

NATO Prepares for War with Russia? Operation “Steadfast Jazz” and the Perpetual Cold War

By [Bryce White](#)

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On Saturday, November 2nd, NATO launched a major military training exercise, its largest since 2006. Considering the magnitude of this exercise and its temporal and geographic setting, it is clear that Exercise Steadfast Jazz represents the continued unraveling of NATO-Russian relations and the perpetuation of a Cold War which never truly ended.

The week-long exercise is being held in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as Poland, with the participation of all 28 NATO member countries and other non-NATO countries. It encompasses air, land, maritime, and special forces components, and will involve 6,000 troops. According to NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “The purpose of this exercise is to make sure that our rapid-reaction force, the NATO Response Force, is ready to defend any ally, deploy anywhere and deal with any threat.” [1] The Response Force, he says, “is the spearhead of NATO. Every year, we test it, to make sure that it is sharp and ready for use.” [2] The exercise revolves around a “fictitious scenario in a fictitious country,” but it is not a stretch to say that the exercise simulates a Russian invasion of Poland.

With the expected withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the alliance is floundering for a new *raison d’être*. According to NATO, “As the operational tempo is expected to decrease after the combat mission in Afghanistan is completed at the end of 2014, NATO will step up training to maintain readiness and interoperability.” Thus, recent exercises such as Steadfast Jazz which showcase NATO’s Response Force are occurring under the premise of a permanent collective security alliance being necessary. While the merits of such an alliance can be debated to no end, Steadfast Jazz and other similar exercises show that NATO unduly views modern-day Russia as a serious security threat.

As NATO continues its eastward expansion, drawing in new allies and partners which were previously Soviet republics or members of the Warsaw Pact, Russia has become understandably wary. With this expansion has also come the development of the Western allies’ missile defense shield, which would afford it a first-strike capability against potential adversaries such as Russia. Russia had in recent years worked to develop cooperation with NATO in the area of missile defense, but on Sunday gave up and dissolved the working group responsible for this cooperation. [3] It is in this context that Russia feels its western flank is slowly being encroached upon. Add to this the fact that the United States and its NATO allies are still holding out the possibility of unjustifiable military intervention in Syria and Iran, close Russian allies to its south. Geopolitical chess pieces are being deftly maneuvered as NATO seeks the strategic upper hand across Eurasia.

In the words of Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov, “These drills are in the spirit of the Cold War.” [4] The last thing the world needs is for two nuclear-armed powers to

fall more deeply into a period of hostile bipolarity, but military exercises such as Steadfast Jazz only serve to engender mutual suspicion and create such an unpleasant scenario.

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Notes

[1] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_104648.htm

[2] <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/941046.html>

[3] http://voiceofrussia.com/2013_11_03/President-Putin-ends-Russia-NATO-ABM-cooperation-0148/

[4] http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20130725/182415452/Russia-Slams-Cold-War-Spirit-NATO-Exercise.html

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