

Israel participating in two large scale military drills in Europe

IDF paratroopers are in Eastern Europe taking part in Swift Response, Saber Strike.

- > U.S. and IDF troops, in major joint drill, simulating battle on 3 fronts
- > Amid rising tension with Iran, Israel to join largest int'l navy exercise



A US M1 Abrams tank fires during the "Saber Strike" NATO military exercise in Adazi, Latvia, June 11, 2016.. (photo credit: REUTERS)

Israel is participating for the first time in two simultaneous large-scale international exercises in Europe, the IDF Spokesperson's Office announced on Monday.

IDF paratroopers will participate in the Swift Response exercise, which will be held in Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, with the participation of a paratroopers unit that will train with the 173rd Brigade of the European Command of the US Army.

Thousands of soldiers from 10 different countries will participate in the exercise, including Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Poland and Portugal.

Swift Response will feature airborne exercises, joint forcible entry personnel and equipment drops, air assault operations, a force buildup using a short takeoff and landing strip and noncombatant evacuation operations.

"This is the first time the IDF has participated in a international exercise of the European Command," read the IDF statement.

"The objective of the exercise is to improve the ability for mutual cooperation between the participating armies."

In addition to Swift Response, more IDF paratroopers will take part in European Command's Saber Strike exercise, in which more than 18,000 fighters from 19 countries, including Poland, Germany, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, will

participate.

An annual drill, the objective of this year's Saber Strike will be to train and drill the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) enhanced forward presence with a focus on promoting interoperability and improving joint operational capability in a variety of land missions.

The exercise, which will occur in several Eastern European countries, will also drill troops on contending with air strikes and tank warfare of foreign forces.

According to the US Army, "these exercises demonstrate the command's continued commitment to NATO allies and partners by maintaining its war-fighting edge and ability for crisis response."

The drill will last until June 15 on NATO's eastern flank and, according to European Command, is "a demonstration of the commitment and solidarity of the Alliance" at a time when Russia's military maneuvers have concerned NATO members.

With Russia's increasingly assertive maneuvers in the region, NATO's strategic interest in the eastern Mediterranean is increasing, and in late May, the British HMS Duncan and Spanish frigate Victoria, commissioned by NATO forces, docked in Israel's Haifa Port ahead of joint exercises with the IDF.

In December, the HMS Ocean, the flagship of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, docked in Haifa port before taking part in several joint exercises with the Israel Navy and Air Force.

The announcement of Israel's participation comes shortly after NATO's secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg told Germany's Der Spiegel that the alliance wouldn't come to Israel's defense in case of attack by Iran.

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