

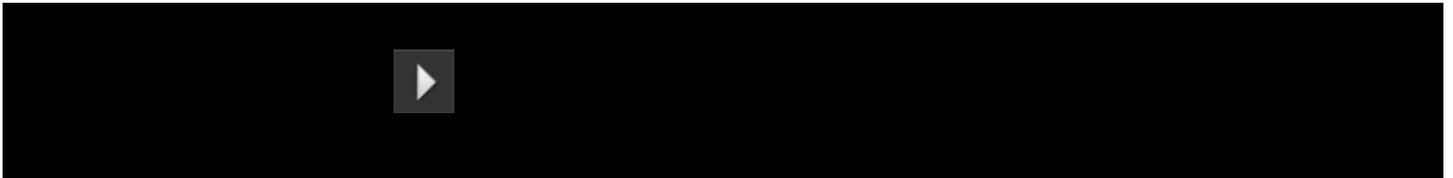
Russia Tests Super-Strength Vacuum Bomb, Military Says

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MOSCOW

Wed Sep 12, 2007 3:27pm EDT

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Wed, Sep 12 2007



A new ordnance, claimed by the Russian military the world's most powerful non-nuclear bomb, explodes in a giant fireball during a test in this undated television image shown by Russian Channel One television, September 11, 2007. Russia has tested world's most powerful vacuum bomb, which unleashes a destructive shockwave with a power of a nuclear blast and dwarfs the biggest U.S. bomb of a kind, the military said on Tuesday.

Credit: Reuters/Reuters TV

(Reuters) - Russia has tested the world's most powerful vacuum bomb, which unleashes a destructive shockwave with the power of a nuclear blast, the military said on Tuesday, dubbing it the "father of all bombs".

WORLD

The bomb is the latest in a series of new Russian weapons and policy moves as President Vladimir Putin tries to reassert Moscow's role on the international stage.

"Test results of the new airborne weapon have shown that its efficiency and power is commensurate with a nuclear weapon, " Alexander Rukshin, Russian deputy armed forces chief of staff, told Russia's state ORT First Channel television. The same report was later shown on the state-sponsored Vesti channel.

"You will now see it in action, the bomb which has no match in the world is being tested at a military site."

It showed a Tupolev Tu-160 strategic bomber dropping the bomb over a testing ground. A large explosion followed.

Pictures showed what looked like a flattened multi-storey block of flats surrounded by scorched soil and boulders. "The soil looks like a lunar landscape," the report said.

"The defense ministry stresses this military invention does not contradict a single international treaty. Russia is not unleashing a new arms race."

Such devices generally detonate in two stages. First a small blast disperses a main load of explosive material into a cloud, which then either spontaneously ignites in air or is set off by a second charge.

This explosion generates a pressure wave that reaches much further than that from a conventional explosive. The consumption of gases in the blast also generates a partial vacuum that can compound damage and injuries caused by the explosion itself.

"The main destruction is inflicted by an ultrasonic shockwave and an incredibly high temperature," the reports said. "All that is alive merely evaporates."

Rukshin said: "At the same time, I want to stress that the action of this weapon does not contaminate the environment, in contrast to a nuclear one."

"FATHER OF ALL BOMBS"

The Tu-160 supersonic bomber that dropped the bomb, widely known under its NATO nickname of "Blackjack", is the heaviest combat aircraft ever built.

Putin, who has overseen the roll-out of new tactical and anti-aircraft missiles and combat aircraft, has ordered "Blackjacks" and the Tu-95 "Bear" bombers to patrol around the world.

The report said the new bomb was much stronger than the U.S.-built Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb -- MOAB, also known under its name "Mother of All Bombs". "So, Russian designers called the new weapon 'Father of All Bombs'," it said.

Showing the orange-painted U.S. prototype, the report said the Russian bomb was four times more powerful -- 44 metric tons of TNT equivalent -- and the temperature at the epicenter of its blast was two times higher.

In 1999 Russian generals threatened to use vacuum bombs to wipe out rebels from the mountains during the "anti-terrorist operation" in its restive Chechnya province.

New York-based Human Rights Watch then appealed to Putin to refrain from using fuel-air explosives. It remains unclear if weapons of this type were used during the Chechen war.

U.S. forces have used a "thermobaric" bomb, which works on similar principles, in their campaign against al Qaeda and Taliban forces in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan.

"It (the bomb) will allow us to safeguard our state's security and fight international terrorism in any circumstances and in any part of the world," Rukshin said. **End**