

Russia and Belarus Hold Joint War Games

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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MINSK, Belarus — President Vladimir Putin and his Belarussian counterpart have watched a massive joint military exercise of the two ex-Soviet neighbors that involved more than 22,000 troops.

The West 2013 exercise, conducted Thursday near the city of Grodno in western Belarus and in Russia's westernmost Kaliningrad region, also involved more than 500 armored vehicles and about 90 aircraft along with ships from Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

Russia and Belarus are allies and have close economic, political and military ties. Russia has several military facilities in Belarus, and the two nations operate a joint air defense system.

The two armies have regularly conducted joint maneuvers, Thursday's exercise being the biggest so far.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko attended the exercise along with his nine-year-old son, who donned full combat fatigues.

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