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Russia Begins Major Nuclear Drills

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An Iskander missile system. **Russian Defense Ministry**

Russia's Defense Ministry announced Tuesday the start of three-day strategic nuclear exercises focused on preparing the armed forces to respond to external threats.

The May 19-21 drills, involving 64,000 military personnel and 7,800 pieces of equipment, will include the launch of ballistic and cruise missiles and take place across regions in the Leningrad and Central military districts.

Hundreds of missile launchers, as well as aircraft, ships and submarines, will also take part in the exercises, the Defense Ministry said, adding that Russia's Northern and Pacific fleets would be involved.

In a statement, the military said the main objective of the exercise is to practice the preparation and deployment of its nuclear forces under a simulated "threat of aggression."

The drill announcement comes a day after the Belarusian Defense Ministry said it launched its own nuclear weapons exercises in coordination with the Russian military.

The exercises this week coincide with a broader breakdown in international nuclear arms control. The collapse of the New START treaty in February formally removed the final remaining caps on the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.

President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have frequently engaged in nuclear saber-rattling since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in order to deter Western countries from sending military aid to Kyiv.

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