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Russia Deploys All Black Sea Submarines as NATO Kicks Off Drills

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Russia's deployment during the Romania-led "Sea Shield 21" exercises is "unprecedented," a commander said. **Sergei Malgavko / TASS**

Russia has deployed all six of its Black Sea Fleet submarines as NATO drills kicked off in the area, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported Friday.

"All Black Sea Fleet submarines are performing their tasks outside their bases," said Vice-Admiral Igor Osipov, the fleet's commander-in-chief.

"None of the submarines are at their base," RIA Novosti quoted Osipov as saying.

The commander of the Black Sea Fleet's submarine flotilla, Captain 1st Rank Anatoly Varochkin, called the deployment "unprecedented."

"This doesn't happen with either Russia's other fleets or those of foreign states," Varochkin was quoted as saying.

The deployment took place as 18 NATO warships with 10 aircraft and 2,400 troops are set to

begin Romanian-led multinational exercises dubbed "Sea Shield 21."

"Sea Shield 21" aims to enhance interoperability and cooperation between the Romanian and other NATO members' naval forces. From there, NATO's standing maritime group composed of Spanish, Turkish, Bulgarian and Romanian frigates will make port calls in Turkey and the republic of Georgia.

Russia views NATO's expansion eastward into its old Soviet sphere of influence as a key national security risk. NATO members perceive Russia's missile deployments in the country's Baltic exclave between Poland and Lithuania as a threat.

NATO, a U.S.-led alliance created during the Cold War to provide collective security against the Soviet Union, suspended relations with Russia in response to Moscow's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

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