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Russia Deploys First Hypersonic Avangard ICBM Missile

Officials say the ICBM flies 27 times faster than the speed of sound.

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Defense Ministry / TASS

Russia's military has deployed its first Avangard hypersonic intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu was cited as telling President Vladimir Putin on Friday.

Putin, who said the nuclear-capable weapon would be deployed by late 2019, has touted the Avangard's ability to evade U.S. missile defense systems. Russia said it showed the missile system to U.S. inspectors last month as part of a bilateral arms control treaty ahead of its deployment.

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"The Avangard strategic missile system has been put on combat duty at 10 a.m. [Moscow

time] today," Shoigu was quoted as saying by Interfax.

It was deployed at a missile division in central Russia's Orenburg region 1,500 kilometers southeast of Moscow, said Gen. Sergei Karakayev, chief of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces.

Officials say the ICBM flies 27 times faster than the speed of sound. During the last known tests that took place in December 2018, the Avangard hit a practice target 6,000 kilometers away.

"This weapon of the future can penetrate both existing and any future missile defense systems," Putin said at an annual defense meeting Tuesday.

He played up Russia as the only country armed with hypersonic weapons, calling it "a unique situation in our contemporary history where they're trying to catch up."

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said last week that Russia is prepared to include the Avangard and the heavy Sarmat missile in a new strategic arms reduction treaty with the U.S., should it be extended beyond 2021.

The Avangard and the Sarmat are among a slew of cutting-edge weapons unveiled by Putin during his state of the nation address in the spring of 2018.

Shoigu said earlier that the Russian armed forces are scheduled to receive 22 Avangard and Yars missile systems in 2020.

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