



## Russia's "Peresvet": Strategic Defense Initiative Redux?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the past several years, whenever Russia introduced a new weapon system, it was often accompanied by extensive domestic media coverage to both highlight its capabilities and show off the growing prowess of the country's military-industrial complex. President Putin added his martial flair back in March, when, during a speech to the Federation Council (and shortly before the presidential election) he presented graphic images of five new weapon systems designed to guarantee Russia's defense. One of those new weapons was described as a mobile laser system, designed to shoot down aircraft, and possibly disable guided missiles. In a subsequent contest, the system was designated as "Peresvet" (Пересвет), named after a 14th Century Russian monk who helped to defeat the Mongols. The accompanying excerpt from the centrist news site, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, reacts somewhat doubtfully to the recent Ministry of Defense (MoD) announcement that this system has "already been fielded."

The excerpt asserts that according to the MoD, "training on these weapons began in 2017," while other reports claim that "several of the 'Peresvet' complexes had already been fielded and have begun operation." The author points out that "almost nothing is known about the complex itself, as its tactical and technical characteristics are strictly classified." Because of its "very powerful power plant" the system is currently "transported on at least two wheeled platforms." The exact characteristics of this weapon system have been "interpreted differently by various sources," but according to the article, the system is capable of "searching for, detecting and capturing air targets for tracking and then destroying them with a laser beam." The system allegedly "works under new physical principles," and targets include, "airplanes, rockets and even satellites."

The article ends on a skeptical note, pointing out that "some experts doubt Peresvet's ability to shoot down large air targets," suggesting that the system is likely able to only disrupt the optics and avionics of aircraft, satellites and missiles, "and destroying small drones." Healthy skepticism may be called for. There remains a popular belief among those Russians who regret the loss of their Soviet superpower status, and who claim that the USSR's demise was partially caused by over-reacting (and over-spending) to US plans to deploy an advanced missile defense system (Strategic Defense Initiative or SDI) which would supposedly employ lasers, particle beam weapons and space-based missiles. Peresvet may fall into the same weapon category. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

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Peresvet combat laser complex in a firing position.

Source: Mil.ru (CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), <https://goo.gl/mo2Mzv>).

**Source:** Iskander Batyrov, "Добьет ли 'Пересвет' до цели (Will Peresvet reach its target)," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 December 2018. [http://www.ng.ru/armies/2018-12-05/2\\_7456\\_target.html](http://www.ng.ru/armies/2018-12-05/2_7456_target.html)

*On 5 December, the Russian Defense ministry released information about the deployment of the Peresvet laser complexes for experimental combat duty. It was also reported that training on these weapons began in 2017. Preparation for training of the complexes was carried out at the Military Space Academy named after Mozhaisky and at the sites of the enterprise, which was engaged in the development and production of Peresvet.*

*Almost nothing is known about the complex itself, as its tactical and technical characteristics are strictly classified. From the words of officials, it can be concluded that currently Peresvet is transported on at least two wheeled platforms." The designers were forced to take this measure, because the laser requires a very powerful power plant and its compact version is not yet available.... The combat characteristics of Peresvet are interpreted differently by various sources, but in general, this involves searching for, detecting and capturing air targets for tracking, and then destroying them with a laser beam. The complex is capable of striking optics, structural elements and aircraft weapons. Attack targets can be airplanes, rockets and even satellites. It is noted that "Peresvet" works under new physical principles....*

*The complex was first announced during the Address to the Federal Assembly on 1 March by Vladimir Putin. Somewhat later, it became known that Russian air defense forces began to master these combat lasers as early as 2017. In particular, in May 2018, the media reported that several of the Peresvet complexes had already been fielded and have begun operation. From which it was possible to conclude that these new air defense weapons were already on duty. For the sake of fairness, it is worth noting that the press organ of the Ministry of Defense, the newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, in its publication of 20 July 2018, nevertheless explained that the Peresvet laser systems used by the Air and Space Forces of Russia are used in training mode. Servicemen are training on the new military equipment at their deployment sites. But all the necessary infrastructure for combat duty has been prepared.*

*Some experts doubt Peresvet's ability to shoot down large air targets. In their opinion, the complex is so far able only to detect targets and track with laser illumination, disabling avionics satellite and rocket optics and destroying small drones.*