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Russia Preparing to Test Nuclear-Powered Cruise Missile Despite Putin-Trump Talks – Reuters

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Russian Defense Ministry

Russia appears to be preparing for a fresh test of its nuclear-powered intercontinental cruise missile, known as the Burevestnik, Reuters reported, citing independent analyses by two American researchers.

Jeffrey Lewis of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California and Decker Eveleth of the CNA think tank told Reuters they had identified signs of an impending launch on satellite imagery of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Barents Sea.

An anonymous Western security source confirmed the assessment to Reuters.

Lewis and Eveleth said the evidence began mounting after Russia issued navigation warnings in August advising ships and civilian aircraft to avoid the area.

July imagery of the test range showed a sudden buildup of shipping containers, specialized

equipment, two aircraft and at least five vessels previously associated with Burevestnik trials, they noted. Additional personnel have been arriving since late July.

“It's full steam ahead,” Lewis said, adding that a test could take place as soon as this week.

The Burevestnik, a nuclear-powered missile that in theory could stay aloft for extended periods and evade missile defenses, has been in development for years.

President Vladimir Putin boasted that the “invincible” Burevestnik has an almost unlimited range and can evade American missile defenses when he unveiled it in 2018.

But the missile, which NATO dubs the Skyfall, has had a poor test record and Western experts question its strategic value.

The Burevestnik is believed to have exploded during efforts to recover it from the sea in northern Russia in August 2019 after it crashed in secret rocket engine tests, killing five scientists.

Putin claimed in October 2023 that Russia had carried out a successful test of the weapon.

According to the researchers, the timing of the latest preparations was set long before the announcement of the Aug. 15 meeting in Alaska between Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Still, they suggested the Kremlin may be weighing the political optics of the test, as halting or delaying the launch could signal readiness to end the war in Ukraine and restart arms control talks with Washington.

“Sometimes you can push up or push down the schedule for a political reason,” Tom Countryman, a former acting undersecretary of state for arms control, told Reuters.

For Moscow, the missile’s development has taken on added urgency since Trump declared plans to build an American missile shield called the Golden Dome, the analysts said.

Novaya Zemlya has a long history as a testing ground for Russia’s most powerful weapons. It hosted more than 130 nuclear detonations from 1955-1990.

In recent years, the site has undergone extensive construction, including between 2021 and 2023, CNN reported.

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