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Russian navy on combat alert as Ukraine begins missile launch drills near Crimea – reports

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Russian warships from the Black Sea Fleet reportedly took up positions off the Crimean Peninsula to provide air defense as Kiev conducted its missile launch drills near the Russian border.

Ukrainian forces conducted 16 successful launches of S-300 medium-range surface-to-air missiles during the drills, presidential spokesman Svyatoslav Tsegolko said in a Facebook post.

*“The Defense Ministry and the General Staff chief have just reported to the president on today’s drills, which were successfully completed. Sixteen Ukrainian missiles were launched. All of them have reached their targets,”* Tsegolko said.

Read more [Kiev to hold missile-firing exercise over Crimea, where civil aviation performs flights - Moscow](#)

*"We've received the first reports about the success of the launches carried out this morning," Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said in Kiev. "These latest exercises involved combat and transport aircraft, as well as divisions of anti-aircraft and radar troops."*

*"I want to emphasize that the launches are taking place in open sea over Ukrainian airspace, in full accordance with international law. The launches will go on regardless of any statement released by Moscow."*

*"The only reason that makes us conduct these exercises is the need to be consistently ready for any full-scale invasion from the side of our aggressive neighbor."*

*"The purpose of the exercise is to gain experience in using these anti-aircraft missile systems and to check the quality of the rockets, which were repaired, as well as to improve the skills of the anti-aircraft missile troop units,"* he said, as cited by TASS.

Kryzhanovsky said that there had been no response to the launches from the Russian side. He noted that the missiles will come as close as 30 kilometers to Crimean airspace. The missiles are being launched from a spot some 90 kilometers from Crimea's shores. The Ukrainian military stressed that its current exercises pose no danger to the residents of the Crimean Peninsula.

Still, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that Ukrainian missile tests near Crimea were a "*dangerous precedent*," as cited by Interfax.

Russian ships from the Black Sea Fleet have taken up positions to the west of the Crimean Peninsula to provide air defense over Russian territory, RIA Novosti news agency reports, citing sources in the military.

*"The Black Sea Fleet warships integrated in the air defense system of the Southern Military District have taken position off the west coast of Crimea for Ukraine's missile launch drills, which are scheduled for December 1st and 2nd. The ships' air defenses are in on high alert,"* the source told the agency.

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Ukraine announced that it would be conducting missile-firing exercises close to Crimea in areas used by civil and state aviation flights earlier this week, warning that they would not be safe for flights. Later, it declared that adjacent areas, partly over neutral waters and partly over Russia's territorial waters in the Black Sea to the southwest and southeast to Crimea, would also be dangerous.

The Russian aviation agency said that Kiev's drills breach a number of international laws and agreements, noting

that they had not been coordinated with Moscow.

Russia asked the authorities in Kiev to abstain from the exercises, but received no response, Russian transport minister Maksim Sokolov said today, while noting that Moscow had also requested that the International Civil Aviation Organization declare Crimean airspace a danger zone, but that also went unanswered.

There were no emergency incidents detected in the airspace over Crimea, Sokolov later said.

Earlier, the Russian Defense Ministry submitted a military-diplomatic note to the Defense Attaché at the Embassy of Ukraine, in which they protested the illegal restrictions on the use of Russian airspace imposed by Ukraine during the exercises, noting that *“the southeastern boundary of the danger area declared by the Ukraine violates the territorial sea borders of the Russian Federation, which is a violation of international law and Russian legislation.”*

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However, according to the Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, the Ukrainian government changed the boundaries of the danger zone for civil aviation in the Crimea region just ahead of the drills so that they no longer breach Russian airspace.

*“The boundaries of the danger zone for civil aviation has been shifted to the west of the Russian Federation,”* the agency’s representative told Interfax.

The Ukrainian military has a record of suffering from accidents while conducting air defense missile drills. In October of 2001, a Siberia Airlines Tu-154 en route from Tel-Aviv to Novosibirsk was accidentally brought down by a missile launched by the Ukrainian military during an exercise over the Black Sea. Seventy-eight people died in that tragedy. Kiev has also been condemned by the relatives of the victims of the [MH17 tragedy](#), in which a civilian plane was downed in the eastern part of Ukraine, for not closing the airspace over the war-torn area.

The full-scale drills are to continue on Friday, according to the Ukrainian Defense Ministry.

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