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Russia 'simulates' nuclear attack on Poland

Russia has provoked outrage in Poland by simulating an air and sea attack on the country during military exercises

By Matthew Day in Warsaw

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The armed forces are said to have carried out "war games" in which nuclear missiles were fired and troops practised an amphibious landing on the country's coast.

Documents obtained by Wprost, one of Poland's leading news magazines, said the exercise was carried out in conjunction with soldiers from Belarus.

The manoeuvres are thought to have been held in September and involved about 13,000 Russian and Belarusian troops.

Poland, which has strained relations with both countries, was cast as the "potential aggressor".

The documents state the exercises, code-named "West", were officially classified as "defensive" but many of the operations appeared to have an offensive nature.

The Russian air force practised using weapons from its nuclear arsenal, while in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, which neighbours Poland, Red Army forces stormed a "Polish" beach and attacked a gas pipeline.

The operation also involved the simulated suppression of an uprising by a national minority in Belarus – the country has a significant Polish population which has a strained relationship with authoritarian government of Belarus.

Karol Karski, an MP from Poland's Law and Justice, is to table parliamentary questions on Russia's war games and has protested to the European Commission.

His colleague, Marek Opiola MP, said: "It's an attempt to put us in our place. Don't forget all this happened on the 70th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland."

Ordinary Poles were outraged by news of the exercise and demanded a firm response from the government.

One man, identified only as Ted, told Polskie Radio: "Russia has laid bare its real intentions with respect to Poland. Every Pole must now get off the fence and be counted as a patriot or a traitor."

Donald Tusk, Poland's prime minister, has tried to build a pragmatic relationship with the Kremlin despite widespread and vocal calls in Poland for him to cool ties with Moscow.

After spending 40 years under Soviet domination few in Poland trust Russia, and many Poles have become increasingly wary of a country they consider as possessing a neo-imperialistic agenda.

Bogdan Klich, Poland's defence minister, said: "It is a demonstration of strength. We are monitoring the exercises to see what has been planned."

Wladyslaw Stasiak, chief of President Lech Kaczynski's office, and a former head of Poland's National Security Council, added: "We didn't like the appearance of the exercises and the name harked back to the days of the Warsaw Pact."

The Russian troop exercises will come as an unwelcome sight to the states nestling on Russia's western border who have deep-rooted anxieties over any Russian show of strength.

With a resurgent Moscow now more willing to flex its muscles, Central and Eastern Europeans have warned of Russia adopting a neo-imperialistic attitude to an area of the world it still regards as its sphere of influence.

In July, the region's most famed and influential political figures, including Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel, wrote an open letter Barack Obama warning him that Russia "is back as a revisionist power pursuing a 19th-century agenda with 21st-century tactics and methods."

Moscow and Minsk have insisted that Operation West was to help "ensure the strategic stability in the East European region".