

Venezuela to host Russia navy exercise in Caribbean

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Caracas. Several Russian ships and 1,000 soldiers will take part in joint naval maneuvers with Venezuela in the Caribbean Sea later this year, exercises likely to increase diplomatic tensions with Washington, a pro-government newspaper reported on Saturday, as cited by Reuters.

Quoting Venezuela's naval intelligence director, Salbarore Cammarata, the newspaper *Vea* said four Russian boats would visit Venezuelan waters from November 10 to 14.

Plans for the naval operations come at a time of heightened diplomatic tension and Cold War-style rhetoric between Moscow and the United States over the recent war in Georgia and plans for a U.S. missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland.

Cammarata said it would be the first time Russia's navy carried out such exercises in Latin America. He said the Venezuelan air force would also take part.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, an outspoken critic of Washington, has said in recent weeks that Russian ships and planes are welcome to visit the South American country.

"If the Russian long-distance planes that fly around the world need to land at some Venezuelan landing strip, they are welcome, we have no problems," he said on his weekly television show last week.

Chavez, who buys billions of dollars of weapons from Russia, has criticized this year's reactivation of the U.S. Navy's Fourth Fleet, which will patrol Latin America for the first time in over 50 years.

The socialist Chavez says he fears the United States will invade oil-rich Venezuela and he supports Russia's growing geopolitical presence as a counterbalance to U.S. power.

Chavez has bought fighter jets and submarines from Russia to retool Venezuela's aging weapons and says he is also interested in a missile defense system

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