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Russia to Move Naval Drills Out of Ireland Fishing Waters

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Russia is planning a number of military exercises in the coming weeks. **mil.ru**

The Russian military said Saturday it will relocate planned naval drills that were originally set to take part in Irish fishing waters and had triggered concern in Dublin and other European capitals.

Russia's Navy was scheduled to conduct exercises off the Irish coast Feb. 3-8, in international waters but inside Ireland's exclusive economic zone. Irish leaders said the drills were "not welcome" and urged Russia to reconsider, meanwhile fishermen, whose activities were set to be disrupted, threatened to thwart the Russian ships taking part.

In a statement published Saturday evening, Russia's Ambassador to Ireland Yuri Filatov said Russia would move the drills to outside Irish fishing waters.

Russia's defense minister Sergei Shoigu "has made a decision, as a gesture of goodwill, to

relocate the exercises ... outside the Irish exclusive economic zone, with the aim not to hinder fishing activities by the Irish vessels in the traditional fishing areas," Filatov said.

The naval drills come amid a tense standoff between Russia and the West over Ukraine. Russia has amassed more than 100,000 troops, heavy equipment and logistical support near its border with Ukraine and is also planning military training exercises with neighboring Belarus over the next few weeks.

Ireland's foreign and defence minister Simon Coveney, who represents Cork in southwest Ireland, said last week that Dublin had no powers to prevent the exercises from taking place but had told Filatov they were "not welcome."

"This isn't a time to increase military activity and tension in the context of what's happening with and in Ukraine at the moment," he said at a meeting in Brussels.

The U.S. and NATO have rejected Russia's demands for a legal guarantee that Ukraine will never become a member and also pointed to Moscow's previous use of military exercises to "disguise" aggressive moves. Ireland is neutral and not a NATO member.

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