

Biden warning: US President's terrifying hypersonic missile can hit Moscow in 20 minutes

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But a military analyst has warned the development of such high-tech weaponry brings with it the dire risk of a catastrophic miscalculation. Up to now, the perception has been that Vladimir Putin's Russia has had the edge when it comes to hypersonic weaponry.

However, the imminent test of the AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW) is a clear indication that the US is catching up.

A release issued by the US Air Force said the first booster test flight (BTF-1) was expected within the next 30 days.

The test missile was delivered to Edwards Air Force Base in California on March 1, and has been loaded on a b-52H Stratofortress bomber.

Work is now underway on pre-flight ground tests and checks to obtain certification for the flight.

Brigadier General Heath Collins, Air Force Program Executive Officer for Weapons, said: "The BTF-1 test vehicle is complete and is progressing through ground testing to verify its readiness for flight.

"The team has successfully dealt with COVID challenges and resolved technical findings not uncommon in a first-of-a-kind weapon system.

"We have minimised schedule delays while maintaining a laser focus on engineering rigour.

"Our first BTF will happen in the next 30 days, followed by several additional booster and all-up-round test flights by the end of the year."

The USAF describes the ARRW program as "a rapid prototyping project that will leverage cutting edge technologies to deliver a conventional hypersonic weapons capability to the warfighter in the early 2020s".

It "expands precision-strike weapon systems' capabilities by enabling survivable rapid response strikes against heavily defended targets".

Speaking last year, former US president Donald Trump raised eyebrows with an off-the-cuff reference to his own country's attempts to develop hypersonics.

During a presentation at the White House on Friday to unveil the new Space Force flag, Mr Trump referred to a project which may or may not have been ARRW.

He said: "We're building right now, incredible military equipment, at a level that nobody's ever seen before, we have no choice we have to do it, with the adversaries we have out there.

"We have, I call it the 'super duper missile', and I heard the other night 17 times faster than what they have right now.

"Then you take the fastest missile we have right now.

"You heard Russia has five times, and China is working on five or six times, we have one 17 times, and it's just gotten the go-ahead."

Eugene Gholz, an adjunct scholar for the US-based Cato Institute's Defense and Foreign Policy Department, subsequently told [Express.co.uk](https://www.express.co.uk): "The bottom line is that the United States is working on advanced, high-speed missiles, and President Trump wants to make sure that everyone around the world knows that the United States is not planning to cede any military-technological lead and that the United States has tremendous innovative capabilities.

Hypersonic weapons pose a major challenge to missile detection systems precisely because of the extraordinary speeds at which they travel.

Pavel Podvig, a military analyst, told Live Science website: "These systems create greater risks of strategic miscalculation and it's not clear if we can effectively deal with those risks."

Speaking in 2019, Mr Putin bragged that his country was the only country in the world to possess hypersonic missiles, which he said could be equipped with nuclear payloads.

Among the weapons in his arsenal is the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle, sometimes referred to as the Doomsday Missile, which experts believe was deployed last year.

Separately, the second prototype of Russia's Tu-22M3M supersonic bomber completed trials at hypersonic speeds during its fourth test flight last year, according to defence industry sources.