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Reports: Russia successfully tests much-hyped Bulava ballistic missile

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MOSCOW (AP) — The Russian Navy on Friday successfully test fired its Bulava intercontinental ballistic missile, the weapon the government hopes will be the future of its nuclear arsenal, Russian news agencies reported.

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The launch was conducted from a submarine in the White Sea, near the border with Finland. The missile reportedly hit a target on the Kamchatka Peninsula, some 6,000 kilometers (3,400 miles) to the east. It marks the second successful firing in a month, further boosting the nation's weapons program that had become accustomed to embarrassing failures.

The costly Bulava development program had suffered seven failures in 13 attempts prior to Friday's firing.

Russian officials billed Bulava as a new-generation weapon, capable of dodging any potential missile defenses, thanks to its quick start and an ability to perform unusual maneuvers in flight.

But the program has consumed a large chunk of the military budget without much success. Only five of the previous 12 launches of the missile since 2004 were officially pronounced successful, and some military analysts said that even some of those were actually flawed in one way or another.

Officials have insisted the Bulava's concept is fine and have blamed the failed launches on manufacturing flaws resulting from post-Soviet industrial degradation. They have said it is difficult to control the quality of all the parts supplied by hundreds of subcontractors involved in the program.

As the tests drag on, the Russian navy has already commissioned the first of a new series of nuclear-powered submarines to be armed with the new missile.

Russian agencies reported that vessel would be the next platform to test the Bulava.

Several other such submarines are under construction, and officials have said they could not be adapted to carry another type of missile if the Bulava program fails.

On Thursday three other ICBMs from the country's Soviet-built arsenal were fired to check performance after years in storage.

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