

Putin Says Troops Withdraw to Help Ukraine Vote

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin speaking to journalists after meetings in Shanghai on Wednesday.

President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday he had ordered Russian troops to pull out from the regions near Ukraine to help create a positive environment for the nation's presidential vote, but added that it would be hard for the Kremlin to deal with its winner because of continuing fighting in eastern Ukraine.

The pullout announced Monday was meant to create "favorable conditions for Ukraine's presidential vote and end speculations," Putin told reporters in Shanghai, China, where he attended a security summit.

Referring to comments by the U.S. and NATO that they are not seeing any sign of the withdrawal, Putin said that "those who are not seeing it should look better." He said the pullout will be clearly visible in satellite images, according to Russian news agencies.

Putin's pullout order and his statement welcoming the election, which he had previously urged to postpone, has shown that he has no immediate intention to send the Russian Army into Ukraine, where pro-Russian insurgents have seized government buildings and clashed with Ukrainian government forces in weeks of fighting that has left dozens dead.

Putin's moves reflected an apparent desire to ease tensions with the West over Ukraine and avoid further sanctions.

But the Russian leader said Wednesday that it would have made more sense for the Ukrainian authorities to have a constitutional referendum that would approve a new constitution before the election.

"It will be very difficult for us to develop relations with people, who come to power amid a punitive operation in southeastern Ukraine," he said.

Putin added that Russia has helped establish a dialogue between the central government in Kiev and people in the southeast.

"We have done everything to help start these contacts," he said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that its military units in the regions near Ukraine on Wednesday began moving to railway stations and airfields en route to their home bases, which they are expected to reach before June 1.

Yet NATO, which estimates that Russia has 40,000 troops along the border with Ukraine, repeated Wednesday it could not yet see any signs of a Russian pullout. Russian television broadcast footage of columns of tanks and howitzers towed by heavy trucks. It was not immediately clear where the footage was taken.

The ministry said its units will make most of the journey by air or rail to reduce the pressure on highways.

General Vladimir Shamanov, the chief of the Airborne Forces, said in televised remarks that battalions from three airborne divisions would return to their home bases within 10 days.

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