

CSTO rapid-reaction force to hold exercises in Kazakhstan in fall

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The joint rapid-reaction forces of a post-Soviet regional security bloc will hold military exercises in September in Kazakhstan, the Russian defense minister said on Tuesday.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which comprises Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, agreed in early February to set up the rapid-reaction force.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said later on Tuesday that the force should be well-organized and equipped to counter a variety of threats.

“These are units that we should be able to rely on in dealing with the most difficult problems, including terrorist and military threats,” he said.

The Russian president also said the CSTO was open for cooperation with the United States in the fight against terrorism in Central Asia.

The rapid-reaction force, which Medvedev has said “will be just as good as comparable NATO forces,” will be used to repulse military aggression, conduct anti-terrorist operations, fight transnational crime and drug trafficking, and neutralize the effects of natural disasters.

Moscow has stressed that collective forces will not interfere in the domestic conflicts of the bloc’s member countries.

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