

NATO Plans Major East European Exercise, Reassures Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BRUNSSUM, The Netherlands — After years of fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, NATO is planning a major exercise in Eastern Europe in November to brush up its conventional warfare skills, but insists it is not practicing with Cold War foe Russia in mind.

Exercise "Steadfast Jazz" in Latvia and Poland from Nov. 2 to 9 shows the 28-nation alliance refocusing on its core task of defending its own territory as it winds down its long combat mission in Afghanistan.

"For the past 10 to 12 years we have become incredibly proficient at the counter-insurgency mission that we have been fighting in Afghanistan," NATO's military commander, U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, told a news conference.

If NATO were ever called on to defend an alliance member, "we have to be prepared for the more high-end of military operations," he said, speaking at a NATO headquarters

at Brunssum in the Netherlands on Wednesday.

The exercise calls for NATO forces to oust an invader. Breedlove denied it was aimed at repelling a hypothetical Russian invasion.

The exercise, designed to test NATO's rapid response force, will involve about 6,000 military personnel from about 20 allied and partner nations and includes air, land, naval and special forces. Multinational troops will take part in a live-fire exercise in Poland, the largest of its kind organized by NATO since 2006, NATO officials say.

The exercise will also involve a "sizable cyber threat," said French Major-General Michel Yakovleff, deputy chief of staff for plans at Brunssum, with nations coming under a staged cyber attack.

As the alliance prepares to end combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of next year, it plans to step up training and exercises to maintain the high level of integration that NATO armies have achieved through fighting alongside each other.

Although the days of the Cold War when huge NATO and Soviet forces confronted each other are long gone, Russia fought a brief war in 2008 over two breakaway regions with Georgia, which harbors ambitions of joining NATO.

U.S.-Russian relations are going through a chilly patch over Moscow's decision in August to grant temporary asylum to former U.S. intelligence leaker Edward Snowden and over the Syrian civil war, although both sides struck a deal last Saturday to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.

Europe and Russia are vying for influence in Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, which will send an amphibious company to take part in the NATO exercise.

President Vladimir Putin stresses the importance of a strong military. Russia and Belarus are planning a joint military exercise, known as Zapad, this month.

NATO commanders prefer to stress cooperation with Russia.

"In the interests of transparency and confidence-building, we have invited Russian military officers to visit 'Exercise Steadfast Jazz' as observers and I am pleased to say the Russians have ... invited NATO officials to observe 'Exercise Zapad' which starts later this week," Breedlove said.

He said NATO and Russia would hold a joint exercise later this month to practice working together on tracking and responding to an aircraft hijacked by "terrorists." The alliance also is planning a joint submarine search and rescue exercise with Russia in 2014, he said.

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