



Deciphering Russian Weapon Developments

OE Watch Commentary: Despite economic challenges, the current Kremlin leadership remains intent on military modernization and rearmament. While genuine progress has been made in improving the military's combat capability, not every proclamation describing the latest Russian wonder weapon should be taken at face value. "Maskirovka" or deception operations may be deployed within the information sphere by Russian journalists, weapon manufacturers and uniformed officials. The accompanying passages from Russian sources demonstrate the challenge in deciphering Russian weapon developments.

The first excerpt from Russia's official news agency *TASS* includes comments from Viktor Bondarev, a senior Russian official who suggested that "Skif missiles hiding at the ocean bottom are part of the arsenal of the Russian Armed Forces." This weapon system gained notoriety in November 2015 when its image was deliberately leaked on Russian TV. The Status-6 underwater, nuclear-capable drone could purportedly be secretly deployed and positioned along the enemy's coast and then launched on command. In explaining the characteristics of this system, the *TASS* report refers to the system as "the Skif experimental design work," which appears to contradict Bondarev's assertion that the system had already been deployed.

The second excerpt from the centrist daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, describes the characteristics of Russia's future Advanced Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft, claiming that this "Russian AWACS will track all stealth aircraft." The details of the article, however, point out that only a prototype of this aircraft has been tested, and that the new aircraft equipped with "breakthrough technologies and the latest components," won't "begin to be serially delivered to the field" until 2020. Describing future weapon capabilities as though they are already part of the current arsenal is a common occurrence among Russian weapon manufacturers and pundits.

The third excerpt from the government daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* demonstrates another type of deception. It announces that "the development of the new generation combat rail complexes (BZhRK)" which had caused so much concern in the West over the past two years "has been cancelled." The article hints that this decision may not be final, positing that "the case is closed, in any event, for the foreseeable future," but that since so much successful testing has already occurred, "if it will be urgently required, our missile train will rapidly get on the rails." Given their penchant for secrecy and deception, separating fact from fiction in Russian weapon developments remains a challenge. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: "Hypersonic and bottom-based missiles make part of Russian troops' arsenal," *TASS*, 21 November 2017. <http://tass.com/defense/976672>

Tsirkon hypersonic missiles and Skif missiles hiding at the ocean bottom are part of the arsenal of the Russian Armed Forces, ex-Chief of the Aerospace Force and Head of the Federation Council Defense and Security Committee Viktor Bondarev said on Tuesday.

"As of today, we have in our arsenal unique strategic bombers (Tu-160 aircraft), tactical missile systems with powerful ballistic and cruise missiles (the Iskander family of missile systems), Sarmat heavy missile complexes, air defense missile systems (S-400s), intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered missile cruisers with powerful anti-ship missiles (the Tsirkon hypersonic missile) and Skif bottom missiles," he said....

...According to public data, the Skif experimental design work envisages developing a transport and launching container for ballistic missiles, which will make it possible to launch them from a great depth.

Source: Vladimir Shcherbakov, "Русский АВАКС поставит все «самолеты-невидимки» на учет (Russian AWACS Will Track All Stealth Aircraft)," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 20 November 2017. http://www.ng.ru/armies/2017-11-20/100_a100.html

...The A-100 prototype which made its debut flight on 18 November this year is a new-generation radar patrol and guidance aircraft. It is based on an ungraded Il-76MD-90A military transport aircraft which is equipped with fuel-efficient PS-90A-76 engines and the latest avionics, including a modern piloting and navigation system, automatic control system, and communication system. The A-100's main "weapon" is the radio system, the design of which used breakthrough technologies and the latest components and materials.... in 2020 the new aviation long-range radar detection and control system will begin to be serially delivered to the field.

Source: Sergey Ptichkin, "Разработка боевых железнодорожных комплексов нового поколения прекращена (The Development of the New Generation Combat Railroad Complexes Has Been Cancelled)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 December 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/12/02/razrabotka-boevykh-zheleznodorozhnyh-kompleksov-novogo-pokoleniia-prekrashchena.html>

The development of the new generation combat rail complexes (BZhRK) has been cancelled. The case is closed, in any event, for the foreseeable future. A well-informed Russian military industrial complex representative has reported this....

...The experimental design work on the Barguzin has been conducted. The experiment with the pop-up launch occurred successfully. If it will be urgently required, our missile train will rapidly get on the rails. But we will forget about it for the time being.

“The development of the new generation combat rail complexes (BZhRK) has been cancelled.”