

# Russian live missile fire air exercise near Alaska

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Not since 1984, just before the fall of the Soviet Union, has Russia ventured to launch dozens of nuclear bombers for an exercise in which Tu-95 Bear bombers will fire live cruise missiles. Exercise Stability 2008 will take place Oct.-6-12 over sub-Arctic Russia uncomfortably close to the US state of Alaska, and Belarus.

**DEBKAfile**'s military sources report that the exercise is part of a month-long war game described by Russian air force spokesman Col. Vladimir Drik as "practicing the strategic deployment of the armed forces including the nuclear triad."

As part of the exercise, our sources reported exclusively on Oct. 1, that Russian ships armed with nuclear missiles will dock at Syrian ports Oct. 8, on the eve of Yom Kippur, before continuing to the Caribbean for joint maneuvers with Venezuela.

More than 60,000 troops and 1,500 tanks and APCs, as well as land-based and submarine-launched nuclear missiles, were tested in the first phase of the war games.

("Nuclear triad" refers to three tiers of a national nuclear arsenal, usually strategic bombers armed with bombs or missiles, land-based missiles and ballistic missile submarines. These weapons must have a first- or second-strike capability.)

Col. Drik stressed that the Tu-95 and Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers will "carry their maximum combat payload and fire all the cruise missiles on board." Also taking part in the air force exercise are Tu-22M3 Backfire strategic bombers, air superiority fighters, interceptors and aerial tankers.

The locations of the war games were deliberately chosen to underline three messages from Moscow to Washington:

1. Russian leaders are willing to brandish their nuclear strength in America's face - to the north (Arctic) and south (Caribbean) – to challenge America's position as the world's No. 1 superpower.
2. Russia is powerful and rich enough to rise above the shockwaves rocking the world's financial markets while carrying on developing its military muscle and expanding its spheres of influence.
3. By docking at the Syrian port of Tartus, the *Peter the Great* nuclear missile cruiser is Moscow's marker on the Mediterranean to betoken the end of US Sixth Fleet's sway. Last week, the Russian Navy united its Black Sea and Mediterranean fleet commands.

Friday, Oct. 3, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, announced that

20,000 kilometers of the Russian border passes through the Arctic. Moscow therefore claims 18 percent of its territory and is preparing a plan to implement this policy.

Laying down an earlier marker, the Russian nuclear powered submarine Ryazan docked at the Kamchatka Peninsula Sept. 30, after completing a one-month voyage under the Arctic Ocean without surfacing. The Project 667BDR Delta III class strategic nuclear submarine with a crew of 130 is armed with sixteen R-29RM (SS-N-23 Skiff) ballistic missiles with a range of 8,000 km.

Russian Navy Commander Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky welcoming the Ryazan's arrival said: "The navy continues to play an important role in safeguarding Russia's maritime economic and research activity throughout the world, including in the Arctic." Laying down these markers and challenges is clearly the prelude for Moscow's presentation of political demands and an enhanced role as global player.

**DEBKAfile**'s military sources report that, for now, Russia's air and naval strength does not match America's military might. However, although Russian president Dmitry Medvedev stated emphatically last week that there is no cold war or any other war with America, Moscow's actions tell a different story.

In addition to their demonstrations of air and naval strength, the Russians have more than doubled their military spending on armaments – especially to upgrade and modernize their navy.