

NATO Military Buildup on Russia's Doorstep: Who Is Doing the Saber-Rattling in Eastern Europe?

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Last week, NATO headquarters [announced](#) Exercise Swift Response-15, the largest Allied airborne training event on the European continent since the end of the Cold War. About 5,000 soldiers from 11 countries in the alliance will take part in the maneuvers, which will last until Sept. 13.

This is neither the first nor the last drill to be conducted by NATO, the largest military alliance in the world.

Over the past year and a half, NATO armed forces have almost doubled the number of military exercises they have staged near the Russian border: between 2012 and 2013 they conducted an average of 95 such training events per year, but there have already been 150 so far in 2015, and flights by reconnaissance aircraft along the Russian frontier have increased tenfold.

But in an attempt to unfairly place the blame on Russia for such exercises, the London-based European Leadership Network [issued](#) a report on Aug. 12 that uses a flawed methodology to compare one type of exercise held in Russia in 2015 with another kind of military drill organized by NATO this year. Criticism was only leveled at the large number of troops involved in the Russian exercise, because the alliance's drill was smaller on that scale. The report's purpose was obvious: to shift the entirety of the West's own culpability for war preparations in Europe onto the Russians.

- First of all, it makes no sense to compare only two military drills conducted by opposing sides; one needs to take into account all the exercises that are being held, including the sum total of their scope and focus (the scenarios being rehearsed). In this regard, it should be noted that the aggregate number of NATO personnel taking part in the alliance's military maneuvers is significantly greater than the estimate of troops involved in the Russian military exercises.
- Second, in regard to this matter, one must also acknowledge that it was not Russia who initiated this upsurge in military drills. The US and its closest NATO allies took that first step under contrived pretenses. For this reason, the European Leadership Network's proposals to limit the number and scope of military exercises in Europe should be primarily directed at Washington and the alliance, not at Russia.
- Third, one cannot overlook the fact that many NATO members (the US, UK, France, Germany, and others) conduct their military drills far from their own borders. The Russian armed forces almost always oversee this training within their own country.

- Fourth, it should be noted that in addition to periodic military maneuvers, a special NATO Response Force has been created that will consist of up to 40,000 soldiers who can be quickly airlifted to wherever they need to be. In addition, the US Navy must now be able to instantly mobilize the resources to form “expeditionary forces” that can be rapidly deployed to any part of the world (for example, as part of a Marine brigade including up to 17 amphibious ships or a joint Marine Air-Ground Task Force with as many as 75,000 personnel). For comparison, a recent NATO Baltops naval exercise in the seas around northwestern Europe involved 49 warships and support vessels from 17 countries within the alliance.
- Fifth, it is important to note that while NATO has 24,000 combat aircraft and 800 ocean-going ships at its disposal, Russia does not own nearly so much equipment of that type. What’s more, the Pentagon is planning a further expansion of the forward deployment of its armed forces. That would station US troops, on a permanent or temporary basis, within more than 100 nations. There are plans to begin prepositioning weapons and military equipment in these countries, as is “needed to equip troops fighting in forward combat zones.”
- Sixth, during these military drills, the Pentagon is rehearsing scenarios for armed intervention intended to overthrow undesirable regimes. For example, throughout the post-war period, the United States and its allies have employed military force more than 50 times, and six times that has escalated into regional armed conflicts.



A Polish Air Force MIG-29 fighter (top) and Italian Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon fighters participate during a NATO air policing mission patrol over the Baltics from the Zokniai air base near Siauliai February 10, 2015. REUTERS/Ints Kalnins

Even NATO’s leaders have acknowledged the alliance’s military buildup on Russia’s doorstep. [According to](#) NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, in 2014 these numbers have quintupled since 2013. And NATO member states’ naval operations have increased fourfold during this period.

In particular, the air forces of the 15 NATO countries that take part in the Baltic Air Policing operation over the Baltic states ramped up their activities more than 1240 times (when calculated in flying hours) since it was launched 11 years ago. This operation is underway 24/7, year-round. Four of the types of planes used in this drill are considered “dual-capable” aircraft that can carry either conventional or tactical nuclear weapons.

At the same time the United States is refusing to adopt the new Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), proposing to revive the [former act](#), which also never went into effect through the fault of its NATO signatories. New talks on CFE-2 have not even begun. At the same time, eight additional military bases in Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as seven command and administrative centers, plus American heavy weaponry and AEW&C aircraft have been added to the 150 military bases belonging to the United States

and its allies that are immediately adjacent or relatively close to Russia's borders.

Without exception, every military exercise that the alliance has recently staged in Europe has had very focused objectives. They are rehearsing scenarios that test the use of the Rapid Reaction Force, which includes the transportation of personnel and heavy equipment over long distances, the interaction between different varieties and formats of armed forces, and the operational "coupling" between the command and control structures. There is no doubt that such exercises have an anti-Russian bias, mainly because, as already noted, they are primarily (up to 55%) conducted in zones adjacent to the Russian borders. For example, an exercise that included 140 armored vehicles and 1,400 troops near the Estonian city of Narva in February of this year was held only 300 meters away from the Russian border.

In mid-February of this year the Pentagon shipped twelve A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft to Spangdahlem Air Base (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany), which will be deployed in Eastern Europe. [There is no doubt](#) about the identity of the potential enemy. Eight of these aircraft were flown to the Ämari Air Base (Estonia) in June of this year. And five USAF B-52H and B-2 strategic heavy bombers were sent to RAF Fairford in Great Britain to participate in NATO military exercises.

In March of this year NATO organized the Joint Viking military exercises in northern Norway near the Russian border, which was an event unprecedented since 1990. Over 5,000 troops and 400 units of military equipment were involved. During these drills, the naval and air forces of the region's NATO countries were placed on alert. The last time a similar drill was conducted was in 1967.

In March and April of 2015 the US, Swedish, and Finnish air forces directed military maneuvers near the Finnish town of Pori, flying sorties with Gripen, F-16, and Hornet fighter jets. In May, the air forces from eight NATO member states staged the Arctic Challenge Exercise in Norway, which included more than 100 aircraft. In early May of this year major military drills known as Siil-2015 were held in Estonia, involving 13,000 troops. This was the first time such large-scale drills had been conducted inside Estonia.

The Pentagon is planning to set up warehouses of military equipment in NATO's eastern flank in order to conduct "ongoing exercises on a rotational basis." For these purposes, 1,200 armored vehicles, including 250 Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles, as well as artillery systems, are to be stockpiled in Eastern Europe. US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter claims that Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland have already agreed to house this military equipment within their borders. Some types of weaponry can also be stationed in Germany, where, just like after WWII, large numbers of American troops are already concentrated.

In light of the increased [US military aid to the regime in Kiev](#) that will be used in the [genocide](#) of Ukrainian citizens, these military preparations are taking on a plainly anti-Russian flavor.

Nor can we ignore America's tactical nuclear weapons, which since the early 1950s have been deployed in four European countries (Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany), as well as the Asian part of Turkey. Furthermore, a US missile defense system will be installed in Romania in 2015, and then another three years later in Poland. These military forces and infrastructures are certainly not aimed at Iran. So how should Russians react to all of this, and who is actually rattling his saber in Eastern Europe?

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