

Video: Russia's "Dead Hand" Command Missiles, Deterrent In The Event of a Crippling Nuclear Attack

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Global Research, January 23, 2020

[South Front](#) 22 January 2020

Region: [Russia and FSU, USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

The existing system of international relations and arms control treaties is slowly, but steadily crumbling. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is dead, with both Washington and Moscow publicly developing previously banned short-to-medium range missiles. The New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) is also moving towards its end in 2021, and it is likely that New START will not be renewed. The United States, China and Russia are developing hypersonic weapons, which are not limited by any existing arms control treaties. The major powers are preparing for a possible global conflict. The dismantlement of the system of international treaties is another factor increasing military tensions around the world.

Russia is actively working towards restoring lost Soviet capabilities and developing new strategic deterrence projects. One of them is the Dead Hand, also known as the Perimeter. This Cold War-era automatic nuclear weapons-control system is one of the most protected secrets and most important deterrence tools of the USSR and Russia.

The Dead Hand is the last line of deterrence in the event of a crippling nuclear strike. It entered into service in 1985, shortly after a major escalation in 1983, which had almost led to war between the US and the Soviet Union. It has been likened to a real-life doomsday machine. Upon activation and determination of an ongoing nuclear strike, the system sends out command missiles with special warheads that pass encrypted launch commands to all nuclear weapon carriers of the sea, air and ground components of the Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces.

https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/FPD_22_01_2020_D_Head.mp4

In peacetime conditions, the system slumbers, waiting for a turn-on command or an alarm signal from the missile attack early-warning system. It has a human "firewall," for example, an on-duty officer who would switch it into the fully automated mode. Therefore, there is no risk of an accidental or unauthorized missile launch. Having received a command or signal about missiles being launched from the territory of other countries, this Dead Hand goes into an automated combat mode. Through a wide-scale sensor network, it monitors signs of an incoming nuclear strike.

The decision to launch command missiles is made by an autonomous control and command system – a complex pseudo-artificial intelligence system. The system receives and analyzes a variety of information about seismic activity, radiation, atmospheric pressure, and the intensity of chatter on military radio frequencies. It monitors telemetry from the observation posts of the strategic missile force and data from early warning systems.

Before launching, the system reportedly checks for four conditions:

1. Once the system is activated it first determines if a nuclear explosion has taken place on Russian territory;
2. If this is determined, the system will then check the communication link with the General Staff operation center;
3. If a connection is established the system will After some time – from 15 minutes to 1 hour – passing without any further signs of an attack, it will assume that a number of the officials with the authority to give the order to strike are still alive and the system will shut down;
4. If the General Staff operation center does not respond, the system sends a request to Kazbek, the automatic system for command and control of the Strategic Nuclear Forces. If there is no response there either, the system automatically transfers launch authority to the command bunker personnel and launches the retaliatory strike.

All of the channels through which the Dead Hand receives its information are backed up multiple times, to remove the possibility of false information being fed to it.

According to openly available data, the Dead Hand is an integral part of the “Zveno” system of air command posts, the development of which was carried out in the Soviet Union. The “Zveno” includes the airborne command and control post on the Il-86VKP aircraft, airborne radio relay on the Il-76RT aircraft, silo-based command missiles ‘Perimeter’ and mobile command missiles ‘Gorn’. In a period of threat, three Il-86VKPs would have the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the Defense Minister and the Chief of the General Staff respectively on board. The Il-86VKP is able to launch an 8 km long antenna, which not even impulses from nuclear explosions can affect. Using this antenna the aircraft can transmit commands to launch all the country’s intercontinental missiles even if all underground command posts are destroyed by the aggressor’s nuclear strike. The radio relay aircraft Il-76RT would transmit commands to launch missiles in distant regions, including those deployed on submarines. In this way, the Dead Hand guarantees a devastating retaliatory strike in the event of communications disruption and the destruction of command posts after the first-strike surprise nuclear attack by the enemy. Its command missiles launch their warheads into space, where no hostile satellite or nuclear explosions can reach them and from there “wake up” nuclear forces to strike the aggressor.

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 led to a deep social and economic crisis on the territory of the former Soviet republics. The Russian Armed Forces also entered a period of crisis. In 1995, the Dead Hand was removed from combat duty. After the start of the ‘Putin era’ and the restoration of proper funding for the Russian Armed Forces in the 2000s, national security once again became one of the key priorities of the Russian leadership. In 2011, it was officially confirmed that the Dead Hand had been put on combat duty. The successful test launch of the 15Yu75 missile took place in Plesetsk in 2016. Furthermore, the Dead Hand is also being modernized. In December 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced plans to sign a contract for the new Sirena-M missile complex. The Sirena-M is the most modern variant of the “command missile system” and “command missile” for the Dead Hand. The tests of the Sirena-M missile, which is based on the first version of the Topol intercontinental ballistic missile, began in 1990. All of them were carried out successfully. The Sirena-M system will enter service in the period up to 2025.

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