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Russia Already Working to Relaunch Tu-160 Supersonic Nuclear Bombers

By The Moscow Times

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A Tu-160 supersonic bomber.

Russia is already working to relaunch production of the powerful Soviet-designed Tupolev Tu-160 supersonic nuclear bomber, the Defense Ministry's senior procurement official told news agency RIA Novosti on Friday.

“We are already working quickly [on the project], we have created a working group, scheduled monthly meetings with the Industry and Trade Ministry on how the work is progressing and appointed chief designers,” Deputy Defense Minister Yury Borisov told RIA Novosti.

Designed in the twilight of the Soviet era, only 16 Tu-160 bombers were built before production ceased when defense funding dried up in the early 1990s. The aircraft, affectionately known in the Russian air force as the “White Swan,” are advanced supersonic bombers capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

The move to relaunch production of the Tu-160 bomber comes after more than a year of Russian strategic bomber patrols near NATO borders, which have contributed to escalating tensions between Moscow and the West.

Russian officials promised months ago that production of the Tu-160 would be relaunched, but details about the project's status have been sparse.

Borisov said in early June that the new Tu-160s would be substantially upgraded versions of the Soviet-era design. While the plane's body will be unchanged, the components used in its construction will be entirely new, making it essentially a new aircraft, Borisov said.

In May, the head of Russia's air force, Viktor Bondarev, said the Defense Ministry was interested in purchasing up to 50 of the new Tu-160s.

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