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Belarus to Scale Back Joint Military Drills With Russia

By AFP

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Sergey Petrov / NEWS.ru / TASS

Belarus will scale back joint military drills with Russia, scheduled for September, cutting troop numbers and moving exercises away from its western border, the Belarusian Defense Ministry said Wednesday.

"We have decided to reduce the parameters of the 'Zapad-2025' exercise and to move its main maneuvers deeper into the territory of the Republic of Belarus, away from the western borders," Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin said in a statement on the ministry's Telegram channel.

The number of troops taking part will be cut by nearly half, said General Valery Revenko, head of the defense ministry's international cooperation department, speaking at a security forum in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Belarus, a close ally of Moscow, allowed its territory to be used as a staging ground for Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Along with Poland and the Baltic states, Ukraine has repeatedly voiced concern over possible military buildups in Belarus.

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Russian state media previously reported that about 13,000 troops were expected to participate in the "Zapad-2025" exercise in September.

Khrenin said the troop reduction was meant "to demonstrate to our allies and partners around the world the truly peace-loving position of the Republic of Belarus."

The Zapad drills typically involve tens of thousands of troops in a show of force near Belarus's border with NATO and EU countries. Around 200,000 troops took part in the 2021 edition, held months before Russia invaded Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned last month that Russia was "preparing something" in Belarus under the guise of military exercises.

"That's usually how they start a new attack," he said.

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