

# Russian Troops to Hold Drills in Ukraine's Neighbor Belarus

By [AFP](#)

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Servicemen of Russia's Western Military District take part in exercises at the training ground in Belarus.

**Russian Defense Ministry / TASS**

Russian troops will conduct military exercises in Belarus, which neighbors Ukraine, the Interfax news agency said on Monday, citing the Defense Ministry in Moscow.

In October, Belarus announced the formation of a joint regional force with Moscow with several thousand Russian servicemen arriving in the ex-Soviet country.

"The final assessment of the combat capability and combat readiness of the units will be given... after the battalion tactical exercises have been conducted," Interfax quoted the ministry as saying.

It did not say when and where the drills will take place but the announcement comes hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Minsk for talks with counterpart Alexander

Lukashenko.

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Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, is a long-time Kremlin ally.

The visit comes 10 months into Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, which was launched from several directions, including Belarusian territory.

The deployment of Russian troops in Belarus in October had raised fears that Belarusian troops could join them in their offensive in Ukraine.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said Sunday evening "the protection of the border with both Russia and Belarus is also a constant priority."

"We are preparing for all possible defense scenarios," Zelensky said in his daily address to the nation following a meeting with Ukraine's military commanders.

Lukashenko has repeatedly said he does not plan to send Belarusian troops to Ukraine.

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