
UKRAINE LAUNCHED 16 ANTI AIRCRAFT MISSILES ON THURSDAY

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Russia has put air defence units on alert and deployed warships along the west coast of Crimea after the Ukrainian military fired surface to air missiles over the Black Sea in a show of strength military that has riled the Kremlin.

The Ukrainian military fired 16 surface to air missiles in drills in its Kherson region, which borders Crimea, as it kicked off a two-day military drill on Thursday.

The Russian government, which annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, has called the drills a dangerous precedent and initially threatened to shoot down the missile.

Air defence crews imitated combat launches of surface to air missiles at aerial targets - unmanned aerial vehicles that mimic the flight of cruise missiles, the Ukrainian defence ministry said in a statement.

Ukraine issued a warning earlier this week defining an area of the Black Sea that aircraft should avoid on Thursday and Friday.

The announcement drew condemnation from the Kremlin which accused Ukraine of stoking tensions around the disputed territory.

The Russian defence ministry said in a note handed to the Ukrainian defence attaché in Moscow that the exercise "violates the territorial sea borders of the Russian Federation" and warned it would shoot down the missiles if necessary.

Volodymyr Kryzhanovsky, a Ukrainian military official, said the exercises were taking place at least 30 km (18 miles) from Crimea's air space in accordance with international law, "therefore it would be wrong to reproach Ukraine".

Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian President, tweeted: no one will stop us. We will be acting in the interests of the people of Ukraine!"

Ukraine said the exercises were taking place at least 18 miles from Crimea's air space in accordance with international law

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Russia's air transport agency said on Thursday that Ukraine had moved the border of the test area further away, apparently reducing Russian concerns.

The drill appears to be an effort to demonstrate Ukraines recovering confidence regarding its eastern neighbour.

Russias superior military inflicted a series of humiliating defeats on Kiev in 2014 and 2015, including the annexation of Crimea and major interventions in the war in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed separatists continue to clash nearly daily in eastern Ukraine, despite a nominal ceasefire.

The Kremlin publically denies involvement in the war there.

France, which along with Germany has tried to broker a peace agreement to end the war in east Ukraine, for restraint from Moscow and Kiev.

"France is concerned about the deployment of Russian warships off Crimea's coastline," Romain Nadal, a foreign ministry spokesman told reporters in a daily briefing.

"We call on all parties to refrain from all escalation and urge dialogue to which France is ready to contribute in all possible ways."

Kaynak/Source: