superpower appears to be sending a message -- reversing Churchill's guidance of "[meeting jaw to jaw is better than war](#)" -- cannot be the only trigger for this invigorated arms chase.

China is building islands bristling with firepower and potentially malevolent capacity, increasing its demands that its territorial claims are respected, while also developing military bases half a world away. The world's second-largest economy is flexing itself in the mold of all emerging empires ready to engage in pursuit of its interests farther and farther from home.

And it doesn't end there. There are other arms races -- albeit on a smaller scale -- underway around the world. In the past few years, Saudi Arabia became the world's third-largest defense and security spender, much to the appreciation of the arms industries thereby enriched.

But as Newton observed in his third law of motion, "For each action there is an equal and opposite reaction." As one army builds, so must an adversary respond in kind.

But as the weapon spending increases, the fragility of the balance become more precarious. More triggers means more fingers -- and more likely the chance of mishap.

To push Newton's postulations to their logical conclusion: When one finger does slip, so will they all. So it should come as little surprise that just last month the world's weather vane on impending conflict swung another degree for the worse.

The so called Doomsday Clock, first initiated in 1947 after the Second World War, is taken as a measure of how safe from global threats we all are. Its most relaxed setting was in 1991, 17 minutes to midnight.

In January of this year, the clock advanced to two minutes to midnight, equaling its most dire status yet, which was achieved in 1953, when the United States and the Soviet Union began testing hydrogen bombs.

Though Putin will likely have only raised the stakes for bombast and self-aggrandizement at home, the message, nonetheless, is chilling for everyone.