

Azerbaijan confirms participation in military drills in Georgia

By [Global Research](#)

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Azerbaijani troops will take part in controversial NATO military exercises in Georgia, the defense ministry said in a press release.

The Cooperative Longbow/Cooperative Lancer 2009 exercises have been slammed by Russia despite reassurances from NATO that they will not involve feature light or heavy weaponry. Some 1,300 troops from 19 NATO countries and its partners are expected to participate, although Serbia, Moldova and Kazakhstan have withdrawn.

Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said “NATO’s plans to hold exercises in Georgia...are an open provocation. Exercises must not be held there where a war has been fought,” and warned that the exercises could have negative consequences for those who made the decision to hold them.

The announcement follows a meeting on Wednesday in Brussels between the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

Aliyev stressed Azerbaijan’s commitment to NATO-Azerbaijan relations and the country’s active participation in the Individual Partnership Action Plan.

The row between Russia and the military alliance intensified on Thursday following the expulsion of two Russian diplomats to NATO over spying claims and the signing of a border protection agreement between Russia and Georgia’s former republic’s of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Russia recognized the two former republics as independent states following a brief war with Tbilisi over South Ossetia.

The two Russian diplomats, one of whom is the son of Russia’s EU envoy Vladimir Chizhov, were expelled in connection with a spy scandal involving an Estonian official, Herman Simm, who was jailed for 12 years for handing over secret documents to Russian intelligence operatives.

Russia’s foreign ministry called the move “scandalous” and added “Naturally, we will draw our own conclusions about this provocation.”

And in a ceremony at the Kremlin on Thursday Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a joint border-protection agreement with the two former republics.

NATO responded to the signing saying that the agreements were a “clear contravention” of

a French-brokered ceasefire deal.

And U.S. State Department spokesman Robert Wood said: "This action contravenes Russia's commitments under the Aug. 12 cease-fire agreement brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy."

Russia expressed its surprise to the reaction with Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko saying in a statement: "It is a surprising point to make as Russia has not signed any truce agreements with anyone in that region."

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