

Ukraine's Defense Minister Says Kiev Preparing for Possible Rebel Offensive

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko addresses servicemen, who take part in the military conflict in eastern regions of the country, while marking the Day of Ukraine's Defenders on the Khortytsia Island near the Dnieper River in Zaporizhzhia region on Oct. 14, 2014.

KIEV — Ukrainian government forces are redeploying in preparation for a possible new offensive by pro-Russian separatists in eastern regions, Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak said Wednesday.

He told a government meeting the rebels had received reinforcements despite a cease-fire that was agreed on Sept. 5 but has been repeatedly violated.

"We are repositioning our armed forces to respond to the actions of the [rebel] fighters," Poltorak said. "I see my main task is to prepare for military action."

A military spokesman said Tuesday that the rebels were beefing up their forces, including

around the port city of Mariupol in the southeast, control of which would open up roads to territory in southern Ukraine.

Kiev says a column of tanks and truckloads of troops crossed into east Ukraine from Russia last Thursday and officials from the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE), a security watchdog, have spotted armored columns on the move.

Russia has denied supporting the rebels militarily in the conflict, in which more than 4,000 people have been killed since mid-April.

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