

Putin Orders Forces in Russia's East on Combat Drill

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President Vladimir Putin on Thursday ordered military forces in the country's east to carry out a major exercise to test their preparedness.

This is a second major drill of combat readiness since June when the conflict in eastern Ukraine was already raging. That drill in the Volga region and the Urals involved 65,000 troops. In May, Russia and China held a joint naval exercise in the East China Sea.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on state television on Thursday that the "combat alert" in the eastern military district, which encompasses eastern territories including those bordering on China and Japan, was issued at 10 a.m. Moscow time.

Russia news agencies later quoted Shoigu as saying that the seven-day drill will test the defense of Russia's sea border. As part of the exercise, Russia's Pacific fleet will repel the enemy's naval attack.

Putin on Wednesday accused the West of using the Ukraine crisis to reinvigorate NATO,

and said Moscow will ponder a response to the alliance's decision to create a rapid-reaction "spearhead" force to protect Eastern Europe.

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323