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Russia fires dummy warheads from planes, sub, silo

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MOSCOW: Russia brandished its nuclear muscle on Friday as it fired dummy warheads from its planes and a submerged submarine as well as an underground bunker in a test of their continued effectiveness.

The unusually well-coordinated show of force coincided with tensions between Moscow and Washington over space defence issues and Russia's commitment to democratic freedoms under President Vladimir Putin's third term. The Russian defence ministry and a navy officials said the Topol and R-29R rockets were fired from an underground bunker and a submerged submarine on opposite sides of the country in the northwest and Far East.

They each flew more than 6,000 kilometres (3,700 miles) in opposing directions before hitting their targets at precisely scheduled times. "The Topol's reliability assessment shows that its operations can be extended in the future," the defence ministry said in a statement. A navy official separately told Interfax new agency that the submarine test showed the missile's "high level of effectiveness."

The official added that the submarine launch was the first such conducted this year. Yet another defence ministry official later announced that two strategic bombers — which can reach any spot on earth from their home bases to drop nuclear bombs — had also conducted successful cruise missile tests.

Russian cruise missiles can also be equipped to carry nuclear warheads but travel much shorter distances and need fewer preparations to launch. The defence ministry said the Tu-160 and Tu-95 bombers each fired two cruise missiles on northern Komy Peninsula where Russia has a European nuclear test range.

This marked the successful completion of testing on Russia's "triad" — the ground as well as sea and air nuclear defences that have formed the backbone of the country's national security through the decades. Russia — the only country to test-launch intercontinental ballistic missiles — often steps up such activities at times of diplomatic tensions with the United States.

Moscow continues to oppose the new NATO-led missile defence shield for Europe and in the past year has been arguing with Washington over Russia's rights record and commitment to democratic reforms, as well as its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. afp