

# U.S.-Polish War Games Start but Bad Weather Delays Naval Drills

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Poland's President Bronislaw Komorowski addressing Polish and U.S. air force men at Lask airbase Tuesday.

LASK AIR BASE, Poland — The U.S. and Poland began war games on Tuesday as Washington makes a gesture of support for its eastern NATO allies after Russia's intervention in Ukraine, but bad weather delayed naval maneuvers with Romania and Bulgaria.

Without naming neighboring Ukraine, Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski called on his country's political parties to safeguard defense spending at a time of budget constraints due to the "events to the east."

The U.S. says both the air drills in Poland and its joint naval exercises in the Black Sea were planned before the crisis in Ukraine. But they send a message of resolve to NATO members nervous about Russia's intentions in its former Cold War backyard, along with separate reconnaissance flights over Poland and Romania near the Ukrainian border.

Romania's Defense Ministry said a NATO E-3A airborne early warning and control, or AWACS, plane would fly through Romanian airspace on Tuesday. The aircraft will fly out of Germany and Britain.

At the Lask base in central Poland, Komorowski watched as four Polish F-16 fighter jets took to the air. A U.S. Hercules transport plane landed with support staff, and at least 12 U.S. F-16s and 300 personnel are due to arrive by Thursday for the exercises, beefed up at Warsaw's request after Russian forces seized control of Crimea.

Flanked by a handful of U.S. soldiers, Komorowski stressed the need to maintain defense spending in Poland, a staunch U.S. ally still haunted by decades of Russian domination during the Cold War. "I hope events to the east of the Polish border, which is also NATO's border, will encourage tough decisions regarding Polish security," he told reporters.

To the south, strong winds and high seas put back the Black Sea exercises by 24 hours, the Bulgarian Defense Ministry said. "The weather is now improving, the sea is not that rough and I do not expect another postponement," said Lieutenant-Colonel Dimitar Titev.

The USS Truxtun, a guided-missile destroyer with about 300 crew, had been due to join the drill in international waters southeast of the Romanian port of Constanta, some 350 kilometers from Russian forces in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.

The exercises underline Washington's leading role in the international response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, where political forces determined to take Kiev westward to Europe have taken power after the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The European Union, hampered by the need for consensus among its 28 members and their economic inter-dependence with Russia, has been less bold. The Kremlin has said it acted to protect Russian citizens in Crimea from attack, and denies invading the region.

In a separate deployment since the Ukraine crisis began, extra U.S. military aircraft have arrived in Lithuania to take part in regular NATO air patrols over Baltic states.

Speaking on Monday at a Polish rocket defense site, not far from the Russian Baltic Fleet's base at Kaliningrad, Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak said the air exercise was to have been smaller, involving only transport aircraft.

But Siemoniak said that after the Russian military intervention in Crimea, Warsaw asked the Pentagon to send fighter jets instead.

"This was our request," said Siemoniak. "We really appreciate that the reaction was that quick and significant."

The USS Truxtun, part of the U.S. Sixth Fleet headquartered in Italy, is due to join the Bulgarian naval frigate Drazki and three Romanian vessels in the Black Sea drills.

It had been expected to visit the Bulgarian port of Varna over the period of March 12 to 14, but Titev said he was unable to confirm when it would arrive after bad weather closed the port on Monday. It was not expected that the exercise would involve any live-firing.

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