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Russian Paratroopers Land in Belarus as Tensions Simmer Over Migrant Crisis

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Russian and Belarusian troops will carry out joint tactical exercises at a site located kilometers from the border of EU member Poland. **mil.ru**

Update: Late Friday evening, Russia's Defense Ministry said at least two paratroopers have died during landing.

Russia said Friday it sent paratroopers near the Polish border for joint drills with Belarus as Moscow stepped up military involvement in the neighbor's territory amid tensions with the West over an escalating migrant crisis in recent days.

The Russian Defense Ministry said it deployed an Airborne Forces unit at a firing range near Grodno as part of "snap" drills testing its combat readiness "on an unfamiliar landing site."

At the site located kilometers from the border of European Union member Poland, Russian and Belarusian troops will carry out joint tactical exercises and return to their permanent bases in Russia after wrapping up, news agencies cited the military as saying. It did not provide a timeframe for the scheduled military drills.

The paratroopers moved toward the Belarus-EU border after Russian nuclear-capable strategic bombers practiced bombing runs for two days at a firing range 60 kilometers east of the Polish border.

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With a growing number of desperate migrants mainly from war-torn countries in the Middle East and North Africa amassing at its border, Poland has deployed 15,000 troops, put up a fence topped with barbed wire and approved construction of a wall on the frontier with Belarus.

The Belarusian military said Friday it has established a "threat response system" with its strategic ally Russia amid the migrant border standoff.

"It seems that our neighbors, particularly Poland, are ready to unleash a conflict seeking to involve Europe as part of solving their domestic political problems and problems in relations within the EU," Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin said, according to state media.

"I'd like to warn the 'hotheads' not to overestimate their capabilities," Khrenin added.

Without providing evidence, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has accused figures he did not identify of seeking to "provoke" an armed conflict by allegedly arming the migrants stranded at the border. The Kremlin declined to comment Friday when asked by reporters to confirm or deny Lukashenko's claims Thursday that he had addressed the issue with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Europe accuses Lukashenko of orchestrating the migrant crisis by luring them from countries including Iraq and Syria in retaliation to EU sanctions for his disputed 2020 election victory.

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