

Russia, Venezuela to hold naval war games

First war games for Russia in South America

By [Vladimir Radyuhin](#)

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Russia and Venezuela will hold joint naval war games in what could be a Russian response to a NATO naval build-up in the Black Sea.

Four warships and 1,000 marines from Russia's Pacific Fleet would take part in joint manoeuvres with the Venezuelan Navy on November 10-14, Russian news agencies reported quoting the Venezuelan naval command. It would be for the first time the Russian Navy would participate in war games in South America.

Russian warships would be visiting Venezuela "to take part in naval training and to strengthen friendly ties between the two countries," said the Venezuelan Navy on Sunday.

The announcement came as relations between Russia and the U.S. plunged to the lowest ebb since the end of the Cold War over Russia's routing of Georgia, the main ally of the U.S. in the former Soviet Union, in a brief but fierce armed conflict last month.

Russia-NATO face-off

Seven U.S. and other NATO warships, including the USS Mount Whitney, command warship from the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet, have since entered the Black Sea with the declared purpose of delivering humanitarian aid to Georgia. Russia said the ships brought military cargoes to rebuild Georgia's shattered armed forces.

Russia said NATO's naval presence in the Black Sea heightened tension in the region.

"I wonder how they would feel if we dispatched humanitarian aid to the tornado-hit Caribbean using our navy," President Dmitry Medvedev asked.

Russia recently sold 24 advanced multi-role Su-30MK2 fighter planes to Venezuela, similar to those acquired by India, as well as dozens of helicopters, and other weapons. Washington bitterly protested the deals.

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has backed Russia in its conflict with Georgia.

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