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# Russia reforging its nuclear shield

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MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti military commentator Ilya Kramnik) - The introduction of the RS-24 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) in 2009 will be the most important phase in the renewal of the Russian Strategic Missile Force (SMF) after the adoption of the Topol-M.

For the first time in post-Soviet Russia, a new ground-based MIRV-equipped missile system will be adopted by Russia's military.

There is little information on the performance of the new RS-24. According to the most reliable sources, this missile, developed by the Moscow Institute of Thermal Technology like the Topol-M, is in fact a further development of the latter, with an improved third stage and dispensing mechanism, the so-called "bus," from the RSM-56 Bulava ICBM.

The new missile should have a range of 11,000 km or more, and the warheads are most likely to have a yield of between 150 and 300 kilotons each. The RS-24 will hold an interposition between the Topol-M with a 550-kiloton single warhead, though in the future it could be tipped with three individually targeted warheads with a yield between 150 and 300 kilotons, and heavy lift launch vehicles RS-20 Voevoda, carrying up to 10 warheads, 750 kilotons each.

The RS-24 is therefore likely to be comparable in performance with the silo-based liquid-fueled UR-100 NUTTH.

Aside from the warheads, the RS-24 carries missile defense penetration systems, hindering enemy detection and interception, which makes the new missile a valuable asset amid the deployment of U.S. global missile defense.

Like the Topol-M, the RS-24 could be specified in either a silo-based or a mobile version, which would increase the Russian SMF's versatility. With the current production capacity, by the beginning of the next decade, up to 15 ICBMs, including five to six RS-24s, could be delivered to the military annually, keeping the ICBM numbers at the required level.

With the RS-24 entering service, the structure of the Russian SMF in the coming decade looks clear. Along with the Topol-M, the new missile will form the backbone of the SMF, their number totaling up to 250 and 60, respectively, by the end of the next decade. Additionally, by 2020, several dozens of Topol and UR-100 NUTTH ICBMs will remain in service. A new heavy missile is also expected to replace the RS-20 Voevoda ICBM. All in all, the SMF would include about 300 to 350 missiles of various types with 800 warheads.

The backbone of the Naval Strategic Nuclear Force will be liquid-fueled RSM-54 Sineva ICBMs, installed on six 667BDRM nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines, which will have their life cycle extended into late 2020s, and cutting-edge solid-fuel RSM-56 Bulava ICBMs on 955/955A€ submarines. The navy plans to commission eight missile submarines of the above-mentioned class to replace the 667BDR submarines. By 2020, the Russian navy will most likely have between 12 and 14 nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines carrying between 192 and 224 missiles with 800 to 900 warheads.

Strategic aviation will go on with the employment of the Tu-95MS and Tu-160 bombers, as the new advanced strategic bomber will not enter service before 2020. The balance in bombers class numbers is likely to change, however, with

Tu-95s down to between 40 and 48 from the current 68, and Tu-160 up to between 22 and 24 from the current 16.

Therefore, before the end of the next decade, the total potential of Russia's nuclear triad is estimated to be between 1,600 and 1,900 warheads. Is it a big figure? On the one hand, with the given deployment of U.S. missile defenses, this number of warheads doesn't seem so. On the other hand, the rapidly increased defense penetration capability of Russian nuclear weapons will make this inventory sufficient to inflict unacceptable damage to an attacker, whoever it may be.

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