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Russia Wields S-400 Missile Systems in Response to U.S.-Led Black Sea Drills

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Russia said Tuesday it has activated its S-400 missile systems in annexed Crimea as Ukraine and U.S.-led NATO launched a military exercise in the Black Sea.

The Navy's Black Sea Fleet said several of its S-400 batteries joined the Pantsir-S surface-to-air missile systems, as well as 20 warplanes and helicopters including Su-27 air-defense fighters, for training checks.

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"S-400 'Triumf' and Pantsir combat crews performed detections and electronic launches (without actual firing) at control targets," the military said.

"Aircraft performed the task both at a maximum distance from radar detection zones and at ultra-low altitudes, using terrain for cover and complicating the task for air defense forces."

Tensions have been running high in the Black Sea since this spring, when Russia's buildup of troops in Crimea and along Ukraine's eastern border sparked alarm from the West.

Russia’s muscle-flexing comes as Ukraine and 32 NATO members launched the two-week Sea Breeze 2021 drills on Monday involving 5,000 military personnel, 40 aircraft and 32 warships.

The Russian Defense Ministry previously said it would be closely following the exercises and act if needed to protect its national security amid a rise in tensions in the area. The Russian Embassy in the U.S. has called for the cancellation of Sea Breeze 2021.

Asked about last week’s standoff involving a British Navy destroyer sailing off the coast of Crimea, the U.S. Navy said that Sea Breeze-21 is a “long-planned” and “familiar” exercise that has carried on since 1997.

The Russian military said last week that its aircraft dropped bombs in the path of the Royal Navy’s HMS Defender and border guard ships fired warning shots after it crossed into Russian territorial waters. London denied that any warning shots were fired and said its destroyer was passing through internationally recognized waters.

Most countries do not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea.

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