

20 NATO Warships Engage in Major War Games in the Baltics



Brussels, May 12 (RHC)-- Nearly 20 warships representing nine member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have commenced the Baltic Fortress 2015 military drills in waters off the Lithuanian Baltic Sea coast.

Naval vessels from Britain, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway are taking part in the war games, which began Monday along with a Lithuanian Navy submarine unit and two military aircraft and are due to continue in Lithuanian territorial waters until May 14th, according to Lithuania's Ministry of National Defense as cited in an RT report.

The ministry added that the naval drills involve joint maneuvering by the combat vessels, shooting, de-mining, interception and the escorting of ships as well as search and rescue operations. The warships will also practice interactions among NATO allies during international operation, including cooperation with the alliance's rapid reaction forces.

The development comes as NATO's ground forces are also currently engaged in two other military maneuvers in the Baltic states. Up to 3,000 Lithuanian forces are participating in the Zaibo Kirtis (Lightning Strike) war games aimed at perfecting joint action by the military and civilian authorities against the so-called "hybrid threats," merging both military and non-military battle techniques.

Estonia, meanwhile, is also holding its largest-ever military drills called Siil (Hedgehog) 2015 with the involvement of 13,000 troops. Baltic Fortress war games have been conducted annually since 2008 with the host country rotating each year. The current naval drills also include the participation of troops from the US and the nine NATO member states.

NATO forces have expanded their military maneuvers along the Russian border - in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe - since Moscow's reunion with the Crimea and the outbreak of a military conflict in eastern Ukraine last year.

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