

Russian Navy Starts Baltic Sea Drills Amid Ukraine Tensions

By [AFP](#)

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Russian Defence Ministry

Dozens of Russian ships on Thursday took part in military exercises in the strategic Baltic Sea after Sweden and Finland recently announced bids to join NATO.

Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement that ships of its Baltic fleet, will "perform training tasks for the defense of sea lanes and fleet bases."

It said that 60 ships and 40 aircraft were taking part in the maneuvers which will also take place on land at training grounds in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

The navy drills come amid heightened tensions between Moscow and NATO after Sweden and Finland submitted their bids to join the U.S.-led alliance after the start of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

If their membership — currently blocked by Turkey — is approved, Russia would become the

only non-NATO country on the Baltic Sea.

In a sign of support for Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, U.S. Chief of Staff General Mark Milley was in Stockholm on Saturday aboard the USS Kearsage, making it the largest U.S. warship ever to dock in Stockholm.

His visit came as NATO conducts annual naval exercises in the Baltic Sea called "Baltops 22" that are set to continue until June 17.

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