

# Daunting Crisis in East-West Relations: U.S., NATO Intensify War Games Around Russia's Perimeter

By [Rick Rozoff](#)

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Along with plans to base anti-ballistic missile facilities in Poland near Russia's border (a 35 mile distance) and in Bulgaria and Romania across the Black Sea from Russia, Washington and the self-styled global military bloc it leads, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, have arranged a series of military exercises on and near Russia's borders this year.

While the White House, Pentagon and State Department pro forma identify al-Qaeda, Taliban, Iran, North Korea, climate change, cyber attacks and a host of other threats as those the U.S. is girding itself to combat, Washington is demonstrating its true strategic objectives by deploying interceptor missiles and staging war games along Russia's western and southern borders.

200 U.S. Marines participated in the recently concluded Cold Response 2010 NATO military exercise as part of a 14,000-troop force training for "cold weather amphibious operations, interoperability of expeditionary forces, and special and conventional ground operations" in Norway and Sweden. [1] It was the fourth such military training held in Norway since 2006 and the first to be held exclusively in the Arctic Circle.

The American troops engaged "in tactical exercises at various unit levels, ultimately culminating in a bilateral, brigade-sized beach assault" [2].

The NATO war games included troops from 15 nations, among them - in addition to the U.S. - Britain, Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Austria, Finland and Sweden are Partnership for Peace affiliates of the North Atlantic military bloc.

The drills occurred "entirely north of the Arctic Circle and...emphasize[d] individual and unit cold weather capabilities."

Britain supplied its Amphibious Task Group and 2,000 marines, sailors and soldiers. Royal Marines were in Norway since January along with American and Dutch counterparts "learning how to survive and fight in extreme weather and terrain." [3]

A newspaper from the United Kingdom remarked that "The training prepares them [British combat troops] for their next deployment" and "if you can fight there, you can fight anywhere." [4]

"The exercise is vital in ensuring that the Royal Navy maintains its traditional sea-fighting capability whilst undertaking amphibious warfare in a cold weather environment." [5]

Marines and other service members from the U.S., Britain, Germany and fellow NATO and NATO partner states did not train for Arctic warfare to deploy to Afghanistan or the Gulf of Aden.

Cold Response 2010, in which U.S. Marines were involved for the first time in four years, ended on March 4. Less than two weeks afterward, from March 17-20, NATO warplanes will conduct exercises in the Baltic Sea region over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. All three nations border Russia's mainland or its Kaliningrad territory.

The drills will include "French Mirage 2000, Polish F-16, and Lithuanian L-39 Albatross fighters, along with U.S. aerial tankers." [6]

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Dillschneider, spokesman for the Allied Air Headquarters in Ramstein, Germany, described the purpose of the upcoming air exercises near Russia's northwestern border as "to demonstrate solidarity with NATO's Baltic members." [7]

Recently, as NATO repeatedly defines itself as global and expeditionary, currently waging the largest and longest war in the world in Afghanistan, it has also increasingly emphasized its "core mission" to respond militarily to alleged threats to member states under its Article 5 "collective defense" provision.

There can be no doubt as to which nation the Alliance and its American leader are sending a signal to by deploying warplanes to the Baltic region in less than two weeks. It is the same country that NATO has been flying continuous patrols over the area against for the past six years. The same one that the West had it mind when it assigned 14,000 troops for war games in the Arctic Circle earlier this month.

Overlapping with NATO's military exercises in Russia's far northwestern neighbor of Norway, the U.S. dispatched the guided missile destroyer USS John L. Hall to Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti for a seven-day stay starting on February 25.

Poti is nineteen miles from Abkhazia, which America's Georgian client Mikheil Saakashvili is anxious to employ his army - financed, trained and armed by the U.S. - to subdue despite the presence of Russian troops there.

The American ship and its crew were engaged in joint exercises with the Georgian navy and coast guard.

"However, the main task of the American vessel in the Black Sea was not the practice of Georgian-American interaction on the sea, but in tracking the drills of the Black Sea fleet," a Russian Navy source said on March 3. A dozen Russian ships had staged "an amphibious landing of troops on the coast of Abkhazia" on February 27 as the U.S. destroyer monitored the action from a few miles down the Black Sea coast. [8]

On March 1 new U.S. ambassador to Georgia John Bass presided over the launching of the fourth radar installation on the nation's Black Sea shore constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

On February 22 U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke arrived in Georgia after visiting the former Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to expand American and NATO military equipment transport,

troop transit, overflights and other logistics for the deepening war in Afghanistan.

Speaking of Kyrgyzstan, “Holbrooke said that the United States would soon renew an agreement to use the Manas airbase, where he said 35,000 US troops were transiting each month on their way in and out of Afghanistan.” [9] That is, 420,000 American soldiers a year at that rate.

While in Georgia, Holbrooke met with Saakashvili and Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia and all three attended what was characterized in the local press as a demonstration training operation at the Krtsanisi National Training Center for U.S.-trained troops headed to the Afghan war front. The Georgian military site has been home to U.S. Marine Corps and Green Beret instructors since 2002. The Georgian armed forces are Washington’s proxy army in the South Caucasus and have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan under U.S. command.

They are also the force that assaulted South Ossetia in August of 2008 and were bested by Russia in a five-day war that resulted from that action.

After his inspection Holbrooke said: “Today I had the honor to take a view of the demonstration exercise on the ground and to meet with soldiers with whom I had some useful talks. I was given the opportunity as well to see US instructors being actively involved in the training process. On my arrival in Washington I will report about it to the United States’ president, Secretary of State and my colleagues.” [10]

Veteran Indian analyst and former career diplomat M K Bhadrakumar wrote of the civilian point man for America’s South Asian war that “Holbrooke insisted his visit ‘had nothing to do with Georgian-Russian relations,’ but the reality is that Washington hopes to incorporate Georgia as a vital link in the proposed NATO supply chain leading to Afghanistan from Europe, which will bypass Russian territory. Clearly, NATO is gearing up to cross over from the Balkans, across the Black Sea, to the Caucasus in an historic journey that will take it to Central Asia via Afghanistan.” [11]

American author Edward Herman recently presented a similar perspective in pointing out that since the end of the Cold War “Across the globe...U.S. military bases are expanding, not contracting. The encirclement of Russia and steady stream of war games and exercises in the Baltic, Caspian, Mediterranean and Western Pacific areas continue, the closer engagement with Georgia and effort to bring it into NATO moves ahead, as do plans for the placement of missiles along Russia’s borders and beyond.” [12]

Journalist Eric Walberg followed suit in his March 2 article “Georgia vs Russia: Fanning the flames,” in which he stated: “With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world expected a new era of peace and disarmament. But what happened? Instead of diminishing, US and NATO presence throughout Europe, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Central Asia rapidly increased, and the world experienced one war after another – in the Caucasus, Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan, each one hotter and more horrible than the last.” [13]

On March 5 military exercises began in Poland with “400 Polish soldiers and scores of U.S. Army soldiers” in what had as its immediate objective training the host country’s troops to “cooperate with their American superiors in East Afghanistan.” [14]

On February 27 Polish President Lech Kaczynski ratified a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S. to permit the deployment of 100 soldiers to run a Patriot missile base

near the Baltic city of Morag.

NATO recently inaugurated a Joint Forces Training Center in the Polish city of Bydgoszcz.

The March 17-20 NATO air maneuvers over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are “the first in a series of military drills to be held this year near the Russian border.”

In June 500 U.S. Marines and Estonian troops will participate in ten days of exercises in northern Estonia, “a hundred kilometers from the Russian border.” [15]

Later in the year NATO will conduct war games in the Baltic Sea region with “over 2,000 personnel from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the U.S.” The exercises will be “the largest since the three Baltic countries joined the alliance....” [16]

A Russian source commented on the above developments by reminding its readers that NATO “will draw a record number of soldiers to Russia’s borders....” [17]

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Finland on March 4 to preside over the bloc’s first new Strategic Concept seminar held in a non-NATO country, co-hosted by the host country and Sweden, both formerly nominal neutral nations.

Rasmussen said “that Afghanistan, where Finland and Sweden have soldiers serving under NATO’s peacekeeping operation, was a model example of NATO’s regional defence starting far from the alliance’s borders.” [18]

Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb said in his introductory remarks that one of his country’s members of parliament “once described Nato as Finland’s secret lover or mistress. I would rather argue that our partnership with Nato is like ‘common-law marriage.’ We have been committed and reliable partners for a long time, almost two decades.” [19]

When NATO fully incorporates Finland it will acquire “237,000 troops, beefed up with the latest infantry weapons and heavy armor” [20] along a 1,300-kilometer border with Russia. [21]

American and other NATO member states’ troops, warplanes and warships are visiting Russia’s neighborhood more frequently and approaching its borders more precariously. Over the past five years the Pentagon and NATO have secured permanent air, naval and training bases in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania and interceptor missile sites in the first three nations.

As Indian journalist M K Bhadrakumar remarked, NATO’s post-Cold War drive to the east began in the Balkans and has proceeded inexorably to the Black Sea, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan. It has also turned the Baltic Sea into a U.S. and Alliance lake, with Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden within the Western military phalanx – all have troops in Afghanistan under NATO command, for example – and Russia left alone in the region.

That trajectory – from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Central Asia – places U.S. and NATO military presence along a substantial portion of the land borders of European Russia.

## Notes

- 1) United States European Command, February 24, 2010
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Arbroath Herald, February 26, 2010
- 4) Ibid
- 5) United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, March 2, 2010
- 6) Russian Information Agency Novosti, March 4, 2010
- 7) Associated Press, March 2, 2010
- 8) Russian Information Agency Novosti, March 3, 2010
- 9) Agence France-Presse, March 4, 2010
- 10) Georgia Times, February 23, 2010
- 11) Asia Times, March 1, 2010
- 12) Z Magazine, March 2010
- 13) Global Research, March 2, 2010
- 14) Xinhua News Agency, March 5, 2010
- 15) Russian Information Agency Novosti, March 4, 2010
- 16) Ibid
- 17) Russia Today, March 1, 2010
- 18) Agence France-Presse, March 3, 2010
- 19) Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, March 4, 2010
- 20) Strategy Page, June 29, 2009
- 21) Afghan War: NATO Trains Finland, Sweden For Conflict With Russia  
Stop NATO, July 26, 2009

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