

Russian Paratroopers Stage War Games Simulating NATO Attack

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More than 1,000 paratroopers dropped down near St. Petersburg, as Russia wraps up three weeks of war games simulating a NATO attack.

Russia, together with ally Belarus, is conducting land, air and sea maneuvers dubbed “West 2009” to test command coordination in the event of an invasion from Poland and the Baltic states, state broadcaster Vesti-24 reported today.

Parallel war games took place at nine Russian sites under the code name “Ladoga 2009,” after the lake that separates Russia from Estonia. Vesti showed soldiers warding off imaginary enemies in pouring rain and under the cover of night.

“The purpose of the exercises is to prepare the Belarusian and Russian armed forces for securing the strategic stability of the eastern European region,” the Russian Defense Ministry said on its Web site as the war games started on Sept. 8.

More than 12,500 servicemen, 100 aircraft and 470 armored vehicles and artillery pieces are taking part in the “exclusively defensive” maneuvers, which end on Sept. 29, according to the ministry.

Russia, which was invaded three times from the west in the last 200 years, has seen former communist allies in eastern Europe join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Relations with the alliance reached a low last year after Russia went to war with Georgia and President Dmitry Medvedev said it has “privileged interests” in surrounding countries.

U.S. President Barack Obama came to office this year pledging to “reset” relations with Russia. He canceled plans to station a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic earlier this month, removing a long-standing irritant in relations with Moscow.

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