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All The Russian Navy Wanted for Christmas Was a Set of Multiple Rocket Launchers

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AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin

The Russian Navy has announced it will be going into 2017 with more weapons — though not all the technology included in this "modernization" will be new.

Starting in 2017 the SPLAV arms firm will renew supplies of "Udav 1-M" and "Zapad" multiple rocket launcher systems to the Navy, according to SPLAV's director. It does so after a 20 year intermission. Meanwhile, the Navy also plans to develop shipborne unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, according to the Major General Igor Kozhin.

In the 2017-2020 period, the Navy will also add Mig-29K and Mig-29KUB fighter jets to its park of shipborne fighter aircrafts, and will replace Ka-29 attack helicopters with more advanced Ka-52K "Katran" helicopters.

In total, the Russian Navy will receive around 100 new airborne vehicles by 2020, Kozhin said.

The two announcements present a complicated picture of naval modernization. The Udav and Zapad missile systems – used to defend ships from missiles, torpedoes, and submarines – are hardly new, but do represent increased firepower. UAVs, on the other hand, are a more recent technological development that Russia has increasingly sought to harness. In 2012, the Defense Ministry invested 5 billion rubles ($81.6 million) to develop drones.

Since the late 2000s, Russia has placed an increasing emphasis on military modernization, planning to spend 20 trillion rubles ($326.2 billion) on the project between 2011 and 2020. The country's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and its military operations in Syria have emphasized the Russian military's growing strength.

However, modernization has proven a challenge, particularly for the Navy. Russia's Black Sea Fleet largely languished for years in Ukrainian-controlled Crimea. Although the peninsula's annexation gave Russia a free hand to modernize and utilize the fleet, Western-imposed sanctions affecting military technology imports and a tanking economy have hindered upgrade efforts.

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Russia's October 2016 deployment of eight naval ships – including the Admiral Kuznetsov, Russia's only aircraft carrier – to the eastern Mediterranean was both a major show of strength and a failure of optics.

The internet mocked the enormous cloud of diesel smoke billowing from the 30-year-old Admiral Kuznetsov as it wended its way to Syria. In December, two fighter jets crashed during takeoff from the carrier.

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