

## **NATO chief: Both Western military alliance and Russia expected to behave despite drills**

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**Russia has been briefed by NATO on the exercises and invited to monitor them, but the move has still angered the Russians. (Express photo)**

**Copenhagen:** NATO's secretary-general said Tuesday he is confident that both the Western military alliance and Russia "will act in a respectable way" as the two sides hold drills in the same area in waters off Norway's coast. Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday as he attended the Trident Juncture war games in his native Norway that "this is not a Cold War situation," stressing it is "purely to prevent, not to provoke."

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Moscow has warned it could be forced to respond to increased NATO military activities and said its navy plans to test missiles in international waters, close to where the alliance is conducting its largest military exercise since the end of the Cold War.

The Russian missile tests will take place Nov. 1-3 off western Norway. The NATO drill, scheduled to end Nov. 7, takes place in central and eastern Norway, the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea. The manoeuvres come amid persistent tensions between NATO and Russia, and Moscow believes the alliance is behaving provocatively near its borders.

"This is a necessary exercise to send a strong signal of unity," Stoltenberg told reporters as he visited the NATO maneuvers that involve around 50,000 personnel from all 29 NATO allies, plus partners Finland and Sweden. There also are 65 ships, 250 aircraft and 10,000 vehicles in a hypothetical scenario that involves restoring Norway's sovereignty after an attack by a "fictitious aggressor." "We are exercising in NATO territory," Stoltenberg said.

Tensions in the region have grown between Baltic NATO members and Moscow, including reports of airspace violations by Russian military aircraft. Non-aligned Sweden and Finland have watched with increasing trepidation, stepping up their own military activity with cross-border exercises and drills with NATO countries.

- AP