

US Air Force awards nearly \$1 bn for hypersonic missile

19 April 2018



This 2010 US Air Force file photo shows an X-51A WaveRider hypersonic flight test vehicle under the wing of a B-52 Stratofortress during testing

The US Air Force is awarding almost \$1 billion to Lockheed Martin to design and develop a hypersonic missile that can be launched from a warplane.

The contract follows repeated warnings from senior defense officials about rapid advances by China and Russia in the field of hypersonic weaponry, where missiles can fly at many times the speed of sound and dodge [missile](#)-defense systems.

In a statement late Wednesday, the Pentagon said Lockheed will receive up to \$928 million to build the new, non-nuclear missile it is calling the "hypersonic conventional strike weapon."

"This contract provides for the design, development, engineering, systems integration, test, logistics planning, and aircraft integration support of all the elements of a hypersonic, conventional, air-launched, stand-off [weapon](#)," the statement read.

On Thursday, Mike Griffin, the Pentagon's new defense undersecretary for research and engineering, said China had built "a pretty mature system" for a hypersonic missile to strike from thousands of kilometers (miles) away.

"We will, with today's defensive systems, not see these things coming," Griffin said.

Hypersonic weapons can beat regular anti-missile defenses as they are designed to switch direction in flight and do not follow a predictable arc like conventional missiles, making them much harder to track and intercept.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in February claimed to have developed a new type of hypersonic missile that is impervious to any Western shield.

Gary Pennett, director of operations at the Missile Defense Agency, recently said enemy hypersonic weapons—which could be launched from planes, ships or submarines—would create a "significant" gap in US sensor and missile interceptor capabilities.

The MDA has asked for \$120 million to develop hypersonic missile defenses, a big increase from the \$75 million in fiscal 2018.

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APA citation: US Air Force awards nearly \$1 bn for hypersonic missile (2018, April 19) retrieved 17 January 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-air-awards-bn-hypersonic-missile.html>

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