

Russia's Military Shows Its Might to Europeans

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More than 20 years after the end of the Cold War, one might have thought that Russia no longer viewed the West as its primary military target. Alas, this is not the case. While Russia's recent military exercises in Eastern Europe have gone largely unnoticed, they reveal that Russia still sees the West as a threat.

Russia's Zapad-2013 military exercises, held jointly with Belarus, took place in September. In theory, the exercises were a counterterrorism operation targeting "illegal armed groups." In practice, they were oriented toward fighting a large-scale war against conventional armies in Europe. And the language that Russia used toward NATO in the buildup to the exercises was highly charged. NATO, it was said, is an enemy because of its pursuit of a ballistic missile defense system and its continuing expansion.

Compared to Russia's previous military exercises — such as Zapad-2009, which envisaged three NATO-like brigades invading western Russia and culminated with a simulated nuclear

strike on Warsaw, — the Zapad-2013 exercises demonstrated a significant improvement in Russia's ability to mobilize and deploy its armed forces.

It is likely that this improvement will continue. Russia's military budget increased by 26 percent this year, and Russia plans to spend \$755 billion over the next decade increasing its technological capabilities.

Zapad-2013 should not be seen in isolation. Last month, five Russian warplanes staged simulated bombing attacks on Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. In April, meanwhile, two Russian Tu-22M3 bombers simulated an aerial assault on two military targets in Sweden, one of which was near the country's capital Stockholm. These developments point to an emboldened and increasingly confident Russia reasserting its global presence through hard power.

While Russia's military leaders openly claim that the country is surrounded by enemies who seek to destroy it, the Kremlin has threatened the independence and sovereignty of Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia over recent months.

European security cannot be taken for granted. NATO's own military exercises in Eastern Europe in early November, which were their largest live-fire exercises in seven years, help give the continent a sense of security.

A generation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the specter of Russia's military is again haunting Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. It should be a matter of grave concern in Western capitals.

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