



Russia's Kavkaz-2020 Military Exercise

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By Mason Clark and George Barros with Madisyn GoodBallet, Joseph Kyle, Owen Lee, Savannah Modesitt, and Paisley Turner

September 27 4:00pm EDT: ISW has updated this piece to include Kavkaz-2020 exercises conducted on September 25 after the original publication.

The Russian Armed Forces conducted large-scale annual exercises from September 21-26. The Russian Armed Forces conduct large-scale exercises each year in one of its four military districts (Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern) on a rotating basis. The Southern Military District (SMD) is hosting this year's exercises, dubbed Kavkaz-2020. The exercise involves ground, air, naval, air defense, engineering, logistics, and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) units in the Caspian and Black Seas, the Caucasus, and near Volgograd in southern Russia. Kavkaz-2020 is a multinational undertaking. Russian units are exercising together with Armenian units in Armenia. Iranian missile boats conducted joint exercises with Russian ships in the Caspian Sea. Chinese personnel were featured prominently in images of planning sessions. Belarusian and Pakistani forces are also participating. Russian forces are exercising in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, territories illegally seized from Georgia in the 2008 war and annexed to the Russian Federation, as well as in Crimea, illegally seized from Ukraine in 2014 and annexed to Russia.

Kavkaz-2020 has received all the Russian military media fanfare the premier annual exercise of the Russian Armed Forces deserves, but it does not have the full attention of Russia's senior commanders. Russian airborne, tank, and motorized rifle forces of the Western Military are exercising at home training areas at an unusually high level in a year when the annual exercise is held in another military district. Russian airborne forces are additionally participating in the Slavic Brotherhood exercises in Belarus. The Slavic Brotherhood exercises in Belarus were originally scheduled to end before Kavkaz-2020 began, in fact, but were rescheduled and extended so that they are occurring simultaneously. The commander of Russia's Airborne Forces (an independent service) participated in the Slavic Brotherhood exercises in Belarus despite the extensive activities of Russian airborne troops in Kavkaz-2020.

The reported tactical exercises are not in themselves especially noteworthy. Russian forces are practicing normal combat, combat support, engineering, and logistics operations they would need to fight in any of Russia's active theaters (Syria, Ukraine, or Libya) or elsewhere. The most interesting thing about them so far is that they are not the most interesting military exercises the Russian Federation is conducting at this time – and the Russian Armed Forces are not fully prioritizing them.

The following is a list of the component exercises of Kavkaz-2020. Exercises are divided by parent organization and day.

Caspian Flotilla

21 September

- The 177th Naval Infantry Regiment conducted amphibious and counter-amphibious exercises at the Turali and Adenak training grounds.¹
- Caspian Flotilla ships conducted minesweeping exercises: minesweeper trawlers cleared a path for small artillery, missile, and landing ships through a field of floating, bottom, and anchor mines.²

22 September

- The missile ships *Dagestan*, *Veliky Ustyug*, *Grad Sviyazhsk*, and *Uglich* conducted simulated shore bombardments.³
- Elements of the 117th Naval Infantry Regiment destroyed illegal armed forces (IAFs, the Russian term for insurgents or unconventional forces) by surrounding them and forcing them to surrender at the Adanak training ground in the Republic of Dagestan.⁴
- A mine-sweeping group conducted mine action support for the deployment of forces and groupings.⁵

23 September

- The missile ship *Tatarstan* conducted anti-air and anti-missile operations.⁶
- The missile ships *Astrakhan* and *Uglich* fired at mock enemy sea targets.⁷
- The Caspian Flotilla's strike group conducted maneuvers simulating difficult hydrometeorological conditions at night.⁸
- The Russian missile ships *Tatarstan*, *Astrakhan*, and *Ustyug* and the Iranian missile boats *Joshan* and *Paykan* conducted joint operations. The ships provided cover for tactical amphibious forces and practiced firing live artillery at surface targets.⁹
- Elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment conducted reconnaissance and search operations along with the operators of several Orlan-10 unmanned aerial vehicles. The scouts found, ambushed, and destroyed a convoy of a formation of illegal armed forces.¹⁰

24 September

- Elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment conducted night-time coastal operations with BTR-82AMs in the Republic of Dagestan.¹¹

25 September

- A detachment of rescue vessels of the Caspian Flotilla and the Iranian *Paykan* missile boat conducted search and rescue and emergency mitigation exercises to suppress a simulated fire on the *Peykan*'s deck in the Caspian Sea.¹²
- The missile ships *Grad Sviyazhsk* and *Veliky Ustyug* conducted counter-WMD exercises. Crews wearing radiation, chemical and biological protection suits successfully destroyed a radio-controlled drone carrying a capsule containing a simulated chemical agent. The ships then conducted a decontamination exercise.¹³
- Elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment conducted a landing exercise. Over 600 servicemen, 24 ships and boats, 2 border patrol ships of the FSB Frontier Directorate, and more than 60 units of automotive and special equipment participated in the amphibious assault landing.¹⁴

Black Sea Fleet

21 September

- The Black Sea Fleet's ship search and strike group conducted anti-submarine exercises using mines and anti-submarine weapons.¹⁵
- Black Sea Fleet Naval Infantry stationed in Krasnodar (unit designation unknown) conducted amphibious transport and landing exercises on the Taman Peninsula.¹⁶

22 September

- A mine-sweeping group conducted mine action support for the deployment of forces and groupings.¹⁷
- A detachment of missile boats of the Black Sea Fleet conducted sea defense of a simulated enemy amphibious assault using the Bal and Bastion missile systems in the Black and Caspian Seas.¹⁸
- The naval aviation of the Black Sea Fleet exercised the delivery of ammunition and food to warships at sea and anchored in the Black Sea.¹⁹

23 September

- Unidentified naval infantry units of the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Krasnodar Territory practiced loading onto the landing ships *Casesar Kunikov*, *Azov*, and *Novocherkassk* for an amphibious operation.²⁰

24 September

- Black Sea Fleet ships conducted exercises blocking sea lines of communication off the Black Sea coast of the Krasnodar Territory.²¹
- The submarine *Kolpino* of the Black Sea Fleet conducted coastal Kalibr complex missile target exercises.²²

25 September

- Black Sea Fleet ships conducted coastal minesweeping exercises and naval aircraft and unspecified fire support ships conducted fire support exercises to destroy coastal defense assets to set conditions for an amphibious assault near Vityazevskaya Kosa, Anapa, Krasnodar Krai.²³

Unspecified Southern Military District units

22 September

- Servicemen of the electronic warfare (EW) and communications units of the motorized rifle units of the SMD established a covert command and control system and protection from the drones of a mock enemy in the Volgograd region.²⁴
- Grenade launchers of the SMD destroyed mock SVBIEDs based on experience from Syria at the Prudboy training ground in the Volgograd region.²⁵
- Aerospace Forces performed flights as control targets to check air defense forces in the SMD.²⁶
- Russian servicemen of the intelligence units of the SMD and servicemen of special units of the Republic of Abkhazia conducted offensive combat against a conditional enemy at the Tsabal mountain range and Black Sea Coast.²⁷
- Helicopters of the Russian army aviation group fired missiles at a simulated enemy at the Kapustin Yar training ground in the Astrakhan region.²⁸
- Snipers of the SMD stopped a convoy of lightly armored vehicles and overcame the manpower of a simulated enemy at night at the Prudboy training ground in the Volgograd region.²⁹

23 September

- Reconnaissance units of the SMD and special military units of Abkhazia conducted operations to identify, block supply routes, and destroy camps controlled by mock terrorists. The units additionally worked on practical measures to defend the territory of Abkhazia from terrorist threats.³⁰
- Combat crews of the Bal mobile coastal anti-ship missile system marched to a position along the Caspian Sea on the coast of Dagestan where they detected, identified, tracked, and destroyed a surface target. The unit also practiced quickly maneuvering while under counterattack.³¹
- Msta-S self-propelled artillery battalions of the motorized rifle formations of the Southern Military District conducted artillery barrages before a mock offensive at the Prudboy training ground near Volgograd. After destroying the primary targets, subunits performed counter-fire maneuvers.³²
- Snipers of the Southern Military District stopped a column of lightly armored vehicles with precise fire. The snipers then used the Strelets reconnaissance and communications tool to direct artillery fire against the stopped convoy.³³
- Mi28N, Ka-52, Mi-35, and Mi-24 attack helicopters conducted air reconnaissance, launched missile strikes on ground targets, and provided air cover for ground troops at the Kopanskaya training ground. The helicopters destroyed more than 20 ground targets with unguided missiles and aircraft cannons.³⁴

24 September

- Ten SU-25SM3 attack aircraft from the mixed aviation unit of the Southern Military District conducted airfield destruction exercises.³⁵
- Approximately 40 operational-tactical and army aviation crews from the Southern Military District conducted air strike exercises at Kopanskaya and Arzgirsky ranges. Aviation units came from airfields in Crimea, Krasnodar, Stavropol, Rostov, and Volgograd.³⁶

25 September

- Unspecified rocket artillery and motorized rifle units of the Southern Military District conducted live fire exercises at the Prudboy training ground in Volgograd.³⁷
- Unspecified SMD units performed a field test of the TOS-2 Tosochka thermobaric weapon system at Kapustin Yar.³⁸
- Unspecified medical SMD medical personnel conducted battlefield evacuation exercises at Prudboy training ground.³⁹
- Unspecified SMD assault aviation units of the conducted air-strike exercises at the Kapustin Yar training ground. Over 20 Su-25SM3 aircraft dropped around 50 bombs on a mock enemy during the exercise.⁴⁰
- Unspecified SMD motor rifle units conducted firing exercises with RPO-PDM infantry rocket flamethrowers at the Kapustin Yar training ground.⁴¹
- Two divisions of the Iskander-M operational-tactical missile systems (OTRK), a Tochka-U tactical missile system division, a Tornado-S rocket artillery division, and 17 artillery divisions conducted test launches of cruise and aeroballistic missiles.⁴²
- Unspecified air formations conducted a massive air-strike exercise at Kapustin Yar. 78 long-range and operational-tactical aircraft, including Tu-22M3 long-range aircraft, Su-34 and Su-24 bombers, Su-25 attack aircraft, Su-30, Su-27 fighters and Su-24MR reconnaissance aircraft, took part in the strike.⁴³

49th Combined Arms Army

- Unidentified units of the 49th Combined Arms Army, along with ground attack and army aviation forces of the Southern Military District, conducted desert combat operations at the Ashuluk training grounds in the Astrakhan region on September 21.⁴⁴
- Unidentified formations of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted river crossing exercises in the North Caucasus on September 21.⁴⁵
- Unidentified motorized rifle and tank subunits of the 49th CAA practiced night combat tactics at the Ashuluk training ground in the Astrakhan region on September 22.⁴⁶
- More than 800 servicemen of likely the 34th Mountain Brigade of the SMD from the North Caucasus conducted an exercise to organize a mobile defense at night in an orientationless desert area with night vision devices at the Ashuluk training ground in the Astrakhan region. On September 23⁴⁷
- Unspecified tank, motor rifle, artillery, and air defense units of the 49th Combined Arms Army, likely from the 7th Military Base in Abkhazia, conducted exercises with unspecified units of the Armed Forces of Abkhazia to disrupt ground and sea lines of communication in Abkhazia and the Black Sea on September 25.⁴⁸

58th Combined Arms Army

- Unidentified regiment-sized (approximately 1,500 people) motorized rifle elements of the 58th Combined Arms army conducted counter-illegal armed forces (IAF) exercises in South Ossetia on September 21.⁴⁹
- Likely the 100th Separate Reconnaissance Battalion tactical group of the Russian military base in South Ossetia provided cover for a convoy's departure by repulsing an attack from enemy saboteurs on September 23.⁵⁰
- A battalion tactical group, likely the 100th Separate Reconnaissance Battalion, of the 58th Combined Arms Army located in the 4th Russian military base in South Ossetia conducted search and blocking, organized reserve units to combat car bombs, and sniper positioning exercises in South Ossetia on September 24.⁵¹
- A brigade-sized multinational force including unspecified elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army and the 20th Combined Arms Army, Armenian, Belarusian, Chinese, Pakistani, and Myanmar forces participated in the exercises that simulated repelling an attack and executing an envelopment counterattack via flank attack and rear landings at the Kapustin Yar training ground on September 25.⁵² These exercises featured more than 330 mock targets, decommissioned military equipment and over 450 banner targets. The Russian MoD specifically emphasized the Kapustin Yar training ground's large size permits forces to conduct exercises simulating combat operations against high-speed, highly maneuverable targets in accordance with Russian forces' experience gained from operating in the Syrian Arab Republic.
- An unspecified battalion tactical group (BTG) of the 58th Combined Arms Army conducted armor maneuver exercises at the Dzartsemi training ground in South Ossetia on September 25.⁵³ The BTG practiced 'Syrian Shaft' tactics as well as mechanized envelopment maneuvers.

Armenia

Armenia announced martial law and a full mobilization of its military amid heavy fighting with Azerbaijani troops in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region on September 27. Russia and Armenia concluded large-scale conventional warfare exercises in Armenia on September 25.

- Motorized rifle, aviation, and air defense units of the Southern Military District and the Armenian Armed Forces conducted joint coordination and counter-terrorism exercises at the Alagyaz training grounds in Armenia on September 21.⁵⁴

- 20 helicopter crews of the Southern Military District's army aviation and Armenian Ministry of Defense conducted combat tactical exercises in Armenia on September 21. The exercise involved 1,500 soldiers and 300 pieces of equipment.⁵⁵
- Military Police units of the Southern Military District exercised repelling saboteurs in Armenia on September 23.⁵⁶
- Approximately 1,500 tankers and artillerymen of the Southern Military District and the Ministry of Defense of Armenia conducted live fire exercises at Alagyaz training grounds on September 24.⁵⁷
- Unspecified Russian units of the Southern Military District likely from Russia's 102nd Military Base and unspecified Armenian forces conducted search and rescue exercises at the Alagyaz training ground in Armenia on September 25.⁵⁸
- Units from the 58th Combined Arms Army and the Armenian Armed Forces units conducted massive offensive exercises involving a land attack and air support on September 25. The ground troops were supported by Mi-28N Hind helicopters and Su-25 attack aircraft.⁵⁹
- MiG-29 fighter crews of the SMD and Su-30SM crews of the Armenian Armed Forces conducted low-altitude attack exercises at the Alagyaz training ground on September 25. The exercises included simulated radar warfare and other emergency conditions.⁶⁰
- SMD army aviation (helicopter) units and Armenian Armed Forces units conducted tactical airborne landing exercises at the Alagyaz training ground on September 25.⁶¹
- SMD medical units and the Armenian Armed Forces conducted airborne evacuation exercises at the Alagyaz training ground on September 25. Mi-8MTV Helicopters were used to transport troops to Yerevan and Gyumri.⁶²

Unspecified Airborne (VDV) Units

- Paratroopers of the 31st Guards Airborne Brigade based in Ulyanovsk and the 56th Guards Airborne Brigade based in Kamyshin exercised "new type" air assault operations and fast rope operations at the Kapustin Yar training ground near Astrakhan on September 22.⁶³
- 50 Radiation, Chemical, and biological protection specialists of the 31st Guards Airborne Brigade conducted reconnaissance exercises at the Kapustin Yar training ground in Astrakhan on September 24.⁶⁴
- Practical training crews of military transport aviation (MTA) conducted mass landing of units and military equipment of the Airborne Forces at Taganrog airfield on September 24.⁶⁵
- An unspecified Russian airborne assault brigade and elements of an unspecified Pakistani Special Forces unit conducted an airborne deployment from the Taganrog and Ulyanovsk airfields to the Kapustin Yar training ground on September 25.⁶⁶
- Airborne assault forces and armored vehicles conducted a parachute-free landing exercise supported by Ka-52 Alligator combat helicopters on September 25.⁶⁷
- Airborne troops conducted a massive landing exercise from 56 Il-76 aircraft of the military transport aviation (MTA) of the Aerospace Forces at the Kapustin Yar training ground on September 25. The exercise occurred at two parallel sites and included 900 paratroopers and 118 units of military equipment. An airborne company of the Aerospace Forces was dropped in BMD-4M airborne combat vehicles.⁶⁸

7th Guards Mountain Air Assault Division

- A tank battalion of the 7th Guards Mountain Air Assault Division destroyed more than 100 armored targets of a simulated enemy in wooded areas of the SMD on September 22.⁶⁹
- The anti-tank units of the 108th Guards Kuban Cossack Air Assault Regiment based in Novorossiysk conducted missile launch exercises in the SMD on September 22.⁷⁰

- Tanks of the 7th Guards Mountain Air Assault Division conducted live fire exercises at moving targets simulating tanks, anti-tank grenade launchers, and artillery pieces on September 23.⁷¹

CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear)

- Russian servicemen of the radiation, chemical and biological defense unit of the Southern Military District, likely the 28th brigade, conducted troop concealment exercises at the Prudboy training ground in the Volgograd region on September 22.⁷²
- Flamethrowers of the radiation, chemical, and biological defense units of the Southern Military District destroyed 50 lightly armored targets at the Prudboy training ground near Volgograd on September 23.⁷³

Engineers

- The Kuban-based engineering regiment of the Southern Military District, likely the 11th regiment, conducted engineer support exercises in Astrakhan on September 21.⁷⁴
- Engineering units of the Southern Military District, likely the 11th engineer regiment, conducted bridge-repair exercises in the Kuban region on September 21. Reconnaissance groups and attack helicopters provided support to the military engineers from a simulated enemy force.⁷⁵
- Engineering units of the Southern Military District conducted anti-tank exercises at the Kapustin Yar training ground on September 25. The exercise involved setting up an anti-tank ditch and a barrage of 122mm rockets.⁷⁶
- Repair and evacuation groups of motorized rifle units conducted evacuation exercises at the Kapustin Yar training ground on September 25.⁷⁷

Air Defense

- Anti-air elements of a motorized rifle formation and an airborne assault formation conducted an anti-air exercise in the Prudboy training grounds near Volgograd on September 21. 80 tasks were carried out and 48 targets were destroyed.⁷⁸
- Air defense units used Pantsir-S1 anti-aircraft missile-gun systems and Igla MANPADS to conduct field command protection at training ranges in the North Caucasus, South Russia, and Transcaucasus on September 22.⁷⁹
- Crews of the Rzhev Air Defense Division of the Leningrad Air Force and Air Defense Forces of the Western Military District performed combat launches of anti-aircraft guided missiles against training targets using the S-300 at the Ashuluk training ground in the Astrakhan region on September 22.⁸⁰
- Crews of the S-400, Buk-M2, and Pantsir-s systems repelled a massive missile and air strike at the Ashuluk training ground in the Astrakhan region on September 22.⁸¹
- Southern Military District (SMD) troops conducted defense against cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, fire and electronic effects on battle formations, and vertical coverage by tactical air assault forces exercises in South Ossetia, in the Republic of Abkhazia, and in the Republic of Armenia on September 24.⁸²
- Elements of an unspecified Buk-M3 division provided air defense for a Caspian Flotilla amphibious assault at the Zelenogorsk training ground in Dagestan on September 25.⁸³
- Unspecified air defense units conducted air defense exercises with S-300V4, S-400, and Buk-M3 surface-to-air-missile systems to hit high-speed air targets at the Kapustin Yar training ground on September 25.⁸⁴
- The anti-aircraft missile regiment of the Southern Military District performed combat training exercises in Krasnodar on September 25. The exercise included crews of the S-400 and Pantsir-S air defense systems.⁸⁵

- Air defense units of the Southern Military District conducted anti air-raid exercises on September 25. The exercise included Pantsir-S anti-aircraft missile systems, Izvoz and Strela-10 anti-aircraft systems, and Igla-S portable anti-aircraft missile systems.⁸⁶

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