

Russia to get 40 new intercontinental missiles this year

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Moscow: Russia's military this year alone will receive over 40 new intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of piercing any missile defenses, President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday in a blunt reminder of the nation's nuclear might amid tensions with the West over Ukraine.

Putin made the statement at the opening of an arms show at a shooting range in Alabino just west of Moscow, a huge display intended to showcase the nation's resurgent military might.

Russia-West relations have plunged to their lowest point since Cold War times over Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and support for a pro-Russia separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine. The U.S. and the EU have slapped Russia with economic sanctions, and Washington and its NATO allies have pondered an array of measures in response to Russia's moves.

The three Baltic members of the alliance, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, have asked NATO to permanently deploy ground troops to their nations as a deterrent against an increasingly assertive Russia. And Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak said Sunday that he and U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter have held talks about placing U.S. heavy army equipment in Poland.

Moscow bristled at the plans, warning Washington that the deployment of new U.S. weapons near Russian borders would foment dangerous instability in Europe.

"The United States is inciting tensions and carefully nurturing their European allies' anti-Russian phobias in order to use the current difficult situation for further expanding its military presence and influence in Europe," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a comment late Monday.

"We hope that reason will prevail and it will be possible to save the situation in Europe from sliding toward a military standoff which could entail dangerous consequences," it added.

Speaking at the arms show, Putin vowed to continue a big arms modernization program despite the nation's economic downturn. He specifically mentioned the Armata tanks and other new armored vehicles, which were first shown to the public during a Red Square military parade last month, saying they "have no analogues in the world."

Putin also noted that the military was to start testing its new long-range early warning radar intended to monitor the western direction and later will deploy another one in the east.

"Over 40 new intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of penetrating any, even the most technologically advanced missile defense systems, will join the nuclear forces in the current year," he said.

Last December, Putin said that the military will commission more than 50 ICBMs in 2015. The reason for revising the plan wasn't immediately clear.

Last year, the military received 38 ICBMs, according to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. Modernizing the nation's nuclear forces is a top priority for the military that needs to gradually decommission its aging Soviet-built ICBMs.

The president said that the re-armament program should help encourage the nation's economic growth and spearhead

innovations. Independent experts warn, however, that the weapons upgrade that envisages spending 22 trillion rubles (over \$400 billion) on new weapons through 2020 would be an unbearable burden now when the Russian economy has plunged into recession.

Despite the gloomy economic outlook, Russian arms makers used the arms show to publicize projects of costly new weapons that even the Soviet Union couldn't afford.

The navy revealed a project of an aircraft carrier capable of carrying 90 aircraft. It also showed a mock-up of a new amphibious landing ship, a vessel similar to the Mistral-class ship built on Russian orders in France, whose delivery has been suspended over the Ukrainian crisis.

Amid the current spike in Russia-West tensions, Washington accused Moscow of violating its obligations under a landmark nuclear arms control treaty by flight-testing a ground-launched cruise missile with a range prohibited by the treaty. Russia rejected the accusations, and, in its turn, alleged that some elements of the U.S. missile defense shield violate the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces, or INF, treaty.

The RIA Novosti news agency on Tuesday quoted Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying that Moscow is ready to hold consultations to discuss the mutual complaints, adding that the U.S. so far has failed to spell out its accusations.

- AP