

Missile Designer Slams Defense Ministry, Angering Medvedev

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The chief designer of Russia's intercontinental ballistic missiles said his plant would fail to meet production goals this year because of the Defense Ministry's failure to sign weapons contracts on time, drawing a quick and angry response from the president.

The public spat reflected simmering tensions caused by the nation's military reform.

Yury Solomonov, who designed the Topol-M and Bulava missiles, said in an interview with Kommersant published Wednesday that the Defense Ministry was dragging its feet on delivering the necessary funds.

"If there is no advance payment, it means there will be no supplies," Solomonov said. "The Defense Ministry's position not only has been unconstructive, but inexplicable from the point of view of state interests."

Solomonov's deceptively named Moscow Heat Technology Institute is currently Russia's main design and production facility for both land- and sea-based intercontinental ballistic

missiles.

President Dmitry Medvedev quickly ordered Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov to look into the matter.

Medvedev has previously criticized domestic arms makers for failing to meet weapons orders last year and said those responsible will be punished. Analysts blame corruption, aging equipment and broken links between subcontractors.

"I had enough of it last year," Medvedev told Serdyukov via video link.

He said that if Solomonov's description of the situation was true, government officials must be punished.

"And if the situation is different, it's necessary to deal with those who were sowing panic," he said in televised comments. "Do you know what they did to those who spread panic under a wartime law? They shot them."

He then told Serdyukov to fire those who were to blame for the failure.

Serdyukov dismissed Solomonov's criticism of the Defense Ministry, saying his plant and some other weapons makers had raised prices for their weapons and failed to explain reasons behind the increase. He said 108 billion rubles (\$3.9 billion) of contracts have not been signed this year because of higher prices, RIA-Novosti reported.

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