
RUSSIA'S MILITARY OLYMPICS EXPAND TO KAZAKHSTAN

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At the International Army Games competitions in Kazakhstan, soldiers from 12 countries competed in sniper and artillery competitions; military VIPs viewed an opening ceremony with Kazakh pageantry, and the visiting soldiers toured Almaty. (photos: MoD Kazakhstan)

Kazakhstan is hosting two events of the International Army Games, a Russia-created military Olympics, the first time the competition has been held outside of Russia.

The sniper and artillery competitions of the Army Games are being held at the Gvardeiskiy training facility near Almaty, with 278 soldiers from Kazakhstan, Venezuela, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, Belarus, Zimbabwe, India, Iran, Mongolia, Greece, and Armenia taking part. "We are glad to be the first to widen the geography of the Army Games," said Defense Minister Imangali Tasmagambetov, the opening ceremony.

Competing at home apparently inspired the Kazakh teams; they won the sniper competition and as of Monday they were leading the artillery event.

This is the second year of the Army Games, a sort of Russian military soft power event with origins in a Collective Security Treaty Organization (Russia's post-Soviet security cooperation alliance) but which has taken on a more global scope. While Russia has tried to get NATO countries to take part, that effort has largely failed and the list of competitors is largely a Russia-friendly one.

Kazakhstan's involvement in the Army Games could be interpreted as a sign of its close ties with Russia. But it's also of a piece with Kazakhstan's love of hosting international events of any sort. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense took the foreign soldiers on a tour and fed them Kazakh delicacies like beshbarmak and kymys. "I loved all of the local cuisine, especially beshbarmak," the MoD quoted an Armenian soldier as saying.

Kazakhstan's involvement in the contest will deepen next year: in addition to hosting the sniper

and artillery contests again, Kazakhstan also will host two new contests -- an armored vehicle rally and a martial arts competition for female soldiers -- as well as the field cooking and dog handling contests, which are taking place this year in Russia.

Kaynak/Source: