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Anti-NATO Military Drills Begin in Belarus

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More than 1,000 soldiers are taking part in joint military exercises in Belarus with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Belarussian Defense Ministry announced Tuesday.

The exercises, code-named Unbreakable Brotherhood 2016, are designed to strengthen understanding and cooperation between CSTO peacekeeping forces and to improve the practical skills, the Defense Ministry said.

Seen by many as a Russian counterpart to NATO, the CSTO is an intergovernmental military alliance between six post-Soviet states: Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Tensions between Russia and NATO have deteriorated dramatically since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. NATO announced at its biennial summit in July that four new battalions would be stationed in the Baltic region and Poland as a response to "Russian aggression" in the area.

Representatives of the United Nations Secretariat and the International Committee of the Red Cross have been invited to oversee the exercise, the Belarussian Defense Ministry said.

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