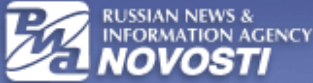


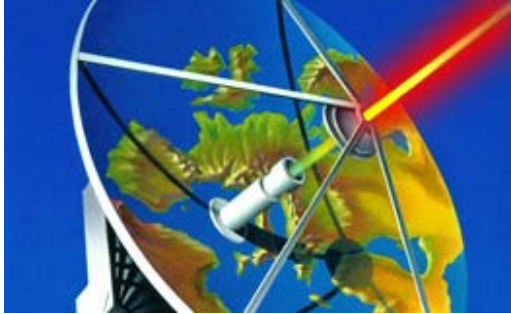
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Russia

Russia 'had laser cannons before U.S.'

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MOSCOW, May 20 (RIA Novosti) - Russia started developing tactical laser weapons before the United States and has several prototypes of high-precision combat chemical lasers in its arsenal, a defense industry source said on Tuesday.

The Boeing Company said recently it had test-fired a high-energy chemical laser fitted aboard a C-130H aircraft for the first time. The successful ground tests, "a key milestone for the Advanced Tactical Laser Advanced Concept Technology Demonstration program," took place on May 13 at the Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico.

Commenting on the announcement, the Russian expert said: "We tested a similar system back in 1972. Even then our "laser cannon" was capable of hitting targets with high precision."

"We have moved far ahead since then, and the U.S. has to keep pace with our research and development," he added.

At the same time, the source said Boeing had achieved its success in the development of military laser technology due to massive financing from the Pentagon.

"There is no doubt that the Americans are determined to continue the rapid development of tactical airborne laser weapons," he said.

Scott Fancher, vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defense Systems, said in Monday's announcement that the company will test-fire the laser in-flight at ground targets later this year.

ATL, which Boeing is developing for the U.S. Department of Defense, can "destroy damage or disable targets with little to no collateral damage, supporting missions on the battlefield and in urban operations."

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