

Russia accuses US and NATO of Interference In Georgia

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, April 14, 2009

RIA Novosti 14 April 2009

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Russia's NATO envoy accuses alliance of interference in Georgia

14/04/2009 15:25 BRUSSELS, April 14 (RIA Novosti) - Russia's NATO envoy claimed on Tuesday that plans by the alliance to hold military exercises in the former Soviet republic were an attempt at interference in Georgia's internal affairs.

The Cooperative Longbow/Lancer - 2009 drills are due to take place at Georgia's Vaziani military base from May 3 through June 3. Some 900 service personnel from 23 NATO member nations and the alliance's partners are to take part in the drills, to be held under NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

"NATO is trying to interfere in Georgia's affairs in this way," Dmitry Rogozin told RIA Novosti, adding that the exercises were an expression of support for beleaguered Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, and "a challenge" to the newly independent South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He also claimed that Russia would be forced to react.

The envoy also said that any attempt to encourage "the Saakashvili regime" showed gross disregard towards those people "sacrificed on the altar of his Napoleonic ambitions."

Opposition protests calling for the resignation of the Georgian president entered their sixth day on Tuesday, as Saakashvili faced the toughest challenge yet to his leadership. The U.S.-educated leader has seen his popularity slump following last summer's disastrous war with Russia, which resulted in the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He has also come under criticism for his failure to carry out promised democratic reforms.

The NATO exercises, aimed at improving interoperability between multinational troops, are to be divided into two parts. Cooperative Longbow will feature staff training, and Cooperative Lancer will be devoted to field drills.

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