

Lithuania Stages 'Little Green Men' War Games With Eye on Moscow

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Lithuania's President Grybauskaitė listening during a news conference at Birini Castle, Latvia, Oct. 31, 2015.

VILNIUS — Lithuania has launched a military exercise to simulate an attack on its new gas terminal, a move its strongly anti-Moscow president said was intended to show the Kremlin that the tiny country would defend itself.

The scenario is modeled on last year's capture of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula by Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms and civilian clothes, who came to be known as the "little green men" when Moscow initially denied their identity.

"We will not allow ourselves to be taken easily," President Dalia Grybauskaitė said Wednesday. "We try to learn from the Ukrainian and Crimean situation ... We're not fearing anybody."

Some 3,000 troops will be involved in this week's "Lightning Strike" exercise, simulating a response to armed groups seizing local government buildings, weapons stockpiles and airports to form a separatist government, as happened in Crimea and other parts of Ukraine.

"The exercise will involve dealing with what can be generally called the 'little green men'," said Donatas Suchockis, spokesman for Lithuanian Army's Joint Staff.

It began in Klaipeda port, where "Independence," a floating liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal, arrived last year. An explosion was simulated in a gas pipeline connected to the terminal, while guards dealt with "protesters" circling it in small boats.

The high profile war games will help cement the reputation of Grybauskaite as a leading voice of opposition to Russia within the European Union and NATO since the Ukraine crisis wrecked Russia's relations with the West last year.

The tiny Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are the only parts of the former Soviet Union to have joined both the EU and the Western military alliance.

They all have ethnic Russian minorities and fear they could be in danger of invasion, since President Vladimir Putin proclaimed Moscow's right last year to use military force to protect Russian speakers across the ex-Soviet Union.

Iron Lady

Grybauskaite's tough stance earned her the nickname "Iron Lady" in her country of 3 million people, and helped her win re-election last year after a first term marked by a crisis that saw the economy shrink by 15 percent under austerity policies.

One of her main achievements in office has been opening the LNG terminal to free Lithuania from the need for Russian energy imports, which she has called an "existential threat."

Grybauskaite repeated earlier calls for NATO to increase its military presence to demonstrate its willingness to defend the Baltics.

"The need of NATO to be present in Baltic states in more large scale is becoming more evident," she said.

NATO countries say Russian forces have increased infiltrations by air and sea into their territory since the Ukraine crisis began. In the past week NATO has also been running one of its biggest ever anti-submarine drills in north European waters.

Russia says it has defended its national interest by protecting its citizens and ethnic kin in Ukraine, and that its takeover of Crimea represented the will of residents in a referendum. Western countries say Russian troops are also fighting alongside separatists in eastern Ukraine, which Moscow denies.

Grybauskaite's supporters say her tough stance towards Moscow has been vindicated. She argues that a ceasefire in Ukraine has collapsed and Kiev needs military assistance. She pushes for more military spending, has reintroduced conscription and has likened President

Vladimir Putin's tactics to Hitler's.

The Baltic states were occupied by both the Nazis and the advancing Red Army during World War II, ending the war under Soviet rule.

"We are noisiest because we have the strongest interests in being so," said former Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius. "Historically we know about Russia's bad behavior."

Critics say Grybauskaite polarizes East and West and quashed dissent at home by accusing critics of Kremlin influence.

When she once called Russia a terrorist state, Lithuania's representative on the European Commission in Brussels, Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis, accused her of building a "Berlin Wall" along with Putin.

Her prickliness sometimes alienates even allies. She refused to attend a meeting of East European leaders in 2010 with President Barack Obama in protest against a U.S.-Russian treaty on arms reduction which she said was harmful to central and eastern Europe defense.

She complains that other EU countries do not have the stamina to push through long term sanctions against Russia.

"Of course, some countries are far away, they think that it's not their business, they engage much more in problems of emigration, or Africa," Grybauskaite said.

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