NATO Air Exercises over the Baltics States

By Global Research
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BRUSSELS – NATO warplanes will fly training missions over the Baltic states this month in a show of solidarity with former Soviet republics concerned about Russia.

The March 17 exercises will involve French, Polish and Lithuanian aircraft, a NATO statement said on Tuesday.

The "defensive training" exercise will be "a demonstration of NATO solidarity and commitment to its member countries in the Baltic Region", the statement said.

The announcement of the exercises follows France's plan to sell warships to Russia, a move which has raised concern in the former Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The three, now all NATO members, fear the deal could affect their security, given Russia's 2008 intervention in Georgia, a country that has been promised eventual NATO membership.

France has defended its plans, saying it is important to build relations with Russia — something NATO as an alliance is seeking to do to improve cooperation on global security issues.

NATO is particularly keen to secure more Russian support for its mission in Afghanistan, which has been struggling to contain a widening Islamist insurgency.

Russia has been angered by NATO's eastward enlargement following the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly the alliance's promise of membership to former Soviet republics Ukraine and Georgia.

Its new military doctrine, published on Feb. 5, states that one of the "main external threats of war" came from the alliance's eastward expansion to Russia's borders.

NATO, meanwhile, said last year that a new alliance mission statement due to be approved in November must reassure new members they will be protected under the bloc's principle of collective security in the event of attack.

Reporting by David Brunnstrom; Editing by Charles Dick

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