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Russia Starts Building Upgraded 'Doomsday Plane' – Reports

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The top-secret planes are designed to protect the Russian president and other top officials in the event of a nuclear war. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia has begun building an upgraded version of its top-secret aerial command center nicknamed the "Doomsday" plane, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported Monday.

The country's existing "Doomsday" planes, the Ilyushin Il-80s, were developed in the 1980s and are designed to evacuate the Russian president and other top officials in the event of a nuclear conflict and allow them to send orders to forces on the ground. The planes are almost windowless save for those in the cockpit in order to safeguard from the effects of a nuclear blast.

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A new version of the plane, modeled after the Ilyushin Il-96-400M, is currently being manufactured in the southern Russian city of Voronezh, RIA Novosti reported, citing an

unnamed source in the military-industrial complex.

"The Russian Aerospace Forces will receive two air command posts based on the Il-96-400M. One is in production," RIA Novosti quoted its source as saying.

The new planes, like their predecessors, will be able to refuel mid-flight and will be accompanied by fighter jets.

In addition to being more technologically advanced than the Il-80, the Il-96-400M is expected to be able to fly for twice as far as the Il-80, RIA Novosti reported. Its radio system will also be able to deliver nuclear launch orders to strategic aviation, mobile and silo missile launchers and submarines within a 6,000-kilometer radius.

Many details about the Il-80 are unknown as information about the planes and their contents are classified as state secrets.

In a rare disclosure late last year, the Kremlin said sensitive equipment had been stolen from one of the Il-80s during upgrade work.

The manufacture of the Il-96-400M comes as Russia has unveiled a slew of hypersonic weapons systems in recent years, edging to the front of the global pack in the new military technology's development. Analysts say these weapons, while impressive, are unlikely to be game-changers — but instead will add to Russia's leverage in arms control negotiations with the United States.

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