

Putin Flexes Muscle in Big Test of Nuclear Arsenal

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin took a leading role in the latest tests of Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal, the most comprehensive since the 1991 Soviet collapse, the Kremlin said Saturday.

The exercises, most of which were held Friday, featured prominently in state television news reports that seemed aimed to show Russians and the world that Putin is the hands-on chief of a resurgent power.

Tests involving command systems and all three components of the nuclear "triad" — land- and sea-launched long-range nuclear missiles and strategic bombers — were conducted "under the personal leadership of Vladimir Putin," the Kremlin said.

An RS-12M Topol Intercontinental Ballistic Missile was launched from the Plesetsk site, in northern Russia, and a submarine test-launched another ICBM from the Sea of Okhotsk, the Defense Ministry said.

Long-range Tu-95 and Tu-160 bombers fired four guided missiles that hit their targets on a range in the northwestern Komi region, it said.

“Exercises of the strategic nuclear forces were conducted on such a scale for the first time in the modern history of Russia,” the Kremlin statement said.

“Vladimir Putin gave a high evaluation to the combat units and crews and the work of the Armed Forces General Staff, which fulfilled the tasks before them and affirmed the reliability and effectiveness of Russia’s nuclear forces.”

The exercises included tests of communications systems and “new algorithms” for command and control, it said.

Russia says that it is modernizing a nuclear arsenal that was largely created during the Cold War and that it will continue to use nuclear weapons as a key deterrent.

In the 2010 New START treaty, Russia and the United States set lower numerical ceilings on the weapons tested in the exercise.

But Putin has made it clear that further cuts depend on, among other things, Washington’s assuaging his concerns about its missile defenses, including a European shield, which Russia says will make it more vulnerable.

Russian and American leaders say nuclear war between the Cold War rivals is now unthinkable.

But critics say Putin, who has been in power since 2000 and is back as military commander in chief since his return to the Kremlin in May after four years as prime minister, is exaggerating potential threats from the West to bolster support at home.

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