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Military to Buy 600 Planes, 100 Ships

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The Defense Ministry said Thursday that $650 billion would be spent to equip the dilapidated military with 600 new warplanes, 100 ships and 1,000 helicopters by 2020.

The ambitious weapons procurement program also envisages eight new nuclear submarines and two Mistral aircraft carriers in addition to the two that Russia is buying from France, First Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Popovkin said.

His announcement comes during a large-scale streamlining of personnel in the bloated and poorly equipped armed forces. The unpopular reforms of Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov have seen as many as 200,000 officers lose their jobs and nine of every 10 army units disbanded.

Though the program foresees spending on strategic forces, analysts hailed the massive order of conventional arms, saying it would lower Russia's dependence on its nuclear arsenal. But they warned that it could only be a success if there were a professional and efficient military to use the new equipment.

"Russia needs a professional noncommissioned officers core to train specialists who can

really put these arms to effective use," said Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent military analyst. "This spending necessitates a whole new kind of military."

Last week, Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin promised that from next year 1.5 percent of gross domestic product would be spent on army modernization, military pay and other defense spending. He said the country currently allocates 0.5 percent of GDP.

Chief among the aviation procurements are the modern Su-34 and Su-35 fighters and Mi-26 transport helicopter and Mi-8 gunship helicopter, Popovkin said. Navy orders include 20 submarines, of which eight are to be armed with the Bulava nuclear missile — which has experienced years of glitch-stricken tests — 35 corvettes and 15 frigates, Popovkin said.

The Mistral, which could carry up to 16 helicopters and dozens of armored vehicles, would allow Russia to land hundreds of troops quickly on foreign soil. Popovkin said two Mistrals would be built domestically on top of the two it had ordered from France. The carriers will all feature Russian-only weaponry, he said.

Several hundred modern mobile S-400 and S-500 air defense missile systems also are on order.

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