

# Russia Launches First of 8 New Nuclear Subs

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Russia launched its long-awaited new-generation Borei-class submarine, the Yuri Dolgoruky, on April 15, its first new nuclear sub produced since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Military officials said seven additional Borei-class (Project 955) submarines are expected to be built in the next decade. The subs will be the core of Russia's naval strategic missile forces, yet the E intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) they are supposed to carry are nowhere near ready production, let alone deployment.

"For the first time in 17 years, we are launching such a vessel," Sergei Ivanov, first deputy prime minister in charge of technology, said during a ceremony at the Sevmash plant in Severodvinsk. "In essence, this is the first Russian nuclear submarine."

The Yuri Dolgoruky was moved April 15 from the Sevmash building berth to a dock at the Severodvinsk submarine base, where construction and testing will continue until it is commissioned in 2008, Admiral Vladimir Masorin, Navy commander, told journalists.

"The process of building eight Borei-class submarines, expected to be commissioned by 2017, is designed in such a way that beginning from 2008, they should be commissioned by the Navy with minimal intervals," he said.

The Dolgoruky's crew, under the command of Capt. First Rank Konstantin Mitkin, already has undergone training at the Obninsk center outside Moscow.

It took 11 years to build the first submarine due to funding problems. High oil prices that helped to boost the Russian economy in the past several years finally allowed work to accelerate on the Dolgoruky and two other Borei subs under construction.

According to the Kremlin's Web site, Ivanov on April 16 told President Vladimir Putin that the Dolgoruky is 85 percent completed, and that the second Borei, the Alexander Nevsky, is 50 percent built. The Nevsky is to be commissioned in 2009. Last spring, a keel was laid for the third vessel, the Vladimir Monomakh. All the submarines are named after ancient Russian princes.

Putin called the Dolgoruky's launch "an important ... event for our armed forces and the entire nation." Putin often stresses in his speeches that Russia's nuclear arsenals protect the country's sovereignty and deter foreign meddling in Russian affairs.

The Dolgoruky, 170 meters long and 13.5 meters wide, will be capable of descending to a depth of 300 meters and carrying 107 sailors for 100 days without surfacing. The Interfax news agency, citing unnamed defense officials, reported April 15 that it cost 23 billion rubles (\$900 million) to build it.

## ICBM Woes

Each Borei submarine is designed to carry 12 Bulava (SS-NX-30) ICBMs, a naval analog of the Topol (SS-27) land-based missile used by the Russian strategic missile forces. Bulava missiles are expected to have an 8,000-kilometer range and carry up to 10 nuclear warheads with individual targeting.

But in four of five test launches since September 2005, the Bulavas veered off their trajectories and exploded shortly after takeoff.

Masorin told journalists in Severodvinsk the next test launch will be in June.

After the latest failed test in December, Anatoly Perminov, head of the Federal Space Agency, said

oversees work on the missile, told journalists that 12 to 14 test launches will be required before the Bulava is commissioned by the military. This may take three years, given that only two to three missiles are produced each year.

The military's launch of the Dolgoruky will put more pressure on the Moscow Institute of Technologies, which designed the Bulava and Topol, to accelerate work on the ICBM to get it deployment, said Ivan Safranchuk, an analyst at the Moscow branch of the Center for Defense Information, a U.S. think tank.

"The military just will have no choice, no one will refit the submarine's launch shafts when it is on the water," he said, referring to the fact that the Dolgoruky already has been refitted once to carry Bulava: was initially designed to carry R-39 Bark (SS-N-20 Sturgeon) missiles.

Safranchuk and Mikhail Barabanov, a naval analyst with the Center for Analysis of Strategic Technologies, a think tank here, agreed that it will be years before the Dolgoruky's systems are operational and fine-tuned. The reason, Safranchuk said, is that production cycles were hectic over years as the submarine was built, with teams of technicians and engineers changing and working on a off because of the unsteady financing.

Russia's nuclear sub fleet is second only to the U.S. fleet in size. According to the Center for Arms Control Studies, another think tank here, the Russian Navy included 12 strategic nuclear subs as of 2006. They carried 180 sea-launched ballistic missiles that can deliver 636 warheads. The vessels deployed only with the Northern Fleet in the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific Fleet. •

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