

Defense Plant Worker Convicted of Espionage

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A defense company worker was sentenced to 8 years in prison for passing secrets about the submarine-launched Bulava missile **Sergei Porter**

A Russian defense company worker was convicted Friday of passing missile secrets to foreign intelligence in the latest espionage case amid a cold spell in Moscow's relations with Washington.

The Sverdlovsk Regional Court in the city of Yekaterinburg handed an eight-year prison sentence to Alexander Gniteyev, a worker at NPO Automation, a leading defense company in the Urals that develops and manufactures control systems and electronic equipment for rocket and space technology.

Court spokesman Yelena Maryina said Gniteyev also has been ordered to pay a 100,000 ruble (\$3,200) fine.

Anna Lastovitskaya, a spokeswoman for the regional branch of the Federal Security Service, said Gniteyev had divulged missile secrets to foreign intelligence, but wouldn't say what

country Gniteyev was spying for.

National news agencies said Gniteyev had handed over secrets related to the Bulava missile, developed to arm the latest generation of Russian nuclear submarines.

Military officials have repeatedly boasted of the Bulava's ability to penetrate any prospective missile defenses and described it as the core of the nation's nuclear deterrent for years to come. The Bulava suffered a string of failures during its development, but the latest launches have been fine, and officials say it will be commissioned later this year.

The court verdict follows February's conviction of a Russian military officer accused of providing the CIA with secret information on new missiles.

(AP, MT)

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