

## **Russia Plans to Take Belarus in Army Drill: Saakashvili**

### **Opinion**

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**&ldquo;What we are seeing in Belarus, I think, is that Russia is planning to take and annex Belarus.&rdquo;**

By Damien Sharkov for [Newsweek](#) Aug 9, 2017: Russia's leadership is angling to annex its closest western neighbor during upcoming military drills, according to the former leader of Georgia. Mikheil Saakashvili made the comments on the anniversary of his own country's brief conflict with Moscow that resulted in Russian troops cordoning off Georgia's two northern regions. Referring to the much anticipated joint Russian-Belarusian drill in the Baltic region, the former president said: &ldquo;What we are seeing in Belarus, I think, is that Russia is planning to take and annex Belarus.&rdquo; Saakashvili, who is a longtime critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, told Baltic news agency BNS ahead of the drill, called Zapad and scheduled for September. Lithuania, a NATO ally that borders with Russia, has expressed concern that the drill indicates a wider threat to the alliance, constituting a ["simulated" attack](#). NATO has demanded that Russia allows for more transparency in the drill, nominally set to involve around 12,000 troops. However, Russia has previously sparked much bigger exercises to go in tandem with drills such as Zapad, upping the number of troops from the promised levels. &ldquo;During the drill, infrastructure will be brought in,&rdquo; Saakashvili said. &ldquo;In that sense the threat [from Russia] has not disappeared rather it only grows. It is just that until now Ukrainians have held it at its own borders [with Russia].&rdquo; [hellip;] [https://www.yahoo.com/news/russia-plan ... army-drill-114804115.html](https://www.yahoo.com/news/russia-plan...army-drill-114804115.html)